

BESS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PREFACE

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A Do Gooder in Hades

Chapter I

THE ARRIVAL

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The sun has already set behind hill the rugged but the objects on the ground around the air port were still discernable in the dim evening light as the Western Airlines plane, gliding over the landing strip, leveled off among the sand dunes. At the edge of the strip lay the strip lay the shattered bits of a plane that had crashed sometime in the past. Perhaps not long ago. I shuttered a bit to think that might have arrived in such condition! But it was a little late to think of danger.

"Remain in your seats until the door is opened" (the usual command) came from the pilot to the six passengers.

At last, after two weeks of travelling from San Francisco - with meetings here and there on the way - I stepped out into the deep, hot sand. The cool evening temperature was 99°; and there was I wearing a black wool suit and beaver hat and carrying a black wool top coat. Not only did I feel foolish, but also hot.

Nearby I could see some deserted Navy barracks, and the airport consisted of a very temporary-looking shack. One taxi awaited. After package all baggage into the trunk, the taxi driver, a very fat man, packed the six passengers into the taxi. Three in the back set (it must have been narrow - but i count not turn my head to see), and three passengers and the fat driver in front. Of course, I set next to the driver, being the skinny one. My other front seat companions were a lady reported for the local newspaper (who had just gone to San Diego for a vacation - her first time out of the Valley in ten years) - and a Border Patrolman who was just returning from his vacation. He was very intoxicated and not too happy at the prospects of returning to work. He kept handing out of the window and pointing out the "first star" which was apparently a planet, very large and beautiful.

I immediately began to recruit the services of my fellow passengers in obtaining a place to live, while a cockroach explored the back and shoulders of the taxi driver.

After a fast eighteen mile drive across some very flat country, we came in sight of the City of El Centro - a few electric lights!

Chapter II

THE HOTEL

At the Hotel Barbara Worth, I was ushered to my room where hung the most conspicuous signs - DO NOT OPEN THE WINDOWS AT ANY TIME.

The prospect of living on this desert was beginning to frighten me. I had never seen anything like the part of the country. But here I was, and I would make the best of it. It would probably be an interesting adventure.

My suitcase was on the bed. I opened it and to my surprise there stood large cockroach wiggling a greeting with his antennae. In my suitcase already! I just stood and stared and said to myself, "I'm going to learn to live with the cockroaches."

And so I prepared for my bath - really a shower built in an old closet. I drew aside the curtain and there were dozens of large, black crickets. One at a time I captured the beasts and threw them over the transom, obeying the signs DO NOT OPEN THE WINDOWS AT ANY TIME. This was the very best hotel accommodation in El Centro and the room rent was four dollars and fifty cents per day.

The following morning (Sunday) I went down to the desk and inquired where there was a Catholic Church. "Oh, it fell down during the earthquake," was the reply. No one had ever mentioned the earthquake to me. As there was a large sign on the Coffee Shop door reading, CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS. I asked where I might get some breakfast. "The Adobe Hut down the street may be open," replied the clerk. With so much to look forward to, I set out to find the Adobe Hut.

As I stepped off the curb, into the street (which was torn up from one end of town to the other, a ditch dug on either side and all the fine slit piled in the center) the sun almost knocked me down. It felt as if I had stepped into Hell - and maybe I had. All I can say is that it was so HOT, that I could hardly put one foot in front of the other. But I did reach the open restaurant where a fan whirled outside the door. Could it be that they planned to air-condition the whole outdoors.

For breakfast there was no meat, no toast, and no sugar. The dishes were dirty and cracked. The waitress treated me as if I were a large dose of poison. I feasted on coffee and a fried egg. Nearby a few bars were open, filled with lounging men.

On my way back to the Hotel, I decided to find out who Barbara Worth had been, since that was the name of the Hotel. I recalled that I had read a story about Barbara Worth when I was in high school, but did not remember the story. The Hotel clerk said that

the library was open on Sunday and directed me to it. The librarian was a little old lady wearing half glasses. I looked up Barbara Worth in the card file and found that there was a book titled, THE WINNING OF BARBARA WORTH. However, I could not understand the coding so had to ask the librarian how to find it. Looking over her glasses she said, Yes, we have that book, but only in braille, my dear." What a negative day for me.

Chapter III

THE OFFICE



On Monday morning I went to see my office. One block from the Hotel was the County Court House. I probably sweated off ten pounds while walking thee. Signs indicated that the Health Department was in the basement behind a corridor of very dusty ledgers stacked to the ceiling. I introduced myself and said that I had an appointment with the health officer.

After waiting an hour or more in the dismal waiting room, I was invited in to meet with the health officer, who wa a very pleasant person, welcomed me graciously and pointed out that my space wa a table by a post in the center of the floor, the typewriter, a file cabinet, and the TB case register. My responsibilities were to "educate the Board o Directors as to problems and solutions in tuberculosis control", conduct a mass chest X-ray survey of all adults in the County (Imperial), and raise \$10,000 by January first. I asked if I might give the waiting room a "face-lift" in my off time. And so I set to work.

Cars were hard to come by in those days after World War II, but by getting in touch with the RIGHT PEOPLE, I was able to purchase a Plymouth. Also, since many buildings had fallen down during the earthquake, it was almost impossible to find a place to live, and the Hotel would allow me a maximum of five days there because the BUYERS were about the arrive to bid on the produce in the fields. The best I could do was to take a room in a very small hotel behind the Greyhound Bus Station. It was a sort of dormitory for the bus drives whose alarm clocks went off at all hours of the night. The walls were paper thin and every resident seems to have a had cough. The bath was private for everyone on the floor.

Chapter IV

MY HOME



For a time, this was my "HOME, SWEET HOME." On the very first night I was besieged by the most violent cramps which continued for days (including nights) without a let-up. No one had ever hold be about Montezuma's Revenge.

The Health Officer was the only physician in town and I asked him if i Might to the local hospital but he assured me that the food would be worse that at the local drug stone counter. Somehow I managed to get out to the corner drug store for a meal now and then and carried on my work by means of the telephone in the hotel lobby. There was no such thing as air-conditioning and the temperature would go to 120° in the daytime. That heat, plus my fever had me sizzling and the doctor suggested I use an electric pad to stop the cramps. I never even tried that. He also brought me canned baby food and a can opener. That was a "soft diet" to be heated in the hot water in the wash basin and eaten out of the can. It was an interesting atmosphere. the man across the hall had far-advanced tuberculosis and was awaiting space in the local hospital, and in an adjacent building was a man with the DTs. One neighbor coughed all night, sounding as if each cough were his last, and the other yelled all night, " Oh, no, no, no." A nearby church had bells which kept ringing, " I hear those gentle voices calling Old Black Joe." Don't you just long the quiet, peaceful life of the desert?

Chapter V

ONWARD, EVER ONWARD

After about two weeks of the misery, I was summoned to a meeting at the Army Airforce Base to met with the War Assets Administration representative, a Navy Official, the Chief of the U.S. Bureau of Tuberculosis Control, a County Supervisor, and several other dignitaries. We were to consider a deal whereby the County would purchase the Base from the Federal Government for one dollars and convert he buildings into a hospital and a TB Sanitorium.

There were no thermometers in sight, but if you had asked me the temperature that day I probably would have guessed 130° - although I was assured it never went much above 120°. However, it was HOT and we walked from building to building and investigated every nook and corner of every building. The buildings had been completely and thoroughly occupied by black widow spiders. Never had I seen so many spiders not such a maze of spider webbing. It seemed as if they planned to fill every square inch of those buildings with webbing. They completely ignored us.

This procedure was followed by a conference over large blue-prints that I could not understand. There were many suggestions as to what to do with the various buildings and hundreds of acres of land. Some of the buildings would be converted into housing for the staff in an attempt to attract professional people to the area. There was such a shortage of housing at that time that this would be incentive to accept a job. A question arose as to whether it would be safe to have planes flying over the buildings to the air strip. But certainly, it would be safe. Besides, the plant would amuse the patients.

As I looked out across those miles and miles of the strange hot sand, I felt the NOTHING could entertain a patient there.

Chapter VI

SETTLING IN

My condition suddenly improved in mid-October, and I discovered that medicine had not been prescribed sooner because there was a possibility that I had Typhoid Fever. Rural life is so HEALTHY.

PUBLICITY - that was the magic word. We had but two weeks now in which to make every adult in the County believe that the most important thing in life was to have a chest X-ray. We must get the message in every newspaper every day- saying the same thing in different words; fill in all the unused moments on the radio programs; distribute leaflets; send a file and speak to every meeting; get space in all bulletins and leaflets; attach it to the milk bottles; stuff it in the grocery bundles; organize lots of committees. We did it.

Then came the MOBILE UNIT with its technicians. Bold headlines announced its arrival as if the magic rescuer of humanity had arrived. Day after day for one month we recruited, registered, lined up the people and sweated.

Some were afraid of the machine, and we answered hundreds of unexpected questions.

The first day by a bit of pushing and pulling we got one old Mexican laborer in position for his picture but were helpless when we wished him to move on. None of us spoke Spanish. We said "O.K." He did not move. We said, "That's all." He remained motionless with his chin against the plate, hands on hips and shoulders drawn forward, probably waiting for something to hurt him. We said, "Go away." No result. We sighed, looked ferocious, motioned. He remained. At last I tried "Passe," because I thought that was what the Border Patrolmen said. He stepped down and departed. A magic word that. But I decided we had better learn the necessary vocabulary for this job and in spare moments were recruited people to teach us some Spanish.

AT last the MOBILE UNIT pulled out of the County. But there was no time to be happy about it. the 4,900 films had to be shipped off for readying , letters had to be sent out to all persons X-rayed stating results, private physicians had to be notified, clinics planned for. Those details would necessarily be handled in our spare time for now there were only three weeks left to prepare Christmas Seal Sale lists and get out 12,000 letters appealing to people to buy the Christmas Seals. The letters were in the mail on time. We made out quota - almost.

Sometime in that rush, I flew to Trenton, NJ, without reservations. One of the major airlines was on strike and that made things

complicated. At each airport I took the next best available flight, usually eastward, but at one point, I had to do some backtracking. I got a taste of travel on every major airline. The only added attractions were one twelve-hour delay because of a FLAT TIRE and one ten-hour delay when one of the motors went on fire. Aside from that and a bad storm over Washington D.C., it was smooth travelling and I was back on the job in a week.

Chapter VII

THE IMPERIAL VALLEY

In December, the Valley was a green field of lettuce and carrots. Mass production harvesting was a novelty to me and sometimes as I drove from two to town, I just had to stop and watch the migrants cutting lettuce and putting it on conveyor belts that carried it across to the trailers for loading. Mass production in the field.

Desert Seed Company had hundreds of acres of land scattered here and there throughout the Valley. These produced crop after crop of flowers in season - marigold, stock, sweet peas, chrysanthemums, these perfect rows of color extended out to the horizon to touch the brilliant blue sky.

For me, the most beautiful of all the crops was the flax. Flax growing was subsidized by the Federal Government at the time. The whole southern end of the Valley seemed to be field of flax by March. When the flax is in bloom, the world is BLUE. Then I liked to watch the fields of blue blossoms roll in the breeze like an ocean. In the background were the dark blue mountains of Mexico topped with the brilliant blue sky. Days ended with the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen, and after the sun had sunk, there was a pale pink rim around the earth topped by a soft blue. All was so quiet and still at this hour. Sometimes I was fortunate enough to be on the road when a full moon arose. There was nothing to block the view and the moon looked tremendous. A beautiful sight.

In November, the date and citrus fruit began to ripen. By mid-December the packing sheds were operating day and night. More labor was imported from Mexico. The migratory workers filled the government camps and trailer villages. Tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, flax, and the first crops of hay and alfalfa were harvested in succession. The final big crop - melons - was ready in late May. Then the land got a rest and was fertilized, while the laborers move northwest to work in the orchards.

Chapter VIII

WINTER

During the winter, my hotel living ended when I found an apartment in El Centro. It was tiny and furnished with drab, old bits of furniture, but some paint and bright linen and draperies made it livable. It was one of the very few second-story apartments in the Valley, and from its windows I could see the palm trees and pale verde in the moonlight. The latter look like huge plumes of pale green.

During the winter I found time to visit the TB wards at the County Hospital. j Two wards, one for men and one for women. I also accompanied the nurses (there were only two) to the homes of those patients who were not so fortunate as to get into the hospital. Usually the homes were unpainted shacks in remote places. There were no sanitary facilities and in many we found families sleeping on straw on the dirt floor. I was surprised to see a washing machine standing in front of one home where there was neither running water nor electricity. Perhaps when the family moved north they had better luck. Some of the Phillipinos lived in structures of palm fronds. The Indians built with adobe and existed with hardly any furniture. The Hindus seemed to be most thrifty of all and one could almost recognize their homes by the fact that they built playthings for their children.

Chest Clinics were conducted in the County Court House basement and each revealed an average of ten new cases of tuberculosis. Facilities for treatment were extremely meager and when we found a terminal case the only suggestion the doctor could give was to put the patient in a tent outside the house so that he would not infect the whole family. We had at least 300 patients who should have been hospitalized, but the County Hospital provided only 22 beds. Our chest physician came down from Los Angeles (250 miles) once every six weeks to volunteer his services to operate the clinic and supervise the 22 patients at the hospital. When necessary, he brought along a volunteer surgeon. Since that was far from an adequate program, it was my responsibility to keep the facts before the public until they were willing to provide something better.

Chapter IX

A CHANGE OF SCENERY

The winter flew away. Then on the first of May the thermometer began to climb again. By noon each day it stood at 110°. My fat (?) melted off. Luckily I was scheduled to go to a conference in San Diego and Tiajuana for a week. There the cool breezes were still blowing in off the Pacific, and I learned more about the Mexicans. This was a conference of the public health workers of the U.S. and Mexico border towns with a few specialists from Washington, D.C., Mexico City, and Alaska thrown in. I never could figure out where Alaska fitting into the picture, but those people never missed a conference. Maybe they just wanted to get warmed up. We all got warmed up. In Tiajuana the Mexicans reigned and each meeting was at least an hour and a half late - as it the custom- and the day ended with a cocktail party and a banquet that was really Mexican. It had everything. The PROGRAM was so good that our spirits remained high of the following two days in San Diego.

When my brain was full of new knowledge and alcohol, I returned to El Centro to turn the office over to the cockroaches and crickets for the summer, and headed North (700 miles) to San Francisco where the summers are always cool. That is my favorite city - so white and clean-looking with the everflowing wisps of fog. The Conference of the Western States Public Health Association took one week and the Conference of the National Tuberculosis Association finished off another. With a lot of new ideas I was ready to get back to work and was assigned six mountain counties in the High Sierras to "do". They may sound like a lot, and it is, in square miles, but it was merely a handful of people who were entrusted to my sage words. Alpine County, which is one of them, had a population of 270 - mostly Indians on the Reservation.

It was an opportunity to explore and do a bit of prospecting for gold, aside from campaigning for the establishment of public health departments and tuberculosis control programs with the Boards of Directors.

The High Sierras are mighty beautiful, and I did not miss a road. I covered 12,000 miles of highway and byway visiting county physicians, hospitals, individual members of the Boards and Indian Villages. My first visit to an Indian Village was memorable. After travelling a dusty trail through sage brush just high enough to block my view in all directions, I suddenly came upon a cluster of little odd-shaped houses built of unpainted wood. I parked the car and approached the only human being in sight, a woman who was doing her laundry. I asked here where I could find Mr. Johnson, who I had been told was their Medicine Man who used peyote, a hallucinating drug, as a cure-all, as well as an essential part o

f the religious ceremony. It was my job to sell this leader on the idea of a chest X-ray program. The woman did not raise her head as she softly answered my inquired with, "He lives in the big house." I walked behind her house and found that the homes formed a circle, but all looked little to me. Odd and drab and not a blade of grass in sight. However, right in the center of this circle there stood an out-house - where you might expect to find perhaps a totem pole or some ornament. This also was of unpainted wood, and over the door there was a neat and PAINTED (black and white) sign, LADIES.

I never did find Mr. Johnson. Each place where I enquired I was told that he had just left. At last I suspected that he knew who was looking for him, so he stayed out of sight. In other villages I was ore successful in finding someone who was willing to sell the idea for me. The Indians were most cooperative in whatever health program was offered. The U.S. Indian Health Service, hard as they tried, did not seem to be too successful in providing health education and health service, and the thought was being promoted that county health departments might do a better job if we could only get health departments established in remote areas.

During July and August, one of my old (?) camping friends came out from New Jersey and travelled with me. It was fund to have company and we had many good laughs at the places where we had to stay and some of the characters we met. In free time we explored places that were not on the itinerary - such as Reno and Virginia City. At such times we wore plaid shirts, blue jeans, and western hats hoping we would be mistaken for natives, but I think the water bag handing on the car bumper identified us as tourists. Nevertheless, there were many times when we were happy to have that water.

In Inyo County we came upon the stage-set for Gene Autrey's Western Thrillers and took some pictures of our own. Although Death Valley was part of the territory I saved that one for cooler days. At the time the temperature could soar to 130°. The same county includes Mt. Whitney which we DID NOT climb.

My vacation came during August, so we rented a furnished tent in Yosemite - at al altitude of 9,000 ft, and encountered the bears and the glaciers. A beautiful Park. There are white granite mountains, specular water falls, meadows filled with brilliant flowers, animal life, strange and interesting to this Easterner.

The Park provides so many interesting activities. Well-educated rangers were available to guide us to the glaciers, on geology trips, up mountain trials, on botany trips. They were very versatile people. In the evening did they not only deliver very scientific lectures at the campfire, but also led the group-singing. It was quite thrilling to feel that you are a part-owner of this magnificent virgin forest and its program.

Toward the end of the first week in August, it became quite cold, so we descended to the Coast to explore some of the flower garden towns. Most colorful were Monterey, Carmel, and LaJolla. It was difficult to leave each.

At the end of August, Erika flew East and I returned to my COUNTIES in the High Sierras and to work my way south to Bakersfield where we had a three-day conference of the California Tuberculosis Association Secretaries.

The meeting was held at the Bakersfield Inn which was one of the loveliest motels in California. I had never dreamed that Bakersfield could have anything lovely. I had always associated it with that frightening forest of oil wells on the outskirts.

From Bakersfield I was scheduled to go to Bishop which is East of the mountains and far north. This is the haven for sportsmen. Fishing, hunting, riding, mountain climbing, swimming. The vast expanses and the rough mountains still frighten this Easterner. The road sign which read, "OPEN RANGE - NEXT 90 MILES," was unbelievable.

From Bishop to El Centro is about 400 miles of desert driving. That was the loneliest ride I've ever taken and it was then that I decided that every travelling worker should have a car with a telephone and dictaphone. Think how much I could have accomplished while driving. But that was unthinkable in those days. The trip was not uneventful, however. Mine never seem to be. Where Highway 466 crosses 395, I stopped for gas. It was around noon and the temperature about 120°. The crossroad has a name on a map, but actually there was nothing there except the gas station and a little cafe.

There was a 1935 Ford standing at the gas pump. After having been tanked up it refused to run. The total population turned out to tackle the Ford. There were the station attendant; the owner of the car (a woman dressed in blue jeans, plaid shirt and half hat); the proprietor of the cafe, and two beer-drinking travelling salesmen who were entirely ignorant of the workings of a car. I stood around for a while and then decided that the only way I could get gas was to get that car started and out of the way, so I put in my two bits worth of advice - with no results.

By the time I was ready to leave, the woman decided to desert her car so I offered her a ride as far as San Bernardino where she lived. That would be the next town. She was delighted with the offer and said she would get her things. Her "things" turned out to be saddle bag and a guitar. As soon as we were on our way she decided to entertain me, and took out a harmonica which she attached to something around her neck. The concert was on. Harmonica and guitar let out weird sounds which now and then resembled a western song. At the end of each number she asked me

if I knew what it was. A couple of times I struck it right and she was pleased, but more often I shocked her with my ignorance. The program ended at San Bernardino as the lady reached her home.

That night I reach El Centro, the heart of Inferno. It was HOT, HOT, HOT and the sand had completely covered every square inch of my apartment, including cupboards and bureau drawers. Nothing is free of the sand. Why had I ever promised to return? Well, I do have my mad moments. There was one good thing about it. The height of the buggy season was over. There is a time when one has to shovel crickets and cockroaches off the sidewalks. Would you rather shovel snow? Which reminds me - we need a snow plough all year to keep the road open to Yuma - removing sand from the highway.

The hot weather lasted well into October. Each day I managed to get some work done and then hurried home to remove all clothing and tackle the job of removing the sand and painting every inch of the apartment. My skin became a mottled mass of ice green, white, and pink paint, but the apartment became much more livable.

Chapter X

REPEATING THE CYCLE OF ACTIVITY

By the time the weather cooled, I discovered myself buried in program and fund raising. It will be a hectic life of activity until Christmas. After that, I will not be bound with so many deadlines. In last Spring I am due back in San Francisco. What awaits me there I do not know.

In the meantime, I shall appreciate the warm sunshine, colorful sunsets, and dream of civilization. I might even write a few letters and attempt to get back in the good graces of you who live in a more normal world.

THE END FOR NOW !

Chapter XI

Added Later:

I had absolutely no social life in Imperial Valley. The volunteers who worked on the program almost never invited me to participate in local recreation. I continued to be an outsider. My secretary was a Mexican from across the Border in Mexicali. Her husband was a travelling salesman and they had a young child who came to school in Calixico. Sometimes he would have trouble at the Border because he had lost or forgotten his passport. That happened rather frequently, and I would go down to identify him and drive mother and son home. At such times, we had dinner in Mexicali and I learned to enjoy Mexican food and to speak a little Spanish. Sometimes we went to a bull fight.

This account was typed in my free evenings at home in that second year in El Centro for a few dear friends with whom I was losing contact.

What awaiting me in San Francisco was a stipend to return to school for my masters degree in Public Health - the beginning of a whole new career.

During the school year at the University of California, in Berkeley, I managed to keep the job moving ahead in Imperial Valley and continued into the following year as an employee of the California State Health Department.

UNEXPECTED PATHS

One takes such strange and unexpected paths in life. "OPEN RANGE NEXT 90 MILES" reads the road sign as I travel north on U.S. Highway 395, alone in my little Plymouth - I, who grew up in the shadows of the tall buildings of New York City where the enchantment of theatres, museums, parks, schools, and more, were just a five-cent ride away by subway in those days.

War work (World War II) had left me off in California. Before returning East, I decided to stay a while to explore the West coast a bit. A trip to the government employment office and hours of testing and interviewing, resulted in my being classified as a public health educator. "What's that?," I inquired. The consultant informed me that it is one who has straining in education and community organization, and since the federal government was planning to push for improved public health, many positions would be opening up.

Within a few days I was an employee of the California State Tuberculosis Association, located in the hearth of the San Francisco financial district. Great! I loved that city. To have time to explore the charms of San Francisco, however, was not my destiny. After a brief training period, I was assigned for the summer months as a field representative to six California counties in the High Sierras - Inyo, Mono, Sierra, Nevada, Alpine, and Placer. Just the names of the counties were exciting to me. What an adventure it would be to meet the people in the mountain country.

I chose the area most inaccessible by car during winter months to renew agency contacts. Mrs. Davis of Alpine County was first on my list. In order to reach her, the highway took me out of California, thru Reno, and back into California. That meant going through two border inspection stations. It was a five hour drive to the little isolated house in Alpine County where Mrs. Davis was watching for me. Fortunately, I was right on time, so she greeted me at the gate and that is where we had our conference, she on the inside and I on the outside. She was very friendly and talkative and informed me that she had been county superintendent of schools for many years. The County population was 250, of which 90 were Indians. (The county I called "home" in N.Y. had a population of one and a half million). Because I had come from a San Francisco office, I was treated like the representative of all government agencies - state and federal. I was advised that Alpine County should not be annexed by the State of Nevada just because it had to use Reno as its business community during winter. I was not aware of that issue but everywhere I went I was given that lecture.

After delivering my recommendations about developing and financing health and hospital services for the County, I was informed by Mrs. Davis that because she was Superintendent of Schools, the Indians

came to her for all sorts of advice and she cited a number of fascinating anecdotes related to that fact. When she finished with these tales she said, "I have been detaining you because there was a rattlesnake at your feet and I was afraid that if I mentioned it, you'd have moved and the snake would strike. He's gone now." That ended that day's adventure, except for the fact that I stopped at a little diner for dinner and, much to my surprise, it was owned and operated by a very small Chinese. I just had not expected to meet Chinese in these mountains. something about me amused him and every time he looked at me he giggled and I giggled along with him. I think my height amused him.

The following day I was scheduled to see Mr. O'Brien in Placer County. The road to the O'Brien home was mountainous, gorgeous, fascinating. The home was very isolated and looked like a crude log cabin. Mr. O'Brien met me at the door and invited me in to meet his wife. They were a rather young couple who had moved out from Boston. The house was lively and I was impressed with their collection of art works and books. They were most hospitable and talked about life in Placer County. O'Brien had purchased land here with the intention of panning gold. He showed me an ingenious device which he had designed to do the panning on a large scale and he said he was making a good living and they loved these mountains. He also kept himself involved in community activities in an attempt to become an accepted member of that community. Although he had been there several years, he was still treated as an outsider.

Next stop Bridgeport, where I was to meet with Judge Smith at his office on the second floor of the Court House. A roly-poly, jovial old fellow who had a lot of advice to send back to State offices. I asked why the town was called Bridgeport as I could see neither a bridge or water. "Oh," said the Judge, "one of the first settlers came from Bridgeport, Connecticut." While we were talking, he jumped up and shouted at a passing car which responded by stopping. The driver was the county Public Health Nurse whom he called in to meet me and suggested that she take me on a sightseeing tour. Not only did I get to see some beautiful scenery, but also learned how medical care was provided. There was one local doctor who also served as health officer and cooperated with State agencies that could provide financing for some services. Major surgery, however, was available in Los Angeles, 500 miles away. I met some patients whose treatment required extensive surgery over a long period of time and who were under supervision of the State Crippled Children's Program (Federal funds). The communications and cooperation among agencies, providers of care, and patients was amazing considering distances between offices, services, and patients - Sacramento, Los Angeles, Bridgeport.

For the night, I had a motel reservation on Mono Lake where I had a long chat with Mrs. Jacoby, proprietress, also U.S. Post Mistress and owner of the grocery store and restaurant. The community was Lee Vining. There were no other buildings that I could see. This

was at the foot of Tioga Pass - a little road meandering down a 3,000 ft drop from Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Par. In those days, the Pass was closed in winter and Lee Vining was isolated from the central and northerner parts of California. Mrs. Jacoby told me that after her husband had died, she had come here over the Pass, loved the area, and decided to start up her business. Sunrise across Mono Lake is strikingly beautiful.

That evening I was scheduled to address the Grange, part way up the mountain. I found the small building and introduced myself to the leader. Of course it was a room full of men. The Indians did not sit on the chairs, but stood leaning against the walls. there was a long table and a flag at the front of the room. We first had the ceremony of saluting the flag. Then I was escorted out of the room to wait in the dark wilderness while the Grangers went through their secret ritual. When I was escorted back inside, and up to the table, the leader walked around the table to introduce me. At that moment, there was a great commotion as several men jumped to their feet to fine the leader 35 cents for walking in front of the flag. I was really out of my element, but took a deep breath and managed to deliver my message.

After breakfast, next morning, Mrs. Martin was my next challenge. Just a bit farther north along the Lake was Mono Lake Hotel, surrounded by very large trees. Mrs. Martin rented rooms and boats and the place was in a frenzy preparing for "Mark Twain Day," much to my surprise. Yes, Mark Twain had spent some time around Mono Lake. Mrs. Martin took time out for our business and did not hesitate to tell me that I had taken my business to her competitor at Mrs. Jacoby's motel.

On the way south to Bishop, I decided that I needed to find a dentist to heal my aching tooth. Fortunately I did find a most accommodating Dr. Hand in Bishop who took care of me immediately. As he drilled and filled, he told me how he came to be here. He and his wife had come west from Ohio and when he saw this beautiful green valley with the High Sierras as a backdrop, he decided to settle and establish a mobile dental service. He equipped a van and attempted to take his services to the people. However, not being accustomed to having a dentist available, people called him only for emergencies. He finally gave up the idea of a mobile service and opened his office. While he worked on me he had to keep running back and forth to the kitchen for water. "The one and only plumber is an alcholic off on a binge," he said, "and I have to wait for him to recover in order to get this plumbing fixed."

Scheduled for that day was a visit to Mr. Johnson, chief of an Indian tribe. I knew nothing of Indians, but off the highway I travelled several miles on a dirt road, surrounded by very tall grasses. All I could see was the road ahead and the sky above. This had to be the right road because there were no intersections. Eventually I reached a clearing where there was a circle of small unpainted hours, all alike. I walked into the enclosed area and

found just one person in sight, a woman scrubbing clothes at a wash tub. I approached and explained who I was and that I had an appointment with Mr. Johnson. She never raised her head. She just kept on scrubbing, but said that Mr. Johnson was at the store. The store, of course, was back on the highway. When I returned there, the owner told me that Mr. Johnson usually sat around in the store, but he had just gone home. He must have had a secret path because there was but a single road to the village. I never did catch up with Mr. Johnson and the store owner suspected it was because he did not want to talk with anyone from a State agency.

At Lone Pine where the highway intersects the road coming out of Death Valley (also my territory) and the coyotes howl in the foothills of Mt. Whitney, and Indians sit in the shade along the sidewalk, leaning on the buildings (the waiting room), I looked for Dr. Anderson, the one and only physician who also served as the health officer, but Dr. Anderson had gone on a "cattle drive" and would not be back until next week.

Dr. Anderson's story was worth coming back for, but I must stop here to contemplate, What is an American?"

These people are not really representative of a cross-section of Americans because all have considerable formal education. To me, however, they represent the spirit of the American. They are very independent and free enough to create their own life styles, a spirit probably inherited from the early settlers who came to America to break away from the old traditions of Europe and to acquire land.

The status of women has certainly changed. The women in the Plymouth Colony had gained some independence by being permitted the right to make contracts and eventually to own land and operate businesses. Here in the High Sierras, women, by this year, were participating in government, business, and community development.

I am one of these Americans. My parents migrated from Ireland and England in the early nineteen hundred and experienced the hardships of the crowded cities and the insensitive employers. However, in spite of poverty, there was always light at the end of the tunnel and education was available to help one reach there. Unfortunately, they did not have the energy to live long and full lives but had the spirit to enjoy the years they did have.

It was not until I had this experience in California that I appreciated what variety this Country has to offer, the meaning of our freedom, and the opportunities open to us. I decided that if I were going to be of any value, I needed a great deal more knowledge and decided to work on that.

We are a young nation. Much of the Country has not yet reached the stage described in "The Greening of American" where "Work and living have become more and more pointless and empty." (page 8)

Thinking of these people calls to my mind a statement in Ralph Waldo Emerson's, *Nature*, in which he says "...why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun still shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship." (page 566).