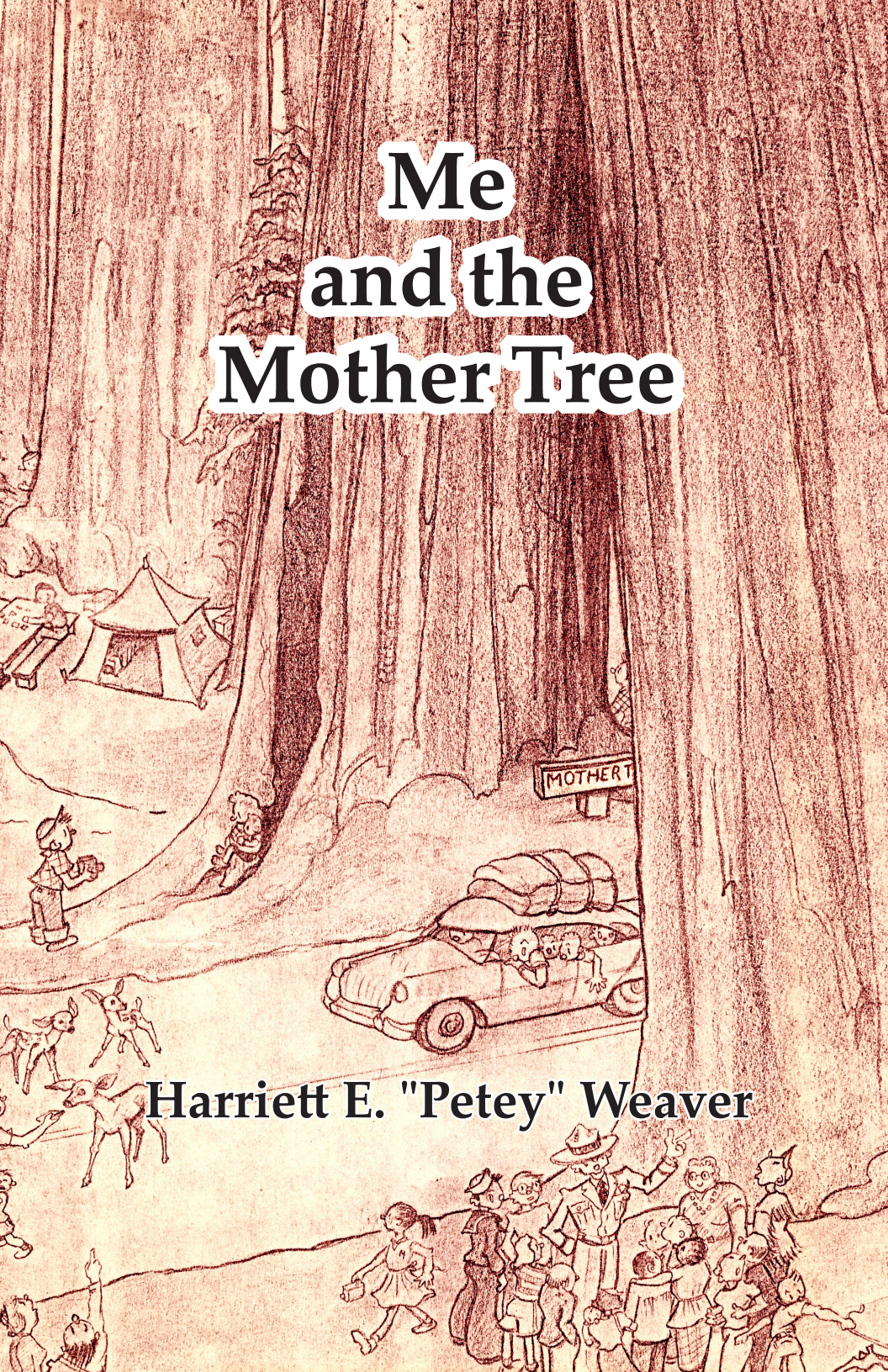


Me and the Mother Tree



Harriett E. "Petey" Weaver



Harriett "Petey" Weaver in front of the Mother Tree at Big Basin Redwoods State Park

On the Cover: Drawing of Big Basin Redwoods by Harriett "Petey" Weaver

Harriett E. “Petey” Weaver

California State Parks’ first woman ranger

Harriett Eilene “Petey” Weaver was born June 18, 1908, in Iowa. She attended high school in California and graduated from University of California, Los Angeles in 1929.

Petey had many careers including teaching for 35 years, penned 10 books, 30 years with Sunset Books, and 20 seasons as the first uniformed woman in the early state park ranger field staff. The subjects of her many books range from the redwoods and bulls to raccoons and cartooning.

Petey’s state park career began just after college graduation. She first worked as a volunteer at Big Basin Redwoods State Park in 1929, and eventually was hired at \$30.00 a month. She transferred to Richardson Grove State Park in 1938, to Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park in 1942, Seacliff State Beach in 1944, back to Big Basin in 1945, and returned to Big Sur in 1950. She left state parks in 1950.

After her time as a ranger, Petey lived in Fortuna in Northern California. She spent many years teaching, writing, traveling, and also worked as a part-time freelance cartoonist.

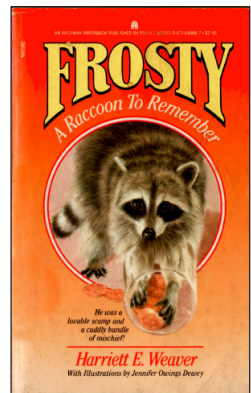
In 1971, the California State Park Ranger Association chose Petey as an “Honorary Ranger.” Her name stands with other well-known honorary rangers including Walt Disney, Joseph Knowland, Laurance Rockefeller, and Ansel Adams.

Petey died July 2, 1993, at age 85. A 355 foot tall coast redwood tree was dedicated in her memory at Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Petey observed, “What you’re living today will be the past tomorrow. Keep notes of observations of everyday life – that’s how things get started.”



Petey with the real-life Frosty the Raccoon, subject of her most popular book.



California State Parks Where "Petey" Weaver Worked



1. Richardson Grove SP, 200 Miles north of San Francisco.
2. Big Basin Redwoods SP, 60 miles south of San Francisco.
3. Seacliff Beach SP, 8 miles south of Santa Cruz.
4. Pfeiffer Big Sur SP, 30 miles south of Monterey

Acknowledgments

The number one person to thank for this book being published is Jennifer Reeves, who preserved and authorized the printing of Petey's original manuscript of *Me and the Mother Tree*. Jennifer also provided photographs and other materials related to the project. A very special thanks also goes to State Park Interpreter Jean Rhyne who, in her research for performing living history programs as Petey, recognized the shelved manuscript's historical value and Petey's clear intention to have it published. She persevered in tracking down the original document and Jennifer Reeves, and made the convincing case to California State Park Ranger Association and the California State Parks Anniversary Committee to publish it. Jean also put a great deal of effort into the final proofreading of the book. Finally, a thanks to Cate Murphy, who did a tremendous amount of work proofreading and correcting the scanned version of the original manuscript, making this book possible.

Michael G. Lynch, Editor

Photo Credits

Most of the photographs in this book were originally supplied by Petey Weaver. All the photographs are from the collection of the California State Parks Anniversary Committee.

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California State Park Rangers Association

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Printed in the United States of America

**Me
and the
Mother Tree**

Harriett E. "Petey" Weaver

Foreword

Of all of Petey's books, this may have been the most dear to her. In 1976, Petey completed the hand-written draft of "Me and the Mother Tree." She sent a short and exuberant postcard to my grandmother Gladys Reeves saying:

*"11 AM Thurs 22 July
Hi Yourself!
Thirty-year mission this minute completed!
Luv & stuff,
Me"*

Six months later she began a new chapter in her life. My grandmother moved in with her, and they remained together until Petey's death. They had met in the forties at Big Basin, when my grandparents, father and uncle camped there and attended the wonderful fireside programs led by a charismatic, forceful and entertaining park ranger named Petey.

Petey tried for many years to have this memoir published. Growing up, I remember there was a shadow of disappointment that the work hadn't been embraced, but also a determination that some day it would. In letters to fellow ranger Don Meadows, she wrote that publishers were rejecting it because it didn't contain the hot topics of the '70s and '80s:

"no sex, no drugs, no violence, no scandal, too regional, and no one interested in such as California's first woman state park ranger. So I shall put it on the shelf until this mess runs its course. Meanwhile I'm happily busy."

As Petey had no children of her own, I've tried to hold on to her memory, as well as safeguard her remaining personal items and writings. It gives me enormous pleasure that Petey's story of the early days and people at California's state parks is now available for the public she loved. I only wish she could be here to celebrate with us.

Jennifer Reeves

Editor's Note

Petey's manuscript for *Me and the Mother Tree* was completed in 1976, forty years previous to its first printing. As such, references to time frames, as well as terminology and word spelling, should be regarded in this historical context.

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Dedication

To the men of the California State Park Rangers Association,
who have made me Honorary Lifetime Ranger — an honor
I cherish more than any accorded me in the past or any I am
ever likely to receive in the future. From the warmest spot in
my heart, affection and deep appreciation for having been so
well accepted as one of you.

*Dear God,
Hear and bless this earth,
Thy wild ones, Thy rangers, Thy trees,
And joy with all Thy lovingness
Every camper, please.*

“Petey”

Introduction

Shortly after the California State Park System was first established — but almost a half-century before Women’s Lib mushroomed into a national upheaval — I became the only uniformed person of the female sex on state park ranger crews. Throughout my entire twenty years of service, the rangers of one 435-foot-long cement ship and three redwood state parks where I was stationed at various times did me the honor of going about our combined duties as if I were merely another worker like themselves, which I was.

Every morning each of us scattered to his own individual tasks, whether of maintenance or operation or interpretation, according to capabilities and need. But just let the slightest emergency arise and we drew together at Headquarters like the deer in Park Center on the first day of hunting season. Humanity being what and how it is, emergencies both large and small, even in those peaceful decades, had a way of popping up on the minute every minute. Besides, any redwood park is liberally endowed with raccoons and deer and other wildlife along with all the conceivable variations of tourist, camper, and kook. On seasonal holidays and long weekends, camping and picnicking areas overflowed, spicing our lives with excitement or exasperation; sometimes with fear and prayers, constantly with laughs — or the whole works in the same twenty-four hours.

Through it all we tried to look cool and calm and in control, which, come hell and loose dogs and forest fires, we had better be. The big campfire was my responsibility. Around it hundreds assembled each evening. There it behooved me to appear as relaxed as if I had been sunning myself all day on warm beach sands. But whether endeavoring to make things look easy to large audiences, abundantly loaded with unknowns, or leading a nature walk around the Redwood Trail or restraining some visitor from digging up our creekside ferns to take home, people regarded me with curiosity. Regularly someone would ask, “How come — and you — you — a *woman*?” Moreover, campers and tourists alike wanted to know, wasn’t this really a vacation and surely I didn’t get *paid* for it.

I assured them that I did indeed receive a paycheck, the last fifteen years or so anyway. As to the how come and was it a vacation, those details might well fill a couple of volumes. Perhaps in the distant future maybe I'd write about them.

Incredible as it seems to me, that distant future has evolved into the Now, and with it, the time to write.

Happily, I find the events of those gloriously uncomplicated days, long gone, just about as vivid today as when they took place. On top of that, rating what appears to be a fringe benefit, I discover myself to be filled with a gratitude I didn't think to feel then. A deep gratitude it is, too, for having wandered into the forest of big red giants exactly when I did, rather than on some June day this season or next or any ever to follow.

Of course to begin with it was my good fortune to have been born during the first part of the century; then, to have lived my most vigorous years helping America's vacationing public enjoy that Pre-Tranquilizer Era, when California's magnificent scene was still unstrung with Kleenex, beer cans, hamburger wrappers, and Styrofoam picnic gear. Those charmed times, clear to the end of my service, grew more and more precious to me as I witnessed so many post-war changes in both people and parks. I could tell when it was just about time for me to go — perhaps to write of the wonders I had seen and lived.

By then I had reached a point in my life when perhaps I could be forgiven for regaling newly-minted rangers with stories of how things had been among massive trees wide as a city street, even taller than the Statue of Liberty, far older than the discovery of our America — certainly ages before I came; when according to my own select interpretation, dinosaur tracks were still fresh in the mud alongside Opal Creek. Out of respect for my greying temples, no doubt, the youngsters, shining, eager, resplendent in their forest green and stiff-brimmed Stetsons, found it in their hearts to tolerate my accounts of Big Basin's distinctive past.

One afternoon, though, I learned my true age and at the same time was awarded an enviable place in history.

That early-season morning I had assisted in some of the orientation of several Ninety-Day Wonders. We had gone over some of the park's beginnings, flora, fauna, and general

layout. At noon, over sack lunches in Headquarters, and together with a number of regulars, we were still at it.

Gazing through the front window of our log ranger station, I told them: "During my first years here, neither this fine building nor the parking area over there nor the highway leading up and out of the Basin to San Francisco had ever been dreamed of. The only way into Big Basin was by a little dirt road, really just two wagon tracks through the forest that wound downgrade from the Boulder Creek side. It looped around the big trees and ended down there at Opal Creek, where there was a small rustic hotel with a porch supported by pillars of redwood with the bark still on. Years before, it had accommodated occasional visitors. Among them was a stagecoach full of western State Governors. They wanted to see for themselves if stories of Paul Bunyan trees were actually so; if it could possibly be that the 2,250 acres surrounding the hotel was capable of producing enough lumber to build a city the size of San Jose; that 19,280 railroad flatcars would have been necessary to convey it to the mills."

One of the boys stared at me as if my imagination had taken flight far beyond reality.

I cleared my throat and went on: "This area where we are, Park Center, was still almost wilderness then. People had to hike up here from road's end at the creek. But if they were able, they always did, although there was no trail."

"Why? Why here?"

"To see the meadow."

"Meadow? What meadow? Where?" another of the lads queried. His glance darted this way and that over the gear-laden cars, the visitors, and the deer milling about in the clearing and out among the mighty giants that encircled it.

"Meadow," I repeated, indicating with a sweep of my arm the entire scene before us. "Out there it was lush with tall grasses and ferns and all kinds of wildflowers — tiger lilies nearly shoulder-high and in throngs you wouldn't believe."

"What on earth happened?"

I shrugged. "Time mostly. Ballooning population. Everyone on wheels. Demand for more and more roads and public recreation facilities. We're determined to save that patch of grasses over there inside the stake and rider fence, though."

For the deer, as you see — and as a kind of In Memoriam, I suppose,” I added, a catch in my voice.

For minutes there was no comment as everyone pondered the past grandeur of this grove that I had enjoyed in its pristine state for years before Progress struck — and most of them had been born.

Finally, one of the veterans sighed at my eloquence, but even more it would seem, at the absolute wonder of my longevity. Then he wagged his head soberly, as if forced to conclude that surely it couldn't be long now, and through a mouthful of sandwich muttered, “Petey and the Mother Tree.”

Now since Big Basin's Mother Tree, like the Father of the Forest, the Grandmother Tree, the Oakland Tree, the Animal Tree, the Chimney Tree, and one of the grandest of all redwoods, the Santa Clara Tree, may well be in their second thousand years, I became classified in a genus and species and of an era few other people have ever been privileged to enjoy. Most women dread aging. But having been lovingly assigned to such a splendid company as this, who could resent it — or even feel old for that matter?

H.W.

Chapter One: Big Basin

Who? Me?

Every career surely has a high point, whether it has to do with hosing down elephants or land-sliding into the White House. Most occur, I imagine, when need or tension or circumstances ride herd, and a crisis has to be met and coped with skillfully and perhaps with great fortitude. Mine came unexpectedly — and undeservedly — in Big Basin Redwoods one quiet midday. I can't help thinking of it as my Highest Noon.

At the time, tourists were strolling among the giants, open-mouthed, silent with awe. Most campsites were filled. Picnic tables, spread with colorful tablecloths, groaned under all kinds of goodies. Barbecue pits wafted tantalizing aromas into the still, humid air. So far that day no one had careened around a curve, laying rubber all the way; no middle-aged adolescent, released from his job for the day or week or whatever, made like the simian version of a hog caller. Here and there, people either drowsed on log benches, counting their blessings or, heads back, attempted to discover the tips of the towering columns that surrounded them.

Trooping into Park Center at the end of my morning nature walk, fifty-odd members of the party began dispersing to their camps and cabins. That is, all except two — an effervescing mother and her middle-years surprise, a seven-year-old daughter and model of juvenile perfection. As Inn guests for the past two weeks, they had followed closely on my footsteps every mile of every daily hike, and still they were reluctant to depart my presence.

So, yearning for my tuna sandwich and glass of milk, I stood waiting, smiling, my stomach growling.

Mama continued to ply her pride and joy with questions to be answered, as she had done the entire morning up the three miles to Sunset Rock and back down again, always managing to push the young one forward in the group so I'd be sure to notice her; gazing down at her fondly, purring, chirruping, fiddling with little Grizelda's permanent; rearranging the lace collar of her dress; at each stop, smugly quizzing her in review of my pearls of wisdom dropped along the way whenever we

came to various flowers, ferns, and unusual redwood growths. All was designed to show off the precocious youngster and incidentally her own genes lest they escape appreciation.

This kind of thing happens periodically to every ranger naturalist. And when it does, and despite anything you can do, your mounting irritation sometimes sifts down to the poor kid. By the end of a hard work week, you at first can't stand the mother. With mileage uphill and the natural wear and tear of sweating personalities massed on a crowded trail three feet wide, you are pestered with a desire to toss both of them into the creek.

That day, thankfully, I resisted. But here we still were.

The questions and answers came so fast now that my attention was cornered. Mama's repertoire of things to ask expanded by the moment, and shy little Grizelda, face tucked low, responded to each in a laconic voice, every reply letter-perfect — right out of her catechism. They had been working toward her first communion, which would follow their return home, so Mama said.

I smiled and marveled.

As the recital wore on, I smiled and marveled some more.

Not one question did the youngster muff, although every word she uttered came out as if in response to a button pressed that connected with a computer recording.

Finally, when my arches were about to fall, a spanking new thought hit Mama. To tie it all in with their vacation in the redwoods, and to word it appropriately, she spread her hands and tilted her head that she might take inspiration from the miracle of those great crowns soaring up into the clouds.

Unaware of my approaching immortality, but simply to get in tune, I glanced at the treetops myself.

"Tell us," Mama simpered, gaze still on high, "who takes care of you in Big Basin?"

I'd heard the other answers. Naturally I knew this one, too — or assumed I did — so I allowed my druthers to slip farther toward the tuna sandwich.

Now, for the first time, little Grizelda's face lifted, treating me to some incredibly blue eyes looking earnestly into my own. From them a worshipful radiance shone out, innocently blessing one she apparently expected to ascend at any moment.... Me.

It yanked my attention back from such worldly trivia as food. A lump rose in my throat as in hushed tones, literally breathed, little Grizelda enlightened us. "Mama, you know who takes care of me here," she said, smiling reproachfully. "Why, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mother Mary, and Miss Weaver."

I defy anyone to reach a peak in his career higher than that one. From that hour forth, for the rest of my life, how could there be any way to move but downslope?

Sharply contrasting with such a summit came what surely had to have been the bottom of the slope. In the same park, too, Big Basin. And it blasted any lingering notion that I might have qualified to forsake the earth for a more exalted plane.

By then I was only a year away from the end of my long park service. The passing of nearly two decades had given me that certain poise that gradually comes with age and experience. I was now one of the Old Timers. I went about my work with ease and confidence, meeting thousands and thousands of people, conducting huge campfires; taking my place alongside the men in a crew of seventeen; feeling sure that I had the substance with which to face any situation that might arise in the ebb and flow of the park's summertime. I posed for family vacation snapshots, humbly accepted the homage and hero worship invariably heaped upon park and forest rangers everywhere who somehow appear romantic to many visitors. But I was always too busy with long-hour workaday duties to be mindful of the pitfalls attendant to such adulation. That's how and why IT happened, leaving me shocked at my own shortcomings and inelegance.

That morning, in making the rounds of the campgrounds, I felt a need and strolled into a WOMEN'S near the entrance to Group 11. None of the stalls were occupied, so in order to make time count while I carried out my mission, I fell to deciding which songs we'd sing that evening.

Being thoroughly engrossed, I was of course startled when a little girl came padding in, squatted down, and peeked up at me from under the stall door, only to rush out and go shrieking back into the campground: "Mama! Mama! Miss Weaver is in the *bathroom!*"

Beyond an understandable annoyance that my

professional self should be thus heralded throughout Group 11, I gave the interruption of privacy no further attention and quickly slipped back into the planning stage.

But for no longer than a minute or two.

Mounting outdoor noises began to sift into my consciousness: youngster noises closing in, squealing and hollering back and forth — feet pounding along the path, scurrying to the edifice doorway, and quickly scurrying away again. Lots of kids caught up in excitement. All ages and no doubt from every campsite in 11. Well, some game probably, with the WOMEN'S door serving as base.

That's what *I* thought!

The racket grew. My organizational ideas well scrambled by now, I abandoned planning and converted to action. Time to get on with the day. I made preparations to exit the place.

Before I could step out into the forest, a swarm of girls with small boys timidly bringing up the rear spilled inside, pushing and shoving. Seeing me, they bunched together, breathing hard, squirming in agitation, staring — disappointment, if not outright dismay, stamped upon their faces.

The expression on my own must have frozen in midair. Taken aback, I stood wondering, not knowing what all the fuss was about. To be on the safe side, I smiled hospitably and opened my mouth to wish one and all the top of the morning.

I never got the chance. The oldest girl in the group found her tongue first, her voice constricted with disillusionment. “Miss Weaver — I — we just never thought that — that — *you* —”

Words failing, there remained nothing to do but scam. This they did in masse, in utter confusion. The big ones backed over the middle-size ones and the middle-size ones over the small ones, leaving them to pick themselves up off the floor and retreat the best they could. It was every man for himself, an utter rout.

The shattering of an image as it tumbles from a pedestal can be more ear-splitting than a Saturday night Destruction Derby at the Thunder Bowl. To preserve what was left of mine, I made sure never to again patronize one of the park restrooms. Better to seek asylum among the huckleberry bushes.

And how fortunate that the following season, I was

transferred to Big Sur and would no longer have to live with the humiliation of my fall from grace.

My rise and fall in California State Parks began inconspicuously enough. I didn't apply to anyone. I simply arrived where things were to unfold for me over a period of many years.

Mom, Dad, and I had migrated from Burlington, Iowa to Denver, Colorado when I was not yet ten, and from Denver to Los Angeles four years later, as the twenties began. Both my father and I had only Wild West corpuscles in our blood. The Rockies and their ghost towns had sparked our imagination and climbing muscles; California challenged our curiosity, simply, I suppose, because it was there and farther west.

But what a blighted hope, Southern California in August — its puny hills of dead grasses and dried-up tangles of brush! *These* were trees and mountains?

In disgust, I turned my face toward the sea and refused to have anything to do with places like Big Bear and Lake Arrowhead and Mt. Wilson and other so-called mountain resorts, so dear to the hearts of the natives. Already I had raised mine eyes unto the loftiest of conifers and snow-capped peaks. What I glimpsed now was beneath notice. Even the joys of the Pacific failed to compensate for the utter disdain I felt at the dusty streambeds (the Los Angeles River — *really!*) and the sprawling oaks and sycamores.

By the summer preceding my graduation from UCLA, I had earned my first car. When Dad told me he had heard about some big trees up north, I set forth in my newly acquired affluence, an aging Pontiac, to check them out. According to the law of averages, there had to be some kind of straight and tall evergreens somewhere in this crumby country, else why would people be erupting into such fits about it and moving out here in droves? I tried to stir up some interest. Secretly, though, I was quite ready and willing to find nothing. I meant to be forever faithful to magnificent Colorado and to return there as soon as I could secure my degree and escape this impossibly overblown state. It never occurred to me that God might have had a hand in creating California, too.

Things did begin to look a bit different as I approached Santa Cruz. Greener. More and more conifers of some kind. Not too bad. Redwoods, a service station man said. Little

ones. Not over a hundred years old and about that high. The bigger ones were thataway — up the canyons and all over the mountains back of town. Bigger ones? Well, I might just go see what Californians called big, and have it over with.

I did go see, and it's not over with yet. That day, unprepared for what lay ahead, my defenses were down when I drove into a forest to end all forests. Sure enough, the redwoods I had seen towering above Santa Cruz homes had been mere saplings, Junior Grade.

Rounding a turn just beyond the city limits, and without any warning whatever, I passed from bright sunshine into a cool dark forest, far denser than any I had ever known or imagined.

As soon as the narrow curving road would permit, I pulled into a turnout and stopped. For a time, I walked through light so dim that I cast no shadow, and upon ground so deep in humus that no footfall could be heard. It was as if I had stepped through the doorway of a great cathedral. One moment I had been outside, squinting against the glare of a cloudless sky; the next, here I stood in half-light, gazing up in wonder at the glory of natural stained glass.

How does one put into words the conversion of a life and a way of thinking, all in the space of a few miles and in the lapse of a few minutes?

Until that day, Big Basin had been only a name on a map. I had visualized it as a huge dent in the earth, and like Southern California, parched and brown. It turned out to be quite a dent, all right, but after a 100-inch winter, as far from parched and brown as landscape can get. When I braked down the grade, around all the curves, under a rustic arch with

“STATE REDWOOD PARK
To Be Preserved in a State of Nature”

carved upon it, and into the park itself, my mouth dropped open in amazement. I wasn't to get it closed again for years.

No one had ever told me about trees like *these*. Of course, it was entirely possible that back in Denver, my elementary or junior high geography class had read of them in a textbook. But if it did, that must have been one of the days I was too busy writing some of my astounding explorations of the

North Pole to have paid any heed to the teacher or the book. Certainly Southern Californians never mentioned them in my presence. The new residents would have been too thrilled over Christmas and New Year's picnics at the beach to have cared; the state's own sons and daughters too proud of their orange groves and winter gardens to have considered the redwoods worthy of mention.

Just inside the Big Basin archway loomed trees that took my breath away. Out of a profusion of ferns and shrubs and a few broadleaf satellites, they rose up and up and *up* — like the tall silos of Iowa farms, still well remembered. Slowing to a few miles an hour, I coasted past them and on to a grove of giants even more enormous. Many of them would have dwarfed Los Angeles' highest business buildings, perhaps even Denver's Daniels & Fishers twenty-story tower. And many stood massive enough to hide a car parked behind. Walking among them later, I found the duff on the forest floor soft and springy underfoot. No one had to tell me that this was because leaves and twigs had been dropping there for centuries — indeed, since before the birth of Christ.

Never before had I felt like a speck on the face of the earth; nor had I ever thought of my life as a split second in time. All at once I learned about humility, something neither home nor church nor school had been able to instill in my cocky, self-sufficient character. For a change, every bit of me stood quiet and receptive. As of then, I began to grow up.

Now, bathed in a shaft of late afternoon sunshine filtering down through the foliage far, far above, I forgot my former home and adventures in the forests and mighty mountains of Colorado and didn't remember them again until a long time afterwards. No thought of hurrying home anymore. Somehow I heard a voice that lovingly compelled me to shut up and listen while I was being told that I *was* home, that *here* I belonged.

Alongside the Redwood Trail that first afternoon, I stopped often to lean back against giants a thousand or two years old — all the better to crane my neck and see the small patch of sky directly above. Once, in approaching a bend in the trail, I heard the animated chatter of many boys and girls.

As I came into view, a stubble-headed lad left the group and rushed to me, grasping my hand. "Here's one,"

he shouted, setting off a clamor amongst the youngsters congregated at the base of a gigantic redwood.

"Come help us make a ring around the tree," another little fellow called. "All we need's one more guy."

With that, we clasped hands until there was a complete encirclement of the old giant. Then we "sounded off," starting with the chubby little blond girl on my right. The count disappeared behind the massive bole, rounded the side, and when it got to me, at the end of the human tape measure, I found I was number twenty-eight. It was hard to believe. This — ONE tree?

Later, after the children had boarded their school bus and were driven away, calling goodbyes until they vanished from sight, I experienced a tranquility I had never known before. Not that the forest suddenly became still. No forest is ever really soundless. I discovered this soon afterwards, when I camped there, for I began awakening at night whenever a leaf fluttered to the ground nearby. It made such a gentle and companionable sound, one I wouldn't have missed for the world.

That first day, though, I was scarcely conscious of the muffled step of small hooves picking their way daintily my direction. Yet I heard them stop, and quickly became aware of two soft brown eyes, curious but unafraid, peering through the foliage of a huckleberry bush. A doe on her way to the creek had paused to look me over. But only for a moment. Once satisfied that I meant no harm, she turned her back and walked calmly away. How could this possibly be? Well, better remember it. I might not see anything like that ever again.

How wrong I was!

All at once, a strange bellow boomed out from somewhere not too distant. Startled and unaccustomed to anything of this sort in a forest — or anywhere else, for that matter — I took off full speed in the direction of the outburst. I'd never heard a moose. Maybe this was one! Surely only a bull moose calling his mate could ever contrive such a roar.

Pushing past a clump of wax myrtle, I could see a big circular meadow ahead. It was from there, or just beyond, that the strange hubbub seemed to emanating. I raced on, but before I could reach the grasses, my doe of a few minutes before whizzed past close enough to kick redwood needles

up into my face. Then bounding on in high looping arcs, she vanished behind some big trees the other side of the clearing.

Now came another doe, and right behind her, two spotted fawns, grunting bleats every time their hooves struck the ground. What on earth was the matter! Could a lion be loose in the park?

I plowed pell-mell into the meadow just as the growing thunder of hooves caught up with me. Glancing back, I beheld to my horror a juggernaut of a buck, crowned with a vast rack of antlers, bearing down with all the frightening single-mindedness of the Daylight Limited. And more loomed close behind.

Thoroughly wild-eyed by now, I lost track of my feet. In the turmoil, one of them was unavoidably detained while the rest of me went crashing onward. Instinctively, I recoiled into a trembling wad and braced for extermination.

But my time had not yet come. The big buck hurtled high overhead, then one by one the others; on they bounded through the grasses like a handful of ping pong balls tossed onto concrete. Suddenly I was alone.

After the stampede had subsided and finding myself still in one piece, I carefully disengaged the horsetails that had become entangled in my hair and pushed aside several tiger lilies, so I could peek out. As the mournful lowing again resounded through the forest, I finally located it over somewhere among a group of great redwoods upslope of the meadow. Still tearing toward it went deer of all sizes, running and leaping from every direction. Oh, for eyes that could see through those gigantic trunks! But that was like wishing to X-ray the Washington Monument.

I inched toward a spot where I could at least discover what was going on among the big trees. Scarcely believing my eyes, I stood up and stared. There, calmly walking about in an undulating mobilization of deer, was an old man with a bucket. Its contents he was distributing along the top of a log, and the deer were lining up on both sides as happily as if they had been doing this throughout their lives, which indeed, most had, I found out later.

Befuddled from my near panic, I sauntered cautiously toward the gathering. No one paid the slightest attention until finally the old man noticed me. He was large, obviously

in his seventies, and a brother to all deer. "Afternoon," he called gruffly. "Want to feed them?" With that, he held out the bucket. "They like their oats," he said pleasantly when I walked toward him. "But today there's only twenty-two. Wonder where everybody is."

I couldn't help him.

"Usually have more," the old man grumbled. Then picking up a megaphone I hadn't observed before, he inflated himself and let go with a long, dragged-out, leather-lunged bellow: "HE-E-E-RE B-A-A-A-BE! Here Babe! H-H-E-E-E-E-RE BA-a-a-a-BE! *Here Babe!*"

No one has ever convinced me that it couldn't be heard around the rim of Big Basin, nine miles out.

The summons brought in three more bucks — two forked-horns and one still in his spikes, the old man explained. And so, while I received my first lesson in redwood country lore, the mess call continued to bugle forth, and I began to like being nudged and jostled by a milling, oaty gourmet club. I even dared to scratch a few long ears and pat some cold wet noses.

Until then, the deer in my life had consisted of a stag gazing into space from an insurance company emblem and a terrified doe that years ago had streaked across my path one memorable afternoon near Buffalo Bill's grave.

Here in Big Basin, for the last quarter century, any deer within earshot had been hailed every day sharply at 4 PM. The old man, Charlie Lewis (officially listed as Custodian, unofficially known as The General Factotum) told me about it. One of his jobs was to feed them, and he never missed, summer or winter. The deer had long regulated their stomachs by his watch, although most didn't need to be called. Habit and hunger pangs told them exactly when a day had reached the designated hour. Many strolled to the feeding grounds ahead of time to avoid the rush and to await their friend with his megaphone and bucket of oats.

Pointing to a huge buck with an impressive seven-point rack of antlers, Charlie, as I soon came to know him, said, "That'n Old Sam. Almost eighteen. That'n over there's Jack. Has a big scar on his flank. Daisy over yonder has triplets. First time. Mostly throws twins. Cute little spotties always.

That's Butch. Kind of feisty. You stay around a spell and you'll come to know 'em all. Every one. By name."

As it turned out, I did, and that was only days away. From then on for the ensuing nine years, we were devoted friends and neighbors.

Without realizing what had happened, I began to like California. There was just something about it.

During the next day, I did nothing more than roam around, gaze at giant redwoods I still couldn't quite believe, and sprawl dreamily in the meadow. Although no more than ten acres all together, it grew lush and green and usually warm around noon, when the sun could reach the forest floor as at the bottom of a deep canyon. Then the grasses and horsetails became luminous, and the tiger lilies among them glowed brightly against the shadowy backdrop of forest. Set like a jewel in the heart of this great grove of tremendous trees, the meadow attracted deer at all hours and therefore tourists from everywhere across the nation and world. Here, many city dwellers saw wild creatures at close range for the first time, and got to touch them.

Today, feeding and petting deer is as frowned upon as feeding the bears at Sequoia and Yosemite has always been. But in those early times, the deer, like their guests, were less ouchy and far less prone to psychoses with unpronounceable names. They appeared to enjoy everyone, for it hadn't occurred to vacationers yet to tease them or recycle film wrappers, bubble gum, plastic sacks, cigar stubs, and road maps through their gastrointestinal tracts. Consequently, few ever felt inclined to rear up and, with their sharp front hooves, neatly filet any of the park visitors.

In 1902, Big Basin became California's first permanent state park when it was saved from the sawmills which, for decades had been denuding the canyon below and were already beginning to cut in the main grove. At the turn of the century a group of conservationists, led by outraged photographer, Andrew P. Hill, had wagoned into the Basin, camped, explored, organized as the Sempervirens Club, and dedicated themselves to the preservation for all time to come of this heaven on earth. Throughout the years since, Big Basin has been the ideal family park.

By the time I appeared on the scene, still well before the Aspirin Man, the third generation was toddling around on the redwood duff, climbing over the rolling surface roots, squealing with joy at the abundance of wildlife. You could tent wherever you liked. Travel trailers were still far in the future. There was no charge; neither was there any limit to the time you could stay, whether that was all summer or even from April, when the winter rains tapered off, until November or December, when they began to come down in earnest. Firewood was yours for the taking, neatly chopped and stacked; water came out of the pipes, clear and ample; no bears lived in the area to climb in through your car window and sit down on the horn.

With no need for concern, husbands and fathers felt free to set up the family camp on a weekend, go back to jobs if they were within a radius of two or three hundred miles, and return to their families and the big outdoors every Friday night thereafter. A tiny grocery and a sandwich stand stood available near the creek, not far from the long-vacant hotel, now used as a clubhouse, and an equally ancient house that served as a park office. Out on the wide veranda of the house, often in a rocking chair, sat the Warden when he was not otherwise busy. The men who followed in later years were to be called Chief Ranger, and then Park Supervisor, as officials became more mind-boggling than the state's skyrocketing budget.

Occupied with restrooms, firewood supply, the campfires, and many small tasks was Custodian Charlie Lewis. Old-time woodsman and Assistant Warden Fred Canham, who could ax a dangerous giant down onto a peg, attended to the more strenuous chores. Both wore badges although they rarely had occasion to exercise authority. Few visitors did anything they shouldn't; everyone pitched in to help pick up the place and keep it orderly, often cleaning whichever outhouse they'd used, so Charlie wouldn't have to work so hard. Every camper knew all the others, when they'd probably arrive, and exactly where they'd camp, because once a spot had been selected, there the children and grandchildren would learn how to walk. Nothing proved too much for any of them or the park staff to do to make life in the Basin more enjoyable. Whenever a need of some kind arose, immediate help could be counted

upon. The closest the park came to a show-stopping problem in those days was usually when a pregnant woman couldn't tear herself away to reach the hospital in time for the action.

Any camper who wished could leave for days or weeks or even months and be certain that none of his gear would be disturbed. The first theft I knew of took place near the end of World War II. A pound box of precious sugar disappeared off a campsite table and no coon tracks led away from it. This epic crime shook us all up. I doubt that any of the crew or campers has ever forgotten.

In June 1929, almost two decades before that incredible incident, I put up an umbrella tent in one of the campsites among the redwoods. Charlie had shown me this special place near the main road, a quarter of a mile out from Park Center. He had also helped me set up before carrying on with his own work.

This first camp was in a "crater" — one of the many to be found in a forest as ancient as Big Basin. Years ago, these were great raw gaps in the earth, some as much as ninety feet around, where a mother tree had toppled. Left behind, after man finally appeared and hauled the down timber away, were rings of "babies" that through the centuries had root-sprouted around the old redwoods and were now giants 6 to 12 feet through. Long rainy seasons had gradually filled and smoothed the tree-encircled basins, which then provided the coziest kind of privacy, well-screened from even the nearest neighbors the other side of luxuriant shrubbery. Inside these craters were the standard Early Park picnic table, circular, with rustic stools around it, a wooden food locker, and a rock masonry barbecue stove. A few feet from mine I found a water spigot; at the end of a short path through the huckleberries, a WOMEN'S — a single-holer. After my time and as Progress emerged triumphant, it was replaced by a \$5,000 "Flushing Palace."

Because this first park season of mine had not really begun, none of the campers who historically inhabited the area had yet put in appearance. So I was completely alone in my section of the great dark forest.

The thrill of adventure coursed through me. I went to the largest of the redwoods girdling my pocket campsite and stroked the fluted trunk. It soared, almost limbless, into the

foliage and the drifting fog well over two-hundred feet above, giving the impression of having transcended human vision. Still, for all that fellowship with sky and clouds and stars, the old monarch was very much of the earth. I thumped its bark, perhaps a foot thick. What a living Rock of Ages! Today's elder in a lineage of growing things that goes back through remote yesterdays to Time Immemorial; heir to forty million years of antiquity; enduring survivor of Nature's fiercest violence — of storm and fire and flood and earthquake.

Even man.

All of this Charlie had pointed out earlier, with appropriate drama and oratory, while we hoisted the center pole of my tent and drove in the stakes.

Leaning back against the big trunk, I thought about this and about Charlie. He was truly a gentleman of the old school, self-educated, unfailingly dignified. He stood tall in frame and spirit, and I was to learn how solicitous of the needy, aged, and ailing he could be; how crusty but impeccably courteous to all who were law-abiding; how ready to chop into bits any who weren't or who left their manners at home and rent the quiet of his forest with their yodels. I adored him then, and I revere his memory now. For me, Charlie became the connecting link between my happy past and an even happier and more responsible future at a time when I needed connecting, and a grandfather image was not only delightful but welcome.

Suddenly my reverie was shattered by a staccato roar of a motor such as only an early day Dodge touring car could emit — the kind of a contraption that, top down, went snorting up the steepest hills in high-water majesty, gulping gas at one end and blasting it out the other, all cylinders clattering their little pistons out, any passengers yelling point-blank into each other's ears in vain hope of making themselves heard above the din.

I climbed up onto one of the redwood's huge surface roots and watched Charlie piloting his topless tigerpower toward me. All I could see above the bushes and the radiator's steam geyser was Charlie's head and shoulders bobbing along. Behind him, a collection of brooms and wet-mops swayed and flopped from side to side every time the car pitched and yawed in and out of the chuckholes.

Seeing me, Charlie pulled up as if he were whoa-ing a mustang at full gallop. "How are you doing, young lady?" he queried, shutting off the motor and tipping his hat.

I stood aside with a "Be my guest" gesture while he climbed down and surveyed my camp critically.

"Neat and orderly," was his terse commendation. "Always remember to keep a tidy camp," he went on. "We do not desecrate splendor. We tread here with reverence." His voice trembled with emotion.

I nodded, impressed, and in hearty accord, determined to be a credit to him and to the Almighty.

Charlie now reached into the back seat, dragged out two bundles of split firewood, and placed them alongside my fireplace.

He brushed aside my thanks. "Can't cook without fuel. But don't ever lay ax around here, understand? We bring in down stuff and cut it properly. Barn there's full. Help yourself."

I nodded gratefully while my new friend once again enthroned himself atop his own private Everest. I wished he weren't going, and said so, wistfully no doubt, because all of a sudden and for the first time, I began to feel awfully alone.

Charlie's heart melted. "Well, climb in, young lady. You can go my rounds with me if you like."

Would I!

The rest of the afternoon, until oat call, Charlie and I and all the cleaning equipment went pitching and yawing along campground roads in his flying hot water bottle, past head-high logs and into over three hundred picturesque campsites nestled among the giants — from one john to another. At each we pulled up while Charlie swept and swabbed and disinfected and replenished paper supplies and told me about this gigantically vertical world in which I had chosen to camp by myself.

He was a terrific teacher in a way that made things stick. He spared nothing that day or during those that followed in acquainting me with redwood country, its history, its big trees, wildlife, and vegetation. We fed chipmunks and their adversaries, the Steller's jays, by day and raccoons by night, and Charlie counseled me why I was not to expect bears.

"There aren't any," he explained. "This was grizzly territory, and they were all killed off back in the 1880s."

"Mountain lions?" I asked.

"None of them either — or rattlers — down in here, anyway. Only up higher in the jack pines and chaparral, where it's open and sunny."

"Poison oak?"

"No worry there either, long time ago, Mrs. Phoebe Apperson Hearst gave \$30,000 to have it grubbed out of Big Basin and to free the streams of down stuff."

Sometimes we would stop by Opal Creek just to see the bowers of fragrant creamy-white azaleas mirroring themselves in the glassy water or to watch someone in a small boat, drifting lazily. Chugging along the daily outhouse route, Charlie showed me the myriads of small flowering people that inhabit the forest floor, such as the *Clintonia* near the park woodshed.

"She was stepped on yesterday," Charlie mourned, kneeling down to support the damaged stem tenderly with a gnarled hand, so I could see the cluster of pink blossoms. "People are so unseeing and thoughtless. She may live yet, though, bless her heart," he added. "Nature's a wonderful healer. Come July, berry-like fruit should replace these blooms. Time goes on, they'll turn a rich indigo. Let's stop often and watch."

We did. Often. We were there when berries appeared, and we rejoiced when they became rich with indigo.

For days on these daily rounds, Charlie taught me about the various ferns — the tall *Woodwardias* and the sword ferns that grew in damp places along the streams; the patches of bracken in the sunnier places; the five-fingered ones, glistening with droplets of spray beside small cascades. From him I learned about the clover-leafed redwood sorrel, or oxalis, dense groundcover of the redwood forest's deep shade. He took me where the lovely trillium grew best, and the salal and coral root. Each day, in and near and between Johns, we visited so many of Charlie's growing friends that I was able rather quickly to identify much of Big Basin's handsome flora, although not by genus and species. Still, Charlie and I were among the fortunate who couldn't walk a trail without seeing special friends everywhere — creekside, on sunny slopes, or in the deep forest.

Soon I knew the delight of fairy lanterns, false Solomon

seal, the delicate alum root, and the dainty star flower in the shade at Sempervirens Falls; the graceful sprays of aromatic yerba buena, and inside-out flower, its leaves so like maidenhair fern. Several miles up a winding road to a high meadow, Flea Potrero they called it, Charlie introduced me to skunk cabbage and his favorite mountain iris blossoms. He made sure I identified the Basin's most abundant shrubs, the huckleberry, and the taller spicy one among them, the wax myrtle. He saw to it that I knew where, below the old mill site on Bloom's Creek, I could find the tastiest watercress.

Charlie pointed out huge Douglas-firs, some nearly as big as the redwoods; the tanoaks from which, in pioneer days, the bark was peeled in woody scrolls and mule-backed out of the mountains to local tanneries; the fantastic red-barked madrones, spiraling up into the canopy on a relentless quest for sunlight. "Great tree," Charlie said, peeling off one of the paper-thin curls, revealing the bright green underbark. "Burns hotter'n any other wood. Because of this, was used in the manufacture of TNT."

Once, after we had finished the john in Camp Group 14, we walked over to a fine specimen of California laurel — or bay or Oregon myrtle or pepperwood. Charlie crushed one of the long elliptical leaves between his thumb and forefinger so I could sniff its spicy pungency, similar to the leaves common to meat cookery. "Its aroma is even stronger than the true bay tree," Charlie commented. "Come here when the mid-afternoon sun hits these leaves, and you'll find out."

I didn't take me long to work up a route of flowers, trees, and shrubs I had to visit and to persuade other campers to come with me to see the wonders growing near their campsites and johns. Later, it all added up when during the war I became Park Naturalist, and the seasonal visitor count numbered close to a half million.

Many a year now, and at odd seasons, I return to the park to visit remembered plants and trees and vistas, where Charlie, without either of us realizing it, began training me for what turned out to be a long park service. Certainly no other preparation for this glorious time of life did I ever have. The California State Park System and I literally grew up together. Gradually. Like Topsy.

I always like to go to the place at the edge of Union Creek where I first saw the baby-like hand prints of coons stamped clearly in the mud — where Charlie told me how the little masked bandits fished all the streams for crawdads and frogs, and pilfered the camps for anything lying around loose. (So *that's* where my bowl of fruit and spare car keys went!)

For years I could still locate patches of star zygadenes, the little nutmeg tree near Woodwardia Falls, and the water ouzel's nest within the spray. Yellow violets still grew where I first detected their demure faces among the other ground cover. Gardens of mosses, lichens, and liverworts still inhabited the trunks of down redwoods; ferns and huckleberry bushes and young firs still sprang from the upended roots of the old Fallen Monarch, stretched across Opal Creek, as they do from many a stump and rotting tree, where seeds of various kinds have drifted and found soil enough tucked away in crevices to start them on lives of their own.

Along the bole of an ancient wind-throw, a half-dozen sturdy young redwoods are reaching for the sky. These may not have been seedlings but sprouts from dormant buds under the bark that were carrying forward the life of the mother tree. I can recall when their first green shoots peeked up through the mossy litter along the trunk and joined the rest of us in this realm of big red giants.

It wouldn't surprise me if some century in the distant tomorrow, silt and falling leaves and twigs, deposited by the storms of winter, would finally cover the huge log so that picnickers of that Age or Epoch could never guess she is there. They may wonder, though, how those great redwoods came to be standing in such a straight line. I won't of course be present to tell them as Charlie told me or as I have interpreted the forest to visitors without number in the past; yet, I would be the one to best explain about those particular titans, for I knew their mother well, and I was there when they were born — before Charlie maneuvered me into a career I was to love more than anything else I would ever be doing again.

This came about the first Friday night of my first week in Big Basin; in a year when there were only 7 parks and 11 historic monuments in the newly hatched California State Park System; all together, no more than a dozen and a half park employees in the entire thousand-mile-long state. Not

then could we foresee the multimillion-dollar organization that would evolve with well over 280 units of many different kinds and more than 750 men and women working to make it the finest in the nation — certainly the most extensive. I find it difficult to realize even now.

How fortunate beyond describing can one be to have matured with it almost from the beginning.

But there were days! And people! And events!

Chapter Two: Big Basin

The Fire is Lighted

“Think you could lead singing?” Charlie shouted from his four-wheel high-rise, just then idling softly — like a jackhammer on solid concrete.

“Well, I was a cheerleader not so long ago,” I yelled back, recalling high school days.

“Then be at campfire tonight,” Charlie called. “First of the season.”

That was all, but it was an order. Charlie Lewis brooked no dissent from young whippersnappers. Tipping his hat in his usual courtly way, he crunched into low and sedately blasted off.

After dark, flashlight in hand, I headed for the red and orange glow dancing on the trunks of redwood giants near the creek.

Breathes there a soul so dead that his pulse can't quicken at such a sight? Not mine. Since the Stone Ages, fire has fascinated man, drawn him to it, compelled in him a need of its light and warmth. For me, a campfire is at once the primitive within us, the winning of the West, an abiding peace; a crying out for companionship inherited from a long time past and probably destined to reach into all time to come.

That night, down at the bottom of the world's tallest, darkest forest, I craned my neck to wonder at a lone star glittering in a patch of infinity between treetops far above. Then, with a jolt, I again related to earth. I stumbled over a huge redwood root and catapulted onto my face, thereby learning the hard way that in this inky place, by golly, you keep your light beamed on whatever lies ahead of your *feet*, not flitting around in the bushes, no matter what sinister critter you imagine to be secreted among them.

All at once, rounding the massive base of a giant, I came upon the big campfire. Never had I seen anything like it or the encircling rows of redwood logs. A quarter had been cut out of each log section so campers could sit and lean back comfortably, heads resting against the outer rings of wood fiber created during the most recent centuries.

By the time I got there, the seats were filled, not with

many families as they would be later after more schools were out, but with adults — the Old Timers who came early in the season and stayed late. Occupants of the front rows near the fire were fanning themselves and trying to keep cool until the fire burned low; those in the back rows were encased in heavy jackets or coats, blankets over their laps against the nightly cold of the redwood forest, which would intensify as the evening wore on.

When I stepped out of the darkness and into the radiating warmth and firelight, perhaps two hundred heads immediately turned my direction. So much attention stopped me in my tracks. I glanced down to see if I might be losing something, apparently prompting a man and three women to leave their seats and come toward me, hands outstretched.

“You must be Harriett,” one of the women said with a kindly smile. “We heard you were here. Charlie told us.”

I was too surprised to manage more than a few appropriate noises of acknowledgement.

The man pumped my hand. “Charlie said you were a newcomer,” he said, “Welcome.”

In some confusion, I went along with the welcoming committee to be presented to each person there, individually and by name, before being hustled to the seat of honor at campfire left — a place I was to occupy of an evening for fourteen years all together. Little did I suspect then that these campers would become lifelong friends, as cherished as any I would ever know. Through the introductions I found every occupation and strata of society represented: government, business, arts and crafts, the retireds. Moreover, all, as one, had a common bond, strong and enduring: the “discovery” of Big Basin. Of an evening, spring, summer, and fall, they gathered there under the redwoods; but twelve months a year, their enthusiasm reached out to “save” others like themselves, who otherwise might stumble blindly through life without ever having known and loved this special heaven on earth.

Each newcomer, therefore, was received warmly as another convert added to their charmed and ever-widening circle. In those wonderfully happy late twenties, then the thirties, a Big Basin camper, like Jonathan Livingston Seagull, knew no limitations. The park was there for his delight. No

question of campsite availability or beforehand reservations via Ticketron ever arose. Such a thought wouldn't have entered anyone's mind. Space aplenty, convenient and inviting, awaited under the big trees. Why didn't more people come? Didn't they know what they were missing? Spread the word! And they all did.

To every campfire, old and young alike came, amply supplied with penny suckers from the refreshment stand, a simple and inexpensive evening ritual that soon after the turn of the century had become a fun tradition; one that was to carry forward until World War II days, when sugar fell short and somehow humanity changed, never to be the same again in our time.

My first night, I hadn't been sitting beside the fire with some of my new friends many minutes before Charlie Lewis introduced me with all the eloquence at his command. Knees quaking, I mounted the tiny log stage.

In one corner stood an upright piano, willed to the park, I found out later, by an aged Santa Cruz pioneer lady whose parlor it had graced from her wedding day until her death. Like its beneficent donor, the piano had long ago passed through its sunset years. Quite amazingly, though, the poor thing still endured not only the merciless summertime poundings but also wintertime occupancy by Park Center mice and rats, which used it for a recreation hall and maternity ward.

Before it now, teetering pertly on the edge of the rickety stool sat a little old lady, then in her 90s, hands folded upon an apron, immaculately white and starched and edged with ruffles, that covered her lap. Earlier, Charlie had told me about Grandma Robinson, veteran of countless song sessions around the campfire. Beaming, she waited patiently for my leadership.

No one had to tell me that Grandma, dear and fragile-appearing, had raised her family lovingly, yet with authority, because once I called for all to join in the singing of "Let Me Call You Sweetheart", her gnarled but still-supple fingers pounced upon the keys with the awesome power of a lioness trapping dinner for her cubs. Then they romped nimbly over black keys and white from one end of the keyboard to the other — and sometimes off the end — in fast and furious ragtime, well-laced with all manner of flourishes.

The audience burst into amused and appreciative applause. Startled, I glanced over my shoulder and saw that this was Grandma Robinson's exuberant way of bringing us together, not only for the old song favorite itself, but also for the season and what turned out to be a new career, just then being born. In the doing, she paid no attention whatever to her flying fingers, but smiling joyously, kept her eyes on me. At once, we were on the same wave length, totally simpatico. I relaxed.

For the next hour, everyone teamed up for some of the most satisfying singing I had ever heard; much of it in three or four-part harmony; most of it favorites of the several generations present there. To receive such wholehearted response awakened in me a happiness that was to sustain wearisome moments during the next two decades, while the California State Park System expanded in every direction; when, after the war, visitors began flocking to the various parks, beaches, and historical monuments by the hundreds of thousands. Especially to the world famous redwood groves.

Grandma Robinson, in her frilly apron, played for us often until she was nearly ninety-eight, always without music, her face alight as she watched the growing hundreds of campers harmonizing around the big campfire.

It was a *good* time to have been alive. First years of the Depression though these were, low spirits never endured very long in Big Basin. Because it cost nothing to camp there, and camaraderie was so contagious, everyone felt he would rather be with his friends among the redwoods than remain at home, despairing about how to stretch a dollar. Strangely, perhaps, the penny suckers played a surprising role in the preservation of enjoyment. They served as a kind of common denominator, a treat *all* could afford and share, even in the darkest days.

During the first three summers and for as many Wardens — and Charlie — I led the sing-alongs. Then Charlie's advanced age forced him to retire. When he did, I took over the entire evening, the singing, sometimes the storytelling, nature talk, and whatever entertainment we could muster from camps and Inn cabins. Afterwards, nightly except Sunday, we danced on a small floor near the campfire circle that had been constructed by the CCC boys of Big Basin's own

contingent, based at the Old Lodge Site above Flea Potrero. Those were days that finished the twenties and saw the thirties almost to the outbreak of World War II. In that time, I absorbed far more usable information, skills, and savvy about public relations than in my five years at UCLA. One of the first lessons involved a matter of great sensitivity — especially to the Southern Californians among us.

I happened to remember a simple audience-participation thing called The Rainmaker. A brief stunt, it had everyone slapping thighs slowly and lightly, then faster and louder, then clapping hands, gradually raising them overhead until the mass sound was one of rain falling. Since we had often used it at high school games to steam up the rooting section and get it going, I figured it might serve the same purpose here.

Now in a California crystal-clear August, you might as well expect the sky to empty itself of shining copper pennies as a single drop of moisture. *It wouldn't dare!* Only that night it did. Unhappily and inexcusably the heavens collapsed, half-drowning the redwood forest — a calamity that took me forever to rise above. Those veteran Big Basin campers, spoiled rotten by perpetually beautiful weather, weren't about to have me tamper with their vacations. From then on, I steered clear of rain stunts, although once again, indirectly however, I was responsible for another deluge.

Seventeen years later, the Saturday evening of Labor Day weekend, when thousands of visitors jammed the park, my good friend Chief Eaglewing of the Karuk people motored in from redwood country's upper Klamath River to entertain with his authentic dances and legends. A ruggedly handsome Indian, dressed colorfully in full regalia, Eaglewing fit into our scene as naturally as one of the giants at the side of the campfire circle. For the entire evening he brought to life fascinating glimpses of our Native American heritage. But they included — woe betide — the Rain Dance.

Most campers, enchanted though they were, nevertheless cringed and well they might have, for before morning all were out in the pitch dark frantically trenching around their tents, and grumbling about my lousing up the weather.

After that, I made sure not to mention storm or rain or even water, and was careful to double check all incoming

Indians. Anything to avoid feeling criminal and so personally accountable for atmospheric changes in Big Basin's traditional summertime.

The night I really started to grow as a park woman took place at the beginning of my third season, and at an up-and-at-'em period in my life, when if anyone carrying a flag had charged into an erupting volcano, I would have followed without a backward glance.

That afternoon, Mr. Moody called me in for a talk. "You *sure* you want to be one of the park regulars?" he probed. Skepticism creased his face as he tilted back in his swivel chair and leveled his gaze at me.

Of course I did!

"Well, I have the go-ahead from San Francisco (then the office of the California State Park Chief and secretary). There's no pay in it, but we need you."

I scooted forward on my chair. A paycheck? That was only money.

The Warden cleared his throat. "Before you decide, young lady, I'd better make clear the obligations and responsibilities you'd be expected to assume besides the campfire." And without crocheting his way around any of them, he did.

I was to help enforce state park regulations and keep myself available to tourists for detailed information, not only about Big Basin but about the other parks, too — in fact about all of California, its roads, mileages, where to go, what to see, and how to get there without becoming a news story or statistic. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and with no time off, I must stand ready and busting out all over to assist park guests in whatever way I could. They were to become my responsibility the same as his; their welfare, happiness, comfort, and peace of mind, my permanent concern. We had always taken good care of our campers, Warden Moody averred. We would continue to do no less.

The moment had arrived for singing "Onward Christian Rangers." By then I could have belted it out with evangelistic fervor. To say the least, I left Warden Moody's office phosphorescent with desire to do or die for Big Basin and all of its wonderful campers.

That night required that I translate the new vows into action.

Restfully sleeping in my new umbrella tent in the usual quiet of the small hours, I was suddenly awakened by a din that bolted me out of the sack and onto my feet. It sounded like a heavy animal thrashing around and falling, struggling to its feet to plow ahead through the huckleberry bushes before going down again. Thoroughly scared, I struggled with the Coleman lantern. All the while, from the direction of the creek, the disturbance grew nearer and nearer.

Not knowing what else to do, I stepped cautiously outside and set the lantern on the picnic table where it would cast a wide area of light. The pale glow spread over the trunks of the encircling redwoods. On the big one behind me, my shadow soared high overhead like a monstrous haunt. Normally not one to alarm easily, I nevertheless was doing a bang-up job of shivering and teeth chattering, brought on by a combination of Big Basin night cold and an overriding suspicion that my heart was about to vacate its premises for the great outdoors. Hurriedly retreating into the tent, I bumped into my robe, and still shivering, waited apprehensively while close at hand now the uproar resounded through the forest.

Moments later, I heard garbled grunts and groans along with a splintering crash in some bushes just the other side of my crater. Then silence, utter and weird. All I needed right then was the Hound of the Baskervilles to howl up a spook for the moonless night. My scalp began to prickle when I remembered that no one besides myself was camped in that whole end of the big park. Whatever This Thing, I was going to have to deal with it alone.

Mercifully, suspense was short-lived. The stillness promptly gave way to a revival of the hullabaloo, only this time reality replaced mystery as the foliage of a wax myrtle, whipping around violently, ejected a tousle-headed man, clothing disheveled, banjo eyes spinning in their sockets. When he careened over the rim of the crater, what held his head on I can't imagine, for on the plunge into my pocket campsite, his toe caught the edge of a bulging surface root. Flip-flopping end over end, mind over matter, he landed with a thud beside my picnic table. In passing, he had clutched wildly at the lantern, and fortunately missed. Still, the man had strength and breath enough left that he somehow

managed to sway up onto his feet and lurch toward me, standing there staring out of my tent.

Stiff with amazement and panic, I froze just as he bowled through the entryway, clipping several of the tent stakes in route, and pancaked at my feet. This set off a chain reaction that popped the rest of the stakes out of the ground like corks out of champagne bottles. In the chaos that followed, the center pole snapped, and with the squishy sigh of a spent parachute, the tent settled over both of us.

Now we did have all-out pandemonium. The man, winded but still hollering and groaning, fought to disentangle himself from me and my numerous hangers of clothing. Together, like beached grunion, we flopped around under the mass of canvas, scrambling this way and that to get somewhere, anywhere but where we were. The tumult and the shouting must have been worthy of a Headhunter feast.

All at once, a glimmer of light from the Coleman came to my rescue. Like one possessed, then, I began to yank harder at the animated tent until I succeeded in dragging first myself then my unwelcome invader out from under it.

Who could doubt by now that he was gloriously drunk? His breath should have shriveled the bark of the farthest redwood.

Panting mightily from the ordeal of extricating both of us, I grabbed the fellow by both shoulders and shook him.

“What ails you?” I demanded stupidly. “What do you want?”

None of his eyes could focus, and because of his unruly tongue, he could form no words as we know them. I growled my disgust, but slipped an arm under one of his shoulders and struggled until I had the man up onto one of the picnic seats. In those moments I learned that a drunk is a thousand times heavier and more unwieldy than dangerous.

Finally, I got this one draped over the table. Then, lest in such a condition he slither back onto the ground, I tried to sober him up a bit by holding a bottle of kitchen ammonia under his nose.

Reaction was instantaneous. The first and only big whiff jerked his rear end up off the seat and his wobbling head up off the table and sent the whole man reeling backwards into the darkness. A pan of Big Basin’s cold water dashed

into his face gave me a chance to collect what was left of my wits and to remember with a bang that as Mr. Moody's new crew member, I was fully responsible for the fellow's safety and happiness. That I wasn't appropriately dressed to meet this rather specialized responsibility occurred to me only fleetingly, while I again wrestled him onto a seat at the table. Panting from the effort, I heard my voice sailing out into the night, unrecognizable but loud.

"Now," I said, "where do you think you're going?"

The question required a minute's consideration before the man was able to address the Coleman, obviously believing it to be me. "Car," he moaned, feeling of his day-old beard and wagging his head like a performing seal. "Where 'n hell's ma car? Where am I, lady?"

"Your car?"

"Thas wat I shed. Ma car. Can't find the damn thing. Stoo dark. Somebody musta shot out the lights."

"Where'd you leave your car?"

"Dunno. Stoo goddam dark. All except you, lady, and *boy*, are you lit up like the whole goddam Redondo pier!"

To emphasize our similarity, he made such a wide sweep with his arm that he turned turtle, and with a sickening crunch, landed bottom side up on the forest floor.

For a few moments after I flopped him over on his back and brushed the redwood foliage off his face, I thought he was dead. But before I could suffer my second heart attack in five minutes, his eyes flew open, and, staring up at me with unseeing eyes, he began to cry plaintively, "I want ma car, lady. Thas all. I just want ma car."

In every woman, I suppose, is a natural drive to go to the aid of a helpless male whether he's hers or not. I propped this reasonable facsimile thereof against a redwood, and on hands and knees, began to poke around under the ruin of my tent in search of some kind of clothing with which to make myself decent for the expedition in prospect. Only one place in the park could the missing car be — at the end of the road at the creek. I would have to get him to it. But not, for heaven's sakes, in PJs!

As soon as I burrowed under the pile of canvas and disappeared from view, the man set up a howl. "Lady! *Lady!*"

Where'd you go? For God's sake, don't leave me. Can't stand being alone. *Ple-e-ase* come back to me!"

I might have let him howl on except that the canvas began to heave and billow from efforts other than my own. My visitor was crawling in after me. Cornered, I reversed my field, seized him by the collar of his jacket and again dragged him out to lantern light. A neat exercise for working up a sweat in the middle of a dark and very cold night. Once free of entanglements, I tossed overboard the niceties of life, and mumbling some selected passages from Shakespeare, staggered to the car. Somehow or other, I had to stow this guy in it for the half-mile ride to road's end.

But this logical plan was not to be. My Coleman informed me without fanfare that the right front tire was flat. Ponty wasn't going anywhere for a while.

I fell against the fender, blew out a long breath of exhaustion, and grew up a bit more as I again rallied to Warden Moody's clarion call to duty. Being quite young, what was akin to school spirit beat stoutly in my breast.

So I cinched the belt of my robe more tightly, pulled the sodden fellow to his feet, strengthened my arm around his waist, and grasping my two-cell flashlight in the other hand, pointed us toward the park road. No one in his right mind would have risked a fallen-down-drunk in one hand and a Coleman lantern in the other. Who needed a forest fire just then!

Sometime between 2 and 3 AM, we hit the main highway into Big Basin center, and I mean hit it, because our feet tangled, sprawling us flat on the macadam. But still hopelessly dedicated to all Mankind, I pulled him upright, then reassembled my wayward pajamas and robe.

From here on in, we managed to stay on our feet most of the distance, although his aimless dead weight kept towing us from one side of the road to the other. We crashed into the embankment on the right, took a deep breath, and bounced off a madrone before veering onto the trunk of a giant on the left. My gosh, I thought, this way we'll stagger miles and both be elderly by the time we can cover that half mile to the car. All the zig-zag way, without letup, my charge drooled and apologized for the trouble he was causing. Over and over he groaned, "I wanna be good. Honest. I wanna be good, lady.

It's just that I'm blind. My God, I've lost my sight. You know what that means, lady?"

Well, not quite but almost, considering the thin yellow beam casting its bilious light scarcely three feet before us.

Nothing ever looked so welcome or as brilliant as the 15-watt bulb dangling from the ceiling of the park office porch at the creek. And sure enough, there was the car, all by itself, a black sedan of some bygone vintage, the keys still in the ignition; for in those days, why bother to remove them?

The relief of my Siamese twin knew no bounds. Giving vent to a tremulous sigh that sounded more like a slow leak, he flopped into the back seat and never moved again, almost immediately snoring basso profundo.

I covered him with his auto robe and rolled a window part way down. Then I closed the door securely and put the keys in my pajama-top pocket.

"Sleep tight," I murmured, "and when you wake up, you won't be blind anymore."

My official chores completed, I fell to shivering as if I were still cold, which how could I be?

Beyond the spare glow of the Warden's Office bulb and my own flashlight, the world around me was one inky-black void; yet I felt no fear or aloneness. At that moment I luxuriated in the fantasy that the redwood forest was all mine. And for the first time, I could wallow in the satisfaction of knowing that at last I was a real working part of this park — not just the director of the evening festivities. On the way back to my campsite, I must have walked somewhat taller than usual, and I felt a sense of wonder that my fuzzy bedroom slippers in the duff were the only sounds among a legion of cloud-sweeping trees, some as wide through as my apartment down south.

All at once the night shattered. The flashlight flew out of my hand. In one wild hurry I snatched it up and turned the beam toward the racket, a big park garbage can.

The lid was rolling round and round on the ground. Atop the can's heap of trash, like a cherry on a sundae, perched a raccoon, busily throwing papers and bottles in every direction as he burrowed down to some picnic leftovers. My presence merited scarcely a glance from him.

Banging garbage can lids had long ago become a way of life in Big Basin. No respectable can would ever be caught

with its lid on come morning. A thousand nights I would be awakened and momentarily startled by them, although no more so than I was to be years later out on the Mojave Desert in bright daylight when a frightened cottontail scurried from under a nearby creosote bush.

My after-midnight tow job down the middle of the highway and return in PJs and robe marked a turning point in my life. While I never again had this particular thing to do, there would be other forays for the pregnant and the measles, for lost kids and teenage runaways, for fat ladies with trick knees who were inveterate one-way hikers. I ambulanced and I refereed; I learned to bite my tongue and shut up when participating in all-night searches for some paunchy and petulant middle-aged boy who liked to disappear himself just to scare the wits out of an embattled spouse so she would be sorry for having denied or upset him; so she would declare over and over before a hundred or more park crew, camper volunteers, Boy Scouts, CCC lads, and a Sheriff's posse that nevermore in the future would she speak crossly to her baby if they'd just please bring him back alive.

For several years, I occupied the campsite down in the main grove, then one in an isolated and little-known Group 14 that covered a hill out the Saratoga Road a piece. Up there I had a forest to myself, usually until well past midseason. What an event that moving day marked! The State, in recognizing me now as one of its own, was providing both insurance and housing.

Fred Canham and Warden Moody had stumbled upon an ancient Spanish-American War Army barracks tent stored in some forgotten corner of the attic at the park maintenance shops. Together, they set it up in my chosen spot on 14. The beat-up old canvas smelled musty and was green with mold and sheltered me with all the cozy intimacy of the Greek Parthenon. But I was content. The chipmunks had a ball, scurrying in and out, leaping onto my slanting roof from the trunk of the giant alongside, sliding down and dropping into the soft duff. Coons, too, came and went. Most crawled under the long sides, rarely bothering to amble through the flapping entryway. So spacious was my quarters that I doubt they ever were aware of being indoors.

Along with the big tent went the public Chic Sale nearby. It became an episode in my life never to be forgotten. Inside, door swung wide, I could sit as long as I liked without fear of interruption; from it I could contemplate deer browsing in the sun streaming down through the foliage of majestic redwoods, and be filled with peace and enchantment at simply being alive and there. Surely no view window ever conceived and created by man could bring forth more gladness than did the open door of that one-holer on the mountain.

The following summer, after it appeared that I was immutably park woman, heart, soul, and spirit, Mr. Moody awarded me a dream — a cabin of my own. Awash with kindly thought, he led me one afternoon to a shack of solid redwood, hand-hewn, a tired but hardy survivor of the ages and the elements — the old barbershop; the last of Big Basin's first structures; Pre Turn-of-the-Century Moderne. Standing in primitive elegance at the edge of what would someday become Park Center and not far from the rustic Lodge, it was the best, and all, the park had to offer as of then.

Long before my debut into the world, the old barbershop had been boarded up, and thereafter opened now and then to permit deposit under the leaky roof of any castoff items left by homesteaders and loggers of the 1880s, early-day visitors, and park employees. Although stacked and cluttered with what today would be considered priceless antiques, the small room nevertheless felt exquisitely mine alone. The door closed tightly. It could even be bolted if need be. At last I'd have control over whoever sought to enter my sanctuary — two-legged or four-legged. What a luxury!

Mr. Moody and Fred Canham made habitation possible by removing several truckloads of ancient iron stoves, throne-size armchairs that had been fashioned at home with loving hands, water pitchers and their basins, potties, and numerous other art objects. Among them were four sets of bedsprings and time-weary mattresses, their straw spewing out onto the floor of a thousand creaks and splinters. The rest of the treasures just kind of remained. But then they lent character and meaning to the aromas that had been accumulating for many decades.

Before he left, Fred pried the boards off the window and reset the doorknob, inadvertently pulled off. All at once, and

with breathless delight, I became a person of stature and substance. Small matter that that night I must arrange myself around and among the lumps in the mattress that graced the rickety iron bedstead. As things happened, I would not be long for them anyway.

About midnight, when I turned out the lantern and crawled in, the cabin came alive. A hockey game with acorn rattled into high gear. It took me only a second to realize that beings other than myself looked upon the old barbershop as home. All at once, here they were — rats as plump and noisy as suckling pigs, and almost as large; the game participants and the vociferous rooters squeaking with glee while one of the stars dribbled the acorn the length of the room while the others snatched and dribbled it all the way back. In tumultuous furor over sport, disappearance of familiar landmarks, and the uninvited critter in their midst, they bounded from the commode to a shelf of cracked and aging dishes to the pots and pans stacked in the corner, banging them around over the floor until the place sounded like a riot in a utensil factory. Crockery of all kinds, kicked off the shelves, crashed and shattered; fat bodies bumped and leapfrogged along the beams overhead and plucked assorted tunes on the bedsprings beneath.

When my mattress grew too animated, and burst into action with residents struggling to escape their nests, I reverted with dizzy speed to my past status as Great Outdoor Girl, and took to the forest primeval. On flying feet, I tore up the hill to my old Army tent, empty, cavernous, sagging, but still there to receive me, bless its floppy canvas heart. Never had it looked so precious.

That winter, the old barbershop gave up the ghost and had to be eliminated from the scene. Come spring, a small but livable house was moved in for me, and positioned on the slope above the Warden's house. It worked fine, woodstove and all, even if like the barbershop, it didn't include a bathroom, thus requiring my use of nearby public facilities.

Several years later, returning from a wartime stint at Big Sur, I fell heir to a larger old cabin that also had been moved in and set alongside the Picnic Area, not far from the Inn and Opal Creek. Three little rooms *and bath*, Flamo gas kitchen stove, potbelly in the front room for heat. This affluence I

enjoyed for the next five years before again being transferred to Big Sur. Living in the well-signed RANGER RESIDENCE 1 in Park Center had its obligations, however, as well as its joys and conveniences. I was now wonderfully accessible, especially at night, when I was sure to be there.

Hours after turning in late, I have been rooted out on countless occasions and for many reasons. Once it was for a slightly panty-waist city dude, "roughing it" solo up in my Group 14. He had heard a lion roar time and time again, and it had even licked his face. Only after I had accompanied him up the mountain and pointed out the reoccurring moan of the Año Nuevo fog horn on the coast seventeen miles distant, did the specter lie down to rest, and, for what was left of the night, the man as well.

Several times I helped in a pre-dawn hunt for false teeth pilfered from Inn cabins by trade rats that had climbed in through open windows and taken a fancy to them, always compensating, though, by leaving something in exchange, usually a redwood cone.

Then there was the coon who, much in the same manner, done veteran camper Jessie Johnson wrong, although she was thoughtful enough not to "discover" it until daylight.

Elderly Jessie, a widow long revered as the Mayor of Big Basin, had occupied the same campsite alone for the past quarter century, settling in with the first trillium of spring and departing only when November gales and a rain of falling limbs drove her to safety. She knew her coons like no one else, yet she had become careless.

"You're going to die laughing," she soft-mouthed self-consciously over early breakfast coffee.

I waited expectantly, for Jessie invariably had something hilarious to relate. After a pause it came out, contritely and with wry embarrassment. "Guess who swiped my dentures last night."

"What?" I howled, knowing. "You of all people! How come?"

"Well, I simply didn't get around to locking them in the cupboard after campfire. They were on my orange-crate bedside table."

I was convulsed.

Red-faced, she went on: "Anyway, I've tracked them down.

They're in the mud at the bottom of Opal Creek. Trouble is, water's at least five feet deep right there, so" Her voice trailed off.

Just before noon, a Boy Scout, passing by and seeing them gleaming up at the treetops, volunteered to dive — a good turn to end all good turns. Thus the dentures surfaced.

That same evening, during campfire, the coon tried again, this time liberating a huckleberry pie placed atop the food locker to cool. Although Jessie's luck still hid on the dark side of the moon, so did his. Returning to camp hours later, Jessie tracked her pie to the same deep pool in the creek. On the bottom lay the pie plate; above it, awash and disintegrating, floated the pie, itself. On the opposite bank sat the coon, looking as despondent as if all the park garbage cans had just been picked up for the winter.

"Can you imagine?" Jessie groaned.

"Sure," I replied, "can't you?"

This wasn't the end of the matter. In the darkest hours of the following night, Jessie came pounding on my door.

"What's wrong?" I queried with concern.

"It's the coon," she sighed.

"What's he swiped this time?"

Jessie brushed my query aside. "I think he's dead," she cried, her voice quavering. "I've killed him. I'm sure I have."

Knowing Jessie and her boundless love for all coons, their raids and thefts notwithstanding, my amazement exploded.

"*What* did you say?" I demanded, unbelieving.

While listening to the details of the tragedy, I dressed hurriedly.

Jessie's story was right on, but not entirely accurate. She had been awakened, and her flash beam had revealed the big masked fellow joyously squirting a tube of Vaseline all over her hairbrush. Angrily, she had raised up in bed and heaved a chunk of firewood in his direction. The last person on earth to want to hurt one of her beloved coons, Jessie, not knowing her own strength and precision, had nevertheless conked the marauder squarely on the head, laying him out flat and still. Immediately thereafter, she had rushed to his side, crooning sympathetically over him, begging forgiveness, attempting to make amends. But all in vain. When his eyes began to glaze

over, she had come flying to me, which sent us flying to the scene.

Now I knelt beside the poor fellow and helped him rub his sore spot until his eyes began to track once more and he was able to stir enough to stagger painfully off into the darkness.

Next evening, Jessie didn't appear at campfire, a highly unusual occurrence.

Afterwards, I went to check, and discovered my friend just beyond the outskirts of her campsite, feeding homemade cream puffs and sugar cookies to a lump-headed coon. To see them was both touching and side-splitting. He had been willing, after a fashion, to meet her halfway — as close as he cared to approach as of then. Between them, they were managing to restore a measure of their old rapport.

Another pilgrimage in the interests of my responsibilities took place late one evening, soon after the park system had reached a stage of affluence that it could replace the timeworn one-holers with flushing apparatus. The new edifices proved to be quite a sensation, not only to our early-day campers, long accustomed to primitive accommodations, but to the wildlife as well.

This particular evening, I could hear two ladies scuffling up onto my porch, bleating with alarm at every step. Sensing that this would be another of those nights, I opened the door and at once recognized the women as new campers who had pulled in just that morning. Both were enshrined in sequined robes and fuzzies, their hair cinched tightly in curlers. When I greeted them, all they could do was pant and point behind them. Quickly grabbing my robe and flashlight, I accompanied them into the campground. As one of the women recovered her breath, she kept repeating, "You just can't guess what's in the WOMEN'S. You can't guess!"

Oh yes I could. In the first place, I heard the splashing before we could see the dim light shining out the doorway, highlighting the bower of creamy azaleas that hung umbrella-like over the little booth. One look inside revealed three big coons puddling happily in the toilet bowl, their ringed tails draped over the seat, the floor splattered with water. I had to laugh.

The women were indignant. "*Those are wild animals!*" one accused quite correctly.

"They sure are," I agreed. "Those are native sons and daughters doing what comes naturally."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Sure. It's the latter part of the summer and warm during the day," I explained. "You've probably noticed that Opal and Union Creeks are almost dry. This pond always stays the same. It looks like Heaven to them," I added, nodding at the coons.

By now, incredulous expressions were changing to amused wonder and frowns to chuckles.

Hearing our discussion, the coons ceased slopping around long enough to glance over their shoulders at us. Then, mouths widening in ecstatic grins, they resumed their puddling and splashing, caring not one whit that someone else wished to use the facility. Out of consideration for their guests, I activated an orderly exit. Off they dripped into the bushes to watch and wait. Afterwards, as I headed toward my cabin, I could hear the women whispering and giggling, speculating on the darnedest things that can happen when "roughing it" in the redwood forest.

In the California State Park System, Progress continued to flower, slowly but surely. When the brown booths were replaced by Flushing Palaces, the delight of Big Basin coons knew no bounds. The water in their creeks might dwindle to a mere trickle by late summer, but drought never seemed to come to the little white ponds. To be sure, no frogs and crayfish scuttled about in them, but oh, how irresistible to the touch was that porcelain!

Glad I am that most of my first nine years in the redwood parks passed buoyantly through those Elysian days before Europe burst into flame; while there yet remained time and open space and undiminished joy in simple things; before everyone began to beat his breast and wail, "Who am I? Where am I going?"

Perhaps I, too, should have been confused, but somehow I've always known who I was and I trusted my Father to lead me where it was right and good for me to go. And of course, He never failed.

As the early days gave way to later days, both road and automotive technology improved, fostering travel on

a grand scale. Suddenly it seemed to us that the whole world discovered the redwoods. Almost every day we saw visitors from foreign lands. Sparked by this surge and the dynamic leadership and dedication of the Save the Redwoods League, the State stepped up its acquisition program to include beaches as well as parks and historical sites. Now, the new Division of Beaches and Parks, Department of Natural Resources, considered itself ready to assume a more sophisticated place in the structure of government. Accordingly, Central Headquarters was shifted from San Francisco to more roomy quarters in Sacramento that could accommodate more administrative personnel.

Need and imaginative thinking and increased funding moved the parks along with the times until by 1946, there were 127 permanent employees operating 38 units, and their salaries had doubled. Today, 10 times that number of men and women are in field assignments alone — with another 500 at Headquarters, administering over 200 units in the system — and on a pay scale 5 or 6 times what it was in 1931.

Before that, when I first appeared on the scene to work at no salary, the Chief of the division and his secretary constituted the summit echelon, while 15 field personnel maintained seven parks and a dozen historic monuments. Who then could have foreseen a Sacramento office occupying two entire floors of the big State Building and administering a multi-million-dollar statewide operation that accommodates 60,000,000 visitors a year?

Out in the parks themselves, not for decades now has a man found it necessary to provide his own tools if he wished to go to work in a park or as one of the “Sons of Beaches” if he drew a seashore assignment. No longer did the Warden, who became Chief Ranger and finally the Park Supervisor, have to use the family car as a park vehicle.

I was in Big Basin the morning a dump truck and a shiny new maroon station wagon arrived to so stupefy us with utter amazement that we just stood and gawked and tried to believe. And I was at Richardson Grove that unforgettable day in 1939 when Jack Covington, Executive Secretary of the State Park Commission, dropped by to tell us that we had fallen heir to Tidelands Oil monies, a windfall so marvelous as to be

almost beyond comprehension. From then on, California State Parks took the high road into Big Business.

One of the first surprises, now called fringe benefits, I believe, to emanate from our new riches came in a directive stating that each of us would now have a day off a week — *with pay!*

A day off? *During the summer?* Never in all those years had I ever known a day off in an entire season. How could a park run with one of its crew absent! We regarded the directive as a lovely spreading of sunshine, but sadly, just another indication that Sacramento simply didn't understand what went on out in a park. For a while some of us didn't take a day. The first time I left on one I was miserable. Cruising aimlessly around the countryside, I finally said to heck with it and hurried back to Park Headquarters before the middle of the afternoon to find out what I had missed. That evening I appeared at Campfire as usual, much to the relief of the rest of the crew, who had dreaded with every fiber of their being having to take over that little chore. For quite a time thereafter, I didn't give in to my growing curiosity about what a whole day away from the park might be like.

A number of years later, following a tour at Big Sur and several months on the Old Cement Boat at Seacliff Beach State Park, I returned to Big Basin in time to celebrate another landmark directive --the eight-hour day.

Eight hours a day? And forty hours a week! That one sent us all into a laughing jag. Big Basin was now serving a seasonal attendance of over a half million visitors. *ME work just eight hours? That would be the day!*

And so it never was. Instead, at the end of the season, those of us on the interpretive crew received a lump compensation for *ays off*, worked.

During the same years as my service in the state parks, ranger uniforms went through as many changes as the governorship, division chiefs, directive terminology, and departmental reorganizations. Wardens and Custodians in khaki shirts, peg-top breeches and leather puttees sharpened into battleship gray — peg-tops as before, only now with snappy black field boots, belt, and tie, plus the traditional stiff-brimmed Stetson. Trim hip-length jackets sported four pockets, shoulder patch and badge, very much like those of

the National Park Service. But after tourists began confusing us with Greyhound bus drivers, the State did a quick end run and converted to forest green twill with Eisenhower jackets and long trousers. All of these, each in its own time, gave us a certain picturesque distinction and authority.

Today, one can see still other uniform variations: the tie-less, short sleeved shirts (in which *we* would have felt practically naked) together with long hair and facial trim that would never have been imagined, much less tolerated for one moment in the not so long ago. But then, who knows but that some of these very able and well-meaning young men may change their minds or find it prudent to alter their hair style before entering a forest fire situation, where flames crackle on all sides and drip from overhead, as we once did.

Of such is the breathtaking speed with which a few, not many, governmental changes can and do take place.

Still, it all adds up to an individual's recognition and response to the lifework to which he has been summoned. We all have our individual worth and our own style and therefore a special place in the good things of our world. Perhaps to be able to perceive it, already within and waiting for activation, is the key to whatever lies ahead for our lifetime — whatever that is to be.

Chapter Three

My Day

About sixteen years after my start at Big Basin, the State Personnel Board decided that I, too, must be a number on a list like all the other state employees. So one day, they notified me to appear at the upcoming civil service examination for Park Ranger. Since these exams were to be given in all of California's major cities, the five of us on the Big Basin staff who were to take the written prepared to pool our gasoline and attend the nearest — at San Francisco. The crew was amused that I, by now an old timer, was about to face my first exam.

For days beforehand, the boys and I together boned up on everything a ranger should have at his fingertips, such as mechanics, painting, construction, electricity, carpentry, repair, maintenance, natural science and ecology, and the park system itself. Because I had grown up with the parks and historical monuments, I knew them well from one end of the state to the other and many of the crews that operated the various units. And I was able to interpret redwood country's special ecology, wildlife, its human and natural history acceptably well. But of the manual skills that kept pipeline and cat and high voltage currents functioning, I had only the fuzziest idea, although in listening to the grunts and groans of the fellows over the years, more than a few details had bounced off my consciousness.

During five of those summers that I had boarded with Bill and Mabel Kenyon, it was impossible not to have absorbed enough to support a reasonable comprehension of park problems. For breakfast, lunch, and dinner we had had maintenance and operation, ideology, policy and management, and never could there have been a more thorough and dedicated Chief Ranger and teacher than Bill. Yet despite all the specifics of restroom care and checking station operation and garbage disposal in a balky incinerator, sifting through my pores and passing through my thoughts, no one in the world was or is or ever could be as mechanically illiterate as I. These elements simply got lost among my genes.

When examination day came and we were about to drive away from Headquarters, Ranger Darrell Knoeffler slipped an

arm around my shoulders and asked sympathetically, "Think you're ready?"

I laughed. "Let's face it," I said. "I can't possibly pass this thing."

"Sure you can," Darrell insisted, trying to bolster my courage. Then, impulsively, he knelt beside a water faucet and pointing to it, queried, "What kind of a connection is this?"

"Connection?" I asked blankly.

Grinning broadly, Darrell picked up the hose and screwed it into the faucet. "Name the two ends I've just connected."

"Do they have names?" I joked. "Well, Dottie and Minnie."

"Wrong, my girl," Darrell replied patiently, undoing the connection. "Now listen to me. This" — pointing to the hose end — "is the female."

"Oh yeah?" I hooted.

"YEAH. And this other is the male," — pointing to the faucet. I howled with amusement. "Since when has there been sex in plumbing?"

Well there is, I found out. Before me on the morning's examination sheets was ample verification. Thanks to Darrell's last minute sex education, I was not only able to cope with a new concept but to regard it, just then anyway, as a thing of joy and wonder forever.

Furthermore, much to my utter amazement, and everyone else's, I imagine, I somehow passed that written and soon afterwards answered a summons to the Oral Board — a panel of top park and forest professionals.

Three months later, my notification arrived, but because I just couldn't bear failure, I stuck the unopened envelope in my car glove compartment. There it remained until the day I took my friend Edith to the beach for a picnic. On the way, in rummaging around in the compartment for some dark glasses, she saw the missive from the State Personnel Board.

"What's this?" she demanded, noticing that it was still sealed. I told her.

"You mean you've never looked inside to see if you passed or flunked?" she challenged, aghast.

"Afraid so," I groaned. "Never failed a test in my life, so I haven't peeked. It's better forgotten."

Studying me incredulously, Edith ripped open the envelope.

When for a full minute I heard no sound coming out of her, I tensed with embarrassment. At last she murmured gently, "It's a good thing you're sitting down."

Something in her tone whetted my curiosity, but I tried to appear nonchalant. Not to be put off, she handed me the card and pointed to the little box in the upper right-hand corner, where one's place on the civil service list is typed.

I stared in disbelief. On the new State Park Ranger List I was Number One. Ahead of all the men? I nearly fainted.

The boys who found out never let me forget. Whenever a particularly knotty problem in plumbing came up after that — or some other disaster of maintenance — they sent for me, which was always good for a laugh. And anything for some fun.

Soon after my new status became official in Sacramento, I began receiving wires from State Headquarters: "Report to Stephens Grove, report to Williams Grove, etc." Finally, I called the Chief.

"Mr. Henning," I said, "we both know I could irreparably foul up the waterworks and the diesel plant and the incinerator, so they'd never work again in our time. Now may I please go on with my job?"

And so I did. Having made the list, I went peacefully on with what I had been doing all through the years. No doubt Chief Henning was more relieved than I.

Much later, another State Park Ranger exam was held to establish a new list, and I let myself be talked into taking it. Once again, this time in Los Angeles, I acquitted myself well enough in the souped-up written to be bidden to the oral. This time the story was different.

The Oral Board that day again consisted of top State and National Park and Forestry officials plus a Personnel Board representative so filled with the glory of his bachelor's degree that telltale beads of moisture still lingered behind his ears. With the professional panel I had the friendliest kind of chat on pertinent subjects, and did my best to answer their questions intelligently. All the while, Junior pinioned me with piercing eyes and a long pointed look that made him appear to have just backed out of a pencil sharpener. Then, smirking superciliously, he drawled, "I suppose you think you could build a bridge."

I had to ponder that one for a moment before replying with every speck of courtesy I could muster. “Yes,” I said as if declaring that God is Love, “I think I could build a bridge, but I wouldn’t advise the public to use it.”

Stiffening, the youngster turned beet red, probably from friction upon reentering the atmosphere. The rest of the Board threw back their heads and guffawed with deep, whole-hearted belly laughs.

On that State Park Ranger list I placed Number 85 — the tail end, which is exactly where I belonged. And as before, what did it matter? I went peacefully back to what I had always been doing.

By the time I returned to Big Basin for my second tour, a FIVE-day week was spreading sunshine among the State employees. For me it was a laugh. None of the crew wanted any part of the big campfire. Most would have run screaming into the woods. They were experts in their line; mine was not a part of that. And every Chief Ranger I ever worked with threw up his hands in horror and developed other matters to attend to whenever I suggested that he would like my evening duty. So I never did take but one of my two days, even during the wonderful years after naturalists Don Meadows and Bud Reddick were added to the staff. For some time, they dreaded leading the campfire, but went on to become very capable at it. Anyway, we had so much fun together that I was reluctant to be away one night, let alone two.

The Big Basin years were hilarious and rewarding. Don and Bud and I, together with Ranger Arlan Sholes, who made and manned the campfire and dance sound equipment, formed a team that for joyous cooperation couldn’t have been equaled anywhere.

All the parks in the system were so understaffed and underequipped during their first two decades that we all worked long hours and were, of course, on call ‘round the clock. To take time off on weekends or holidays, as is done now, was absolutely unthinkable. And so it remained until after I left the park service.

Even after we finally acquired a crew of seventeen, everyone had to be spick and span, front and center, early on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day, when Big

Basin thronged with people; especially when the occasion added up to a *long* weekend. We knew from experience that of the thousands of visitors, a number would wander off and get lost, others would attempt to move some of the giants with their cars and motorcycles, and still more would try to drown, tumble into canyons, and swallow safety pins. Not to be outdone, the State often got into the act. Park roads would be oiled on July 3; transformers would blow out; at least one source of water would go dry, and new cesspools would have to be dug NOW — during the rush.

Take a day off, then, even though it might have been scheduled? Every last one of us, as well as all tools and rescue equipment, had to be at the ready.

My average day usually began about 7 AM, depending upon where I happened to be stationed. It closed whenever my own work and the further need of my services permitted — no earlier than ten or eleven at night and almost always considerably past midnight. One thing never varied: my total responsibility for the campfire. It was my baby.

A complete mystery to the crew was my enjoyment of this evening gathering, loaded as it eventually became with the unpredictable and the unknown, for to campfire came not only our park visitors but also residents, old and young, of the surrounding countryside. And as word got around that the spontaneous self-entertainment there under the trees was something refreshing and different from any other on earth, more and more people turned up from as far away as the Bay Area. Attendance grew with each passing year, necessitating an enlargement of the campfire bowl. To direct and control it all from the mike beside the booming fire frequently dredged up strengths I never knew I had. It was no place for the timid, but offered a challenge happily accepted.

During the day, I made whatever preparations were necessary, so the evening would move along with the fewest foreseeable hitches for two or more hours. Naturally, this became easier as time went on and experience taught me how. It was a good thing, too, because each day was usually chock full of goings-on until the wee small hours of the next.

For example, I made the rounds of the campgrounds every morning, saw most of the campers, and spent a little time with them. I felt that the State owed its vacationers a warm, personal

interest. It was my job to make sure all of them knew that the park crew cared very much that they were with us.

Often I served several hours a day at Headquarters, giving information, registering campers and picnickers, selling bundles of firewood. I happened to be at the Big Basin ranger station the morning the state began charging 50¢ a night per car for the use of the facilities, and heard the mass howl that soared out through the treetops because of it. In the years that followed, I always seemed to be at the window when the Penny Arcade man from one of the nearby cities came to pay his \$15 monthly camping fee with pennies. It was his own special form of protest, perhaps the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, who knows.

In order to keep from working straight twelve to fifteen hours a day, I tried in later years to manage an hour or so in the afternoons for personal trivia or simply to sit down and shut up and let my face hang. But this euphoric idea usually went awry when some emergency or other either required my attention or at least my presence at Headquarters to release a ranger for his specialized services. And if I did dare to flatten out for a few minutes' rest, I might expect to open my eyes and look into the face of some tourist peering in through one of my many windows.

You couldn't be angry with these gentle folk. Most just had a romantic image of a ranger cabin's interior, and wanted to see. Those who chose, rather, to knock at my door were invariably the ones who had walked past the sign RANGER RESIDENCE 1 to ask plaintively, "Is this the restrooms?" It made me wonder if some of these people, upon entering a bona fide restroom, ever inquired of whomever might be handy, "Can you tell me — is this a ranger residence?"

I've long thought that women, especially, don't have to go as bad as they think they do or they would heed directional signs. Too many have stood in full view of one of our Flushing Palaces and asked where to find it. Then, if it happened to be a few feet upslope, they'd shrug and walk away. What might solve everyone's problem would be strategically located signs the shape of a hand, constructed to swing up into position every minute, pointing and blaring, "There it is, girls. *There it is!*"

A summer week in any busy state park begins slowly on Monday and increases in tempo and population as the week progresses. This is because so many campers leave on Sunday afternoons to return to their homes and jobs. Often more than half the campsites are empty by Sunday evening. Tuesday and Wednesday move along peacefully, a few new campers settling in. Thursday usually registers a noticeable pickup in tempo and activity. By Friday noon the campground is almost full, and the Inn cabins as well. Friday night campfires are always fine, zestful things, everyone in a cheery mood, especially the newcomers whose vacations are only beginning. Saturday nights, I remember, were *something else*.

By then, the whole world appeared to have discovered Big Basin. Every campsite was occupied, every cabin spoken for, and countless visitors turned away. The dining room and the coffee and souvenir shops would be humming; the Picnic Area alive with happy families, their wicker baskets, and red-checked tablecloths; the forest ringing with the exuberance of youth. During the sunny hours, you could see little groups everywhere, posing at the broad base of the Father of the Forest or the Perfect Tree or the Chimney Tree or any one of a dozen other giants while cameras clicked away for the family record. The deer, having had lean pickings for a few days, now pestered everyone. With unrestrained gusto, they ate all that was offered. The crew called them our family goats — and with some justification.

Sunday was the busiest day of all. Those arriving after church usually had to spread their picnic on the ground somewhere, although families were nice about sharing the big plank tables and rock stoves. On these days I kept a steady walking patrol of Park Center and the Redwood Trail area, which included the giants of the main grove. Also I checked the Picnic Area several times, collecting the 25¢ fee from those who, for one reason or another had failed to stop at Headquarters when they came in. We did this with the thought in mind that the neglect was an oversight, generally the case.

While release from daily routine sometimes erased such minor obligations from the consciousness of visitors, it nevertheless had a way of bringing out the goodness and generosity in nearly all of them. They fairly bubbled over with invitations to join in the celebration of their Chianti, fried

chicken, and potato salad. Had I accepted even a small portion of all that was offered, my “fishin’ worm figger” would soon have grown rotund enough to roll sideways. Indescribably tantalizing was the aroma of coffee boiling and bacon frying and hamburgers barbecuing. The scent of sunlight on redwood duff never did quite compensate for walking away from all the delectable creations of those Sunday picnic spreads.

Once in a great while, when the situation warranted, I accepted a glass of lemonade or something, like one day when a youngster approached me with a cup of Kool-Aid cradled in his hands. “Please?” he begged, and how could I have refused.

That particular picnic site was close alongside a fallen giant some 12 feet in diameter, sheltered and private, and therefore one of the visitor favorites. As we stood sipping and chatting, we could not be seen from the other side of the log, nor were we concerned with whatever might be going on over there. We did, however, begin to hear kid-shouting and squealing from somewhere in that direction. Since this was Sunday Situation Normal, no one paid heed. I doubt that we were even conscious of the racket then closing in, so engrossing was the conversation and Kool-Aid.

Suddenly, a mighty SWO-O-O-O-O-SSSHH of wind whisked leaves up into my face and peppered it with chunks of duff. A tawny blur crossed before my eyes between me and the little family. All of us recoiled instinctively, our drinks cascading down our fronts.

Thundering upslope in terror plowed a fine buck of seven points. At the same time, rounding the butt end of the giant, scampered three boys, screaming as only ten-year-olds can when in hot pursuit of big game. “There he goes! Up the hill. BOY! Did he ever take off over this old log. Just like a bird. Yip-e-e-e-e!”

Yes, just like a bird, over that great bole. On Sunday, occupying the lee — and blind — side of a down redwood has its hazards.

Summer in Big Basin officially began with Memorial Day and ended after Labor Day, but Nature’s calendar often proved more reliable than the one at Sacramento. Because of her occasional capriciousness, she has been known to let the park fill with eager beavers, then that day wind up her long rainy season with a masterpiece of a gully-washer. Afterwards, as

if to compensate for her sneaky trick, she invariably brought out her best azaleas and mountain iris and all the rest of her flowering jewels, and urged them to their fullest glory. Not until late summer was the Great Detractor, the Kleenex Bush, to reach its height of profusion.

By the first week of November at latest, Nature usually tired of hosting her funny little humans. Upon the latecomers, who had hoped for a forest to themselves, she bestowed her kickoff storm for the coming winter. No one in his right mind remained after this soppy warning that the elements were about to take over for the next six or seven months.

Between the two downpours lies The Season, Northern Californians predominating until about the middle of August, when their exodus is exceeded only by the influx of southerners. We found easy to predict from week to week who would be with us.

I hadn't been at Big Basin very long before learning just where to locate the various families, for each year they returned to the same campsites. That way I grew to know many hundreds of people by name and city and campsite number, and also when to expect them.

Up until the latter years of the war, things remained this stable and predictable. Then, gradually, the certainties gave way. Men moved their families into the park while they shifted jobs or their military status could be determined and the question of further moves resolved. For the first time, the State began to set camping time limits in the larger and more popular parks. Gone forever were the days when ample room for all made the length of stay no problem whatever.

All at once, I found myself beside the evening campfire, describing prehistoric redwood forests, strange and silent in the mists, supreme in a world that as yet knew no mammal or human — then having to follow up with a quiet but stern warning about approaching any unusual-looking objects discovered along the trails. The Western Defense Command had alerted us that the enemy was sending over “buzz bombs” designed to drop into our forests and set them afire. Many a day both rangers and park visitors watched the shiny, silvery cigar-shaped things moving across the sky overhead. Several had already landed in Northern California and Oregon.

Fortunately, only a few of the missiles came down in our area, and these the military disarmed as soon as they were reported. The frequent appearances in Big Basin of jeeps filled with ordnance men, although disturbing of course, nevertheless proved mighty comforting, too.

Not the least of the reminders that our nation was at war were several pilots from nearby air bases who were working on their flying time before going overseas. While passing over the mountains of the San Francisco Peninsula, they must have been attracted by the spots of bright color in the round clearing among the tall trees of the forest below and suspected, quite correctly, that some of them adorned pretty girls. Also quite characteristically, then, they descended for a closer look, almost snagging their landing gear in our treetops. And still quite characteristically, one would have to be among them who would feel himself mortally challenged to test his dive-bombing skill in that tiny clearing.

We had no warning the afternoon he zeroed in on us. Suddenly there he was, zooming straight down, full throttle, headed for the patch of water we used as a pool. Everyone in Park Center froze with shock and braced for the inevitable; yet somehow, American boy know-how triumphed. An instant before plunging into the deep end, the plane pulled up sharply, and with an ear-splitting roar, rocketed into the sky from between a couple of our 300-foot giants. For some time afterwards, the great limbs of those redwoods whipped about wildly, as in a winter gale. This little gem of a maneuver consumed no more than five seconds, but none of us who witnessed it will ever be the same again. Lest we find ourselves hosting a P38 in Park Headquarters, Chief Ranger Roy Cushing lost no time in bestowing exasperation upon the air base commandant.

VJ Day came one glorious afternoon soon after that. Not once in the years of the war had it been necessary to sound the air raid alarm atop the station, although it had accidentally been set off once the previous June by a new Ninety-Day Wonder, intending merely to turn on the lights in the front office. Now, upon receiving official notification of the surrender, Roy nodded to me and said, "NOW, Petey." With tingles running up my spine and tears of joy down my cheeks,

I flipped the switch that set the siren into wonderful gyrating howls of victory.

Immediately, from every direction came shouting, crying campers. Not appreciating the significance of all the unaccustomed racket, the deer bounded away to more tranquil places. The rangers ran out onto Headquarters porch, yelling, tossing their Stetsons high. More than a few folks knelt beside some giant in prayer. Within minutes, hundreds of campers, Inn guests, and employees had gathered in a cheering mass outside the ranger station while the siren continued to broadcast the happy news. It was one of the most jubilant times I can remember in my entire life.

Finally, I let the siren wail its last and joined the noisy celebration. It was then that I noticed a dejected-looking man sitting alone at the other end of the porch. I went to him, thinking maybe he had lost someone in the fighting. But that wasn't what he had lost.

"Want to talk?" I queried sympathetically. He nodded. At last he found words. "I guess I'm not proud of what I did in this war," he droned. I waited. "You see, I collected scrap."

I was mystified. "We all did," I said.

"Not like I did, though. I collected tons and tons. Everything. Old auto bodies, oil well pipes, bathroom fixtures — bathtubs, wash basins, toilets."

"Great," I replied.

"Well, you don't understand," the man faltered. "Pretty soon I found out that all that stuff was being shipped to Japan. How was I to know that this outfit was doing such a thing! I had no idea. Ever since, I've felt like a traitor."

Despite my efforts to be consoling, self-recrimination, long in the building, finally burst forth in all its misery.

"You know what happened," he blurted. "Why, the enemy took all those things and fired them right back at us."

The vision that crossed my mind jolted me onto my heels. Having one of those literal and vivid imaginations, I could see it all. Struggling to keep my face straight, I gave the drooping shoulders what was meant to be a reasonable thump, and developed a need to dart around the corner of the building.

No doubt every ranger is used as a threat at some time before his career is over. It happened to me once in a while. I'd

walk into a camp while youngsters were eating, and after the usual amenities the conversation would go something like this:

"Miss Weaver, we have a problem." Ah! The telltale sign that it was about to be handed to me. A pause while all eyes bored into the offending child. "Jimmie won't eat his turnips."

"Jimmie, turnips are good for one," I would venture.

"I hate turnips."

"Jimmie, just look at Miss Weaver. She eats turnips."

Because I was never quite certain what that was supposed to mean and in order not to pull the rug out from under Mama and Papa, I'd have to feel silly and act like yes, just look at Miss Weaver. She eats turnips.

"I still hate turnips."

All words failing, I might be pressed into eating a serving then and there. More than once, my dinner or supper was prefaced by a dish of turnips or carrots or some other revolting stuff.

Walking into another camp I'd hear a shriek: "Darlene Jo! You get right in that tent and wash your feet!" Here again I was in the middle of the soup. Too late to duck behind a tree. Eyes would light up as if an Instant Genie had just popped out of the earth, ready to dispense magic.

"Look who's here, Darlene Jo. Miss Weaver has come to take you straight to the police station if you don't get in there this minute and wash those dirty feet. Isn't that so, Miss Weaver?" Politely, although through clenched teeth, I would somehow manage to reply something like: "No, Mrs. Whoozit, sorry. Who am I to usurp your privileges! I'm a Park Ranger, remember?"

That being that, I would then exit smiling, as they say in the theatah, and walk to the next camp, where I hoped to — and usually did, fare better. As in any neighborhood or town, there are all kinds.

Shortly after twelve one night, while I was preparing for bed, I heard a knock at my front door. "It's me," a man's voice whispered, one I recognized as belonging to Gus Sgarloto, the Inn manager.

"What's wrong?" I asked anxiously and let him in.

"Well, you won't believe this," he laughed, shaking his head, "but for goodness sakes, will you come and bail me out?"

Believe me, it's absolutely out of my line, I don't know what the hell to do." When Gus didn't know what to do, it had to be something out of the ordinary. It was.

He led me to one of his cabins, where we were met by an upper-middle-aged character I had been seeing around, fluttering up to every man who happened to stand still. And she was in a tizzy to end all tizzies.

In the first place, the lady weighed over 250 pounds, none of it brain. Most of the time she had adorned herself in lavender with a peek-a-boo neckline that never failed to be vigorously décolleté, and a hairdo upswept enough to rival the diamond stack of a Gay Ninety narrow-gauge steam locomotive. And that wasn't all. The hair was violently henna, its bottled glory crowned with a lavender creation that looked as if yards and yards of organdy had been whirled until it spun into a shape recognizable as a hat. On the brim, somewhere between the outer limits and the crown, nestled a nosegay of violets. This was what greeted me at the door: this and matching sound effects.

"Wo-o-o-o-o, my dear," the woman hooted, clutching me to her bosom under that trembling organdy umbrella. "You've come. Just in time. I need a *woman*." That, I thought, is a switch.

"It's my hat," she wailed. "I can't get it off. Please — please help me, my dear. You will know what to do." She glanced reproachfully at poor Gus.

"Of course," I said confidently. "Just let me . . ." With both hands, I reached for the floppy delight and began lifting it off as anyone would go about lifting such a hat off such a head. But the two refused to part company. For one breathtaking moment, with her hair rising slowly, the lady looked as if she were taking in 220 volts.

"See?" she screeched. "It's *stuck!*"

It sure was. That morning, in anticipation of a date with some man she had cornered, and thinking to give her coiffure an irresistible sheen, she had asked Gus for some lacquer spray. To Gus, lacquer was lacquer, and trying to be accommodating, he had raided his garage shelves. That afternoon, hair shining under lavender fluff, the woman must have looked fetching indeed; but when she sought her room to change for dinner, there was no removing the hat.

Well, no time to fuss with that. She wowed the dining room and afterwards the campfire, where a wide organdy hat guaranteed a lost horizon to all sitting behind it. To top off the day, she fluttered across the creek to the dance and waltzed round and round, although only with men stunted enough to be hovered under her lavender canopy. Bedtime now was something else. Unable to rid herself of inappropriate and superfluous accessories, she at last had to face up to her hat — under the circumstances, nothing less than a gymnastic feat.

I suggested to Gus that since there was nothing he could do, perhaps Gratefully, in one big hurry, he did, leaving us alone.

“Okay,” I said. “We go to work.”

We went to work, all right. There was no way of removing that hat short of removing the woman’s head — or at least her hair. But because the brim was constructed of numerous concentric wires, I was able to bend it so that, by careful maneuvering, we pulled her dress off over it and eventually her slip. By reversing the field, grunt and groan, we pulled on her nightie. By the time we had achieved all of that, the millinery wonder had as many swoops and dips in it as the Jack Rabbit Racer at the Santa Cruz boardwalk. Just the thing for bed.

Next morning, I went to see what I could do, and that of course, was the reverse of the night before. Over the organdy hat went the slip, then the dress. After each ordeal, the hat sprang quivering from its crumpled state and out into its far-flung orbit like an imprisoned bird ecstatic at being released from a cage. Classic lines suffered, to be sure. Also pushed out of shape was the woman. Perspiring even more than I, she collapsed into a state of unstrung nerves and stringy spit curls.

At noon a taxi came to deliver the agitated apparition to a beauty shop in town, where skilled hands finally separated the lady from her hat — and as it turned out, from her hair as well. All I know is that she wrote a letter of commendation for my abortive attempt in her behalf, sending it to Mr. Harold Ickes, at that time Secretary of the Interior and therefore associated only with the *National Parks*. A year later, the letter found its way to me, probably having filtered down through every park-connected department and division from Washington D.C. to Sacramento, then the District Office, and eventually into our

own Park Headquarters. Naturally a morsel like this provided the boys with a much needed bit of escape fare, although no one could quite believe there had actually been such a woman or such a pickle until Gus came forth and backed me up. Even then, they still insisted that Gus was a terrific kidder and anything for some whoopla.

One day we dedicated a fountain at Big Basin to Andrew P. Hill, and to the occasion came the State Park Commission and the founding members of the Sempervirens Club who were still living and able to make the trip. Not many were left of those intrepid folk who had pioneered Big Basin and spearheaded the drive to save it from the sawmills back at the turn of the century. We were highly honored to have them with us, forty-odd years after they had won their long fight.

After a touching ceremony at the fountain, we and the two hundred or so visitors gathered in the bowl for a speech by Joseph Knowland, a Native Son of great eminence, and for many years Chairman of the State Park Commission.

When everyone had been seated and I had introduced Mr. Knowland, a little striped chipmunk climbed the stage and scampered up onto the roof to a point on the ridgepole directly above the speaker. Then, only moments after Mr. Knowland had launched into his address, the chipmunk stretched out on his belly and went to sleep.

Before long, stirring in his dreams, the little fellow rolled off the ridgepole and far enough down the steep pitch that he had to scramble to keep from falling off the roof. In several succeeding tumbles, he again managed to catch himself in the nick of time, but he was always on the verge of failure. This brinkmanship grew mighty unsettling for those of us trying to concentrate on the finer things of life.

When Mr. Knowland concluded his presentation, everyone broke into appreciative applause. The chipmunk, disturbed by the noise, roused from his nap, stretched, yawned cavernously, then slowly made his way to the rear of the roof and disappeared. Human oratory, combined with the warmth of the afternoon sun, can, for some, become a lullaby.

Because the redwood forest is so tall and dense, bright sunlight appears in rather limited patches, usually for a short time and in the open spaces. For me, a real sunning meant

a ride twenty-six miles down canyon to the beach at Santa Cruz. My shopping chores attended to, I often drove to nearby Capitola or to Seacliff Beach State Park. Little did I know when I walked the sands of Seacliff that one day I would be on its crew. Somehow I never imagined myself anywhere but in a redwood forest, and for almost my entire park career, that's where I remained.

But Seacliff did come to pass, as do so many odd things in a lifetime.

In September of 1944, a need arose for me to leave Big Sur to replace a ranger who had enlisted. At that time, with manpower on the short side, I was to fill in at Seacliff for several months, thereby entering a category spoken of as "Sons of Beaches."

Seacliff Beach State Park is a strip of beautifully sandy shoreline on around the curve of Monterey Bay a few miles from Santa Cruz. The autumn I reported to Chief Ranger Charlie Hight, a row of twenty neat campsites filled the northern end of the park between the beach and a row of eucalyptus trees. In the park's central section were a small headquarters, the Chief Ranger's residence, and the Picnic Area — a number of barbecue pits and heavy plank tables under ramadas of heavy timbers. South along the beach stretched an undeveloped mile or so. The pier, situated directly across the park road from the station and residence, extended out into the water for perhaps a city block. Connected to the end of it, stern on, was the skeleton of a 435-foot *cement* tanker. One boarded it from a short gangway.

The Palo Alto, as she had been christened, was one of several cement supply ships designed and built by the government during the closing months of the First World War. They had been planned to meet a critical shortage of steel. So when the Palo Alto and her sister ship slid down the ways in the Oakland Estuary, a new concept in maritime shipping was born. Fortunately, before the two vessels could be fitted out and readied for service, the war — and need for them — ended. A good thing, too, for seafaring men wanted no part of these chunks of floating (?) concrete.

Following the Armistice, the sister ship was taken to Alaska to serve in the fish-reduction industry. The Palo Alto cooled her hull in San Francisco Bay. In 1930, she was purchased by

the Cal-Nevada Stock Company, towed 100 miles down the California coast and maneuvered into line with the company's Seacliff pier. Once positioned, her seacocks were opened, and she settled onto the sandstone shelf in shallow water. Her owners then prettied her up a bit and turned her into an amusement center. I knew her first as The Ship. How gay she looked out there at night, lighted up, lively music wafting from her saloon. A year or so later, when the State purchased Seacliff Beach, the Ship was included in the deal. But because the State had no intention of going into the night club business, the then Division of Beaches and Parks stripped away the bright lights, along with related accoutrements, and peeled the Palo Alto down to a mere shell. Thus the vessel became the beloved Old Cement Boat, mecca of fishing enthusiasts of all ages from Monterey and San Francisco Bay areas and points inland.

Resting on an uneven bottom as she was, the ship's back eventually broke amidships in a series of winter gales; yet she went right on hosting her public. Some of the biggest catches were hauled up out of the hold by fishermen who crouched at one edge or the other of her gaping fracture and dropped lines down into the dark sloshing water of the hold.

For me to be brought out of the forest and transferred to this beach and ancient concrete ghost was, I thought, like being sentenced to Outer Slobobia. Even so, Labor Day passed and my departure from the nearly deserted Big Sur didn't add up to disaster. Lee Blaisdell, the District Superintendent, laughed at my reluctance to make the change. "It's only for a while," he reasoned. "A few months at most. Then you'll be going back into a park. I figured you'd like the variety of acting as a relief ranger here and there until next summer."

So to Seacliff I went. And who wouldn't, if only for no other reason than to please Lee?

Elderly Chief Ranger and Mrs. Charlie Hight took me under their wing and into their home and were as good to me as if I had been one of the family. For the first time in my life, I could lie in bed and watch the Pacific breaking ashore. Soon I grew to love the incessant pounding, and on moonlit nights, the silvery path that stretched across the bay to our sands. Other nights for perhaps a week or two that autumn, "Red Tide" was in. This occurs when reddish plant-animal microorganisms multiply and swarm in the planktonic layer

of seawater that has somehow warmed. In the disturbance of surf crashing on sand, a chemical reaction is touched off that radiates a luminescence. During the dark hours, the waves glowed as if electrically lighted from below. While for humans, the Red Tide is not harmful, it can destroy great numbers of fish by using up the oxygen in the water. Nevertheless, it creates a truly beautiful sight.

All of these things notwithstanding, my new job at Seacliff nearly floored me. After working long hours doing many different park chores for so many years, I now found myself struggling to kill time.

At 8 AM sharp my first morning, I stepped out of the house into a fog so thick that had I run a knife through it, the two chunks would surely have fallen apart with loud thuds. In the Picnic Area, the scraggly old cypress trees dripped miserably and I couldn't even see the FISHING 25¢ sign at the head of the pier. In the sop, the salt air bit into my skin and nostrils. Aside from the rhythmic crashing of the surf and the screams of gulls, there was a stillness everywhere that was nothing less than spooky.

Turning back indoors, I saw kindly Mr. Hight watching me sympathetically. "Not much like Big Sur, is it?" he asked softly.

I tried not to let him see how lost I felt. "What would you like me to do this morning?" I asked. I couldn't imagine.

"Better start checking the pier and boat," he suggested. "There won't be much to do until the fishermen arrive. Should be some over from San Jose today."

How could anyone move anywhere in a peasouper like this, I wondered.

"Usually around eleven a few show up," Mr. Hight went on, and donning his Stetson, he tossed me a friendly "Don't worry about this job" and left for Headquarters to work on his Weekly Report.

Mrs. Hight smiled warmly and walked me down the front steps. "As Charles says, dear, don't worry. Just relax. It's going to be a change of pace for you, but after you get used to it, I think you'll like it and want to stay."

I nodded silently and gave her a hug. Then I disappeared from view. I know because when I turned to wave, neither she nor the house was visible; a few steps farther and neither was the beach. I had never known such a lonesome feeling — not

even when I'd been stalked in the dark by a mountain lion at Big Sur; not even the morning I found myself alone in a smoke-filled forest at Big Basin. Getting used to this situation was going to take some doing.

Disconsolately, I strode the length of the pier, crossed the gangway, and eyed the wet cement deck. Then, shivering, I zipped up my jacket and walked on around the amidships superstructure. My footsteps echoed metallically from the steel walls, followed me to the forward mast, and on toward the bow. All the while, I could hear the sea swishing around in the hold below. Here and there I noted cup-size holes in the deck, where some sort of machinery had once been set.

Startled suddenly by a loud hissing *Pshshshshshshshsh*, I stooped to peer down into one of the holes. That was the instant that a wave, pouring into the bowels of the ship, compressed the air below decks, shooting it up into my face, and blinding me with salt spray, and parting my hair right down the middle. Later I discovered fishermen deriving a great deal of enjoyment from watching strangers inspect those blowholes. Only a seagull had witnessed my initiation.

That first morning I had plenty of time to lean on the railing amidships, where the cement deck was no more than a dozen feet above the rise and fall of the swell, and watch the grey-green water rolling gently through the fog. The few gulls and the one pelican riding up and down, up and down on it, plus the unaccustomed fishy smell, almost made me lose myself in the illusion of being adrift far from anywhere.

Climbing the steps to the forecandle, I touched for the first time a ship's anchor winch, wet and rusty. Then I stood for awhile at the railing and gazed out into the void of dank nothingness. Finally turning away, I walked back through swirling mists to the pier, and the full length of the pier to the park road. There I met Mr. Hight.

"I've done the pier and boat," I said. "Now what would you like me to do, Mr. Hight?"

"Well, just stay around and check them from time to time."

That stopped me. Check them for what? "There's some litter on the ship," I told him, "and some newspapers and lunch sacks and a pile of fish heads and old bait on the pier. If you'll give me a pokey stick, I'll pick up."

"No, girl," Mr. Hight replied pleasantly, "that's no work

for a woman. You aren't going to poge this pier and boat. I'll have one of the men do that. Someone will come to fish pretty soon. Meanwhile, just — just don't worry."

Don't worry? Once more outbound, I "did" the pier and boat, trying not to worry.

Thankfully there was a difference this trip. One of the gulls that had been standing on the ship's railing sat down.

Four trips later, as I neared shore, I was jarred by a strange voice somewhere in the fog behind me. Out of the mists it squeaked, high-pitched and nasal. "Two bitch for baits," it whanged. "Two bitch for baits!"

Swiveling around, I accosted a short plumpish fellow, face spread wide in a toothless grin, a seaman's cap perched jauntily atop white butched hair.

"You the lady ranger?" he piped, looking my uniform up and down.

I nodded.

"I'm Tony," he announced shyly. "I'm Portugee and I sell baits." He pointed to a small tackle stand at one edge of the pier, which, in the murk, I hadn't noticed before.

Tony was like a character out of a waterfront movie — one of those B thrillers in which someone gets dumped off the wharf when the fog drifts past at just the right moment. But his friendly grin completely dispelled the atmosphere of drama and mystery. Shaking hands with him was a relief and a delight. Furthermore, I could tell that he, too, was pleased to have someone with whom to share the loneliness and gloom.

No great numbers of fishermen crowded pier and boat during those war days except on weekends, when we could expect maybe a hundred or two who had pooled their gasoline and driven in by the carload. Some brought families, who picnicked or lolled on the beach if the day was warm. But to the avid fisherman who came to sit and wait by the hour for a tug on the line, the beach was merely the place where the ocean ended; the picnic ramadas were only for those who came to cremate hamburgers.

By the end of September, autumn began to color the surrounding landscape. Willows and alders and maples turned yellow, poison oak a bright red. Surf bathing no longer appealed, and the campground often stood empty. My attention went to such as pelicans who hovered over the swells

until they spotted an unwary fish, then folded their wings back and dove straight down. Over Thanksgiving vacation, the scene brightened. Countless boys and girls with droplines and cans of bait rushed both pier and ship. Wherever there was a hole in the deck or a loose plank in the pier, at least a half-dozen clustered around it. Down on hands and knees, they waited with unceasing patience for that nibble sure to come.

Along the railings, working on gear or sorting or simply resting motionless were the older people, their bronzed faces well-leathered and wrinkled. Regardless of whether the fish obliged or the day turned sunny and blue or the fog impenetrable, there they sat with their poles and assorted tackle boxes and folding chairs — and their exquisite contentment. The same ones appeared regularly, swathed in old clothes, their unraveling sweaters, salt-encrusted tennis shoes, and wide-brimmed hats; the happiest lot imaginable. In passing among them, never once did I ever hear a single grumble about either the weather or their luck. All serenely accepted whatever fortune decreed, although not without elated cries when the catch was a big one, or shouts of excitement when it turned out to be an octopus or shark.

Slowly I grew to tolerate Seacliff, even though at first my work or lack of it came close to making a gibbering idiot of me.

Many mornings, as winter came on, a thick layer of frost as well as ceiling-zero fog greeted me at 8 AM. Both usually remained until well into the day, and even though I wore my warmest uniform, plus an under layer of long handles and sweatshirt, I had to move continually to keep from freezing solid. I've never been so cold in all my life. One of the warmer mornings, Tony invited me to fish awhile. Mr. Hight had already made such a suggestion, so I let myself be talked into it. After baiting my hook, Tony handed me a pole and escorted me to the bridge railing.

Secretly, I had always kind of wanted to fish, although not very badly. Just now, the fact that this was a work hour and I was fiddling instead of doing something meaningful didn't bolster my lukewarm motivation one bit. But the water was glassy, the gulls asleep on superstructure and railing or floating up and down on the swells. The tide was out; all was tranquil.

"See? Like this," Tony said, and adroitly swung his arm

back and whipped the hook and line out so its sinker plunked softly into the water. As he reeled in, I was touched by a mild degree of suspense, and resolved to do as well.

So I took the pole in hand, and not nearly as deftly, made my first and only cast. At the exact instant of the plink in the water, and at the exact same spot, a black hole appeared — one bracketed with long wiry whiskers and bright eyes. A sea lion had emerged from the depths, opened his mouth wide, and let fly with one of those hoarse, melancholy barks that only this animal can emit. Miraculously, the hook did not catch on the tender flesh. To have come so close to snagging the fascinating creature was all I needed to cure me then and there — and permanently — of ocean fishing. Practically wadding into a knot, I handed the pole back to Tony, thanked him for his good intentions, gave his shoulder a pat, and headed outbound for the bow to part with my breakfast.

What a way to fight a war, I thought bitterly — riding herd on a cement ship in a fog! I couldn't help but recall how, just a few weeks before, Bill Kenyon and I had had our only serious argument. He had been determined that I remain in the parks for the duration, during the acute manpower shortage at least. Lee had backed him up, too, saying he needed me as a relief ranger for his district. I had been just as adamant about joining the Army Medical Corps, for which previous training had qualified me — but reluctantly I had given in to Bill. Now look where the heck I was! With heartfelt venom I kicked a pile of fish heads off the deck. Then I leaned on the rail and sputtered some pungent philosophy to a gull that had perched on a stanchion nearby.

Just at that moment Mr. Hight appeared around the deckhouse and called to me. "Going to have visitors tomorrow."

"Without any gasoline?" I called back, conscious of my own lack. "These folks have gas," he replied, laughing. "All they want.

They did that all right.

Next morning a string of Army vehicles appeared in the fog — jeeps, weapons carriers, covered wagons. From them leaped helmeted men who scurried around doing this and that, including erecting tall reddish-orange cloth markers on the forecastle of the Old Cement Boat. This was the first time I had ever seen luminous material that glowed as if it were a light.

"Whatever is that?" I asked a sergeant who was heading shoreward to meet a contingent of supplies.

"You might say it's our beacon," he answered amiably. "To guide the landing craft."

I was astounded. "Landing craft from where?"

"Over at Fort Ord," he replied. "Due to land at 1300."

All I could do was explode, "*Amphibians?*" and with good reason, as told in detail in later Big Sur chapters.

That afternoon I stood at the bow of the old Palo Alto and watched wave after wave of Fort Ord ducks bobbing across Monterey Bay and riding the breakers in. All at once, a fierce love for amphibians coursed through me that I didn't know I had. A horizon full of Old Glories, streaming out in a stiff breeze, couldn't have stirred me to more unashamed tears. As each wave of those extraordinary critters hit our beach, snorting victory over the sea, I found myself cheering wildly. Two capsized and had to be dragged out and three GI's needed medical attention, but the exercise was adjudged a success by the brass standing in their jeeps on the cliff high above the park.

Presently, the ducks ceased roaring and beating their armored chests with pride, and then quieted so evaluation could begin. Before dark, down came the banners from ship and pier, and the command vessels headed back to Monterey. Not until much later did the ducks leave.

About 9 PM they started warming their motors, then revved and zoomed, all hundred at once, until the scheduled hour of their departure in the middle of the night, leaving us a thoroughly chewed-up beach to smooth next day with the help of the tide.

On several occasions afterwards, Seacliff hosted similar invasions, all of them riots of shouting and gaiety and deafening noise. Each time after they had gone, the fog seemed to thicken, the Old Cement Boat grew unbearably desolate, and the surf more thunderous than ever. Then only the piercing cries of the gulls assured me that I was not of the time of Genesis — of primordial seas when mists were still rising from the cooling earth, but of some later era, after life had been breathed into the world.

Chapter Four

Ranger, Where's the Picnic Area?

To people the world over, I suppose, the redwood is a thing of wonder and glory; something almost unreal in its incredible age, size, and grandeur; a sublime creation; an experience. Our days swelled with the awestruck. For a few it was all too much, and they left. Most lingered, transfixed, as if in some holy place.

One day in Big Basin, a little old lady got out of her car, took a long look at the redwoods rising like living skyscrapers all around, and exclaimed softly, "My! Don't things grow big around here! I thought our Missouri watermelons were big, but these trees — *these trees* —"

Like hundreds of other out-of-state tourists that day, she had been on her way somewhere else. Yet hours later, I found her sitting on a log in a shaft of later afternoon sun. Seeing me, she smiled. "How does one ever leave such a forest as this to go look at a Chinatown and a World Fair?" she queried plaintively.

Another day, a man skidded to a stop in front of Park Headquarters and ran up to the window, blue in the face and out of breath. Pushing aside several people, he whined, "Ranger! Quick! Which way outa this hole? Gotta git. Fast. Trees are too damn big."

Then there was the beautiful blonde, last one off a tour bus that had just pulled in. After the other passengers had hurried away to take pictures and stroll among the giants, she emerged without so much as a glance at the enormous Washington Tree nearby. Instead, leaning against the bus, she languidly tapped a cigarette on the back of her hand and treated herself to an orgy of boredom.

Such crises as this are bound to challenge almost any young ranger. Our newest and handsomest hurried to be of service. Exuding charm, he touched the brim of his Stetson smartly and held a cigarette lighter at the ready, its flame burning as brightly as his own.

"If you're looking for the Redwood Trail," he began hopefully, "I'll be glad —"

From beneath heavily mascaraed lashes, the visitor eyed

the crisp forest green uniform, then bestowed a thin smile and shook her head. "I've seen a redwood. That one there," she purred, blowing a stream of smoke toward it. "Now why should I go look at more? Aren't they all about alike?"

In a single summer, we could expect every conceivable variety of camper and tourist. We never missed our quota of happy extroverts, making like the horse opera hero who dashes out of a saloon, jumps on his horse, and rides off in all directions. We saw innumerable urban fugitives, wired for sound and turned on full, straining every heartbeat, every muscle fiber, every vocal cord in their desire to broadcast to the world the fascinating fact of their escape from the daily grind. We didn't have to look to know that we had a generous sprinkling of hard-driving travelers, seat-weary and constipated, incapable of enthusing over anything more, or that in our many camp groups, inveterate outdoor buffs were enthusiastically sharing all manner of ideas for camping gear and gadgets.

Seen but seldom heard were intellectuals to whom towering trees had meaning only when translated into philosophy; seen and always heard were the vocally religious, too often inclined to behold the hand of the Lord in everything except their own kind.

Each season produced poets who went off by themselves to compose odes to Time's Ageless Relics — and came dragging back, frustrated because the floweriest words they could summon didn't say what the forest had stirred up within their breasts. And the same fate befell the artists. They would spend days painting some giant, only to bring in canvas wiped clean. You have to search to find good paintings of redwoods, and there's a reason.

Along with the learned and creative folk we welcomed the inevitable naturalists, both amateur and professional. But aside from a quick hello at Headquarters, most of them vanished into the forest. Rarely could they be found among the newcomers in the main grove who were soaking up our gigantically vertical scene with such vigor and passion that they were practically ready to collapse.

Spoiled by all of these delights, and many more, we would have been less than human had we not dreamed of a whole season free of cut-ups, psychos, adult delinquents, litterbugs,

and indignant Taxpayers, asserting their Divine Right, and reminding us that we were “after all, just public servants.”

How easy it is — and how heartwarming — to remember with pleasure the days before everything was unconstitutional but crime; to remember with gratitude the thousands upon thousands of outgoing, nicely adjusted families making the most of vacations that were always too short. Hand in hand, they would stroll along the trails, seeking and finding the joys of togetherness. Somehow, they managed so well to look upon us as workers like themselves, with a job to do, that many of them became our cherished long-time friends. Most returned about the same time every year for their two weeks or two months or summer, and we looked forward to their arrival. Along with them came a steady stream of picnickers from neighboring communities, in for the day, toting coffee pots, frying pans, hot dogs, pies, cakes, and bowls mounded with salads.

Weekends and holidays especially, were days of wood smoke and excited chatter and the tempting aromas of hamburgers and steaks and oniony potato salad. They were days of overflowing camp and picnic areas; of America at its best and worst; of park crews on “unlimited hours” and struggling to cope, even so.

Even in those times, and certainly now, nothing was more loaded with the hair-raising and unpredictable than any weekend; yet we wouldn't have missed one for the world. We were all on deck and geared for any eventuality.

Things changed as the population began to explode, and during World War II, military training on the West Coast showed thousands of young men and women what California had to offer. To hang in there now, you have to love people much more than wildlife and trees and far silent places. This is why I find myself advising young college applicants, hopelessly under the spell of *The Outdoors*: “Before you choose Parks or Forestry or Fish and Game as your future, make certain first which you can't resist — wild animals or wild humans.” Such a thought usually invites proper evaluation.

Through my years of people in the big trees, we had both famous names and Just People paying us visits.

One Big Name, a famous movie star, arrived about the same time every year, soused to the ears, and propped up by her manager. For some reason, she would seek me out and coyly dent my chest with a forefinger. "Bet you don't know who I am," she would drivel one time after another. I knew all right. Who wouldn't, who had ever looked upon that beautiful face on the silver screen? But I never saw her in person sober enough to distinguish whether I was the Golden Gate Bridge or the Resurrection Tree.

Then there was the mystery of one of our Just Folks, who, for some obscure reason, left a vase of gladiolas beside the fourth loop of the Saratoga Road just above Park Center on July 8 every year. The last summer I was stationed at Big Basin, the vase did not appear, nor has it at any time since. We will always wonder about the story behind that simple dedication.

In the thirties, Big Basin underwent its first modernization. Only the giants, the creek, and a portion of the meadow retained their original identity. The state could not of course relocate them, but it did move almost everything else except the Lodge. Camp and picnic areas, restrooms, campfire circle, even the winding dirt road that had ended in a turn-around at Opal Creek were relocated. The rickety old house on the creekbank, which from the beginning had served as the park office, was moved far upslope to become the Chief Ranger's residence.

A splendid full-log ranger station arose above the meadow, some distance away. Engineers even brought a two-lane paved road, known as Highway 9, in past it; that extended up and out of the Basin to the Skyline Boulevard along the crest of the San Francisco Peninsula.

After these and other changes, even Old Timers who had known every foot of the Basin since the turn of the century found themselves in a strange new world and had difficulty getting their bearings. Other visitors became confused enough that they were unsure of what park they were in.

One of these I took to be a Kentucky colonel. With a florid face like filet mignon, medium rare, and an unruly thatch of hair, drooping eyebrows and mustache, all snow white, he looked as if he ought to be enjoying a mint julep. Instead, he had lost a tree.

“Ma’am, Ah can’t raghtly find the General Sherman Tree,” he complained bitterly.

“I think you have the wrong park, sir,” I told him. “The General Sherman is in Sequoia National Park. That’s about a hundred miles east of here in the Sierra Nevada.”

Begging my pahden, that suhtenly was not so, Ma’am. He knowed it was raght here five years ago because he was here and saw it with his own eyes. It had a room in it. He remembered it well.

As soon as he said that, I knew at once the cause of his particular confusion. Gently, I told him that the tree he sought was the General Fremont, downcanyon seventeen miles at Big Trees County Park, now Henry Cowell Redwood State Park. In 1846 General Fremont had supposedly used its burned out interior for his headquarters while in the area. It was sometimes called the Room Tree.

In my mind the matter ended there, but it didn’t in the Colonel’s. Through those overhanging eyebrows, his pale blue eyes fired cold steel. Head wagging, he began to enunciate, slowly and deliberately, each syllable coming across in capital letters. “It’s too bad,” he fumed, “that our public officials aren’t pro-per-ly informed before they are set out in these forests. Here you are, a public — yes, a public *salesman*, and not even perceptive of the wares you have to sell.”

I glanced around, and seeing no one else in the office, concluded he must have meant me. Any lingering doubt was dispelled when the Colonel leaned on the counter, his face so close to mine that my eyes wouldn’t track.

“You un-dah-stand, Miss,” he went on, dotting every i and crossing every t and hissing every s with ex-cru-ciat-ing patience, “any old tree won’t do. I want the *General Sherman Tree* — where the General had his command post during that famous march to the sea.”

I took a couple of seconds to draw a deep breath and inquire, “Sir, could it have been that it was on one of Sherman’s marches to another sea that he had a hollow tree command post — the Atlantic, for instance?”

At this, my Kentucky Colonel yanked a badly mauled cigar from between his teeth. From his heavy watch chain on up, he jerked back and stared at me. “Bah Jove, girl,” he roared. “You may have something there!”

Ah, but not for long. With mounting excitement, he began to study the fire-scarred bases of some of our giants nearby. Suddenly he whirled around. "No! No!" he shouted, pounding the counter. "It couldn't have been. Don't you remember, girl? Sherman the dirty bastard — laid waste to the countryside as he went — pillaging and burning." (This with the veins in his temples bulging, and an arm cutting a wide swath in our crisp morning air.) "Well, Ma'am, look over there — and there — *and there!* See how those big trees are blackened by flames? I knew it. *I knew it!* NOW WHERE IS THE GENERAL SHERMAN?"

What could I do now except shut up and look as much as possible like a waste of the State's money. Yet in my abject shame, I couldn't help thinking that both the Union and the Confederacy would be stunned if they could just learn how far General Sherman had detoured in that famous ride from Atlanta to the sea. He had not only split the Confederacy in two but the Western Hemisphere as well.

After a triumphal Bah Jove he'd find that tree, and with malice toward some, the man left me standing there with my teeth in my head, and clumped off across the meadow and out the North Park Road, flapping this way and that, obviously expecting to find the missing five hundred-ton-giant in the Picnic Area somewhere.

You can do only so much for the human race; from there on in, it simply has to be on its little own.

The Fremont Tree, so rudely rejected by the Colonel, has had occasional troubles of its own. When I first saw the giant, one could walk into its blackened interior standing up. But because a redwood heals its wounds as do you and I, scar tissue has been slowly closing the entrance for years. Today's visitors must stoop low to enter the tree.

One summer, a crowd of tourists gathered around it when they heard fiendish screams and howls coming from within. Among them was one of those instant heroes who seizes command of every contingency from conception to reincarnation.

His stentorian voice rang out loud and clear. *He* knew what this was. He had tramped the trackless wilderness of the West from Canada to Mexico. He had seen every creature that inhabited the whole works. He knew their every call. This call,

he said, was the call of a wildcat — and a rabid one, too, make no mistake. He'd heard rabid wildcats before. Stand back, everyone. Quiet, please. And don't move. Forthwith, the good man dispatched a teenager to bring a ranger, who would of course shoot the poor thing.

The crowd, buttressed by the brave adventurer, backed off a safe distance and waited anxiously.

The ranger came, listened, and looked puzzled for a few moments. Then he bent over, and much to the horror of the frightened onlookers, disappeared into the dark interior of the burned-out Room Tree. Everyone tensed for the shot, or the last gasp of the totaled ranger. But they heard neither, nor any more screams and howls. Only silence.

Presently, the ranger emerged, in his wake a small boy, grinning sheepishly.

To find out how wonderful the redwoods really are, one has only to follow a Kitchen Thoreau around the park. In my experience, most of these impromptu naturalists were middle-aged matrons, wearing dark dresses and black hats. It was from them you could learn the more amazing facts about the trees. At Big Basin we called them our Guest Conductors.

In order to qualify for this distinction, they spent just enough sightseeing hours in the park to feel that they had become authorities. As such, they considered themselves able and committed to personally conduct walks for any of the uninformed who would go along quietly — and listen. You could easily identify these women because they invariably affected an elaborately carved walking stick, and each jutted out ahead of her little group like a dragon rampant on the prow of an ancient sailing ship.

If, out of uniform and therefore more or less incognito, I occasionally went along on these walks, I afterwards wondered how I could ever bear to give my old dull trailside talks again.

One morning I joined a group that had assembled on the Redwood Trail and was stringing out behind the current Guest Conductor. At the base of the Mother Tree, she halted — (or perhaps *pulled up* describes it better) — assumed a stance that reminded me of George Washington that day afloat on the Delaware, and pointed dramatically at the venerable old giant with the burned-out heart. "Of course you can readily see

how this great creature got its name," she suggested in a deep Schumann-Heink contralto.

All eyes, including mine, turned toward her expectantly. In silence and with bated breath, we waited to learn what, of course, we could readily see.

She let suspense build up for several moments. Then, all chins aquiver, faced her followers and began to declaim.

"A million years ago," she said, "this basin was a barren valley; a raw scar on the face of the earth. But in it stood one expression of God's infinite love — this tree, then only a seedling. It was commanded by the Father, and it answered bountifully, for from its being sprang this entire grove. Of all the billions and billions of seeds scattered before the winds that century, only a few found soil and life. You stand beneath them here today."

Our lady indicated the entire scene with a grandiose sweep of her arm, so magnetic that all eyes followed it, just as on a bright day, the faces of yellow sunflowers follow the progress of their master across the sky.

On a nearby log, a chipmunk scolded. Rather than compete, and with resolute forbearance, our leader let him have his say. Then, gazing upon us as if she were about to serve up a moral, piping hot, she asked significantly, "Is it any wonder, my friends, that this great lady is called the Mother Tree?"

Since some kind of reply seemed to be in order, most of the party managed a grunt or a cluck or a headshake in disbelief, and reared back on their heels to gaze up at the first big limb, perhaps five stories overhead.

We hadn't seen anything yet. Because the Mother of the Forest could hover quite a number of people, this, too, the tourists must savor. Accordingly, high drama reigned as Our Lady of the Seeds now shepherded her flock into the giant's blackened interior. Everyone stepped through the big slit but me. Declining politely, and for an alibi, pointing to my camera, I waited nearby for the inevitable.

Sure enough, and rather more quickly than usual, the rest of the group, wiping their faces, stepped back out onto the trail. The grand old dame, like so many burned-out redwoods, is upon occasion, a bat tree. To look up inside at times like that can be surprising and dampening. This, many a tourist

has discovered — including one wedding party. But then, the young couple had come a long distance “just to be married inside a tree.” Perhaps it would bestow its durability upon their union. Hopefully it did, but that wasn’t all it bestowed during the course of the ceremony.

Another day, a Black Hat, leading a group through the main grove, announced that the Grandmother Tree was so named “because she had been responsible for more young redwoods than any other giant in Big Basin.”

One thing about these women who conducted: a half century before women’s lib and female sexuality, they really glorified motherhood and left no doubt that if it hadn’t been for the womenfolk of the forest, the park would today be a sterile wasteland.

This made me wonder how the Father of the Forest figured in the story of creation — he of the one hundred and eight foot girth and the incredibly enormous bulk, standing there alongside the Redwood Trail, not far from the Mother of the Forest, solitary and ignored. One June, though, on the third Sunday, he finally received fitting tribute.

That morning, a small boy ran excitedly to Headquarters to report it. At first, none of us believed this noisy kid, although to humor him, we laughed heartily at his story.

Nevertheless, when there was a lull in activity — and so we could have peace the rest of a busy day — I took time out to walk to the Redwood Trail with him. Striding around the last turn before the Father Tree, I stopped suddenly and stared up in amazement. High on the vast trunk of the giant, far, far above the reach of the park’s tallest ladders, hung an enormous greeting card. It read: HAPPY FATHER’S DAY.

As far as I know, no one has ever been able to explain how it got there.

All day long, visitors by the hundreds saw, laughed, and paid homage; and the fathers who stood gazing up at this behemoth of the forest surely must have had a warm feeling in their hearts. Thus the giant came into a measure of recognition, however belatedly, even though some of it did tend to exalt the ingenuity of man rather than the wonders of Nature.

The morning a Guest Conductor was “showing” our Perfect Tree, one of the tallest and straightest shafts in the entire park, I happened along. The Black Hat had all stops out.

"Oh yes," she was declaring stoutly, evidently in answer to a question posed by one of her followers. "There are no roots in the whole world like these!" Her diction was clipped, crisp, and clear; her voice rang with authority. "These roots grip the very bowels of the earth. They penetrate as far below the surface of the ground as the great trees rise above it."

That was one for any botanist's notebook.

At the time of *The Revelation*, I had to glance toward the creek, at one of my old-time friends lying across it and for a city block out into the forest. During the previous January, the tree had succumbed to the violence of a fierce winter gale. With a sharp crack and thunderous roar, it had toppled. I remember how bad I had felt upon reading a letter from one of the boys, telling me the sad news.

As I studied the few pitiful roots fanning out from that huge upended butt, I thought about the marvel of balance that had sustained the tree in stately grandeur through the dozen centuries of its life. The same marvel was still at work, holding erect all the other big red skyscrapers, and doing it without the help of an anchoring taproot. For how many centuries to come could the shallow grip of five or six feet hold them fast? Well, no need to worry about that anymore. I knew now that the roots must be embedded in the rice paddies of China.

Not all of our Guest Conductors were women. Sometimes a man got the call.

I found one, a tall gaunt drone, Bible in hand, intoning dismally at the Chimney Tree. When you're a woman member of a park crew, and not in uniform, you don't walk up and say, "Sorry, sir, not in a State Park." Either you go home and get properly attired to meet the situation or you shut up. I decided to let the park go to pot for a few minutes in favor of improving my education.

Pointing to the hundred foot burned-out tube of a tree behind him, the man implored his listeners: "Now consider this one. Is it not a symbol of the ages — of ages so vast that your puny life is but a single moment in their passing? Eons ago, when the Indians were still new on the face of the earth (along with the dinosaurs, no doubt), they became aware of the power of Christ (Wow!). They set a fire to burning at the base of this great tree and kept it burning until the flames had eaten clean out the top. And then, after the tree had cooled, those

savages looked heaven-ward, up through this poor blackened tube; and they saw the light that was God; and they believed — and they were saved. *They were saved!* And as the centuries passed, they held ceremonials in this tree at Christmastime — all to the wonder and glory of Christ. That is...,” he added perfunctorily, “That is, until the State took over.”

That did it. I took off for Headquarters. It seemed a good time to do something about getting California back in the good graces of the Almighty.

Quite a relief from such as Guest Conductors was the young mother with five stair-step youngsters who approached me one afternoon and queried innocently, “Can you tell me where the Big Basin is, so we can wash hands before eating our picnic lunch?”

I did a fast double take, but kept my voice level when I directed her to the nearest WOMEN’S. Then I asked gently if this were her first visit to our park.

“Oh yes,” the woman murmured politely, “we don’t go this far from home much. My husband works ‘til noon Saturdays, and it’s a long way from Fresno here. He’s a plumber, you know.”

I hadn’t known, but I could tell that a person’s background and training might easily determine what he’d expect to find in a place called Big Basin.

Without question, the largest wordage run up by a Big Basin ranger crew in any one year of the park’s long history has had to do with trying to steer people to the Picnic Area.

After repeated experiments, none of which worked, the men placed a huge redwood slab in the clearing across the Center from Headquarters. Its routed letters were a foot high and read: PICNIC AREA —>. At the Information window, we could then lean over the counter, extend an arm toward the sign and ask, “See that big sign over there — the one with PICNIC AREA and an arrow on it?”

The picnickers would then bob their heads and reply that yes, sure. They saw the sign. So?

So, presuming we had their full attention, we’d swing our arm the direction the arrow indicated, and while in the process, tell them very, ve-ry slowly, “Well, you just follow the road there that the arrow is pointing to. See it?”

Yep. Sure. They saw it.

"Now continue on that road for a hundred feet and you'll be right in the Picnic Area. Understand?"

Sure! Great! Simple! Nothing to it. And oh boy, were they ever starved.

Having already paid their 25¢ picnic fee and bought a 50¢ bundle of wood, they would bound lightly off the porch. Filled with happiness and anticipation, they'd leap into their cars, wave their thanks and good will, and with nuts and bolts flying, zoom off in the opposite direction.

Ask any Big Basin ranger what he'd like most, aside from sleep — and he'll tell you that it is an automatic tow rope installed there at the ranger station onto which he can hook all the jolly picnickers. He believes that perhaps in this way the customers can think about their chicken and salad and coffee, and still be able to locate the day-use tables and barbecue pits on the very first try.

Some visitors didn't care whether they could find the designated picnic areas or not. We have discovered bridge tables and folding chairs set up on the Redwood Trail, on the stage at the campfire circle, in the big crater right outside the souvenir shop — and believe it or not, in the Deer Feeding Grounds, beside a brisk weenie bake fire, going at the base of one of the redwoods.

That was a busy Sunday in August, during a prolonged California drought, when the humidity had plummeted straight down the week before and stayed there. For days, all of us had been waiting tensely for someone to rush to Headquarters, screaming FIRE! We just knew it was going to happen, despite warnings and continual patrolling. Everything was tinder-dry and almost ready to explode of its own accord.

His hair rising on end when the weenie bake was reported, one of our young and earnest rangers hurried to the scene and with back pump, quickly doused the flames. The family gaped in astonishment. Why, what had they done wrong! The picnic sites were all taken and their fire was only on the *ground!*

"Yes, but the ground is pure fuel," our ranger told them, his hair turning white before their eyes. "And the humidity is down almost to zero. ZERO!"

The man's face, bulging with hot dog, broke into a happy grin. "Yep. Right. You sure can't beat California. No humidity. Great! *Terrific!* That's why we left Iowa."

Rangers never fade away. They never live to grow old.

The danger past, our finest took the opportunity to explain in detail about the redwood forest floor that can be duff for many feet down; how fire, once taking hold there, can burn underground until it is almost impossible to get at and extinguish.

Our man, Jerry, had the full attention of the family now, plus that of all the deer-feeding visitors whose interest had transferred from the dozen or more animals milling around. Group conservation education was definitely on the road, unswerving dedication propelling it onward and upward.

That is, it was until a tiny four-year-old girl suddenly squealed, "MAMA!" at the top of her lungs. As of that instant, the exciting subject of forest fires began deteriorating fast. The family abandoned their education on the spot, and swung around to see what terrible thing was happening to their young one — and so did everyone else.

Standing there, utter amazement and fascination lighting her face, she was pointing to one of the big bucks who had turned his back on the weenie bake in favor of a tourist apple. "MAMA!" she squealed again, "MAMA! Just see the beans come out of the goat!"

Which is just another reason why the Deer Feeding Grounds is less than ideal for a picnic — and why problems of interpretation and park management sometimes passeth all understanding.

To watch people milling around in the redwood souvenir shop, one can easily become confused about what in the park really is the main attraction.

Almost any hour of the day, the place bulges. Youngsters beat the souvenir tom-toms, menace customers with souvenir tomahawks, heft souvenir baseball bats, and blow souvenir whistles. Tiring of these things, they lick park decals or sneeze upon the \$15 photographic lampshades or drip ice cream over the \$25 redwood bookends or run sticky popcorned hands around the \$40 burl salad bowls.

Meanwhile, their mothers also dally around the display tables. They, too, like to feel of things. As if magnetized, their fingers seem drawn to the expensive redwood clocks and vases; and for some reason they can't resist questioning the

workmanship of every redwood jewel box by raising the lid, then letting it drop with a bang. Some even test the satiny finish of the redwood cocktail trays by dragging long red fingernails across them to see if the surface can be scratched, or they pick at the curly redwood St. Francis shrines to find out if the woody swirls are for real.

Into our busy little mart streamed a steady flow of American families. Watching them was both a delight and an endless source of amazement as the range of human nature ran its gamut. Most undoubtedly behaved as they would at home; a few, released from the sameness of daily routine, acted like outcasts from society. To bring out the ultimate in the Great Oppressed, though, leave it to the stamp machine.

There ours sat, on the counter next to the postcard rack, glaring defiantly and trying to see how many people it could annoy. Prudent souls retreated to the post office window, just around the corner of the building. The naturally combative individuals sensed the magnitude of its hostility, and because they would rather fight than be intimidated, roared into battle formation. Snatching a coin from their supply, they immediately jammed it into the wrong slot.

Now, having ignored the array of directional signs above the slots, and unable to turn the knob, they began hopping from one foot to the other, demanding that The Thing spit out their stamp. But with a nickel in the quarter slot and a dime in the nickel slot, the monster wasn't about to produce. At this point, the customer always erupted into cold fury and started breathing through his nose.

His next move was to give the stamp machine a tentative thump and then, when still nothing happened, to grab the diabolical critter, wrench it loose from its moorings, and pound the living stuffing out of it then and there.

These stamp vendors weigh a good twenty pounds. Still, anyone sufficiently enraged at the disappearance of his money, and no stamps to show for it, can exhibit strength beyond belief.

I remember how, before a clerk could interfere, the one adversary began shaking the other like a terrier would a rat. You could hear the poor thing's miserable insides rattling and tumbling all over themselves. Still nothing ejected from the slots. Moreover, by now the embattled fiend was snarling back

like something demented, and as the struggle waxed more savage, the customer gradually turned livid.

Only after the clerk was able to make her way through the crowd and pry the two fuming antagonists apart was peace restored in the souvenir shop. That is, it was restored to everyone but the clerk. For her, peace was a luxury not to take form until after she had spent an hour or so in the back room, calming the stamp machine and reassembling its complicated innards for the next illiterate.

A gentleman onlooker once told me that slot machine experience was helpful in outwitting one of these demons. Said he, "It's really a simple matter. All you have to do is put a big sign on The Thing reading 'PLAY UNTIL YOU HIT THE JACKPOT,' and you've got it made."

Most stamp machine users can and do read the halo of signs and follow instructions perfectly. In goes the coin, out comes the stamps. Eureka! But where is my penny change? Can't that thing subtract? If they had just walked that extra few feet to the post office window, they would have discovered that the postmistress could have coped with the arithmetic.

Stamp machine days were like the dog days of August, and when they were upon us, clerks, concessionaires, and rangers alike had to keep occupied with other matters. Fortunately, we never lacked for diversion.

There was, for example, the man from Washington State. In my book, he did more for the feeling that sometimes depresses people down at the bottom of a giant forest than anyone else I ever saw, and in a way all his own.

That day, as I was walking across the meadow in Park Center, I heard a male voice hailing me. "Ranger lady! Ranger lady! Yooooooooo-hooooooooooooo!"

The call had the lilt of a bird on high. And small wonder. I had to rear back on my heels and peer straight up into one of the towering redwoods to locate it.

Over a hundred feet above me, boots spiked firmly into the great bole and leaning outward against a loop of rope was this fellow, waving like mad. His spirit soared. He even blew me a kiss.

I was flabbergasted. "You come right down from there!" I yelled up at him.

His hearty laugh rang with the pure ecstasy of living. "You

come up here!" he shouted back. "Where you are, you'll get claustrophobia sure. Why, gal, you can't see out!"

The Last Frontier, I thought. When a forest becomes too crowded, the only way to go, I guess, is up. Leave it to a lumber camp high climber to find a solitude above and beyond compare. Neither of us knew then that Man would eventually go to the moon — or that a Jonathan Livingston Seagull would one day show us earthbound critters how to banish *all* limitations, even those beyond the moon.

Of such is the day of a ranger. During The Season, each day developed a personality of its own. Most proved endlessly interesting and full of surprises. No two were the same.

Deeply engraved in my memory still is the day of Whang-Ho in the Big Sur Lodge; the lovely old lodge of beamed ceilings and whole redwood logs that preceded the present one of more modern taste.

That afternoon, the place teemed with tourists milling around in the gift shop, registering for cabins, resting, and people-watching in the easy chairs of the picturesque lounge. Stalking smugly past the NO PETS INSIDE sign, a well-dressed woman with a Siamese cat aboard, pardoned her way through it all, determined to see — and show — her pet the sights.

At the jewelry counter, she asked Whang-Ho, now sitting in cross-eyed splendor on her shoulder, what he thought of the abalone shell rings. Obviously expecting no reply, she moved on to the seashell trays, thence to the redwood crafts, on past the booklets and postcards to the magazine rack. Only momentarily did she stop there, suggesting thoughtfully to Whang-Ho that they go enjoy the lounge for a spell. Having no choice, Whang-Ho went along, his crossed eyes taking in all six of everything that came into range before that turquoise stare. Because friends of mine had a handsome but unpredictable character like this one, named George, I retreated a safe distance, premonitions sticking out all over me.

Whang-Ho's enrichment of life went well until his mama paused beneath one of the low beams of the lounge's rustic ceiling. At that point, unfortunately, he glanced up. Directly overhead, too close for comfort, a stuffed bobcat poised

menacingly, glassy-eyed, snarling, one huge paw raised ready to strike.

Instantaneously, all hell broke loose.

Not of a breed to sidestep combat at all, but nevertheless one sharp enough to know when he's had it, Whang-Ho vacated the premises. In one almighty blast off, he passed through the lobby and out into the upper atmosphere, leaving behind a string of startled visitors whose shoulders he had appropriated for leverage and a single hole, just his shape, in the Lodge's screened door.

I like to recall a certain busy afternoon when I was helping out at Big Basin Headquarters.

During a lull in the ebb and flow of visitors at the window, I noticed a middle-aged woman pacing back and forth the length of the porch, apparently watching for someone. Every now and then she would stop to freshen her makeup and straighten her hair a bit. Later, I saw her remove a pencil from her purse, wet it with her tongue, and without benefit of mirror, darken her eyebrows. I wondered how she could be sure of hitting them that way.

After the lapse of an hour or more, I observed a car pulling up nearby that claimed her immediate attention. The driver, a tall graying man, jumped out and rushed up the steps toward her. Joyously they threw their arms around each other in the most stupendous, supercolossal hug I have ever seen in public — or private. All of us, rangers and public alike, turned to stare. Well, I thought, here's one middle-aged couple that's still filled with romance, and after all those years, too. To think of it made me glow.

For a few minutes the two talked excitedly. Then, holding hands like young lovers, they walked slowly toward the window.

Not once did they take their eyes off each other. It was a good thing that the tourists milling around on the porch moved to let them through, for neither of them was remotely aware of anyone else in the world until they reached the sign: INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION. All vibrations Go, I stood waiting. And I must have been smiling broadly at the man because when he looked up and saw me, shyness took

over. By way of stalling until he could regroup, he laboriously cleared his throat.

"Maybe you can tell us where to find a minister," he said finally. "This lady and I haven't seen each other for almost twenty years, and — and we'd like to get married."

Just to see his happiness nearly took my bachelor girl breath away. When I gazed from him to her, I stopped breathing entirely. Crowning that radiant face were two eyebrows that had been generously touched up with *indelible pencil*. Nothing ever looked so gaudily purple, and there were plenty of them. Obviously, the man hadn't even noticed.

"Married?" I parroted stupidly, glancing at their gray hair.

"That's right," the woman laughed, and her voice tinkled as musically as Oriental chimes in a summer breeze. "We've waited a long, long time for this. Circumstances — well..." Here she hesitated and seemed unable to find words. But no need. The man at her side took it from there.

"We were young people here together — once," he explained. "Things didn't work out for us then. And now — and now — *now they have!*" He finished triumphantly, his face like the brightness of a rising sun.

The lady put in earnestly, "Do you know where we could find a minister? We have met in Big Basin today so we could be married here if possible. It's terribly important."

I could see that it was and why. And heavenly days — I did know of a minister. He and his family were camped in Group 11. Furthermore, I was positive he'd love nothing so much as to perform a Sunday afternoon ceremony.

The minister's camp was the coziest imaginable, and one of the most unique in redwood country. Over the entire campsite spread a canopy of interlocking azalea bushes, just then covered with such a profusion of blossoms that it illuminated our forest with a great brilliance.

A few days before, when I had stopped by to visit, the minister had said, "What a pity someone doesn't want to get married right here in this camp. Have you ever seen a place so exquisite or that smelled so fragrant as this natural altar of azaleas, especially in late afternoon, when the sun streams down through these redwoods? Wouldn't you just know that anyone married here would feel abundantly blessed?"

Most definitely I did think so.

The minister went on, pounding a fist into the palm of one hand. "There must be people in love who would like to be joined here in this natural chapel, where the pillars are not of stone, but of giant trees; where the altar is not of carved oak, but of whole masses of flowers in their prime. Look! They're in full bloom. This is a perfect sanctuary, created by Our Father, himself. Surely it was meant for someone special."

In his enthusiasm the minister had become eloquent, and I thought about that now as I spoke to the couple standing hopefully before me. "I know just the man, and I'll take you to him," I said, turning the window over to a ranger who had just come in.

However, before appropriating the park pickup and driving the couple down to Group 11, I took the lady to my cabin and scrubbed the upper part of her head so her husband-to-be could see what she really looked like. Even so, I doubt that he ever noticed the difference. But early summer had brightened our forest so splendidly for this union that the least I could do for the couple was to start the bride out with her own natural eyebrows.

A month following this beautiful occasion, we suddenly hosted another middle-aged woman who was purple also, although in countless places other than her eyebrows.

Heralding her arrival was a shrilling high-speed stop in front of Headquarters that laid rubber down for fifty feet. Visitors who had been hanging around the porch or were lined up at the Information and Registration window scattered like tenpins as she sprang from her car. All biology, boom, bust, and butt, she barreled wildly through their midst, gasping as if she expected every breath to be her last, and collapsed over the counter. Her tousled head reminded me of a dust mop, well past its prime. And when at last she raised her face, I saw that it resembled nothing so much as a tarnished spittoon that might have been kicking around the Mother Lode since Gold Rush days.

"Help!" she rasped, "my husband's gonna kill me!"

The three of us on duty at the time gave the woman's car a quick searching look, for there had to be an irate husband getting out or rushing toward us. But the car was empty, and no one with murder in his eye was anywhere to be seen. At

that moment, everyone appeared a lot more concerned with escaping trouble than becoming a part of it.

Men, women, and children, two dogs on leash, and several deer some of the tourists had been feeding were taking cover behind the nearest big tree. That is, all but one vast mountain of a man, bald headed and rumped in pale denims and a sickly yellow and green fish and seaweed sport shirt. Obviously he was either stone deaf or the crime-in-the-making held no fascination for him. Yawning elaborately, he ambled over to the bulletin board and began to scan the Daily Hike Schedule. I thought to myself, just watch Unconscious come to life when this maniac, wherever he is, does show up!

The woman, still gasping, now dragged herself up onto one elbow and glanced fearfully behind her. Then suddenly turning back, she reached out with both hands and grabbed our lightweight ranger by the lapels. With one yank, she pulled him halfway across the counter, flipping his Stetson onto the ceiling.

"You gotta help me," she implored. "My husband's about to shoot me!"

That did trigger action. Like ricocheting billiard balls, we behind the counter started bumping into one another as we darted back and forth, trying to get where we could see a scowling brute bearing down on us, gun in hand.

Nothing of the sort was in sight.

Big Ben, our heftiest ranger, made the first sensible move. He forcibly loosened the woman's grip on the lapels and got the embarrassed ranger back down on the floor where he belonged. At the same time, he bellowed into that beat-up face across the counter, "Where is your husband, Madam? WHERE?"

"Right over there!" she bellowed back, and whirling around, pointed, leaving no doubt in our minds. Out of the swellings that were her eyes shot a stream of white-hot sparks that glowed like tracer bullets in the night. "That's him. Right there!" she brayed.

"HIM" had been paying less attention to all the pyrotechnics than he would have to some wisp of an old man tying his shoe laces. Instead, he had gone right on placidly studying the hike schedule, one hand inside that ridiculous seaweed shirt, lazily scratching his considerable stomach.

From my vantage point, I could see, reflected on his face, the utter bliss that comes only with stomach scratching. No one ever looked less like a potential killer and more like a mound of yogurt than this overly generous helping of a human — until that electric instant that the woman leveled a long trembling finger at him, and screeched, “THERE! See him?”

Now, in turning slowly and impressively, he loomed like Half Dome.

Recovering from only momentary paralysis, our finest leaped into action. They rushed out the door, pinioned the man’s arms, and steered him, unresisting, through the outer office and into the Inner Sanctum. Still panting from their efforts, they then stepped aside to view their suspect and to straighten their ties and shove their shirttails back inside their trousers.

There was no need to frisk Man Mountain. As soon as his arms were freed, he pulled a gun from his pants pocket and laid it on Roy Cushing’s desk.

This casual surrender, following the hubbub of his “capture,” seemed incongruous to say the least. Sweat blotted up from ranger foreheads was not due to any struggle at all, but rather to the monumental task of bulldozing several hundred pounds of flabby bulk. As one of the fellows observed afterwards, “I’ve never been good at moving a bunch of mattresses. I do better with just one at a time.”

During the height of the clamor, the woman had charged around the porch, continuing to yell for help, pointing out her puffy eyes, her ballooning lips, her gashes and her bumps. In bold face footnotes, she loosed a pungent recital of her husband’s special talents and exposed his unsavory pedigree. Then she spotted me.

I was an official and a woman, so she grabbed my lapels (they should eliminate those darn things from uniforms) and slammed me against the building. Mashing me flat, she purred sociably, “Honey, you understand, don’t you? You’ll get onto my husband, won’t you?”

Getting onto her husband had not so far entered my mind; and no, I didn’t understand, because none of my men had ever whaled me to a pulp. But to save wear and tear, I bobbed my only movable part, my head, up and down. Instantly, although through no attribute of my own, I became her buddy, her

kindred spirit. And so I was released with the same impetuous vigor that had nailed me.

Mobile once again, I managed to maneuver the woman into the office. This neat little trick I pulled off by listening so intently, eyeball to eyeball, as she enumerated her husband's shortcomings and his family tree, twig by twig, that her eyes never left mine. We had actually seated ourselves around the chief's desk before she noticed, with some surprise, where she was.

Meanwhile, Mr. Obese lolled comfortably in one of our massive hand-hewn chairs with all the aplomb of a philanthropist about to present to the State a prime grove of redwoods. On the far side of the desk lay the disarmed gun. Here and there around the office, the boys were beginning to get the hair back down on their heads.

At this juncture, Roy took the State Code out of his desk and read the regulation on loaded guns in a State Park. Still no reaction save utter boredom. Somewhat nonplussed, Roy then aired his upbringing and his principles with a quiet sermon on conduct in public places — to which he added a few well-chosen words about the care and feeding of wives. The man paid no attention to that either.

When nothing happened and went on not happening, Roy came to the frayed end of his rope. "Well, Madam," he sighed wearily, "do you want to bring charges against your husband?"

At first the woman's face froze with what appeared to be utter astonishment. A second later, it erupted.

Bring charges? BRING CHARGES! Against who? HIM? Hell, no. No guy was worth a goddam who couldn't stand up for hisself. Bring charges against her Angie? *Never!* He was quite a boy. Only trouble, Angie didn't know his own strength, but by God, he wore his own pants. There wasn't any other so-and-so in them. His language might be perfectly abdominal, but you sure gotta hand it to him; you gotta respect him. He'd just whup the livin' tar outa her if she got pesty — and women do get pesty, you know.

Through scalloped lips and eyes that were by now mere slits, Our Lady of the Ball Bearing Personality declared her undying love in terms that left no doubt in our befuddled minds just what was meant. And every word of it she pounded

out with swollen fists on her husband's overstuffed shoulders. In conclusion — and for emphasis — she planted on his shiny top a kiss that was both noisy and succulent.

That last tender touch pulled the plug. It reduced Mr. Obese to soft quivering goo. Mooning up at his mate, eyes glistening with tears of love, he simpered, "Aw, Mama...."

We who had spent so many years working with America on vacation thought surely we had already witnessed everything possible to humanity. But as we stared at one another during this foreplay, we realized how smug we had grown in the illusion that from the mere passing of time, we had come to know and understand our kind.

A short time later, the couple emerged, arm in arm, from the ranger station. We watched the two gaze as adoringly into each other's eyes as if we had just married, not disarmed, them. All that was lacking were flowers and Mendelsohn.

Completely unaware of anything but themselves, Angie (believe it or not, his name was Angel) escorted his Mama to the car, and with touching ceremony, assisted her into it. Mustard-plastered contentedly together, they and their unloaded Luger drove away to their next battleground.

I had a struggle to restrain myself from telling them just before they departed that only from November to February are performances — such as this one they had staged — natural and predictable in our forest; that four-footed forest residents had a time for everything, including this; that it took people animals to stage it anytime — July, for instance.

Next, pressing eagerly against the counter, faces shining, all anticipation, clustered a family of seven. Could we please tell them where they might find a big redwood they could really drive clear through?

Chapter Five: Big Basin

All of These and Heaven Too

California's giant redwoods do amazing things to visitors standing at their bases, looking up and up. I have seen them reduce garrulous folk to silence and open up the floodgates of words in the mousey. Certainly they make people look very small, whether those people have the grace to feel that way or not. Many forest monarchs have been standing since the time of Christ, growing taller and mightier with each passing century. Their lifespan has encompassed the rise and fall of empires — even of entire civilizations. Before such massive bulk and timelessness as this, our brief sojourn on earth is but a fleeting thing — and often hilarious.

The appearance in Big Basin of Long Beach's Mr. and Mrs. Blodgett was fleeting, indeed, despite Mrs. Blodgett's pronouncement that they intended to pitch their tent and "snuggle into the bosom of nature" for at least a month, perhaps forever.

The Blodgetts were only two of nearly a half million people who sampled Big Basin that year, but they managed to stand out from all of them. They stood out from all the busloads of tour travelers, the thousands of families who camped among the big trees, the multitudes in for the day with six-packs and cameras. We had a forest fire and still the Blodgetts stood out. Yet the first and only time I ever saw them was the few minutes after they had selected their campsite and were preparing to set up.

What first took my eye was their two-wheeled luggage trailer, piled high, its mysteries hidden from view by a huge tarp. This, I thought, is no ordinary collection of camp gear. And then I discovered that Mrs. Blodgett was no ordinary woman either. Her thoughts were not only audible but visual as well, whizzing bumper to bumper on the jammed freeways of her mind. On the other hand, the lumpy little person she referred to as her husband blended into the mottled dark and light of the huckleberry bushes even more perfectly than a fawn still in its spots. Just as you could imagine Mrs. Blodgett, ample, orchid-bearing, pouring every Wednesday at the Women's Snooty Club, so you could picture Mr. Blodgett

hovering breathlessly over a miniature aquarium of pregnant guppies.

When I walked into their campsite, Mrs. Blodgett began clasping and unclasping her pudgy, diamond-studded hands convulsively, and sucking in great gulps of our mountain air. Most utterly was she reveling in our outsized outdoors. "Ah!" she fizzed upon seeing me, "'God's in His Heaven, and all's right with the world.'"

This launched us on a happy note. It always warmed my heart to have people appreciate our big trees. Glowing at my pleasure, Mrs. Blodgett accelerated into more happy notes. "All of this," (our giants and things, I presume) was just too delicious. The birds sang prettily because they knew how much she loved them. Didn't I believe that all wild things were aware of being loved, the same as people? Yes, of course I did. Life was divinely beautiful and sweet and *this* was God's own country. Here she could escape the evils of the city. (Jiminy, I thought, does she mean staid, Iowa-bred Long Beach?) Here she could repose in the arms of Mother Nature. The Blodgetts, she chattered on and on, were in Big Basin to rough it; to let themselves go; to be primitive. They were going to listen for the flutter of wings; they were going to be lulled to sleep by the breeze in the treetops. Much, much more than this, they were going to be reborn in the aura of other days.

Just before I slipped back into the Jurassic Epoch, a movement of the trailer tarp arrested my attention. I had forgotten Mr. Blodgett momentarily. Now I saw him swirl around his trailer like a dead leaf in an eddy of autumn wind. In his own fussbudget way, he had undone the tarp and lowered a ramp. The moment of unveiling was at hand. Pulling the canvas aside, he began to grunt a small, gleaming-white icebox down the slope to the forest floor.

Mrs. Blodgett watched, her face shining, all the while twittering away at me with rapturous cheeps and chirps about the glory of the wide-open spaces — of which we had none.

Next down the ramp came a high-backed rocking chair, the little man laboring with it like an ant dragging a breadcrumb; after that, one of those flamboyantly flowered portable wardrobes, light in itself, but heavy with cargo. Mr. Blodgett tugged and pulled at it with all the determination of a robin straining at its first spring worm.

Confided his wife: "I brought a simple gown or two. You never know who you'll meet in a place like this, disguised in old clothes." It was easy to figure that, in deference to "this life under kindly skies" she had stored her mink and sable, and had brought along only a fox number or two. I couldn't help wondering what our wild animals were going to think.

As a love seat, a full-length mirror, and a pressure cooker were hauled down the ways, my fugitive from the social whirl filled the air with gay, holiday noises. She made me think of nothing so much as a steam calliope — one like those on the Mississippi River paddlewheel steamers I used to ride as a child. Evidently she reminded other people of things, too. Something was attracting them, for entire families started escorting their one little water bucket to the spigot nearby. Behind me, a group of campfire girls peered around a big redwood.

I kept my mouth shut. Anyway, what was there to say? Mrs. Blodgett was saying it all, twatting ecstatically at two chipmunks dashing this way and that. "Oh-h-h-h!" she trilled at one that had just taken a good look, and fled, "Isn't that little fellow darling?" Then confidentially: "Of course you know He made them, even as He made us." I nodded solemnly. Well, it's true, isn't it?

Meanwhile, with the feverish industry of a bird building its nest, the little man was scurrying back and forth, stopping once long enough to smile feebly, mop his forehead, and murmur, "Nice morning" in a way that reminded me of a leaky faucet. Then, on with the job, this time forcing down the ramp a vanity, complete with ruffled flounce.

By the time he had towed out the chaise lounge, Mrs. Blodgett was beginning to notice the closing perimeter of vacationers whose curiosity and wonderment wouldn't let them remain decently furtive any longer. Waving coyly at some and turning to flutter at others, she seemed completely overwhelmed by so much attention. "My!" she bubbled, "Aren't these the nicest people? In Long Beach our neighbors never bother with us at all. It must be the northern part of the state. We were told it would be more friendly than the southern. Now I see what they mean. Oh-h-h-h-h! We're going to like it here." And she set off another cadenza.

Once again, from the trailer staggered Mr. Blodgett. This

time he carried a potted fern and a cage of canaries. "We couldn't leave them behind, you know," his wife whispered in my ear. "They're so dependent on us." So also, apparently, was a kerosene lamp with a hand-painted globe base, a survival of the Gay Nineties.

I felt a tap on my arm. "It's been in our attic for years. Just the thing for roughing it," she cooed sociably. "You can't very well bring your good things here, of course."

"Of course," I parroted, other words having deserted me.

Suddenly she stopped and cocked her head first to one side and then the other. "I think it's a thrush," I said, trying to be helpful.

"No," she said absently, "it's not that. I was looking to see which tree it's on." And she began to trot from one to the other — two firs, four redwoods, and a madrone.

I was really befuddled. I couldn't see a sign of a living thing on any of them. Nevertheless, she examined each burly trunk with the infinite care of a trained botanist. Then she turned to me, posing daintily, and with a bridge-tea smile, dimpling her face and chins, twittered, "Well, What am I doing. All I have to do is ask you. Where is it?"

"Where is what?" I queried innocently.

"Why, the plug-ins," she announced as if I were playfully holding out on her. "You know — the plug-ins for our electric things, Henry's razor, our tent heater, the toaster. Which tree is it on? I can't seem to find it."

It took me a few seconds to get my eyes back into my head. Then I explained, perhaps over-courteously, that the plug-ins she sought were a half-mile down the road at the combination house in Group 3; that they were on the wall beside the ironing boards in the laundry; that if she had an uncontrollable desire for jumping toast, she could set the toaster on one of the ironing boards if no one was using it. Then she could go right ahead with breakfast, providing she didn't mind some camper at her elbow, sweating over a tub full of dirty pants and socks.

While I was thus describing our limited facilities, the love of the Great Outdoors slowly faded from the woman's face very much as the sun dies in the west at the close of day. And since there appeared to be nothing more I could do to help settle either her things or her peace of mind, I thought it a

splendid time to start hunting the nearest exit — one as free as possible of overhanging limbs and protruding roots.

First, I mumbled a few pleasantries, and then bidding her a good day, I pardoned my way through the gathering throng. The last I saw of Mrs. Blodgett, she was standing there looking as stricken as a trapped animal.

Next morning, off on my rounds again and feeling somewhat less than omnipotent, I went the long way around in order to buy time and grow a bit stronger before reaching the Blodgett camp. Noon rode the sky when I finally made my approach.

Evidently the neighboring campers had been waiting. A few at a time filtered out to the path to tell me that once I was out of sight, Mr. Mouse (that's what they called him) received a change of instructions. Whereupon, reversing his direction like a film being run backwards, he hauled all their stuff back into the trailer and within a couple of concentrated hours had everything battened down. It was she, however, who drove away. He was laid out flat on the back seat alongside the plush giraffe, brought along for a counterpane decoration.

Well, perhaps the Blodgetts would find a vacation spot where Nature would be kinder. Already their place was occupied. I had to stop to see whom we had won as a consolation prize.

At the campsite post, I stood quietly for a moment or two in memory of what might have been. Then I stepped on in and saw a wrinkled old man sprawled on the ground against one of the big redwoods, reading a funnybook. Peering at me over his glasses, he squeaked, "Hi there, Lady Ranger. I'm enjoying meself. Come on in."

I sat down on one of the picnic benches, and without rhyme or reason we grinned wordlessly at each other.

After a while he spoke again, pointing up and around with his pipe. "Y'know, gal, a purty spot y'got here. It's jest so purty I could bust a hole in this old redwood here with me bare fist. Have a spot of tea."

I jumped at the invitation. Seldom did I share a camper's fare, but this occasion seemed to call for something that rose above ethics.

I wouldn't have missed drinking from that bean-can cup, rigged in the most ingenious manner with a baling wire

handle; and no tea ever tasted so good. Comfortable, relaxed, the gentleman and I sipped in companionable silence. At the same time, I glanced around the camp. Unrolled, in a patch of sunlight surrounded by a cluster of huckleberry bushes, lay the old fellow's sleeping bag; rocking merrily on his grill burred a dented old teakettle. And that frayed straw hat, perched at a jaunty angle on the man's graying butch, somehow took me back to the haystacks of Midwestern farms. On such a day, under such circumstances, and out of such relief, how joyous is nostalgia!

Everywhere in Big Basin — the length of redwood country, for that matter — huckleberry bushes grew in profusion. About the middle of August the dark purple berries ripened. From then on, as long as the fruit lasted, entire families with cut-down milk cartons suspended from their necks, prowled the forest, harvesting.

How well I remember such delicacies as huckleberry biscuits, pancakes, jam, pies, and the invitations to sample and share that passed from one campsite to another. So vacationers had a choice: they could come in the spring and early summer flowering time or they could select late summer and the forest's bounty, free for the taking — or in those uncrowded days before camping limits had to be imposed, they could be there for both. Big Basin was a happy place any time but the sopping winter.

While the prohibition against removing any part of plant life in the California State Parks was winked at in the case of wild berries, the chopping of standing trees and the gathering of downed wood was not. Because redwoods depend upon the decomposing vegetation for their nutrients, all down stuff must be left where it is. Cooking fuel is the camper's responsibility. He may bring it with him or buy firewood at Headquarters. Periodically we had problems with this, despite our trailside and campfire talks.

There was that kid and his father in Group 5.

That morning, the chop-chop of steel on live wood cut through the smoke of many breakfast campfires. I took off toward the sound and eventually located the source — a six-year-old working on a sizeable tanoak. Already the tree was girdled, and big chips lay on the ground. Nearby, Daddy

was polishing a bird's-egg blue late model Oldsmobile and glorying in his son's pioneer spirit.

Bringing to bear my best PR manner, I explained some ecology and asked for understanding and cooperation.

Instead, I got Daddy's outrage at the proposed restraints on his son's self-expression. He sizzled the full extent of a mule skinner's vocabulary; but he did stop work long enough to snarl, "ROBIN!" which terminated Robin's efforts.

After quiet was restored, Daddy really let himself go. Now, what the Hell was all this nonsense?

I re-explained.

The man flew into bits. "Look here, lady. We're in Big Basin for just two weeks. I doubt that Robin will level all your trees in that time."

For his age, Robin had a flying start.

Carefully, I lowered the Polite Powers — pointing out the State Park regulations posted on the food locker door. Daddy's attention somehow went to the line about a fine for violation.

Lightning struck. "Robin! Drop that hatchet!"

Then a less benign blast at me: "There! I hope you're satisfied." With that, he turned back to polishing his real pride and joy.

An hour later, I met him and his wife at the pool, preparing to take a dip. I smiled. "Isn't Robin going in, too?" I queried.

"Naw," the Master Mind replied gruffly, "he's back in camp. We like to leave him alone sometimes. It's good for him. Teaches him responsibility and how to be resourceful."

How true, how true. How resourceful was Robin.

Circling around through Robin's section of the campgrounds, and hearing some mighty peculiar-sounding chopping noises, I headed with my finely honed instincts for a certain campsite. When I peered through the huckleberry bushes, I saw *how great* was Robin's resourcefulness. Happy as a lark, enjoying his vacation hatchet to the utmost, Robin was working over the bird's-egg blue Olds. By the time I finished my calls in that area, strolled back to the pool, and in passing happened to mention Robin's current phase of self-development, he had inelegantly engraved both front fenders and was well on his way to redesigning the entire port side of the car. And just as Daddy, bulgy-eyed and apoplectic,

steamed into view, he went through the taillight with a soul-satisfying shatter of glass.

One Fourth of July, I took out for the Redwood Trail, whence emanated that telltale sound of steel on big redwood. Because a giant's porous bark is anywhere from six inches to a foot or more thick, pounding on it produces a hollow thump that is unmistakable to the likes of us. Sure enough, I panted up to one of the park's natural wonders just in time. The Animal Tree, whose basal burl growth had for centuries been running wild enough to form imaginary animal heads, was about to have its elephant trunk amputated. The hatchet marks are still there. The vacationing Boy Scout is not.

We found scouting only as strong as its leadership. At times, scout hatchets and Bowie knives forced us to replace signs, campsite posts, and bridge railings. Far more often, though, our hearts were warmed by the boys' sincere offers of assistance in repairing faulty or damaged facilities they, themselves, had discovered.

Who can forget the earnest young Cub Scout who appeared at the shops one wildly busy Saturday to report a trail slippage five miles out toward Berry Creek Falls.

At that moment, our Assistant Ranger was routing an urgently needed PARK PARALLEL sign to be erected as soon as possible in front of Headquarters. His concern concentrated on the immediate problem rather than the one far out in the forest. He paused only to grunt his thanks to the boy, then again bent over the redwood slab and went on cutting deep in the fiber, sweating against time. For nearly an hour, chips flew as the buzzing router bit four-inch capitals out of the wood.

The boy remained to watch. Gradually anguish began to cloud his face as he correctly read the gouged letters from across the workbench. Once or twice he tried to get a word in edgewise, but his immaturity worked against him in coping with the ranger's single-mindedness. So, as best he could, he held himself in check until the sign was finished, the racket stilled. Finally, mustering courage and in some embarrassment, he stammered plaintively, "Sir — S-Sir — I believe you've misspelled a word there. Isn't it PARALLEL instead of PARALELL?"

What our Assistant Ranger muttered to himself had best be consigned to the Ages.

From time to time there were other scouts. And so they might enjoy an area all to themselves, and thereby also make other campers happy, we usually turned over to them my old Group 14 mountaintop. One morning we had a double-header and a stunning First for Big Basin.

No one, camper or ranger, could ever remember a single black vacationing in the park. Somehow they simply had never appeared. Now, all at once, Group 14 fairly swarmed with black boy scouts from one of the Bay Area cities — three patrols strong. Their scoutmaster, a Mr. Banks, signed them all in, after which they disappeared noisily up the hill. But only temporarily.

Early in the afternoon, we at Headquarters became aware of cadence-counting in the distance and drawing closer all the time. “Hup! Hup! Hup, hip, hup, ho-o-o-o-r-r!” over and over and over. We stared at one another in amazement as down into the bustling Park Center marched the entire company, stepping along smartly in a column of two, not with Prussian robot stiffness, but with the pride of precision of the healthy American boy. At their head strode the leaders. All were clad in bathing trunks; all sported white towels around their necks. In perfect step, the dark contingent swung across the Center, heads held high, eyes front. Passing behind some giants between us and the pool, they were lost to view although we could still hear them. We knew that perhaps three hundred campers were in and around the pool. One of life’s crises loomed dead ahead.

“Brother!” the Chief Ranger exclaimed, for until then, nothing remotely approaching this expectation had ever faced Big Basin or park administration.

Time for me to make some more rounds — starting with the pool area.

Big Basin’s pool was a pond, really, at the lowest edge of Park Center, among some considerable giants. Round and natural looking, it had sloping sides, cemented, a diving board at the deep end, and a sandy perimeter for sunning. Into this scene I ambled from around the Father Tree just as three dozen black scouts broke ranks and splashed happily into the water.

Gasps of amazement burst from every throat as beach occupants sat bolt upright; swimmers treaded water, and shock waves filled the air. Then noticing me, all faces froze into living question marks. I was The State. What was I going to do about this incredible invasion!

As the moments fell away and joined their ancestors, they saw what I was going to do. Nothing. So, overreacting as if some unseen pump suddenly flipped its suction button, every bather siphoned himself out of the pool. I clamped my teeth together and started believing fervently and devoutly that somehow the good in all mankind would prevail this lovely afternoon.

Ten minutes of mind-blowing suspense, then the scoutmaster's whistle blew. A repeat of the siphoning action drew every scout from the water at almost the same instant. Quickly toweling themselves, the boys fell into formation. Once again, counting cadence, they marched away, across Park Center, and disappeared up the hill, leaving behind a stunned public.

The dam of silence burst. Everywhere now a flood of words poured forth. In all the upheaval, an elderly man rushed to me, fuming. "Will you please tell me why you *permitted* that?" he raged.

"Because they, too, are camped here," I responded as well as I could, considering his bigotry, and strolled off toward Group 1 as if we had just witnessed a daily occurrence of long standing — and before I could have a nervous breakdown.

That night, the campfire as usual burned brightly; at the start so hotly that only two or three youngsters could tolerate the three front rows. The bowl had filled otherwise. Many hundreds of campers were sitting quietly on the log seats, watching the flames, when in the distance... again

With every Hup! Hup! tension mounted in the bowl. The glow of leaping flames highlighted anxiety and annoyance on every face. I got a good grip on my own expression. Right then, nothing in my life had ever seemed more important. Glancing out into the darkness among the giants, I saw the dim forms of rangers moving in unobtrusively.

Thirty-six boys and four men? Where could we put them? As the scoutmaster appeared at the head of the aisle, I walked up to meet him.

"You are Harriett Weaver," was his polite opener. "We would like very much to attend your campfire if we may."

"Of course you may," I told him, and then explained about the two front rows being the only place left where we could seat so many boys. "It will soon cool down there," I said, "Then perhaps —"

"Just fine," the gentleman agreed, beaming.

Down each of the two aisles marched a single column of boys dressed in best uniforms, spotlessly clean, neat, and carefully pressed; all faces shining and prideful. Upon the command, "Parade *Rest!*" all arms and left feet responded with snap. West Pointers would have been envious.

I felt the hostility relax just a bit — except in one man whose son still sat, determined to bake, on the front row. The lad's two companions had readily consented to move to accommodate the scout troop. But before this one could, his father was down the aisle and halfway up my frame. And he was livid.

"My boy's not clearing out for any niggers," he roared. And to the kid: "Go right back there and *sit*, Robert!"

Hesitantly, Robert did. I said fine, no problem. If the man hadn't muttered every step of the way up the aisle to his seat, you could have heard a redwood needle drop into the duff.

I hung out a fresh face, but my unmentionables were soaked with perspiration.

In a matter of minutes, the fire had cooled and the excited scouts seated themselves in the two front rows, completely filling them. They, and Robert squarely in the middle.

My back was turned somewhat accidentally when Robert Senior stormed down the aisle, stumbled over one black knee after another, snatched his adenoidal issue by the hand, and towed him up the aisle and out into the kindly darkness.

That galvanized the forgotten hundreds into breathless chatter, but fascinated by now, they watched the vacation joy bubbling over up front.

Although fifteen minutes earlier than customary, I found it prudent to start the proceedings. I called up our volunteer pianist and whispered to her to *hit the keys*.

She did. She romped all over the piano, and we attacked "Anchors Aweigh," "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain When She Comes," "I've Been Workin' on the Railroad," "Old

McDonald,” and a dozen other rollicking old favorites of the noisiest possible vintage.

There is nothing like two rows of wildly enthusiastic boy sopranos and early baritones, overflowing with exuberance, to lead a restless crowd of up-tight adults to great heights of sound. Due to no magnetism of mine, I felt the singing surge ahead the way you feel a powerful car roar away under pressure of a foot on the accelerator. The black fast-pacers in the front rows opened their mouths wide and gave voice with all their might. Completely overriding accumulated prejudice and shock, the evening quickly caught fire. A song leader lives for nights like those.

Rarely did we ever have any difficulty rounding up self-entertainment around the campfires. Usually there was more willing talent than we knew what to do with. This particular evening, just to provide the opportunity for the unknown, but suspected, to come forth, I made arrangements with some of our regulars not to volunteer unless an emergency should develop. Then, stepping to the mike, I asked for talent as if we were fresh out.

For a few minutes nothing happened. Then we noticed a buzzing among the scouts and a vigorous pointing at one very solemn and skinny kid. Something like this was exactly what I had prayed for.

Finally the youngster yielded to all the prodding, and with the cheers of his buddies ringing in his ears, shuffled up onto the stage and plunked himself down on the piano stool. For various reasons, the bowl went silent, the black scouts bright-eyed, ramrod straight, tense; everyone else just tense; I, the tensest of all.

Before I could secure the lad's name and properly introduce him, the hands that had been hanging limply at his sides suddenly flew into action. Hunched almost double, he attacked the keyboard as if he meant to overpower and strangle it. Long bony fingers landed with a bang on a couple of chords, and he began to rock back and forth between them like a human metronome, one number eleven tennis shoe stomping every downbeat. In a throaty voice, heavy with gravel and unvarying monotone, he pounded out yard after yard of what may have been lyrics, the wordage indistinguishable, suffering in translation, and about as

spirited as a sausage factory assembly line. On and on they droned to the accompaniment of two chords and that pile driver foot.

I glanced around at the crowd and saw, frozen on each face, an expression of suspended amazement.

All at once, without warning, the bony hands poised in midair. The boy swung around toward his public. In true Jimmie Durante style, but this time at the top of his voice, he belted out, "Caledonia, what makes yo haid so hahd!"

Jolted out of its open-mouthed wonder, the mass of onlookers had breath only for deep gasps of surprise before the youngster swung back to the keyboard and plunged into a second series of whatever it was. Behind me, I detected a brief flurry of comment rippling along the rows. Then a hovering silence.

Another interminable installment of mumbled verses now rolled forth again, finally exploding unpredictably into another bellowed "Caledonia, what makes yo haid so hahd!"

Promptly taking it down the line from there, the boy unleashed a rising tide of human reaction that I could feel crawling up my spine. Yet no way could I evaluate and identify and gear for eventuality without looking back. Somehow I had to cope and try to keep from squirming. Above all, I must appear calm and unconcerned. Inside, I twisted into a knot, for the evening ticked on and on, bestowing no mercy.

By the time the third episode of the blues or ballad or folk song or whatever really got rolling, I could tell that public sentiment of some kind was a-building. And sure enough! When still another convulsive "Caledonia!" hit the night air, the whole place erupted into hysterics.

What music to mine ears! Out of relief too monumental to control, I let my nerves just go ahead and collapse.

The scouts were almost beside themselves with enjoyment and approval of their accidental ambassador of good will. But not the scoutmaster. His mounting embarrassment had become acute enough that he lost no precious seconds in heading for the stage. As one, the audience protested loudly, "Let him be! Let him go on!" they clamored, and broke into wild applause.

Evidently, though, the finish of *The Work* was not even

in sight. Mr. Banks, smiling kindly, retrieved his deadpan volunteer with an arm around the shoulders and gently steered him back into the uniformed midst.

No one ever did discover or think to inquire what Caledonia was about, for who wasn't lost in the fascination of its delivery.

In twenty years of campfires, never did I hear more heartwarming appreciation than for that half hour-plus of Caledonia. Furthermore, Caledonia's services were demanded every night after that for the remaining days of the scouts' stay. "Caledonia! Let's have Caledonia!" rang out from normally quiet and orderly hundreds. No one seemed to tire of his deadpan fervor or of having their hearts melted. Each time, his only words before dropping onto the piano stool was a deadpan, "All right, I'll do it all over again," — which sent everyone into a new gale of hysterics. And on his last night they gave him a standing ovation, long remembered, I'm sure, by all of us who were fortunate enough to have been present.

The day of the troop's departure, I happened to be crossing Park Center and saw the three dozen strong lined up and standing at ease in the usual columns of two outside the souvenir shop. And as I passed behind a cluster of giants nearby, I heard Mr. Banks calling a rebuke: "Hold a minute there, fella. Just get those ants out of your pants. When two comes *out* that door, two goes in. Not before."

In selecting a gift to take home, no charges of his were going to mob the scene. "Two comes out: *then* two goes in."

Now why couldn't a few hundred thousand of our other seasonal visitors have heard those immortal words!

The following summer, much to everyone's delight, the black troop came again to their Big Basin mountaintop. At the first campfire, however, I'll never know how I managed to keep from breaking when I had to crush all the happy anticipation with a heart-rending announcement — and eulogy. During the winter, tuberculosis had forever stilled Caledonia's voice on earth. But his Big Basin fans felt sure that in another beautiful summertime, in a heavenly choir, he was being heard again. That night, the firelight revealed tears glistening on many a cheek.

Besides the regular campers, devoted to redwood country

year after year, generation after generation, there came also a stream of newcomers. They piled in from all over California, every state in the union, and often from foreign countries. The big trees are a powerful magnet. While evergreens blanket much of our nation and form beautifully dense and aromatic stands, inviting in every sense of the word, none can match for sheer might and majesty the giant redwoods of both coast and Sierra. Survivors of an ancient race of trees, which in prehistoric times covered much of the Northern Hemisphere, these can now be found only in California and Southwestern Oregon. And because they are stately and enormous beyond belief, their forests spectacular, people flock to them by the thousands. Camping there offers a joy and a thrill that cannot be described. It must be experienced.

At no time would we have had a problem distinguishing native newcomers from out-of-staters. Just leave it to errant raindrops to separate those two. The best and the worst invariably surfaced whenever moisture dared dribble from the sky during The Season — occasions rare enough to make front pages. The out-of-staters, not jaundiced by our monotony of good weather, would fold newspapers over their heads, perhaps, and go right on roasting hot dogs over a balky fire. Was this ever a lark. Oh boy, oh boy! They'd saved all year to be able to do just this under a redwood tree. The sprinkles? Why, they made hiking and everything all the better.

I'd notice some of them outbound, and call, "Have a good time, Kansas."

Like as not, they'd laugh and call back, "Nebraska!"

Well, I couldn't miss it very far.

Then, in a matter of minutes, here would come the Californians — not the Old Timers, who lapped up everything the sky might have to offer — but those in for a short stay. Identified beyond redemption by their dour expressions, turned-up collars and caps pulled down over their ears, they would drag dejectedly into the ranger station Rec Hall. Before long, a whole drove of them would be huddled there like so many range horses, rumps backed against the blizzard. Some of the refugees worked heroically at solitaire; others thumbed restlessly through assorted old magazines; more tried to quiet their kids, who screamed up one wall and down another. With misery pulling mouths down at the corners, they'd plead,

sometimes silently, more often audibly, for help in their hour of great need.

Wasn't I going to show them slides or movies or lead some games or start a round of charades? Just what *was* I going to do for them?

Surely Appalachia never looked more deprived than these who, through no fault of their own — except by choice of habitat — had been spoiled by too many perfect days year round. To them, anything less than divine represented a personal affront. The Californian who will bend to tolerate less should be stuffed and placed alongside the other exhibits in the park museum.

Sympathetically, because of being a Californian myself, something in me managed to feel mildly obligated to brighten the unhappy few minutes that had diminished my compatriots' precious vacation time. So, all smiles, I'd usually build a fire in the huge stone fireplace. Then I'd leave them to stew in one another's juices while I fled outdoors to revel in the excitement of those from North, South, East, and Midwest, who, hatless and coatless, faces upturned and shining, arms outstretched, welcomed the heavenly drops with the unrestrained delight of migratory birds splashing in a desert waterhole. "Gad!" they would exclaim, soaking it up, "Just smell these trees *now!*"

Earthquakes were quite another matter. Those, Californians had a right to dread, just as out-of-staters do electrical storms and tornadoes that drive blades of straw through pig sties and barn doors. And if it's any surprise to Missouri and Illinois, we of the redwood forests learned to fear even more than the shaking and rolling underfoot, that eerie rustling that surges in ominous crescendo through treetops twenty to twenty-five stories above, yanking loose great woody arms and raining them down upon the forest floor; limbs as big through as the conifers that shelter Colorado vacationers' tents. There are better places to be than in a stately old redwood grove when the planet adjusts its outer hide.

The Fourth of July holidays in one park where I served had a special significance over and above the historical. Without fail, we could expect a certain camping visit from a portly state politician who had steel girders of ideas and no nuts and bolts and rivets to hold them together. He looked upon this park

as his personal passion, not only to have and to hold, but to single-handedly manage and legislate for, by God.

Word always preceded The Body. In essence: be sure your buttons are bright and the trees all standing up straight. *He* was coming. Not on foot across the water exactly, but in a long black Cadillac with bootleg license plates fore and aft, proclaiming his lofty station on the Sacramento totem pole. Then, even though hundreds of loaded cars cruised back and forth past campsite 84 and would-be campers, supposedly on a first-come, first-served basis, gazed longingly at it; nevertheless, one way or another that space had better be there for The Arrival. By hinting vaguely that it swarmed with red ants, that someone had been sick in it, that a tree was liable to fall across it at any minute, we managed to persist. But at what a cost! Like the man leaning into the wind who fell flat on his face when the wind suddenly stopped, of such was our combined condition when the VIP and his wife finally drove in.

Scarcely had the senatorial tent risen, than with pontifical tone, the man invaded Headquarters to review, analyze, argue, evaluate, and conclude on our duties, our policies, our maintenance costs and methods, and our efficiency in serving his constituents. It was plain to see that top-level wheels were already turning toward a catharsis of management and operation and a brand new Cause which, after a decent twelve-month pregnancy, would be born alive, fully formed and squalling, before the following Fourth of July. What The Thing would turn out to be, we never knew; but we could be darn sure that it would espouse something terribly pertinent to our park. Who knows? Perhaps a bill to construct sundecks atop the flushing palaces or to make one of the old CCC barracks into a skating rink. And we could count on a rider enumerating a long list of niceties due the campers.

After the lawmaker's final visit before being relieved of office by the electorate, we discovered the ultimate that such a list might be expected to include.

The wife of our Chief Ranger received a letter from the wife of the senator. Woman to woman. Would she please go down to their campsite and retrieve an item inadvertently forgotten in the crush of important state matters? On the west side of the middle-sized huckleberry bush between the rock

barbecue pit and the water spigot she would find, hung out to dry, a pair of her husband's best shorts. Would she mind boxing and returning them by the next mail?

The shorts were still there all right, strung on a couple of limbs infinitely more spindly than the stubby senator's. But there they remained, a victim of the popular vote. Perhaps they would soon rise to greater heights on some lanky fellow, who would be forever unaware of just how distinguished his new drawers.

Then there was the happy extrovert widow, elderly but undaunted, in Big Basin for the first time. Although camping alone, nothing — but *nothing*, was going to cramp her boundless appreciation of the great outdoors. Where she pitched her tent didn't matter. Weren't all the campsites just wonderful? Hey, gal, how about a cup of coffee with me?

Who could have resisted this joyous spirit. We had coffee, and when we had finished, she flipped the coffee grounds over her shoulder and out into the huckleberry bushes. "Can't do that in my stinkin' little apartment," she averred stoutly.

Our combined laughter sent several chipmunks streaking for cover. What the new camper was doing to start my day out right, had it been bottled as a tonic, would have put drug stores out of business.

Every wild creature was her friend. Already she had birds so fascinated that they came and sat on her picnic table and shared meals. Their rapport reached such heights that one of her feathered friends even turned up to help with the morning chores.

I had noticed her upper plate resting on the car hood. Evidently she had been about to take care of that item when I appeared. Now as we sat talking, I watched a sassy jay hop down alongside the denture and begin picking away.

For a moment, all I could do was stammer and point. Before words could be formed, our new camper had taken off on a rescue mission, at the same time laughing so hard she almost cried. "Don't that beat ever'thing for services offered in your park?" she demanded, vanishing temporarily into her tent. I had to admit that it transcended anything described in park folders.

Nina Clarke camped all summer in Big Basin. For her, every day was a fresh delight. After she returned to her

“stinkin’ little apartment” I received a letter full of Clarkisms — and one terse comment: “What do you think! Landlord repapered my kitchen while I was away. Then, my first morning back, darned if I didn’t forget and toss the coffee grounds over my shoulder, like in camp. What a mess!”

The utter freedom of prolonged camping does have its hangovers.

By the end of summer in any busy park, rangers are liable to become punch-drunk. A silly season of mine came one year in Big Basin on a jam-packed Labor Day weekend, complete with blowing transformers, accidents, fires, and the usual duke’s mixture of human travail. It was Friday, too — only the beginning of the season’s last agonized gasp. Not the best time for egg on the face.

I had just stepped out of Headquarters when from across the road trotted a man, grinning from ear to ear, his hand outstretched. Golly, I thought, struggling to remember his name, so I could properly welcome him to the park, I know that fellow. He camped here last August, and here he comes again. Oh-h-h, *yes!* Campsite 3 down by the creek. I can see that much quite clearly. But what in blazes is his name? Memory for names had always been my special gift. Why now with this nice fellow did it have to go *kaput!* Without question, months of long hours had taken their toll.

Had they ever! While his hand pumped mine with all the bouncy friendliness and enthusiasm of a man about to start living up his vacation, I remained as blank as ever. He must not guess that I failed to recognize him from just last year. Thank goodness it didn’t seem to be trickling into his consciousness that this was even possible. I’d stall for time.

I greeted him as if his arrival had made my day and that I naturally knew who he was. Then, still stalling, fighting for recall, I steered the conversation around the rink.

“Great day,” I offered.

“Wow! Sure is!”

“Park’s filling up fast.” Being only too evident, no safer ground than that.

“Glad I don’t have to worry.”

That puzzled me. At the moment, such a reply didn’t make sense. By noon, any Labor Day Friday, vacant campsites were

virtually nonexistent. What incoming camper wouldn't be sweating!

"You're all set up in number 3?" I ventured in speculative half-question. The man appeared to be slightly confused. That bothered me.

"You always land there, don't you?" I continued, joshing him. Again, certain of safe ground.

"Sure do. Best campsite in the whole park." Enthusiasm rolling again.

"Right!" How could I lose on that.

"Well, guess I'd better shove off." On a sudden impulse, up shot an arm for a look at the wristwatch.

The unexpected move disconnected me completely. That's all it took. A Thursday night's rest would have made the difference.

"How long you staying?" I asked, barging on mindlessly.

"Staying?" Amused amazement. Then a hearty guffaw.

"Well, like I told you yesterday afternoon down by the pool, our two weeks are up. Hate like everything to pull out and get back to the old grind."

With a jolt, total recall now. Name and all — and that last bantering conversation we'd had after he had splashed, bare-chested, out of the water, and stood, trunks dripping, drying himself.

The shock of such an unforgiveable lapse of memory stopped thought cold. But fully operational to the end, my mouth stumbled valiantly onward. Alone in a little world all by myself, chaos took over where only moments before, fatigue had ridden herd. In a voice cracking with mortification, I faltered, "Well — yes — *sure*. I'm sorry. You see — well — I just didn't recognize you with your clothes on." What was that I dimly recall about clothes making the man?

Chapter Six: Big Basin

The Congested Concerto

Togetherness may be a common and trite expression, but in relation to American families congregated around a forest campfire, togetherness is the word, and its magic eclipses anything that could be construed as commonplace. And when the fire is of huge slabs of evergreen that pop and snap before burning down to an incandescence just right for marshmallow toasting, it is irresistible to most people. Nothing in the nighttime outdoors can equal it.

Among family and friends — or for that matter among total strangers sitting down together for the first time — a campfire is a sharing of the spirit. Troubled minds and ailing bodies rest, rough edges of conflict vanish, wounds begin to heal. Time now for reflection in the companionable warmth and glow of the flames; time for renewal of faith and courage; time for contemplation of lofty ideals as more possible of achievement. For me, a fine booming campfire at day's end, squarely in the middle of the circle, has always seemed to enrich the conservation of human resources, and in the highest sense.

From one end of the week to the other, our evenings ran the gamut of enjoyment, often with dizzy speed within a single evening. In the days before the instant wisdom of a new bureaucracy decreed that our gatherings would henceforth be dedicated to conservation education, by heck, or else, we not only interpreted the parks, their wildlife and history — we had fun to boot. Everyone was curious and eager to see what was going to happen each night and *incidentally* to learn — which is, more often than not, the strongest kind of learning. And what variety it all added up to. That was before the campfires, themselves, were relegated to one side and fueled by small sticks of wood.

Upon occasion our songs got rollicking and some of our impromptu entertainment corny, but come 7 PM, all tracks led just one direction, to participate in whatever was going on. So it was and so it had been decade after decade, since the beginning. And everyone went confidently and in peace to join his fellow campers for two or three hours or more with

no fear that in his absence from camp, any theft or vandalism whatever would occur beyond a calculated ripoff by spoiled raccoon friends.

Watching the flashlights converge from every direction in the towering blackness of our giant forest, I somehow thought about the fireflies of my childhood. On Sundays, our more thoughtful nights, they reminded me of the finale of Disney's incomparable *Fantasia*. I could still see that long line of flickering candles moving through the valley from distant hills, filing slowly and reverently into the great cathedral, as voices rose in the glory of Schubert's "Ave Maria."

Because in my first year in Big Basin I was too young and naive to be wary, but more probably because there was then no reason to be, I started each evening except Sunday with a swapping of stories and personal experiences. Later, at Big Sur or today in most California public parks, if five hundred to a thousand people assembled for uncensored storytelling, turmoil would automatically serve itself up on a silver platter.

Even so, one or two gems always managed to pop out during the course of a season. Nearly every time, these were told by some little kid who had heard his story enjoyed by adults. Understandable then that he deemed it perfect to slay a crowd with some dull evening. How else could it be but funny? In its wake I always grinned ruefully at the amusement that followed, suggesting that youngsters please to remember that grownups were present. The one adult per summer who knowingly told a stinker speedily discovered how an economy of well-chosen words, spoken calmly and reinforced by vigorous audience approval, could turn his blood to ice. As the Silence of the Season, stiff and embalmed, settled over him, we simply moved forward into the evening's fun. Without fuss and feathers and from that moment on, the grapevine had a way of spreading the word across campgrounds and far into the weeks ahead. It was that simple.

We had some wonderful storytellers, not only of jokes as such, but of personal bits, often those of camping before the advent of paved roads and motels. Most were hilarious and well received. If storytelling time was slow in getting started, sometimes I found ways to beef up the interest and bolster the timid. One of the best was to incite good natured mayhem by siccing California's two archrivals on each other. First I'd

ask, "Who of you are from Los Angeles?" Then, "Who of you are from San Francisco?" Finally, "You mean you don't know anything funny about *that other city*?"

It was like dropping a match on hillside chaparral in August. L.A versus The City would take off like wildfire. Perennial favorite fuel:

Q. "What's California's largest animal?"

A. "The Los Angeles bull."

From there, stories were sure to roll for the next half hour.

Followed then at least another half hour of community singing — a mixture of action songs, rounds, ballads, folk tunes, old-time favorites and current popular numbers. These without necessity of repetition for two weeks or more.

From the campers and Lodge guests came the accompanists, and seldom were we without one. Some, former professionals, managed to beat upon our Woodrat Steinway with all the gusto and finesse once reserved for the grand pianos of music centers. By the same token, we also fell heir occasionally to volunteers, who, in supplementing their willingness and jolly good humor, endowed us with galloping rhythm and/or melody that would have amazed the composer. Try holding a crowd on a single note until everyone runs out of breath, while the pianist, frowning at her music, ponders on the next note — and then pianissimos all over the place. The exuberance and strong hands that motivate community singing are quite different from those required for Sunday morning hymn-singing just as there is a vast difference of nature and response between "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" and "Nearer My God to Thee." Expertise with Pablum classics like "The Glow Worm" simply cannot fire an audience to song, no matter how breathlessly devoted to it the one at the piano. I have partial dentures today because of teeth ground down to stubs while waiting, arm poised on high, for some creative pianist to experiment with the keyboard. More frequently, my heart warmed to the untrained who played by ear. To them, notes on a sheet of music resembled chicken tracks, but how they did faithfully tend the tune and the all-important steady beat and come down on the chords with resounding authority.

When volunteer pianists were named Smith, problems

could crop up over and above any previously encountered or imagined. Only a girdle saved me the night of Mrs. Smith.

As we plunged into “My Darling Clementine,” she was all heart and lungs, vocalizing in addition to playing loudly but not well. Her trouble was a series of pauses to inspect the music. The rest of us, by struggling on, finished Clementine (actually and figuratively) several measures ahead of our accompanist. And so we continued throughout the rest of our singalong — probably the shortest on record. What an ordeal! A willing soul, Likeable Mrs. Smith. She just hadn’t known her own limitations and should have kept to the zither. Ye gods, I thought, somehow I’ve got to find a pianist tomorrow, if I have to hire one to camp here until the Smiths leave.

Next morning, Mrs. Smith intercepted me as I hurried to meet my hike group. She was sparkling.

“I wanted to tell you not to worry that I won’t help out tonight,” she said. My insides gave a lurch.

“Oh?” I murmured inconclusively.

“I’m going to a party at the beach,” she went on. “I may not get back here until the very last minute. But never fear. I see to my responsibilities.”

My smile must have been weak, but I tried.

So I had to live with that all day. Frantically I searched for an Old Timer who had played for years and years and *of course* expected to play again. But we were loaded with newcomers. No rescue was at hand.

Later, the dinnertime radio news proclaimed a pea-souper along the coast. Little traffic was able to move. Whew! I thought. *Saved!*

Sure enough, during storytelling no Mrs. Smith.

Wallowing in monumental relief, I began to live again.

Tonight, I thought, we’ll just hang loose and I’ll call for a volunteer. If no one offers, we’ll sing without accompaniment, which, by choice, we often did anyway.

Storytelling over, time now for song. I called, although not at the top of my voice, for Mrs. Smith, resting assured that she was still fogbound twenty-six miles away, and wouldn’t hear. A murmur rippled through the crowd — the sort that let me know that we were all of the same mind. I smiled serenely and appeared not to notice.

Mustering more confidence, I called again. No response. I should have left well enough alone.

The third time, they say, is a charm. I called the third time. With startling suddenness, who should materialize at the top of one aisle at the rear of the bowl but Mrs. Smith! I managed to catch my face before it hit the forest floor. All other faces, not having perceived what I saw, turned toward a large woman who had risen from one of the log seats up front and was moving my direction.

Immediately, a dead heat set in, for Mrs. Smith headed down her aisle.

Then the miracle.

Halfway, she was hailed by a friend, and stopped briefly to exchange hellos. All the while, both of her hands worked at adjusting her girdle to a more comfortable grip. That's all it took. That was the difference. By then, the other woman had reached the fireside mike.

Smiling pleasantly, she said, "I didn't realize that you knew me or that my husband and I had arrived. We pitched camp just an hour ago. I'm accompanist for the Light Opera Company of Minneapolis. Did we meet back there? I don't seem to remember... But then many people saw me... more than I ever met, of course."

I'm not above a little light crime. It took me but a second or two to unscramble my world, get my mouth in gear, mumble something delightfully unintelligible, and point the new Mrs. Smith toward The Steinway. We walked, not ran, but it was one of the less orderly and more frenzied walks of my life.

Before launching into "Bicycle Built for Two," I crossed my fingers and weasel out of my trap by quietly explaining to the first Mrs. Smith that having been so certain she was fogbound, I had been forced to go ahead and commit us to the second Mrs. Smith. Happily, the good woman took it all in fine spirit, and we later formed a friendship that lasted many years until her death. Meanwhile, the grab bag Mrs. Smith turned out to be one of the best community sing accompanists I had ever seen. She played without music, knew all the favorite songs, and improvised the rest. And heavenly days — she remained in camp for three whole weeks!

After singing, came the half-hour or more of nature lore by whoever was on duty at the time. Often this took the form

of slide talks, occasionally appropriate movies. Sometimes we had visiting naturalists or vacationers, who brought their own travel films on parks and wildlife and ecology — but always something special to increase awareness and understanding of our resources and environment — the incredible giant trees and what had happened in their homeland from ages past to recent times, after the coming of mammals and finally man. Even the most blasé visitor, who wasn't about to stir his mind on that cherished annual vacation, invariably found himself listening avidly.

In the time remaining, roughly an hour and a half, we entertained ourselves with whatever talent was available to us from Lodge, campsites, and Picnic Area. How much we could put together usually depended upon the day of the week and the time of the season. Mid-summer, the Fourth of July and Labor Day, Friday and Saturday nights were generally the high spots.

The parks varied, of course. Big Basin, the first and largest of all the redwood state parks, boasted the largest campfire area — one that through the years had to be enlarged several times to accommodate the growing number of enthusiasts, not only from the park, itself, but in for a few hours from the Monterey and San Francisco Bay areas. Finally it resembled a bowl or amphitheater rather than a circle, as did Big Sur's campfire. Richardson Grove, in the Redwood Empire 200 miles north of San Francisco, would have been a complete circle had it not been for the tiny stage. To the Basin came more of those we think of as the Great American Family; to Richardson Grove, more intellectuals; to Big Sur, a preponderance of young, happy-go-lucky Sicilian fishermen from Monterey.

Somewhere around 9:30, at the conclusion of our assorted entertainment, we stood and sang "God Bless America" except on Sunday nights, when, after a quieter and more thoughtful evening, we sang, then hummed "Silent Night, Holy Night."

And no comments, please, about Christmas. Among such majestic giants, some from Biblical times, this beloved tradition was entirely appropriate and appreciated. And since it preceded the era of the much-heralded separation of church and state, we could even have gone ahead and felt all nights to be holy without threat of nationwide upheaval.

Before everyone dispersed to campsite get-togethers or to

the outdoor dance floor or to a moonlight hike or merely to the fire to linger awhile for a warming of the backside preparatory to hitting the sack, I always gave a brief benediction. It was adapted from the Anti-Vivisection Society's *Animal Lover's Prayer*:

"Dear God, hear and bless
These trees, Thy beasts and singing birds,
And guard with all Thy tenderness,
Small things that have no words."

Families took this little thought home with them. I was told countless times that youngsters chose it for Grace at the dinner table and prayer at bedtime; that it also became the seed of school compositions. More immediately, by the glow of a campfire's embers, it offered a sense of tranquility at day's end that would ease consciousness into restful sleep.

Until my return to Big Basin from Big Sur the last summer of the war, we never thought of using a microphone and P.A. system at campfire. But as the end of the conflict drew nearer, and later, with the release from gas rationing, the immediate rush to wheels doubled our park attendance. The need then became apparent.

Arlan Sholes, a long-time electronics expert who made and operated his own equipment, was added to the ranger staff. No more would I have to project my voice so it would reach the bowl's last row of seats. From here on out, all I had to remember was to speak in a low conversational tone. And not one, but two mikes, Arlan placed at my disposal. One stood near the campfire, the other onstage. At a panel in the wings, Arlan mixed the sound for both and for every individual — a real luxury, although at the same time, and by its use, the atmosphere was less intimate. Still, with audiences such as we foresaw now that half of America's GI's had discovered California, no one could expect the old intimacy ever again. Clearly, an era was passing beyond recall. Fortunate, indeed, were those among us who had been privileged to live it.

Mike fright I never knew. Neither did most who came forward to tell a story or to entertain. But all of us had to remember about keeping a foot or more away from the mike and then speaking naturally. That summer, a lot of visitors

learned not to grab the thing and all but swallow it. Who can forget Naturalist Don Meadows' first night with it, or his first campfire, for that matter!

Although Don had long been an authority on Baja and Southern California, a popular after-dinner speaker, and Sheriff of the Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners (an international society of western history buffs) he, for some reason, faced his first Big Basin campfire with knee-shaking anxiety. He got through it quite capably, though, and with Arlan's ever-present skill and moral support, concluded the evening in fine style. Had he not goofed in the seconds immediately following, he would have received an A+ for excellence. Yet because of those seconds, he endeared himself to us and his dumbfounded constituency much more than if he had remembered to turn off the mike switch at the end of "God Bless America."

As Arlan came down from the stage to pick up the campfire mike and store it away, Don grinned with relief. Wiping perspiration from his brow, he blurted in no stage whisper, "Well, that *damn* thing's over. Wonder what Petey would have thought."

Up at Park Headquarters, the other side of the center, what we all thought at that moment was side-splitting beyond breath or words. And all the campers, just then turning to leave the bowl, were nearly deafened as Don's explosive comment sailed through the forest to far-flung camp groups and park boundaries. Outside of a presidential address, his relief probably received more audio coverage than most events of national significance. Everyone who heard, doubled up with amusement, and no one ever let him forget the crowning achievement of his Big Basin debut. After that, Don remembered to flip the switch before even wondering anything to himself, much less aloud.

My own maturing as director of the evening campfires started very early in my career. Fortunately, I learned fast. I had to, with no one there to teach me. Any previous training was simply by virtue of horse sense, gleaned from several college years as relief director at 37 of Los Angeles' 57 municipal recreation centers. By request, all had been in the slums, in Chinatown (where I was the only Caucasian), in

Boyle Heights, Watts and the Central Avenue black belt, and numerous Mexican-American barrios. Not much preparation, that, for a park full of average American families on vacation, altho the experience had developed self-reliance to build upon. But in no way had it enlightened me for my first acid test.

The Big Basin campfire at that time was still small — only a few hundred, mostly Old Timers, a few of the second and third generations there. Many were in middle- or old-age, a number of them widows camping alone, proud and possessive of their park. Two among them were rugged individualists — fine, concerned women. Thanks to them, I learned that I must take hold of potential havoc firmly and fast.

That was the night of the spiritualist.

Mrs. Shaffer had been a World War I nurse in a French field hospital not far from the front. And since she, with her calm, rich voice, was one of the best storytellers we ever heard, the campers looked forward to almost nightly accounts of her experiences. Everyone settled back on his log seat and gazed into the flames while she stood near the fire and skillfully wove her spell.

But after a time, her episodes began to take on the aura of the supernatural. Here and there throughout her stories, people minus their bodies wandered around her scene. As she spoke now of these long-ago events, the campers seemed less preoccupied with their suckers and the flames, their minds more attentive to every detail of her adventures on night duty. As I studied their faces, I grew increasingly uneasy.

The evening finally came when I resolved to visit her camp next day and ask that she keep her spell-weaving on a more earthly basis. Due to an all-day hunt for a lost youngster, I never got around to it. I had to scramble to dash to the bowl and light the fire on time.

Quickly I glanced around, as I always did, to assess the scene. Everything appeared to be quiet and tranquil except Warden Moody, who paced back and forth at the rear of the bowl, chewing a cigar nervously. What he hadn't told me, as per instructions, was that we had company. Those distinguished men and the woman in the back row were not our own people but the Lieutenant Governor, three Chiefs of Divisions including our own, two State Senators, and the entire State Park Commission.

As soon as the fire blazed hotly, I started things going. A camper came forward and related his family's adventures in a desert sandstorm, an old man told of his mushing across Alaska in the days of the Gold Rush; a lad lisped through a lengthy joke, ending with a punch line he obviously didn't understand and shouldn't have. Then Mrs. Shaffer took her place near the fire. Suddenly remembering my firm resolve of the previous evening, I glanced around at faces growing tense, took a deep breath, and prepared myself for the inevitable. Tomorrow, come lost child or even total disaster, so help me, I'd get us out of the spirit world and back into protoplasm.

But alas, tonight!

The good nurse launched placidly into an account of what happened one particular midnight in this hospital in the ruins of an old chateau. You could have heard a redwood needle drop, so skillfully did she weave her yarn into a ghostly fabric. All eyes were upon her, all minds alert, no one lost in contemplation of the flames.

The story moved on, slowly, dramatically. Soldier after soldier died of his wounds, and as each slipped away, his spirit joined those of other boys who had gone before. Together, as wraiths, they roamed the dimly lit wards and drafty hallways of the shell-torn chateau. All were tranquil spirits, to be sure, and the night was coal black — like the one tonight, she added, gazing up into the trees. Only the distant boom of artillery and the bright explosive flashes across the horizon told of fighting not far away.

Holding everyone spellbound, Mrs. Shaffer vividly painted the scene in the shattered building, describing how, lamp in hand, she had passed from cot to cot, soothing and reassuring the wounded now and then touching a fevered brow, covering a white, lifeless face. All the while, she told us, specters of the departed were at her side, giving her strength to carry on through the grisly night. When she would have collapsed with exhaustion, they sustained her; whenever she faltered, one of them would lay a hand on her shoulder — not one she could see, but one she could sense.

By this time, my middle was knotted, my heart galloping. If we *ever* get through this story, I'll stop this thing, I vowed, as I again glanced over my shoulder.

Adult faces registered mounting suspicion. Youngsters

either sat stiffly on the edge of their seats, mouths hanging open, or snuggled themselves tightly against one of their parents. Their eyes widened, even as they were being quietly counselled never to be afraid of ghosts they'd meet on a dark night. "You see," Mrs. Shaffer went on, her face serene, her voice low, "You, yourselves, will be ghosts one day. There is nothing to fear. Engelbert Dollfuss, the Chancellor of Austria, who was assassinated by the Nazis just a year ago this month, is now among his loved ones. We in this circle may one day meet again. Who knows? Perhaps by this same campfire, for nothing that lives is ever lost." With that, she prepared to resume her seat in the third row.

I had been coming unglued so fast I could scarcely collect my wits. When I did, there was no opportunity to say anything. One of our Old Timers, an Irish woman of infinite poundage and volcanic personality, beat me to it. As she jumped up, her voice rang with the urgency of a fire bell. Tolloed she: "I'll have you know, the Chancellor was a good Catholic, and Catholics do not recognize all that monkey business!"

For a few seconds we had a stunned silence. I saw Mr. Moody stop pacing, yank the chewed-up cigar from his mouth, and stare in horror. I felt as if every drop of blood was draining from my body. I opened my mouth to say something — heaven knows what — but nothing came out. Whatever I might have thought of to add would have been lost anyway, for on the other side of the circle, some man I had never seen before now leaped to his feet. "What *do* you Catholics recognize besides your idols?" he demanded with all the prissiness of a carnival barker.

Florid-faced with righteous anger at this affront, the Irish woman turned on her heckler and screamed, "Our *what*? You stupid idiot! We do not worship idols, nor does any Christian. Now what would you say ailed your fat red head?"

"Are you addressing me, my good woman?"

"That I am, and the saints preserve you!"

The shouting began to heat up as others of the campers, outraged by all the furor, started to air their opinions and to make acid suggestions. Most just sat taut and electrified. The nurse, who had only meant to be entertaining, blinked in

surprise at the verbal blockbusters whizzing back and forth across the bowl.

At the rear, the heads of our distinguished visitors swung one way and then the other as if watching a tennis game. In those few harrowing moments of riding a whirlwind, I think I metamorphosed into a full blown park woman.

Two things came to my aid before Mr. Moody could rumble down the aisle and chew me out: my cheerleader's foghorn vocal chords and a couple of phrases I gleaned from my Political Science course at UCLA, which I had nearly flunked the previous spring, that apparently had lingered, unbidden, in my subconscious. Anyway, suddenly here they were. First, my megaphone voice somehow projected above the confusion. "*That,*" I roared, "*will be all,*"

Much to my utter amazement, that *was* all.

Oddly, the ensuing silence struck me with greater force than had the rising pandemonium. I was so astounded that the crowd had paid the slightest attention to my command that I almost forgot to go on from there. But not quite.

Quickly snatching at my unexpected advantage, I said in quieter tones, "We all know that this matter is controversial (Ah, bless that Poly Sci course!). We also know that this campfire is not a public forum (Bless it again). The discussion is *over.*"

Then motioning to the current pianist, I said, "Come on. We are all about to sing — and LOUD!"

Good old Dawn Bently, who could purely by ear, make any old beat-up piano dance, picked up her cue, sprinted for the stage and with the fury of a blast furnace, charged into "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain When She Comes."

Full steam ahead now, how everyone did come around that mountain.

From there we took inventory of Old McDonald's Farm and swung into "A Tavern in the Town." For a solid hour we belted out sprightly things that required us to jump up and down, clap our hands, stomp our feet, whistle and whoop. By the end of the hour, none of us had the breath or the hostility left with which to explore Outer Limits or challenge the other fellow's freedoms.

Although swinging my arm and singing at the top of my lungs all that time, my scattered thoughts found a way to

swear by all things holy that if Mr. Moody didn't order me to fold my tent and steal silently away that very night, I'd corral future storytellers and not drag anchor about either. That vow I was to keep religiously for the next eighteen years.

After campfire, Mr. Moody, not perspiring but soaked with plain old sweat, introduced me to our visitors. Needless to say, I gasped in unabashed embarrassment when I learned who they all were. But none of them appeared to be the least bit upset by what had happened. Instead, they grinned, and several laughed heartily as they shook my hand before leaving. One, Jack Covington, the Executive Secretary of the State Park Commission, tall, dark, and handsome, remained behind to whisper, "All they wanted was to see what a Big Basin campfire was like. Guess they found out, eh?"

I smiled wanly, for by then I was in no condition to cheer about anything other than a glass of milk and if possible, eight hours of uninterrupted sleep.

From that wild evening grew a long friendship with this big likeable fellow, Jack. Countless times in the years ahead, including several that he was Chief of the Division, he was to confide in me and talk over administrative problems. For him I became a kind of sounding board; for me, he was a ticket to greater understanding of park workings from the highest level on down in our rapidly expanding State Park System. No one ever knew this, of course, and nothing we discussed went any further as far as I was concerned. Perhaps because I was a woman he sought my opinion and suggestions, and I'm happy to say that I remained in the service to see many of these suggestions put into operation.

I also remained long enough for Jack to make never-ending fun of my night of trial by spiritualist and to play outrageous jokes on me at the most inopportune moments.

One of these took place the afternoon he led a much later Park Commission to Big Basin on an inspection tour. That was the day I slipped from professional maturity into utter disintegration — but with a flair.

The Commission was a brand new one, following the election of a new governor. Jack's job was to orient them to both parks and personnel. Having been notified ahead of time, we made sure Big Basin was clean and neat and in perfect

order. All of us stood duty in our best dress greens, creases sharp, ties straight, buttons and boots shined; reflexes hair-triggered to snatch up the tiniest scrap of litter that might mar the glory of our forest floor.

Just as I stepped out of the Park Museum I saw the Brass emerging from the souvenir shop next door. None of them noticed me except Jack. Properly, he should have smiled and perhaps waved. But *no!* With a leonine roar that ossified everyone within earshot — Chief, Commission, and swarm of tourists alike — he boomed, “HONEY!” and, arms outstretched, came barreling the length of the porch like an SST on takeoff.

Too dumbfounded to move, I stood aghast while he rushed at me, grabbed and crunched me to his bosom with the gargantuan abandon of a Kodiak bear. Then he planted a kiss squarely where kisses are supposed to go, and it sounded as succulent as a sow pulling her feet out of the mud.

I should have swatted him flat-handed then and there for making such a scene before God and the Commission and half the park, but I was too abysmally flustered to do anything other than really foul things up. Hastily grappling with what was left of my dignity, I came back with the only reproach I could muster.

“Jack! NOT in public!”

How the implications of that little gem threw the visiting Powers into hysterics. With my hair in disarray, my tie shoved to one side, and my face flaming, I somehow managed to acknowledge Jack’s introductions, all the while wishing I could disappear behind the Resurrection Tree, which was wonderfully handy. From then on, I was a marked woman, although everything turned out beautifully.

Campfires, natural composites of many kinds of people from all walks of life and of every disposition, can be loaded with the unpredictable. Even in the early days, when we had a public stability unknown today, or, for that matter during the past three decades, anything could happen at any time. It behooved me to be prepared. So I was careful to size up a crowd during storytelling and singing — without seeming to of course. In appearing completely relaxed and off-guard, I created an opportunity to lengthen my antennae, evaluate the

mood of the evening, and locate any possible trouble spots. After that, I felt better able to handle whatever might come up. Mostly nothing did. Often a ranger stood at the rear of the bowl, just in case, but I never had to call on him.

Upon occasion, we were afflicted with loudmouths. A five-cell flashlight beam full in the face had an extremely quieting effect on them, especially if accompanied by an invitation to bring their entertainment forward to the stage. Once though, at Richardson, I never got around to such an invitation.

Some drunks from a California city and their families had made fun of a little girl playing the piano, and spotlighting only loosed more remarks. To speedily terminate the incident, I directed them to call at Headquarters for a refund, since they would be leaving the following morning — the only time I ever did that. The crowd backed me so vociferously that my problem promptly shifted to one of restraining a large group of fine professional men from forcibly ejecting the offenders. However, a word or two took care of the rising situation before it could further materialize, and the evening moved on.

Even with my growing competence in handling the unforeseeable, I never did sense full control at Big Sur. It would have been like corralling quicksilver.

To a warm-hearted Sicilian fisherman, a little child is the most miraculous, the most irresistible, the most stupendously fascinating creature in the whole universe. No matter what was going on, if any youngster sneezed, cooed, stood up or sat down, *all* attention beamed to him — *now*, exclusively, without deviation, until long after the sneezing, cooing, standing up and sitting down had ceased. And the dedication was one not only of the heart and eyes, but of the lungs as well, fortissimo, to the nth power. Try managing the likes of that when almost the entire audience is Sicilian — as, for instance, the night a former concert pianist was playing for our sing-along.

We were well under way; so far everything going forward with the usual gay abandon. Then it happened.

A three-year-old boy slid off his father's lap and waddled down the aisle toward the stage. Instantly, several hundred hearts and mouths responded in force. The accompanist, she of single-mindedness and strong hands, heard none of the mounting roar of happiness as the youngster, unrestrained and egged-on, explored the aisle, the campfire, the rock steps

leading up to the platform, and finally the plank flooring back of the footlights. What really fascinated him were the ferns that bordered the footlights all the way across. While he toyed with them, the entire crowd howled its ecstasy. Unaware, the pianist pounded on. She was still pounding on, unaware, when the youngster, feeling an urge, stood up and opened his pants. Then, facing the audience, and highlighted by the footlights, he proceeded to piddle into the friendly ferns.

You would have stopped him? In the middle of that? How? It was to all our advantages to let him finish. Had I responded to my more genteel instincts, I might have retrieved him, but to have terminated his impromptu performance would have messed him up, interrupted a spectacular piano concerto, and set off a tumult audible the length of the Big Sur Coast. I know when I've had it.

Another Big Sur evening — a Saturday some years before the end of the war — we were forewarned of things to come, yet little could we do.

The Sheriff's office at King City had called to say that a gang was on its way to the park, bent on a riot at the dance, which would follow the campfire. No help was offered; other law enforcement problems took precedence, we were told. We would be on our own.

Every man of our seven-man crew reported to the bowl that night, armed with the only weapon a ranger was permitted to carry at that time: a five-cell flashlight.

While leading singing, I observed our meager crew lined up across the rear of the bowl about a dozen feet apart, tensed and as ready as they would ever be. The several hundred campers, their usual ebullient selves, had no idea of the violence that threatened.

We had gone through perhaps a half dozen songs when I noticed zoot-suited critters filtering into the scene behind the rangers until they stood shoulder to shoulder from one side of the bowl to the other. By comparison, our only line of defense seemed monstrously less than adequate. My throat tightened with alarm. I had a struggle to appear as happily composed and unconcerned as if we had all gathered at church for an ice cream social. The trick was to hang out a pleasant face, then hiding behind it, just go ahead and let the rest of me get angry

or scared to death. I was both. The invaders looked ominous and intent.

Using some flimsy excuse, we had that afternoon cancelled the dance. Not knowing this, the gang waited for the campfire to end, their impatience and venom abundantly evident and growing.

So we swung into "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain," and from there into several time-consuming rounds and a series of noisy, athletic things that plowed well into the second hour. As time stumbled on, the invaders moved about restlessly. Finally, unable to contain themselves any longer, they converged out in the dark for a conference. Soon afterwards, their cars roared away toward more exciting fields to disrupt. We had literally bored them out of our hair.

I loved Big Sur, the country and the park and the local residents, but not always my work there.

The coastline, itself, has been described as being the most magnificent meeting of land and sky and water in the world. I often wished I could have thought the same of the great mix of humanity that loved the Big Sur as I did — and always will.

Once in a great while we had Indians at campfire. One time was at Big Basin the evening of the children's librarian from New York, who thought the kids needed more American history to bring them closer to their country's colorful past. She told me: "I'm a storyteller. That's my job. I'd like to entertain tonight with a tale from the Westward Movement."

"Sounds fine," I said, thinking of the surprise I had planned for that same campfire. "But hold it to ten minutes." And so it was agreed.

While the fire popped and crackled, the crisp young woman with her Brooklyn accent launched into what had happened to a wagon train. Her objective must have been high drama rather than accuracy, for she played fast and loose with the facts. In order to give the yarn local flavor and identity, she had decided that her villains would be our own Klamath Indians. Neither horses nor palefaces were spared in her breathless account of war whoops, brandished knives dripping with blood, and gaudily painted Indian bodies. Needless to say, every young one below ninety sat transfixed as the story pushed toward its crashing climax. With color and skill, she

brought her covered wagons through the killer Klamaths and on to safety, but with a touch that made our historian-naturalists wince. Covered wagons in the dense undergrowth of our redwood forests? The kids at our campfire, unmindful of such trivialities, grew increasingly impressed and not a little apprehensive, as I noted from numerous glances out into the darkness beyond the campfire.

They weren't the only apprehensive ones. So was I. That morning, the Indian story had seemed like an excellent preliminary for what was to come next, just then being readied backstage. Now I wasn't so sure. Why couldn't our librarian have selected open country and the Apaches or Sioux for her scary episode instead of our own Klamaths? Too late for post-mortems. On with the show.

I stepped up to the mike. "It isn't often that we have Indian stories at our campfires," I began, hoping for Divine Guidance, "or real Indians either. For the most part, our Indian era has passed here in California. But..." Here I paused to take a deep breath. "But thankfully we still do have some in our state."

Another deep breath. "And so, I would like to present one of the finest men I have ever known, one I am proud to call my dear personal friend — none other than Chief Eaglewing, of the Karuks — of the *Klamath* people!"

Eaglewing had been waiting backscenes. Now, in full regalia, white buckskin, war bonnet, the works, he bounded onstage and down beside the campfire.

For a few hectic moments, I wondered if we weren't going to have to pick the kids out of the treetops. But wide-eyed shock soon gave way to curiosity and wonder as Eaglewing, handsome and kindly, took over the rest of the evening. No yelling, no separating of scalps from heads; instead, a splendid figure of a man, who soon demonstrated that at fifty he could still do the hoop dance with all the agility of a young brave.

Many times Eaglewing performed Indian dances and told Indian legends at campfires, in all three parks where I was stationed. Each occasion became one ever to be remembered. What better setting for it than beside one of those big fires in his own giant redwood country? It had to be a natural.

Throughout each presentation of life along California's great northwestern Klamath River, Eaglewing's tremendous sense of humor helped deliver a very special kind of

conservation of our natural resources. One that stuck. Included was a code of conduct to live by; a philosophy with which to tread the wilderness.

After campfire, he always remained to visit with whomever felt inclined to crowd around in admiration or to ask questions or just to talk and receive a copy of his Indian Laws:

1. Obedience is our first duty;
2. Courage is the brave's highest gift;
3. Love and help your neighbor;
4. Play fair in the game of life;
5. Smoking is an act of reverence for men only;
6. Be a gentleman of the forest (which he stressed);
7. One kindness every day;
8. Promote the beauties of nature;
9. Love for silence, meditation, and prayer;
10. Word of honor is sacred.

By the end of that particular Big Basin evening of the children's librarian, the Klamaths somehow didn't seem fierce anymore — and every kid had taken to hoping that more Indians would come bounding out of the forest while they were there to welcome them.

Chapter Seven: Big Basin

“What’s On Tonight?”

“Your campfires are too good,” I was told at the end of my second Big Basin tour — and my nineteenth year — in the service of the California State Parks. “We’ve got to tone them down. Keep everyone’s mind on conservation. That’s what’s important for them while they’re here.”

Another expression was that fun campfires were attracting too many people into the park, some just for the evening; more than the ecology could stand, more than the crew might someday be able to handle. We would have to pull back.

Perhaps this was the beginning of what is in evidence almost everywhere in our parks today — a growing population, more and more motorized and more and more recreation-minded; not all of it as decent and orderly and thoroughly enjoyable as we had always known in those pre-fifty days. And yet, with all the “pulling back,” park problems are burgeoning as never before, requiring peace officer training and preparation for today’s park rangers.

Anyway, the splendid flaming campfires of the past degenerated into flickering piles of sticks, moved to one side and blocked from view by metal shields so their light would not interfere with the showing of educational slides and movies. Apparently someone in our Upper Atmosphere had not met with us often enough to note that when we presented visuals, we simply waited until the fire had burned low. No problem. The Sacramento intent may have fertilized in some distant mind, trying to justify a job, or it may have surfaced as an outsized hunk of ineptness. Without question, it ignored our own long-established and easy flowing ways of making park and nature lore an important, exciting, and meaningful element of every evening’s get-together.

The best means by which we could interpret our parks and outdoors to some people on vacation was first of all by enticing them to a potpourri of spontaneous and mostly unrehearsed entertainment. By virtue of merely being there and relaxed, they became receptive, and absorbed the concepts and ideals we so much desired to communicate to them. This, I carefully explained to the Visiting Power, who listened

politely, a vague covered-wagons-on-the-horizon look in his eyes. And with his head, not his feet, solidly encased in cement, ideas presented quite understandably went in one ear, turned around, and came back out.

All at once, recreation was swept under the rug. Ironically, years later, the State Division of Beaches and Parks evolved into an expanded entity, henceforth known as the State Department of Parks and Recreation. What a revolting development that must have been to someone.

I saw many unforgettable summers before entertaining ourselves became something verboten. Rarely did we have real difficulty finding volunteers in camp. Although now and then a professional turned up, almost all the talent was the homespun variety, given in good spirit and received the same way. Some of it came forward timidly, even fearfully at first, until the participant felt the appreciative response of the crowd; until he sensed that they were with him. Then to watch his nerves and self-consciousness disappear was a joy everyone shared; and whoever had given went home with fresh confidence and sense of achievement.

For thousands upon thousands of people of that time in our century, before television and jet planes and travel trailers and motor homes turned thought and mobility into a national restlessness, such outings and activities highlighted the family year.

Amassing far-flung lands had not yet become a status thing. Campers liked to go to a favorite spot and stay. Between vacations they kept in touch with one another and arranged to be in the park the same weeks or months. Those who chose to help at campfires checked the strings of their guitars and banjos; wrote more skits; assembled more funny stories, stirring adventures, and experiences to tell; learned more readings and tap steps; bought more sheet music; and offered new songs for community singing. Happily they reminisced about summers past, their vacation neighbors, both human and wild. No mountaintop lodge or rocky point aerie beside the sea could ever have been more cherished than their campsite among the giant redwoods.

Tourists who pass through the groves often view the trees with an awe bordering on worship. But for those who returned season after season, the impact was much more

than that. It added up to the comfortable warmth of looking forward to the same trees and bushes, the same creeks and hiking trails — another rendezvous with old-time and beloved friends; a continuation of a way of life that had long been special and deeply satisfying.

At campfire, one could count on plenty of bobbles, none ever leading to disaster, but lending extra spice to the evenings — a handcrafted touch akin to a potter's fingerprints in his clay.

We had everything from "pomes" recited by toddlers to symphonies in for a day's picnic and an evening's appearance. We enjoyed concert violinists, harmonica players, groups of folk and square dancers, and freshman magicians sans rabbits; even a bride and groom, married that day, who solemnly announced that they were going to sing "All Through the Night." Innocently unperturbed by the burst of hearty laughter, they smiled their bliss and proceeded to earn an unusually big hand.

Another night saw all out hilarity when ten-year-old twin girls flew into a hair pulling jamboree onstage over which verse of their song was supposed to come next.

We always loved the unforeseen incidents that sparked campfires with personality bits out of the ordinary. Like the night when a storyteller from Texas was nearly mobbed at the microphone by the very people he was on his way to surprise — who were on their way southward from Oregon to surprise him.

And another time when a rather elderly lady in the audience recognized an accordionist, just then entertaining, as the college chum of forty years before, there was a wild reunion. Somewhere in the "Beer Barrel Polka," she rushed onstage. With squeals and whoops, hugs and kisses and remember whens, the two lost themselves in memory. Minutes passed before they became aware of the several hundred people out there the other side of the fire, agog over their spectacular.

One thing I avoided like the plague was any tendency to inject a Broadway flavor into the campfires, no matter how professional the talent at our disposal. Fluffy ballet costumes were not for our scene; nor fond mamas, determined to show

off their little angels every night or two; every night if possible. No way were our evenings to lapse into kid shows.

Neither were they intended to be a springboard or showcase for budding superstars, although from there, several of our folk did go on to make it big in show biz — and we felt proud to have enjoyed them when. For the most part, we remained essentially blue jeans and plaid shirt stuff, with emphasis on teenage and above. Anyone inclined to perform *ad nauseum*, I tactfully headed off.

Well I remember the night I had to persuade away from the piano a tipsy woman with a sandpaper voice, who insisted upon grinding out a classic of two chords and forty-eleven verses that inventoried the marital difficulties of a pair of characters named Ma Oompah and Pa Oompah. Before I could finally administer the *coup de grace*, the audience was rolling in the aisles.

Sometimes, on the spur of the moment, I'd invite old and young to come forward and whip up some harmony — whatever they should select after assembling onstage. Other times, with plenty of talent in camp, I'd act as if there were none, and turn the evening loose for potluck — which usually brought out folk who had not so far made their talents known. One way and another, we had variety, spontaneity, and good humor aplenty.

Upon occasion we celebrated wedding and birthday anniversaries. The honorees always stood and we sang to them while an array of flashlights and matches struck dotted the darkened bowl like candles on a cake.

The unpredictable was always popping up at campfire. The campers hashed over these unexpecteds for years; some went on to become legend. One was of the shy little woman who gave readings.

Her husband had confided to me that she was “damn good” at it. Sadly, though, her only audience had been the family. When I asked her to perform for us, she almost fainted. “Oh, I couldn’t get up before all those people,” she averred, popping her knuckles nervously.

But her husband’s loving encouragement prevailed, and a few nights later, she agreed to help out. “I-I guess I’ll try it,” she faltered, trembling even then.

I was sympathetic. "Are you sure *you* want to?" I asked.

"Yes, I'll try," she murmured so softly I scarcely heard.

That evening, after a racy number by a male trio, and a tap dance by a youngster, I called on Mrs. Blanchard. Watching her walk slowly down the aisle, I became so concerned about the strength in her knees that I strolled to the stage with her, chatting, trying to put her at ease.

As it happened, I needn't have worried. Mrs. Blanchard told me afterwards: "Once I heard my voice speaking those first words, I was all right. Why do you suppose I've been so afraid all these years? Those folks out there felt just like family." Because I had no way of knowing she had lost herself in her act, it was I who suffered.

And *how* I suffered before she had finished!

Little Mrs. Blanchard turned out to be as good as her husband had predicted. After announcing in a shaky voice that she was going to "do" a woman discovering a mouse scurrying across the kitchen floor, she plunged headlong into her reading. All stops out, she gave with such gasp and scream that the squirrels must have taken to the treetops.

Then she jumped upon a chair, pulled her skirts tightly around her knees, and launched into a series of "Get out of here, you nasty thing!" shrieks. To all of this, the built-in empathy of every woman in the audience responded wholeheartedly. Feet were yanked up off the ground and planted on the round back of the log seat in front of them.

But far more camper participation than that was to accompany Mrs. Blanchard's first public monologue. Midway of it, their shrieks began to top hers. By rights, they should have been loosed out of pure enjoyment. Circumstances, however, rendered this impossible. Anyway, Mrs. Blanchard was so engrossed, she wouldn't have known the difference. Up there on the chair, acting out the terrified housewife, she faced stage left instead of right, or we could have had a casualty that evening, and so far I had never lost an entertainer.

What probably happened was that Mrs. Blanchard's realism disturbed one of our Big Basin natives. While the woman continued to scream for rescue from the imaginary mouse scurrying around the kitchen floor, out onto stage right from backscenes waddled the permanent resident of the place.

He was no mouse. He was a “so round, so firm, so fully packed” wood rat with ears as big as nickels. A rat to match the giant redwoods. Obviously filled with curiosity at the antics of human wildlife, he ambled almost to center stage before stopping to rear up on his broad base, and set his nose and whiskers wriggling inquisitively. You could even see the question in his black beady eyes.

Now came the moment of greatest audience participation. Even the men’s feet flew up off the ground. Response to the performance onstage suddenly zoomed.

For one wild moment, I who dreaded and avoided rodents above all things earthy, sat rigid and revolted, watching the big rat watch the woman watch the mouse. Somehow I hung on to my face — I think — and dug my boot heels into the ground, although not without cost.

My self-control gradually slipping, I glanced back at the electrified crowd. Indecision gripped me, knowing as I did that only by a slender thread were we hanging suspended between momentary paralysis and all-out panic. I could picture the woman turning on the chair just far enough to glimpse her co-star — and passing out cold on the hard stage floor. The thud would of course catapult the rat out into a crowd already strung taut. In the resulting stampede to clear the bowl, I could see myself flattening campers by the dozen as I sprinted over their prostrate bodies on my flight to the first limb of the Oakland Tree.

Single-handed, Mr. Stage Right Rat took care of the entire situation. Having already enriched Mrs. Blanchard’s act, he now quieted the crowd by satisfying himself that the woman was merely noisy, not dangerous. Once he appeared to settle on that, he turned his back on her, sat down, and began grooming himself.

His long tail received the most attention. Tenderly he dragged his tongue the full length of it again and again, while Mrs. Blanchard screamed and exhorted some more.

Meanwhile, hundreds of onlookers still sat bolt upright, ready to spring, although no one did. It would have required feet on the ground. As of then, unthinkable.

After a while Mr. Stage Right Rat completed his chores. Not a minute too soon either, for Mrs. Blanchard was winding up hers. Leaving the camper to take a bow alone, Mr. Rat

paused briefly to size up the campfire and the sea of faces the other side. Then he waddled slowly offstage, whence he'd come.

One by one, the rest of us oozed back into our seats, realizing that Mrs. Blanchard must have solved her mouse problem, although just how, none of us ever remembered — if we ever heard.

Anyway, she stepped down off the chair to loud and hearty applause, not only for her vivid performance, but also for her supporting cast.

Bursting with pleasure and relief, and beaming with the joy of stage fright overcome, she hurried up the aisle to the waiting husband — who had news for her. This everyone strained to watch. When she gave a sharp gasp and turned pale, applause and laughter broke out all over again. It seems that her fear of appearing before an audience had been exceeded only by a lifelong terror of the rodent kind.

To myself I muttered, "Tonight I burn a candle to whoever delivered us out of this dilly."

One of the most colorful readers Big Basin ever enjoyed was Gen Stark. From childhood, all her summers had been spent in the Basin. Now, as a grandmother, she still returned to the same campsite. We could have listened to her funny monologues every night of the week. Her especially hilarious reading was of a foghorn evangelist sermonizing the nursery rhyme, "Old Mother Hubbard."

It took Gen almost fifteen minutes to rip-snort through all the ecclesiastical implications of the dog, the bone, and the empty cupboard. Into her impassioned ranting went the hellfire and damnation of the old-time back country circuit rider. By the time she had finished, she had evoked the Almighty, the United Nations, the fine points of diet, the Gettysburg Address, the animal shelter, and reincarnation — and the audience was in stitches.

One evening, during the height of this particular harangue, Lou Donaldson, our night ranger, eased into the bowl and squatted down beside me. "Boy, have I got something big for you!" he whispered. Naturally I listened with interest. But when I heard who waited at the rear of the bowl, I nearly fell apart. Lou looked puzzled that I didn't go breathless

with excitement. I couldn't. Prostration had set in. How complicated could things get! Anyway, Gen's deep pulpit voice still pushed the upper decibels.

“. . . Now bear in mind, my good people, this was *Mother Hubbard*, not Father Hubbard who went to the cupboard to get her poor dog a bone. Was Father Hubbard there to help? NO! Mother Hubbard had to go to the cupboard alone to find sustenance for her poor dog. She was not the Queen of England; she was not the First Lady of our land; she was not famous or infamous — as one of our shady ladies of the night; she was not captivating as men think of women who twist and rend their hearts. She was simply Mrs. Hubbard, loyal wife to a thoughtless Father Hubbard, who had deserted her in her hour of need.”

I looked at Lou and he at me, helplessly. How, pray tell, was I ever going to introduce our distinguished visitor after that — he who had been born in Big Basin country and had gone on to become an explorer of Alaskan and Alpine ice fields; a famous authority on the Arctic, particularly its glaciers.

I don't know who gulped first, Lou or I. Tossing me a crisp “Well, Baby, this is your problem” salute, Lou rose and stole silently out into the darkness.

Too bad I lost my nerve. Those were my early years, and I sometimes became over-awed when I should have recognized and seized golden opportunity.

Years later, our visitor returned, and together we laughed about my dilemma that night. By then I would have been more maturely able to cope with Mother Hubbard and Father Hubbard, the world renowned “glacier priest,” one after the other, both in the same evening.

Talent for campfires turned up in different ways. Sometimes it sought me out; other times it was snatched on by relatives and friends. Often I stumbled on it quite by accident — such as with Big Bill.

I first noticed him as he was photographing two young men companions draped around the base of the Santa Cruz Tree. He was a whopper of a man, and ruggedly handsome. The day wore on, and he proved to be more uninhibited with each passing hour. He was fun to watch because he was filled with a zest for life that prompted him to go flapping around

the park, jumping over obstacles instead of going around them. Some lucky coach's pride and joy, I thought, when he rough-housed his friends all over the meadow. The idea occurred to me that I could be heartstruck.

Dancing with him that same evening, I chickened out on the third flying whip around the floor. Five to ten miles a day hadn't prepared me for *that!*

The following morning, a compensation of sorts salved my dented pride. Making my rounds, I heard this man's phenomenal exuberance soaring through the treetops. When I finally tracked him down, and his pals winked significantly, I took the cue and closed in.

"Come on, Bill," one of them urged. "Do as the lady ranger asks. Sing tonight at campfire."

The handsome face broke into a multi-wrinkled grin that warmed like the sun breaking through the morning fog. "Okay, kid," he quipped, thumping me hard on the back. Then with a bellow of happy abandon, he went cavorting down the path, hurdling stumps and downed hardwoods and diving fully clothed into the creek. All he needed was a vine to swing on to make Tarzan look like a neurotic.

"Crazy as a loon," one of his companions laughed, wagging his head.

Bill wowed them — that big crowd and the two that followed. Accompanying himself, he roared through "The Reluctant Dragon" and several other whimsical ditties that included some wordage just risqué enough to have done time the other side of the tracks. The campers kept glancing at me to see how I was taking this skirting of propriety. Not one to betray my inner workings, I hung out a sensible smile, and let it be. I could tell that others were noting the flirty twinkles Bill directed my way. Then and there I vowed I'd sit out this rogue if it was the last thing I ever did in the park service.

On Saturday night, after his usual nearly-naughty offerings, he plunged all at once into "The Desert Song," and from there was overwhelmingly applauded into "New Moon." What a voice! What a charming dynamo! Had he set "The Piddling Pup" to "Bringing in the Sheaves," I'm positive the Presbyterians would have loved it. Again and again he was clapped back to the piano.

Finally he sobered, and when at last he could make himself heard, his tone turned serious. It surprised us all into silence.

"Tomorrow is Sunday," he said. "It will be a beautiful day in Big Basin among these enormous trees. Anyone who walks here will surely know that he does not walk alone. I would like to pay tribute to Him who created these magnificent giants — and to you who love them so."

Bill came down to the fire, by then only a bed of coals and small tongues of flame. For a moment he stood there, waiting for quiet. Then in that glorious voice of his he sang "The Lord's Prayer," powerfully and dramatically; as I had never heard it sung before. Open-mouthed and enraptured we sat, deeply touched by his inner light.

Afterwards was not the time for applause any more than if we had been gathered inside a manmade church.

Again Bill spoke, his tone resonant and vibrant. "Thank you for three unforgettable days and nights here in Big Basin. I can't begin to tell you how much they have done for me in this, my very first vacation in many years. Tomorrow, my friends and I must leave and return to our jobs. But we shall never forget you or these campfires in the tranquility of redwood forest evenings."

I couldn't help myself; I just had to ask. "Bill, just what is your job?"

He hesitated. Then he replied softly, "In a large Midwestern prison, I am the Catholic chaplain. God bless you all — and goodbye."

I was as stunned as everyone else at this well-kept secret.

Bill tossed a friendly wave, and smiling happily, strode up the aisle and out into the darkness. Slowly, silently, the crowd rose to its feet.

The next night after Bill's departure, when Arlan tried to shove the piano onstage from the wings, all he moved was the veneer. It slid off in his hands. Our aging Steinway had been in no shape to withstand the gymnastic attacks of a priest strung together like a heavyweight champion.

How it stood naked and pitiful and suddenly air-conditioned, arousing sympathy enough to draw from our midst a piano tuner who "just happened" to have his tool kit along.

Our summer tuners were the angels of my life. At least two a season came and revived the poor critter for which The State assumed no responsibility whatever — and every time, it seemed they did it because they wanted to “show my gratitude for the privilege of camping in such parks.”

This dear man, Mr. Sparrow of Glendale, peered inside the case and shook his head. And he shook it again when he learned that our One and Only had sat out the long sopping winter backstage. Strings had loosened; some had snapped; gardens of moss festooned various parts of the action; felts had been chewed off and converted into nests for successive litters of kangaroo mice and rats, most of which took to the woods when the first optimist sat down to play. A few of the more foolhardy — or retarded — remained to bounce ghostly tunes out of the strings in the dead of night or to go over the side in panic when the pounding inside became unbearably deafening.

And then there was the stool that teetered. Prospective pianists, intending to position it to their liking, found that the seat lifted at the slightest touch, leaving a spiraled spike sticking up in their faces.

Mr. Sparrow spent all day with tools and piano bits and pieces spread all over the stage. Contentedly, taking his time, he replaced strings and felts and ivories, adjusted hammers, removed wildlife and emergency plumbing fixtures and bailing wire, and connected the various parts so when keys were pressed down, we could hope for something besides rodents from the department of the interior. Then he tuned it as best he could to approximate the standard pitch and sound.

Reborn and resplendent, not only repaired but polished, the black keys black and the white keys white, our Steinway at last stood tall, like a thing loved and tended. Every note played. Anyone sitting down to it now had reason to expect that what he put into it might just come out. How sad that The State pleaded poverty and unwillingness to pay for skill so generously bestowed. All we could do was ask our piano tuner benefactor to stand and be identified, and then give him a big hand of heartfelt thanks. Under no circumstances could we take up a collection, Sacramento had decreed.

A piano in usable condition was a big help to most visiting

choirs, which we had once or twice a summer on Sunday nights. I remember three especially: one because of a man and his dog; another because of audience competition; the third because of that day being one of the most memorable of all our lives.

This particular Sunday evening, a robed church group came in from Palo Alto. For almost an hour they sang favorite sacred numbers to a relaxed and appreciative audience.

Midway of the concert, I happened to glance toward the rear of the bowl and saw a whiskered apparition standing in the darkness behind the last row, trying his best to attract my attention. Annoyed, I turned away and again concentrated on the stage.

One thing can be said for the man: He at least waited until that number was nearly over. Then, after clumping noisily down the aisle, he squatted beside me. I had never been one to ask quiet of an audience while someone was performing and then go into conference myself, whispered or otherwise. I gave the Silence Please sign, and then pointedly turned my attention to the choir, just then winding toward the close of "How Great Thou Art."

I may have considered the moment inappropriate for discussion, but this character and I were not synchronized.

"Hey, honey," he rasped hoarsely.

"Sh-h-h-h!" I hissed. Together with his unhinged look, his manner was having the effect on me of a thumbnail being dragged across a blackboard. How could anyone breathe during the choir's awe-inspiring rendition, much less talk — or even move! I frowned and laid a restraining hand on his bare arm. Taking this as a right friendly gesture, he cuddled up a little closer. By now, the choir's voices were swelling into the final strains of the music.

"Guess what!" the man persisted confidentially, his eyes gleaming because he was positive I'd never in the world be able to guess what.

"Sh-h-h-h!" I again protested, nodding toward the stage. "*Listen!*"

He was in no listening mood. He had things on his mind — big things that would send me spinning when he revealed them.

Leaning closer, he blurted, "I got sumpthin' in my car

you ain't never seed before. I got a singin' dawg. Trained him m'self. When this gang gets done whoopin' it up, let's put him on. Whatcha say?"

Don't tell me I didn't look as placid as a cat that had just sampled every flavor of Nine Lives. But at the same time, out of sight, my nails kept gouging deeper and deeper into the canine maestro's bare arm. I'll bet he carries the scar to this day. More than that, because the first applause just then began to mount, I took ten seconds to summarize for him, in italics, the meaning of the Sabbath, illuminating it with a few pertinent suggestions explosive enough to fire the pest back into the darkness. If anyone ever suspected that solely because of me, we numbered among the world's deprived that peaceful night, I never heard of it.

Another Sunday we expected to be just as peaceful.

Everyone had settled down dreamily to contemplate the fire while a large group from San Jose took the stage and began what was to turn into a colossal struggle.

Even I, having seen no reason to be on guard, had become lost in enjoyment, when down one aisle sauntered a huge well-corseted hourglass of a woman — a Tillie con carne, with plenty of carne. Her husband and five adenoidal youngsters, ranging in age from about four to thirteen, followed; and as they all sauntered, they inventoried every vacancy in the bowl. The fact that a vested choir was singing sacred music deterred them not.

Irritation arose within me. Why didn't they take one of the partly empty log seats at the back, and *sit*? But that seemed farthest from their thoughts. Meandering on down to the front, they drew together beside the fire for a family conference. Then they ambled clear across to the left side section and selected a place to light.

"Put at last," I mumbled. No doubt others mumbled likewise, for hundreds of campers readjusted themselves and turned back to the concert. Once more quiet prevailed.

But not for long. One of the log's annual growth rings must have disturbed Mama. Sitting all over herself, she commenced to rotate on her axis, at the same time glaring across five tousled heads at her husband and raising her eyebrows meaningfully. Papa wilted. As if on cue, the children

studied their mother's face, and scooted forward to poise on log's edge.

When the choir slipped into a pianissimo, Mama further demonstrated her discomfort by shifting her center of gravity. All eyes noticed and watched. A rear like that one, searching for a soft spot, can steal attention away from a choir — or brass band --any day. This Mama did unconsciously, although by experience born of practice.

Again heads turned as she now leaned across her youngsters toward Papa's face, which was leaning toward hers. With unmistakable gestures, she indicated that her considerable sitter was not sitting well. And just as the choir came to the end of a number, she explored the matter somewhat more audibly, so his good ear would grasp the message.

At a moment such as that, when a sudden stillness is upon the air, the human voice has remarkable carrying powers. All the way to the back rows, loud and clear, went, "It's just numb." No question about what she thought was.

The choir acknowledged well-deserved applause, turned a page, and prepared to move on into the next number. The rest of us murmured a thing or two; some even giggled. I didn't. My Pleasant Face was slipping.

The choir had scarcely gotten under way again when Mama decided she'd had it at that site. So rising and carefully pulling her dress down all around, she prepared to seek a more favorable location, perhaps a softer log. Up bobbed the rest of the family.

Standing so as to view all the possibilities to better advantage, they gradually turned full circle and evaluated every vacancy in the bowl. Mama, facing the audience, pointed out this, this, and that space where their family might fit in. By now, every camper would have welcomed a bolt of lightning.

The choir sang on, their well-modulated voices rising in dramatic crescendo. Soaring alongside went my blood pressure. Just when I had about decided to go see if I could strangle her, Mama spotted a place for her brood over in row five, center section. After a number of face and hand signals back and forth along the line, Papa got the word. Like planes on a bombing run, the kids peeled off and followed him, one by one, tailed by Mama, the old B29.

Once more the audience tried to settle down and resume attention to what was going on up front.

I thought, now we've got it made. The evening was so deceptively beautiful; the fire such a red-golden glow as it highlighted the faces of the singers. Sighing, I, like the campers, leaned back comfortably.

Moments later, out the corner of my eye, I picked up stirrings in fifth row center. First, I saw Mama glance across the plateau of her bosom at Papa, who began to assume the appearance of a candle melting. He knew what was coming; he recognized that Mama's investigative spirit was still on the prowl; he could tell she was considering a vacancy over there in second row right, where the log might offer a contour more sympathetic to her anatomy. As one, all youngsters looked to her for The Sign.

A rising of eyebrows signaled all bodies to stiffen expectantly. A realignment of the posterior signaled then to poise for takeoff. On red alert, Mama stretched across her brood to advise Papa of her new flight plan. Beaten, suffering from terminal helplessness, he shrugged, and melted some more. Every pair of eyes in the bowl watched; every shred of endurance strained at its outer limits.

Once more Mama heaved up onto her feet, again pulling her dress down all around, for she was a woman of impeccable morals and wanted that distinctly understood by everyone present.

Turning a quarter left; she lumbered across the aisle, and then plowed over the feet and laps and ravaged tempers of at least a dozen campers. Only by bunching themselves fetus-like were they able to arrange the passage of the Great Migration. I glued myself to my log. All we needed right then was the Lady Ranger wading into the fray to — well, to do what!

No longer was the choir the feature of the evening. It had become mere background music for the starring vehicle. What else could one call her but a vehicle! A Mack truck. I clenched my fists in frustration, and indulged some uncharitable thoughts.

This time, Mama sat still for five minutes, during which our attention actually drifted away from her, melding into appreciation of a Bach chorale. The evening could have been

one of the truly lovely ones of the summer had it stood a chance.

But then began new stirrings in the being that was Mama. The crowd detected them at once, and groaned. The choir's eyes strayed from their director, although they sang on gallantly.

Determined not to make this a triple feature, I nevertheless completely abandoned my Pleasant Face, and allowed myself the luxury of looking like a thundercloud. At the same time, my feet were serving notice that any minute they would refuse to obey command.

At the exact moment they rebelled and up I got, so also did Mama. Papa shrugged; so did the kids; up they all got.

While the whole works received vigorous directional nods toward a space two rows back of the plot they had occupied only minutes before, I sat down. Collapsed is a better word. I tried my best to look calm and collected. But only Mama was calm; I needed to be collected.

To spearhead the assault on the new site, Mama hoisted herself over a family of four, steamed majestically to the end of that row, where she stood tall until her mate and offspring had barged in alongside; then she gave arm signals for a mass sitting.

The youngsters, however, being chips off the old stump, had to have their inning. So, for the next few minutes, they jockeyed for favored positions — at odd intervals, pushing and shoving, leapfrogging and hurdling over one another and Papa and Mama like squirrels in an exercise wheel. Pretty soon the youngest wore out. He laid his head in Mama's lap and promptly went to sleep.

Now, aside from hisses and blowouts, as regular and full-bodied as if powered by a gasoline engine, quiet prevailed. Mama had stabilized; Papa began to doze; the kids, mouths ajar, stared into space; the choir, released from murderous competition, sang on with spirit; the audience, heaving more sighs, eased back in their seats.

For the next half hour it was so — until the little one suddenly awoke and began to whimper that he had to pee. That startled sleeping Papa into a series of snorts, grunts, and whistles right out of a pig sty. "Huh? Whazat? Um-m-mph."

Mama responded patiently. Over and over, in words of one syllable, she explained to Papa about Junior until she got through to him. Supplemental sign language conveyed to everyone, even those in the far rows, that a speedy exit had to be affected, and why. By now the choir must have forgotten what it came for.

Papa tossed the sleepy one over his shoulder and led the procession up the aisle. Only half awake himself, he wove and staggered. Mama and the rest of the clan brought up the rear. Row after row of campers began to breathe easier and to take hope, a few at a time, according to their faith in humanity. Most turned their attention back to the choir, still in there, bravely competing. I, too, sat back, folded my arms comfortably and luxuriated in a measure of relief. Once more it felt good to be alive. I surrendered to a sense of well-being.

But it proved to be premature. Before the family could make it all the way out of the bowl, Mama encountered a small obstruction somewhere in the duff of the aisle. Stumbling, down she went. And the going was sudden and unexpected enough that two youngsters immediately following, rear ended and fell over her.

Papa heard, of course. Even with the choir struggling on, he couldn't very well have missed a collapse of such proportions. Quickly grounding the young one, he rushed to her aid. Together, he and the oldest boy and girl tugged and pulled her to her feet.

It was impossible for a woman of Mama's bulk and presence to *just leave* a place. Before she could exit properly, there was the dress to be pulled down all around and a few adjustments to be made in her principal parts. And not only that but things had to be said about the incident — not later either, but there at the scene, while they were fresh in her mind.

When Mama took over the air to inform Papa and progeny about the cause of her mishap, everyone including the choir was likewise enlightened. It all came out during one of those brief silences between phrases when singers must pause to gather breath. While the choir inhaled, and in that instant before it attacked the resounding finale of Heavenly praises, Mama drew a bead on Papa's good ear, and roared, ". . . some goddam bastard rock!"

Now we knew. And with that, the whole caboodle vanished into the darkness, finally releasing everyone to a belated Sunday evening.

Many years later, Big Basin had another memorable choir — and not on a Sunday. It didn't just happen in for a picnic and concert. This one was planned for, and everything moved as perfectly as the hand of God and the work of Man could have made it.

The night of August 10, 1945, saw probably the most celebrated campfire in Big Basin's long history.

More than a week we had been waiting for the occasion. People all over the world waited. Japan was about to surrender, ending World War II. The crew had grown restless, the campers excited and expectant. When the great day drew near, I began to prepare for a Thanksgiving service.

In Santa Cruz, I located a clergyman who would stand ready to hurry upcanyon to the campfire when the big moment came. Immediately, he contacted his choir members and several superb musicians, among them two trumpet players I especially wanted. "Yes," the minister then assured me, "You can count on us. We consider this a privilege, believe me. Whichever evening it turns out to be, we'll all be with you at 7 o'clock."

They were. By the glow of the campfire, a red-robed choir of forty men and women streamed down both aisles, carrying candles, and singing the Processional. There, deep in the redwoods, it was a sight none of the many hundreds present will ever forget; nor are they likely to forget the minister's short inspirational talk, the violinist playing *Intermezzo* beside the fire, the choir's beloved hymns and chorales. And when the hour was over, the audience stood and everyone joined in singing "Onward Christian Soldiers."

Afterwards, all heads bowed in silent prayer of thanksgiving while from the mountainside nearby came "Taps," sweet and clear and infinitely sad. People wept openly; tears ran down my own cheeks and those of the choir. There were only a few dry eyes around the campfire that night. Hearts were too full. Some of us had lost boys in the fighting; countless more, because of the day's blessing, had been spared their loved ones.

Just after the last notes of "Taps" had slipped away among

the giants, an echo, faint but touching, drifted down from the other side of Big Basin — the second trumpet, muted. A scarcely audible gasp went through the crowd at the ethereal purity and tenderness.

Around the dying campfire, neither sound nor movement marred the stillness until some minutes after the final tremulous note had faded into nothingness somewhere out in the forest. Silently, then, the hundreds in and around the bowl filed out into the darkness. Together, by families, they went, finding no words, lost in their own thoughts and emotions.

The minister and his folk and I remained standing until every log seat was as empty as it would be in the middle of the night. In that time, I gazed up into the massive trees that towered over us all, and thought, “Your kind, which has witnessed the death of nations and even the disappearance of entire civilizations, has survived to see the end of yet another senseless carnage. For this one, thank you, Father.”

Turning, I watched the bobbing lanterns and flashlights wind away in many directions through the grove and on into the black void toward distant campgrounds.

Chapter Eight: Big Basin

How Come A Mother Tree in a Virgin Forest?

To become a naturalist there are two ways to go, I'm told: by accredited study in an academic situation, such as a college major in the natural sciences — or by heck and by gosh. Had I been able to foresee, I would have gone whole hog for genus and species instead of hockey. Freewheeling through life as I was in my late teens and early twenties, how could I ever have known that the California State Parks, the redwoods in particular, were going to center my future? By some early counselling fluke, I had been steered into the only identifiable prerequisite, Latin. I had even waded through four years of its classic fundamentals. Yet all I can remember of Gaul being divided into three parts was the nauseating passage that translated into: "Then Caesar threw up his breastworks." Such a revelation just about finished the subject as fundamental or even tolerable in any scheme of mine. Rather than fight on, I switched to more pleasing thoughts. And so it worked out that I learned on the job, starting with Charlie Lewis on our daily runs from john to john, and afterwards by whatever opportunity and means that popped up along the way.

A lady on one of my nature hikes years later probably summed it up in one beatific observation. "I always wondered what a naturalist was," she purred. "Now I know. Why, it's someone who *just* does what comes naturally."

While this boiled down to an oversimplification, it nonetheless appeared to be what I was *just* doing, all right. Or maybe my world had unfolded like that of the Milwaukee street sweeper. "Funny," he mused, trying to absorb it all. "You spend your life in a city's concrete canyons, like I done, and you don't really know if there is soil somewheres. You just have to take that for granite."

UCLA degree notwithstanding, I had always learned more permanently when "doing" at the scene than when hunched in a classroom lecture chair memorizing and trying to stay awake. For me, a tree or fern or wildflower didn't come to life on a page of print. But rising out of the earth and reaching for

the sun, it became a marvel of creation that I must learn about, appreciate, and care for. Better I should be told creekside that the small patch of horsetail along there has to have a well-watered spot to stand in; that during dinosaur times its height and size rivaled the immensity of the redwood; that for some reason known only to its Maker, it had been relegated to a much lesser stature, while the big trees went on to glory; that however humble the feathery blades, they held bits of silicon, which when rubbed on pots and pans, scoured them clean. So my lovely horsetail, like everything else, had found its place in the Great Plan after all, as the Scouring Rush — the pioneer Ajax. Its scientific name, *equisetum*, I learned only because Bud mentioned it in passing. And when he did, memory dredged up something out of ancient Gaul: *equus* — *equi* — *equestrian* — horse — *equisetum* — HORSETAIL! Well, blow me down!

Late in my park life, Bud Reddick came to Big Basin to enrich our three-man summer interpretive crew: Don Meadows, Leonard Penhale, and myself. And how he did enrich it. Both he and Don were members of the Science Department of Poly High in Long Beach.

Don, a warm friend and suave intellectual, was an entomologist and noted California historian with a merry sense of humor a real delight to all who accompanied him on his hikes and listened to him at campfires. Lennie, backscenes in the State Laboratory, was a Museum Curator and Technician, talented and skilled beyond belief — an unassuming perfectionist who knew in minute detail what he was about in preparing exhibits. As State Naturalist, he not only set up the Big Basin Nature Lodge but went on to build the beautiful one at Morro Bay and to supervise the construction of and contribute to interpretive displays in other State Parks and Monuments.

When Bud, a herpetologist, joined our little group, he brought to us a tremendous fund of reptilian savvy. Accompanying it, to our enjoyment, came a pixie-like sense of humor that spiced our association and companionship to no end. Small of stature but big of heart, and rugged, his generous mouth naturally curving upwards at the corners, Bud's gentle salty wit was always cocked and ready to go. Crew and campers alike loved him.

With these three and Arlan Sholes, whose peerless

electronic skills kept our campfires and dances running smoothly, I was proud to tag along. Never a quibble marred our harmony. Together we formed a public information team that I'm sure proved more than adequate in our efforts to interpret redwood country.

Big Basin's first museum was in the old hotel on the bank of Opal Creek, where the early day dirt road terminated. Inside, we hung oil paintings of pioneers and pioneering and of primitive logging and tanbark harvesting and hauling; also of one of the Sempervirens Club members, who were among the first to venture into what was then a remote grove of redwoods, and who fought mightily to save it from the sawmills.

Outside, on the veranda, we kept live exhibits, labeled so visitors could easily identify the various flora of forest and the higher elevation zone of chaparral. In the evenings, I talked of the trees, their history, and the wildlife until a regular Naturalist was employed. Then I dropped back to filling in on his days off and later going it alone a year before once again playing second fiddle, and even doing some small chores in the museum under the direction of Lennie Penhale. I always felt happy to work in the shadow of our incomparable Naturalists at Big Basin and Richardson Grove. Big Sur was a different story because the unusual wartime circumstances.

As with any public service, conducting nature hikes had its own specialized pleasures and irritations. A small group of ten to twenty campers was, of course, much easier to lead and talk with along a narrow trail than seventy-five to a hundred and more that went along on numerous occasions. Such a gang is apt to cut across switchbacks and plow up the forest as they jockey for a favorable position from which to see and hear. And some juveniles, most of them middle-aged, have incredibly sharp elbows and hip bones when it comes to pushing and bowling their way to the naturalist's side. There they tend to divert attention to their own more fascinating knowledge and hair-raising adventures as great outdoorsmen. Blessed be the Great Majority — all good listeners, who enjoy and question and seek to learn. Fie on the ones, studying to be halfwits, who thoughtlessly shatter the easy give and take of a group by slipping and sliding along upslope, scooping the

feet out from under those who faithfully keep to the trail, lest they loosen the hillside to erosion and grind underfoot delicate groundcover.

I must admit to my less admirable moments at such times. Usually smiling, but feeling pleasantly sadistic, I had a sneaky little way of maneuvering any offender to my downslope side. There, rest assured, his eagerness to seize and hold everyone's notice would soon couple with failure to watch where he was going — all the better to toboggan him into the creek below.

Most folk who have what it takes to climb out of the sack on a cold morning and rendezvous at 8 o'clock for a two-to-five-mile hike are cooperation itself. They draw together at stops, and listen avidly, arms around their youngsters. The kids, themselves, stand silently observant, soaking up every word about the burned-out redwood, the water ouzel's nest in the spray of the waterfall, the possibility that the hole high in the tanoak trunk might be a raccoon's nest. Ninety-nine percent of the campers regard these expeditions as one of the really gratifying privileges of their precious next-to-nature vacation days. And what a privilege to help them identify and understand what they see around them, and better comprehend the ecology and their own part in the perpetuation of it all. They make up a thousand times for the one or two who appear amused that you are so naive as to think that bird calls and a redwood's life story could possibly be of interest when there's physical ailments, psychoses, and sex to enjoy — not necessarily in that order.

A few tried my soul.

One of these was the Snowflake the Hippopotamus type — the overstuffed woman; the trick knee, one-way hiker that someone, preferably the handsomest man there, is supposed to piggyback through canyon and over ridge and across creek in order to return her to her brood in camp. Another was the "heart case" — also a woman. She fluttered at every turn. How daintily she suffered from "this terrible altitude" until put out of her misery — and everyone else's — by an offhand remark that "Believe it or not, you are now standing at less than 1,000 feet elevation."

More distractions to be weathered were unsupervised youngsters. My pet peeve were those who selected the nearest redwood for a scalping party, tearing round and round it with

knives and tomahawks and bloodcurdling yells, while their parents, serenely oblivious or functionally deaf, clustered with the adults.

And once or twice a summer, it seems, I had to be afflicted with Superman. Lip curled in a faint sneer, he liked to droop just beyond the group's fringe. Unmistakably favoring us with his presence, he hung around only for an opportunity to reveal how infallible was he, what a dunce was I.

Any number of these may have come close to doing just that, who knows! But not this one: he had tailed the group walking the Redwood Trail that morning, smoking a meerschaum pipe and looking sickeningly superior. And he had managed to contain himself quite well until we reached a section of the park called The Twisted Forest. There, for some reason, the fluted bark of the redwoods spirals clockwise up the great boles instead of ascending vertically. I had directed attention to a large burl high on one of the trunks and was pointing out the unusual bark formation when our genius came to life. The only sin committed to bring this on was to say that I didn't know why the bark on these particular trees had grown in such a manner.

Ah! but Superman did. He had made an exhaustive study of this very phenomenon. We all turned to him expectantly. Pompously upstaging, he took over. "Well," I thought, "at last I get this thing explained."

"You see," he began, pulling on his pipe, "it's really very simple. We scientists who dedicate our lives to seeking the truth eventually find the answers to mysteries like these, which of course illustrates one of Man's triumphs over Nature."

Although somewhat confused by that last assertion, I nevertheless felt as if I should be impressed. So I was. We were all ears before so much authority.

He let his pronouncement sink in for a few more pulls on his pipe, and then went on.

"The whole matter — in simple terms you can understand — narrows down to a single elemental fact. The planet, as you may know, is rotating clockwise with, naturally — ahem — some centrifugal force involved." Heads nodded. So far, so good. The man continued patiently. "In order to compensate for this force, Nature has twisted the bark of these trees

counterclockwise. You will note that the bark of all is spiraled in the same direction." Everyone looked around. True. Every tree *was* spiraling the same direction.

I thanked our benefactor for his helpfulness, and after a few appropriate comments, we started on down the path through the grove.

Presently I detoured us onto a little-used spur of the trail to a fine stand of Douglas-fir — and several inexcusably notable specimens of redwood.

At an advantageous spot, I gathered my group around. While I spoke glowingly of the firs, eyes had time to travel up their trunks, out along their graceful arms, and down the boles of the redwoods nearby.

Suddenly a commotion rippled through the ranks. Two small boys began punching each other and pointing excitedly. "Jeez!" one of them burst out, "look at the bark on *those* redwoods. They ain't twistin' like the other'n's. They're a-goin' the *other* way around!"

At such an astounding observation everyone turned to look. Dumbfounded surprise all over my face, I exclaimed, "Why, so they are!"

The only decent thing to do then was to peel off and lead the way toward the Perfect Tree, which was kind enough not to spiral in any direction but to soar straight up into the morning fog.

By the time we reached it, there was no longer an authority amongst us.

Later, as we passed a colony of creamy azaleas peering at their reflections in the mirror of Opal Creek, I took a moment to be grateful to the Builder of the massive columns all around for letting me be just ordinary.

Wholly satisfying was the fact that I first knew the giants as friends instead of a plant classification. They had become important as companions even before I learned about their fantastic ability to survive the disasters of centuries; before I found out that their family roots lay buried deep in antiquity, their woody tissue so saturated with tannin that most destructive insects would have none of them.

Even now I can visualize each one as an individual, its place in the forest; the taper of its crown; the form of its surface roots, clawing the earth to maintain a miracle of

balance, precarious at best; the healing of its wounds that tells so graphically of catastrophes endured century after century — storm, fire, flood; and now perhaps even Man.

Every year as long as I am able will find me visiting my old friends. I want to watch the progress of scar tissue gradually enclosing a certain blackened interior so completely that when the year 2000 rolls around, no one will know that it ever existed. I have to check on that gaping crack in one redwood too incredibly tall to be so slender, too willowy to defy winter gales howling in off the sea, yet enduring still. As I used to long ago, I'll be sure to curl up within the surface sprawl of my remote and secret giant that had always seemed to care and to sympathize when sometimes I felt lonesome in a park teeming with vacationers.

Most hikes move along smoothly. A few hikers turn up deaf — like the fellow, who, to all appearances has absorbed your every word, but may catch up with you ten paces farther on to ask for a private re-run on what you've just finished telling; the fellow who catches the witticism you offer in a low voice, and laughs his head off.

Upon occasion, organized groups go along. We had traveling university summer field trips, charter-bussed in for a few hours, senior citizen tours, and school nature study outings. At least, they were outings.

Bud long remembered the afternoon the high school pep and cheerleader squads joined perhaps two dozen campers on his Trail Beautiful hike.

That day, spirit bubbled in those vivacious teenage girls and their sponsors, every one clad in blue short-shorts and white blouses emblazoned with their school emblem, the eagle. At just about the second turn, all of their courteously suppressed pep and cheer erupted, blowing their tolerance for Nature. More than a dozen pairs of bare legs went shortcutting on ahead, galloping through ferns and oxalis, and disappearing around the mountainside. The happy squeals that went with them took minutes to fade into the distance enough for Bud to make himself audible to the rest of the group.

"So goes the birds," he quipped.

Soon afterwards, after another stop, a new girl-screaming

went up somewhere beyond. This time it filled the forest with terror. Alarmed, Bud and his party took off in a hurry.

Several turns farther on, they rounded the mountain and came upon the pep and cheer queens yelling as they had never yelled at any game, jumping and dancing about, wild-eyed and in pain, slapping at themselves and the air.

In breaking their own personal trail through the underbrush, they had plowed through a yellow jacket nest. Immediately, the maddened swarm started attacking every square inch of bare hide it could find with every available stinger. When the outraged wasps began to buzz down inside those eagle-crested blouses and up into shorts, clothes began to fly in all directions. Without thought for the gaping strangers clustered on the trail, the girls burst into a full-bodied birthday suit fire dance.

Always the gentleman first and naturalist next, Bud had one horrible moment of indecision — but only one. Swinging around toward his followers, he barked, “About face!” with all the authority of a drill sergeant. Then, resolutely, although under difficulties, he delivered himself of a surprisingly sensible talk on just why the spiketop on yonder redwood.

Meanwhile, the girls, *au naturel*, fanned on up the trail, rolled in the duff, and finally escaped their tormentors. None of us ever saw them in the park again.

Trail Beautiful was something less that afternoon, and Bud’s hike shorter than usual, but for his evening fireside talk, the girls had provided some living ammunition. The presentation, however, might have occasioned more serious thought than it did, if in introducing the subject matter Bud hadn’t slipped, as every now and then one of us did, and announced that he was going to talk on the birds and the bees. Maybe the effect was more lasting even so. Perhaps Bud deliberately planned it that way, too. He knew the value of humor in teaching.

Don had a somewhat different experience with one of his hikes, although for him it was just as memorable, and it also involved the female kind in shorts — he thought, and never really knew.

This took place on a day in late summer, just after an extremely rare and unseasonal drizzle. It had lasted for two days, and the dankness of the forest made Don question

whether anyone would care to hike up Pine Mountain or anywhere else for that matter. But at 10 AM a lively bunch of ex-GI's awaited him at the Bowl. All were well-swathed in knit caps, service boots, and heavy jackets; and to keep warm, they hopped from one foot to the other, shoulders hunched, hands rammed deep in pockets. Oh yes! Of course they were game. Let's go. So off they went.

Before leaving the campgrounds behind, bundled-up twin seven-year-old boys fell in line, and finally a very chunky young woman. Waddling out of the last campsite, her hair in lavender curlers, her feet scuffing along in white furry boudoir mules, she stopped the party in its tracks. Everyone stared as she piped gaily, "Wait for me! I've driven all the way from Maine to learn about your old redwoods, and this is the day, oh boy! Saved my pennies so's I could come out here and soak in your sunshine. Don't see any yet, but you-betcha, I'm prepared the second it appears. How about *that!*"

She was prepared, all right. Apparently her only concession to dripping redwoods, as far as Don and the others could make out, was a protective canopy of almost clear plastic, more tent than raincoat. It ballooned out over her considerable self, part-way down her bare legs, and was just frosty enough to raise a big fat question about the state of things within. A vague silhouette above bare legs amply confirmed her declaration of readiness to greet the sun in as close to her entirety as possible. But in an early morning chill? In the sop of a dark dreary day in a towering redwood forest?

Don shivered and harrumphhhhed and said something appropriate — said something polite anyway — and along with the other men and two boys tried to perfect their focus on the hike's objectives.

The party moved out. Don strode into the lead, tailgated by the happy-go-lucky easterner scuffing along in the soggy duff, followed closely by a string of veterans whose attention followed neither Don nor duff.

The illusion lingered, unverified and tantalizing. For Don it proved demoralizing as well. Periodically, he stopped and attempted to spark interest in the likes of banana slugs, geological formations, bird calls, and the view, but no one, including Don himself, would have noticed had he lapsed into transcendental meditation. Only one thing piqued curiosity

those three miles up and three miles down: what exactly was the situation inside that plastic?

However Don turned, this way or that, in explaining the marvels of Nature, he was at loss with the Greatest of These, planted as she was before him, mouth agape. He did the best he could with the Big Outdoors, but it wasn't good enough. Too many distractions eluded his control --such as *what on earth those darn kids were up to*, yet hesitating to ask lest they tell him. Anyhow, he knew.

Halfway up the mountain, the boys' sneaking suspicions had overpowered them. Every time Don pulled up to elucidate about something, completely absorbing the lady's attention, they had closed in at her back. Noses pressed against the frosted surface, they shaded their eyes and peered with all their might. Then between stops they argued in whispers whether she was or wasn't. No one ever did find out.

One of my hikes got only as far as the South Campground. There we had an impromptu nature demonstration of sorts, although the lesson of it escaped me. Perhaps it served to show how itchy a buck deer can become in late summer, when the velvet covering his antlers is hanging in shreds and he is trying to rub it off on anything handy.

That morning we were a big group, and that may have been what set off Old Sam. One of our long-time bucks, and fond of people, he had been peacefully nibbling pancakes at a campsite only moments before. Now, strolling across the campground road, he looked up, heard a burst of happy chatter, and bolted. In seeking refuge in another campsite, he lunged into a clothesline strung between two small trees. He didn't become entangled in it. Old Sam was too smart for that, but he did ram his antlers into a pair of red bathing trunks hung out to dry. For him they were a perfect fit. Upended, they draped his rack from far point to far point as if they had been especially tailored.

All we could do was scatter while he reared and plunged, determined to rid himself of the latest in deer haberdashery. It took an hour and a neat roping-and-tying trick before the poor fellow could be released from his gaudy two-legged crown. By then we had given up on Union Creek for the day, and Old

Sam had made up his mind to forsake the South Campground forever.

About sixty million years ago, many kinds of redwoods flourished across the Northern Hemisphere. They populated Western Europe, Asia, North America, Alaska, Iceland, Greenland, and even lonely St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea when those places were mild and tropical. But starting about a million years ago, they were ground to extinction under advancing ice sheets.

When the glaciers melted back for the last time, only three kinds of redwoods remained. They had lived far enough south that the continental ice sheets hadn't reached them. In 1948 one of these, known as the Dawn Redwood and thought to have been extinct for twenty million years, was discovered in the interior of China. The other two, surviving in our own West, have long been publicized and visited.

The incredibly tall *Sequoia sempervirens* or coast redwood, blankets much of the Coast Range with dense forests for nearly five hundred miles from Southwestern Oregon to well below Big Sur in Central California. The really massive *Sequoiadendron giganteum* — the sequoias or Big Trees — grow in about seventy isolated groves for nearly two hundred fifty miles in the middle elevations along the western front of the Sierra Nevada. During the Ice Age, their supposedly continuous band was broken into isolated groves by glacial rivers, which slid down from ice fields that capped the Sierra and quarried out a number of deep canyons, such as the Yosemite, Tuolumne, and the Kings.

This information and visual comparison of the three redwoods is thoughtfully and graphically depicted by colorful exhibits, complete with diagrams and maps, in a number of the redwood parks. Through the simplest possible presentation, visitors can better understand and therefore enjoy and appreciate. Hundreds of thousands do every year.

Yet here was this good woman I happened to observe in the Big Basin Nature Lodge, strolling from one diorama to another, studying first the display of the Coast Redwood, then that of the Sierra Big Tree, and finally the one of China's Dawn Redwood; completely fascinated, marveling aloud all the way.

Until she made ready to leave, I was as pleased about her

as if I had done the exhibits and grown the redwoods myself. Alas, at the last minute she shot it all down.

Smiling sweetly, she queried in a plaintive voice, "Could you tell me, Miss, where I might find the three trees? Will it take long? Do I have to walk to them or can I drive?"

Mother told me there would be days like these.

But then I remember the elderly gentleman from the Great Lakes region, who had traveled far to contribute something to our day. He turned up at Headquarters especially to warn us about our redwoods. "I think you ought to know," he began earnestly, "just what these redwoods if yours are capable of if'n you plant 'em close by your house."

We suspected, but we listened anyway.

He went on: "My grandpappy came back to Michigan from logging awhile out here in the 1840s. Built hisself a home. Plunked a seed in the ground aside the front room window, y'know, so's he could look out and watch it sprout and grow. And whataya think happened?"

He didn't wait for us to think. His tone waxed righteously indignant, "Why, the durn thing growed up fine, right through the rest of Gramp's life and through my daddy's life and right through mine. But now its roots are a-hikin' the whole house up on that corner so's you can durn well roll downhill from the parlor to the kitchen sink."

Let that be a lesson to anyone who's of a mind to plant redwood, seed or seedling, near a home. Just about the time for the second or third generation, you may start to have problems. Yea verily, and unto the fourth generation. By then, and from then on out, it would be much easier to chop the house down.

When you are the only woman on a state park ranger crew, whether it be three man or seventeen, as ours was, it's possible to lead a sometimes hectic life. For me, teasing now and then rose to unbelievable heights. It was all in good clean fun. I hope I took my lumps like a lady; certainly I was treated like one in every park by every crew. Perhaps it was because it never occurred to me to expect anything else.

But don't think my mettle wasn't tested.

On days when no crisis impended and everything moved along much too smoothly to be real, someone had better look

out. Those became the incubation periods for practical jokes. I might find a Sally Rand poster tacked on the office wall, its wording slightly changed and personalized; or discover a kangaroo mouse in a desk drawer; or, like one time, receive an abrupt and foxy introduction to a brand new phase of on-the-job training.

At my desk in the Inner Sanctum that afternoon, while engrossed in plans for the campfire, I sensed an unnatural silence developing. And when nearly every man of our crew happened to be hanging around, looking innocent and unconcerned, things got suspect in a hurry. This time, more than suspect.

I had not noticed when Don entered slyly, his arms full of something, which, with no preamble whatever, he dumped into my lap. Then, grinning like the others, he bounced back out of range.

I could have had a choice or a reflex. Instincts didn't count. Glancing down at the wriggling mass in my lap, I instantaneously chose a heart attack to any other form of speedy escape; yet, within the flicker of an eyelash, something about all the forked tongues struck a responsive note in whatever was left of me just then, and Dutch stubbornness took over. Or maybe it was a simple cataleptic fit. I know I was unable to breathe for a full minute. And I could tell without looking that suspense was killing those monkeys waiting there for me to scream, throw the whole squirming works into the air, and tear out of there and through the forest, not slowing until I passed the South Gate House.

I still regret disappointing them. I loved them all so much, and they were sagging so pathetically when I wrapped the two king snakes around one wrist, the gopher, rosy boa, and ringneck around the other, and left, struggling not to pass out but just to saunter away as one might to the daily sunbath.

In Park Center, on my snail-pace rush to the Museum lab, I *would* have to encounter two old timers who had just arrived. In the joy of reunion, I forgot my unprecedented state of being, and hurried toward them, all anticipation — and with open arms. That was the last time they ever trusted a bear hug of mine without first frisking me.

Anyway, the heart-stopping day of the snakes was the

beginning of my appreciation of the reptile kind. Bud's priceless gift, delivered by Don, is a delight to me still.

Many were the spring nights following until Bud's death that we roamed desert backroads, collecting all kinds of reptiles. We carried nylon sacks, which I held while Bud dropped our catch into them — lizards, snakes, rattlers included, mostly sidewinders. They had crawled out of the cold sands of the desert night to curl up and sleep on the macadam, still warm from the daytime heat.

When our bags were reasonably filled, we would return to my desert house and put the bags in the refrigerator for awhile, until the morning light was just right. Then out they'd come for photographing in a natural setting. During their sojourn in the refrigerator, they had lapsed into semi-hibernation, thinking winter had come, I suppose. This way we could photograph at close range, and secure some fine slides for school and the campfires to come. The red diamondbacks and Mojave greens plus the feisty little sidewinders coiled obligingly and stared into the camera lens but were too stupefied to strike. Anyway, beyond a third to a half of their length, their normal striking distance, we felt safe.

After our picture-taking was over, and Bud had made ready to leave for home, we took them all out into the desert and let them go, for each had his special place in the natural order of things.

Bud's addition to the Big Basin crew immeasurably enriched the museum as well as the campfires and the hike program. While Lennie painstakingly mounted birds and animals and prepared exhibit units to appear as lifelike as possible, both Bud and Don contributed, each in his own way: Don by collecting and mounting indigenous insects; Bud by collecting and arranging live reptile displays. He made proper screened-glassed cases for his charges and saw to their care with kindly consideration. My help was only incidental and minimal, but my education and experience broadened no end.

For example, as time went on I ceased to curdle at the mere touch of a snake, and so was elected to help Bud sun and air our reptiles at least once a week. A tall log stockade enclosed an area at the rear of the museum. With a proper snake stick, made of a fly rod with metal curve welded near the tip, Bud lifted the rattlers out of their indoor quarters into a sack, and

then turned them loose out back in what we came to call “the exercise yard.” It was our combined job then, sometimes mine alone, to herd the snakes with the snake stick so they wouldn’t slip through a crack in the stockade or slither under the building. Afterwards, back in the sack they went and into their glass house. Once again visitors could see and note the difference between the flat, triangular-headed poisonous kind and the taper-headed, non-poisonous ones in the other cage.

But too many squeals of thrill and revulsion, too many noses flattened against the glass did things to our pregnant Pacific rattler. She nearly had a nervous breakdown. She did begin to abort. Bud moved swiftly. He removed her and her three stillborn babies, placing her on some grass at the bottom of one of our tall park trash cans, which we kept in the lab for reptilian privacy. Then he lowered a 15-watt bulb in there for warmth against shock. Too late. Every one of her thirteen young were born dead. Normally they would have arrived squirming and deadly.

Feeding Bud’s little people was where I balked. To hand over a poor mouse to be ingested was for me just too much. Nor would I participate in live-trapping them. The day came, though, that Bud led me into the lab and made me agonize once, so I’d see firsthand how Nature worked.

Round and round the bottom of the can scurried the mouse, the rattler’s flat head hovering. Then for some reason the mouse turned his back for a second, and as soon as he did, “out of sight, out of mind.” Seeming to have no memory of the menace behind him, he began grooming himself as if he were alone in his nest. The rattler struck. Instantaneously it was all over. I stepped out the back door and heaved.

Another day I happened into the lab after the feeding of four rattlers and a beautiful banded king snake, each in its own separate can. The mice were well on their way down those long, cold tubes — in the king snake, already about a foot.

A few minutes later, one of the rangers entered by the back door, accidentally slamming it and frightening the rattlers so much that they coiled and set up a loud buzzing. This frightened the king snake. Upon hearing the hated warning, he instinctively arose to his natural response, burped up the mouse, and prepared to do battle to the death, although,

segregated as he was, there was no need. Kings can do away with rattlers in short order. They wrap around them, crushing them to death, for like boas, they are constrictors.

I never did handle a rattler, even though the time came when both Bud and I considered me ready. I would have been careful and cautious, not only because it's my disposition, but also I had better be and knew it. Too bad that in my anticipation, I made a serious mistake.

I popped into Headquarters and announced to Chief Ranger Lloyd Lively that today was going to be the day.

Lloyd never had shared one iota of my growing interest in the rattler kind; therefore, what I was about to do all but turned him inside out. Up through the roof rifled his perpetual calm and good humor. In a voice that would have paled a Fourth of July celebration, he illuminated the Inner Sanctum. From the head of the park, orders came through loud and clear, emphatic and final.

"You'll do no such thing, *understand?* We've got something else to do around here besides sweat over those campfires of yours while you lie at death's door in some hospital. You get the heck back to whatever you were doing and see that you turn up in one healthy piece tonight. Go get yourself extinct some other time!"

I crept out, ears hanging low, and dragged back to the lab to make some exhibit labels for Lennie.

Naturalist's wives don't always know what to expect next. Anita Penhale, Lennie's wife didn't, although she entered into his activities and projects with zest. Still, she could never be certain when opening their refrigerator what all she would find inside.

Sometimes her strawberry pie or cold leftover chicken or Jell-O salad would have been pushed aside to make room for a stiffened hawk or a very dead skunk. Only after the State saw fit to provide a facility for the lab could she rest assured that what was meant for the table wouldn't have absorbed some overly ripe wildlife aroma.

I did enjoy going out with Lennie to photograph his mounted specimens. This he always did before placing them in the natural settings he had created in the museum exhibit units. For example, he set the Great Horned Owl on a high stump in a dark part of the forest, where the big orange eyes

would contrast to advantage. To photograph the coyote, we drove up to the sunshine of the next higher life zone. There Lennie arranged the animal among some manzanita bushes so he'd look as if he had just run across the open slope in search of cover. The scene was as real as life until Lennie got down on his knees, took out his pocket comb, and painstakingly drew it across the coyote's flanks and hindquarters until finally, to his satisfaction, every hair was in place for the official photo.

Bud wasn't the only one of us with a live exhibit. In a funny slantwise way I had my own a couple of summers before he came.

How can I possibly lump onto a few pages what took eight wild months to live? Several years ago I gave up trying and wrote a book about him — *Frosty, a Raccoon to Remember* — which Chronicle Books of San Francisco published in hardcover and Simon and Schuster paperbacked in their Pocket Book line. The story made two book clubs and became enormously popular, and the thousands who saw and experienced Frosty either in my cabin or at campfire or in Santa Cruz or the beach will never forget him, that's for sure.

Orphaned and brought to me when only as big as a kitten and just as cuddly, he proceeded to shatter my daily schedule and make goo of my heart. Also he almost drained the Picnic Area of its water supply one busy Sunday. He had grown to the size where he could climb up onto the toilet seat and pull the flush lever one time after another. Well, it always resulted in such a happy gurgling pond, a perfect place to jump into and splash around when he was left alone, as he had to be when I was at work.

Frosty's ingenuity was boundless and nonstop. His shiny black eyes shone with mischief, gentle but awfully premeditated. During an hour or two of self-entertainment, he displaced and relocated everything movable he came to inside the cabin, for of course he was never chained or caged or restricted except by four walls and a roof. When on twenty-four hour call, how else would you raise a sweet little raccoon?

My long days became more than exhausting. Too much time had to be allotted for finding out what Frosty had done with my things. It was fun, anyway. Much of the time that I was home, the park grapevine usually filled my cabin with

curious visitors who were never quite prepared for the warm welcome they received.

Frosty adored his humans. He'd greet some with a flying leap onto the bosoms, bowling the smaller ones over backwards, riding them to the floor. He'd rearrange ladies' hairdos and finger their jewelry and end up ramming an arm down their dress fronts. He developed into a connoisseur of cleavages.

And that wasn't all. He had something for everyone. If one of his male guests happened to sit down, Frosty was on his lap in a second. Some had little packages in their shirt pockets that he liked to grab, so he could roll the cigarettes back and forth between the palms of his hands. And more than just those aroused his interest. Most of the men had zippers in their pants, and he soon figured out how they worked; how far he could reach in when they did.

Regardless of whether all of this could be classified as natural science, Frosty nevertheless continually educated his public about what was possible to coonhood. That summer, more people learned the wide range of raccoon intelligence and talents than before or since, because Frosty was the liveliest live exhibit we could possibly have had. And I felt it my duty as well as my pride and joy to show him off and share him with as many hundreds of Big Basin visitors as I could.

So I took him to campfire when I made my raccoon talks. He sat on my shoulder, a leg around each side of my neck, his baby-like hands gripping my hair, my cheeks, my ears, while he watched the fire and the sea of animated faces beyond. And one night his chattering cries of pleasure were answered from one of the tanoaks at the side of the bowl. A big coon, in full view of several hundred campers, scrambled up the trunk and sat on a limb, watching, while Frosty and I finished our talk.

Wherever I have gone, raccoons and I have communicated and collaborated, even in a locale or two they were reported to have abandoned. If one is within miles, I swear he'll find his way to me or I to him. Should someday I stand on the fifty-yard line in the Los Angeles coliseum, I'm sure a furry ball with mask and striped tail will come rumbling out there. For me, this is an immeasurable joy, and, I'm told, carries a better recommendation than being chased by squirrels — which also

has been my lot. Imagine dander getting up just because of interest in their acorn cache!

More understanding were the striped chipmunks, who, like the raccoons, seemed to look upon me as simply another manifestation of their own kind. One dug a hole in the wool comforter on my bed while I was at campfire and had her babies in the batting. Another tumbled into an uncovered pail of water on my back porch and would have drowned if I hadn't heard the frantic splashing and hurried to its rescue. That taught me something; lest campers, too, grow so careless, I passed the lesson on to them in one of my evening talks.

But sad indeed was the pitiful one I held in the palm of my hand another day; yet his lifeless body may have served to protect all other chipmunks as nothing else ever could have. For this I was to feel mighty grateful.

A boy had enticed him close with a sack of peanuts, and then by way of target practice, killed him with a rock. A cluster of screaming, crying youngsters brought the broken body to me with the heartrending story.

At fireside that night I told of the incident. A horrified silence settled over the crowd. For some minutes I spoke of the bright-eyed little fellow, recalling how he had made so many happy with his love of life, his complete trust; how merrily he had bounded toward those who offered to share their goodies; how he had delighted in climbing over anyone who would sit on the ground beside his own private tree. And I concluded by saying that in his memory we had all better do a fine job of making it up to the rest of the Big Basin chipmunks.

Evidently it was one of my more dramatic efforts.

Later in the evening, a group of youngsters came to me and in whispers asked for the chipmunk's body so they could bury it. Touched, I of course agreed, and at the close of campfire, announced the event.

Next afternoon every child in Big Basin — and many adults — attended the impressive graveside services, conducted by the children themselves. The little fellow was tenderly laid to rest at the foot of his own special tree, where he had lived and died. In sacrificing his life, he had promoted a Be Kind to Animals consciousness that no amount of literature or visual aids or ranger exhortations could ever have

called forth so effectively. He also achieved what no human I know of ever did — a splendid redwood giant for a headstone.

And all the good didn't end with wildflowers placed on a tiny mound. Before the week was out, every chipmunk in the park must have suffered a stomach ache to end all stomach aches. The Big Basin grocery store and those downcanyon in Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, and Felton sold out their nutty treats. Never again did we hear of one of our chipmunks being abused. Rather, they were almost loved to death. To say the very least, all flourished abundantly with shiny coats, bodies round and plump, and spirits high.

Chapter Nine: Big Basin

Off Season in the Redwoods

With the sharpness of an ax falling, Labor Day chopped off the vacation season. By nightfall, the park was almost deserted. The campgrounds would have been ghostly had it not been for the few Old Timers who would remain until winter storms drove them out.

Most of my chores completed, and feeling somewhat lonely, I sauntered from one camp group to another; filled with nostalgia, I remembered who had occupied each site so happily only hours before. Already the raucous Steller's jays had taken over, squawking their loudest and scrapping with the feisty chipmunks and one another over crumbs and tidbits left behind. They hovered in tattletale umbrellas over the coons, who now began scrounging everywhere, wondering what had happened to their source of supply.

Strange, indeed, that I could stand so many places in and near Park Center, and neither see nor hear anything except the everyday sights and sounds of a forest; small sounds made by falling leaves and cones and the scampering of tiny feet in the duff and over the pithy bark of the redwoods. Missing was wood smoke in the air and the aroma of bacon frying and coffee burbling in dented pots on countless rock stoves. How unmistakable that the human element had vanished from the scene. Well, good! At last the giants could start healing their trampled root systems. I could almost sense their relief as they rested, waiting for the merciful rains that would soon loosen and revitalize the compacted earth around them.

For awhile I felt empty without all the activity and animated chatter of my own kind. But when I stayed on, as I did a few times, I found that by the afternoon following Labor Day, I had adjusted well to the strangeness of the park. In fact, by lunchtime Tuesday, I could empathize completely with the rangers, who, having watched the steady stream of departure the day before, now lapsed into a state of limp euphoria. The season's last mighty outpouring was all over.

As long as two cars remained in the park, there was always the possibility that they would round a blind turn and bulls-eye each other. To see the boys, Stetsons pushed back

on their heads, I wondered if they could still rise to any such emergency; or should another man appear who had lost his dentures down a john and wanted the sewage disposal plant probed, could they face that challenge again.

At Headquarters, everyone had assembled in fatigues to hash over winter work projects, and get moving. Only one of us would remain at the office to greet what public might wander in and want to know where they could find a tree to drive through. For perhaps a week, the Chief would huddle at his desk, buried under requisitions, contract forms, subpurchase orders, and report blanks piled up before him, spilling out of wire baskets and drawers, the steel cabinet, and the typewriter — to be filled out in triplicate, of course.

Not for days would the man lose his harassed look; not until the Big Weekend receipts were totaled up and a stack of long official envelopes dropped into the mail. Then and only then could he overcome his pallor and dilated pupils and those deeply etched facial lines the public finds so fascinatingly outdoorsy. As circulation once more resumed, the puffs from his pipe would become more leisurely and less like steam blasts from a pile driver. And finally, when that cocked-and-at-the-ready look had faded and he began to mumble about a bridge restoration, cleanup of the creek bed, and repair of rock barbecue pits, we knew winter had set in, although the days might be still sunny and bright, even warm; one in a million for artists and photographers.

Spring in redwood country is vibrant with new life, daintily expressed, but autumn is really the colorful time of year. Dogwood and hazelnut, the red alders and the maples and willows along the streams turn all shades of yellow and orange, and stand out brilliantly from the somber greens of the forest. The days before rain starts and temperatures plunge are ideal for the mass of outdoor work that must be accomplished before another summer, regardless of the weather.

During those early years, how cherished the quitting time at day's end, when a man hurried home to dry and warm himself beside an old fashioned wood stove. After modernization struck, replacing those wood stoves with oil heaters and Flamo-powered Wedgewood ranges, something special and comforting and personal disappeared from life in park and forest.

I remember that we went up to the dump to retrieve some of the coal the CCC boys had tossed there when their camp was deactivated in the thirties. This, together with the nubbins left from downed stuff and tree removal, furnished us with the most satisfactory kind of heat. Of an evening, in every home, life centered around the wood stove. The old iron potbellies will appear and reappear, at least in art form and folklore as long as American man and his memory survives. Certainly the image is fondly engraved on my heart.

During the first several decades in Big Basin, our small hand-lumbered houses were Frontier Shack Primitive, but free to us. They stood in the main grove, down at the bottom of the Basin under the mightiest of redwoods.

Two were merely additions to the maintenance shops; several more clustered near the Lodge and its employee dormitory. As the State developed the park, and the staff grew accordingly, more housing became a must. Time had come for the permanent crew to voice some feelings of long standing. More than anything, they and their families wanted out from under the giants and up sunnier and therefore drier, healthier places. They also wanted plenty of distance between themselves and the public, which was always peering through windows, and making itself at home inside the four walls.

Mel and Mary Whittaker occupied the "big house" — the old Warden's Office — that had been moved up from the creek bank to the new Center at the meadow. It stood next to the Nature Lodge, or museum, and the concession building, providing handy access for visitor inspection and convenience via both front and back doors.

"Hey, you all!" Mel whooped one afternoon, blowing into Headquarters. "I know a gal that admires my legs! Had a phone call just as I finished my shower. Went into the hallway to answer. Nuthin' but shorts on, you know, and there she stood. Feasted her eyes on my gams until I hung up. Then darned if she didn't hold out a tin cup, and wondered if she might borrow a pinch of salt for their hamburgers." Mel and Mary never knew who they'd discover strolling down their long hallway and into their kitchen.

One of their unbidden visitors received more than she had come for.

Mary had the electric mixer going on full in a big bowl of

whipping cream, her back turned to the kitchen door, when this woman walked in. Of course Mary couldn't hear the polite knock on the kitchen cabinet, and the woman couldn't seem to rise above the racket. But when moment after moment was unproductive, she decided to enter into competition — to *win*.

On the counter, within reach, lay a plastic bag of dried beans. To make her presence felt, she snatched it up and banged it down on the counter so hard the container split, avalanching beans into the sink and all over the linoleum. Mary heard *that* all right. Surprised and startled, she whirled around. Mixer still in hand, loaded with whipped cream, Mary sprayed the woman from head to toe, and the room from floor to ceiling.

When the air cleared and the invader had wiped the Whittaker evening desert from her face, she was able at last to sputter her reason for living. "C-Could you tell me, please, where to find a minister? My daughter says she has to get married."

And so it went with the rest of us, too, surrounded as we were by campers, picnickers, and sightseers enjoying the big trees of Park Center --especially on weekends and holidays.

"All right, let's see what we can do about this," said The State in a first flush of concern for the day-to-day happiness and welfare of its park folk. "Tell you what — we'll hold a park meeting, and discuss what you'd like in the way of better housing. Bring the wives. After all, *they're* the ones to be satisfied with what we build and where we build it. *They'll* have good, practical ideas."

How hearts melted over such tender consideration. And at the cozy get-together with the Brass, the wives did present their heart's desire, which boiled down to just three requests:

- 1) houses located out of reach of any big trees
- 2) set on a sunny well-drained slope, like three miles up the Old Bloom Grade above Flea Potrero, and
- 3) far enough apart that families wouldn't be reading each other's thoughts. In an isolated pocket such as Big Basin, where ten or so families necessarily had to be closely associated, request number 3 could have been the difference between peace and undeclared war.

So — no big redwoods; sunny, well-drained slopes; privacy. Simple guidelines, entirely feasible. All of them.

“Great!” said The State, its compassion expanding by the hour.

Happy anticipation filled the air. Sketches of the proposed six-room residences were drawn and approved. A new day had dawned. Excitement ran high as the time came for construction to begin.

Which it eventually did. In The State’s sudden affluence, four six-room \$17,000 houses began to take shape — for those times, architectural wonders only slightly below the grandeur of Hearst Castle.

Yet, even though the likes of them had never before graced any state park, they still fell short of heart’s desire. True, they stood far from the curious public and out from under the big redwoods of Park Center. For that, praises be. But they were not as dreamed of and supposedly agreed upon — a distance apart, on sunny, well-drained slopes above Bloom’s Grade. They rose side by side among the skunk cabbages of Flea Potrero!

The famous Olmsted Report cites Flea Potrero as a swamp-meadow, unique in redwood country, a glorious array of flora, a wildlife habitat to be preserved at all costs.

Another classic booboo surfaced soon after Big Basin’s anguish, when the Powers designed the campground of another state park. A hundred and fifty beautiful campsites had been scheduled for appropriate places in that area. On the drawing board, one hundred and forty-nine were already penciled in. Now the big question was where to put the last one.

Well, over there in the corner of the plot plan is a small vacant spot that needs something in it to balance out the picture prettily. Right? Right. Okay, that’s where number one hundred-fifty goes.

Winter snows melted, work went forward. Number one hundred-fifty, neat and inviting, took shape in the corner space indicated on the blueprint. But for that site to host warm bodies, both automotive and human, the State had to request, justify, and appropriate funds because the only way campers could reach lonely one hundred fifty would have to be by bridge, constructed across a creek.

Meanwhile, back in Big Basin, disappointment over its new houses was taking some time to wear off. The coons,

however, were ecstatic. They were having a ball, scouting frogs in the marsh underneath each home. Flea Potrero, like the Park Center, was a natural runoff catch basin, and during its first winter of human occupancy, it caught and caught and caught.

Gradually, the splendid new structures sank deeper and deeper into the muck. Anyone stepping outside might sink up to his knees, giving rise to the fear that he could even disappear from view unless promptly rescued.

Gradually responding to cries for help, the State now had to appropriate \$10,000 per house to jack it up out of the Protrero. Then, because the houses all looked stork-legged, the rangers were instructed to skin the topsoil off the adjacent slopes, and with it, fill in, around, and under the buildings.

Alas! The subsoil left behind on the now barren slopes was of such consistency that fertilizer would have been required to mold it into acceptable bricks. By the time the last yard of dirt was patted down and leveled, one of redwood country's really precious forest jewels resembled nothing so much as a freshly bulldozed urban subdivision, raw and ugly.

But of course that also could be remedied with a quick twist of the wrist. "Guess you'd better landscape," The State directed. "Make everything look nice and woodsy."

Thus it happened that most of the crew achieved their ambition to quit home life under the big trees while they were still ahead; before disaster should crash down, such as it had in times past. A runny nose from November until May was nothing compared to getting squashed under hundreds of tons of redwood — or even under one of the smaller limbs.

I never did live anywhere but down under the big ones, nor did I ever wish to be anywhere else. Perhaps I kept much too busy and too much in love with the giants to dwell upon what I knew about them; perhaps I didn't have sense enough to face facts; perhaps, being young, I fell happily but rashly short of fear. Good fortune held, but before my park service ended, my blood had iced several times.

My first predawn call came during my second summer, when a tree dropped across a tent with five youngsters asleep inside. Although the tree was only a small tanoak, it sent four children to the hospital, and one little girl died there under it.

Not long after that, in the pitch dark of the night, a

piercing telltale r-r-r-i-i-i-ppp! ejected me from bed. Planted in the middle of the room, scarcely awake, eyes wide but unseeing, I stood paralyzed while a horrendous roar mushroomed into thunder. With a deafening crash, the big tree hit the earth, flipping me up off the floor. The redwood, a small one as redwoods go, had stood more than a half mile from our main area. Despite its football field reach, it had not endangered anyone. Still, the fact of its demise left everyone in Big Basin in a state of shock. "Suppose it had pointed our way instead of harmlessly the other direction," people kept speculating. "And suppose it had been one of the big ones."

Well, it didn't and it wasn't, and so life picked up where it had stopped for the duration of several galloping heartbeats. A few giants have pointed our direction, though. Some have flattened cars and camps. During my years, at least, none ever claimed a human victim — a phenomenon that surely has to be as phenomenal as the trees themselves. Someone above those lofty crowns must have been watching over redwood forest people, both visitor and worker. Most of us grew strong in the belief that we were protected, and most of us added to this, plain common sense. For one, I can cite Fred Canham, richly endowed with a woodsman's natural instincts.

Mr. Moody had moved Fred into an old house in the Center, between the Lodge and a cabin later to become mine. The first thing Fred did there, even before stowing his gear, was to spend some time eyeing the treetops and studying the angle of the surrounding giants in relationship to his house. Curiosity brought me to his side to ask what he was about.

"See those scraggly limbs up there?" he demanded, pointing to the dark canopy far above.

I saw them.

"That crown is dying," he went on. "Means trouble sooner or later. Means if it goes, my bedroom gets ironed out. I have to remember to jump up and run like Hell down my hallway."

"Yes, but what about that redwood over there?" I asked, indicating one that leaned toward Fred's new quarters.

"No problem. Strong as iron. Built itself a brace by widening the annual rings on the weak side. Probly sturdier than a lot of these others that's standin' straight. But see that one way up that far slope yonder, across the creek? That'n

could give up, come a big wind. Base all burnt out on the down side, and erosion's cut in."

"So?"

Fred's eyebrows flew up into his hair. "Just the tip of that thing could make matchwood out of both my house and the Lodge. Headed exactly right."

But that one didn't finish Fred's house. It was the bad crown overhead. Less than a month later, on a quiet autumn night, Fred awoke to the dreaded r-r-r-i-i-i-p-p-p! Snatching his pants, he raced down his long hallway. Right behind him, squash went the bedroom. Before he could reach the front door, a limb slightly more than a foot in diameter, plunged almost three hundred feet, shot through the ceiling and floor of the hallway just ahead of him, and embedded itself in the ground beneath. Like a great arrow that had just found its mark, the thing was still twanging when Fred plowed into it and skinned his face.

So much for that cabin.

A few years afterwards, a neighboring cabin met its everlasting in a similar way. In the dead of night, when the Wellse were asleep, their baby in her crib nearby began to whimper. One of them got up and brought her in bed with them. Only minutes passed before a big redwood fell across the room and the crib, narrowly missing the bed.

So much for that cabin.

Another year, again in the dark hours, Bill and Mabel Kenyon had reason to remember Bill's estimate of their own situation, and to react instantaneously to his often-repeated warning: "Remember, Mabel, any time we hear that rip, scam out the front door, *not* the back."

That's how the Kenyons lived through Big Basin — out the front door. The back part of the house, the kitchen, garage, much of their furniture, and their car were flattened as if a skyscraper had collapsed onto them. The State, of course, was not responsible for such acts of God and occupational hazards.

Anyway, bye-bye cabin. The ranks were thinning.

All the little houses down in Park Center, including my own, have disappeared from the scene, and for various reasons. Most of the Lodge cabins were removed when the Lodge closed, which was probably just as well. There had been too many near misses in this over-mature main grove. Not all

of them derived from the inky darkness and howling winds of winter or even from breezy spring and autumn nights. Some came on hot, windless summer afternoons, when down in the bottom of that splendid forest, all was beautiful and photogenic, a scene of tranquility and enjoyment.

Through some amazing natural selection for survival, the redwood has managed to maintain its balance on a shallow pocket of roots, no more than a half dozen feet deep, and minus an anchoring taproot to hook into the earth. In full view, great claws of surface roots grip the ground tenaciously, while just beneath the forest floor, a network of fine feeder roots spreads horizontally far and wide.

On hot days, which do occur occasionally, the sun draws the sap up the columns to the crowns, two or three hundred feet above. Without so much as a wisp of moving air, the giant can become top-heavy and crash, usually taking other trees with it.

I remember one hot August day, when a camper, an ardent berry-gatherer and gourmet cook, had just set three of her huckleberry pies on a log to cool, and suddenly a part of the crown of a nearby redwood gave way.

Straight down it crashed, missing the tent and car but drawing a bull's-eye on the three pies. The woman, a stolid Swedish concert singer, was of a disposition that might well have remained impassive through the explosion of Krakatoa. She took one deadpan look at the small disaster before her, and in a low monotone, muttered, "My God, what now!" and packed up and left.

And how vivid still is the memory of the warm evening of another summer, when, for a huge Douglas-fir, the time had come.

Everyone in Park Center heard the sharp cr-r-r-a-a-a-a-ckk! On the outdoor dance floor, all gaiety stopped cold. Assistant Ranger Clyde Newlin, who happened to be present, immediately sprang into action.

Motioning to Arlan to shut off the music, and quieting the hubbub with a raised hand, he listened intently, at the same time studying the dark canopy of big trees overhead.

Another piercing rip, and he had the giant located. Calmly, then, he directed the dancers to safety in a far corner while the big tree came crashing down across the opposite one.

For years I rehearsed in my mind how I would empty the bowl of its hundreds of people should we hear the awesome cr-r-a-ackk! during campfire — either from earthquake or by the natural toppling of a redwood that had lived out its centuries. Fortunately, the emergency never came.

An unusual car-meets-redwood (rather than redwood-meets-car) happening took place downcanyon a few miles from Big Basin last year. It had the modern touch.

The giant fell with an earth-shaking roar across one of the county roads just as a small compact car approached at top speed, too late to stop. No one was hurt; on the contrary, two young people suddenly acquired a conversation piece to end all conversation pieces.

Plowing into the prostrate tree, the “Bug” bounced into the air as if made of rubber, and landed astraddle of the bole. And there it sat, many feet above the road, two wheels spinning on each side of the trunk.

All of these things point up why redwood people fall in love with the vast emptiness of the Mojave Desert. I visit my redwood forests often and stay as long as I can, but when night comes, nothing looks more welcome than a little town in a great big clearing.

After the crew had cleaned the Picnic Area and all the camp groups of Labor Day trivia left behind, autumn settled peacefully and colorfully over redwood country. The wild ones, having few outlanders to panhandle anymore, now turned to us for treats and companionship. The forest came alive by day as well as by night, when families — sometimes whole gangs — of coons swarmed out into the sunshine. Usually these animals are nocturnal, but they like the daytime, too. They sleep when they get good and ready. If they feel like roaming at noonday, that’s when they roam — if they are among friends like their park folk. In our relatively mild climate, coons do not really hibernate, although if the weather is continuously unpleasant, cold and rainy, they will hole up for days at a stretch. So all I had to do was step to my door and call, or even bang on the window, and a furry mob would rush the back porch and rumble into my kitchen. Often I counted eighteen to twenty — and all ages.

Of an evening the coons liked to show up regularly to

share goodies and sometimes join us around the potbelly stove for late snacks.

Upon occasion, they were followed onto the back porch by one of the deer, almost always one of the older generations, who knew us well. It had already eaten the geraniums out of the window boxes of the park residences. With none left to munch on, it liked to crane its neck through the open doorway, gazing in, managing to look pitifully starved. That never failed to pay off big.

Gradually the days grew colder and damper, and finally the rains came pouring down. Embattled coons, growling and snarling, sounded a disturbed note in the icy nights. Even in the mildest afternoon, few people found Big Basin anything but bone-chilling. Potbelly stoves were fired up twenty-four hours a day, and moss quickly formed on things stored in closets. Some of the crew even insisted that moss would gather on our backs if we stood still very long.

One cold morning, I drove the pickup out to the shops with a message. As I pulled into the yards, I saw a mama coon and three youngsters waiting for the noon lunch hour and the tasty bits they had reason to expect. All four moved restlessly over the patch of macadam in front of the garages. In a minute I saw why. The surface was white with frost. Mama kept sitting up on her haunches, cupping her hands, and blowing on them for warmth.

Now the deer rutting season was upon us. Once in a while we could hear the crack of antlers as bucks met head-on in conflict. Their coats had thickened and turned gray, and their necks had swollen greatly in preparation for the mating battles of November and December.

No matter what, the winter work program went forward.

During drenching storms, the boys usually worked indoors. Otherwise, warmly clothed, they whittled away at a myriad of outdoor projects. On cold but quiet days, after our chores were done, we found time at last to act like visitors, and have our own weenie bakes and fish fries.

All summer long we had envied the carefree vacationers who gathered round picnic fare that looked and smelled irresistible. Now we, too, could go down to the Picnic Area and enjoy.

Fun times, those. Dusk closed in early of course. By

mid-afternoon the sun had vanished behind the usual PM fog bank; the forest stood tall, dim, and silent. We loved the change. Wool sweaters under heavy jackets kept us snug, and a wood fire, flaming brightly in our rock stoves, buoyed our spirits.

For all the lack of the human element, we never felt lonely in that deserted Picnic Area. Company was ever-present.

Steller's Jays sat in the bushes and on the big redwood plank table, squawking suggestively as we ate. Deer leaned over our shoulders and drooled, and sometimes nudged us on the back with their noses as a reminder that they had stomachs, too; coons got up on the benches beside us and pointedly begrudged every bite that went into our mouths instead of theirs.

Naturally we shared. During those happy evenings, we may have eaten less than in the warm seclusion of our homes, but no one ever went hungry. You say you'd have retreated to the cabin, closed the door, and pulled down the shades — and consumed all of that food yourselves? Outside, our friends would only whimper and pace around — and who could digest with all that going on?

We bought day-old bread and other bakery goods by the gunny sack from the grocers downcanyon, and fed the raccoons *first*. That gave us a head start, so we'd stand some chance of eating much of our own meal. But when a soft little hand reaches out and touches you lightly, as a gentle hint not to forget the starving, you don't. The Coon Survival Society had us and our after-season picnics all figured out — and under control.

With the departure of the vacationing throngs, we saw mountain lions occasionally; not down in the Basin, itself, except once, at the sewage disposal plant in the Waddell Canyon; but mostly at night, crossing the road in front of the car as we drove the upper roads out of the Basin. For those precious seconds of wild feline grace, we were always grateful.

Although no bears had been around to pester anyone in the Santa Cruz Mountains or Big Sur's Santa Lucia Range since the middle 1880s, things changed somewhat when Darwin Tate became Chief of the State Division of Beaches and Parks.

By talking Fish and Game out of two black cubs, he

arranged and imported a problem for our park service — as if we didn't have a superabundance already.

Big Sur was chosen as The Place, and upon the cubs' arrival, Bill Kenyon turned them over to Assistant Ranger Lloyd Lively for custody. Having been trained as an ornamental horticulturist, he was of course just the man for the job.

"Somehow we've got to raise these little guys," Bill mused. "Train 'em to be around people without loving them to death."

"To what end?" Lloyd wanted to know, even then, thinking in terms of aims and objectives.

Bill shrugged, and grinned helpfully. "Not sure yet, but I think Mr. Tate has it in mind to ride the two bears on a float next New Year's Rose Parade. *And* without interpreting some innocent bystander in terms of garbage."

Lloyd gave up. "Okay, where do we sleep the little monsters?"

"Only place strong enough to hold 'em is the diesel plant."

And so, for two darling cubs, the diesel plant on the hill became home. By night, anyway. By day, Lloyd had them out learning to be bears. On two separate leashes they went exploring through the park, playing in the Big Sur River, inspecting the camp and picnic areas, mixing sociably with the few visitors, who lionized and spoiled them.

The only trouble was that the bears grew. And they grew. And they developed two sturdy bodies and two sturdily diverse personalities, each with its own individual preferences. Lloyd was not only spread-eagled one minute, when the bears romped away from him in opposite directions, but straight-jacketed the next, as they changed direction and bounded back across him to the other side.

To try and outmaneuver them, Lloyd got the brilliant idea of a new leash — a Y sort of thing that assured better control and fewer contortions of his arms and shoulders. The big problem was that he dreamed it up too late. By then, the cubs were half grown. Came the afternoon, when in a surprising singleness of thought, they burst the bonds of cubhood and made lickety-split for adolescence. And with a bear power no one realized they had.

Their wits and strength appeared to be challenged by a big

tree dead ahead. In unison for a change, and with no preamble whatever, the two made a beeline for it, dragging Lloyd along behind. Up the trunk they clambered, clear to the first limb. There the bears paused to contemplate the man hanging in midair below — at the other end of their leash. And there the bears sat, until tiring of their caper, they lowered themselves and Lloyd to the ground.

Blessings on the stern-looking gal from the Humane Society who came down the following week to inspect. Happily she was so unhappy with the cubs' hilltop suite, their diet, their recreation, and probably their potty training, that she felt impelled to relieve us of them. And so ended the story of Silverlocks and the Two Bears, as the rangers came to dub the episode.

And Lloyd had done everything but regurgitate for his two charges!

An incident of an entirely different kind took place on a late spring afternoon in one of our northeastern parks, where bears are much more natural to the scene than park men.

A new ranger walked the far trails, "sweeping" them in preparation for the coming season's use. Moseying along, checking for slides and cave-ins, he began to have the creepy sensation of being followed. He scanned the scene. Nothing in sight. He shrugged, and moved on.

Somewhat later, he not only sensed a presence, he heard it, faint but unmistakable — close behind him. He slowed, listening. Sure enough, footfalls on the rocky trail; soft pads; breathing, too — heavy and warm. The man could feel it on the back of his neck.

Suddenly tension snapped. He whirled around — and stood toe-to-toe, belly-to-belly with a huge brown bear, reared up on his hind legs! The ranger, a sturdy Swiss, not too long from the homeland, found himself staring into a wide open mouth, its full complement of teeth gleaming in the sun.

For a moment he was too stiff with shock to move. Then the mountain man in him reacted instinctively and with the speed of lightning.

Powered by a mighty gulp of smog-free air, years of Alpine living came yodeling out of him — and down the animal's throat. Nothing in the poor beast's past had ever prepared him for such a frontal assault, nor did he have time

to cringe protectively. Before this blast, everything internal from his tongue to his tail had to have vibrated and rattled like a crystal chandelier in a sonic boom.

And so ended that bear episode. The only uproar set off by it was the bombardment of rocks and gravel, kicked up by several hundred pounds of pure terror, scrambling for traction enough to clear the entire area at the first possible split second.

Although Big Basin could expect no bears, it had its own unique problems to face after vacationers had gone. One of them was the little matter of the dynamite cache a couple of miles up the winding Saratoga Road — the main traveled route out of the Basin, toward San Francisco. The explosives had been left “as was” by the CCC boys in the early thirties, when the contingent pulled out; no one thought to mention the existence of the abandoned cache.

Almost a decade passed. Then one day a patrolling ranger happened to notice what looked like a path, leading from the road into a part of the park where no trail had ever been built. Curious, he parked the pickup and followed the path around and behind a hillock that bordered the highway. The path ended at a heavily padlocked door in the hillside. Streaming out from under the door was a fluid that appeared to be nitroglycerin. Dumbfounded, the ranger didn’t run or even walk away. He tiptoed, and made sure not to cough.

In no time, Chief Ranger Roy Cushing and others of the crew were staring in wonder and dismay at what was obviously the entrance to an old storehouse of high explosives that had sat in solitary confinement so long that it had separated from the sawdust. With the passing of years, it had disintegrated into enough danger that the slightest sound or movement might set it off. Just what we needed in a forest of giant redwoods!

“Gad!” Roy exclaimed, after the group had eased away from the site and back to the road. “One car coming too fast and too close around this curve, and we’ve all had it. It could blow this hillside and road to smithereens.”

“and take a whole passel of big trees along with it!”

Roy coasted the pickup around a few turns before starting the motor. It seemed better that way just then.

Time dragged on. The problem was almost too hideous to contemplate. All winter the crew fretted, not knowing how to

rid themselves of their monster before someone should sneeze, and trigger massive destruction.

One day Roy had a thought. "I've called Ordnance at Fort Ord," he announced. "They're on their way now. They'll come up with something, you bet. After all, this is their kind of thing."

In an hour or so, a jeepful of sapping specialists drove in, listened to the story, then tailed Roy and several of the men up to the site.

One look at the nitroglycerin running out from under the door and the lieutenant and his specialists shook their heads. Said the officer, "Sorry. I've got a wife and three kids. I'm not messing with the likes of this. Not me."

"What do we do then?" Roy demanded, at total loss.

The lieutenant scratched his head. "Hard to say. Only thing I can suggest is to call the Air Force and see if you can get them to fly in and bomb this place. That might work."

Bomb our park? Full of giant redwoods?

Anyway, the military departed, leaving us stuck with our nightmarish problem, and no answer in sight.

Again time dragged on, more ominously than ever.

One of the crew took me up to view our prize hazard. Before we started to ease along the path, he warned, "Whatever you do, watch your feet. Don't you dare stumble, and don't say anything out loud. Got it?"

I did. I looked and saw, and we tiptoed back to the road.

More time passed. No one seemed to know what to do with the hill that round the clock, threatened to blow up.

Dread only magnified when one of the men discovered a jalopy parked near the path. Investigating, and to his horror, he came upon a couple of teenagers with a hot little weenie-bake fire going not twenty feet from the magazine!

We all shriveled a bit more. And even still more after some prowler shot the lock off the door.

Then the whole scary business was taken care of for us, and for some time we were totally unaware of it.

One of the park system's older and more rugged individualists — a ranger from a park north of San Francisco Bay — stopped by on his day off, partly to be sociable, mostly out of curiosity. He had heard about our secret dilemma.

Roy told him how to find the cache and cautioned him for

God's sakes to tread softly. The man was incapable of treading softly, but he did find the cache. Looking the situation over fearlessly and still in one piece, he decided that all those explosives going to waste was a pity, indeed. Besides, he had need for some of it. What the hell!

Snorting with impatience, I'm sure, since he was a can-do man, prone to snorting at any deterrent to whatever he needed for his park, he simply walked into the magazine and picked up one of the boxes of better-looking stuff that he judged to be safe and usable. And after striding to the highway, he tossed it in the back of his pickup. Then he decided to return for more. All of that accomplished, the ranger started the International. With no bent for wasting time, he threw it in gear and lurched off in a cloud of dust.

Around the umpteen blind curves of the Saratoga Road he jolted and roared, for once having been a city ambulance driver, Hurry was his middle name.

Up the Skyline Boulevard, that tops the mountainous San Francisco Peninsula he whizzed, then across Golden Gate Park and the Golden Gate Bridge.

The following week, when calling Roy to thank him for blessings appropriated, he casually mentioned what he had witnessed in making that last crossing,

"Damned if the whole Pacific Fleet wasn't steaming in under me!" he exclaimed, "Quite a sight, I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

The wonder of it was that the fleet missed him.

Of such were the rugged men of early days, who, when they saw a job to be done, rode in and did it. Now. And how! And without all that monkey business of planning, requisitions, EIR'S and appropriations — along with miles and miles and miles of red tape to get tangled up in and delay the action.

With some of them rode the angels.

Chapter Ten

What Do Rangers Do All Winter — Sleep?

The traveling public is not always easy on the working hours and nervous systems of perpetually undermanned ranger crews. About midway of The Season, well after the Fourth of July rush, when a park like Big Basin still teemed with humanity, we usually sagged to a physical and emotional low, incongruously known as The Hump.

For a few days thereafter, until the famous second wind refilled our sails, little things invariably blossomed into whoppers. At such times, Chief Rangers found it prudent to start talking winter work program. Even sketchy ideas and reminders jotted on scratch pads had a way of dulling the reality behind the popular parks-wide adage that “everything happens in Big Basin.”

So then, best to divert attention from the big calendar on the wall; best to provide a glimpse of that magic hour following Labor Day, when life would shift from taxpayers, to dams and bridges and electric cables to be strung up one ravine and down another while a steady downpour pelted the oilskins.

The seasonal low is rarely more than temporary. A State Park Ranger is a thinking man, at work exactly where he wants to be, because, more than anything he enjoys parks and people enjoying parks. Had he preferred solitude, he would have gone into Forestry or Fish and Game or the wood products industry. But have his moment he does, like any other mere human. And during those times, he can become picturesque when bellowing that after three to four months of the Great American Public, cat skinning in December is nothing — *nothing!* And neither is blasting out stumps the size of baby grand pianos or wading in waist-deep to free clogged and swollen ice-cold creeks. No gripes from anybody. No hurt feelings. No demanding of rights. No soothing of the oppressed, whose camping neighbor slams all forty of his car doors after 11 PM. Just wet, piercing cold and runny noses — and hallelujah! An eight-hour day! In mid-July, such prospects

as these have given many a ranger strength enough to respond courteously when queried, “Hey fella, what do you guys do in the winter here — curl up before your fireplace and sleep?”

Fireplace? *What fireplace!* Those were for city people, who simply wouldn’t be without one. Park residence architects designed only for oil or bottled gas heat, doubtless unaware that forests are full of trees; that at times we seemed to have more wood lying down than standing up.

And so eventually, as autumn arrived, park kids would huddle in a little group to await the school bus, and park wives would bolt for town and a hairdo. Gone were dazed souls, wandering through park homes in search of telephones and restrooms. Now it would be possible to negotiate the turn between bedroom and bath without bumping into some lady hoping to borrow a disposable diaper.

Callers are infrequent once winter really closes in on redwood country — by late October or early November. Because the big trees grow only within the coastal fog belt, where precipitation is heavy (from sixty inches at the southern tip of their range to as many as a hundred and forty-four inches in one place near the northern tip), torrents can and do thunder from the sky as if to drown or pound into bits all living things. Temperatures take a dive. Moss gathers everywhere but on electric blankets, and so much moisture condenses on plumbing fixtures that it collects in puddles that require constant mopping.

Our beloved vacation heaven turns into an icy sponge — and the ranger along with it. To do his work, he must don several layers of wool; on top of those, oilskins and boots as dainty as pontoons. Then he heads out into the sop to help dig a ditch for a mile or two of pipeline.

Late afternoon finds him slogging homeward, perhaps to a problem that may fill his evening. The oil heater has blown — again — redecorating the living room and his wife.

Next morning, 8 AM and still dark, back to the romantic outdoors. By now the Pacific Front may have swelled into full gale, a shrieking monster, tearing widowmakers out of whipping treetops and flinging them to the forest floor. How do redwood men live on and on? They say it’s because their lovingly appointed guardian angels never take a day off all winter long.

Such must have been the case with Lou Donaldson, although not from any winter violence.

In Big Basin's early days, planning as it is presently known did not exist. Life was still simple; the shortest distance between need and supply was still a straight line. What a Chief Ranger figured should be done now was done. Now. Today. He and whoever else constituted the crew went to work and completed the job with no fanfare but an outpouring of sweat.

For privies, no miles of red tape, no endless consultations up the ladder of supervisory and administrative echelons, no requisitions, no site plan reviews, no environmental impact reports, both aesthetic and seismic; nor elaborate front and side elevations in color renderings, run through the State Department of Architecture. And when an outhouse qualified for retirement, without delay the thing was moved to another site and the old pit covered over. Ditches for pipes and cables were dug as necessary, the hardware laid, the excavations filled. No maps of their whereabouts were ever drawn, no records kept. A natural accumulation of forest litter soon obliterated the telltale scars.

Time passed; so did rangers. Maintenance problems eventually developed. The only way to locate the trouble was to guess where it might be, then probe the forest floor in that general direction, because memory of those Pre-Dawn subterranean wonders had slipped into the forgotten long ago.

Every now and then, though, as archaeologists stumble upon prehistoric fossils, a modern day ranger falls over — or into — works of another age, accidentally discovering something that had been sought for years.

Lou, aboard a D3 tractor, bound for the Sempervirens Dam site, dropped in on one of these. Like a down express elevator, the big Cat let go. When Lou finally caught up with his stomach, his eye level and the tread tracks were perfectly aligned.

This wasn't any ordinary pit that Lou and the Cat now occupied. Some rangers of bygone days had moved its outhouse to a new vista and filled in the abandoned one. An administration or two later, other park men had strung a 2,300-volt primary underground cable through that area, and unknowingly across the ancient pit. Lou looked down and saw that he had just solved the long-standing puzzle of the

power line's whereabouts. Huddled on the hot seat in the jaws of death, his realization was jolting.

Fortunately, the insulation had not broken, but with all that tonnage resting on it, no telling what moment it might. Bill Weatherbee and Darrell Knoeffler, at work nearby, came on a dead run. "Lou! Don't move! *Don't move! Sit tight!*" they both yelled in heroic effort to make themselves heard above the din.

Lou sat still all right, scarcely breathing, squirting cold perspiration from every pore. Had he panicked and tried to scramble up onto the sopping ground, he might have lighted up like a theater marquee.

The cable, caught under the Cat treads, was holding so far, but it was anyone's guess when it would snap and then start spitting darts of blue brilliance. Only after one of the men raced the mile out to the South Gate house and threw the switch was quiet restored to the forest, and a future restored to Lou.

What they needed, the crew agreed afterwards, was that Army ordnance-sapping squad that had responded to wartime calls for help with the likes of over-age dynamite caches and downed enemy buzz bombs. Perhaps they and their gear could locate all the underground workings that had turned Big Basin into a kind of root-bound booby-trap. Somehow it never got done. The boys went on with their chores, of course — in their happy-go-lucky way — mildly aware of widowmakers overhead and pitfalls underfoot that could spring more surprises than a Fun House on a beach amusement pier. Too many after-season chores required their attention and effort to permit dwelling on life's vicissitudes. Some had to be finished before the rains began.

One involved a new retaining wall for the incinerator. The problem there was not so much the work to be accomplished as the cement to do it with. The way things too often happened, what was requested did not come, and what wasn't requested arrived by the truck load.

Chief Ranger Lloyd Lively, being every inch the well-organized leader, laid plans for a retaining wall for the incinerator project in May, before the hordes of visitors began arriving. He filled out all of Sacramento's newly designed and expanded forms for requisitioning a large supply of cement,

and sent them to District Office, which then bucked the papers on to the capitol for perusal, due consideration, and blessing. But before the triplicates made it through Due Process, summer and fall had slipped into history. The monsoons of winter had already blown in. For weeks the forest lay drenched; for as many weeks afterwards, nothing even began to dry.

By the requisition's first anniversary, the following May, the incinerator wall had failed drastically, and by the time another slummer and fall had come and gone, and the second winter's deluges were at hand, it was ready for last rites. The moment for action had arrived and was stomping on the welcome mat.

So had it also in Sacramento. A responsive bit of cheer came in the mail, cancelling all previous requisitions and purchase orders, and requesting new ones. Someone's desk had become too cluttered. A clean swipe had taken care of the nuisance.

Blotto went the cement work, for by the time new requisitions had been written, haggled over, approved, legislated, and appropriated for from park to capitol, yet another summer had passed.

Once again the rains were imminent. This time, before thunderheads could build up, Lloyd and the boys took off downcanyon to appropriate bags of cement any way they could. Sympathy rampant from many private sources saved the day. Hurrying back to the Basin with a loaded truck, the crew flew into the rockwork like squirrels burying those last-minute nuts before snowfall.

When a big load of requisitioned cement finally did arrive months later, a record deluge was inundating the scene.

On the first warm day the following April, the crew piled the State cement into the park pickup, and then had a ball going around the countryside bestowing sunshine and repaying their debts. That's how the incinerator became usable as early as two and a half years after the first plans were presented. That's how there was an incinerator at all. Wasn't it the Seabees who welcomed the Marines to Tarawa? Some of our men had been Seabees.

Beloved of San Franciscans is 2,600 foot Mount Tamalpais,

rising above bay and sea just north of the Golden Gate. The state park on this mountainous peninsula surrounds beautiful Muir Woods National Monument, a pocket of big redwoods at the mountain's seaward base, and extends quite a distance up the peak. Within it are a number of wooded camp and picnic areas, widely separated. A natural mountain theater plus a trail system through redwood lined canyons and a grove of wind-sculptured cypress, along the upper level stretches of chaparral, and across adjacent grasslands, attracts people by the hundreds to Mt. Tam. From practically anywhere on it, the panorama is spectacular. Just as spectacular are park problems.

In the first place, none of the park is level. The recreation areas are connected by fifteen miles of winding two-lane highway that climbs past steep ravines, dropping precipitously alongside every foot of the way to the summit. Fog pours over the lower ridges and hogbacks from sea to bay like thick syrup, enveloping everything and everybody, including lunatic drivers, who roar around the curves at top speed.

Any ranger transferred to Mt. Tam soon becomes part goat out of pure necessity. And the first time he carries a loaded garbage can from the picnic area down the path to the dump truck, he finds how advantageous it would be to have one leg shorter than the other. Mel Whittaker, promoted from Assistant Ranger at Big Basin to Chief at Mt. Tam, in one of those September shifts of personnel, soon discovered just what that step up the ladder was going to mean for him.

Ten minutes after he had moved the family into the park residence near the foot of the mountain, his Unlimited Hours began.

The telephone rang. From ten miles up the mountain, loud and clear, came a plea of desperation. "Hey, Mel! We've got a lulu going here at the incinerator. Something's gone haywire. Kind of an unusual situation."

"What, for instance?"

"Well, we've got a length of copper tubing hooked up from the pit to a boiler in the shops so's we can have hot water to hose out the garbage cans with."

"And?"

"Well, you know we've always used just a small amount

of kindling at one time for burning in the pit. The guys up at the government radar station here on the mountain know that, too, but this morning when they brought in their trash they went and piled on a stack of wooden crates they wanted to get rid of. Things are hotter'n hell and getting hotter by the minute. Can you come up?"

By the time Mel drove in, the boiler was literally dancing under a full head of steam, and threatening to fly into bits. Instant action was indicated.

Not one to dally, Mel decided to release the steam through an attached hose, and to hold it down by standing on it.

He underestimated the pressure that had been building up. When the steam burst out in a blood-chilling roar, it flipped him off the hose as if he were a speck of dirt, and then thrashed around over the floor like a wounded animal in mortal agony. To escape a mauling amid the scalding clouds, Mel went into a jump rope routine, all the while trying to edge toward the nearest exit. Before he could clear it, the writhing hose caught up with him, slapped him fore and aft, and slammed him onto the floor, where it searched out one pant leg and fired straight up the thing.

Afterwards, in the doctor's office down in Mill Valley, Mel, with second-degree burns spurned hospitalization. "I've got to go home," he protested, wincing at every word. "I'm chief up there. I've got to be handy to the boys."

For the rest of the day, no new developments blossomed. Mel, salvaged, bandaged, and sedated, had only to decide whether to stand up or lie down. But the old mountain had just begun to work on him as it had on previous rangers. Maliciously, it waited for the evening fog and the dark of the moonless night.

Then came a banging on the front door.

For the ten-dozen-th time that month, a car had missed a loop a few miles above and plunged into one of the ravines. The people following had merely glimpsed the car disappearing over the side, so dense was the fog. Very, very slowly they had crept back down the mountain to seek help.

Mel immediately called the Mill Valley ambulance, but how was the driver ever to find his way out of the village, much less up that socked-in mountain! Stiff-legged and

groaning, Mel groped his way through the pea soup to the pickup.

Sacramento had never seen any justification in the repeated requisitions for wire basket stretchers in this park of cliffs and abysses. So the crew loaded up what they had — the bulky canvass ones that were about as practical and maneuverable as old dress forms. With two of the men walking ahead of the car, they crept up the road until at last they heard cries of the injured somewhere in the gray void.

At this point, everyone but Mel eased blindly down into the canyon, a bush at a time. Mel remained at roadside, groaning along with the foghorn in San Francisco Bay far below, for he had chosen to work the pulling end of a long, long rope. Together with the stretcher party, he hauled and grunted each cumbersome and unwieldy load three hundred feet up the mountainside to the road by headlight illumination. And four had been injured.

Next morning, burns plus a sacroiliac.

Men are surprisingly determined and durable creatures when responsible for life, limb, and park. Mel didn't look as if he'd last the second day, but he knew he had to, because the day was Sunday.

Rangers must last through Sundays, even if they have to be propped up and a smile pressed into their faces. As a concession to his pain, Mel did agree to one of the crew driving him on dawn to dark patrol. The old mountain countered that one by bringing them to a blind curve at the same moment as three motorcyclists, not quite clever enough to careen around it and squeak through the sliver of daylight between the pickup and a Greyhound bus.

Time out to collect bits and pieces from hillside and canyon.

Later that day, when Mel was settling slowly by the stern, a motorist flagged him down. "Ranger, a gang of Pachucos is beating the tar out a GI down near Bootjack. Poor guy was just a-hikin' along the road mindin' his own business, and they jumped him. Hurry!"

Five turns before the pickup screeched to a halt beside the unconscious soldier, the Pachucos saw it coming and took off down the mountain, merrily nicking fenders all the way.

Before they could cross the Golden Gate Bridge, the police nabbed them for speeding.

The following week, the court smiled benignly and said boys would be boys, and if they'd pay for whatever dents the fender-owners objected to, all would be forgiven.

At such a pace and in such a manner, Mel Chief-Rangered Mt. Tamalpais for three years. Then transfer to Columbia State Historic Park in the open Sierra foothills came through to joy his heart. After a long tour in the redwoods, the old Forty-niner gold town in the Mother Lode felt like the Pastures of Heaven, a haven of wonder and peace forever.

By no means dire is all off-season life in redwood country. John McKenzie, the Curator at Fort Ross State Historical Monument, had no worries about over-age dynamite or falling trees or the vagaries of a capricious mountain. The old fort, standing in somber majesty atop a barren cliff overlooking the Pacific and the cove where the Russian otter hunters of the early 1800s built their redwood ships, is isolated and lonely; John's chief concern, people and houses; his pet peeve, hunters.

Although monstrous winter gales sweep in off the sea there, a few travelers manage to turn up when the coast road is scarcely passable. They spend hours in the Russian Orthodox Chapel and the Commander's House, now a museum; and some like to prowl through the blockhouses at two corners of the high quadrangular stockade.

John remembers the dreary autumn day when a young couple drove into the compound and parked. After glancing around and noticing that there were no other visitors, they talked excitedly for a few minutes, and then entered the southwest blockhouse, carrying a sleeping bag. Fort Ross had offered no overnight facilities since 1812, when it was built. The empty tower-like blockhouses are only for inspection and viewing, as surely any sane and sober individual would deduce.

Jess Rodriguez, John's neophyte assistant, puzzled for a moment. This party was definitely not to be condoned.

Slipping into the dim interior of the lower floor, Jess stood quietly, listening. Muffled talk and some low-key giggling drifted down from above. It sounded cozy and very private.

Jess, a brand new ranger, and understandably still unsure of himself wasn't constituted to barge on upstairs into what might well be a delicate situation. He slipped outside to think before making a noisy reentry, scraping his boots on the door-sill, coughing, clearing his throat, stomping around on the lower floor. The old blockhouse responded with woody echoes loud enough to proclaim an invading Army.

In the windowless upstairs, no scrambling around; no hurried preparation to appear proper and decent; just more grunts and muffled giggles. What choice was there but to clatter up the stairs and put a stop to this unseemly episode.

On the top step, Jess gulped and cleared his throat for the last time. No substitute for duty could he find now, regardless of how intimate the scene about to be interrupted. Cautiously he opened the door. In the semidarkness all he could make out was the sleeping bag in action.

"Er — pardon me," he mumbled. "Ah — er — farther on up the road is a motel. At Fort Bragg you can"

The young woman broke in, her voice a-tremble with urgency. "Oh, wait a minute, won't you? We won't be much longer. Please — not just yet," she begged, "we're almost through."

Jess's Adam's apple took a dive. Nevertheless, he gathered himself together and geared to do his job.

He never had to. Before he could state his authority and enumerate the State's objections to such goings on in public, the young man relieved him of what would have been the most embarrassing moment of his life.

"There," he sighed, with happiness fairly dripping, "we've taken care of that, my sweet one. Boy, How I would have hated to lose those great shots of the Russian River and Bodega Bay. Damn this jammed-up film roll anyway. Well, thanks to the good old sleeping bag, I'm sure I got the ratty thing out without exposing it to light. Here, Mary Ann, stick it in your pocket. I'll reload outside, where I can see what I'm doing."

Jess's eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, watched Mary Ann get up off the floor, take the film, and help the young man out of the sleeping bag. Together they rolled it up and got ready to depart.

A few minutes later, calling their thanks and a friendly

goodbye, they disappeared upcoast in the drifting fog. Jess's initiation into the state parks had been given a flying start.

The year-round problem at Fort Ross was housing — or rather the unreasonable facsimile thereof.

Because the historic outpost stands on the bleak North Coast, John found day-to-day existence a challenge to both body and spirit. A hardy, enduring man, devoted to the old fort, and an authority on its history, he lived for years in a decrepit house beside the chapel. Soon after its construction as a ranch house, about 1840, it must have become an architectural sieve. Since then, no rat had been too obese to gain entrance through any of the dozen gaps where the logs had parted or been eaten away by salt-laden elements. Even the skunks had found easy access. As soon as they discovered all the steaks on the hoof congregating indoors after dark, they joined the throng and cleaned house for John in noisy all-night massacres.

The outhouse, also more than a century old, was even better air-conditioned than the residence. Along the back edge, the hillside still retreated steadily before the onslaught of chilly Northerners that whipped away the crumbling earth and gusted mournfully just beneath the seat, discouraging profound thought.

On nights that rains pounded, John slept with a chamber on his stomach, and a number of pans at other strategic places around over the bed. When the time came that he wished to marry, and hinted for a better deal, Sacramento saw no bona fide justification for new quarters. Time dragged on.

One day though, to John's amazement, someone Up Top appeared to have been saved. All at once the State tore feverishly into another of its \$17,000 wonders just across the road.

Complete to hardwood floors, modern kitchen, and tile bathroom, the standard park residence arose in breathtaking grandeur on that dreary headland; yet for five years, it would not be occupied. Someone had neglected to investigate the water supply that was to have given life and meaning to the shiny fixtures. With the silly season now in full flower, John had to postpone his wedding until by attrition a local residence, fit for a bride, could be obtained.

Progress marched on, however. The Commander's House

got an oil stove to comfort the Russian ghosts — although afterwards, someone discovered that the oil distributor did not deliver that far upcoast. For a long time the ghosts had to shiver and shake despite the spasm of modernization that had struck the only real stronghold of the Russians in America.

I am well aware that some forests have to be opened once a year to help Nature balance her deer and their food supply. But now and then I am just sadistic enough to enjoy a hunter's predicament. One of these involved John and a newly-rich dude from the big city.

The stock market had amply rewarded his acumen, he announced with pardonable pride. Now, a gleaming new .357 Magnum in hand, and clad in the latest Mighty Hunter fashion of custom-made cap, boots, and natural hide jacket, he revealed further expectations. "Ranger, I didn't come all the way up here to go back empty-handed. Tell me where I can get me a deer *for sure*," he growled. Having just cleaned up on Wall Street, he saw no reason to put up with anything other than ongoing success.

John considered the whole picture for a moment — the finest outfit and equipment money could buy, the new green Cadillac, the air of a man who would not be denied a glorious culmination to his ego trip. Not by man, not by the weather, not by Nature; probably not by God.

Courteous and helpful as ever, John pointed toward the redwoods that blanketed the slopes rising gradually to mountains behind the fort. "There's a one way dirt road back in there," he said. "It winds ten miles down into the wilderness. Few folks except the local residents know about it. Probably deer in there."

Great! Just right! Thanks. An impressive snorting by all the horses, and the dude was off to his crowning achievement.

According to fragments pieced together later, he finally negotiated the ten miles of back road dust and chuckholes clear to the end. That far inland, even in the deep shade of the forest, the day had grown hot and stuffy. So, off came the hide coat, to be laid carefully across the hood of the car.

For an hour or two the man stalked and circled, pushing his way through the underbrush, sweat streaming, eyes peering this way and that, gun held at the ready.

Suddenly, over beyond a huckleberry thicket, he saw it — his dream of a lifetime! Hands a-tremble, he crouched behind a huge stump, leveled his small cannon, and fired.

When the echoes of the blast had died away and the man's eyes came back in focus, his jaw dropped. The deer, a big hole in its side, still remained on its feet.

What the...well, by God, no animal was going to do that to him! He fired again. As before, perfect aim. The hole enlarged — *and still the animal stood!*

The mighty hunter jumped up and plowed through the brush, determined to subdue the thing one way or another, if necessary with his bare hands.

No need. A few feet away he stopped short and stared in disbelief. He had blown his own jacket to pieces. Moreover, closer inspection showed that he had also shot the distributor out of the Cadillac.

At dusk, when the dude dragged into Fort Ross, John found a way to register proper amazement and sympathy.

During the sopping wintertime, most park families had to make their own sociability. In Big Basin, they lived three miles from the nearest neighbors and nine miles from Boulder Creek, the nearest village. Slides, slip-outs, and down timber sealed them off for days at a time. To counteract such isolation, some of the park wives used to meet once a week for tea and sewing --like that stormy Wednesday in December, when they gathered at Roy Kerr's house in Park Center.

Down under those towering trees, winter nights begin to close in soon after midday. This particular afternoon the weather deteriorated fast. Before long, the wives who lived in the meadow decided they'd better get themselves up the hill. Helen Caldwell and her carful left immediately and made it home safely despite the increasing violence swooping down from the Basin's rim. Irma Crawford's station wagon, suffering from dampened spirits, would not be hurried — and thereby brought on a night to remember.

By the time that car and its load moved out, even the giants were swaying like prairie grasses in the rising wind, their limbs creaking, their massive trunks grinding together ferociously, Minute by minute, the ride became more like

rounding the Horn in a windjammer under full sail than easing around the first mile of forest curves in a V-8.

"Keep your fingers crossed," whispered Chris Lively to Maxine Epperly sitting next to her.

Maxine's widened eyes showed her concern. "All these limbs falling and everything, I"

With a blast, as from a shotgun, the blood-curdling rip began. In the thunder and splintering of dying timber that followed, pure terror froze words into silence. Four women congealed; the fifth hit the brake — a lucky thing, too, for just yards ahead, a mountain of tangled limbs and foliage bounced and shattered onto the pavement. For this there were no words. At such times, fear can throttle so utterly that feelings aren't nearly fluid enough to express thanks.

All at once, senses rushed back to life, and everyone scrambled out of the wagon for a closer look. Fighting to stand upright in rain that had begun to slam almost horizontally, Chris yelled the obvious: "We're sure not going any farther!"

"Can't go back either," yelled Anita Penhale. "No room to turn."

What they also knew was that anywhere in Big Basin, any one place would be as safe — or as dangerous — as another.

"I'll hike back to the shops and call Lloyd at the C camp," Marion Spencer shouted above the din, and leaning into the wind, headed downhill.

A half-hour later, she stumbled into the maintenance office and found the telephone still operational. Lloyd's voice crackled over the line from the other end. "Hey, where in heck are you girls? Are you all right? What's going on down there?"

To keep from alarming Lloyd unduly, Marion took care to sound calm and to minimize their predicament. "We're okay, Lloyd. It's that we can't get past a little tree down below Huckleberry Flats. Could you come?"

Thinking "little tree", Lloyd concluded that the problem sounded pretty simple; so, depending on the ax always carried in the pickup, he hurried to the rescue.

Around a blind curve he skidded into a three foot Douglas-fir (three foot diameter, that is) surrounded by an enormous pile of tree crown. From the other side, in the gathering darkness, sifted the headlights of the stalled vehicle.

"Jeez!" he exploded, surveying the great understatement of the year, "Did she say 'little tree'?"

Because of the blinding sheets of water now pounding the scene, some minutes passed before Lloyd was able to determine exactly what all did block the way. Only when he crawled and climbed over, under, and through the debris did he discover that in addition to the big Douglas lying athwart the road were also the crowns of two redwoods the toppling fir had brought down. All jammed against a steep embankment.

At last he reached the women huddled in the car, wincing every time another limb crashed to earth nearby. "I'm going to ferry you girls across and up the hill two or three at a time," he yelled, and spat out a mouthful of water.

Chris, Marion, and Irma volunteered to remain until the second trip; Anita and Maxine piled out of the wagon and followed Lloyd into the sopping mass.

Icy fingers of limbs and greenery tripped, scratched, clawed; tried every way to ram down necks and put eyes out until the three dropped onto the pavement and clambered aboard the pickup. Then came the long grunting struggle to turn it around on the narrow road.

Typical of redwood country, no bad situation is ever overcome until it gets worse.

Soon after the three passed Sempervirens Falls, a huge madrone collapsed across the road ahead, neatly bracketing them between the two blowdowns. For good measure, approaching night turned inky black prematurely, and the downpour let go with renewed force.

Lloyd jumped out of the car to assess their plight. In a few moments he was back, shouting over the noisy drumming on metal and oilskins. "Just the upper part of the tree lies on the road. If you girls will help, I think we can break this up."

Lloyd chopped and Maxine and Anita dragged chunks to one side until they had enough clearance that the pickup could squeak through and on up to the meadow. Even so, the all-out effort in the deluge was nothing compared to simply trying to breathe in it.

Well over an hour passed before Lloyd could return to the waiting wives and help them across the pileup. By that time, other park families were straggling homeward. In quick

succession, three cars stalled at the blockade. One belonged to Lou Donaldson, the heavy equipment operator, who surveyed the mess with an appraising eye.

"I'll get the Cat and blade," he hollered over the racket, and took off on foot.

Now followed more black hours with Lou and the rest of the crew bulldozing, axing, chain-sawing, crowbarring, tugging, and cussing in what added up to six inches of driving rain in twenty-four hours.

Finally, mission accomplished. At 4 AM, encased in ice, but miraculously whole, the crew staggered into the Lively residence for coffee and breakfast. A hot bath and a couple of hours of sleep later, they were back on the job, clearing all the park roads.

Ranger folk sometimes smile when they hear summer campers vow to return home only long enough to sell — and then return to live forever in God's country. Ah, yes!

Redwood country's soaking wintertime can stretch with few letups from October or November until March or April, sometimes even May. That's what it takes, plus summertime fogs, to grow the world's tallest living things, whose weight is about three-fourths water. But even on the worst days, Big Basin rangers are usually girded and ready for some manifestation of human frailty to pop up in their totally deserted park.

One, still painfully recalled, occurred in a wartime January, after almost two weeks of steady downpour.

Into the Basin late that afternoon, driving a bright blue sedan, motored two Army nurses from the San Francisco Presidio's Letterman Hospital. Already the alcohol content of their blood had risen to impressive heights. Undaunted, they expected to pump it still higher with a small sack of lunch and a large bottle of "warming fluid."

Seeking seclusion in which to partake and enjoy, they pushed aside a CLOSED barricade, and slithered down into a campsite, still mushy from recent creek flooding. Sadly, the mud where they came to rest had a false bottom. No sooner had the motor been cut than they sank in up to the hubs. Neither realized this of course, and neither would have cared if she had.

One nurse, well past perpendicular possibilities, passed out cold. Somewhat later, the other recovered enough of her wits to notice that the day had turned into night and that the car was hopelessly embedded. She staggered to the road in search of help. Gus Sgarloto, the innkeeper, on his way out of the park, found her there, reeling back and forth across the soft shoulder. He picked her up and listened to a garbled tale of woe.

Gus was always God's gift to a lady in distress. Straightway, he turned around and they drove back to the Lodge for a towrope. He would pull the nurses' car out, and they could then be on their way in no time.

Only that wasn't how it turned out.

Gus tied onto the sedan's rear bumper, hopped into his own car, and gave it the gun.

Nothing happened except the spinning of his own wheels. The mired sedan would not budge.

So, thoughtfully stowing the jabbering nurse alongside the soggy one, Gus hurried back to the Lodge to call Chief Ranger Roy Cushing.

Six of the crew, swathed in oilskins, and bearing tow gear of every sort, soon appeared in the International and got out in the drenching downpour to see what they could do. The storm had intensified. The only difference now between the water three feet below the surface of the flooding San Lorenzo River and the saturated air in the campsite was that the river had sediment and a current. Nevertheless, Gus and the six rangers circled the stuck car, figuring ways and means, bouncing ideas around.

At last they all agreed. Using Gus' car and the International in tandem, they would apply a two-car pull with a block and tackle arrangement thrown around a sturdy two-foot tanoak nearby.

Accordingly, they hitched up. Arlan Sholes posted himself where he could see through the sheets of rain and watch both ends of the operation. He was to signal the drivers with repeated flashes of his torch as long as things were going well. Should he stop flashing, all action was to stop. Now. At once.

When everything was ready, Mel Whittaker threw the International into its most powerful gear; Gus revved his motor and prepared to ease forward with all horses; the rest

of the men heaved their weight against the front of the nurses' car. Slowly, combined effort synchronized. The rope pulled taut around the oak.

The stage was now set for the Big Basin gremlins to get into the act.

As the rope strained in unison with motors and men, the oak seemed to creak. Arlan, the only one in position to notice, dashed the water out of his eyes and peered anxiously into the darkness. Well, just his imagination, he guessed. He could have sworn that the tree was starting to lean — in a mighty undesirable direction.

Horrified, Arlan began to shout warnings. But no one could hear him over the pelting rain and roaring motors. And no one could see him either, although every man was concentrating on his flashlight signals in the dark.

Historically, when calling for help or proclaiming an emergency, people *press* buttons — not release them. Full blast, Arlan now reacted to that lifetime habit. While agitation mounted within him, his flashlight finger kept right on reacting historically.

Hind wheels dug deep for traction. The nurses' car moved a few inches. So did the oak, its lean gradually worsening. In desperation, Arlan ran to it and hurled his weight against the trunk in heroic attempt to hold the thing up with his own considerable strength; at the same time, and without being aware of it, he went on frantically signaling *Go, Go, GO!* The odds ganged up. He might as well have been a fly trying to push a horse off one of its legs.

With a tremulous sigh and a grinding *crun-n-n-n-n-n-chh!* the oak heeled over. The men pushing the front of the nurses' car were suddenly engulfed in dripping foliage and acorns. Mel and Gus, sensing that something unforeseen had happened, shut off their motors, and jumped out to investigate. Aghast, everyone clustered beside the sedan — and the tree stretched lengthwise of its top, dead center, taillight to windshield.

Now came the stampede to yank open the doors and find out if the nurses had been countersunk in the transmission.

Great was the relief. The two, unharmed, sat side by side, stiff as ramrods, their eyes wide and unseeing, each in what

amounted to her own private compartment. The oak had grooved the car down almost to the back of the front seat.

Never before in the annals of Man had a group of rangers stood completely speechless.

What a night! The storm howled on, while the crew, with chain saws and other gear, cut the oak into chunks and dragged them off the car. By daylight, the poor divided sedan was back in service, after a fashion, and parked alongside Headquarters.

Time to hold a wake.

Inside the Inner Sanctum, much tobacco was smoked in worried, floor-pacing silence. How to escape this ticklish episode with hides whole and careers intact and without being banished from the human race was a moot question, and getting mooter by the moment. The younger rangers would never age in the service; the senior ones would never collect retirement. And just wait until Sacramento heard from the nurses' attorneys — or from the War Department's Adjutant General! An atmosphere of doom settled over the scene like a suffocating smog.

Then some astounding revelations fused into a true State Park Miracle.

The nurses, painfully hungover but sober at last, carefully lowered themselves into chairs before the Chief Ranger's desk.

Clearing his throat, Roy plunged into the usual procedure. "May I see your driver's licenses, please?" Routine, but just now awkward to say the least.

The women made no move other than to squirm and glance at each other.

"Your driver's licenses?" Roy repeated wearily, raising heavily lidded eyes in question.

"I-I-we don't have any," one of the women ventured, studying the floor.

"What!"

"Neither of us has ever owned a car," the second nurse said at length. "So — well — we've simply never applied for any license. Our — this car is borrowed." Then in a quavering voice, "Borrowed from our C.O."

"No licenses?" Roy queried in a dazed sort of way, having not yet absorbed the full significance of the confession.

One by one, the other men turned to stare. The nurses shifted uneasily.

Roy finally recovered his speech. It came out slowly. "When are you due back at Letterman?"

"Wha — what day is this?"

"Tuesday."

A long pause. "Well — I guess — the day before yesterday. At 1800."

A paper clip, dropping to the floor, would have rocked every man to his boot soles. The office clock, doling out seconds, hammered with deafening insistence through the stunned silence.

In that time, the enormity of their transgressions began to seep into the still-benumbed senses of the two women. All at once it burst into tears of despair at the specter of indictment by both park service and the military. Self-preservation seized command.

What thoughtless wrenches they had been in keeping the whole crew up all night in the rain! Covered with remorse as they were, what could they do to atone for such abysmal thoughtlessness. Just name it. Name it! *Anything at all*. Obviously, they meant anything at all.

At first, none of the men could think beyond the waves of relief that passed through them at being snatched off the hook. Then, as shock gave way, bleariness faded from their eyes and strain slipped from their faces; a tingle of new life and hope began to warm their hearts. By noon, after crowbars had pried the car top up off the upholstery far enough that at least minimum auditory communication could be established between driver and passenger, mutual appreciation flowered like early spring.

About 1300, the lady lieutenants bade a fond and agitated farewell. Soon afterwards, the blue sedan, bearing a remarkable resemblance to a Parker House roll, steamed up the Saratoga Road toward San Francisco. The screeching noises filling the air back at Headquarters, while all hands waved goodbye, were those of ranger nerves letting the rest of the way down.

Of such as this and much, much more is wintertime in redwood country, especially in Big Basin. Intolerant of any

nonsense, it quickly dispels the notion that rangering is one long vacation with pay. At the same time, it compensates by developing unsuspected capabilities in park men; then it blends that competence with growing self-reliance, and polishes the finished product with a friendly manner, all ready for next season's public. And when at last, survival and the end of the probation period merge, and the ranger or trainee still has bounce in his step and can-do in his blood, he is probably seasoned enough for a park of his own when the opportunity presents itself.

Of all the State redwood parks, Big Basin has ever been deemed *the* training ground; *the* place to prepare for everything possible to the redwood situation and the human comedy. It is the weeder-out of the faint of heart and body and spirit; the maker and breaker.

Note well the crew next time you visit that magnificent grove of redwood giants. You are among *men!*

Chapter Eleven

Public Relations That Went to the Dogs

Fifty-plus years ago, before the California State Park System became a stack of administrative echelons from outhouse to capitol, what went on in a park largely depended upon the whim of the Warden — or as he is now known, the Chief Ranger or Park Supervisor. If he liked visiting animals, we had them; if he didn't, they had to go.

At that time and for that time, the Big Basin Warden proved to be quite adequate although unpredictable. Joying him beyond words was the mustachioed mountaineer who drove in once or twice a week, his old truck loaded down with homegrown fruit and vegetables to peddle. Every June he welcomed a little old man and his cow, who came plodding seven miles upcanyon along a narrow winding road to the summit and down into the park, there to spend most of the summer in a grassy campsite near the South Gate.

The Warden's stern face always crinkled into smiles as he watched Bossy, udder swinging, lumber into a cluster of giants, heave a sigh, and lower herself to the ground for a well-earned rest. Moreover, he proclaimed it a grand accommodation that she supplied the park's campers with all the milk they could drink. He even urged her beneficiaries to tell others about her bounty so more people would come and camp in Big Basin. Why not! What other park had milk spigots? And in the autumn, when the maples were turning yellow and man and beast prepared to plod back downcanyon to their home, the Warden bade both fond farewell, reminding them that another June would roll around again in a few months.

But dogs? BAH! "Get rid of them, Petey," he would order.

One of my first official duties at Big Basin State Park, therefore, was to show visiting dogs the exits as soon as their presence was detected.

My love for anything four-footed being what it is, I suffered more than the pets and their owners and invariably went to great pains to explain how Big Basin was the ancestral

home of deer, raccoons, and chipmunks, who took a dim view of dogs. But such propaganda, no matter how fervent or spectacular in its delivery, bounced off the more reluctant of my listeners. They either could not or would not comprehend the purpose of a game preserve. That fact engraved itself upon my memory for all time to come the day I approached a man and woman and coyly turned back the edge of a yellow rosebud baby blanket.

Because the couple was close to middle age, and fix seemed to be understandably self-conscious about showing off their infant, I made sure my greeting oozed warmth and friendliness. Even so, the father, tenderly carrying the blanketed bundle, began to glance around desperately. Nevertheless, all smiles, I inquired whether their pride and joy was boy or girl.

“Ah — er — female,” the father stammered.

The reply struck me as odd, yet on I blundered, intending to comment on which of the parents the baby most resembled.

An instant later, as I peeked in among the folds, I found it resembled neither. At point blank range, a perfect little monstrosity erupted into a series of hi-octane yips that wet down my eyeballs. Only by reeling backwards over a protruding tree root did I manage to save my nose from a tenderizing by bared fangs. After that I kept a safe distance between me and babes in arms until identities were established.

In those uncomplicated days of the late twenties and early thirties, when state parks were just beginning to get under way, few dogs visited them. But as the Depression ended and a person could afford to feed an animal and travel, too, only the Great Crusades could have surpassed the mass migration of dogs into recreation areas. Quite obviously the day had come for some sort of regulation.

After much heated debate all up the line from camper to governor, it was decided that dogs and cats *on leash* could howl, sample other visitors, and intimidate the wildlife during daylight hours but never at night. When darkness fell — OUT.

Signs to this effect soon appeared at the entrance of most parks and at numerous sites within. Yellow letters five inches high, routed into sturdy redwood slabs, proclaimed: NO DOGS PERMITTED BETWEEN 8 PM AND 7 AM and DOGS

ALWAYS ON LEASH. These slabs, conspicuously positioned and of average dog height, were destined to become the all-time piddling favorites of canine tourists intimidated and dried up by trees too massive for their understanding.

Rangers have always known of course that many dogs are better campers than some college graduates. They have been quick to acknowledge that there are those who do remain on their own little beddy-byes, as claimed by their doting families, and who wouldn't dream of emptying themselves on neighboring campsites. From time to time they see dogs who would never bay at the moon or plunge into a frenzy every time a leaf drifted to the ground in the night or chase every deer and raccoon and chipmunk or tackle other dog campers with or without amorous intentions or dash between the feet of a man struggling to extinguish a conflagration in his gasoline stove or chomp on the mail carrier whose vacation had just rescued him from the canine emotional crises on his route. In that pre-flea collar era, as well as today, dogs came who didn't harbor a single passenger to leave behind for the next camper to scratch. But there were tens of thousands who did, forcing park crews to face the inevitable. Eternally understaffed and overworked as they always were (and still are and probably always will be) they simply had no time to consider each dog on its own merits.

Years ago I submitted to the Sacramento office a master plan for a well-treed park, set aside and operated especially for dogs. "Just declare it a dog park," I wrote. "Spread the word. All dogs admitted all the time. No restrictions except one. Put up a sign at the gate: HUMANS ADMITTED ONLY IF ACCOMPANIED BY A DOG."

Sacramento complimented me on an "excessively forward look" but sidetracked my proposal. Consequently, illiterates, liars, and smugglers have flourished throughout the years — until The Administration overreacted, opening every park to the dogs twenty-four hours a day. For a fee.

Small wonder that some of our traditionally high caliber maintenance and management has had to lapse into limbo while the Dog Detail rushes here and there, chasing and confining runaways, seeking owners, following up complaints about fouled campsites and uninhibited barking. They have had to advise on rabies shots, spray for fleas, apply first aid,

and make reports to Sacramento in triplicate (quintuplicates any day now) and participate in the 90,000 violations investigated each year. At the same time, mountains of trash tend to collect in and around the big green cans, and long ago the Public began complaining occasionally about restrooms not being as consistently clean and sweet and unplugged as formerly.

Something had to give. It did. Bubbling with one of his famous drives to accumulate a huge treasury surplus, The Governor cut park funds. Then fewer and fewer rangers struggled longer and longer hours in parks overrun with more and more visitors, electric guitars, mental cases, skinny-dippers, hippies, hopheads, vandals, and dogs unlimited. Park men who chose the service to enjoy and interpret the outdoors have had to be armed and trained to protect themselves and law-abiding folk. As in years past, if matters simply refuse to tie in knots under their own steam, leave it to the politicians to lie awake nights figuring out a way. This you can count on.

In the old days, Charlie Lewis felt so sorry for our few dog rejects that he built a three-unit kennel at the South Gate House where he lived. The several Big Basin campers who did bring their dogs along could board them out there. Things went along fine this way for years. But after Charlie passed seventy-five he wore out on fights among the guests who couldn't make the adjustment from wailing sirens to deer mice in the leaves. Besides, he had lost about as many fingers as he could afford to do without. The day came when the kennels had to be consigned to the ages.

After dogs on leash were permitted during daylight hours, more canine characters visited the parks. There was, for instance, the big Australian shepherd, who, with his jeans-and-buckskin clad parents, arrived one day in a long maroon station wagon with the ranch brand painted on the doors.

The man and woman, fresh from Marlboro Country, alighted and removed their ten gallon hats. For a time both stood gaping in wonder at the tips of the lofty giants surrounding Park Center meadow. Then as their gaze slowly followed the big trunks down to ground level, they saw for the first time the sign: DOGS ALWAYS ON LEASH.

He was overheard commenting to her: "HmMMM. Some

guy must've brought in an unruly mutt some time or other. Well, they *should* control such outlaws." Nothing said about all dogs; just some other dog.

Next thing, the couple and their shepherd discovered a dozen or so deer lying in the tall meadow grasses in front of Park Headquarters and another dozen or so strolling quietly among the tourists, drooling at anyone who had food in his hands. The sight thoroughly intrigued them. They began talking excitedly to each other and to their dog, who by now was straining out the car window, panting and oscillating from head to tail like an electric paint mixer. All the mounting enthusiasm alerted me. I bolted for the station wagon.

But not fast enough. Before I could reach it, the woman had flung open the door and the dog was on his way. Like an arrow straight and true, he shot into the meadow to demonstrate cattle herding.

Deer spurted toward every point of the compass. Like rubber balls they took off in arching bounces all around Park Center, streaking over people, trash cans, picnic tables; soaring across fallen giants with trunks so thick that only a tall man on horseback could have seen over them. On the heels of first one deer and then another went Rover, swinging into his thing as if he were working the open range of Montana.

Mr. and Mrs. Rancho shouted in high glee. They yelled herding technicalities and cheered with all the larynx-shredding spirit of cheerleaders exhorting a rooting section. "Rush! RUSH! This way, boy. Now, wide. No — WIDE! After him there! Bring him round. ROUND! That's it. Attaway! Whoooooop-p-e-e-e-e!"

Nothing any noisier ever happened at Little Big Horn. Yet despite the coaching from the sidelines, Rover failed to round up anything more than the wind and redwood needles left in the wake of flying hooves. Yipping at the top of his voice, the bugle corps of a dog dashed first one way and then another, all for nothing, for no deer — not even our film wrapper and potato chip deer --were about to let themselves be whirled into a tight little circle by any foreign grasslander.

By the time I could reach the couple and make myself heard, Park Center had all but emptied. Terrified visitors had taken cover wherever they could. A woman had fled through the first door handy — the MEN'S. Picnickers had dived

under their tables, and in one instance, under their fruit salad. An elderly gentleman with a prosthetic leg had commenced to wonder how he got into the souvenir shop behind a rack of Alpine hats and Indian tomahawks. And the blackened interior of every burned-out redwood was sheltering its full capacity of twenty to thirty refugees. Only Mr. Rancho could speak when most of the park's duty rangers converged on him. "Look!" he exulted breathlessly. "Isn't he magnificent? Cattle will be simple after this."

After that anything would have been simple.

One day on my rounds I found a huge police dog lying in a spot of sun. He appeared to have neither leash nor family, so I decided I'd better take him to Headquarters until his owner could be found.

Asserting his taxpayer's rights, he decided I'd better not. His viewpoint became increasingly clear, too, even as I chirped suggestions about coming with me. One brow cocked meaningfully, he lowered his beautiful head onto both paws and left it there. After that only his eyes and brows moved, but he didn't miss a thing I said or did. At the same time, what sounded like distant thunder kept rumbling in his throat; and every few minutes, whenever my shadow darkened his patch of sunlight, he elaborated. Without question there was a difference of opinion on what we were going to do next.

For a long time I circled at a prudent distance, coaxing, trying to reason, pointing out the advantages, offering inducements, turning on all possible charm, for I have always believed that animals deserve the same courtesy and consideration as the humankind. None of it improved our relationship one bit, however. I continued to be disdained as something suspect.

Finally my time and patience and virtues fell apart. The Southern Californian in me burst into Spanish as it often did when I felt hopelessly outmaneuvered.

"*Andale!*" I barked, my frustration showing.

To my utter amazement, the dog barked back. Then up he sprang. Before I could climb the nearest redwood, he had planted his huge forepaws on my shoulders and was plastering me against it. His long tongue splashed back and forth across my face with all the careless abandon of a farmer whitewashing his henhouse. In between swabbings, he

grinned so big his head looked to be half off. My near heart attack had been for nothing.

As soon as I could breathe I pressed my advantage. "*Vamanos!*" I again barked, scarcely daring to hope.

"*Si!*" he barked in reply, and bounding away, teased me to follow. Any plans at all would be fine, for by now communication lines were well established. Filled with rapturous collaboration, he started with me for the office.

The dog loved our ranger station and all of its pet-starved men, who could have no animals of their own because they lived within the park. One of the boys even came close to shedding a tear over our handsome visitor. "He's just like Teddy," he kept repeating, all the while hugging and thumping the furry body. "And to think I had to give him away when I came here. I wish I still had him." We almost lost a promising young ranger that day.

Toward sundown the boys began to speak of drawing lots for the privilege of camping with our four-footed friend somewhere outside park boundaries. But such an arrangement never became necessary.

All at once we heard the rattle of our neighbor tongue at the Information window. Instantly, doggy ears alerted to full attention. For a few seconds our guest stiffened, listening. Then, recognizing the voices, he let out a shriek of delight and in one long leap, vacated the Inner Sanctum.

Bob Carey, minding the window at the time, became the perfect springboard. Over his head sailed the big police dog, gracefully airborne. Along with him went Bob's Stetson. It bounded down the stone steps of Headquarters porch and rolled across the road between two cars passing in opposite directions.

The reunion was one of the happiest I have ever witnessed. The dog barked until he deafened everyone, while his family — an even dozen — jabbered in Spanish to him, to one another, and to us. We jabbered back in English, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. In all the excitement we never once thought to explain the leash law. I wouldn't have known the Spanish for leash anyway. Besides, the utter joy of the moment was rallying us from the annoyance occasioned by some Boy Scouts, who, earlier that afternoon, had chopped hunks out of one of our bridge railings with their hatchets.

Dogs of those days were different from today's dogs. A trip into a forest of giants sent them into trembling ecstasy. Few dogs nowadays have ideals higher than a fireplug. Too much is provided for them. They have rubber bones, a wide variety of prepared foods — each with its own enchanting TV commercial — some with chlorophyll to assure social acceptance; then there are fancy dishes with ear deflectors, hair bows, toys, Beautyrest mattresses, and especially dedicated relief areas in roadside rest stops. So what appeal our natural wonders? In recent years I saw dogs yawn as they rode past some of the greatest trees on earth.

At Richardson Grove, which is a river flat of giants, dogs did very well for years before the pet regulations went into effect. Perhaps that was because the Warden there tolerated them both day and night, and they had plenty of leisure in which to investigate the full circumference of the redwoods in their vicinity. They could while away an hour or more sniffing their way around a single trunk, and no telling how many other dogs they'd meet before completing the circuit. They even attended campfire. But the time finally came when I was forced to declare such evening amenities off limits to dog campers. The decree followed the night of the Italian opera star.

The man didn't want to se-e-e-e-ing. He would be out in the damp night air. He hadn't brought his throat spray along. He had always been accustomed to a vast stage, a full symphony in front and a huge cast and sets behind. For a week, I tried to convince our distinguished Lodge guest that our natural outdoor theater with its lofty walls of living redwood and a star-spangled ceiling would provide the most magnificent setting he could ever perform in. I also assured him that the Richardson Grove campers and Lodge guests were people of refinement and culture and would applaud him enthusiastically.

At last, in a cloud of garlic, he relented. "I weel se-e-e-e-ing," he growled, bobbing his head and spreading his hands helplessly.

Before he could change his mind, I wrote his name phonetically in my notebook, thus making certain of correct pronunciation later when introducing him. Everything —

EVERYTHING — must be just right for this Great Presence. After all, he had never known anything but a many-tiered opera house filled to the crystal chandeliers with the likes of nobility, diamonds, and mink. He deserved the best possible presentation and the most attentive of listeners. I would see that he got both. This became a consuming dedication, the bull's-eye of my life. It also became the eye of a hurricane.

In falling somewhat short of my resolve, I learned another lesson for all eternity.

Word of the pending operatics spread quickly. That evening, residents of nearby villages and resorts converged on Richardson Grove to join the park campers and Lodge guests around the big campfire. They filled all of our log seats, then covered the slope along the left of the bowl and the length of the fallen giant on the right. Several hundred more stood wherever they could find room at the sides and rear of the bowl and on out into the grove. All were a-buzz in anticipation of an evening that would long be remembered. As it turned out, this one would turn into one they could never forget.

At dark, when I went to light the fire and take stock of the largest audience we had ever assembled, I saw a big bloodhound named Socrates sitting in the second row beside his owners. Because he was so tall and no one could see over him, I asked his family to change places with a family in the back row. There, once again, he sat tall, ramrod straight, and melancholy.

The great moment came. I presented the rotund opera star with all the impressive wordage at my command. Responding promptly and with pomp and circumstance, he made his entrance from the rear of the bowl, moving down the aisle like an advancing storm front. Immediately the audience burst into thunderous welcome, then went silent with awe.

For a few moments all three hundred pounds of our man stomped around the little redwood stage, looking like a wrestler testing the mat before assuming the risk of being slammed through it. Quite plainly he was more nervous about the skill of the accompanist, recruited from the ranks of the campers, than the fearful woman was about herself. Nevertheless, when at last the arena appeared to be acceptable, he nodded to her, and she, taking a deep breath, pounced upon the introductory measures of her music. The

Italian, feet planted wide apart, pumped his pickle-barrel chest up to cement mixer proportions, and closing his eyes, hurled himself into the part of Figaro, the Barber of Seville.

I had never heard “Caruso” except on records, but it seemed to me that no man could ever have poured out his soul as powerfully as did our big Italian. Surely every living thing in the Redwood Empire from Richardson Grove to Garberville must have paused, startled. For us gathered around the booming campfire, listening to this personage who had dominated the Milan Opera House, it was almost more than we could absorb. How fortunate we were. I began to feel smug and important.

But not for long.

Still sitting regally in the back row, Socrates soon began to take a monstrous dislike to grand opera in general and barbers in particular. Pointing his nose at the new moon riding the heavens that night, he gradually made his objections known, although not to me immediately. Many rows forward of him as I was, occupying a place on the front log in close proximity to both crackling campfire and onstage performance, I failed to catch Socrates’ opening passages. As the primitive in him welled up out of ages past, I simply got the feeling that the Italian was somehow singing a duet.

All at once I became aware of a mournful pear-shaped howl taking form somewhere back of me, swelling to full volume, and then slipping into black nothingness among the treetops. The sound had been weird and unearthly, like the chilling harbinger of doom.

Stiff-spined, the entire audience turned as one toward the rear of the bowl.

When I whirled around, what attracted me at first were the dancing lights of campfire flames on everyone’s back. Then I noticed Socrates. From collar buckle up to the dark knob of a nose was one long soft line, broken only by the round hole of a mouth. Out of it rolled a hound’s sympathy for man’s suffering.

The louder the Italian’s crescendos, the louder Socrates’ howls. When the man hit a resounding note and held it, so did he. Mercifully our celebrated guest appeared unconscious of everything but his own impassioned outpouring. On and on he roared, giving vent to his all. On and on the dog howled,

giving vent to his. In between those two great vents, almost a thousand people were sandwiched.

I nearly died of mortification on the spot. Not so the audience. As soon as the absurdity of the situation hit them, they convulsed. The more they convulsed, the more I sweat; the more I sweat, the more they convulsed. Finally, looking like Old Dutch Cleanser, I took off up the aisle, in my mind a single thought: to throttle that hound before the Italian could run out of music.

By the time I could reach the dog, a half dozen men were starting to push and pull, trying to drag him out of the bowl. But they might as well have tried to move Pike's Peak. Socrates, deep in his trance, was about as manageable as if he had been molded out of a comparable poundage of silly putty. Thus began the homestretch of a hair-raising Grand Prix between grand opera and the call of the wild.

Through the last pages of "The Barber of Seville" and twice as many of dog's ancestry on earth, the seven of us tugged and grunted frantically. All at once, recognizing the finale rushing at us, we merged into a human bulldozer. Together we somehow contrived to shove Socrates, still transfixed and in a sitting position, out of the bowl and around behind several redwoods. Not a minute too soon, either. Just as the final blast of Italian hit the night air, I straightened, jerked my uniform jacket from under my nose, and strode down the aisle to lead the applause.

With every traditional flourish, the Great One bowed and bowed to a cheering but exhausted audience. Completely innocent of his supporting role in high drama, he presumed quite correctly that the standing ovation paid tribute to his incomparable performance. What he never guessed was that even more, it expressed monumental relief.

Without further ado, I vowed never to permit another dog at an evening campfire. Positively. Never again. NEVER.

Yet there was one — on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, when the park boasted the largest regular crowd of the summer. This goes to illustrate human frailty in its highest sense.

Sunday campfires I arranged well in advance, determined that they be different from the varied and often hilarious

offerings of the other six nights. It seemed to me that the older people deserved at least one campfire a week of serenity and thoughtfulness and nostalgia that would invite remembrance long after vacations had ended. So classical music stood in for boogie, inspirational talks and travel slides took the place of skits, and a few moments of silent prayer replaced crooning teenagers and harmonica duets. For the several hundred campers who chose to gather quietly in the presence of the trees, which, in their might and splendor, dwarfed man and his trappings, Sunday evenings were indeed times of reflection on blessings received.

With the final strains of "Redwood Lullaby," the introductory theme song, played on the piano by Park Naturalist Malcolm Byce, it was my custom to rise from my log seat near the fire and motion for everyone to stand and sing the Doxology. I felt it to be in keeping with Sunday, the Lord's Day. After the Doxology, everyone would then sit again and for twenty minutes or so enjoy favorite hymns, love songs, and ballads. Older people looked forward to these special nights.

On this particular night, I donned my dress uniform, jacket and skirt, and went over to the bowl only to discover a mustached fat man and a small terrier clad in a checkered sweater sitting in the front row left of the campfire. Around them a number of children had gathered because Papa had been putting Tootie through a series of tricks that anyone would have had to admit were cute. Still, this being Sunday, I intended to preserve the atmosphere of restraint and reverence. I explained the situation to the man and concluded by saying, "So we don't include dogs at our campfires Of course you understand."

Of course he didn't. And the children didn't. Why, my goodness, leave this adorable little fellow back at camp? By *hissself*? Unthinkable. The man couldn't bear the idea, for this was Tootie's first night as a camper in all his life; the children couldn't bear the idea either because lookit all the tricks he could do. "Please, Miss Weaver," they wailed, clinging to both of my hands and hugging me. "Just tonight. Please."

The man argued persuasively, too. "He's just as good at listening to a sermon on the Bible as he is at balancing my pipe on his nose," he assured me. "He'll be no trouble. And it's such

a dark forest. He couldn't stay alone in it. I'd have to go back to the tent with him."

You might know I weakened. Anyway, Malcolm had begun the "Redwood Lullaby," and since everyone else was lapsing into the Sunday evening hush, it seemed appropriate that I shut up and stop making such a commotion. So I did. I crossed to my seat at right front and sat down.

Tranquility settled over the crowd like a benevolent umbrella. People leaned back in their seats and relaxed. Most watched the leaping flames of the campfire or studied the gigantic red trunks that surrounded the bowl. The terrier, pushing companionably against his papa, yawned once or twice and dropped his eyelids to half-mast. Everything was as properly Sabbath as could be. A more peaceful evening than this one, I couldn't remember. My attention quickly drifted away from the dog. At the right moment I rose and went to my place by the fire.

Then, as the audience stood and I raised my arms to lead the Doxology, something struck the dog. Exploding into a series of piercing yelps, he came tearing across the narrow clearing in front of the fire and sank his teeth to the gums in the calf of my leg.

Afterwards, in talking with the campers, I couldn't find a single one who remembered singing the Doxology, although I'm sure that out of habit they all did. Certainly I recall very little about leading it. Neither was I aware that Malcolm almost fell off the piano stool in a welter of indecision about whether to rush to my aid or carry on where he was. He managed to remain at his post, although in the confusion he hit the hymn a few glancing licks, none of which could have been in its best interests.

Meanwhile, Papa, all a-quiver and breathing hard, waddled to my rescue. "I can't understand it. I can't understand it," he kept repeating, his eyes limpid with wonder. "He never did *that* before."

Nevertheless, he was doing a finished job of it now.

Valiantly, I struggled to regain my composure and preserve what was left of the Sunday atmosphere. I swung my arm to keep the singing moving along while clenching my teeth to hide telltale pain. All the while, Papa continued to puree apologies and condolences through his considerable

moustache. "Oh, Miss, believe me, he never did this before. He's so gentle. I hope you're not hurt. What can I do for you?"

I showed him fast. Together we managed to unhook Tootie from my leg in time for me to assume a more dignified stance for leading the closing line of the hymn — even though I did it while slowly bleeding to death and with one hose ripped to shreds and festooning down over my shoe.

Afterwards, tossing a poo-poo flick of my hand, as if this sort of thing was Sunday tradition, I managed to allay the concern of the campers and went on to make an announcement or two. Then I shifted the slide talk on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land up ahead of the cello solo and retired temporarily to Headquarters so Malcolm could give me first aid for my part in the religious activities.

As usual, his squirrely humor soon started me laughing. And by the time he had me cleaned up and flamboyantly mercurochromed, I was ready to return to the fray. Standing back to admire his art-work, he quipped merrily, "Well, one thing's different about you now. Up until tonight you had never been bitten in the Doxology."

Right then and there, I vowed I never would be again either. No more dogs at campfire. "Never again, see?" I shouted, pounding the office desk. Yet two years later I was transferred back to Big Basin, and the first thing — a dog at campfire. And a Sunday campfire at that.

I didn't know he was there. Since it was already 8 PM, this utterly adorable Boston Bull pup shouldn't have been in the park. Up far past his bedtime, he had curled into a little ball on an auto robe beside his mama and fallen fast asleep.

Campers sitting nearby, wishing to be kind, had told the woman about the dog regulation, but she failed to be impressed. Smiling affably, she explained that Pal could not possibly harm anyone. "He's only four months old," she whispered. "He probably won't even wake up."

At that moment all she said seemed to be true.

Mama unwittingly wore out Pal's welcome for him. On her lap lay a big purse loaded with all the trivia of a woman on vacation and therefore as dainty as a flatbed truck piled loosely with old auto bodies.

About midway of Dirdle's Souvenir, just then being rendered by a fine and sensitive violinist, the bag slipped off

the lady's lap. This wouldn't have been worth passing notice, of course, except that it contained, among other things, a nail file that had been forced part way through one corner of the bag by the weight of an alarm clock and a jackpot of Nevada silver dollars. And as the heavy load slid, the point of the nail file impaled the bull pup just south of his screw tail.

What all of this did to nerve endings shouldn't happen to any living thing. It fired Pal out of his dreams and into the second row down. From there he took off wherever there was an opening — along the row, over and under feet and legs, down the aisle, around the big campfire and nearly through it. You could hear him barking hysterically above the screams and shouts and the jangle of the woman's alarm clock that somehow went off in the melee.

After a man with a bullhorn voice yelled, "Mad dog!" chaos really let go. Well over a thousand people, including myself, leaped up. Many jumped upon their seats, flinging their arms around. Children began hollering and crying. With the fire crackling brightly, the whole scene took on the frenzy of an African tribal rite.

For years I had rehearsed in my mind over and over again what I'd say and do if we ever had an earthquake during one of these evening campfires under the giant trees. I had even said it aloud many times so the words would come automatically. In that way I figured I could afford to be scared like everyone else and still be able to try and calm panic or direct mass escape, either or both.

Now, without an earth-shaking stimulus to set it off, some of that preparation was triggered. As rehearsed, out tumbled the words. I shouted, "Everyone sit down. Please. Just relax. It'll be over in a minute. Sit, folks. See? It's all over. *It's all over!*"

Only it wasn't. Ki-yi-yi-yi-ing wildly, Pal sideswiped the violinist, who took to the air from the stage, and then streaked for a huckleberry thicket. There I finally caught up with him, poor little fellow. He cringed, whimpering in terror, but he let me reach under the bushes and drag him out. I'll bet his psyche was scarred for the rest of his life.

I don't mean to give the impression that dog owners are either oddballs or else determined to secure camping

privileges for their darlings, no matter what. Most visitors listened to our explanations of why we had to prohibit pets, and nodded understandingly. "Sure," they'd say. "You would have a madhouse if you let everyone's pet in overnight. Wish we could camp here in this heavenly forest but we have Queenie with us and she's one of the family, too, so on we go I guess." With bleeding hearts we would then watch them drive away to some private campground where pets were at least tolerated.

Every summer, though, a few visitors appeared who strained our patience through a fine sieve. Of such was the woman in the black Cadillac who pulled up alongside Headquarters at Big Basin one day early in June.

The door of her car flew open and out bounded a sleek boxer. As big as all outdoors, he had huge flopping feet and rubber legs and the inquisitive spirit of youth. And he was on a leash, to be sure — but all by himself. With reverberating sniffs and snorts, he vacuumed Headquarters area, taking potty shots at the drinking fountain and every redwood, tanoak, fern, and tiger lily from the Auto Tree to the distant Compass Group. Mama leaned against a front fender and smoked as she watched, her face aglow with fondness for her darling.

Chief Ranger Roy Cushing, noting both performances out our big side view window, glared one long blistering glare. It was late Saturday afternoon. The park still teemed with five or six thousand people and so much of the old weekend potential that the bloom on Roy's sense of humor had begun to wither.

Without a word he reached for his Stetson, rumbled out the door and toward the offender like a Sherman tank advancing up Hill 609 — and with about the same ironclad expression. The rest of us watched him touch his hat brim and offer a few pleasantries before gently lowering the Polite Powers as outlined by Sacramento. We also saw rage convulse the woman's face. Screeched she, "Can't you see? He IS on a leash!"

"Yes, Ma'am," Roy replied, still gently, "but you must be on the other end."

Pointing vigorously to one of her feet encased in a slipper, she let fly. "Goddamit, I can't follow Brutus all over the place!"

I gotta bum foot." She indicated Brutus' territory with a 180 degree-plus sweep of an arm, for it was indeed wide coverage.

"You'll have to control your dog somehow, Ma'am," Roy said. He should have known better.

That did it. The woman blew. Her tone sizzled as she tied into Roy. "Ranger," she ranted, "I ain't yet learned how to manage a dog's bladder and bowels."

The slow unraveling of Roy's patience was a thing of wonder and glory forever, for he made still another try with the Polite Powers before bringing to bear that last resort, Law Enforcement.

One thing about our Chief Ranger: deadpan though he appeared much of the time, he liked people so wholeheartedly that it took him longer than any of us to reach the boiling point. When finally driven to it, however, he reacted quietly but with the delicate touch of the current in the electric chair. That day, Roy calmly studied the front license plate and the registration slip on the steering wheel, and then reached inside his blouse pocket for a citation book. Mama's face ossified into a scowl.

Inside Park Headquarters Assistant Ranger Clyde Newlin, who always brightened every utterance with verbal neon, gave a low whistle. "Roy had better look sharp," he said, grinning. "That gal's face is like a time bomb, and believe you me, it's ticking away."

Roy went on doing his job as he saw it. One foot propped on the front bumper, he began to write in the little book of pink tickets. Between his devotion to detail and his efforts at self-control, he failed to notice the big boxer loping back to the car. He paid no heed when Mama, scattering redwood needles, snatched up leash's end, just then passing on her right.

Brutus, though secured and legal at last, had not yet finished with Big Basin. While Roy wrote, the dog sniffed the park pickup and a Picnic Area directional sign, and would have none of them. Then he loped to something he hadn't investigated before — the Chief Ranger's pant leg. It struck a responsive note. Something about it started his juices flowing.

Roy's concentration and heavy twill being what they were, the impact of Brutus' preference had no effect at the time nor immediately afterwards, when the dog gave our duff

a few hefty flips with his hind feet; or even after that, when he jumped onto the back seat of the car and sat down with a bored "Home, James" expression on his sad countenance.

Still unaware of Brutus' contribution to his day, Roy concluded the State's business. The woman snatched the carbon copy, and leering murderously, flounced into the Cadillac, jammed the gear into reverse, and with a mighty lurch slammed backwards into one of our mammoth redwoods, stoving in the car trunk. Then, without noticing, or so much as a backward glance at Roy, she gave whip to the horses and roared away in a cloud of monoxide, leaving tread behind clear up to the first turn in the Saratoga Road.

Same old deadpan, stolid and capable as ever, Roy rumbled back into the office, one pant leg dripping the essence of Brutus all over his newly-shined boot. Some time passed, too, before he was able to appreciate our laughing jag.

"Well," Clyde said after regaining his breath, "now that we have the drinking fountain, the ferns, the Grandmother Tree, and the Chief Ranger duly launched, perhaps we can get on with the season. "

I can never think of dogs in our state parks without the Castle Crags dachshund coming to mind. He was different from any other dog visitor any of us ever encountered, for he was admitted to that park and camped for some time, regulations notwithstanding.

As the family car pulled up to the checking station, the ranger on duty detected the dachshund in the back seat atop a pile of blankets.

"Sorry," he said politely, after the elderly couple had spoken their wish to register. "We have State regulations forbidding dogs the overnight privilege."

"Oh, *that*," the man replied, showing relief. "That's no problem."

"Well, sir, I'm afraid it is. Your dachshund —"

"She'll be no trouble. I can guarantee that."

The ranger smiled; he'd heard this dozens of times before. Dozens of times a week, in fact. It was a daily occurrence in every park. He continued patiently. "I'm afraid, sir, that we couldn't accept your dog and turn away the others."

The man sat back dejectedly, then swallowed hard. His

wife leaned across him. Her voice quivered as she took up the plea.

"We won't be breaking any of your regulations, ranger," she persisted quietly, half-turning to look at the animal behind her. "You see, our little dog died last spring. To keep her near us, we — we had her mounted. When it came time for our vacation, well, she had always enjoyed our trips so much that we couldn't leave her behind — naturally."

"Oh — yes — naturally," the ranger replied finally and without actually being aware of it. He was too preoccupied with the realization that the glassy-eyed dachshund in the back seat hadn't once moved.

Chapter Twelve: Big Basin

Some of My Best Friends Were Wild

I have always been glad that my years in the redwoods passed happily in game preserves. Even so, there were times when man's unholy obsession with killing invaded the park where I was stationed.

Still vivid is that incident at Big Sur when a camper, hearing a suspicious thrashing around on the hillside above his tent, reported the matter to Headquarters. Upon investigation, two of the rangers found a little gray fox whimpering in pain and fear, one paw snagged in a steel trap. The poor little fellow wanted relief so much that he remained perfectly still in the lap of one of the men while the other pried apart the two rows of jagged teeth. Afterwards, he even let them massage his paw and sympathize with his pain until, when they finally set him down, he took off for the trees as fast as three good feet could carry him. Before he vanished, he paused several times to look back at those who had set him free. It made their day.

We always had to be on constant alert for violations of our game sanctuaries. This, however, didn't always include a refereeing and arbitration service for the park's natives. In both theory and practice, a park must be for all. If some of its inhabitants just had to bite and claw to death in mortal combat, that was usually their business, the same as if they had battled miles away, beyond our knowing. During the rutting season, bucks occasionally lock antlers and die of starvation together if no one finds and disentangles them. Game Wardens and Rangers who learn of such occurrences go to the rescue. But the men make no move to separate two raccoons who may be settling a feud. Neither do they go out and shoot lions that come to prey upon the deer, nor destroy rattlers unless the things happen to be where someone might conceivably encounter them. All snakes are valuable. They help ride herd on the rodents, which, given the most infinitesimal opportunity, would swarm across the face of the earth. We need every natural control we can get.

One of the really amazing animal phenomena I have observed was the assembling of the deer in Big Basin Park Center each August on the opening day of the deer hunting

season. The afternoon before, there might have been only a dozen or so of the animals walking about or lying in the meadow grasses; yet next morning by daybreak, deer would be all over the place. They had come in from miles around to take refuge with us. Coolly exhibiting the charisma usually attributed to movie stars and super-athletes, long used to drooling audiences, they would mingle with both tourists and campers, passing among the tents and sleeping bags and cars and laden picnic tables as if these things were standard on distant ridges.

Almost anywhere in Park Center, one would see yearlings with their brand new spikes, two year olds with forked "horns", and stately old bucks with wide racks of antlers. And there never was any lack of does and fawns. Some of the does had singles; many had twins; sometimes one would throw triplets. All sojourned among us for the entire hunting season. During that time, so many would turn up for our 4 PM oat call that we had to bring out extra buckets full to take care of them. We never ceased to marvel at the Wondrous Voice that directed them each year to seek safety in our park on the *exact* day.

As soon as the deer had finished their oats, which they obviously considered to be mere samples, most turned expectantly to the onlookers to take their care and feeding from there. Bursting to oblige, park visitors would leave steaks and hamburgers to cremate while they shared the rest of their picnic fare with the four-legged moochers; after that, they emptied the park grocery of potato chips, bread, cookies, and fruit. Breathlessly, some ran miles and miles of film through their cameras, for how soon again, if ever, would one get to feed a wild deer while scratching his long ears and granite-hard head?

The Big Basin custom of hosting the deer every day at exactly 4 o'clock covered most of a half century before Sacramento decided that people and oats and film wrappers were bad for the animals. This was also about the time visitors, both old and young, became more and more impelled to offer food, then repeatedly withdraw it to entice the creatures closer. After so many such shenanigans, sharp hooves occasionally struck out in protest. I watched a doe rip a naval officer's uniform neatly down the front right after I had warned the

man about teasing her. He hadn't seen things my way. Being every inch The Brass, he was accustomed to giving orders, not taking them (or suggestions either) even if the war had ended. I suppose he had as much right as anyone to learn the hard way that there's a slight difference between commanding an aircraft carrier and a four-legged female with a mind of her own.

In various state parks, signs began to appear that read: DO NOT FEED THE DEER. That has also become the order of the day in the national parks; only there, the rule first applied to the bears, which had been giving the campers fits. We didn't have bear trouble in the coastal redwood parks the way they did and sometimes still do. But campers have never stopped expecting it. Every now and then at Big Basin, someone fresh from Sequoia or Yosemite would rush up and ask, "How about your bears, ranger?"

To this we could always smile benignly while reassuring them that we had none to worry about. In the North Coast Ranges, north of San Francisco Bay, the American black bear still flourishes, but remains mostly behind scenes, minding his own business. The ranges from the Bay Area south to about San Luis Obispo, which include Big Basin, had once been grizzly territory, and the now-extinct grizzlies had not tolerated black bears. So no bears today.

One time we heard that state biologists were doing research in the park. After a decent interval, the men reportedly decided that the oats we fed the Big Basin deer, together with the tourist tidbits, did very bad things to the animals' intestinal tracts and coats. This might have been true to some extent. Anyway, the much-loved daily event, like the firefall at Yosemite, went the way of several other simple pleasures once enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of visitors. It ground to a halt; yet strangely enough, the offending grain went right on corrupting deer stomachs. The State simply failed to note that oats became immediately available at the park grocery for 10¢ a bag, and that there was no limit to the amount you could buy to distress deer with. Oats avalanched out of the store and into the animals almost as fast as it could be sacked. And when the sacks ran out, familiar round boxes filled in. Quaker Company may have realized a small fortune from Big Basin alone as the deer continued to thrive. Certainly the Oats Rush made the

concessionaire happy, and indirectly the State treasury, since it received a nice percentage of the concessionaire's gross. After years of being associated with what I assumed to be conservation, I began to wonder who was conserving whom.

Our deer led a good life. They could disappear into hundreds of square miles of redwood forest or they could dally among us and become tourist-watchers — or both — exactly as they wished. Within the park they were quite safe, at least from hunters; most lived to ripe old age despite the over-indulgences of excited visitors to whom deer had formerly been only pictures in magazines and movies or prisoners in a zoo.

Take Mike or Sam or Jack. For sixteen to eighteen years that I know of, each placidly chewed up and swallowed whatever he selected from all that was offered. They posed impartially and majestically with everyone for snapshots that would be lovingly preserved in family albums for generations; they could move about freely with no hazards other than automobiles and perhaps an occasional attack of indigestion; their lives would close peacefully among us who loved them. Possibly some of my conservation was a bit unorthodox, but somehow I thought our family deer could have done worse in their pursuit of happiness.

One game warden assured me, "So what if some deer do choose to spend their lives with the likes of you! Their stomachs become more or less adjusted to human fare. The only thing is that when the tourists leave, they could have a problem reverting to their own natural browse." Evidently few of them did, for the sopping wintertime in Big Basin made tourist-prospecting mighty skimpy, and none of us noticed any of our deer fading away from attitude adjustment and starvation.

At the very start of my years in the redwoods I learned how easily my heart could be melted by big, soft-brown eyes and Garbo eyelashes. Alas, the Big Basin deer soon learned that, too. From then on they worked every angle. Some would always await my return to the cabin each late afternoon to prepare dinner. With necks outstretched, they would stamp impatiently around my back steps and peer into the kitchen until I opened the door and talked to them. Then how the

propaganda would roll! You would have thought they were about to collapse from hunger.

I could see Suzie nudging her twins and muttering under her breath, "Do you want to starve? Turn on the oil. Remember, this park gal is good for a loaf of bread just to start with. Look famished." And so they did. They'd get not only a loaf of day-old bread (which I bought by the gunnysack on my day off) but a part of my dinner as well.

Later on, near midnight, I'm sure Suzie must have nudged her twins again and told them, "See that big fellow over there in Park Headquarters? That's Lou Donaldson, the night ranger. He'll be eating lunch any minute now — before his next run in the pickup. If we'll just get ourselves over there and gaze in through the big window at him and drool, we've got it made. He's an old softie. Let's go." And so they did that, too. Around the clock the deer grapevine bore fruit like mad.

Many times during my fourteen years at Big Basin, park people hand-raised fawns. Ordinarily a stray isn't an orphaned one. His mother is nearby, and he shouldn't be picked up. But sometimes one is found that really has been orphaned either by accident or predator, and must be cared for. More than any, I remember Skippy.

Warden Moody discovered him at the side of the road, nuzzling his dead mother, who had stepped out from behind a Douglas-fir, directly into the path of a car.

Only for a few moments did the fawn show fear of this man who loomed large before him. Bleating pitifully, he wobbled a dozen steps as if to escape. Then his legs gave way and down he went in a patch of oxalis. When Mr. Moody tenderly lifted and tucked him inside his jacket, the little one did not struggle. Somehow he realized he was secure. With that, he relaxed and let Mr. Moody carry him home down into Park Center.

By the time the fawn had been bedded on a woolen blanket near the woodstove in the Moody kitchen, he was acting as peaceful as a lamb, newly born to the Project Ewe of some 4-H boy or girl.

If you've ever seen or held a fawn, you know that he very much resembles a lamb or kid except for his protective coloring. His coat, tawny and flecked with brown and white,

serves as a camouflage the first few months of his life, while he remains small and helpless. Lying perfectly still among leaves and shrubs, he is difficult to see. You can't distinguish him from the mottled sunlight on the forest litter. Then, too, the scent bags behind the fawn's knees don't develop for six months, so he can't be detected by odor. A lion could pass nearby and never know of his presence unless he moves, which he does not. His mother has taught him to "freeze."

Skippy quickly adjusted to his new home. He took his first bottle of warm milk and honey like a veteran and then snuggled down on the blanket to enjoy the warmth from the stove.

May had only begun. The day Mr. Moody brought Skippy in, spring skies were still shaking out what remained of the winter lows; the redwood forest was still so chilly and damp that the warden and his wife kept Skippy indoors for almost a week. In that time he grew up a bit and had callers. Members of the park families — especially the youngsters — came regularly to give him his bottle and watch him thrive under the loving care of the childless Moodys. They spoiled him and were aware of spoiling him, of course. But how could they have stopped? Skippy wouldn't let them.

We could see the signs of things to come the first day our little waif kicked open the Moody screen door and bounded out into the open. Standing there, all four hooves wide apart, his eyes flashed impudence calculated to let you know he was now ready to match wits with anyone. "This," I said to Mr. Moody, "is no ordinary fawn." He agreed.

Yet Skippy's jet-propelled debut into the outdoors soon became bleak business indeed. It could have been because he smelled of human that his own kind would have nothing to do with him; or it could have been that mature deer would have no truck, *period*, with young smarties. Anyway, to Skippy's surprise and dismay, the park deer lashed out at him with their sharp hooves, and ran him off. Instinctively, he sought safety with those whose love he could count on. He had to be quick about it though, for several of the bucks were taking out after him.

Pouring on the coal, he tore for the nearest refuge — the souvenir shop. The fact that it bulged with tourists buying postcards and other mementos of their visit to the giant trees

deterred Skippy not at all. With racks of antlers crowding his tail, he didn't hesitate to spring onto the steps, and by skidding, bumping, and clattering, manage to stumble to the porch, leaving the fire-breathing bucks behind in a cloud of dust. This brash young squirt could plunge into a building full of people if he wished, but not they! Back and forth outside they stomped, milling around, snorting and pawing the ground in frustration, waiting for the object of their disgust to reappear.

Meanwhile, Skippy was causing no end of commotion inside the shop. In valiant struggle to keep his balance and obtain some kind of traction, those hooves of his alternately shot out from under him and beat a rackety tattoo all over the wooden floor, sending him into collision with customers, scattering them every direction. Added to the din of confusion was the loud crash of the postcard stand he knocked over while scrambling to stay on his feet and at the same time scoot behind the counter. The clerk, Peg Bishop, about to ring up a sale, flopped over the cash register as Skippy pushed between her and the wall shelves of knickknacks. But when she looked down and saw him leaning heavily against her legs, panting and glassy-eyed, all cockiness gone, she knew what had happened. Later she reminded us, "Remember? I told you he'd be rejected by the others."

Without question, having to hide behind a woman's skirts must have shattered Skippy's ego, although at the moment he was in no position to be choosey.

Most of the summer Skippy managed to elude the wrath of his elders by peeking to see if the coast was clear before stepping out from behind a redwood or a clump of azaleas.

Following Labor Day, when most of the campers left, things got easier for him. Many of the deer now began taking longer and longer jaunts into the back country as their summer smorgasbord dwindled, and the rangers picked up and stored the park trash cans one by one.

With the passing of the first autumn days, Skippy's spots faded noticeably. Before long he would be as self-sufficient in the forest as any other adolescent. His legs were strong, and he had learned to be quick and shifty on them. During nearly four months of dodging hostilities, tagging along behind sightseers, and panhandling campers, Skippy had become the happy

extrovert — in his eyes, the unmistakable glint of mischief. We wondered what would be next for him. How would this personality boy fit into the life of the big park now that his adoring public had vanished from the scene? We soon found out.

Early October ushered in the first of the winter rains. No more than light showers, they refreshed the forest floor and dampened the meadow just enough that its grasses and ferns, flattened by summer visitors, began to stand up straight and tall again. At mid-day, the meadow was a beautiful, warm place; late in the afternoon, after the sun had vanished behind the lofty green wall of redwoods, the air grew chilly enough that the boys of the park families found the clearing perfect for after-school football.

Park children must devise their own fun, but they have a wealth of possibilities all around them to choose from. What the average town youngster yearns his heart out for and reads and dreams about endlessly, park youngsters find right at hand. Still, come fall and the start of school, boys everywhere start thinking football.

This particular year of Skippy, almost enough boys lived in Big Basin for two four-man football teams. One team was short a player, but only until the day Skippy bounded playfully into the middle of scrimmage, to be grabbed, hugged, and recruited. From then on, competition was better than even.

With coaching, Skippy learned fast. And with zest. No one really had to show him what to do. Once he saw the chubby quarterback receive the ball from center and race toward the line, he naturally knew. Head down, he sprang in the same direction, and plowed into the line first, bowling over everyone in his path. For the ball carrier, he opened up a hole in both lines you could have driven the park garbage truck through.

The boys squealed with delight. What did it matter that Skippy had taken out members of both teams impartially? He had merely eliminated whatever loomed before him.

Calling time out, the boys revised the rules so that the side in possession of the ball had a four-legged halfback to run interference. The plan worked fine. Skippy, included and warmed by love and applause, blossomed as never before. His already sublime pleasure in himself soared to new heights.

That year, Skippy made the All Big Basin team because

supply of tourists, all with backsides, many leaning over. Something had to give. It did.

The rangers, aware of the possibilities and by now thoroughly fed up with deer athletes, decided that for the conservation and preservation of park visitors, best to introduce their juvenile delinquent to the wide open spaces. So one morning they loaded him into the pickup and took him nine miles up the Saratoga Road to the North Gate on the rim of Big Basin. There, in the sunshine among madrones and jack pines, they let him out and figured that was that.

They didn't know Skippy. He saw nothing familiar up there in this hot, open forest; certainly there were no people to play with and fuss over him. Instantly, I suppose, as he did everything else, he made up his mind to quit this God-forsaken place and get the heck back to his folks, as fast as he could, too, and not around all of those senseless curves.

Skippy didn't quite beat the pickup back to Park Center, but he made it in for 4 o'clock oats. Before the week was over, a botanist, bending over to examine a fern, got a closer look than he had anticipated. That did it. Skippy was taken downcanyon a few miles to Big Trees County Park (now Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park) and confined to a huge fenced-in area in the grove with several other deer.

I wish I could report a happy ending to the story, but I can't. Deprived of freedom, familiar places, and most of all, his loved ones, Skippy's blithe spirit withered; then, his heart broke. Before the leaves turned, he died, apparently because he saw no reason to live. Something in us died with him.

Tragedies such as this make park folk hope a deer heaven awaits sparkling souls like Skippy, where they can have their tourists and butt them, too. None of us will ever forget our merry little problem child. All of our lives we will see his snapping mischievous eyes, his twirling tail, and his spring-shod hooves; his cast iron, armor-plated skull; and his two spikes, set like crowning jewels.

Wild things are very often adopted, loved, and spoiled by those among us who mean so well, yet how easy it is to make a mistake in raising them.

I'll always remember the tiny fawn one of our new men found and took into his home, poor baby. By courtesy of

the finest of intentions and a new ranger's complete lack of understanding — or any inclination to acquire any thereof --she never stood a chance. Less than one day old and scarcely dry, the little thing was put out in the back yard when night came "because she's a child of the forest and naturally wants out."

"She doesn't want anything but her mother," I had remonstrated with this man who knew so much that he wasn't able to cope with his job for long. "You *can't* put her out. She's too young and the nights right now are far too cold. Remember, she has no mother to keep her warm."

"My friend, she's wild, not domestic," he had insisted, as if I didn't know. And after I had gone on my pestiferous way and darkness had come, he did put the fawn out. Next day she died in his arms of pneumonia. To be well-meaning is not nearly enough.

Most of the redwood country animals I have known that were hand-raised turned out well, returning to their own kind as they should have. But before they did, nearly everyone had turned into a character not easily forgotten.

Like the fawn Sandy. After she was orphaned in Big Basin, Gus Sgarloto, the Lodge innkeeper and his wife, Daphne, adopted her. Fortunately Sandy had no competitive spirit and therefore no athletic inclinations as had Skippy. She was the perfect lady, politely winning and influencing people. Lively, yet gentle and sociable, Sandy participated in the refined and cultured activities around the Lodge.

For example, whenever she noticed chairs being arranged in a semicircle, she knew a special treat such as movies or slides was in prospect. These she must see. While someone readied the projector and fifty or so guests were seating themselves, Sandy would make herself comfortable on the floor directly in front of the screen. She seemed utterly transfixed by the changing picture, and no show proved too lengthy for her to watch clear to the end. When the entertainment was over, however, she would rise, stretch, yawn, and amble to the door to be let out for the night.

More than anything, Sandy liked small children and soon became skillful at their hunting games. She knew more places to hide than they, and by instinct how to "freeze" once hidden.

Can you imagine any small child ever remaining motionless for more than a few seconds? Pressing her advantage, Sandy hid and froze, and they just hid. Then, with squeaks and squeals of delight, they “discovered” one another and went jumping around, all of them together, as if made of rubber.

One of Sandy’s secret hideouts was in the shadows under the big round coffee table in the lobby. She would scramble under it, flatten her ears, and lie still until one of the children found her; then scramble out and bounce gaily around the room. All summer long, everyone thought this the most fun.

As September drew to a close, it became apparent — even to Sandy — that she had almost outgrown her hiding place. I was there the evening she outgrew it completely; when wriggling under the table was difficult enough; wriggling out again, impossible. Valiantly and somewhat frantically, the fawn struggled, but to no avail. Trapped was the word for it. Gus finally had to lift the table off her.

For a few moments, Sandy stood staring at the thing that could now hold her prisoner. Then a kind of pleased amazement lighted up those big brown eyes. You could see it dawn on her that she was growing up.

Suddenly everyone there began to laugh. Sandy, out of embarrassment perhaps, but more as if to celebrate her abrupt crossing from fawnhood to adolescence, began jumping from one Navajo rug to another, kicking and bucking like a mustang. To this farewell to the Junior League — her coming out party — she gave everything she had, rushing here and there, skidding rugs into heaps, leaping up on couches and chairs, flirting outrageously.

From that time forth, Sandy would have no more of milk out of a bottle. Not that a bottle didn’t interest her anymore; she was just more particular about its contents. Once she had Coke, that was it — until she tasted beer; then that was it. Nothing else would do.

After the season, Gus and Daphne moved into Sunnyview, a retirement setup they had been building at the upper edge of Summit Meadow, three miles above Big Basin on the road to Santa Cruz. Near the house Gus had also built a grocery store and motel.

Sandy went along to Sunnyview and immediately made herself at home in the spacious house and warm meadow, but

especially in the grocery store, where she appointed herself the official Greeter. In line with Sandy's idea of being The Deer of Distinction, Daphne decked her out in one of Gus's red bow ties. All summer she wore it proudly. A familiar sight, Sandy could be seen sporting her finery and nuzzling customers, who were amazed and delighted to say the least.

On hot days, though, the doe sacrificed popularity for the comfort of the walk-in icebox. In there she was free of annoying deerflies, and could lie in cool solitude among the bottles of soft drinks and beer, to which she had become addicted.

Sandy enjoyed a number of privileges at Sunnyview. For one thing, she had the run of the candy bar and made all the young customers envious by strolling nonchalantly behind the counter and helping herself. And when the spirit moved her, she let herself in through the back screen door of the home to nap on the overstuffed couch and chairs in the living room. Of an afternoon, though, what could be nicer than a front porch welcome mat and traffic watching until the sun went down. When the last golden rays disappeared behind the hills, you could be sure that Sandy would rise, stretch, and saunter to the grocery for a PM bottle of beer.

Near the end of the summer, the doe had to be banned from inside the house, all because of wearing out her welcome.

A week before, the Sgarlatos had bought a new maple dining room set, and on the table Daphne had arranged a bowl of geraniums. After she and Gus had left for town to get supplies, Sandy nosed open the screen door, and on her way to the couch, saw the flowers on the new table. Being an ardent geranium-fancier, up she jumped and ate them every one. This act plunged her into monumental disgrace, for the tabletop had to be refinished. From then on, exile was the only answer.

The first winter at Sunnyview, Sandy acquired a boyfriend. Bucky was a personality that stood out from the deer crowd in a way all his own. You might say he corresponded to our "boy next door." A stickler for convention, he did his courting in the best approved manner, coming to the house many times and making intentions clear before melding into the family circle.

For a time it proved to be a happy household. Bucky became as lovable as Sandy had always been. All winter he watched over his mate tenderly; then, late in May, after their

fawn was born, he vanished, leaving Sandy to raise the little one alone.

She did a good job, although under difficulties. No longer protected by the sanctuary of the state park and now a well-known public figure, she was never really safe on private property — doe or not.

Hunters often stopped at the grocery, took a long look, and drove away reluctantly, gazing back with ulterior motives in their eyes. Sandy was smart. She sensed what filled their thoughts, so whenever her human family needed to be away, she played it safe by disappearing behind the big old barn at the far side of the meadow. Instinct told her that some of those long-lookers would return to Sunnyview in the absence of its owners.

Yet none of the trespassers ever did locate Sandy and her fawn. She was too wily for them. She simply nudged her baby through a creep hole in the back of the old barn. Inside, the two of them would stand quietly in the dark, peeking out through the cracks, watching the hunter steal by, shotgun at the ready, no doubt figuring to bag his quarry at the edge of the forest.

Sandy's big moment came during the great forest fire of August 1948. The Sgarlatos, on vacation and far away, were unaware of the disaster for many days. Meanwhile, much of the forest back of Sunnyview and Big Basin burned in what soon grew into one of the worst conflagrations ever known in that area. In it we almost lost both Sunnyview and Big Basin.

During the first weeks of the holocaust, Gus and Daphne's meadow was used as a base by firefighters from all over the state. Working together with Army, Navy, and convict personnel, residents and forestry units tried desperately to stop the inferno that roared over Pine Mountain and down into Little Basin, across ridge after ridge, where to end no one could guess.

At Sunnyview, Sandy lost no time in entering into the spirit of the emergency. Appropriately dressed in her red bow tie, she went right to work to make every firefighter feel welcome on her property. She passed among the exhausted smoke-grimed men, ministering to them as best she could, while behind them all, treetops whipped around as if fanned by a hurricane, and enormous yellow clouds of smoke boiled up into the sky and blotted out the sun.

In return for her moral support during those critical hours, Sandy modestly accepted a record amount of fringe benefits, her PM bottle — or more accurately, her PM *bottles* — of beer being just one. Of course she made all the newspapers. Photographers came from far and wide to take pictures of her in her red bow tie, playing gracious hostess to fatigue-sodden men; laying her cold nose on the brow of many a sleeping fireman; standing by as trucks full of volunteers and equipment drove away toward the flames and smoke.

Not too long after the fire had been brought under control and the occupation of the meadow ended, Bucky appeared again, although only briefly, to claim his family. Together then, he and Sandy and the fawn went into what was left of the redwood forest near Little Basin, never to be seen again.

Some years after Sandy came Bambi. In fine style he, too, was to make the transition from Public Idol #1 to just another deer in the forest.

A fawn couldn't have been more petted and fussed over than he. From May, when someone carried him into the Lodge, until late October, when the Lodge closed for the season, Bambi was liberally spoiled by both staff and guests — with one exception.

Most of his admirers had never seen a deer in its natural setting — to say nothing of one walking around a hotel lobby and dining room as if he were a *maître d'* of long experience and impeccable references. Where Skippy had been a captivating Puck, this little fellow was as elite and coolly poised as a First Vice President. His eyes never shot the vermilion sparks that Skippy's had, but always glowed softly, placidly brown. As someone said one day: "He sees no pay in tearing around and butting people to get attention when he knows easier ways."

Through much of the summer, Bambi enjoyed bottle feeding by sojourners from Mississippi, New York, Alaska, Macedonia, Hangchow, China, and just about everywhere else. While staying at Big Basin Lodge, these visitors would walk the Redwood Trail, gazing reverently at the trees, some of the largest and oldest living things on the face of the earth, and speaking in hushed tones. But I think the real thrill of staying in our park was Bambi. During the dining hour he

always contrived to saunter from table to table, resting his head in laps, awarding diners the privilege of smoothing and scratching it. This was his personal welcome to each guest individually.

On cold evenings, and most are in Big Basin, even in the summer, Bambi insisted upon lying on the raised hearth in front of the fire. The fireplace itself was huge, and the great logs burned brightly until about midnight, when the last of the guests went off to bed. But as long as anyone remained to sit and talk or play cards, Bambi kept them company on the hearth, not three feet from the flames, panting as if slowly dying of thirst. Many times, concerned guests moved the fawn to more comfortable places only to see him rise and stalk back to his hot spot, lie down contentedly, and start panting all over again.

The year of Bambi turned out to be also the year of Sun Yan, the Chinese chef. The man knew his business, and he ran his domain with all the life and death authority of a war lord. The young help were scared to death of him because he had an unpleasant way of going berserk if one of them approached him while he 1.) prepared the entrees 2.) seasoned anything 3.) looked into the oven 4.) attended to last-minute details for salads and desserts 5.) all other times. One of the waitresses put the whole matter in perspective by whispering, "He goes around with his ears laid back."

The kitchen crew panicked whenever one of them dropped something while Sun Yan carved meat. Things could happen at such electric moments, for Sun Yan was an artist with any sharp-edged blade, and too hair-triggered for comfort. Bambi may have suspected that to this Chinese chef he rated no better than animated cuisine; yet even so, he saw no reason to let any chef separate him from the good things of life. And he *was* intrigued by those fantastic salads the man put together.

Peeking cautiously in through the kitchen screen door at them, all side by side on the long salad table, beautifully constructed of colorful fruit rising tall from a lettuce bedding to a Maraschino cherry peak, he drooled and drooled. For days he peeked and drooled — and bided his time.

One noon the right moment came. At least two dozen of those salads, fully assembled and beckoning, lined the edge of the table, ready for the waitresses to deliver to the dining room.

Sun Yan was darting from one to the other of noisily sizzling pots on the vast plateau of stove, oblivious of everything else. For a few minutes he would be hovering over his steaming creations of the day. Then, with small chirps and squeaks of satisfaction, he would summon waitresses, serve up, and having given his all, collapse in a quivering heap on a stool by the sink.

Bambi, of course, knew this sequence; he had been casing the joint.

Carefully nosing open the screen door, he slipped inside the kitchen, setting down each hoof so slyly that Sun Yan couldn't possibly hear him. Slowly, very slowly, as the Queen Mary would ease up to her berth, Bambi sidled up to the salad table and filched the salads one after another. Due to press of time, he ate somewhat faster than usual, but nevertheless relished everything with a delight long postponed. During this ecstatic interlude, Sun Yan was concentrating on his hot dishes, adding herbs and spices, stirring vigorously, tasting for flavor, swirling around the stove in a veritable whirlwind of finishing touches.

How Bambi ever managed to gobble up most of that string of fruit salads without dragging a dish off onto the floor no one will ever know, but he did. By time for Sun Yan to utter that singsong cry of rapture over his morning's artistry and turn to summon waitresses, nearly all the salads had been dismantled. In one furiously cataleptic moment, the chef saw that they had been — and why.

Pandemonium broke loose. All that was Tong War and hatchet man came careening around the end of the salad table, shrieking Oriental outrage and brandishing a gleaming cleaver on high.

Still trying to maintain that poise for which he had always been famous, Bambi skirted the end of the salad table just ahead of the cleaver. He was no fool. He must have known that if caught in such an awkward situation he would wind up in the next stewpot, state park or no state park. And since he didn't aim to end that way, he bolted the nearest exit — the swinging doors into the dining room. Considering that the floors had been freshly waxed and the room was filled to capacity, Bambi found it no mean feat to skid to a stop before

falling flat or bowling over a waitress or some of dozens of guests.

The diners, not really accustomed to a deer bounding into their midst during the soup course, rose off their chairs and gasped. Then they smiled and sat down when Bambi recovered his balance and began to strut toward the lobby in one of the most stately retreats of modern times. Bambi knew that no chef — not even this one — would rush screaming into a crowded dining room, brandishing a cleaver in hot pursuit of a poor little fawn, everybody's darling.

To me, Bambi was the living proof that still waters run deep. Unperturbed, he ambled back into the dining room at dessert time, nonchalant as ever, available for petting and sympathy in case the guests insisted upon bestowing both, which of course they did.

Big Basin Lodge continued to operate under a few small difficulties such as this as long as the Chinese chef presided over the kitchen, for Bambi pulled the same stunt again before the man left, and the Health Department and Sanitation struck.

Eventually autumn rolled around. Gold replaced green on the broadleaf trees. Only a few guests remained at the Lodge — and Bambi had been banned from both lobby and dining room. Thus excommunicated from the Inner Circle, interest in the forest gradually replaced his dependence on humans, and he began to venture farther and farther from Park Center. One day he left for good. As far as we knew, Bambi reverted with the same aplomb with which he had captivated his world of people.

Whenever I was home, deer craned their necks to see into my house. I had to adjust to changing clothes with a half dozen pairs of eyes gazing through my bedroom windows with unabashed curiosity. Sometimes the daily striptease reminded me of dreams I'd had of walking downtown Los Angeles in my nightgown.

In a way it *was* somewhat the same. My cabin stood between the Picnic Area and the Lodge, and I did in fact have all the privacy of the May Company's corner window Christmas display. One nice thing, though: the house had been built on a gentle slope; therefore, my kitchen, at least, was high enough off the ground that neither tourists nor deer could see

in without mounting the back porch to peer through the glass of my window and door.

Early every morning I could expect two little chipmunks to do just that. Sparky and Stubby (of the half-tail) liked to climb up to the windowsill and peek in, chirruping at me to open my door. They knew I kept a carton of English walnuts on the floor beside the cupboard, and whenever they heard me get up and begin to prepare breakfast, the rush was on. We'd eat together then. But I made sure to crack the nuts after Sparky had his accident.

Gripping the seam of a huge walnut in those sharp incisor teeth of his, he had scampered happily out the door and toward the Picnic Area — although not far. The big walnut, considerably larger than his head, made it impossible for him to see where he was going. In bouncing toward his secret hiding place, he had plowed full speed into a tanoak stump.

That morning I reported late for work, for how could I be free to tend my own kind before I had rubbed one small chipmunk's bump and promised an unobstructed view for him in the future?

Even Stubby had a slight mishap. While I stood at my front door telling a picnicker that no, my house was not the restrooms; that the restrooms were right over there, where the sign indicated, Stubby jumped up onto the table and dove into the peanut butter jar. In the doing, he sank into crime so deeply he couldn't extricate himself. When I returned to the kitchen, all I could see of him was his hind feet and half-tail sticking out of the jar.

You can't always shut your door against forest friends who like to come in and share. You just have to keep your home clear of all the hazards they are likely to encounter. I was forever working at it.

I didn't feel too badly about what happened to Sammy Jay. Every time some of the raccoons or chipmunks or deer came up onto my porch, he would sit on the railing and squawk his lungs out at them. He had more to say than anyone in the forest and he said it nonstop. I couldn't shut him up. One day he shut himself up and very nearly for good — the litterbug.

That particular afternoon, he had followed two big raccoons into my kitchen. Perched on my Kleenex box, he went right on airing his opinions. Then, to emphasize one of

his acid remarks no doubt, he poked his beak into the Kleenex, snatched a tissue, and took off out the door. Just outside, the Kleenex unfurled over his head, blinding him. Helplessly, I watched him fly a collision course directly into the trunk of a big redwood. For a time after that he had nothing to say — until he awoke.

Following his recovery Sammy returned many times, but not to my kitchen. And I noticed a difference in his haranguing. Goodness knows he had never been a boy soprano; now, due to his accident, Sammy's voice was several octaves lower. It had been knocked down to a croaky bass.

The redwood forest and its more open upper borders of madrone, jack pine, and chaparral are home for many animals, but more appear in some localities than others. At Richardson we saw few wild ones around the campgrounds, probably because the noisy, well-traveled Redwood Highway bisected the park. Only at Big Sur did I ever see foxes in the main section, and no more than a half dozen times in my twenty summers do I recall campers being visited by skunks.

I'll never forget the night at Big Basin when one went on an exploratory trip of an elderly lady's tent. The foray turned out to be harmless enough, but while in progress, it had all the earmarks of a white glove military inspection.

At a respectful distance, stiff and ramrod straight with apprehension, stood practically everyone in the park, none of us calling any suggestions lest we trigger something we might regret. Yet nothing too regrettable happened. The little fellow merely tore up the woman's toothbrush and tromped a long white worm of toothpaste out of its tube and all over her bedside orange crate nightstand. Then it topped that off with a thorough spit bath in the spilled contents of a bottle of My Desire and waddled off into the darkness. Considering the pee-wee expression on his face as he glanced our way, I got the impression that he much preferred his own fragrance to one of ours.

Coyotes kept to themselves. Rangers and members of their families glimpsed them only occasionally and then usually in the off-season in the higher and more remote places. Sometimes, however, one would appear in Big Basin's Flea Potrero, where the State residences were located.

There was that morning when Jim Whitehead, new on the job (now Chairman of the State Park and Recreation Commission), looked out his kitchen window in time to see a coyote chasing a doe through the meadow. Outraged, he determined to save the endangered lady. So he grabbed the only weapon handy, an empty milk bottle, and took off in hot pursuit.

On the far side of the Potrero and running a poor third, Jim tripped. By courtesy of the momentum generated in his dive through the air, the milk bottle got hurled at the coyote, all right. Nice try. The animal never did realize that someone with an eye to murder was on his tail though. With Jim the story was different. He limped back home, his brand new twill uniform trousers ripped across both knees. With pants as costly as they were, his milk run turned out to be expensive. Nature, uninterrupted, went right on being Nature.

I have seen more bobcats on the desert than I ever did in the big timber. Parts of the Mojave are well populated with them. One I encountered in Big Basin I shall always remember.

The time was early April of the year it fell to me to spend many pre-season hours going over the thirty-odd miles of Big Basin trails, making notes on repairs needed before the upcoming summer. In redwood forests, heavy rains and high winds of winter do harsh things to trails and their signs.

For perhaps two weeks I set out early with lunch and notebook, sometimes to be gone for most of daylight, depending upon the length and condition of the trail to be checked. At that time of year, spring should be just around the next weekend, but that isn't always so in redwood country. In the thick bedding of humus, continually soaked for many months, cold and dampness lingers. For trail sweeping I donned gloves, two woolen sweaters, a heavy jacket, and long handles under my jeans.

Unless you could be in that forest when spring does unfold, and see for yourself, you would be hard put to even imagine the pristine glory of the giant forest after the trees have rested from the merciless trampling of the previous summer, and before the arrival of the approaching summer's tourists. It is then that the ferns and grasses, well-watered, rejuvenated, washed clean, again stand erect; it is then that the oxalis and

trillium and wild iris and other ground-loving plants respond to the year's first warmth with dots of color. Rhododendrons and azaleas and dogwood and others splash the shrub level with showy blossoms. The hardwood tanoaks, madrones, and laurels bloom; and the tips of redwood branchlets, bright green with new growth, give luminous highlights to the somber hues of the canopy, towering darkly overhead. I have always thought these days of awakening to be the best of the year, for the giants and their companions still have time left to stand in tranquil silence before shouting hordes of vacationers arrive to fill the air with cries of joy and wonder.

On one of these still-crisp mornings I saw him, the beautiful bobcat, standing atop a huge log, gazing down with the calm intent stare that even a housecat trains on a human he is reading. His unexpected presence surprised me, but I wasn't alarmed. I spoke to him then and I spoke to him often during the hours of my survey, explaining what trail repairs were needed. Once it was while he stretched full length along the trunk of a windfall; other times as he picked his way among the hillside huckleberry bushes. Whenever I talked, he gave undivided attention — something I couldn't always count on from my own kind. In his curiosity he surely must have sensed my love for animals and my pleasure at his being there; my unwavering philosophy that there is unity in all life; that any animal I meet is due the same courtesy and consideration as a human. I wonder if he also sensed my caution because of knowing that he, above all others of our wild ones is probably the most unpredictable. Nevertheless, everything in me wanted to stretch out a hand and offer portions of my lunch. Instead, I settled for merely talking to my companion as I walked along and tended my chores without fear, making sure, however, to use common sense and keep a watchful eye his direction whenever he drew too close.

Until late afternoon he stayed with me. Only when we approached the campground did he draw the line on friendship. The moment came that I glanced upslope and saw no bobcat. Scanning the forest behind me, I finally discovered him. He had chosen a high stump for our goodbyes, and there he sat in statuesque dignity, watching me walk on down the road toward Headquarters. Several times I looked back and

waved. Somehow it just seemed fitting — and what I felt like doing in appreciation for his trust.

I think wild animals know when they are in the presence of one who bears them no malice; when there is neither fear nor intent to do them harm; when they are admired and respected. Without being aware that we do, perhaps some of us through fear or hate set off an unpleasant biochemical reaction that is every bit as offensive to the animal world as the skunk's natural reaction — and defense — is to ours. Or how do you explain why wild folk turn away in apparent disgust or terror from a few of us while others they tolerate, often trust, and sometimes grow to love?

Of all my forest friends through the years, more raccoons than any other creature seem to have thought my scent acceptable. Anyway, they have accented and highlighted my life like a theme song. Certainly I have never lacked for their company, and after a long day with the human race on vacation (not always a lovely sight or sound), the masked bandits were a welcome relief. About dusk I'd begin seeing them around my cabin, and I knew that much later, when I returned from Campfire and other duties, a number would be there waiting to share some kind of nightcap.

Many an evening I didn't get in until well past midnight. By then, garbage can lids all over the park would be banging and rolling around on the ground. Time for raccoons from every creek bank and hollow tree and from under every building to infiltrate campground, Park Center, and ranger residence areas; time for me to unwind, fix a snack, and entertain any little visitors who appeared at my door.

Among those I could always count on was the mother of the family that lived under my house. The first part of the summer, she came alone. After the middle of August, when mama raccoons started teaching their babies how to forage, she usually brought her brood along. Almost every night through June, July, and the first half of August, I had heard them beneath my bedroom floor, trilling and bumping their heads on the plumbing as they tumbled about, playing. They were a lot of company, even as merely sounds.

Because campers brought bags and lug-boxes of different kinds of fruit and vegetables from their gardens and ranches in

the rich Salinas, Santa Clara, and Great Central valleys, there never was any shortage of good things to eat in any of our park homes. Some former Big Basin campers may now be surprised to learn that a part of what they gave me went to my friends through the kitchen door. Let them be advised, too, that this made me far happier than if I'd tried to *stuff* myself with all the bounty they so thoughtfully provided.

One evening after campfire, I volunteered to babysit for Mel and Mary Whittaker in the "big house" in Park Center while they celebrated their anniversary by going to the dance. After they left, I settled comfortably on the overstuffed couch in the living room and read until I dozed.

Before long a slight disturbance alerted me. Without moving or opening my eyes, I forced myself to concentrate and soon identified the noise as the squeak of the back screen door being moved very, very slowly. Now I opened an eye far enough to see into the kitchen. Feigning sleep, I watched. Never had we ever been bothered with vandalism or thievery at Big Basin; yet this had the unmistakable aura of someone sneaking in where he had no business.

Sure enough, stealthy footsteps on the linoleum. I tensed. Then after a minute or two I saw a furry face with a black mask over its eyes peeking around the corner of the stove. So that was it. Well, I'd remain quiet and find out what he was up to.

When I made no move, the prowler evidently thought the coast clear, for he rumbled boldly across the kitchen floor, jumped up onto a chair, then the drainboard, where he systematically went over all parts of the electric Mixmaster, sampled a few of the grapes in a bowl, stuck a finger up one of the faucets, and tried out the nipples of the baby bottles. Nothing escaped his scrutiny before he finally abandoned the scene and swaggered into the living room.

Here he hesitated long enough to look me over with genuine concern, puzzled no doubt because I didn't either get up and feed him or throw him out. I'd swear he shrugged his shoulders before turning away and crawling into the Taylor Tot to play with the colored beads on the handlebar.

Next he patted Rudy's football, and then picked up Marilyn's doll by the hair. The balloon on the ottoman would have been great fun if he hadn't accidentally released the air, firing the thing over his head in a series of hissing loops that

scared him so badly he rolled back under a chair, snorting and bristling.

With a raccoon, curiosity isn't merely an amusing character trait, although most definitely it is that, too. More, it is a survival instinct; a dominating force that enhances any coon's life.

This one was curious about everything in the Whittaker home. Peering from his sanctuary under the chair, he soon forgot his fright at the balloon because of being attracted by fringe dangling from the lampshade on the table nearby. With no further ado, up he climbed to investigate. At last, tired of twiddling the metallic threads with his sensitive hands, he began to dig a hole in Mary's planter, at the same time scanning the room to see what else was new. While his eyes took inventory, his hands busied themselves with other things he wanted to know.

Fascination of the planter soon lagging, he hopped over to Mel's desk, there to become entranced with a large photograph of the Whittaker children. For some minutes he studied it, simultaneously helping himself to the jellybeans in the candy bowl. But even these novelties couldn't hold his fancy too long. They couldn't compete with the piano, topped as it was by a bouquet of gladiolas. Anyway, it offered a much loftier outlook than the desk.

Deciding to hit the high trail to it, he clambered up onto the back of the couch I occupied and ran the length of it, leaping nimbly over my face. From the end of the couch, the piano top was easy.

Up there he surveyed the scene, and while thus engaged, fingered every gladiola in Mary's flower arrangement. Yet his summit view ceased to interest him once he glanced down at the long row of black and white keys. Now what could they be? Well, he'd have to find out. A moment later he found out all about pianos.

It shouldn't have happened on a soft summer night. Lightly — like a sack of cement — the big fellow landed on the bass section, setting off a house-shaking BONG! in the piano's insides that panicked him the full length, end over end, arms and legs flailing wildly past high C and onto the floor with a deflating squish. And if he hadn't landed on a rug, he never would have secured enough traction to bolt the living room,

skid across the kitchen linoleum, hurl himself at the screen door, and burst into the black haven of night, never to return.

For a time one winter the Whittakers took care of a small puppy that had been dropped in the park. But since he was a dog they of course couldn't keep him — probably a good thing. Had he remained he might have acquired a lifetime trauma.

That same winter, the Whittakers were feeding a mama raccoon that had put in quite a summer raising an unusually large litter. Worn out by so many youngsters, she needed fattening a bit; but every time she came to the back door for a handout, there, awaiting her, was still another juvenile to put up with — this pup.

Although she growled at her tormenter a few times, no doubt hoping that this would end the matter, the pup either didn't understand or paid no attention. He went on barking and nipping at her tail when she tried to eat from her dish. Finally she turned on him and hunched her back. The warning only served to stir up his interest. For three days Mama forced herself to cope, because after all, the dog belonged to the people who were feeding her, and I suppose she figured that for them she could do no less. On the fourth morning, patience shattered.

With awesome sound and fury she spun around, pulled out all the stops in her noise department, and delivered a thrashing that would have done credit to a jungle beast. Dust and redwood needles flew in every direction. For minutes afterwards, yips and howls filled the air. Anyone hearing but not seeing the fray would have thought some poor critter was being torn to shreds. Those of us watching knew differently.

Mama had applied just enough coercion to throw the puppy flat and bounce him around. Most of the scramble was purely a case of uncoordinated dog trying to gather himself together and flee this horror that had jumped him with resounding snarls and eyes that flashed fire. The old coon, recognizing him for a baby, like her own had been, had no objection to scaring the bejibbers out of him. Not for the world would she have hurt more than his feelings.

Of such are the sometimes more than human ways of the wild.

Chapter Thirteen

The Redwood Empire's Richardson Grove

Richardson Grove, two hundred miles north of San Francisco, is truly one of the most spectacular stands of redwood on the entire Redwood Highway, U.S. 101. Here the enormous columns, massive and majestic, rise so close together that their crowns form a nearly solid canopy through which little light can penetrate. Were it not for the narrow two-lane ribbon of macadam bisecting the park, the place would be one of mystic tranquility.

When I first reported there in 1939, the pavement was scarcely ten years old. California's northwest had remained young in that, aside from some lumbering and commercial fishing, human erosion had yet to come and alter its isolation.

Like practically all old growth in this part of redwood country, Richardson Grove occupies a well-watered alluvial riverside flat. The Eel's South Fork flows for three-quarters of a mile along one side of the main grove, providing clear, slow-moving water for swimming and fishing and a sandy beach for sunning. Ever since convict labor improved the first dirt path around and among the Big Ones back in the twentieth century's second decade, Richardson has been a popular family camping spot.

And so I found it. Rounding an open bluff above the meandering river, I suddenly plunged into the densest stand of redwoods I had ever imagined. How soothing that shade and coolness; how muffled all sound because of abundant noise-absorbing bark everywhere. I pulled up before two log buildings near the edge of the highway and for a while sat gazing up and up and listening to the silence.

Rosy word pictures of Richardson and the Redwood Empire had been painted for me that spring, along with viewing of slides, by my old friend Jack Covington of the State Park Commission. For specialized reasons, the Division wanted me up there to work with Bill Kenyon, also being transferred and promoted to Chief Ranger. Bill and I were meeting for the first time; the rest of the crew had just signed on with the park service. None of us had ever been to Richardson before. Quite

a different situation from what I'd been used to, this one; aside from redwoods, a brand new scene.

Whereas Big Basin was miles off the beaten path and reached only by a side road, the entire world appeared to pass the front steps of the Richardson Grove Park Headquarters and concession next to it. The Redwood Highway is, after all, one of the state's two main north-south arteries. Why put up with bloody-hot U.S. 99 of our Great Central Valley when you can cruise pleasantly through the shadows of tall, world-famous forests all the way into Oregon? We must have seen everyone who didn't put up. Cars, cars, cars. Day and night. Only the length of a parked vehicle plus perhaps a half dozen feet separated our Headquarters porch from motor transits, heavily loaded cattle and sheep trucks, Greyhound buses, and the gamut of tourist conveyances, most in one whopping hurry.

My reluctance at leaving familiar and quiet Big Basin soon gave way to excitement over a whole new outlook. To make my initiation perfect, Bill Kenyon and I found ourselves in almost total accord. Unflappable Bill knew how to operate a park with problems. He ran such a tight ship that I doubt anyone of that first crew ever suspected his off-duty clownishness.

After Mabel Kenyon invited me to board with them, my mealtimes turned into delight rampant. Between her good humor and delicious food and Bill's antics, I gained twenty-six pounds in six weeks. And the night I sneezed at campfire and popped all the buttons off my uniform jacket, I knew something had to give. Yes, but what? How? No way would the fun stop, or should it. I'd simply have to eat less. Try that in a happy home of good food and total enjoyment.

For awhile I lived a stone's throw from Bill and Mabel's home, in a tent house overlooking the river. Siding was of rough planks; the upper third, screen wire. It worked just fine until I spirited a squirrel-pestering cat from Bill's clutches. Determined to effect a rescue, I whisked the animal off to my quarters, intending to find a home for it in nearby Garberville the next afternoon. The only trouble was that the next day I started working at the Information desk Out Front on the porch of Park Headquarters from 7 AM to 5 PM with time off

for lunch. Dinner followed that duty; then the campfire, the dance and a beach party topped it all off.

So Tommy remained a house guest a second night — one too many.

Sometime during the dark hours, he pushed out a loosened edge of screen wire, had a stinky affair with a skunk, and returned to anoint my quarters with the essence of his encounter. Since Mabel had already offered me their spare bedroom, my flight from the scene, although not in the nick of time, was speedy to say the least. And after Tommy had aired himself out, Mabel and I did move him on to the better things of life.

In addition to presiding at the Information desk out front all day, my chief duties were, of course, the campfire and whatever else required my presence and capabilities.

In those years immediately prior to the war, groups of young people expected and seemed to like being chaperoned on their moonlight hikes, marshmallow toasts in the dying embers of the campfire, and weenie bakes down by the river. They invited me to many of them, usually along with some of their parents. Not once, that I know of, did we have a problem with these kids in their teens and early twenties. Nor had we any previously at Big Basin. Aside from happy laughter and song occasionally wafting through the forest until the curfew hour of eleven, there was little to indicate anything special going on.

The campfire, more of a cozy circle and less the amphitheater of Big Basin, was located across the highway from the campground, the rustic Park Headquarters, and the concession; a tiny stage fitted neatly between two giants. On it was a piano. Directly above the circle, on a flat, stood a dozen or so Lodge cabins, reached by zig zag path. The Lodge office, circular dining room, gift shop, and post office, all housed in the long log building, was perhaps thirty feet from Headquarters — the other side of a fire-hollowed giant, through which went a footpath to the campground along the river. Across the front of the concession extended a wide porch equipped with redwood not-so-easy chairs where campers and passers-by could relax and watch the continual ebb and flow Out Front. They still do, a favorite sport at Richardson.

Parking room between the edge of the highway and the

porches of both buildings was at a premium most of the time. So was parking across the road in the limited space among the big trees. Worst of all, because of the giants rising alongside the pavement, tourists approaching from either north or south came upon the main grove suddenly and unexpectedly.

Much to their amazement, there they were. In the middle of it. Then it was QUICK! Pull over NOW or you'll find yourself whizzing out the other end!

Brake pedals hit the floor, and chain reactions set in. The trick was to tuck in the taillight before it could be sheared off by a thundering lumber truck piled high with huge redwood logs — sometimes only one, but a full load just the same. Pretty scary if one of these and a Greyhound happened to be passing just as they reached the first curve in the Center, one guarded closely by huge redwoods on either side. This and similar crises happened a number of times during campfires. During my years there, nothing serious ever resulted; although once in a while the crunch made us all duck and grit our teeth.

The entire quarter-mile hub of Richardson Grove still remains no place to slow down and rubber at the treetops — especially with the head out the window. Or on foot, crossing the road.

In those days, hundreds did cross back and forth every day all day and the evening. At dusk they poured from campground and concession over to the campfire circle; by dark, sometime after 9 PM they poured back again. Off and on all day they went over to cabins or redwood exhibit and returned later on for mail or refreshments, remembering to look both ways to see what might be bearing down on them.

From Headquarters porch, barely spitting distance from the white line, I expected momentarily to see cars and people ground to bits before my eyes. Welcome were the occasional surprise hours in the afternoons when another of the crew would replace me so I could go for a dip. The cool waters of the Eel always calmed my jumpy nerves. I almost envied the little water snake that swam alongside now and then.

A kind of suspended excitement permeated the atmosphere Out Front. Something was always going on or about to. People from all over the world stopped for an hour or two to stroll and look and photograph and perhaps eat

or buy a redwood souvenir. Old time campers, many there for all summer, hung around, socializing, mingling with awestruck travelers, watching the changing scene, the passing parade. I enjoyed my hours of talking with the “regulars”; answering the questions of newcomers and directing them to points of interest up and down the Highway and all over California. At Richardson I must have met the full range of human comedy, well-seasoned with sincere appreciation and a desire to learn. A normal quota of feather-brains forced me to remind myself that if I were in the Everglades or the Great Smokies or the Mammoth Cave, I, too, might ask questions that would provide hilarious conversation fodder for rangers, and probably wind up in a “Peculiar Tourists I Have Known” book of memoirs.

So I tried to act accordingly — even with the prim DAR luminary whose hauteur was surpassed only by her condescension.

After extolling the significant branches of her family tree, she finally got around to what little else was on her mind. Bunching her lips so as to steer her words past two prominent front teeth, she said, “Young woman, these are the shiniest tree trunks I have ever observed. You must polish to keep them so.”

Somehow I stifled a remark to the effect that yes, we do indeed polish. Every morning a man climbs a tall ladder to buff and burnish until he can see his reflection in the deeply ribbed bark. Instead, I assured her that no, because this was how the big redwoods came to us, we simply left them as they were — in a state of Nature.

The unvarnished truth, so help me.

More down to earth was the gentleman from Texas who leaned companionably on one arm atop the counter, and waved the other northward. “Miss,” he wheezed, “tell me here. How much farther up this pesky road does all of this tall brush run?”

Then along came a Missouri license, the driver a middle-aged fellow, sporting a straw hat, an accumulation of facts all his own, and an eagerness to challenge. “You mean to tell me that these here redwoods are the tallest trees in the world?”

I nodded. “Some of them farther north, yessir.”

“Are you sure?” he muttered, obviously disappointed. “I thought the U-cal-a-pee-tus trees of Aus-trail-i-ia were.”

"Well, in a way you're right, sir," I assured him. "They are certainly *some* of the tallest."

The man went away happy, and I turned to the next questioner, still another tourist seeking a tree he could drive through.

More than two decades later, I reminded myself of the Missourian, for by the time that day rolled around, I, too, was middle-aged and had accumulated a fund of information along with a sometimes bent to challenge.

I had left the Continental Airlines reservation desk at the Los Angeles International Airport, clutching my first airplane ticket, and scared to death. I was no bird.

The young ticket agent had beamed, "You're just in time for our first *pure* jet."

"What's a *pure* jet?" I demanded.

He regarded me with amused tolerance. "Why, the first time our planes will be flying purely on jet power alone."

One eyebrow cocked, I bored in. "By any chance do you mean NO PROPELLERS?"

When a happy laugh and nod confirmed my darkest suspicions, I fluffed myself into a whole henhouse of self-righteousness. "Young man," I fumed, "I taught aerodynamics in the big war, and I *know* what keeps a plane in the air. Don't for one minute expect me to go up there without a propeller!"

So, at my insistence, he sold me a ticket on an Electra prop-jet, and off I flew.

Over the Rockies and across the Great Plains, our Electra vibrated wildly. *That* wasn't what I had taught either. Next day a wing fell off one of the Electras, and immediately all were grounded. Back in Indiana I voiced exasperation at human error — including my own — and gave thanks to be driving back to California.

Just as exasperated was one of our rangers my second year at Richardson.

The busy and crowded Sunday waned. After a particularly long hard week our man grew frazzled. Assigned to "contact the public" at the redwood exhibit all afternoon to further interpret the simple labels, he'd had it by the time the lady with the ice-blue eyes and vacant stare confronted him just as he headed for his first nourishment since breakfast.

She had stood before him for fifteen minutes as, for the dozenth time that afternoon, he had told how the toppled giant had begun life about the year 700, when the ground level was perhaps eleven feet lower than the present one. He had indicated the upended root system and explained most graphically how seven great floods had engulfed Richardson Grove since then, one by one, depositing a thick layer of silt; he had described how the redwood, in adapting to a succession of higher ground levels, had built itself a new and higher root system each time until there were seven, one above the other; and he had pointed them out, exposed to view as they were, numbered and identified, along with the labels on the cross section that indicated famous historical events occurring during the year that particular ring in the woody tissue was formed. Every year many thousands of visitors walk the self-guided nature trail to this most dramatic of exhibits in all redwood country.

That day the very avid Lady of the Vacant Blue Eyes had to know more than she had heard. Her approach was somewhat hesitant, "Perhaps you would be so kind as to enlighten me," she said, "Did this tree fall?"

In the ranger's weakened condition, temptation proved too strong. Slowly, reluctantly, he collapsed into a sigh, "No, Madam," he replied in a tone far more kindly than understanding, "the tree is just lying down resting. It'll be up shortly,"

Apparently satisfied, the woman smiled, expressed her gratitude, and went thoughtfully (?) on her way.

Not so the man who sought no extra enlightenment, or any at all, but instead came to *tell* us — and how! In a brief but pungent lecture, he laid out and clarified our obligations toward the dead.

To begin with, I didn't know we had any. But he did. Yessiree, Ma'am, he did — right over there between the concession and the highway! Because of it he had come blasted near stoving in his front end while dodging off the road and pulling up at the post office.

Set in a log base, exactly where the man indicated with extended arm and trembling finger, stood our redwood cross-section sign, the grove's pride and joy. In yellow routed letters a foot high, it announced RICHARDSON GROVE to anyone

approaching from either side who could read. Below, in smaller letters, which this irate gentleman assumed, I suppose, to be birth and death dates, was: "Campgrounds, Cottages, Dining, Swimming, Dancing."

Shaken from near-collision, the fellow rode a cyclone of rage by the time he had stomped onto Headquarters porch, and bellowed, "What the hell do you mean anyway, burying this man Richardson in the parking area, three feet from the edge of the highway — and then putting up a grave marker out there for people to run into and bash their brains out! Is this civilized, for God's sake? Isn't anything sacred to you government guys? I'm gonna call the governor about this. I'll see that Richardson gets a decent burial place if it's the last thing I ever do!"

Somewhat later, for safety reasons, the crew removed our beautiful and individual RICHARDSON GROVE sign when it finally did become more of a hazard than the flow of travel and exploding population could bear. Besides, who could tell when another illiterate might come along and have his senses bruised.

We tried to slow traffic Out Front to 25 miles an hour, but the Division of Highways would not cooperate. It decreed that if this were done, it would only unleash speed along the curves at either end of the short straightaway through the grove. Quite accidentally we found a temporary stopgap of sorts for our problem.

One busy Sunday, when Naturalist Malcolm Byce and I happened to be talking at roadside, we suddenly noticed that all vehicles were cruising sedately past. Wild-eyed drivers these may have been around the approach curves, but here, though the Center, they scarcely crept. When we finally solved the mystery we had to laugh. What a decelerating effect our uniforms and badges were having on all the normally heavy feet! Should things get too congested, we now knew a way to make our tiny segment of highway safe from swivel-chair administrators and Thunderbowl champions. Yes, but who among us had the time to stand out there and look impressive!

In no rush whatever was the long military convoy that passed through the grove near the outset of World War II. Shortly before it was due to appear from the south, a jeep with a handsome commanding officer drove in and positioned

himself for review in front of the concession in the best open space we could arrange.

Word spread quickly. In almost no time, half the campground and all the girls and young women in the park started hurrying from every direction. To form a contingent of their own — happy, full of pep, clad in colorful summer garb, with emphasis on shorts and halters — the girls assembled across the road, opposite the jeep, where they could attract both jeep and arriving convoy.

It turned out to be a great day for youth. With all that boisterous rooting section of feminine joy, hello-ing, waving, throwing kisses, radiating the old SA from one side of the road, how could it ever occur to a GI to even glance toward the other. The poor colonel never did rate either notice or salute.

“Well, that’s war for you,” he philosophized wryly but with a sparkle in his eyes, “and I believe they say war is hell.” With that, he did the only thing left to do as the last truck passed. He brought up the rear.

Out Front, life was endlessly entertaining and heart-warming. Thousands upon thousands of good folk parked, and gazed around as if this were a whole new world they had just wandered into. Then there was the couple with the Wyoming license.

These two, husband and wife, pulled up a few feet from Headquarters steps. He got out and headed for the coffee shop. She remained in the car. During one of my few uncrowded moments, she called, “What an incredible forest!” and presumably to let the big outdoors in, opened her car door.

I smiled a welcome.

“The most beautiful spot we’ve seen yet,” she assured me
I beamed my pleasure.

She reached for a Kleenex from a handy box on the seat, and while gazing up in wonder, blew her nose noisily.

I thought: Yep, moved to tears; so many are.

Wrong. It was a cold that filled her. She’d had it since leaving Rock Springs, she said. I sympathized.

Plunk! The dirty Kleenex landed on the ground outside the open door. Shortly, another landed alongside; then another and another in quick succession.

Nasty critter, this bug, I was told. Things had been just

such all along the Columbia River Highway and down the Oregon coast. She bet she'd used up a dozen boxes of Kleenex already.

At that moment, our crewman who was "picking up" the park came along with a pogeey stick and a gunnysack slung over one shoulder, and saw what was going on. Horrified, his double-take completely totaled any friendly greeting that might have risen to his lips. And upon studying me, he must have noticed the sunlight fading from the Siberian tundra of my face.

Thus reinforced, and fully deadpan, he stepped up to the growing pile of soggy white wads, speared them one by one, and with appropriate flourishes, deposited them in his bag. Then he stood by in glacial silence, waiting for the next contribution to his morning.

More would be forthcoming all right. Until her husband's return, and their departure, the unconscious Wyoming patriot snatched, blew, and tossed. Each soft plunk had scarcely died away before the tissue was nailed and banished from view. Seldom in that time did the woman cease enthralled over the majesty of Richardson Grove and all the causes and societies she supported that were dedicated to the preservation of parkland beauty; nor did she stop bereaving over parklands thoroughly desecrated.

And so that day passed less joyously than others. Most, though, were delights to be savored and remembered; all were loaded round the clock with human comedy, near-misses, and economy-size problems, afoot and on wheels.

I don't know which of these you would label the performance of Mrs. X, wife of a Most High Washington D.C. Mover and Shaker, on her first — and probably last — visit to Richardson Grove.

It all had to do with one of our new men, who, like most in those days, began service as a G(garbage)-Man or as a T(restroom)-Man, and from there could rise the hard way through the ranks to Chief Ranger and on beyond, if he had it in him. And many did. Not at any university but on the job they learned. At the same time, great was their contribution to the development of state park concepts and resource management. Some became the finest administrators any park system could ever have.

This particular neophyte, though, was to carve a special niche all his own, albeit not one that would set him apart as a man on his way to the top --or even on his way.

T-Man Joe had a problem. He just could not get our big central WOMEN'S free of customers long enough to clean.

"How in tarnation do you persuade those females to cinch up their pucker strings for another minute or two?" he wailed. "I spend half my day standing around outside, waiting for them to get through. By then there's another batch who think they gotta go. So how do I win? I just get behinder and behinder all the time."

An idea finally occurred to me and I suggested it.

Joe nodded. "Anything's fine with me," he declared vehemently. "ANYTHING. Bring it on."

So outside the WOMEN'S we placed a large, 3x5 foot cardboard sign. On it in color I had cartooned a park ranger sweeping and swabbing, a box of paper supplies nearby, large words across the top: CAN YA WAIT?

No woman in her right mind would be caught dead being snickered at as unable to wait. So the challenge worked quietly and successfully until one day, the day of Madam X, when it exploded on a national scale; not quite the shot heard round the world, to be sure, but anyway, one to become deafening in Washington D.C.

Just as Joe started to work, brooms, mops, and all, Madam X stalked past him and on in. According to Joe, her dynamic single-mindedness was indeed impressive. He backed out while he was still ahead.

Time passed. Quite a lot of it. Joe paced a groove in the duff. At last concerned that the woman might have died in there, and wanting to get on with his day whether she had or hadn't, Joe stepped to the side of the doorway and called, "Cleaning man. All out, please!"

No reply. For a few minutes Joe paced some more, muttering all the while. Then, being a practical character, he once again stepped to the door.

This time, after calling more forcefully, he heard the rustle of a newspaper inside. Peeking, he saw two feet well planted, and concluded rightly that not only was Nature at ease in that stall, but so also was the woman, and far more absorbed with current events than trivialities like his daily schedule.

Joe's temper rose to a boil. No man to be ignored, he saw only one way to clear the decks. With all the urgency of Code 3, Joe hitched up the hose, turned it on full, and head down, plowed in there as if into the inferno of a three-alarm fire.

That did it. For then. Flushed clean of human habitation, the WOMEN'S received a vigorous and historic scrubbing and disinfecting until it stood ready to receive all who would now like to sit and improve their minds as long as they liked.

But that was only the kickoff to the Richardson Grove Field Day.

At Headquarters, Madam X, like a cattle stampede, overran Bill Kenyon. Once past the apoplectic niceties, she really got down to business — what she intended doing about this Lysol monkey who had flooded her off the John and out into the afternoon traffic. For starters she'd have him strung and quartered. Then, sputter-sputter-sputter, she'd have him ejected from the human race. Bill had better understand that her husband *was* the U.S. Government. His word in national parks was Power Beyond Belief — and *final*. BOOM! He would take care — and *how* he would — of all the flunkies who didn't conduct themselves properly in the performance of their duties; and whereas and furthermore, he would, with the same incisive stroke, eliminate Chief Rangers who tolerated flunkies who didn't conduct themselves properly in the performance of their duties. By all that was holy, she would this and she would that, and by God she would —

Well, had we been a national instead of a state park, she just might have, too.

In earning their daily bread, Chief Rangers face a wide variety of hazards. At Richardson, even the simplest act of standing roadside and watching traffic slow down produced its own. Bill Kenyon discovered this on the wild Sunday of the women — the first two of whom had been so frightened they were furious.

Two cars pulling small house trailers almost ran over Bill's feet as they swerved off the highway and slammed on their brakes in front of Headquarters. Stumbling backwards, Bill stared in speechless surprise as the wives from both cars got out and rushed toward each other, yelling accusations. Totally

oblivious of Bill, they converged under his nose, and tied into each other.

"Do you realize your stupid husband damn near caused a nice juicy pileup back there?"

"He did not. It was all your fault."

"You nearly ran us into that big tree."

"We'd all have been killed if you'd passed on that curve!"

"We didn't try to pass."

"You did so!"

"You're a liar — a bald-faced liar!"

Bill, caught in the middle of the fracas, opened his mouth to introduce a little come-let-us-love-one-another atmosphere. It was not to be. No way.

That instant a hair-pulling set in. In the total surprise of it, Bill didn't duck far enough. Hands flew, clawing and yanking where his face had been, flipping his Stetson high in the air. He snatched at it; touched the brim once or twice; almost had it another time before, whoops! up it went again. Bill's juggling act in the middle of a cat fight brought down the house Out Front.

Yet it was only a prelude to the other woman late that afternoon, who contributed to the meteoric maturing of our new nineteen-year-old ranger, Wiley Gerber.

Bill, not one to get himself in the same kind of bind twice in a row, tenderly removed his Stetson when he saw — and heard — this gal coming. Wiley had prepped him for her; so, bareheaded, he stood feet wide apart, firmly planted, mentally ready.

That's what he thought. How could he be really ready for a blockbuster of a woman, stalking up from the river, muttering all the way.

But to backtrack a bit: Our utterly delightful young fellow, Wiley, had signed on early that summer. Clean-cut, reserved, intelligent, of high integrity, and of extremely sensitive and serious nature, he had gone about his T-Man chores self-consciously. He hadn't known that in a state park *everyone* worked his way up the totem pole from there. With compressed lips and downcast eyes he nevertheless persisted because it was in him to do his best at whatever his responsibilities.

So Wiley kept pushing his two-wheel Jenny through

the campgrounds from john to john every morning and late afternoon, cleaning, spraying, replenishing paper supplies — but too embarrassed to even glance up at all the pretty well-wishers along the way. Because he was almost impossible to attract, every teenage girl in the park made him her personal project. And the more the girls tried to undo his knots, the tighter he re-tied them. Until that day.

That morning Bill had called Wiley in. Time to show promising youth the path leading upwards from Flushing Palaces; time to extoll the ever-expanding future open to well-rounded park men. Those wise enough to learn well as they went along.

Time to widen Wiley's horizons there at Richardson.

It proved to be one of Bill's better man-to-man sessions. Wiley left the office inspired, his morale on the rise. Quite rightly he saw himself now as more than just a sanitary engineer. Determined to overcome a lifelong shyness, he squared his shoulders and faced up to Bill's locker room talk.

None of us ever suspected he had it in him. Anyway, head held high, Wiley grasped the push bar of his two-wheeled cart, and with studied nonchalance, started for the South Campground. Brooms, mops, buckets, and rolls notwithstanding, he began to call out in carnival sing-song. His voice rang loud and clear. "Popcorn! Peanuts! Soda pop! Right over here, folks, your favorite ice cream bar! He-e-e-r-re we are! Come and get it!"

In droves, the girls swooned by the wayside. And a future ranger was born.

Before the day ended, Wiley had moved on to even greater heights. While passing near the beach, he looked down beside the river and saw something that roused his freshly motivated spirit: a woman walking what he presumed to be a dog, off leash, on the sand, among the bathers. Insufferable to a newly well-rounded park man.

Not officiously at all, because gentle Wiley wouldn't have known how, but with just the right amount of freshly minted authority, he detoured a few minutes to speak to the woman about her transgressions.

Hard-bitten, flamboyant, the kind that could spit and sniff at the same time, she quickly noted Wiley's youth, and let him have it. Both barrels. Wiley, reaching for the second rung in

the ranger ladder, politely heard her out. Then he cited her by requesting her appearance at Headquarters — after which he slipped quietly Out Front to warn Bill.

And so here she came, howling up the path.

Bill smiled at Wiley's concern for his safety. No problem. Modestly, he hinted at his expertise in handling such minor details as dog violations — an opinion whose time had come.

Typhoon Aimee closed in. Due to the press of the moment, she and Bill met on the front porch, just then swarming with Sunday tourists, all wanting to know something or other.

The woman's eyes bulged. So did those of the shivering little oddity pressed against her heaving bosom. For a minute Bill reeled under the impact of Mama and what Wiley had declared was a dog.

Screamed she, clutching it more tightly, "What do you mean by summoning me like this?"

Bill tried to get in gear and explain, but he never stood a chance. The woman rushed on, waving her free arm; tossing her head and scattering hairpins right and left, thereby unleashing a rooster tail that bobbed and flopped with every blazing invective.

No bullneck of a uniform was going to dictate to her. She had come to this park for peace and quiet and by God she was going to have it. This was her little Taxpayer's right. She would take up Bill's asinine park rules with her friends in High Circles, who would yank the forest floor out from under Bill. She would call her Congressman, too. Him and her were just like that. One way or another, her Bitsy was going to enjoy the freedom of the Great Outdoors.

Meanwhile, Bill. So far no sound had escaped him. His mouth had gone slack and his eyebrows had pushed his scalp up as far as it would go. Bitsy's eyes kept rolling in their sockets like marbles in a whirlpool, while overhead, Mama's jaw flapped in stinging disdain.

Cranking up for a final blast, she boomed, "What you don't know is that Bitsy hasn't been at all well. He's on strict orders from his vet. He has to have medicine every morning and evening if he doesn't do his business, and he *must* do his business. And brother, if you think I'm going to tote him around after he's had his medicine and hasn't done his

business, you better think again.” Then more plaintively, “Can’t you see, Bitsy and I have things to do this summer?”

Glancing away from my chores at the counter, I wanted to point out that Bitsy was already doing his — right down Mama’s front. Apparently this was his day to run loose in every respect. Mama had yet to discover his full potential.

Campfires at Richardson were a joy. Campers, lodge guests, and passers-by there proved as willing to help out as those at Big Basin. Never did we lack for good clean fun. To supplement our “regulars” and newcomers were the Pasadena Playhouse students employed by the concession. All summer they pooled their talents and kept us supplied with good music and impromptu skits. One hilarious serial, its episodes improvised on the spot each evening, lasted throughout the season and was a source of great anticipation from night to night. Phyllis Benbow, whose family owned the nationally known resort just north of us, and who has since headed up the famed Bishop Players, was the natural leader. And then we enjoyed the happy folk of all ages from San Francisco’s Little Sweden. Complete with native costumes and accordions, they arrived now and then to polka around the campfire — once nearly into it.

Because Richardson Grove lay athwart The Highway, every imaginable kind of talent found its way to us there under the giant trees — travelers with slides, missionaries to foreign lands, concert and musical comedy artists, photographer-naturalists, entertainers from everywhere who seemed thrilled to perform in this most unique of settings. Of all, though, we loved our “home grown” ones best.

We always sang for at least a half hour. Then the park naturalist took over for another half hour or more. First he would announce the next day’s hike or motor trip to such as the Scotia Mill or the whaling station at Fields Landing, where for 25¢ you could “go through a whale.” Then he would talk on some phase of redwood nature lore or perhaps other units of the state park system. After that, until nine o’clock, came whatever else we had, some serious, some comic; all of it my duty to scout out, assemble, and arrange in and around long hours Out Front, and then conduct after lighting the campfire.

Somewhere between 10 PM and 3 AM my day ended, not to begin again until 7 AM the following morning. Out Front.

Like the great river, my park education went on and on, for much of the time I was with Bill Kenyon, even at meals. Even on my days off. *That* innovation — a free day — blossomed for State employees during my first summer at Richardson. Bill made certain I didn't just fritter away golden minutes when I could be learning where all the parks were and what made a park tick.

So as the weeks wore on, thanks to that day off, I became more and more knowledgeable about every mileage, every road, every park and its crew, every community and its facilities, and just about every wild and wonderful place in the Redwood Empire from Willits on the south to Oregon on the north. Small wonder that by the end of my first tour I had turned into a walking fund of Californiana. Understandable, too, and perhaps prophetic that after I left the park service I wound up teaching a year's course in California (its geography, geology, history, resources, where to go and what to see and enjoyment thereof) over a period of almost two decades; that I authored books on redwoods, and still represent *Sunset Magazine* and *Books* the length of redwood country. With Bill constantly riding herd to see that I discovered and dug out and lined up, ready for reference, everything California and parks, what else could have evolved so beautifully?

Through Bill Kenyon I had an ongoing and close contact with the smallest details of state park usage and operation, both as to concept and to daily problems and management. In those relatively simple times, state park development and ranger training took place hand in hand, where and as it could — on the job.

Since then, things have changed greatly of course. For some years now, park crew candidates have been receiving their basics at the state park training center in Asilomar on the Monterey Peninsula, known as the Center for Continuous Learning. It is not only for new rangers but also for in-service training as well. For the past five years, women have been accepted there, too, going on as trainees to become able rangers alongside the men. From the time I left the service in 1950 until then, there were none, nor any ranger training school.

State Parks were Bill's lifeblood. Completely devoted to them above all else, he was one of the finest teachers I could ever have wished for. Through the years, men have disagreed with him or they couldn't rise to his standards, and have transferred. Most who stuck have gone up to district offices and on to administrative and developmental positions in the state capitol. Bill, himself, went on to become Superintendent of District 6 in Southern California, enthusing over the deserts as he had the redwoods, and there eventually succumbing to cancer.

Those summers with the Kenyons at Richardson Grove and the war years immediately afterwards at Big Sur, were among the most rewarding experiences of my life. During that time, through varied work assignments, together with year-round study and writing, I was able to progress from merely director of the evening campfire and sometimes naturalist to much more of a whole park woman. It carried through my last years, again at Big Basin.

I am not a women's libber. As ever, I stoutly believe that we women have our special place in the scheme of things, and that men have theirs; that in some instances we can overlap, where education and physical and mental capabilities make that desirable and acceptable. Nowhere in the course of my park years did it ever occur to me to want to learn how to plumb or carpenter and wrestle a chainsaw or repair a powerline or drive a garbage truck and fire the incinerator. That was man's work. How could I presume to do more than get in the way and really foul things up?

Certainly I had no urge to compete. My work was more or less clearly defined. Most of my expertise lay in meeting and dealing with people, at their best and worst — wherever my services seemed fitting or wherever I was fit for certain services, such as informing the public, patrolling, checking camps, making up reports, hunting for lost visitors, fire watch, first aid, and countless odds and ends as they arose and a woman's touch or personality or capabilities were needed or requested.

And all the time, my psyche did just fine, especially since this was long before any of us had the slightest inkling that women were going to pester and intrude, lib and lobby, and

try to emulate their whiskery sidekicks in every possible activity, whether they were muscled for it or not.

I'm thrilled that I lived when I did. Period. When I came into the park scene, things were really elemental. They got done NOW — without triplicates, Mirandas, environmental impact reports, and sidearms carried for the protection of life and limb.

I think of the camper at Richardson who was determined to drink himself fallen-down drunk and still have his forest and wildlife, too. Under such conditions as he imposed upon himself, giant trees can grow nightmarish by dark; wildlife can become a snakepit.

It is told that the naturalist had given a splendid talk at campfire on reptiles of the area, being very careful to explain the difference between the poisonous and non-poisonous ones; making sure to say that none of either kind had been seen in the campgrounds and central grove; that the triangular-headed ones mostly inhabited the higher or at least the more open places.

Fear thus laid to rest, everyone in camp went to bed except this fellow who tied one on before turning in.

Next morning he went berserk, thrashing all over the ground and wrestling with himself and a lot of other horrors, all triangular-headed and poisonous and with designs on him.

Someone ran for the Chief Ranger, who in those days was a big Scotsman named McTavish. He came, saw a number of campers trying to cope, sized up the situation, and forthwith took it in hand.

Since the Polite Powers were as yet many years in the future, Mac went right to work in his own inimitable way. With one single punch, he rendered harmless both the fellow and the snakes, then tied the man up with a rope, loaded him into the pickup, and took him into Garberville to the authorities and a doctor.

Who says there weren't any snakes at Richardson? If in a dark towering forest of oversize trees you persist in pumping up the bourbon content of your blood, a dark towering forest of oversize trees at night and wildlife is purely what you make it.

He was.

ADDENDA
Richardson Grove

Of such is the life of a park ranger.

As you pull up to a park headquarters or one of the checking stations, there he waits, smiling. Looking trim and crisp in his forest green uniform and stiff-brimmed Stetson, he's as out-doorsy as the tall timber standing all around. And the way he greets you, you'd think his summer is made now that you are here. There's a strong possibility that he may even call you by name, too, especially if you distinguished yourself by falling off a cliff the previous summer — or kept your camp unusually neat and clean. But don't be surprised if the Chief Ranger has to call him away from your pleasant conversation or from in front of your camera, for he may have to start him on any one of the countless chores that are vital to making your vacation, and that of every other visitor, a memorable one. There's much more to park ranging than you have any idea.

About the third week of June, as the park reels under the first rush of summer throngs, the ranger's eight hour day disappears with the upcanyon breeze. The men are then subject to what is known as "unlimited" hours, and the dear old eight becomes merely a dream until September.

Then quite suddenly, on Labor Day, the vacationing mobs pour out of all exits as if drawn off by some unseen suction pump, leaving the park in a silent shambles. At that moment the rangers exchange dress uniforms for jeans and fatigues and start working with tools, caterpillars, and motors — things that don't fly into their faces declaring their Taxpayer's Rights. Each crewman gets back to his eight hour winter work schedule of restoring beat-up campgrounds, battered restrooms, and whittled trail signs that have either been turned the wrong way or pulled up and thrown into the creeks and canyons. He also tries to do something about the young saplings that haven't been quite strong enough to stand up for themselves.

Only time and Nature can heal the wounds of the Central Area and the hillsides between the trail switchbacks where the violets and wild iris had looked so fresh and hopeful in May. Only they can persuade the trampled ferns and oxalis, the

grasses and the tiger lilies of the meadows to rise again and face the even greater throngs of the next season who may not be watching where they walk any more than some of you did.

But as far as *this* glorious summertime is concerned, the park ranger is yours, on call around the clock, if need be.

The crew, always undermanned by Hardening of the Funds in the capitals, nevertheless combines every effort to keep the park maintained and operating smoothly and happily. They direct you to wherever you wish to go just as patiently as if you weren't at that moment looking right at the sign that points to it. They relate the history of the area, explain the "how come" of every natural wonder, and try to help you be easy about the night in this big, dark, unlighted forest. Now and then, without seeming to, they hope to slip into your consciousness the idea that there are several responsibilities that go along with your privileges as a park visitor. This often after you have tersely pointed out that you own these parks, that they are actually yours — You, The People.

Sounds like purely mental activity, to be sure, which would make it seem that a ranger ought to exercise. He does. Sandwiched in between and around his public relations chores are his more physically demanding jobs, so he never does become what you'd call flabby. For example, it would amaze you to learn how many full-blown adults take off on some trail long about sunset without bothering to notice which one or having told anyone where they were headed. And when 10 PM or so rolls around, and they haven't come back to camp, Park Headquarters begins to swarm with wild-eyed relatives and friends. Excitement mounts, search parties are organized, and sometimes they're out for days.

Afterwards, the sleepwalking ranger drags into his home, eats, showers, and shaves (unless some new crisis prevents such luxury) then drags back to duty. And duty could be a lengthy stint at the checking station or museum or in the park pickup on patrol for throttle-happy visitors who like to whiz wherever they go. Rest? Maybe later.

Other routine activity for the park ranger includes risking his life to snatch you off some lofty ledge before you become a headline, or who in demonstrating how much animals love you have become overly chummy with an elk. They

also include carrying fat people with bad hearts and former athletes with trick knees down steep trails and across boulder-strewn mountainsides — people that had been determined to prove that they were just as young as ever. Of course, there are miles and miles of band-aids to be applied and once in a while prayers to be said for drivers who turned to gape at the crown of some three hundred foot redwood while rounding a skyline curve.

If a park ranger is lucky he gets to eat at mealtime. “Lucky” means if one of you don’t need his services or the power plant or water supply doesn’t threaten to become extinct. Those items being under control and operational, your ranger may yet have to go unplug a restroom or take a turn on the “salad wagon” so, come nightfall, the coons won’t climb in the trash cans and redistribute their contents. And just let him prepare to shower and there’s bound to be an SOS for some stubborn tourist who thought it would be fun to tease a deer. In the middle of at least one night a summer the pounding on the ranger’s front door is by some addled soul who swears up and down that a lion had licked his face.

Now, if you inquired, you’d find going on all the time, a continual vigilance against the half-wit who tosses lighted cigarettes out of his car or builds a fire against a pine tree to roast a weenie or two. After campfire at night the crew takes turns patrolling, and while they’re at it they silence the thoughtless late-hour merrymakers who forget they aren’t still riding the Jack Rabbit Racer at the beach.

In between times, the transformers blow out, boilers blow up, new cesspools and pits have to be dug, and people sneaking dogs in have to be shown out. Dogs and cats and wildlife mostly don’t mix, and these are game preserves. They are also human preserves or would you prefer unlimited canine use of your campsite and all night, multiple yapping at every falling leaf?

There’s a place for everything. Home on the bed is the place for your lovely patchwork quilts, not strung up between the trees all around your tent. They add nothing to, say, the view down the Eel River or the majesty of a grove of giant redwoods. Neither do old bedsprings, castoff girdles, and beer cans enhance the creeks, nor Kleenex and plastic carrot bags the bushes of the campsite you are leaving for the next fellow.

You just can't improve on Nature. And the tax dollars spent in hiring extra employees to clean up the debris of human erosion would, for you, brush a new trail to some scenic spot.

Park rangers always hope they can help you enjoy your vacation. They always hope, too, that you will be busting out all over to do your part in preserving the park for the enjoyment and delight of your great grandchildren. They want you to realize, all by yourselves, why it would be better, therefore, if you refrained from picking the wildflowers for your hair or digging up the ferns and shrubs for your garden back home or letting your kids whack holes in the trees with their vacation hatchets or killing every crawling thing because you know it just *has* to be poisonous

Call it Conservation or Preservation or anything you please, but it still adds up to one thing: if you like city fun, stay in the city; if you want what a state or national park has to offer, you are welcome, indeed. But surely then you will see your way to pay the small use fee without referring to the national debt. The total income from a season's entrance charges in any park doesn't begin to satisfy the costs of maintaining and operating this chunk of scenery and its staff and facilities, dedicated to your pleasure and that of generations yet to come. You, your collective selves and your increasing needs and demands are expensive. But then aren't you worth it?

Chapter Fourteen: Big Sur

“The Agony and the Ecstasy”

The Road

Legend has it that sometime in ages past, a great offshore land mass broke away from the California coast, and that the Big Sur — a splinter of the Santa Lucia Mountains — is all that remains of it. Left behind also, if the legend be true, is an aura of mystery that persists to this day, a mystery enhanced by drifting fog, which much of the time conceals the joining of the legendary splinter with the sea.

For years, writers have insisted that Big Sur is merely a philosophy of life, a state of mind. This may be so, but to the inhabitants, many of whom are of the third and fourth generations, it can, and often has, represented stark reality. Yet nothing could drag them away, even though they lived much or all of their lives in primitive simplicity, beyond telephone and power lines; beyond the services of a doctor and the comfort of a man of God.

Both the Big Sur and the mother Santa Lucias have been extolled in about every major magazine. They have been endlessly photographed and painted, too. But people tend to scoff at an artist's work. “Why doesn't that guy go learn to paint? Nothing really looks like that,” they will protest.

The man can paint and that's the way it does look. The trite cliché “out of this world” comes as near to applying to the Big Sur as to any spot on earth. Not at many other places will you find such a sublime meeting of land and water and sky.

The name Big Sur sounds romantic, partly, I suppose, because it originated early in California's history. The state's first Franciscan missions were just being established, the pueblos only beginning to spring up around them and the presidios. One of these, Monterey, served as the seat of government of Alta California. Franciscan Padre Junípero Serra took nearby Carmel Mission for his headquarters. Since any coastal location was described as being either north or south of Monterey and the mission, the biggest river south of there became known as *El Rio Grande del Sur* or Big Sur. And the long sweeps of coastlands in both directions from

the gorge and valley that cradles this stream were thereafter included in what seemed to be a kind of microregion.

Big Sur has never been a town and has no definite boundaries. When you wind downstate from Monterey and Carmel, on the road that spans deep clefts as it twists tortuously along the brow of massive headlands plummeting into the sea, you enter into it at Point Sur and leave it perhaps forty miles or so south of the valley. Just beyond the Point — a sandspit leading out to a great bulge of rock with a lighthouse on its seaward tip — the road diagonals behind a ridge and follows the Big Sur River upvalley and on beyond, where it tumbles out of the mountains.

From there, Big Sur Country climbs up the southern end of the valley and out onto the cliffs. The road then borders the Pacific once more for nearly a hundred miles, offering the camera bug some of the really breathtaking shots of land and water to be found anywhere in the nation. The landscape is wild, rugged, and primitive. The fact that man ever succeeded in etching a two-lane road along the face of such a range halfway between the clouds and the sea amazes all who behold it.

Early-day Spanish explorers, approaching the range from the south, tried to break trail along its western front and finally gave up. Instead, they pushed inland over a low pass in the hills and down the gently sloping Salinas Valley. Long afterwards, a century to be exact and for two decades thereafter — from the late 1860s and through the 1880s — the Santa Lucias did permit a few of an incredibly sturdy breed of men and their families to penetrate from Monterey, and hack out homesteads down the Big Sur.

Why did such men persist? Some may have been lured by a sort of magic, others by a curiosity about the dark land, hulking and unknown, that lay below Carmel Mission and Point Lobos. For whatever reason, all picked their way carefully southward for thirty miles and more along ancient wild animal and Esselen Indian trails never before trod by white man. Bracing themselves against the wind, they clung to a succession of fearsome promontories that jutted out into the sea. They took shelter in dank, tree-lined canyons whose streams cascaded so steeply into rockbound coves that they became sparkling veils of light and water. They peered off the

edge of a continent into the foam of a thundering surf many hundreds of feet below. When they came at last to a level patch, one not as tilted as most, and stood gazing up at tawny summits several thousand feet above, they said, "Here on this flat is the place for our home and garden and corral. Up there in those meadows is the grass for our stock. Here we will take up land." And they did.

No more than a score of families, many of them Spanish, found little "flats" for themselves on lofty points. Terracing the slopes a bit, they began life in one of the grandest sweeps of scenery to be found on this planet.

From split redwood, bay, oak, and sycamore trees the settlers hewed their homes and barns and furniture, and carved many of their utensils and tools. With down-to-earth know-how, they cut V-slices out of redwood saplings, and channeled water from the springs and creeks. Then, in the black fertile soil they planted their gardens and fruit trees. High on the barren mountain front overlooking the sea they sowed their grain by hand and pastured their animals in fields of natural grasses that were green and flower-spangled in the rainy season and golden in the dry. In their corrals, on horseback, they threshed — "tramped out the beans" — they called it. Methodically they set about wresting a living from this strange silent country.

Such folk had to be enduring, for their struggles merely to exist were monstrous. But some weren't enduring enough, and they left. Only a dozen or so families remained to brave the gales that howled in off the sea and blew their chickens and turkeys away; the grizzlies and mountain lions and eagles that raided their stock; the loneliness of living miles by precarious trail from their nearest neighbors.

Yet they loved this way of life. They loved this unbroken rawboned range along the Pacific — even when the fog rolled in, shutting out both sea and mountain so that their world became no wider than whatever they could embrace with outstretched arms, no more earthy than the dirt and vegetables right around them. Only the one tending the animals in the high-flung grasslands above the upper borders of the fogbank could enjoy a larger world. Warmed and tanned, he could look out into an endless expanse of blue sky and see a string of sunny islands like the one he stood upon that stretched away

both north and south of him. And everywhere about was a stillness broken only by the occasional lowing of a cow and the faint booming of the surf against the rocks far, far below the billowing floor of his private universe.

In time, these people made contact with the outside. Twice a year they would muleback hides, timber, tanbark, and lime down the precipitous paths to cable landings in several of the coves. There they would meet tiny coastwise steamers that put in during calm weather and exchange produce for clothing material and utensils. Once or twice a year a bold muleteer would ride down from Monterey bringing perhaps a small farm implement. Occasionally a padre would make the trip to baptize and marry, hear confession, and say mass for the dead. Seldom, though, did the Big Sur residents go to town. It took them about a week altogether, and in the wintertime some of the mountain wall always crumbled, dropping parts of the trail — and sometimes men on horseback — into the sea. Just staying on those mountainsides became an achievement for both man and beast.

Still, those who did pit themselves successfully against such odds led a good life. Never really needing money, they bartered with one another in a way calculated to make social events of their dickerings. They held their dances, their brandings, and their barbecues, some lasting many days, to which the guests walked or rode, often in the dark along narrow paths that skirted cleft and canyon. They enjoyed picnics in the only accessible pocket beach, tiny though it was, and some went abalonying or exploring the tide pools. Out of pleasure as well, as need a close kinship soon grew in the Big Sur pioneers.

In the early 1880s the settlers built a schoolhouse of split redwood, then brought in a series of lady teachers; a series because most of them became fascinated, not only with the stirring beauty of this untamed country, but with some young homesteader as well.

So civilization began to feel its way gingerly around turn after turn. In the 1870s, a settler named Bixby dug out a road of sorts, actually little more than wagon tracks, from Monterey to his homestead at Bixby Creek. From there to Big Sur, a traveler found only a footpath until 1886. That year the wagon trail was extended all the way to the Pfeiffer homestead in Big

Sur Valley, where the river bursts out of its gorge — a narrow slot in the mountains — turns, and rushes down the valley to the ocean at Point Sur. Between the Pfeiffer homestead and the Point, a distance of seven or eight miles, the new “road” crossed the river twenty-three times.

All that was necessary for a man to round the spectacular ridges and bluffs and up that valley was time, fortitude, and Divine Guidance. A few hardy souls came to the Pfeiffer ranch to fish. After 1895 the U.S Postal Service delivered three times a week as far as the Post homestead, several miles south of the Pfeiffer place. First, however, Mr. Post had to hack a wagon trail out of the wilderness. The trail labored uphill around mountains and ravines to where the valley opens out onto the sea cliffs. But in the 1870s, long before all of this elaborate construction, a good Monterey doctor, John Roberts, had begun to take an interest in the medical welfare of Big Sur. Using the old trail, he had ridden his horse downcoast as often as he could to tend the few inhabitants who hadn't already been cured with Indian remedies.

As years passed and the century turned, the idea came to Dr. Roberts, quite understandably, that a better way down that coast would sure be nice, especially since automobiles were evidently here to stay. In 1906, driven by a daring young man, an automobile made the trip clear to Post's, its skittish passengers riding the running boards so they could jump before the car should topple off the mountainside and into the Pacific. So for the ensuing thirty years, Roberts fought for a safer road, and after at last selling the Legislature on his proposal, managed to live long enough to see it completed.

Nearly twenty years of construction, \$10,000,000, and many lives were expended before this miracle of engineering could be readied for use. Finally one day in 1937, there it was. The Road, as natives have always called it, pitched, soared, twisted, and agonized for almost a hundred miles along the stony brow of a range, which, only a scant million or two years before, had humped its back mightily and shouldered up out of the Pacific.

Today The Road is known variously as the Big Sur-San Simeon Highway, the Cabrillo Highway, Scenic Highway 1; most appropriately California's Wonderful One. Not only has it been generously named, but it has also had the tenderest

of care. A devoted crew who live down the Big Sur watch over it constantly. These men know only too well what that narrow ribbon of macadam means to all the inhabitants, to say nothing of thousands of visitors who now drive it every year.

For the most part, The Road stays in good shape as long as the weather does. But when a winter storm rolls in and drenches the landscape, rivulets can and do pull rocky props out from under ledges. Suddenly not just a few assorted boulders but whole mountainsides, relieved of cliff-hanging, let go and roar down upon the highway. Anyone approaching one of these masses from either direction might as well have come to the end of the earth.

Going no farther, the traveler finds himself looking down into a chasm where days or hours or perhaps just minutes before, a bluff has collapsed, pulling the rug from beneath one lane, sometimes both. Once in a while a bridge goes along for the ride.

Then maybe for weeks, travel will be cut off, for in most places a detour is completely out of the question unless one possesses wings.

Big Sur highway maintenance men are on call day and night. Almost any day you can see them fashioning turnouts so a motorist can pull over, stop, and plant his feet firmly before gazing over the edge; or perhaps they're installing more railings to protect rubbernecking drivers from their own folly as well as from the winds that howl strongly enough to send a car airborne. Long ago they placed gates at both ends of The Road. These they can close against the foolhardy who have yet to learn that this is no place to be in storm or dense fog. Sadly, what some people learn in a few horrible moments is that any mistake made here is going to be their last.

I remember what happened near Lucia years ago during a big storm. Late one night, in a torrential downpour, a man and wife were inching their way around curves and over high canyon bridges. The moment eventually came when the car took in too much water over its sparkplugs. All at once it coughed — and pffftt! For a time the couple sat there, wondering what to do next and knowing that no one would be coming along to help them decide.

As the fury of the gale abated somewhat, the man got out to assess their situation. When after a reasonable wait he failed

to appear in the headlight beam or anywhere else, his wife made up her mind to investigate. In almost no time she solved the mystery. By listening intently she could make out his calls, faint and garbled, riding the wind whistling up from the sea. He had stepped out of the car although not upon the highway, because the outside lane simply wasn't there anymore. Gravity being what it is, he had executed a flying chute-the-chutes until his feet at last caught up with the missing lane. Standing on it now, he was safe although blacked out from the rest of the world.

Another stormy night, Bill Kenyon, by then Chief Ranger of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, and his wife, Mabel, chose to try for home after a show in Monterey, and thereby learned a lesson for all time to come. A few miles south of Point Lobos they squinted into the darkness and the downpour well enough to see a gap in The Road ahead. Bill hit the brakes. Only the left front wheel slid into the void, but over the brink climbed four young people whose car had found the bottom of it. Moments later another big section of pavement let go and squashed their car flat.

During times of enforced isolation, especially, the downcoasters make a point of staying healthy. There still is no regular doctor on that 105-mile stretch between Carmel and Cambria, the tiny fishing hamlet, once a whaling station.

The land and sea area bordering From the Post Ranch to Cambria looks very much as it did when Sir Francis Drake sailed past in 1579. So the Big Sur people know they must be self-reliant and interdependent. With no telephones or power lines until a few years ago, they have had to share with and help one another — the homesteaders, Indians, highway crew, and U.S Forest guards; the artists, writers, and craftsmen; the retired, who built rustic houses on the points and ridges; the ranger families, after a part of the Pfeiffer homestead became Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park in 1934; the resort owners, not many but a few, who have set up small businesses.

The wide variety of viewpoint extant in such a community has meant that there couldn't be total accord among the inhabitants. Nevertheless, the Big Sur folk have gotten along well together, considering. They have exchanged labor in ranching, construction, and repair, and nursed one another in sickness; they have shopped for others in town and

taken turns hiking steep trails and roads up and down the mountains to fetch mail from boxes alongside The Road; they have swapped what they made, were cordial when they met, stood together fiercely against intrusion from the Outside — and for the most part, still do. The intensity of their loyalty has manifested itself most strongly, of course, in times of urgent need, when completely beneath their notice were differences in social strata or lifestyle or personal traits. One truth stands out: of all those who have loved this forbidding mountainland facing sea and hurricane, the hardy — and only the hardy — have remained to help and be helped.

And that is what this strange country is to many people — forbidding.

I saw one tourist who was cowed beyond recall. Revving his motor, impatient to be off, he shouted, "I'm clearing out of here! There's something about this place. I feel like I'm dangling from a penthouse window by my fingertips."

To me, the incongruous and amusing thing about the fellow was that his office was situated on the fourteenth and top floor of a Los Angeles building, in those days, a skyscraper. Furthermore, his home proved to be a goldfish bowl perched on a Bel Air hill. Only its rearmost studding had been contaminated by contact with soil. The rest of the house soared out into the sunset like an eagle about to take off from its aerie. Anyone could see from snapshots shown to us that the architectural cliff-hanger stayed put only by virtue of tall stork-legged stilts and the grace of God. I would have been nervous about tiptoeing across the living room for a look at the view. Yet I know that the man, in order to keep from looking down into the ocean on his way home, would probably leave car paint on the rocky inside embankment of every outside curve he came to.

While some people shy away from even glancing over the side, others dread the towering mountainsides above that shoot skyward from the very edge of the pavement. No doubt they have the same misgivings as the early-day navigators who sailed along this coast. One ship's captain wrote in his log: "We had the feeling these immense mountains were going to fall on us, so we set sail farther out to sea."

Whether you look up or down or ahead at The Road, sweeping around a succession of land bulges, the Santa Lucias

make a whopping impression on you. You're either thrilled or overwhelmed at being suspended between sea and sky on that narrow thread of pavement. Whichever, you do understand that Nature is in unquestioned command down this coast. The message is loud and clear that your presence here is not wholly on your own terms and definitely at your own risk.

The Road, however, is a far cry from the original one, which was dirt and hair-raising even to drivers of horses and wagons. And what it must have done to the blood pressure of pioneering motorists who dared those first two tracks clinging to the mountain front could have been utterly devastating.

I love The Road. For me it is truly California's Wonderful One. As I head south from Point Lobos or north, upgrade, from San Simeon, something happens to my car, something I've never been able to explain. The thing springs forward like a Kentucky thoroughbred sprinting into the homestretch. I have to keep alert to hold it back, for wild exhilaration vibrates up through the floorboards as the car fairly leaps at the pitches and curves. Such has been the case with all my cars, and not a one of them had ever been to Big Sur before falling into my hands.

You think this is pure nonsense? Perhaps. But we still fly to Big Sur and drag our heels when we leave.

The first time I tackled The Road, it went south from Carmel just thirty miles or so — only as far as Castro Canyon several miles below the old Pfeiffer Ranch, which had just become the state park. There it ended. A few years after that, workers again hooked themselves onto the cliffs, and blasted and clawed an extension of The Road out of the remaining sixty miles along the Santa Lucias to San Simeon.

Some of the workmen weren't able to hang on well enough to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Nevertheless, where even horse-mounted explorers had once found the range too formidable a barrier, the stream of wheeled humanity now cautiously began to venture the length of it. Big Sur became a remote vacation spot for those who wanted to escape the crush of the more accessible parks and highways.

In the early thirties, the boys of the Civilian Conservation Corps camp at the southern end of the park constructed most of the park's new trails, including those that wound back into the Ventana Wilderness of the Los Padres National Forest. In

the redwoods behind the Pfeiffer ranch house they improved a number of cabins, built long before by the Pfeiffers for their guests. These, together with the ranch house, became the first Big Sur Lodge. The boys also constructed a kiosk checking station nearby at the park's only entrance and exit, laid out camp areas along one side of the stream and picnic grounds, and constructed a campfire circle along the other. Then they dammed a loop in the river to make a swimming pond.

As time passed and people of Central California began to discover the park, more and more rangers were required to maintain and operate it. All of this brought a flurry of activity to the little slot of a valley. The inhabitants managed to work up some interest in Outsiders, but not much; the Outsiders found themselves consumed with curiosity about anyone who would deliberately choose such a primitive frontier for his home. The time had come for the Big Sur residents who desired seclusion to retreat to the ridges above The Road and out onto the points south of the valley. A few elected to serve travelers and vacationers. They built rustic tourist cabins and offered home-cooked food and assorted redwood knickknacks.

The Pfeiffers, having sold their family home and hundreds of streamside acres of their land to the State, erected a stone house for themselves and a full-round log structure on property farther downvalley that eventually became River Inn. The daughter, Esther, and her husband, Hans Ewoldsen, in order to secure their own privacy, built a log home high on the valley's inland ridge, about a thousand feet above The Road. From their windows they can look across the seaward ridge and watch the Point Sur light gleam out over the Pacific, where in times past many ships met disaster. In the fertile soil of their skyline flat, they still raise fruit and vegetables for themselves and the wildlife, as well as flowers of all kinds and colors, which the deer enjoy more than anything else they eat.

Despite the fact that the Ewoldsen's sanctuary was very often in or above the clouds and to all appearances in another world entirely, the family still remained in touch with all things earthy. From their back yard, a steep dirt corkscrew wound its rocky ruts down the mountain through chaparral and redwood grove to The Road. Almost every day it was negotiated by means of a jeep, more steeplejack than automotive wonder.

There was one other conveyance, too, but it ran downhill only and had to be brought back up as a jeep passenger.

Neatly solving the problem of how to get below to meet the school bus, the three Ewoldsen children had whipped up a soap box coaster car that whizzed them bumpety-bump, lickety-split down the steep 25% grade and around numerous zigzags in a few seat-shattering minutes. Gravity travel is inexpensive and speedy transportation in places like Big Sur, but it is as powerful as it is cheap. To master it, you have to possess steady nerves, instant judgement (all of it good), and cast iron muscle. These things the young Ewoldsens developed early in life while other kids in California were dressing dolls and expressing their inventive spirit through Tinker Toys.

When I mentioned that my heart bled for a ride in the plywood hotrod, the family shook their heads and smiled tolerantly. "You'd just get killed," they stated simply and finally and in a way that left no room for argument.

In lieu of that angel flight, I usually took an hour or so to ease my way down to The Road. All the while I made sure to set one foot securely in front of the other lest I slip on some pebble and land you know where. After sitting a couple of dents in the road before reaching the bottom of the grade, I began to appreciate the Ewoldsens' concern for my welfare.

Most of the little roads leading out onto the points from the highway aren't nearly as vertical as those leading upmountain from it, and most twist and turn more gently. But when the fog pours in, they, along with practically everything else out there, are utterly obliterated. Anyone trying to find his way back to The Road on one of them had better know it like the back of his hand, not just every foot of the way but every cotton-pickin' inch.

Many a time when visiting one of the point dwellers, I found the day — or moonlit night — so brilliantly clear that for a hundred miles the coast would stand out from the sea as sharply as if it had been cut out of paper. Yet in the spring and summer especially, I always knew there was a gold-plated certainty that a fog as delicately ethereal as a chunk of concrete would engulf the entire landscape before I could finish a second cup of tea with my friends. Suddenly the promontory would have taken on all the spaciousness of a deep well; and

there I'd be, socked in and at least four or five miles from the sunshine — or moonlight — down in the park.

Getting myself off that point would then become a project of the first magnitude, for the mile or so to The Road was as undulating as a ruffled petticoat and only slightly wider. Still, anyone sober could manage it if he took it segment by segment, sometimes feeling out each one on foot first, and in the doing, not minding that he looked like a sleepwalker. The only other human he was likely to encounter in the pea soup would be someone else attempting the same thing from the opposite direction. Even so, such a confrontation was bound to be a shock. Running into dripping coyote brush is one thing; colliding with a gray hand reaching through the mists is something else — to say nothing of the maneuvering problem then to be solved on that one-way ledge in ceiling zero.

This never happened to me. Somehow the many years of finding my way through an inky-black redwood forest at night served to lead me safely back to The Road and the park. Therefore, visit my friends I did with reasonable frequency. The war, its restrictions and sadness, curbed the activities of the Big Sur's isolated few, about seventy-five all together, but it rarely diminished their spirit or the pleasure of one another's company.

Chapter Fifteen: Big Sur No Offense, General, Sir But This Is the *Big Sur*

My second sampling of The Road turned out to be the hard way, through sheets of driving rain in the opening storm of the rainy season. Because construction had been completed to Morro Bay only two years before, cliffs both above and beneath the highway were still raw and unstable. Nevertheless, I was determined to see this engineering marvel, described so vividly all summer at Richardson Grove by Southern Californians who had chosen to try that route on their way upstate. Precious little could I glimpse of it, however. Twelve miles south of the state park down came the sky and with it the mountainsides; down onto The Road and clear on down into the sea far, far below. Even so, I was lucky. I rammed the big boulder instead of it bounding onto me, squashing and bulldozing me over the side.

Both of us ground to a crunching halt, on solid road surface, to be sure; but above the pounding of my heart and the rain, I could hear the breakers thundering over the jagged rocks a thousand feet straight down. For a minute I sat there and tried to get my circulation circulating again.

Before the collision I had been creeping along in low. There I was destined to remain. Something had happened to the under part of the car that had rendered the gearshift inoperable. In my half-blind crawl back to the haven of the park, I did some fancy broken-field navigating, dodging a rain of boulders and swerving warily past collapsing outer edges of the narrow highway. In that scary hour I swore if I ever managed to escape The Road alive, so help me I'd never return.

Yet I did. Three years later, the summer after Pearl Harbor, Sacramento transferred me to Big Sur State Park.

To be transferred from the mightiest of redwood forests to this little river valley at the southern tip of the redwood range really shook me. Shouted a ranger friend: "That's a demotion! You've always been in the number one and number two parks.

This is number three! Besides, those redwoods down there are puny. Why, the largest is only twenty-seven feet around."

Wrote Sacramento: "We need you down there, Petey. You and Bill Kenyon. It's wartime, so don't expect the year to be like any of the others you have ever known. Can we count on you?"

Put that way, of course they could — especially after Bill Kenyon was mentioned. Working with him those years at Richardson Grove had been some of the most wonderfully educational and idiotic times of my life. Bill and Mabel had become close friends. I knew if there was a challenge downcoast Bill would meet it head-on. I knew also that I would relish meeting it with him. With these thoughts tempering my rebellion, I stopped feeling sorry for myself, and struck out northward from my home in Santa Paula.

The first inkling of what lay in store emerged from the yellow bush lupine just above San Simeon at the San Carpoforo Creek gate. As I approached, an armed soldier, helmeted and businesslike, stepped onto the roadside.

December 7, 1941, had changed many things for Californians. One was that we had to accustom ourselves to being interrogated by sentries at places we had frequented for years. While slowing, I couldn't help wondering, "Why *this* spot, so far up a lonely coast?" Until that moment, I had encountered nothing more than the spring crop of cottontails scurrying in and out of the bushes. No need for security that I could see. As I pulled up, the guard advanced with fitting military manner and caution. His glance darted all over the interior of the car.

"Where you bound, Miss?" he queried crisply.

"Big Sur. The park," I answered.

"Business?"

"I'm one of the park staff," I told him. "Reporting for duty. Due this afternoon."

"YOU?" he demanded indecently, instant suspicion narrowing his eyes to slits.

I showed him my orders from Sacramento. He read the paper from beginning to end, all the while wagging his head back and forth and looking me over. Obviously this man wasn't used to a woman on park crews. Finally he spotted my rifle.

"What's that for?" he snapped, now sure he had caught a saboteur.

"The usual thing," I replied inanely, without the faintest idea of what I meant.

Unexpectedly the soldier's face broke into a wide grin. He nodded understandingly. "Good girl," he assured me. "A sub sank one of our tankers off Morro Bay a week ago. We don't know what's going to happen next along this coast." A big sigh. "Okay, you can go on, but don't fiddle around about it. Watch yourself on this road. Be sure you're off it by dark. Dimmers are required after that — IF you have to be out then. Remember. *Required*. But lady, this is no place to be at night, and for the duration."

I assured him I had good lights.

"Sure you have," he went on patiently, "but The Road is open to the sea. Even a match lighting a cigarette can be seen clearly for miles out there. Blackout at dusk. Don't forget. The Japs..."

That was the beginning. A few miles farther on I was stopped by the jeep patrol I was to come to know well in the weeks ahead. Approaching a road that led out onto one of the points, I passed a man with binoculars around his neck who was walking his police dog. In my rear view mirror I noted that he turned and watched me until I rounded the next curve.

Well before dark, I did reach Big Sur. Late that afternoon I drove up in front of the Chief Ranger's residence near the entrance of the park, and what a joyous reunion we had, Bill, Mabel, and I.

Bill could scarcely wait to show me the park. Dear old Mr. System. His stone-ground, vitamin-enriched efficiency had irritated several rangers into requesting transfers, but when that efficiency was combined as it was with the zaniest kind of humor I had ever encountered, it made for me an ideal working situation. Bill and I always synchronized harmoniously, although not always in total accord on everything involving parks and visitors.

After we had coffee and generous cuts of Mabel's delicious lemon pie, Bill grinned and reached for his Stetson. "C'mon," he said happily, "I want to show you around. Quite a park. Nothing like the Basin or Richardson, but it's a honey. You'll like it. Honest."

As we climbed into the green park pickup with the bear decal on the doors, I gave him a sidelong glance that was intentionally skeptical. Bill grinned again. "Honest," he repeated.

Because both he and Mabel felt this way about Big Sur, I knew that in the end I probably would, too — somehow. Anyway, I resolved to work at it.

Even that first afternoon I had to admit that the park, while not the dark spectacular stand of massive giants like the Basin or Richardson Grove, certainly did have a charm all its own.

Extending downstream a couple of miles from the Gorge, where the river tumbles out of the national forest, Big Sur State Park is pleasant and much of it sunny. The redwoods there, being near the southern tip of their five-hundred-mile range, average no more than eight feet or so in diameter. Few rise higher than two hundred feet. Most stand in large clusters on the streamside flats. In their dense shade are the favored campsites, although many vacationers do prefer tenting places in the more open woodland of tanoaks, bays, cottonwoods, sycamores, maples, and alders.

Through the center of the park and on down the river valley to the sea flows the river, actually a mountain creek until winter rains set it wild. After swirling in little eddies, tumbling over cobbles and around rocks, it eases into the Pacific. Nowhere is the water very deep except where the CCC boys dammed it for swimming plus a few quiet spots both above and below there. By the end of August it can be waded anywhere except the deep end of the pool.

With Bill that first day, I watched the ripples and listened to the rustle of the afternoon onshore breeze in the broadleaf trees, and thought how different this place from the majestic redwood forests farther north; yet despite my reluctance to like Big Sur, I found myself gradually surrendering to its well-publicized magic.

Bill drove me over the entire park — almost. Not quite. I was to discover that the next day. Dusk and suppertime were closing in, and when a meal was about to be served, Bill made tracks toward the feedbag like a homing burro. A rotund figure testified to his dedication. Even so, his unbounded enthusiasm for everything edible was surpassed by his deathless devotion to the California State Parks and state

park management. Therefore we examined this park of his minutely. Most of it.

In my orientation tour that afternoon I was introduced to Headquarters; the checking station, beside which all cars must pass and be accounted for when entering or leaving our domain; the maintenance yard with its machinery and tools, plus cords and cords of firewood neatly stacked for sale to the campers and picnickers; the diesel power plant, source of the park's electricity; several ranger residences; the rangers and their families. Included also was a quick look at the Lodge — a full-round log building opposite the checking station, boarded up for the duration. We skipped the closed-off outlying camp areas, but went over rather carefully the main campgrounds in the redwoods along the stream. Only five of the eighty-odd campsites were occupied.

"Where is everyone?" I asked as we cruised past a group of empties. "Is it too early in the season?"

Bill shook his head. "Nope. Probably be about like this all summer."

I was horrified. My voice must have betrayed my dismay. "All summer? You must be kidding."

"Well, I'm not. Few civilians can get gas to venture this far. Most that we do have are Monterey fishermen. We're only 30 miles from Cannery Row, so some of those folk will make it, especially on weekends and depending on the sardine runs. Real characters."

For several minutes we rode in silence while I did some pondering on this strange situation. The more I thought, the more puzzled I became about my place at Big Sur.

"What on earth am I doing here?" I demanded finally. "Don't tell me I'm holding campfires for five campsites."

Bill took a deep breath and gave me a sidewise glance before answering. "We won't have any campfires at all except on Saturday nights," he said quietly, "and then only small ones that can be doused by a bucket of water we'll always have to keep handy."

"Blackout?" I asked.

"Right. You'll be spending most of your time at the checking station. You'll open up at 8 AM, raise the flag, be the central point of contact for the park and the outside, keep track of every car that comes and goes. I've plenty of map work for

you to do at the old C Camp drafting room. Late afternoons you can check camps, take care of the day's receipts and the weekly reports for Sacramento. Lots of odds and ends. Oh yes. You'll be the clearing station for calls within the park as well as for calls coming in, mostly from Fort Ord at Monterey. It's now a staging area for the Pacific. While the troops are waiting there to ship they're sometimes brought down here for R and R. The Navy comes occasionally, too, though mostly for just the day. After dark, nothing. Deader'n a doornail. We sit around and talk. Go to bed early. Have to have blackout curtains and always be prepared for a red alert. Goofy times."

I could think of no reply. I was reviewing the years past when by this time several hundred campers would be settled into any of our big parks, all bright-eyed and eager for the evening campfire and sing. The dozen or so I had seen here were older people who appeared tired and sad, and had little to say. With so many empty campsites and the closed-off areas, the park felt ghostly. An unnatural quiet haunted the whole place. All that broke it was the screeching of the gray squirrels and jays as they taunted one another. My spirits sank. It looked as if I was going to be bored stiff this summer. As Bill and I skirted the empty picnic grounds and headed toward a big meadow at the southeastern end of the park, I considered resigning and returning south to continue my work with the Women's Ambulance Corps and as a first aid instructor for the Red Cross. How glad I am that I didn't.

Behind the meadow rose three and four thousand foot mountains and the steep-sided Gorge. I could hear the river rushing out although a low hill stood between me and it. At the far edge of the meadow I saw an old CCC camp, long abandoned, weather-beaten and dilapidated. Just one small structure, what had been the camp dispensary, remained in fair condition, Bill told me, pointing it out. A moment later we drove between two sagging barracks, and stopped at the back door of the little building. Standing somewhat apart from the others, it overlooked the meadow and was hovered by the spreading arms of an immense oak.

With a flourish Bill unlocked and opened the door. "All yours," he announced, grinning. "Three rooms, big kitchen, lots of windows. Pretty good bed. Chest of drawers, too." He was now ricocheting from room to room, bursting with

delight. "See — overstuffed couch in the living room. All the stuffing's in. Left over from the CCCs. And — " Bill came to a halt, beaming as if he had just been made Chief of the California State Park System. "And a telephone, by golly!"

Sure enough, there it was on the wall — a telephone of my own that connected with Bill and Mabel's home, Headquarters, and the checking station. This was the Waldorf deluxe. In any of the other parks, you would have to run for help if your cabin were burning down.

I stood breathless, trying to absorb it all and remembering the ancient and dilapidated cabins I'd lived in year after year during most of my previous years on park crews. What Bill was turning over to me now was a luxury such as I had never dared hope for or even thought possible. And then to find it situated in a beautiful scene overlooking a spacious meadow, clear away from other buildings and campgrounds — WOW! Here I could be alone with the great outdoors and its wild things. The last shreds of resistance to Big Sur crumbled in the few heady moments that I surveyed my new affluence. The only thing that could have in any way supplemented my sense of well-being would have been a view of the ocean, but with a long high ridge between me and it, this, of course would have been impossible.

However, a part of that ridge west-bounding our narrow valley was park property, Bill said. Would I like to go up there and look down upon both valley and sea? Naturally, so in the waning afternoon we set out. Bill unlocked a gate, shifted into compound low, and we began to grind our way up a bladed-out break in the dense chaparral and grasses, then along the ridge to where it crested the highest.

Up there, the panorama was breathtaking — the sweet, spicy pungence, released by the day's warmth on the various herbs, exquisitely fragrant. Just as we stopped and got out of the pickup, a red ball of sun vanished behind the watery horizon, and the Point Sur light came on. Throwing an orange beam twenty-six miles out over the Pacific, it would flash its warning every fifteen seconds all night, as it had been doing since 1889.

While Bill and I stood looking down at the great rock and its lighthouse, he told me about the many shipwrecks that had taken place off the point and the Navy dirigible Macon,

which had gone down there in February of 1925. At this moment at end of day, when the blue haze of evening was beginning to lower, I couldn't imagine disaster ever touching such a glorious scene. Tranquil, incredibly vast, it stretched out before us farther than eye could reach or mind could comprehend.

Suddenly Bill grabbed his binoculars off the car seat and began training them downcoast. "Thought I saw a light," he commented. "Probably old Mr. Dani taking a look around. Have to keep an eye out. All of us. See every little thing. This is a long, lonely coastline."

"Japs?" I queried senselessly.

"Yep. Could be at any time. Perhaps by submarine," Bill replied. "Many of the coves at the canyon mouths would be swell places to land a raiding party, even one of considerable force. All they'd have to do to cut The Road would be to blow up one of the thirty-three bridges. Then they could disappear back into these mountains and infiltrate on inland."

I mulled over the possibilities. "Aren't we protected at all?"

"Jeep patrol on the move all the time up and down this coast. And Big Sur folks, all seventy-five, keep watch day and night. Everybody's got high-powered glasses. Lookout tower up there on Chew's Ridge, too. Another on Anderson Peak."

All at once it came to me that this *was* going to be a summer different from all the others that had gone before.

Mystic shadows of impending nightfall began to darken the headlands of this remote, nearly uninhabited coastline that was still rising out of the mother sea.

Bill said abruptly, "Well, let's shove off. Mabel's having fried chicken, oh boy, oh boy, and we've got to get down from here before we have to use dimmers."

We climbed into the pickup, Bill turned it around, and that was that. With a dry cough, the motor breathed its last gasoline.

You have read somewhere, no doubt, about a horrified silence? We had one. Frantically, Bill began throttling and yanking every protuberance on the dashboard, all in vain. We looked under the hood while Bill fiddled with a few more things. Still no response. Then, out of wishful thinking I imagine, we walked a few steps to the brink of the ridge and peered down into the rapidly deepening blue-black of the

valley. Both of us were sweating over the same inescapable truth: we were hopelessly marooned only a half-mile or so crow flight from Mabel's fried chicken and the one or two tiny lights just then coming on down in the park — but several miles by road.

"Jeez!" Bill exclaimed, shoving his Stetson onto the back of his head. Not only was the car out of gas, but so was the Chief Ranger.

I never dreamed I'd live to see such an impasse as this — not as long as Bill could enumerate 1, 2, 3 all the ways to prevent operational blunders. For once Bill Kenyon was without words, analyses, and justifications. Weak with the realization of our predicament, we walked back to the pickup, sat down on the running board, and said nothing. When I did look up, it was to notice for the first time a leaning post, topped by a weather-beaten sign reading BUZZARD'S ROOST.

"Well, I'll be dod-blasted," Bill erupted finally, and went on to mumble something about all the high-powered glasses that would be trained on us and the alarms that would be passed from the lighthouse to the Post Ranch should we try to flashlight our way down the trail from the ridge by dark. His exasperation changed nothing, for here we were — us and our abysmal inefficiency.

Ah! But not for long. And let me say that ever since my first twenty-four hours at Big Sur, I have been a devout believer in miracles. Before the following day could be fully born, I was to witness two.

One was approaching now. We could hear it coming — a symphony of jeep motor, grinding its Wagnerian way up the ridge. Still, it was difficult to accept as actual — even after we glimpsed two helmets bobbing along above the tips of the chaparral, or even as we watched that dear, unforgettable, square-jawed countenance of the Army's mechanized pride and joy churning around a chamise bush and clattering to a noisy halt beside the pickup.

The sergeant laughed until he nearly cried when Bill sheepishly told him the awful truth. Bill laughed with him finally, although he was red-faced about it. "Boy! Are we glad to see you," he said, loosening his tie.

I asked the GI's how they happened to find us up on this

seaward ridge, of all places. Both shrugged. "We come up here every morning and evening for a look around," the sergeant explained. "We have a key to the gate, too, you know."

The men siphoned some of their gas into our tank, and so we got back for Mabel's chicken without having to hike down from Buzzard's Roost in the pitch dark after all. This, I thought foolishly, is all that can happen today.

But it wasn't. Not quite.

At dinner we talked about the possibility of an enemy landing somewhere along our coast. "We had a scare last week," Bill said seriously. "Tuesday afternoon just before supper, Bert Lazano, one of our downcoasters, rushed in to tell us he had seen a sub surfaced in Partington Cove. He's solid, Bert. Not one of those guys that likes to stir up a whoop-de-do. I questioned him pretty sharply, but he kept on insisting that there was a sub in Partington. 'I know a sub when I see one,' he told me, and because he'd been a Navy vet, I knew he did know."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Well, we're on Army Flash here. I picked up the phone and said 'Army Flash' and boom! We had Fort Ord right now — in seconds."

"Did they come fast?" I asked.

"And how. They sent a captain and a dozen or so GI's and a lot of guns and ammo and stuff in several private cars, so the wrong people that might be watching would think them civilians."

"Lloyd, Torchy, and I led them to Partington Canyon — us with dimmers at first, then completely blacked out. The captain had told us to signal with our tail lights when we came to Partington, then go on a couple of turns down The Road and wait, lights out, of course."

"Did you?"

"Yep, sure. But we didn't know if we'd round a curve and barge right into a Jap roadblock. Darn ticklish business."

"Then?"

"Well, pretty soon the canyon erupted, shooting all kinds of stuff, big and little. What a racket! For quite a while, too. Boy, were we strung up, sitting there in the dark, cut off from a phone, wondering what was going on, thinking we might be plunk in the middle of an invasion."

“What did happen at Partington?” I pressed.

“After a bit the cars joined us. Captain said they hadn’t found any sub.”

“Then why all the shooting?”

“The GI’s let go with everything they had — submachine guns, grenades, guns, everything they had. They gave the canyon and cove a thorough working over just in case the sub might have landed a raiding party there. That’s what we’re afraid of mostly. It would be out of the question to scale the cliffs along here, but they could paddle into the coves on dark nights and climb the canyons to The Road.”

“You really expect some kind of landing?” I persisted.

Bill sighed. “Anything’s possible. We just have to watch. On moonlit nights, you can see out over the ocean as far as at straight-up noon. No raiders would be damn stupid enough to make a try then. But in the dark of the moon...” Bill’s voice trailed off, and he shrugged. I got the idea.

“And what if someone does discover either a commando party or an invasion force?” I asked, reaching for another piece of chicken. “What do they do? Telephone?”

Both Bill and Mabel laughed humorlessly. “They can’t. There are no phones south of the park. We’re the end of the line. They’d have to make their way somehow up to us without lights — at least until they hit the valley and were no longer visible from the sea.”

“Where do we get help from then, Fort Ord?”

“Right — if a bridge between here and there hasn’t been blown up.”

I was beginning to understand more clearly why this summer was going to be one for the books.

Bill started to make some remark, but a knock at the door and the appearance of park personnel, invited in for dessert, changed the direction of the conversation, though only briefly. Talk soon veered into an intense discussion of Big Sur’s isolation — especially after the jeep patrol came along, took ten, and joined us.

That evening everyone was on edge, wary, and deeply concerned; every resident along the entire coast alerted to the slightest sound or light that appeared the least bit unusual or suspicious — for this was one of those moonless, pitch-black nights.

When I look back now, I think the remote Big Sur coastline was amazingly well-guarded considering the vastness of that virtually unoccupied stretch of America, abutting the sea for over a hundred miles. At Cambria, Cayucos, and Morro Bay to the south and the towns of the flat Monterey Bay country to the north, many residents had become so apprehensive that they had sold out at great loss or closed up and moved away. The Big Sur folk who hadn't joined the armed forces remained in their valley and on their ridges and points throughout the war. Their daytime life moved pleasantly enough, although with binoculars always at the ready. Their nights may have passed without fear but never without vigilance — particularly on inky nights like this one, my first.

About 11 o'clock, with saboteurs crowding all my thoughts, I excused myself. I was tired and anxious for the dark solitude of my newly acquired mansion out at the old CCC camp. There I would lie and listen to the familiar and beloved sounds of woods and meadow until at last sleep would overpower me. Such heaven!

But my car wouldn't start. Plenty of gas but a dead battery.

Bill laughingly consoled me. "No problem. We'll just leave your car here, and Mabel and I will run you out to the C camp. Tomorrow we will recharge the battery up at the shops."

Once in my new quarters, I undressed in the dark because there wasn't a window shade in the house yet. I put on my very loud red-white-and-blue striped birthday pajamas, opened wide the big screened windows beside my bed, and climbed in.

The night was as still as it was coal black. No leaf stirred, nor any living thing that I could hear. Within a few blissfully peaceful moments, I fell asleep.

I didn't awaken once during the night to revel in the silence or the fragrance of the air. We wouldn't be getting any low fog, Mabel had assured me — not down in the valley. It always passed high overhead up some of the canyons from the sea in long white trains.

But I guess the fog never heard of Mabel, for this night it really socked in Big Sur Valley. I could smell the wetness of it even before I opened my eyes far enough to see dawn's early light. That pea-souper had settled onto my meadow and had grown thick enough to slice.

What dispelled my drowsiness only moments later were noises outside in that fog that must have been filing away at my subconscious for some time. Strange sounds they were: the scrapings and gratings of metal across earth and rock; the muffled movement of heavy things dragging or being dragged through grass. The stealth of animals at night I was used to, but this was not animals at night. And this was not just one or two. This was massive, and it seemed to be coming from all directions.

Rarely had I ever known honest-to-goodness fear when out in the wilds, but my blood fairly curdled now as I realized that never before had I heard such noises in a forest or park — or anywhere else for that matter. Furthermore, I knew they didn't belong here.

Trying to calm myself, I raised up cautiously and peered over the windowsill into the impenetrable gray sop. Wherever I looked, I could make out activity. The grasses were parting here and there, and through them eased clusters of big shadowy mushrooms that seemed to have sprouted all over the place.

Mushrooms? *Mushrooms!* Those things weren't mushrooms! Wait a minute. Why, those things looked like — Yes! They *were* helmets! Under them, soldiers in full battle gear.

And they were converging on my house!

Fortunately, I didn't go berserk. Finding that my arms and legs could function, I slid off the bed, crawled into the kitchen, and crouched beside one of the windows. Through the drifting fog, I studied the nearest barracks building. Just as I thought: movement there, too. In the dark gaping windows and doorways, ghostly forms loomed, all poised with rifles. Between the barracks, other forms scurried from one bit of cover to another, throwing themselves flat, snaking forward — toward me. The fog was dense all right, but the horrifying fact that hundreds of troops were closing in on me was unmistakable.

"My God! JAPS!" I exclaimed in a stage whisper, heart flopping around in my throat and chest.

Then another sledgehammer of a thought hit me: this commando party must already have fallen upon the park families and murdered them. Moreover, at this very moment

other raiders were probably stealing up on the houses out on the points and ridges and on down the valley. My first dawn at Big Sur had the distinct sensation of IT.

All at once I felt as alone in the mists as if this were the dawn of Creation, and I were the first to crawl out of the sea. Sure that it was either do or die now, my animal instinct for survival gripped me around the windpipe and took over. In that one crystal-clear instant, resolving not to make the supreme sacrifice in my wonderful park house without a fight, I grabbed and loaded my rifle, knelt below one of the windows, and prepared to ventilate as many of the enemy as possible before becoming a statistic in the invasion of the United States.

Outside, the ring was tightening fast. I could see machine guns and mortars in the windows of the old barracks and behind clumps of coyote brush, and no lack of pale cold gleam on bayonets anywhere I cared to look. One of the invaders, apparently a noncom bellying ahead of the advance, was giving arm signals to which his men promptly responded. They were well trained and deadly, I reasoned. No question about it, they meant to storm my house any moment now.

Clamping my mouth shut to keep myself from disintegrating into bite-sized pieces, I slipped the rifle nose onto the sill, drew a bead on the leader squarely between the eyes, and with trembling finger, began the trigger squeeze.

At the last split-second, the other Big Sur miracle presented itself.

The fog cleared around my intended victim, permitting me to glimpse his face. My rifle, released from my grasp, crashed to the floor. Stunned at what I thought I had seen quite plainly, I squinted for a better look.

Well, by golly, his eyes *didn't* slant. And as others of his company edged closer, I saw that none of their eyes slanted either. Then the fog surged past again, leaving me with only a general impression of the undulating mass of men swarming toward my house from every direction.

"These," I exclaimed aloud in disbelief, "are American boys!"

By now, the front door was shuddering under the blows of powerfully wielded gun butts. Yet somehow I found the strength to get up off my knees, fling open the back door, and

stalk out into the fog and a cluster of intent GI's, charging with guns upraised.

Well now, it surely must rock any man to have a tousle-headed woman, clad in some of the loudest flannel pajamas ever exposed to public view and waving a white dish towel, open and exit a door he was about to club to pieces — and then stand there glaring. All of this from one of the crumbling and supposedly deserted buildings of an ancient CCC camp. In a dense fog. At dawn.

Army maneuvers froze. Hundreds of troops, like phantoms in a nightmare, sprouted up out of the grasses of the old C camp and clearing as far toward the river as I could see on such a morning. Inside the barracks and out, soldiers grew together in tight little groups as if to pool their amazement. Barefoot before the assembled multitude though I was, yet splendidly arrayed in our national colors, I must have embodied soul-stirring patriotism like Old Glory being run up the pole at reveille.

The meadow came to life. Suddenly it started buzzing as more than a thousand GI's jumped to their feet and began chattering excitedly among themselves. A young lieutenant who seemed better preserved than the rest of us elbowed his way through to me. "H-H-How'd you get here?" he faltered, burning with embarrassment. "We — I had no idea.... There's no car or anything. We didn't know —"

I broke in. "I live here," I said. "I'm one of the park staff. Now, young man, will you please explain what all of you are up to?"

The young lieutenant's face fell. "Why, lady, we're camped over the hill," he said, pointing toward the Gorge. "At Weyland Camp." (Ah! One of the camp areas I *hadn't* been shown.) "We're from Fort Ord. We bring trainees down here, a new bunch every two weeks, for bivouac and exercises. Didn't Mr. Kenyon —"

"No," I snapped, silently blessing out dear old Bill, who relished his practical jokes. "Mr. Kenyon didn't."

"I — well, with no car here — we — just — never dreamed that —" The poor fellow was so upset that all he could do was stammer and bounce from one foot to the other.

"It's all right," I answered, rapidly simmering down, "only

there's one thing. That corporal over there. You, fellow. Take off your helmet, will you, please?"

The GI did as requested, and I was treated to an appealing sunburned face, flanked by two of the biggest ears I have ever seen. He couldn't have been more than eighteen because his mustache was having a struggle. My heart melted at the sight of him standing there, helmet in hand, and looking more like the new kid at school than an assault leader. Only moments before, he had been a condemned man.

My voice shook when I told him about it. "Believe me, I'm glad to see you alive," I added. "The Battle of Big Sur came close to being your last. I'm a good shot." I felt like splashing tears all over him there before his men. Instead, I told him tersely that he'd better bring his buddies and drop in for coffee later — when I would be more appropriately attired to receive.

Danny, accompanied by a couple of his pals, did come to my cabin several times before they returned to Fort Ord the following week. I even heard from him once or twice after he shipped. And then no more. I have often wondered if, having escaped sudden death at my hands, he made it safely out of the South Pacific.

Needless to say, his unit considered me quite a curiosity during the remainder of their bivouac. At day's end, many of the boys came to the checking station to visit with my official self, having seen the daybreak issue. And when at last they roared past the kiosk and away to war in the great two-and-a-half ton "covered wagons," there was a waving and a calling of goodbyes that brought tears to my eyes. I never got used to watching those loaded trucks drive out of the park, knowing that within hours the GI's would be shipping to far-off battlefronts, perhaps never to return.

But this was how it was to be all that summer and the next two — troops coming and going much of the time. We had almost no difficulty with any of them. They were closely supervised by their officers. In their free time, lonesome and far from home, they visited with us like mothers' sons in our own neighborhoods.

I often wonder how this would work today: camping in the same park, large and small units of soldiers and perhaps fifty or so civilians, many of them girls and women; some protected by tents, others sleeping out in the open; most loving

to stroll along streams and park roads by moonlight or flash-beam; all having to hike back and forth between campsite and restroom by dark; a young woman in her early thirties alone in an isolated cabin; the woods full of bivouacking military just beyond.

Because I was ten to twelve years older than most of the boys, I became kind of a Chief Listener and Sounding Board to the ones who felt like airing their troubles or who simply wanted to talk about family, home, and girlfriends. Yet I'd no sooner get to know them by name than away they'd go, often unexpectedly, leaving the park once again to the quarreling of the jays and squirrels and the lassitude of the pitifully few civilians.

For a time thereafter, we would have quiet. Then in a matter of days here would come another convoy, led by an officer in a jeep. The procession would stop at the kiosk long enough for the customary checking in, after which it would rumble on down into the park to the bivouac area at the mouth of the Gorge.

Since the passageways on either side of the kiosk were very narrow, Bill insisted that the drivers proceed slowly. I would remind them: "Don't forget, in the park 15 miles an hour at all times." It is man's nature, I suppose, to rev a powerful and noisy vehicle, and then turn the horses loose.

Even some of the officers had to be cautioned, particularly the cadre who led the operation of big equipment exercises down into the park and back again, sometimes without stopping to rest their trainees, unnerving though their thirty-mile initiation to The Road must have been.

Never will I forget the day the dapper major parked his jeep beside the big redwood across from the kiosk in position for reviewing his covered wagons as they departed the park. He had been a race car champion, I learned later, and fancied himself still "one of the boys." When the speed of the convoy began picking up, he only smiled indulgently. After a third truck roared past my window, I decided I'd better usurp command. "Major," I called, "have your drivers reduce speed at once!"

Like a kid caught slipping a lizard into the teacher's hair, he grinned. Then saluting smartly, he complied with my request in an impressive military manner by pulling out all

stops and roaring at the young driver just then making his approach.

Surprised and confused while under a full head of steam, the boy wobbled at the wrong instant. Too late to hit the brakes, he instead romped on the accelerator and with a mighty Z-o-o-MM clipped my edge of that narrow slot of daylight between the kiosk and the giant redwood. The best I could do was duck. The trainee, all gung ho, sideswiped our kiosk with everything the big covered wagon had.

Afterwards, the major dubbed the incident a small snafu. I called it something more colorful and appropriate. Anyway, I went down in a heap amidst shattering glass and other assorted debris — the flimsy file, the telephone, and a can of yellow paint. Chunks of wood and shingles flew in every direction as the monster ripped off a part of the roof, and jolted the full-round redwood uprights at the four corners of the little structure from their concrete foundations.

After that I was careful to slow to a crawl everything that moved past either side of the checking station the *first* time a driver played loose with our regulations. Manning that narrow island with its handkerchief of lawn in front and Army freeways on both sides had its hazards, none of which were covered by my insurance.

The day the amphibians came down to the park aboard “a new gizmo” as the GI’s called it, I found I wasn’t prepared for the wonders of military science.

At the time, my back was turned to the IN driveway. All at once I had the creepy feeling that something was sneaking up on me. Whirling, I saw what looked like the port side of a boat easing past the window. I kept my head prudently inside the station, but leaned on the Dutch door and squinted up until I could see the top of it. As an old beat-up tire passed at eye level, I reasoned that this had to be chafing gear. And as the thing stood clear, I could see that it was of the barge genus, and the flagship or whatever you’d call it of a long line of barges just then beginning to turn in from The Road. A string of boats, bouncing along gracefully through the forest with helmeted soldiers on their decks, is a bit incongruous to say the least, especially if you never knew such a flotilla existed. What a war, I thought.

One of the GI’s called from the deck of the lead boat

— vessel — vehicle — whatever it was. “You need a gate-stretcher *bad*.”

“Whose Navy is this?” I called back.

“Ours,” he replied, laughing. “Never seen these? They’re ducks. Go on land or water. Crawl up a beach from outa the sea. Shinny up the front of a barn, oopsy over the roof, zooey down the other side and keep right on a-rollin’. Latest toy Uncle invented for his cute little nephews. Wanna ride?”

The unit, it seemed, was out for just that, a ride. They were driving — or navigating — The Road on a shakedown cruise with orders to terminate at the park and return to Fort Ord. Where could they do this? Quite obviously not at the park entrance.

Bill had the only answer. He directed the two dozen or so ducks to *squeeze* in past the kiosk, roll on down to the meadow, there to make their turns (all of which would literally stymie any other activity in that part of the park, had there been any) and then *squeeze* back out the other side of the kiosk.

All morning I watched rubber-tired vessels squeaking past my glass cage with only inches to spare. Once a rumor came forward that several of them were showing off down at the pool by going in swimming with the campers, chasing them in one end and out the other. Knowing Bill Kenyon, I also knew that this clownish maneuver was merely wishful thinking from his own inventive mind.

We grew to expect covered wagons and jeeps, half-tracks and weapon carriers, ducks and alligators and ambulances any time of the day — although never at night because of their exposed position on the cliffs and the ever-present danger of being shelled by enemy submarines known to be prowling the area. For many years after the war, the corrugations made by the treads of some of these vehicles remained in the surface of the Big Sur highway.

Besides driver training, Army G-3 arranged field exercises in the park for assault, limited combat, medical, communications, and other assorted units from time to time. There was, for instance, that first survival-training group.

Its advance scout, a droopy lieutenant, drove up one morning, alone in a jeep. Throwing gravel, he skated to a stop, then flopped back in his seat and went to scanning the scenery from ridge to ridge.

"What lousy country!" he exploded after the manner of someone who had caught a whiff of something well dead. "Talk about straight up and down! How I ever got stuck with such a Godforsaken hole I'll never know. This *is* Big Sur, I presume."

"Yes, Mr. Livingston, it is," I said, presuming too so we could come to some kind of agreement.

A long sigh blew out from the lieutenant. "I'm in one hell of a spot. I've been in this flea-bitten state just two months — from Arizona — and I'm the one that's got to bring a detachment down here to live off the land. That's what the colonel said, 'live off the land,' for God's sakes. All I've seen so far are buzzards. Tell me, ranger, how are they? Tender?"

"Frankly, I've never eaten one," I said, responding in kind to his astringent remark. I felt impelled to let the air out of the inflated ego of this California-hater. "Don't worry about buzzards, though," I told him more affably. "Back in the Wild Area, you'll run across plenty of edible plants as well as lots of fat rattlers. Rattlesnake steak is delicious, they tell me. Deer season hasn't opened yet, so of course any you see would be Off Limits. But the national forest is full of tasty skunks and ground squirrels and mountain lions. Then there's ham. You'll have no trouble locating wild pigs, lieutenant. They'll discover you first, I imagine, hopefully where there's trees to climb, because they do have nasty dispositions. And there's another nice thing."

"What's that?"

"Well, if any of these things don't agree with your men, all you will have to do is reach over and peel bark off the cascara sagrada bush. Plenty of it around."

By now the lieutenant's face was beginning to look as if bubble bath had been slipped into his martini. My heart softened. To ease the plight of this bombastic but helpless outlander, I suggested that he go up to the Post Ranch at the head of the valley and talk with the menfolk. "They're Indians," I told him. "Three generations of them. They'll show you how to live off these mountains."

A few days later I watched the dour lieutenant lead a small band of GI's up the trail into the Ventana Wilderness. A week later out they came — ruddy, toughened, apparently no worse

for feeding on quail and rabbit and trout, wild mustard, sorrel, watercress, and berries.

At this point I wondered about the American Indian in the armed forces. Surely there must have been some young brave or two who could have shown the palefaces how to survive in a wilderness without benefit of supermarket and automat. But then, they may have been needed back at camp to count the oyster spoons.

One of the first G-3 officers to think Big Sur a fine place to toughen troops jeeped in one warm day to scout our back country. He was the original Iron Major. No following any trail for him. In assaults on mountainous terrain, his men barged right through the brush. Forest Service trails were only for campfire girls and the 4F's left behind on ranger crews. Yup. In a few days now he'd be down with a company-strength unit that would leap out of the trucks and take off straight up that ridge there behind the park, eventually to emerge triumphant near King City in the Salinas Valley, the other side of the range.

"I've got to separate the men from the boys," he howled with a flat-handed swoop of his arm that indicated to me more of a P38 flight pattern than a ground action.

Ever so slyly, the Santa Lucias winked at us.

Purely to quiet Bill, who was irritating him by suggesting that even the Army might need some orientation, the major magnanimously consented to a young ranger guide up Mt. Manuel — but only far enough — "Get this, fella" — to start him on "the big stuff" back of there, which he was damn well capable of handling without the aid of Boy Scouts — so he asserted.

Off they went, the major and the minor.

On the fifth switchback, the Brass found it expedient to sit on a big rock and contemplate the thickets of the impenetrable chaparral that blanketed the nearly vertical mountainsides. Finally, rising stiffly, he peered down into the Gorge while our young ranger spoke of the fishermen who had tumbled in earlier that summer and had to be brought out around giant boulders and through whitewater on rafts made at the scene by a special Army engineer detachment summoned from Fort Ord.

Two switchbacks farther on, about halfway to the summit,

the major flunked the course. All by itself, and prematurely, his "piddling 4,000-foot bump" had separated the men from the boys. In doing battle with the peaks of the Santa Lucias, you find out rather quickly which of you will be standing when all the oratory dies away. Somehow it's always the same ones.

Most of the troop training at Big Sur took place down in the valley in the park, although the main campground was reserved for civilians. Not only did we close that area to maneuvers and bivouacs, but we also had the Army declare it Off Limits.

Throughout the war the park waited for the usual stampede of vacationers to fill the campsites, but few people came at any one time with the exception of some weekends. Sometimes, for days at a time, we would see none at all. We did have several flurries of butchers though. For about three weeks, when they had no meat to sell, nearly all of the butchers of Monterey packed up their families and tenting gear and came down to the park. Just let one of them begin to pull up stakes, and in moments the word would run through the crew that meat was in. Then WH-O-O-O-SHH! Away would race our butchers, behind them a long kite tail of rangers' wives and meat stamps. For perhaps a week thereafter, we'd have smiles where our faces used to be.

Weekends often brought us a stream of day visitors, bumper to bumper, mostly from the Monterey Peninsula, who had pooled their gasoline and coffee and descended on us in any conveyance that still had tires with tread. For a few happy hours, we would come alive as cars of exuberant picnickers lined up to pay their fees and buy bundles of wood. Once again we would whiff the delectable aroma of coffee boiling over fires, although the fragrance of meat cooking remained more of a memory than anything else.

I remember vividly the busy Sundays when Bill would stride into the checking station with the smug look of a man who had just been given a fist full of ration stamps. "Fellow frying bacon down in camp 42," he'd remark much too casually. Then, after letting me stew for a few minutes, he would add, "Maybe you ought to take a break and check the Picnic Area."

Of course I should, for while I was about it I could always

invent some excuse to pay my respects to the baconed ones. Quite legitimately, my uniform got me close to many a frying pan, while the poor underprivileged public had to be content with walking nonchalantly past to the water spigot or restrooms. Few meat-cookers invited me to participate, and I never accepted the invitations of those who did suggest I share their precious bounty. War or no war, rangers just didn't, although I can't imagine more enticing spreads or greater temptations.

During the meat-short summers, there were times when, if someone had dangled a dab of raw liver before me, I might have snatched and swallowed it before any of the jays watching from nearby limbs could have muscled in.

On Sunday evenings, after all the hullabaloo had subsided and everyone had returned to Monterey, Carmel, and Pacific Grove, only the usual night bird calls and the bubbling of the river broke the quiet. Along this remote coastland, sounds did little to remind us that we were actually a part of a mighty nation fighting on two battlefronts.

The evenings following Army and Navy R and R's were not as quiet as others, and much busier.

Whenever the armed forces came for the day, they arrived with truckloads of food — enough to anticipate every need of well-stoked appetites. Menus, planned in advance, guaranteed every man all he could eat, even should he sit down and gorge himself all day. No Overs were ever to be lugged back to the base to cause accounting problems; neither were they to be given away, lest they bestow food poisoning along with their vitamins.

In polishing off the expedition's mess chores, leftovers were dumped, and the containers washed clean. Huge pots of coffee and chocolate were poured onto the ground; cases of canned food were sometimes buried in the Picnic Area under the bushes; messmen, staggering under trays of excess steaks, hams, roasts, fried chicken, and hardboiled eggs, pies, cakes, chunks of real butter, even cartons of ice cream, hurried back and forth between their work tables and our tall green cans until the garbage became a thing of wonder and beauty. To those of us who hungered for these goodies — gone but not forgotten — this waste, however justified, was almost unbearable.

Determined that such delicacies should not have been created in vain, some of the boys wanted to organize a kind of salvage operation — a rescue mission, I believe they called it.

Toward evening of the days of Army and Navy occupation in the Picnic Area, devotion to duty always managed to maneuver Public Relations past the collecting bins. Resentful eyes trained on the deer lying in the brush nearby and on foxes and raccoons spying from behind convenient trees and on squirrels bounding around the perimeter of the banquet — all busting out with ulterior motives.

When at last the Navy, awash and afloat, weighed anchor and was navigated from our midst, we had to stand by, mouths watering, and watch the wildlife close in. Carefully they inspected, selected, and ate whatever cuisine their little hearts desired. How we envied them. Once in a while, some of us snatched before any of them could.

The Navy came infrequently, but Army encampments being a regular thing, we could have eaten well on their Overs. We didn't get the opportunity. Whoever supervised those messes must have had an obsession about poisoning civilians for they made quite a thing about homogenizing their Overs with their garbage.

Like my pears.

All summer I had been saving ration stamps, so I could accumulate eighty points and in the fall buy a can of my favorite fruit.

One never-to-be-forgotten afternoon in August, my delight knew no bounds when I found a mess sergeant dumping several gallons of pears into one of our green cans. Just a split second before I could jump in after them, a lanky PFC buried my pears under a bucket of table scraps, two vats of onion soup, and another of mashed potatoes. Minutes later, he further interred them under more scraps and then crowned them with a huge bowl of whipped cream studded with pickled beets. I wonder how I lived through that disaster.

But one soft hearted ranger-poisoner came down from Fort Ord, bless his heart through all eternity. He was a first lieutenant, but first of all, he was a humanitarian. And it became our good fortune that every other Wednesday, he brought a small group of medics to the park for a three-day training exercise.

Each time his group made ready to depart, he'd jeep into Bill and Mabel's back yard, very quickly deposit on the back porch a carton heaped with potato salad, sliced tomatoes, fried bacon strips, and wieners — and then take off fast. Never ones to deny a man his philanthropy, we were never "at home" when he arrived, and none of us ever acknowledged the windfalls beyond grins and slight nods. Mabel watched for the young officer, and after he left, brought the bounty in and divided it six ways. Thanks to our benefactor, the crew and families had blue plate specials once every two weeks. If the good lieutenant should read this, here, sir, is our undying affection.

At times we knew what it was to really crave meat, and that can and did go hard with outdoor men putting in endless hours of muscle work. Trout and seafood soon became inadequate and monotonous. In order to have meat of any kind during those weeks of the camping butchers, most of the rangers went fishing and abalonying on their day off. More often than not they came home with enough to last for some time.

Mabel is one of the best cooks I have ever known. The several summers I boarded with her and Bill, I put on too much weight; yet even Mabel couldn't fix those abalones so they would be palatable — or else she became as disenchanting with them as we did. In spite of anything she could do, they came out of the pan curled up in scrolls and with the consistency of rubber bath mats.

During slow times in the park — between Army convoys, Navy picnics, jeep patrols, and arrangements with G-3 at Fort Ord; between Monterey fishermen and Big Sur natives wanting to use the telephone, I did a lot of small jobs, as Bill had predicted. Besides — or in conjunction with — operating the checking station eight hours a day, I kept park records, painted regulation park signs, made up the day's receipts if any, drafted park facility maps, foot-patrolled, checked camps, and kept current the flimsy file of camper registrations. With so few civilians in the park, this didn't tax either my brains or my endurance. Consequently, I had time to learn every camper by name, hometown, family history, views on how to win the war, and his allergies, in order of importance. I could recite the roster by heart (in alphabetical order with matching

license numbers) so well that it became a matter of pride to be able to glance at an approaching car and instantly identify whoever was cruising up the rise from The Road unless he be a newcomer. By the same token I could readily identify all those outbound, a chore that seemed trivial to me, but which was of some value to the jeep patrol, who was trying to keep a finger on everyone down the Big Sur in those days when to be strange was to be suspect.

Park wives and youngsters were very good to stop by the checking station for a chat as they drove to and from the little grocery downvalley, but otherwise were too busy wrestling with the ever-present problems of constructing nourishing meals to spend much time in small talk. Besides, they were striving valiantly to raise victory gardens in a small plot up by the park shops. I say striving valiantly because no matter how high the men built the fence around the garden, the victory always went to the deer, who leaped nimbly over it, and to the many burrowing inhabitants who tunneled underneath.

Big Sur State Park, like all other state parks, is a game preserve. By profession the crew had to be dedicated to protecting that game, knowing full well that the protected were even more dedicated than we — not only to the rows of corn and tomatoes and lettuce, the melons and berries, but also to any bright color in sight, such as gladiolas and geraniums. The day came when our welfare system got to one of our more earthy rangers. Clear down at the checking station, I heard him disputing the civil rights of a young doe sunbathing in the tomato patch while digesting the last head of lettuce. “You know, sister,” he shouted, “you look to me like one great big barbecue. And I don’t give a fat damn if this *is* your home and I’m the intruder.” It was a simple case of diminishing dedication.

Silent, often lonely, hours passed while I was on duty at the checking station. The wind had to be just right for me to hear the men at work up at the maintenance yard, but if firewood ran low, I could phone for one of them to bring me a load. Then, while the ranger stowed it in the 1 x 1 bins at the rear of the kiosk, we could talk awhile. Many times, though, there was nothing other than the voices and movements of the forest creatures to break the stillness. I found what it was to be grateful for the company of a friendly deer or two during

the day, whether they were on their way up to the garden or coming down from it.

On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings at 11 o'clock, I got to visit with the crew and their families and most of the Big Sur residents as well, because they invariably assembled at the panel of open mailboxes nearby (called hens' nests after some joker laid an egg in one) to await the Star Route truck. These gatherings were the big events of the week. Surprisingly, everyone found a great deal to talk about. Everything from how to prepare beans ten different ways to the appearance of a new eagle on the ridge was of consuming interest to all — the artists, authors (including Henry Miller and Lillian Bos Ross) woodcarvers, highway folk, pioneers and their progeny; a few Indians; the retireds, the one or two business people, the rangers and families, both park and U.S. Forest.

At least once a week I could count on hearing the clippity-clop of horses hooves as the forest ranger Ted Reeves aboard Buck would ride up to find out what had happened while he was patrolling the heights behind us.

I can remember the countless times that a couple of hours would pass before anyone came through the checking station. For me — and the park — this was strange to the point of being unreal. I had always worked ten to fifteen hours out of every twenty-four and walked miles and spoke with several hundred people while doing it. Now here I was, confined to a five-by-eight glass cage for most of my eight-hour duty. Usually, though, I didn't have to wait too long before someone appeared to provide a human touch. Bending over a redwood slab sign, yellowing in the routed letters or working on some report, I often got my first inkling of human presence from passing shrubbery.

At the beginning of my service at Big Sur, coyote brush or black sage stealing past my window shook me, but I got used to it.

Every week or so, platoons of GI's, wearing Coast Range flora in their helmet nets and holding bayonets at the ready, would sneak stealthily by the kiosk, stalk the gas pumps, take the Lodge and the hens' nests without disturbing any outgoing mail in them, then cross The Road, and vanish in the river bottom. Once I couldn't suppress a playful compulsion

to lean over the Dutch door and hiss, "Sic 'em!" into a passing clump of manzanita. I might have known that with such an intent-looking soldier under it, I would wind up with a bayonet tip grazing my nose.

Other days, the Army loudly announced itself. I could hear the troops in the distance, counting cadence, so I would always be ready and watching when they swung smartly past Headquarters, then the grove of big redwoods, and finally the kiosk. These would be the mornings that they were taking off on a long hike. Sometimes a number of nurses would bring up the rear. Many of the GI's, but rarely any of the nurses, would smile and wave and have something to say as they marched toward The Road. Most favored tired feet and blisters when they slogged back again at day's end. Sights such as these made it difficult for me to realize that I was actually in one of the most popular state parks that had long served a light-hearted, vacationing America.

In the dark war days, only a scattering of fishermen, faces eager and hopeful, strode jauntily past the station. Few hikers, tin cups bobbing from their belts, called a cheery hello on their way to Pfeiffer Falls. No groups of fascinated visitors followed a naturalist around or cared enough to ask what might "be on" at the Saturday evening campfire. And I don't recall a single car, piled high with camping gear, pulling in for information about The Road, the parks, the weather prospects, or points of interest. Out-of-state license plates were as scarce as laughing tourists from anywhere at all. And of course, missing entirely, were the swarms of happy folk going in and out of the Lodge grocery and curio shop. No one was in a happy mood. They all had ration boards.

We, too, had one.

Ours never did get around to conceding that Big Sur residents were actually living organisms with a need for food, drugs, clothing, and medical and dental attention like other humanoids. Moreover, the Board seemed either unwilling or unable to imagine that doctors and dentists could breathe life into us. As a result, during the war some of us kept our tonsils and lost our teeth.

But gasoline was apparently no problem to Cannery Row — or else they ran their cars on sardine juice. Every time the fish split and took an extended swim seaward, the fishermen

tied their purse seiners up to the wharves at Monterey and tore madly down The Road to us.

Suddenly, without warning — the warning we needed to brace ourselves — they'd come bowling around the last turn, roar up to the checking station, skid to a stop, and begin haggling over the 25¢ charge per bundle of firewood and the 50¢ a night camping fee as if we were all in the marketplace. This went on with the certainty of the night following the day despite their custom of pitching their tents at the start of the summer and leaving them there until the end.

Most of the fishermen were bright-eyed, loud, and expansively friendly if they liked you — the devil on wheels if they didn't. That they produce sizeable families seemed to be not only a national tradition but a national obligation as well. The youngsters, from cradle to altar, were attractive, tempestuously adored, and apparently fortified for life with Dago Red early in life, and never unfortified. Consequently, we saw no fishermen of any age who wasn't exuberant, explosive, utterly indestructible, and wonderfully preserved. You couldn't help but be warmed by their fireworks, although some did have an unbridled passion for ear-splitting music that periodically threw the park into turmoil. They not only enjoyed their music but shared it by blasting it out through the treetops after their stomachs were filled and their wine bottles empty and they could get around to setting up a band in one of their campsites. Amazing how loudly a healthy, well-fed Italian can blow and how athletically he can squeeze an accordion when his spirit is soaring.

In trying to keep up with the conviviality of the grownups, the small fry often sank into an exhausted sleep wherever they happened to be — and occasionally into convulsions. Whenever this happened, I could hear the rising tide of despair down in the campgrounds. Within minutes, then, someone would come for me, for in addition to my other duties, and since I had long been an instructor for the Red Cross, I had been unofficially elected the Big Sur first aider.

One night, though, the call was not for an emetic to be suggested. Downcoast several miles a car had gone off The Road in a heavy fog. Bill and Mabel came to fetch me about 3 AM.

"A WAC and a GI," Bill said nervously. "Daughter of

the Norris' downcoast. Got an overnight pass. Were trying to get home to see her family. Didn't make the curve below McCullum's. Mac heard the crash and came for help."

"They aren't over the side, I hope," I said fervently, adjusting the first-aid kit on my knee.

"No, thank God. Down a little pitch between The Road and the mountainside," Mabel put in. "Girl's cut pretty badly."

Daylight was still a couple of hours away when we climbed out of the valley.

The minute we reached the cliffs we were swallowed up in the pea soup fog. Using low beams, Bill probed it a few feet at a time, moving along with his head outside so he could see at all; feeling his way around each turn; stopping often to try and get his bearings. We knew well the coastline along here, but in such fogs as this one, familiar landmarks vanish and distances become distorted.

Finally we found the car, which very fortunately did miss an inside curve instead of an outside one, and had plunged down a short embankment into a sycamore tree. In the wrecked automobile lay the unconscious GI and the WAC with one side of her face laid open from brow to mouth, and only partially conscious. Bill had already called Fort Ord. An ambulance was on the way. About all we could do was control the bleeding and keep the two as warm and comfortable as possible.

It was a long job. Mac, not being well, groped his way homeward. Bill and Mabel remained for a while, then began their snails-pace grind back through the fog around sharp curves and down into the valley to meet and guide the ambulance when it arrived.

Although pre-daybreak was bright and clear in the valley it sure wasn't along The Road between Fort Ord and Point Sur — some twenty-five miles or more. Fog, so thick that nothing could be seen beyond the front bumper, constantly challenged the driver's effort to avoid places of no return — the outside edge of the narrow, looping highway he was crawling along. The only way he would be able to tell when he neared the valley was by the growing volume of the Point Sur horn. When the dismal groan reached its peak, the ambulance driver would sense The Road turning diagonally inland. A few minutes thereafter, he would pass out of the gloom and into

the morning light as if emerging from a long tunnel. Ahead lay the Big Sur Valley, its stream meandering toward saltwater; at the upper end, another stretch of curves high above the sea, and more fog as thick and blue-gray as that already negotiated in stomach-clutching brinksmanship.

Shortly after 8:30 that morning, in response to my shouts, the ambulance drew up near the wreck.

For several hours I had been sitting in the car with my patients, doing what I could for them. All the time mists had swirled around, deadening the boom of the breakers pounding away at the rocks a thousand feet below. After daybreak began to infuse the drifting fog, it created the illusion that we were not on the earth at all but flying through heavy clouds somewhere out in the universe. The scene was weird. The Genesis must have looked something like this. How comforting to know, though, that another day was dawning, as it always had and always would.

With the passage of hours I began to make out the silhouettes of yellow bush lupine alongside The Road above. I could see clearly no more than the old sycamore, wedged deeply into the radiator and crumpled hood of the car, and the glistening ceanothus foliage just outside the shattered windshield.

One day fifteen years later, long after the war was over, I happened into a restaurant in Monterey. The waitress and I seemed to know each other although we couldn't quite remember when and how or where we had met. All of a sudden both of us realized that she had been the WAC whose face I had held together that morning in the fog.

Now for the first time, I noticed a faint scar down her cheek. Strange that we ever could have the slightest recollection of each other, considering the circumstances of our only meeting. With such curiosities is life seasoned if one lives long enough.

Chapter Sixteen: Big Sur

How to Become an Amphibian Without Webbed Feet

Most of the amphibious training units from Fort Ord usually checked in about mid-morning. The following day, at the crack of dawn, their exercises would begin.

Still drugged with sleep, I'd hear them coming over the hill from Weyland Camp, counting cadence. And as the tramp, tramp, tramp, "hut, hut, hut, hup, hip, hore" drew near, I knew that my night's sleep had terminated, that my day's education was about to commence.

Because the big meadow in front of my house provided the only spacious open place in the entire park, it had been selected for the maneuvers. By merely raising up in bed, I had a ringside seat for the entire course. In no time at all I learned how to pack a bedroll with every item in its prescribed place, how to assemble various kinds of weapons, the technique of hand grenade throwing, and the choicest of profanity. One of the officers told me they fed these amphibians on raw meat to stoke their battle ferocity. Whether or not this was so, I discovered that they knew some mighty efficient ways of protecting themselves and dispatching the enemy.

All of this enrichment brought me one dilly of a problem to solve: how to get to work at 8 o'clock sharp, properly dressed. Since none of my windows as yet had curtains or shades, I was hard put to figure out where to stand to dress without being observed from three different directions by GI's perfecting their thrust and parry.

The arrival of the first medics came as a stunning surprise. Something new was added that morning. No marching feet, platoon after platoon; no cadence count; no mass of personnel spreading over every inch of meadow. Instead, a fleet of ambulances.

The unit was small — a field hospital group of perhaps fifty men. I had paid little attention when Bill had told me they were due in our midst. All I could think of was that for three lovely days no raw meat eaters would be swarming over my meadow and around my house, trampling to shreds every

blade of ground cover. Blessed be the newcomers. Now maybe peace and quiet would reign in the meadow, and the squirrels would resume their scolding overhead in my big spreading oak. Long ago they had found their screech-ingest epithets no match for those of the amphibians and had retreated to more refined sections of the park.

I first became aware of the medics at dawn. Situation normal. Before daylight, while I still slept soundly, they had set up their field hospital under some maples on the far side of the meadow and camouflaged it well. At the same time they had also established a number of shelter points around the perimeter of the meadow, every one in the shade of a leafy tree that would hide an ambulance from “enemy planes.” In evacuating the wounded from the Big Sur battlefield, the string of ambulances were to move clockwise from one to another of these shelter points until each crew had delivered its wounded to the aid station across the clearing. What I didn’t know was that one of the posts in the circle was going to be under my big oak — just outside my bedroom window.

That introductory medic morning I literally jumped myself awake. With an earth-shaking CRRRRRRRRRRUNNCHH! an ambulance scraped the corner of my house and roared up beside me. Another six inches and it would have rolled over my bedroom slippers.

Certain that a tank was about to crawl in with me, I lurched to the far side of the bed. By the time I got my breath and wits back, the clouds of dust were beginning to settle enough that I could see the framed photograph of my boyfriend on the chest of drawers. Nevertheless, I pulled the blankets over my head until I could establish what exactly was going on.

That didn’t take long. Everything quickly slid into place. A gravelly voice yelled, “Lie down, Fittenheimer, you stinking bastard! You’re supposed to have your goddam guts blown out.”

Ah, *yes*. This must be the medics. No amphibian would be so panty-waist about expressing himself. Cautiously, I stuck my head out from under the covers and saw a huge red cross vibrating outside my window.

At the same moment, the driver discovered me. From his face I concluded that he never expected to see a woman in

bed in an old and supposedly deserted CCC building he had just clipped. Grabbing the arm of a corpsman sitting beside him, he bellowed, "Holy smoke, Gowdy, mind your bitchin' tongue. There's a girl in that there bed."

For a few moments we eyed each other. The driver took his boot off the throttle and allowed the motor to idle so it sounded a bit more like a Swiss watch and somewhat less than an earth mover. The more articulate corpsman touched his helmet, leaned across the steering wheel, and called to me, "We're medics, Ma'am. Over there's our field hospital. This here is Ed Hatch. I'm Len Gowdy. We both borned in Loosiana. Where you all from?"

A gallant attempt at the social amenities.

Determined to enter into the spirit of the day, I replied, "Name's Weaver. From the South, too - Santa Paula, near Los Angeles."

Both men grinned shyly and nodded acknowledgement. "We supposed to have bad wounded in back," Ed explained, jerking a thumb over his shoulder.

"Yes, I know," I responded, sitting up now and pulling the blankets in a teepee around me. "Happy to meet you fellows." What else would one say?

We might as well have been at a USO party, although the social atmosphere didn't last long. A shrill blast of a police whistle snapped both boys back to duty.

Called Ed: "Gotta go, Ma'am. That was the signal to git to our next post." Propelled by an impressive throttling of male ego, they roared away, leaving me to cough and sputter in a fresh cloud of dust.

Before I could recover my breath and grope my way to the X on the hallway floor (the only place I could dress unseen in the entire house) a rattling Z-z-o-o-o-omm! announced the presence of another ambulance in the eye of a mini-cyclone of dirt and leaves. This one I sat out, too, since there wasn't time to do anything else.

As before, we all introduced ourselves and passed a number of pleasantries before the whistle again blew and off went the ambulance with its wounded. Off I went also. I made a beeline for my X and dressed fast. Then I closed my windows before the next shift.

Every time we had field hospitals it was either get up

before daylight or prepare to greet from my bed two new medics and a load of wounded every ten minutes. For ethical reasons, it seemed expedient and proper to set my alarm for 4:30 AM during those particular exercises. Sometime later, my blackout curtains arrived, and for the first time I had a measure of privacy in my goldfish bowl.

We seldom saw the personnel of the small Signal Corps units. Once they had checked in and headed for their bivouac area, they all but vanished in the brush. A few times I was startled by one or two of the men, and that only because they had a funny way of turning up where you least expected them. Sometimes I'd find a single GI strolling along, speaking quietly into a kind of walkie-talkie. Other days I'd discover several setting up a field station under a manzanita somewhere or crouched in a dark corner of one of the barracks or stretched out on the Lodge roof or under a picnic table — always with their rolls of wire and their little telephones. All were mannerly, never in a hurry, and rarely more than two or three together. Each spoke so softly that I had to strain to hear his part of the brief conversations we held. Like ghosts, these wire-draped specialists infiltrated our hillsides and canyons and outlying campgrounds, stringing miles and miles of wire. More often than not, I learned of their presence in my vicinity only by tripping over some of their well-hidden communication lines.

Today, whenever I meet a soft-spoken man, I can't help wondering if he was a Signal Corpsman.

During my first summer at Big Sur, I had GI neighbors just the other side of the rustic stake-and-rider fence near my back door, in an undeveloped section of the park. Those boys were lots of fun. Many an evening we spent together, chatting about everything that interested us. In a way, we enjoyed what is known in military parlance as a combined operation. They contributed goodies available only in PXs; I provided a home of sorts. They shared their letters and snapshots with me; I shared my letters and books and kitchen table with them. We all looked upon it as a happy arrangement, for *their* "home away from home" was nothing more than two pup tents under some cypress trees. They loved to laze on my mouse-gnawed overstuffed couch and rap by the hour.

Never at any time were there more than four GI's;

more often, none, although their pup tents remained. The boys would appear unexpectedly, and days or weeks later, disappear without explanation. Because their part in the war effort was to train pigeons for carrying messages, almost daily the birds flew into and away from their secluded post in the cypress and grasses the other side of the split redwood fence.

One afternoon late I came home to find the pigeonaires gone again, and for the first time, their pup tents as well. That night my house felt lonely indeed, for left behind were several bottles of almost non-existent Cokes and a note reading, "Bye. Thanks for all the hospitality. Pray for us."

I never saw my young friends again.

Their going saddened me. I missed their chatter and the lively discussions we'd had. I also missed their GI bottle opener. I found myself wishing they had left it along with the precious Cokes. Much to my surprise, the pigeonaires took care of that little matter in their own special way.

Towards evening of the day following their departure, I heard a flutter of wings over by the cypress trees. Because the sound was one I had come to know so well, I ran outdoors, all anticipation. Sure enough! There on the top rail of the fence sat a pigeon; taped to one of its legs was the bottle opener.

Nights in the Big Sur, even in summer, are usually cold, so I worried a lot about the GI's bivouacked out there on the ground with only two blankets to keep them warm. Nevertheless, that was the issue for what the officers termed "the final hardening up before shipping." Some of the fellows told me they had never been so cold in all their lives, and most had come from the Midwest. I've never been able to decide what there is about the California coastal dampness that seems to freeze the corpuscles of men who have spent their lives shoveling snow, but there definitely is something. Countless GI's have told me so.

During my time at Big Sur, we had thousands of troops from the Great Plains and the populous cities of East and Midwest. I found them on lonely sentry duty, walking a post while the rest of the bivouac slept. The closest many of these boys had ever been to a forest was on Sunday picnics in a regional park or in riverbottom woodlands near home. To see them, anyone would know that they had never before been given a road to guard on a moonless night with no street lights

or flashing neon signs or traffic to keep them company — and in this part of our state that was still largely unknown, even to Californians long used to exploring far-flung stretches of mountains and deserts.

Walking through the campground one night late, just to check it, as I often did, I came upon one of these young sentries at the edge of a military area closed to the public. I didn't know the soldier was there until out of total blackness came a shaky and unnaturally loud voice. "H-Halt! Who — who g-goes there?"

That taught me a lesson. A boy in the condition of this one could easily have had a heavy trigger finger. As soon as I could reassemble my nervous system, I clicked on my flashlight.

"It's me, soldier," I said quickly. "I'm the lady ranger." I turned the light onto my face and badge.

An explosive sigh of relief. "Oh," he said, "I'm sorry, Ma'am."

"Don't be," I answered, moving toward him then. "You were doing exactly what was expected of you."

By the light of the torch I could see that despite the chill of the night, the boy was perspiring freely. His face glistened with sweat. I think he had been crying, probably out of sheer loneliness — and no question about it — fear, stark and real.

Naturally I pretended not to notice. If some mother's son ever wanted to be thought a man it would be when he was walking his post in "a military manner" as Army General Orders decreed. My sympathies were all with him. Looking at this strained young face, I knew how I would have felt had a vast, impersonal agency like the U.S. Government set me down at the head of some dark alley in New York and ordered me to halt and investigate everyone who came along.

"My name's Harriett," I said. "What's yours?"

"Kenneth," he replied, "but I'm called Sandy. I saw you when we came in yesterday."

"Expect so," I said. "That's part of my job — the checking station. Do you like our park?"

Sandy hastened to assure me. "Oh — yes. Yes." By now he was beginning to feel secure enough for a spark of enthusiasm. "It's mighty pretty. Never've been in a place like this before.

Never saw such big trees. There must be lots of things to hunt. Big stuff like — say — bear? Or lions?" His voice trailed off.

I could see what ailed him. He was apprehensive over what might be walking around out there in the dark.

"You know, I'm pretty hep with a 30-30," he blurted, lest I get the idea that he was the slightest bit concerned about the intentions of our wildlife. Thank goodness it was too dark for him to have seen my smile. The mightiest game this lad had ever hunted, surely, had been blondes at the corner confectionary.

I answered his concerns casually. "Once grizzlies roamed hereabouts," I told him, "but they were killed off a long time ago. In the back country there may be a lion or two and some wild pigs. Around here we have scads of black-tailed deer and cute little foxes and raccoons. Once in a while a coyote sings from a far hilltop. If you get lucky, you may hear one. Being out at night, you just could. Would be something to write home about."

"Well — yes, it would," he agreed after some hesitation, mulling over the fact, I'm sure, that he would have to go through the ordeal first before he could write of it.

At that moment we detected a small rustle in the leaves on the hillside back of us, and I sensed that it jolted the lad, so I went on talking in an offhand way. "You know, Sandy, we have the cutest little white-footed deer mice. At night I hear them as I walk the grounds. In the leaves they sound like elephants because when everything is quiet, even the tiniest sound is greatly magnified."

Sandy was skeptical although anxious to believe.

"And we have the fattest owls. After dark they, too, are around because they see well then and come out to hunt. It's their daytime. Just knowing they are near is company for any of us patrolling at night. Kind of companionable, I guess you'd say. It helps for a person to know he isn't alone when there's work to do and almost everyone else is sound asleep."

"Yeah. Well, sure. I'll be darned."

I warmed to my subject. "Now if you should notice a kind of heavy muffled sound in the brush, you can be sure it's a furry body like a skunk or fox or raccoon. And if you're real careful not to make any sudden moves — instead, just talk quietly to them — sometimes they'll come closer. Most

aren't too shy of people because this is a state park. Our wild ones are like members of the family. Some of the best fun that rangers and their families have is entertaining foxes and raccoons at night."

"Entertain them?" Wonder triumphed over disbelief.

I laughed. "They visit our homes for handouts. Some aren't a bit bashful about coming clear in. They know they're safe with us."

"Doesn't one ever bite if you feed him out of your hands?"

"Only the raccoons actually eat from our hands. But does a dog pinch you with his teeth when you put a bite of food into his mouth?" I countered.

"Oh, sure. Sometimes. But not if you slip your fingers away from between his teeth at the moment he bites down. It's the same with a raccoon. No problem."

Obviously Sandy still felt uncertain. "They wouldn't attack anyone like — like out...?"

I broke in. "You mean out in a forest — in the wild? Mercy no. That is, not unless you have your pockets full of grapes and cookies, and a watermelon under each arm. Then they might mow you down. All they're interested in is their stomachs. Let's sit and be quiet for a few moments and maybe we can hear something."

Thanks to an owl, a rabbit, various other rodents, a deer and two raccoons on their way to the river, as well as innumerable falling leaves and twigs, we identified the terrifying night sounds, one by one. By the time the moon came up, 18-year-old Sandy, mechanic's helper from Kansas City, was able to take up his sentry duty with more peace of mind. No longer was he in mortal fear of being pounced upon and torn to pieces. He now had some idea of the kind of animal that might be hiding nearby, looking him over, and what its intent would be.

Sandy even relaxed enough to tell me about his family, and as he walked his post I tried to help him build up confidence in himself. His family would surely be proud, I said, if they could see him, a man now, standing guard out here in this western forest, far from home. Just think of all he could write them about the wonderful serenity of the night and the friendly wild creatures that kept him company off and

on. This wasn't really a lonely post after all — just a quiet and peaceful one.

Sandy's growing confidence rang out when he startled me with an excited whisper. "Hey! Hear that noise over there by the creek?"

He stood motionless for a few moments, listening. "It's a deer. I heard hooves, not pads. Right?"

I turned on my flashlight and directed the beam toward the sound that had come out of the dark. There at the water's edge, a big five-point buck turned his noble head and gazed questioningly into the light. After we spoke to him, and thus identified ourselves, he began to drink as if our presence aroused no concern whatever. People with flashlights in his night were nothing unusual.

"Well how about that!" Sandy exclaimed. "He wasn't afraid at all."

"Nor we of him or any of the others," I added.

Sandy was learning. He could manage now with this night made in heaven. I thought: in the months ahead, huddled in some distant battlefield foxhole, perhaps he will recall this tranquility and somehow it may help to sustain him. Dear God, I hope so.

My prayers were reinforced two mornings later, when I went to leave the cabin for work. As usual, the meadow seethed with men. All at once I heard a yell. "Miss, oh Miss!" from the direction of a machine gun group. A belt of ammunition dangling from one hand, Sandy raced up to me.

"I told the guys about the other night," he panted, "and guess what. Last night Old Andy, who had the duty, saw two little foxes trotting along just after dark. All the guys are lookin' now. Sentry duty isn't so bad. Wow! What a place!" He indicated the park with a sweep of his arm. "Boy! I'm a-comin' back here someday."

I didn't have time to reply. Something with leather lungs bellowed, "Hey, YOU!" from the meadow, and my city boy took off. Happily leaping over his field piece, he stood for a second, grinning broadly before once again concentrating on his weapon.

"That," I said, trying to convince myself, "is a raw-meat eating amphibian?"

During those wartime summers at Big Sur I spent many an

hour pacing back and forth with nervous sentries — boys with no lack of manliness, but who had never before been set down in a pitch-dark forest. I like to feel that in our park some of the timid ones discovered a reserve of courage lying deep within themselves, upon which they could draw when necessity commanded them to change from boys into men, braced to kill.

In the spring preceding my second summer at Big Sur, a ranger with a family took over my mansion in the meadow. I moved up the hill above the checking station, into a room at one end of a long barracks normally used by women Lodge employees. Because the Lodge was closed, I had the entire building and its unheated showers all to myself. Almost, but not quite. My door opened out into the old Pfeiffer family orchard.

As with other pioneer family plantings, this one had fruit trees of many different kinds. In summer, before the ranger wives could pick and divide the bounty of peaches, pears, apples, and apricots, our forest friends were harvesting to their heart's delight. That made the old orchard one of the busiest places in Big Sur. Quartered beside it as I was, how could I ever be lonely. After a leisurely dinner at Bill and Mabel's and a round of conversation, a walking check of the campgrounds, and often a visit with a sentry, I would hike up the hill and spend the rest of the evening with my four-footed neighbors.

How different the old orchard from the meadow sprawling at the other end of the park! My moving up had been like a transfer from L.A. International Airport to the lookout on Chews Ridge. Down below I had been enveloped in a swarm of sweating, yelling, fatigue-clad humanity, clanking its armor and sharpening its hostilities. Up here, only the enchantment and splendor of solitude, touched by sounds of Nature, filled my off-duty hours, which were mostly very late and very dark ones. I could understand why the orchard became an attraction and a refuge for all living things roundabout. They had no stomach for being spooked by bushes that suddenly sprouted legs and went tearing off through the grasses and into the creek. That was just too much credibility gap.

I do remember several deer who were either curious beyond belief or had low IQs. By day they laid in the drying bracken and rattleweed at the edge of the meadow, watching

the antics of mankind, and by night, stalked boldly among the sleeping soldiers. The great majority of the park's native sons and daughters naturally migrated into the backcountry or up to the fruit trees on the hill, where low-slung limbs, laden with a variety of smorgasbord, was theirs for the taking.

The old orchard had long been a favorite hangout of the deer. Almost any time of the day or night they could be seen there, a dozen or more bucks, does, and fawns, lying contentedly under the trees, placidly ruminating.

The foxes and raccoons preferred to show up after dark. When my day had drawn to a close, I usually sat out on the steps of the barracks porch and kept them company while they harvested and ate their fruit. I thought it funny and smart the way the raccoons climbed the trees, straddled the limbs, and felt of the peaches or pears or apricots like picky housewives in a supermarket. Once the decision was made as to which fruit was ripe, they ate some, then tossed other selected pieces onto the ground. That way there was no need to carry the loot down, one at a time. I had to laugh. "These," I told myself, "have more sense than a lot of people."

Yet what turned out to be even funnier and smarter than the efficiency of the raccoons was the cunning of the foxes. No mean tree climbers themselves, those sharp little fellows would wait patiently in the shadows until the raccoons had dropped a nice supply of the choicest fruit. Then boldly they'd trot out to collect and enjoy it. To the scheming foxes, the raccoons were the ultimate in labor-saving devices.

Whenever you hear the expression "smarter than a fox," remember that means smarter than a raccoon, which is really smart. Also remember that it is characteristic of raccoons to ignore proffered advice from the likes of us. I tried to tell them that they were working for someone else, but they paid no attention. I suppose they had to make up their own minds that they were being used. When this finally dawned, the foxes were smart enough to take to the woods on the double.

Not all of my evenings were devoted to the orchard visitants. Many times I went to call out on the sea cliffs and lofty points of land south of the valley, even if it did mean using dimmers and risking a pot shot from the sea. I figured that since the enemy hadn't been able to clobber the huge stationary oil tanks near Santa Barbara, it couldn't possibly

hit a small object moving along our cliffs. Anyway, I loved to enjoy those balmy summer nights with my friends, when the stars seemed near enough to touch, and we felt much closer to heaven than the earth.

Usually we would sit outdoors and listen to the faint roar of the waves pounding relentlessly against the rocks a thousand or two feet below. On moonlit nights, we couldn't take our eyes off the long silvery path stretching across the great vastness of the Pacific from curving horizon to the invisible base of our promontory. Of all the places I dearly love, the headlands of the Big Sur will forever stand out among those most cherished.

After finally signing off, and until sleep overpowered me, I would lie in the dark, gazing out my window, studying the black silhouette of the forest against the star-studded sky. Before many minutes had passed, I would hear a familiar noise outside.

"Lights out" invariably signaled the deer to assemble and retire in a tight little group near my window. Apparently they liked my nearness as much as I liked theirs. Off and on during the night, I would hear them heave big sighs, and sometimes sneeze. As long as I lived in the barracks, they slept close beside me, remaining there until I rose in the morning. Upon detecting movement the other side of the bedroom wall, they, too, would get up, yawn, and go their way.

I hadn't lived in the old orchard more than a week until I discovered that the deer were not nearly as enamored of me as a person, as they were in need of my protection. It seems we had a big cat that made a habit of terrorizing the hill.

I recall vividly the first night he let fly with one of those unearthly rr-r-r-r-ahs that only a mountain lion can loose from deep in his throat. The surge of fright outside was instantaneous. The deer leaped to their feet, bleating excitedly, and began milling against my wall.

It took me no more than a second or two to snap on my light, spring out of bed, and turn on the porch light. With my door standing wide, the area was well illuminated, and no lion is going to rush into that, especially when someone is standing large in the middle of it. For an hour or more I would sit on the steps, talking quietly to the deer, trying to reassure them. But for a long time they would be wild-eyed, their ears

continually swiveling one way and then another, straining to pick up the slightest sound.

I always knew when Big Tom left at last because the deer relaxed their vigilance and once again bedded down in the grasses. The lion paid the hill a number of unwelcome visits before the summer was over.

Particularly frightened of Big Tom was the little spotted fawn I called Joe. He had been orphaned, perhaps by this same lion, and every time Big Tom returned to the orchard he panicked almost to the point of heart failure, poor little fellow. His scars were the kind he would carry all his life. Having no mother to love and protect him, he would run this way and that, seeking security and finding none, for not one of the does would move to stand between him and the horror that lurked at the dark edges of the clearing. Even in the daytime his life was a shattered thing. I'd hear him bleat with sudden joy, pathetically expectant as he went bounding over to some doe, thinking her to be his mother — only to find that she wasn't and to be kicked away.

I tried to persuade him to come to me so I could give him a bottle and pet him and let him know that someone cared. But he would have none of that. He was inconsolable. All summer I hurt for him. I never felt as helpless, though, as when Big Tom lurked not far away.

For this lion, and surely for others, the old orchard served merely as a stopover on a long route. Lions travel many miles a day, usually over the same territory. Anyone living beside one of the "lion crossings" has to expect periodic callers. The park, being also a wildlife preserve as well as a round-the-clock buffet, was therefore of intense interest to Big Tom. Anyway, time had doubtless proven to him that no one was going to interfere, even if he did kill an occasional deer, so he made himself at home.

None of us were afraid for ourselves. Mountain lions, panthers, cougars — whichever you choose to call them — have seldom been known to attack people as do their African counterparts. California's Coast Ranges, in fact most of the state's mountains, are so well populated with deer and other small animals that the lions probably wouldn't go after a human unless rabid, cornered, wounded, or if a lioness were somehow separated from her young. The only case on record

that I am aware of is that of a rabid cat that killed a woman and boy in Santa Clara County many years ago.

Down the Big Sur, lions were occasionally seen in broad daylight by natives and park personnel.

One afternoon several women, strolling on a dirt road out onto one of the points rounded a turn and discovered a lion just ahead of them. Except for being startled momentarily, the cat showed no alarm. It simply sauntered away, glancing back over its shoulder, apparently feeling neither fear nor urge to escape. Bill saw one on the Gorge Trail near the Old Homestead cabin; Lloyd Lively, our Assistant Chief Ranger, and some of the local residents came upon others at various places in Big Sur. All the animals took their time about loping off into the forest.

One man had a somewhat different experience while walking a park road. For nearly a mile he was paralleled by an unusually large Tom that crept stealthily along the hillside just above. This typical maneuver provides the cat with a position of advantage, at the same time permitting it to indulge its insatiable curiosity. Bob was strung too high for comfort before he could reach a cabin at the end of the road. Wisely, though, he didn't panic. Gathering his nerves together, he simply kept putting one foot in front of the other and whistling the entire distance — the longest mile of his life.

Another day, at dusk, a ranger striding up the hill from the checking station toward the old orchard encountered a big cat as it jumped down off the embankment and bounded across the road, to the huckleberry bushes and redwoods of the Lodge cabin area. The ranger was shaken momentarily, but the lion seemed little disturbed by human proximity. He may have felt confident, and justifiably so, that he, the predator, was as much protected as the prey. Live and let live. Everyone concerned went about his own business.

One evening, though, I nearly forsook wildlife conservation and its multiple-use concept in favor of the preservation of Weaver.

I was on my way up the hill to my room. The hour had grown late, and the night was another of those inky-black ones I sometimes had trouble with. On top of that, my flashlight had conked out just as I crossed the bridge over the stream. But then, didn't I know every foot of the way past the Lodge

and checking station and on up the crooked road, even in the pitch dark? Sure I did. And I knew exactly where to connect with the short steep trail that cut through a small clump of redwoods and out into the lower border of the orchard, less than a hundred feet from my quarters. It offered a handy cutoff for my daily hikes up and down hill. Going home at night, I would tramp with a heavy step and loud song so the deer would know who was coming, and not be frightened.

This particular evening I moved along as usual, singing a lively tune. A brief solo it proved to be. When I stepped from the trees and into the orchard — Whh-s-s-s-stt! A rush of wind and leaves swirled up before me as a string of deer thundered across my path with the speed of the Daylight Limited.

I reeled backwards, instantly wary, then stood motionless. Something wrong here. Why hadn't the deer recognized my voice as always? Whh-s-s-s-stt! Across my path flew another deer in full flight, then another and another.

After the pounding of their hooves had died away in the stand of bay trees on the far side of the orchard, and the forest had fallen graveyard silent, my scalp began to prickle. I shuddered and almost stopped breathing.

In the total darkness I could see nothing. But when a twig snapped in the redwoods to my right, I realized I was being followed — and by whom. Recollection of other such occasions popped into mind. A fine time to review the lion kills rangers had cleaned up from time to time. What a blessing that I couldn't know then about the one to be cleaned up a year later on the steps outside my door.

Pulling together the ballet of my nervous system, I decided to do what my stalked friend had done — put one foot in front of the other. I also burst into song again and began to stomp toward the barracks, kicking dirt and leaves like mad, trying to sound monstrously big and dangerous.

How I ever made it between the apple and apricot trees without impaling myself on a limb or two, I'll never know. Every step of the way, I sensed being paralleled; a perfect setup for a cat attack on a helpless human. Nevertheless, I reached the barracks safely, yet somewhat more speedily than usual.

Once in my room, I snapped on the porch light and peered

out into the old orchard. Not a single deer was anywhere to be seen. In a hurry I reloaded my five-cell flashlight and slipped outside to listen.

Mountain lions are wonderfully agile creatures. They move as soundlessly as a living thing possibly can. I had to concentrate for some minutes before I picked up an almost inaudible noise at the edge of the clearing closest to the building. Clicking on the flashlight and aiming it that direction, I walked slowly along the beam it cast.

Where the grasses of the clearing met the redwood grove, I saw Big Tom. At first he made no move to go, but the strong light glaring in his face so blinded and confused him that he turned, and belly dragging, slunk off through the wild iris and coffee ferns and on down the hillside to Pfeiffer Creek.

Back in my room again, I thought about the lad walking his post below the South Campground, and gave thanks that he wasn't anywhere near the old orchard. You simply couldn't tell a young factory worker that mountain lions and bobcats might possibly be around, even if his chances of ever seeing one were one in a thousand. Best to speak of lion country as lying beyond the Gorge; beyond the first ridge of the Santa Lucias that bordered the bivouac area.

After the war, my friend Ethel and I lived in a nearby resort for the winter. Our cabin stood beside a "crossing" — one of the routes known to be traveled regularly by lions passing across the valley from ridge to ridge.

The first night there, a big cat announced his presence with a throaty growl that sounded as if he intended leaping through the open bedroom window. Another evening, at a corral downslope of us, a shot was fired into the air to frighten him away from a mare and colt. Understandably, the animal sought refuge at a higher level — ours.

Just then, two foxes were enjoying treats on our front porch. Following their usual custom, one of them ate while the other, his back turned, faced out in constant surveillance of the landscape. The instant the sentry whiffed danger, his ears perked up. A second later both foxes vanished into the darkness. I turned my long flash beam toward the hillside, and there sat our visitor — tawny, lithe, statuesque, coolly looking the situation over. Such was to occur many a night.

Countless times at Big Sur, I longed to escape the park, mainly because I had almost no gasoline to do it with, I suppose. We were completely isolated down this coast, but an isolation such as ours was like being hopelessly stranded in Paradise. How could I ever want out! I gave up trying to read logic into those crazy impulses to rid myself of blessings bestowed so abundantly.

At Big Sur, as at Big Basin and Richardson Grove, I had Mondays free. What to do with the big day was always a week-to-week question. Mostly I remained in the park; sometimes I went on working; other times I accepted my downcoast friends' invitations; a few Mondays I exercised Ted Reeves' spare horse, Buck; once in a while I'd ride into town with the USO man who came to the park campfire circle every other Sunday evening to show movies to the troops and civilians, if any.

Ordinarily the film would end about 9:30. Immediately thereafter we would head cautiously up The Road toward Monterey, worming around cliffs, trying to keep out of canyon and sea, hoping no enemy submarine would take a shot at us. On the way, we would always stop at the naval installation and K9 training post at Granite Creek to show a late film. So even under the best of conditions, we never reached town until well after midnight.

Once in Monterey, the USO man would let me out at the Monterey Hotel, where, if the clerk didn't have a room left (and mostly he didn't), he was kind enough to let me sleep in the lobby along with others similarly deprived. Being in town was worth it, though. Next day until mid-morning I could window-shop, buy a thing or two, and pay an outrageous price for an ersatz breakfast.

Sharply at 10 AM, the party was over. At that hour, Jake Smith's Star Route mail truck of ancient vintage, weighted low on its axles, canvas sides flapping, was due to leave the post office for downcoast. I had to be on it. Otherwise, no telling when or how I would get back to the park.

More often than not, there would be at least one other Big Sur resident sitting beside me on the tailgate, dangling his legs. Jake had no room inside for anyone because, along with his heavysset wife and the mail, he carried newspapers, auto parts, groceries, baby chicks, drugs, building supplies, and

whatever else he had been commissioned to buy and deliver to the folk on his route.

Some Mondays, when I had enough gas stamps saved up to take me out of the valley, I drove to Slaters Hot Springs, fourteen miles to the south, once the site of the Esselen Indian's main village, and now famous for its Esalen Institute with its sessions on the expansion of the human potential.

The little sloping flat where hot mineral water runs out of the earth sits high above the sea and beside one of the many deep canyons that gash the mountain front. Almost a century ago, the Esselen Indians there showed the settlers how healing the waters could be. Near the end of World War I, a Dr. Murphy took a cue from them, and for a number of years developed and operated the property as a health spa. In 1938, however, the structures were partially destroyed by a hurricane, and the doctor never rebuilt.

Then came Pearl Harbor. Dr. Murphy left and went to Salinas to help in a hospital. Soon the flat was overgrown. Sage, coyote brush, rattleweed and other vegetation moved in and flourished along with the wildlife; finally the plant growth became such that only the roofs of several buildings still standing some distance from the springs could be seen from The Road above.

Big Sur residents, knowing where the water was, went occasionally to enjoy it, as the doctor would have wished. We followed a path, nearly obscured by then, that zig-zagged steeply down through the chaparral to the broken signs: MEN and WOMEN, pointing in opposite directions. Both led to tiny shelves cut out of the mountain face near the hot water flow.

Mabel guided my first visit to the springs. In opening the wooden door entrance to the WOMEN'S, she pulled what remained of the thing off its rusty hinges. We stepped over the rotting threshold onto a ledge decked with rough planks and about the length and breadth of the average living room. There I was introduced to three prehistoric bath tubs, each partially partitioned off from the other and covered by a common shed roof that provided some protection from sun, wind, and passing gulls.

The effect created was that of an open air chicken coop with an unobstructed view of the Pacific Ocean that rivaled any vista on the Big Sur. A narrow cement canal carried

the hot water along the mountainside next to the tubs. And protruding from the outlet at every tub was a hand-whittled wooden plug, which, when removed, released a vigorous three inch stream of water.

In each stall stood a dilapidated oil drum containing water that had been left to cool by the previous user, as well as a bucket of many dents for ladling it into the tub. Scarcely a dozen feet away, the cliff plummeted down into the pounding surf. The drop was so sheer that it looked as if someone who liked things nicely trim and neat had hacked off all irregularities with one blow of a giant cleaver.

"You could get cut on this," I told Mabel, peering over the side. Down below, the Mediterranean-blue sea sparkled brightly and crocheted white lace collars around the offshore rocks.

Suddenly Mabel pointed at the kelp beds out beyond the breakers. "Look, sea otters! You can hardly tell their shiny-dark heads from the kelp floats, but they're there. Over by those gulls. As usual, floating on their backs, heads erect, belly and feet up. See? This side of that pointed rock."

"I thought the Russians hunted them out a century or so ago," I challenged.

"They darn near succeeded," Mabel agreed. "The Russians and five or six other nations, including our own. No one saw any otters for almost a hundred years. It wasn't until the 1930s that they were sighted again, just a few. At several places along the Big Sur. Since then, Fish and Game has been protecting them like mad. A thousand dollars fine and a year's imprisonment you get for harming so much as a hair of their precious coats — or if you're caught with an otter pelt." Mabel took her binoculars out of their case.

"And that has paid off," I mused.

"You bet. They've come back fine. Right now there's a herd of about four hundred along here between Carmel Point and San Simeon. See that one shading his eyes with a forepaw? Just like us, huh? And see that one to the right of the pointed rock? The one beating real fast on his chest?"

Mabel handed me the glasses, and I trained them where she had indicated. She was full of her subject, and went on: "They hold the shellfish — clam or mussel maybe — between their forepaws and keep banging it down upon a flat rock

they've dived for and placed on their chests until the shell is broken. Or they can use a rock as a hammer if they want to. Lots of times you can hear the clatter before you can locate the otter. Watch. That one's starting to pick the meat from whatever he's been working on — maybe an abalone. Likely a sea urchin. He likes them best. When he finishes eating, he washes dishes by rolling over in the water."

"I should think all of that pounding would do something to his hide," I observed.

Mabel was quick to assure me that it did. "Examine one of the few mounted specimens in a museum and you'll most likely find a callus on the chest."

I had to laugh with wonder when Mabel added that the sea otter, largest member of the weasel family, is the only animal that consistently uses a tool. I was to see many do it during my tour at Big Sur, and not only from the hot springs cliff but also from other vantage points along the coastline.

The best of them was from the wave-swept rocks of Partington. On Mondays I often hiked down to the bottom of Partington Canyon and through the old tunnel that led to the deepwater cove the other side of the promontory. The tunnel had been blasted out threescore years before so mules, laden with rolls of tanbark, could deliver their loads to the landing in the cove, where tiny coastwise vessels waited — *if* the sea was calm enough.

When the tide was out and the water emerald green and glassy, I liked to sit on the rocks below the landing. There, at close range and until the breakers began thundering in toward the deep caves in the cliffs behind me, I could watch the clowns of the kelp beds. Their big brown eyes, set wide apart, fairly shone as they rolled and wrestled and batted kelp floats around in their version of water polo.

Eventually the otters tired of their sport. Most then rested on their backs, forepaws folded on their chests or over their eyes as a shield against the brilliant sunlight. None seemed shy about drifting my direction. Neither did any of them appear to mind that I watched them ride the swells, daintily picking away at some marine delicacy. Uninhibited show-offs that they are, the otters' whiskered faces showed plainly how much they enjoyed a friendly audience. At least they were good humored about my gawking. But then these characters

get along with everyone — even sea lions and seals, the pelicans, cormorants, and gulls that frequent the same waters. In fact, a number of gulls are usually rocking on the waves nearby, waiting to fight over the scraps dumped when the otter turns over to wash off his chest-table after eating.

Comical indeed is the way sea otters tie themselves up in a strand of kelp to make sure they don't drift ashore while asleep, for their entire life span is to be lived in the ocean, where they were born. Although sporting sometimes in whitewater around jagged sea stacks, their home and sanctuary remains in the swaying marine forest of kelp. The otter mother ties a strand of it around her one pup a year whenever she wants to go attend to family chores, resting assured that when she returns, he'll be right where she left him, safe from their enemies. Sharks and killer whales have a thing about entangling themselves in a snarl of seaweed.

Many times I visited Slates Hot Springs and Partington Point. Sometimes I took a lunch and went to both on the same day. They were only a few miles apart, yet each such a world of its own. At either place I could let my face and hands hang, and escape the sights and sounds of humanity.

Down on the rocks of the Point I could revel in the screech of the gulls, the dismal barking of the sea lions, and the swish of water unlimited. But there I faced a violence that never stopped hurling itself at soaring cliffs as if to pulverize stone into sand before another sunrise. I had to keep my wits about me and remember not to become so engrossed in observing the clowning of otters and the goings-on in tide pools that I would forget those sneaky breakers. To feel the sharp sting of salt spray every few minutes was one thing, and very delightful and stimulating. To become embroiled in foam, swirled round and round and bounced upside down, scraped raw on barnacles and black mussel beds, and finally slammed against the rearmost crags of the cove was quite another. It had to happen to me only once, before I knew that if I wanted to consort with an ocean, I had better conform to its life-style — or else.

At the hot springs I stood far, far above the reach of the capricious surf. Up there, the mountainside was as utter tranquil as the surging tide was dangerous. Usually I went alone so I could lose myself in the companionable whine of the

wind and the scurrings of ground squirrels and lizards, into whose sunny domain I had intruded.

Well remembered, the hours on that lofty shelf, when a whale added to my pleasure by swimming past out beyond the kelp beds, blowing spouts as it went. Much farther distant for me to wonder about were wartime ships that steamed by now and then.

Between dips in the hot water, I stretched out on deck, luxuriating in the warmth of the sun, gazing out into the blue infinity. And along with thanking My Father for all of this, I blessed the strong ingenious men, who, according to historical account, had floated the tubs in from a small vessel, and with rope pulled them up the face of the cliff so they could install them there by the waterflow.

One afternoon when I went to Slates, I found a handsome young woman at the tubs. As we soaked, we talked through the partition. She told me about coming recently from England to stay with Big Sur friends. I was incredulous. How could a civilian come over here with a war going full blast, and on what VIP priority?

“Well, you see it’s like this,” she began in clipped British. “I’m a physician.”

She didn’t look more than twenty. I kept silent and listened.

“I’d been pretty busy with the blitz and everything. No sooner out of med school than the bombs started falling on us. My home’s in London — or was. It isn’t there anymore. Nor my family. I was spared only because I happened to be at the casualty station. Lots for me to do. So little rest, don’t you know. Babies being born ahead of time, heart attacks of the elderly, the already ill — all in addition to the frightful bombing injuries. I suppose I kept at it too long at a time. Anyway, I was sent over here to rest up a bit in exchange for an American doctor. Then back I go. Isn’t this heaven? It’s hard to believe —”

I could understand what was hard for her to believe. I can’t think of Slates Hot Springs without remembering what it did for that fine young woman. I wish I knew whether, having had her vitality restored at Big Sur, she was able to survive the final furious attacks on her city.

To find relaxation and seclusion on my day off, I didn’t

really have to go as far as Slates or Partington. Much-loved places lay close at hand. One, Pfeiffer Beach.

A mile south of the park, a dirt byway descends seaward from The Road for about three miles along the bottom of narrow Sycamore Canyon. Almost enclosing it is a canopy of broadleaf trees and small redwoods that drip in a steady shower when fog drenches the coast. The little creek you hear rather than see, screened as it is by a dense understory of alders, shrubs, vines, and ferns.

I enjoyed winding my way down to the old two-story house near the end of the canyon road. Long ago it had been one of Big Sur's first pioneer homesteads. Now it belonged to an elderly couple, the Dani's, who, together with their pets and assorted farm animals, always saw fit to make me welcome.

After parking my car alongside the Dani barnyard, I was privileged to shortcut through the vegetable garden to the beach trail near where it left the woodland and skirted a hillside of wild blackberry vines, sticky monkeyflowers, and poison oak. A half mile beyond, the path disappeared into several large dunes, capped by windswept cypress trees that looked as though they were straining to pull up their roots and crawl inland. Usually I sat under them for a while, studying the reflections in a large shallow pond, created and constantly freshened by the creek. Finally, the spirit would move me across the wide strand to saltwater.

Hemmed in both up and downcoast by great rocky points, the pocket beach with its quiet lagoon-like pond, was for me a very special refuge. I couldn't get enough of wriggling my toes in its wave-washed sand or of breathing deeply of the salty tang in the air. Never did I tire of watching the swells rise and fall, mounting higher and higher until they crested into towering walls that curled, folded upon themselves, and toppled. Oh, the awesome power that crashed upon the shore and shook the ground under my feet! Just as enchanting was the way the breakers flattened, once their magnificence was spent; the way they raced up the sandy slope in thin scallops of foam, then raced back again to disappear beneath the next massive onrush.

Icy and treacherous water, this, but it left behind on the beach all manner of marine curiosities. It also kept enlarging

the tunnels it had been punching through a giant shoreline rock for no telling how many centuries. When the tide was high, the big rocky loaf became an island; after the tide had ebbed, you could walk out and climb all over it; on calm days, while the swells surged gently for a few hours, you could even fish from a small ledge where the water rolled through. I thought this a wonderland of things to see and do — except for surf bathing of course. One could not go into the water comfortably or safely anywhere along this untamed coast.

I didn't care. The cove was isolated and incredibly peaceful, and it offered escape from both Monterey fishermen and amphibians, both yelling their every thought — and just yelling. To have one day completely alone now and then with the sea and fog revived my Sunday night sag. Best of all, I was able to sunbathe should the day turn reasonably warm, a real lifesaver to a Southern California beach addict who otherwise would have been denied that pleasure all summer.

During the war, only a person now and then came to little-known and remote Pfeiffer Beach. Should anyone show up, I had ample time to make myself decent, for I could see whoever walked the open trail down creek long before they reached the cypress grove and then the pond.

More often than not, I set out alone early in the morning, carrying a sack lunch so I could have a long day which might, but seldom did, include that much longed for date with a warm sun.

Because any sunbathing at all had to wait until the fog had burned off, generally around ten or eleven o'clock, I would have two or three hours in which to explore the beach and the littoral along the water's edge, and to discover what was new in the pond. Sometimes I'd take a sketchpad and water colors along and do the gulls or the headlands. Other times I'd collect shells and search for California jade. Down there in the damp air, sounds and smells were different from those up in the valley and on higher up the mountainsides. I could never find enough hours to spend in this secluded and virtually private pocket of sand beside the sea.

One Monday early, the warmest kind of sun awaited me at Pfeiffer Cove. To my great delight, the fog bank had retreated far out over the water. With carefree abandon, I flung every stitch of clothing from me. Then, partway between high tide

and the pond, I excavated a nice pit in the sand and on my stomach, countersank myself.

How heavenly that day! Monterey fishermen, the war, the amphibians seemed a long way off. Feeling utterly relaxed, wallowing in the warmth, I closed my eyes and listened to the cries of the shorebirds and the pounding of the surf. In no time I had dropped off to sleep.

Somewhat later I roused enough to realize that I was shivering. Surprised, I raised up and watched a mid-morning fog roll in, thick and gray. Even so, I still felt reasonably comfortable. Only my bare backside was chilly. Lazily, I scrunched more deeply into the sand. No pea souper was going to run me out of my cozy nest. I dozed again.

The fog didn't bother me anymore, but it ran interference for something else that did. Fifteen minutes later, I was on my way inland, as red-faced (and not from the sun either) as a woman who had just snapped the elastic band of her panties at Seventh and Broadway.

Only minutes before, I had begun to hear unusual noises. Thinking someone might be coming, I opened an eye and squinted up canyon. No one at all there. Behind the dunes, the forest stood dark and silent and solitary. So I lay down again, determined to stay, no matter how many goose pimples it cost me. So what if the fog was so dense it blotted out the sea and shoreline rocks! To heck with it. This was my day off, and by golly I'd enjoy it or bust!

But I hadn't counted on the amphibians. For once they came the way amphibians should come — by sea. Behind the made-to-order fog screen, they hit the cove with full battle gear and drawn bayonets. The sand crunched and rumbled under the rush of booted feet. I was so stunned I couldn't move, which was just as well. So there I remained, looking like a sea turtle laying its eggs — and right in the middle of a beach head!

I had less than ten seconds to snatch at my clothing, tossed carelessly to one side, but all I could get hold of to pull over my sun-pinked posterior was a sweater sleeve. Nothing could I do but claw more deeply into the sand. At that moment every single grain counted.

While the heroes of zero hour swarmed around and past (and one took a flying leap over), I jammed my face deeper,

and prayed fervently and by all that was holy that should I ever meet any of these men, none would suspect ever having seen me before.

With my nose and eyebrows doing the burrowing, I had no opportunity to judge the extent of the landing operation until the second wave of amphibians passed over me, and there didn't seem to be a third on the way. I came up for air then, and after hurriedly digging the sand out of my eyes and nostrils, tried to form a better idea of what else I might expect from the war.

Several of the GI's were glancing back. A couple fell flat on their faces because they hadn't paid attention to where they were going. The rest of the two hundred or so charged on toward some inland objective as fast as they could plow the breadth of the beach. All I saw of them was their backs as they ran forward, dropped, got up and ran forward to drop again in simulated assault.

Behind me, looming in the fog just beyond the water's edge, were three landing craft, their big ugly mouths hanging wide open — in astonishment, I suppose.

Now, trembling with shock and frustration, and muttering aloud some of my homely philosophy, I crawled into my underthings and then my jeans, sweater and moccasins, snatched my basket, and strode up the beach. I can't truthfully say I brought up the rear. By the time I had gotten under way, the rear had disappeared. The invasion had charged on, leaving the cove and me as alone as if the landing had been mere illusion.

The Dani's were sympathetic when I told them what had happened to my day off. "If I could escape the amphibians for just one day!" I wailed, feeling real sorry for myself.

Mrs. Dani had a good thought: "Why don't you go down The Road to the Deetzens?" she suggested. "See if you can't go up the mountain back of their place to their new home site. They leveled it off not long ago. It's at least a thousand feet above The Road. No one will bother you up there."

"That's it," I cried eagerly, and took off up canyon, eyes bright, spirit rejuvenated.

Sycamore Canyon up to The Road is mostly one way. To be sure, there are several small turnouts, but I had never met

anyone to turn out for. Today was to be different. Everyone was there.

Less than a mile above Dani's, I rounded a curve and came face to face with the entire assault force. Dumbfounded, I stopped the car. At the rate the boys had been running, they should have made it clear up to The Road by now and halfway to Monterey. But Oh my, no. Here they were, the whole works — not only the amphibians but a rendezvousing supply force.

A string of bulging two-and-a-half ton covered wagons had streamed downcanyon and were hovering the ribbon of roadbed like so many setting hens. Among other things, they contained all the fixings for one of those dainty picnics the Army provides for soldiers who have completed an invigorating sea voyage and a mile run uphill in the morning salt air and fog. Packed in like Monterey sardines, the boys were resting and waiting. Chow was about to be served, after which a problem evaluation would be held. No one expected to go anywhere for a long, long time.

All the more volcanic qualities of my assorted ancestry, including a sliver of American Indian, now began to simmer. Pulling on the emergency brake to hold the car, I fumed in silence for a few minutes and tried to figure out a way to elbow room. What's more, I determined to escape even if I had to swing from vine to vine up to The Road. I had no intention of spending the day trapped in that canyon with the amphibians.

All at once a sergeant saw me and hurried toward the car. "Want out?" he yelled.

Before I could answer such a silly question, his face lighted up like a desert sunrise, and his amazement burst into a leonine roar. "Ho! Damn me to hell! You must be that girl down there who..." His voice trailed off, the only decent thing it could do.

The fact that I was "that girl" had to have been obvious, for who else could I be with the area as densely populated with young women as a men's Turkish bath. Still, how come the instant identification, when I was just then sitting on the only view any of them could have had of my person?

Regardless, word rushed up the line like a prairie fire, past the mess and on beyond the group gathered around the coffee urn, to a captain who was briefing his noncoms, to a whole

bevy of mechanics trying to diagnose the pains and aches of an ailing truck. From there it took off around the bend to the rest of the thundering herd.

"Hey! Hey, you bums!" my sergeant, all lungs, was yelling. "Let the lady through. We busted up her picnic. Now get with it and help her out here. Pull them wagons tight against the bank. *On the double!*"

Afterwards, to me: "Now go ahead, Miss. You can probably squeeze by. Take it easy though, or you'll land upside down in the creek."

I started grinding uphill shortly before 10:30 AM; I emerged from the congestion soon after 2:30 PM. Most of the time I had two wheels on the road at the same time; once or twice, three; never four. But I didn't slide into the creek — not quite. All along the line the boys volunteered to help. Some even apologized for having interrupted my fog bath. I might have accepted assistance if the first offer hadn't come through loud and clear, "You'll never make it, gal, but *I* can get you out."

That did it. Too bad, though. The canyon was packed wall-to-wall with personality. Another time, another circumstance, I might have played the helpless female to the hilt. Not that day.

The Deetzens listened to my story and we had a good laugh. Sure, they said, go up to their new home site. The road was barely one way, and straight up, but definitely clean of amphibians. No nothing up there but view, and no possibility of interruption.

At last, freedom, although only in a sense, I discovered later.

But the view! And the day! It was turning out to be a lovely one after all. During my long travail in Sycamore Canyon, the fog, having played its dastardly trick, had backed out to sea again, leaving the atmosphere shining and clear. Visibility unlimited. I couldn't remember when the Pacific had looked as wide or as sparkling as it did that afternoon.

From Deetzens' mountain, I could count a succession of mighty headlands for the better part of a hundred miles, some to the north toward Monterey, some to the south toward San Simeon and Hearst's Castle. As if to make up for the fog's collaboration with G-3 down in Pfeiffer Cove, my world suddenly righted itself. The sun shone brightly high

on the barren mountain front, far above The Road; and not an amphibian was in sight. From my lofty perch, all I could see that pertained to the human race were the homes of my various friends way out on distant points. All I could hear of it was a faint hum of an occasional car down on The Road, and then only when the wind blew just right. Chocking the wheels of Plymy so she wouldn't land in the Deetzens' back yard, I looked around to see what I could find.

All I actually expected was the covey of quail that rushed out of a manzanita thicket to take a look at me, then rushed back in again. But after a minute, something behind a clump of wild buckwheat caught my eye. Of all the incongruous things to discover up here — an old fashioned, beat-up wicker rocking chair with a decided lean to port. Amused, I dragged it to the brink of the site and sat down cautiously. When it didn't collapse, I began to rock back and forth.

Even with this unforeseen luxury, something was still lacking in the fragment of a day left to me there on the top of the world. I had set out for a sunbath that morning. I still wanted one. All at once, my clothing felt tight and unnecessary. Off it came.

In naked solitude, and while I soaked up the afternoon warmth, I gazed at the infinity of sea and sky spread out before me. Far, far to the west I could see the curve of the planet. For two unforgettable hours, I sat there at the edge of the home site cut, rocking and listening to the murmur of onshore breezes in the chaparral. Only the scampering of the brush bunnies and the lizards, once or twice the squeal of a hawk, reminded me that I was actually earthbound. All afternoon, no one, *nothing* disturbed my sense of exquisite well-being.

Finally, the growing redness of my skin told me it was time to go. Besides, I wanted to drop in on some of my retired friends on my way back to the park. That would wind up the day perfectly.

Thanking Deetzens for their hospitality, I drove northward several miles, around a number of curves, and turned out onto the point where Mac and Margaret McCullum lived. Said I to Margaret as mysteriously as I could, "Bet you can't guess where I was today."

Said Margaret, laughing heartily, "We don't have to guess. We know."

"How do you know?" I queried, laughing back, for how could they know.

Said Margaret, "Because, my dear, your windshield flashed in the sun."

Picking up their binoculars, she trained them on Deetzens' mountain, and then handed them to me. "Look," she directed.

I did. There, looming as large as life, was the old wicker rocking chair, rocking in the wind. I gulped.

Later, I went to Anne Field's cabin on the next point.

Said Anne: "You're pretty sunburned. Don't you think you stayed up there a little too long?"

I noticed her binoculars lying on the table under the window. In a wall mirror I also noticed that my face was growing redder every minute.

Said Esther Voss out on the loftiest and farthest-away point of all, after I had needlessly explained that I'd taken too much sun, "How well we know. I thought you'd never come down from there. Let's douse with vinegar right now."

What I should have remembered up on Deetzens' home site now gradually seeped through my thick skull: that there wasn't a cliff or ridge dweller the length of the Big Sur who didn't keep watch day and night. Continual vigilance was the word. And that included a curiosity about shiny objects high on mountain fronts facing the sea and enemy submarines; where only coyotes and chaparral and clusters of bays and oaks and such things had any business to be.

The crowning wonder of the day was that I hadn't remained there just a few minutes longer; long enough to find myself leaping out of my wicker chair — and doubtless out of my red birthday suit, just in time to greet the jeep patrol, already on its investigative way at top speed, having been alerted by the Coast Guard.

Chapter Seventeen: Big Basin Fire!

Tuesday, August 31, 1948, at Big Basin — a night to remember. Eleven PM exactly. The clatter of boots on my front porch, so heavy with purpose and urgency that they jarred the house and me along with it. The shouted cries of a man's voice, shaky with alarm.

Filled with a sense of impending disaster, I ran to the door. Don Meadows, out of breath from his own running, gasped out words torn from his heart. "Petey! Petey! The park's on fire!"

My blood turned to ice. Staring past Don, up through the dark silhouettes of the giants towering all around us, I saw long tongues of red and orange shooting skyward, vividly outlining the summit of Pine Mountain there behind the South Campground. Because of our big trees, Pine Mountain had never before been identifiable from down in the Basin. Tonight it was a fiery bulge in the darkness. Whipped by pressures from the sea, the flames were bearing down upon us.

For many days we had known that the "fixins" were there, as they had been many times before when humidity dropped below the critical point of 35%. That afternoon, in the upper reaches of Big Basin, it had registered close to zero. At the same time, the thermometer had soared to 107 degrees. The crew was tense, watchful, jumpy. Fifteen thousand people had camped, picnicked, or just milled around in the park all day, starting early their last fling of the season — Labor Day weekend. Several thousand still remained; hundreds were campers without transportation. Their menfolk, still at work, would not be joining them for several days yet. How prime was that scene for the granddaddy of holocausts.

And all at once, here it was.

"Lloyd says get yourself to Headquarters fast!" Don called, already on his way.

That early in the evening I was of course still in uniform. I had stopped off at the house for a cup of coffee before going on patrol with Don and Arlan. Now, as I ducked out the front door, I turned to my closest friend and housemate, Ethel Young, that summer an employee of the souvenir shop. "Load

our stuff into the car. If you have to leave, go to Santa Cruz — to Peg's." With that, I tore for Headquarters.

Most of the crew had assembled by the time I panted into the office. All appeared shaken but calm, quite a feat just then as we watched the sky turn brilliant red, above and just beyond our grove. Already we could hear the crackle and roar.

Lloyd, his usual unflappable self, paced back and forth for a few minutes, knowing he must think right the first time. This would be no moment for error.

He drew a deep breath, then quietly instructed the park wives, who had gathered, to go home and pack and prepare to leave should the situation demand. To Lou Donaldson and Gene Davis and several others, he said, "Fan out through the campgrounds as fast as you can. Tell everyone who can to get out. Tell those without transportation to take only what they can carry in hand and come up here to the Rec Hall — and no fooling around about it. Okay? For heaven's sakes, avoid panic, but see that everyone *moves!*"

Big Basin's various campgrounds spread over five hundred acres north, south, and west of Headquarters. Pine Mountain loomed over much of it. Up there was apparently where the fire had been set. That we were to discover later.

To the rest of the men, Lloyd said, "Grab back pumps and McLeod rakes. We've got to go find out just how bad this thing is. Forestry's on the way."

Then to me, "Petey, get help. We've got to empty this park within an hour at most. If the onshore wind is as strong as usual, everything here could go up."

The door slammed. The clock pendulum noisily hammered out the seconds. Alone now, I ran to the window. Already some of the campers were coming down the roads toward Headquarters, most in nightclothes and robes, some carrying suitcases and children. They had seen — or heard — the monster above them.

I hurried to open the Rec Hall in the other part of the station building, and called to the first of the campers, a woman whom I well knew, to take over, build a fire, and get everyone settled and calmed and told that help was on its way — not to worry.

Not worry? Ha!

Back in the office I felt a sense of relief that Forestry

would soon be with us to take command. The fire lookouts on The Chalks, Eagle Rock, and Bulowski had some time ago triangulated and located the blaze. I put in a call to Les Gumm, the District Chief Forester, informing him that we were in the process of evacuating the park. Just as I hung up, a camper pounded on the counter and demanded a 50¢ refund for this night he wouldn't be finishing in Big Basin. I suggested mildly that he go sit, close his eyes, and count his blessings.

Thinking of the hundreds without cars, I then called the telephone operator at Boulder Creek, and outlined our predicament. "We sure need your help quick," I pled. "Can you mobilize every school bus, delivery truck, taxi — whatever — in your area and send them up here right away?"

"Right away," she replied stoutly. And even after I piled on requests for aid from the local citizenry and Red Cross, an evacuation center or two, food, medical standby, and installation of an extra telephone line out of our office, her voice rang with reassurances. "Don't give it another thought, honey. Consider it and more done. We'll be up in a few minutes. By the time your folks get down here, we'll be ready to take care of them. Go tend to the rest of your problems."

God bless telephone operators! How many stories had I read about the heroic ones who remained at their posts, assembling resources and securing help while flood waters lapped at their feet or the roof blazed overhead. With a thankful heart, I dashed to the window for another look. By now, both campers and Lodge guests were streaming toward Headquarters. I thought — school bus? Delivery trucks? For all these people and so many more out there. We'll need more than that.

So, on the telephone again, I called Pacific Greyhound in Santa Cruz — and made darn sure my voice was low and calm. Perhaps that was the problem. Maybe I should have thrown a tizzy, but I'm just not the type. The agent at the other end simply refused to take me seriously when I explained in words of one syllable that we had an extremely dangerous situation in full flower — that we were urgently in need of a couple of their buses as fast as they could send them upcanyon to us. "Aw, c'mon, lady," said the bored, overly patient voice at the other end of the line.

I didn't argue. No time for that. I simply hung up and

called the sheriff's office, briefly explaining our plight and asking if they could secure the Greyhounds for us, and then arranged with the Highway Patrol to clear everything except essential travel from the canyon and the Saratoga Road. We were in big trouble. Verify with Forestry if they liked.

Cooperation was immediate and all-out. Traffic control went into high gear; Greyhound more slowly. By the time three buses pulled into Park Center, little Boulder Creek and the tiny communities of Ben Lomond and Felton had everything on four wheels tooling into the park and back out — loaded.

Never, I suppose, will I live down the presence of those empty buses, standing for a time in a nearly abandoned park. Rangers still josh me about them and the bill that came in the mail later. Yet they are good-naturedly mindful that perhaps in Heaven I may be forgiven having gambled and lost with buses rather than with the lives of hundreds of campers. Anyway, how was I to know that dear little Boulder Creek — in fact all of the San Lorenzo Canyon would literally explode into action.

The mass exodus flowed well. Some of it went north toward the cities of the Bay Area; some tried the North Escape Road, our emergency exit that bypasses the looping Saratoga Road; a few hardy souls braved the one-way Gazos Creek Road, a nightmare of seventeen tortuous miles of dirt, curves, and chuck holes, to the coast highway; the great majority rolled downcanyon to Santa Cruz. Some of the campers who lived not too far away went home; many of those on vacation tours simply resumed their travels. Most would sleep the rest of the night in their cars or in schoolyards or on the beaches or along the roadsides.

Fanning out through the campgrounds, our rangers quietly awakened the campers and told them to get up, leave all equipment, and go.

To this there were various kinds of responses. More than once, a camper growled, "Aw, lemme alone," rolled over, and covered his head; now and then were those who went right back to cuddling after cussing out the interruption, and had to be urged out of bed more forcefully. One took a look at the intruder looming in the darkness and swung. Others were so dopey that mention of a forest fire on their tails stirred not

the slightest concern. Another yelled, "Oh, my God!," sprang from his tent in long looping arcs, grabbed his pants and what was left of his fifth of bourbon, and galloped up the road. Two Old Timer Lodge guests discovered hours later that bruised and lacerated mouths were because of having snatched and installed their spouse's dentures instead of their own. Then there was the woman, dressed only in a flimsy nightie, who skidded to a stop at Cress's service station in Boulder Creek, yelled at the top of her lungs, "Am I going *away* from the fire?" Told that she was, she crunched into low and shot away at top speed, not around but through the colorful garden of flowers that bordered the station driveway — George Cress's brand new beautification program.

One way or another, everyone departed, and there was no panic. The evacuation was fast but orderly. The Rec Hall had emptied; outbound travel had ceased; the whole park stood black and silent, nowhere a vacationer or his car — only a ghost forest of giant trees and empty tents.

In reverse ratio, and as sirens and emergency vehicles filled the canyon with their wail and rumble, the canyon villages — Boulder Creek especially — became beehives of activity.

The firehouse and library filled to capacity. In homes, in churches, in schools, women made coffee and sandwiches and got ready to set up breakfast the next morning. Chuck Gaynor, the town baker, turned out a phenomenal supply of doughnuts; the VFW packed the ham it had been preparing for a big dinner and sent it down to the fire camp in Little Basin. Grocers loaded trucks with boxes of cigarettes, candy bars, soft drinks, and beer for the firefighters. Bob Druhe and his taxis kept busy evacuating until no one remained in the park who needed a way out. One of the town chefs said simply, "I go," and headed for a fire camp to cook for the duration. Frank Locatelli, the local lumberman, took off on his twenty-three ton Cat, which he then drove for five days almost continuously, scraping out wide fire lanes and pushing aside hundreds of trees and masses of earth and underbrush — followed by one of his employees, Manuel Rodriguez, on another Cat.

By now, the fire was not only still racing wildly through the explosively dry underbrush and conifers of Pine

Mountain's upper levels, but it had also begun to work downslope toward the bigger stuff, the main grove. As long as the flames could find evergreens with resin, though, they roared and consumed; when they came to the resin-free redwoods, the burning slowed — a fortunate thing for the park. And, too, down in the Basin, a pocket cut off from the sea as it is, the more moist atmosphere of night settled heavily, acting as something of a retardant; although not enough to be any consolation to our men with back pumps and McLeod rakes hurrying up the Pine Mountain Trail. Suddenly face to face with blazing reality on one of the switchbacks, they stared in horror for only an instant before turning to run for their lives. Even so, the fire, knowing nothing about switchbacks, nearly caught up with them.

After contacting the sheriff, I called Jack Knight, our district superintendent, sleeping peacefully in Berkeley. Then I called the assistant district superintendent, Clyde Newlin, at Mountain View. Clyde, of an old-time Big Basin family, was weak from a bout of the flu, but both he and Jack came in a hurry.

"Funny," Clyde said later, "the minute the phone rang, just shortly after midnight, I knew Big Basin was on fire." Good people are sensitive to their loved ones.

I called every local pioneer family I could think of, for they, better than anyone else, knew redwoods and the rugged terrain of those deeply seamed coastal mountains surrounding our park. Of the old time park men, Roy Cushing and Carl Saddlemyer rushed up from Seacliff on Monterey Bay; Charlie Fakler from Portola Redwoods, Mel Whittaker from Mt. Tamalpais; all bringing equipment. Quipped Mel, "The old girl needed me," meaning the Basin — not me, of course.

And here came countless others — they of the old guard, who knew every tree and trail, every ridge and gully. By daylight, a very special clan had mustered in the office. Along with them, supply and manpower moved in from San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Benito, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo counties. Youth Authority boys, and prisoners from the Medium Security Prison at Soledad were soon en route. Volunteers recruited from city streets and loggers with heavy equipment poured into the fray. A system of communication was set up. Bulldozers began chewing out firebreaks. Many

more of these, plus armies of men on foot with Pulaski axes and shovels, would be required to quell this inferno.

Chiefs of county and state agencies converged to direct it all — DeWitt “Swede” Nelson, Chief of the State Division of Forestry; WD Winters, State Fire Control Officer and veteran of forest conflagrations of two decades; Bert Werder, long time Fire Warden of San Mateo County; others of top brass and local know-how — who all pooled their knowledge and skills and talents in order to face this monster that threatened not only the park but the settlements and farms and cabins of mountains, canyons, and finally even the coast. California’s mightiest firefighting resources were fast assembling.

At the same time, the postmistress carried away the mail and government properties; and the park concessionaire and employees dashed here and there, loading trucks and station wagons with stock from gift shop and grocery, plus furnishings from the Lodge. Over us all hung a heavy pall of smoke that could be seen a hundred miles away, that hour after hour grew denser until by noonday it made a red ball of the sun.

In Park Center and the campgrounds, coons and deer stood around with dazed, inquiring looks on their faces. Just what the heck had happened to everyone and their overflowing fountain of goodies? My heart melted at the sight.

I took time to grab a couple of buckets of oats for the deer. The delayed service seemed little enough compensation for the loss of their big weekend. So *far*, at least, they were safe. What could happen when the afternoon onshore sea winds swept up those mountains, fanning the flames back on us, might be another story. Awareness and dread of that lurked in all of our minds, unspoken, but ever-present — evident in the ranger family cars, packed to go on a moment’s notice. Ethel had ours loaded and waiting. The green State pickups, at the ready beside Headquarters, would of course be the very last to leave, should the flames come roaring back and crown into the campgrounds and main grove.

Crews of hundreds manned the 2,000-acre fire the hard way — with hand tools — much of it burning valuable fir and redwood, and still raging out of control. Updrafts carried smoke a mile and a half into the air above Scott’s and Mill

Creeks and blackened Pine Mountain, as the conflagration headed for the coast, now only six miles away.

Long before daylight that Wednesday morning, Lloyd and our rangers had returned to the office. Forestry had taken over. It had set up its own telephone line in Headquarters, so that made two clear lines out.

All day, firefighters, equipment, and officials continued to arrive. Les Gumm and his men from the Felton forestry headquarters set up a fire camp in the South Campground, near the foot of Pine Mountain Trail. Soon men from the Naval Reserve at Santa Cruz and soldiers from Fort Ord near Monterey would arrive; later, after Secretary of the Interior Krug and President Truman had conferred, heavy equipment and personnel came from Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park. It seemed to us as though the whole world was burning. But Forestry calmly and coolly moved forward toward eventual containment of the behemoth, steadily bearing down upon Big Basin's stand of virgin giants.

To all who regarded the Basin with a love bordering on reverence, the sights and sounds and smells were almost more than we could bear. Some of our crew took up tools and joined the battle as it advanced, snapping and crackling deeper into the park. Others kept patrolling — watching over the campers' personal property, so hastily abandoned just hours before.

Sometime following dawn, Ethel prepared breakfast for us, after which I was sent to the South Gate for the day to check incoming cars. A few hours' sleep that night, then duty at the barricaded North Gate, high on the rim, about eight miles up the Saratoga Road. For a time, Don Meadows and Lennie Penhale remained with me, watching the dense smoke spread like a funeral cloak over ridges and canyons. The day was crystal clear and *hot*, with no offshore fog ready to drift in and discourage burning. Conditions were ideal for the big front to rampage.

From the North Gate we could overlook the vast panorama — smoking Pine Mountain, clusters of Douglas-fir in Little Basin dying skyward in great billowing mushrooms, like exploding atomic bombs. Tongues of red, suddenly climbing tree trunks, turned their tops into torches; then, at whatever the whim of shifting winds, the tongues skipped along crown to crown.

At the North Gate, I agonized with the doomed down in there, rooted and defenseless or fleeing in terror, collapsing, being consumed. At the roadside, I waved in fresh troops and fire trucks and flatbeds carrying bulldozers; and I talked with hundreds of sightseers, some of whom tried every ruse known to human ingenuity to gain entry into the park. I even had to cite three young people who, having been denied access to our picnic facilities, proceeded to build their barbecue fire on the ground against a knobcone pine, already about to combust on its own without any help.

Down inside the park, four hundred men battled for Big Basin. Joining them from time to time were youths who had driven from the Bay Area and the hinterlands to see the fire, saw it, and with trembling voices inquired where they could go to volunteer — a few of them kids, who, through their middle teen years had been nothing but pains in the neck to us. Yet down into the Waddell Canyon they went, and worked at backbreaking jobs in stifling heat and over terrain so steep they had to cling to it with both hands. They cleaned up after the convicts in fire camps, washed dishes, toted supplies hour after smoky hour until they stumbled and fell from fatigue. Out of the defense of Big Basin, pests, along with the others, grew into fine sturdy men.

Perhaps all that saved the park the first night was the fact that the usual PM northwest breeze somehow didn't blow in from the sea hard enough. Had it followed the usual pattern, the main grove would surely have gone quickly. Someone Up There granted us one of those miracles that rangers and firefighters pray for. How well our men knew about the low humidity that comes by midmorning on such days as that one had been; how the down-draw in the canyons pulls the fire toward the ocean in the afternoon — when the land heats up, warming the air until it rises — and the sea air rushes in to fill the void and create extreme turbulence over the blaze.

From the North Gate, after nightfall, I watched backfires starting up in the whitethorn and elderberry, ahead of the roaring five-mile front — pitiful, futile little things, soon to be swallowed up by sheets of flame. I couldn't, of course, see the brave bulldozers struggling to carve wide swaths over there before the inferno, nor could I have the comfort of hearing their motors snort — but I knew they were there,

and that the men operating them were truly men among men, plowing headlong into danger, wrenching free great masses of chaparral, shoving trees aside into the darkness. And whenever the fire crowned and raced onward, high overhead, leaving them behind, fear that they might be trapped tore at all of our hearts.

Day after scorching day, dirty yellow plumes mushroomed thousands of feet into the sky as thousands of acres of some of the finest timber in the world ceased to be. Every afternoon, when the fire rushed back toward the park, up a different canyon, we thought that this time it could not be denied. It was surging closer and closer to the campground. The watershed bordering it dripped fire.

Firefighters began dragging themselves in after countless hours without rest or sleep, out on their feet, some with faces swollen from poison oak borne on the smoke. Many had worn out before they could even reach the burn. For a time then, all they could do was lie flat and gasp, every breath of heat and smoke searing their lungs; every muscle screaming; their flesh the hue of boiled lobster.

A few came close to losing their lives because of almost not finding strength enough to get up and move before the fire swept over them.

One afternoon we nearly lost Arlan Sholes and Art Parvin down in the Waddell Canyon. Suddenly trapped by a stopover above them, they saved themselves only by submerging in the creek's warming water and dodging the fiery debris as they worked their way back upstream to safety.

By Friday, September 3, when normally the park would be packed with holiday spirit and fun, 7,000 acres of forest and brush had been reduced to smoldering ashes. The front was now ten miles long and three and a half miles wide in an arc paralleling the Empire Grade — the road along the ridge bounding one side of the main canyon to the sea, the San Lorenzo. A fire lane, twenty to sixty feet wide on the ocean side of the grade was being dozed out, and another hand-cleared about a mile below that. Five hundred men battled on far-flung fire lines in country far too rugged for bulldozers to operate. In many places, sheer rock cliffs rose two hundred feet or more, while in others, the mountainsides were so steep

that in order to reach the higher levels, men had to climb trees and swing off onto the ground.

With all possible speed, still more firefighters had to be recruited and equipped. Hundred-foot trees, burning off at the base, rolled into ravines like giant flares. Time after time, the wind snatched glowing embers and carried them on ahead to set spot fires that roared and crackled and in turn, exploded great showers of flaming chunks onto untouched slopes, powder-dry and ripe.

It seemed to us that before such terrible forces, mere man could never prevail. Observers watched as the tiny creatures below lined up bravely and faced the flames — sweeping over valuable watersheds, leaving behind cliffs of stone that jutted out starkly where there had been gentle expressions of verdure only moments before. They saw entire mountaintops burst from their veiling of smoke like roses suddenly alive to sun and dew and their own blossoming power.

Torrid day after day, the monster raged out of control.

About seventy-two hours passed before any of us got much sleep. Some didn't get any. Who could sleep if he tried — despite exhaustion and sickness of heart?

For three days, with intermittent relief, I remained at the North Gate. In that time every drop of moisture in every living thing for miles around was sucked up into the thirsty atmosphere. My naturally curly hair straightened out and turned into a kind of yellow straw, not to return to anywhere near normal for over three months.

The third afternoon, I was relieved for a couple of hours to go up to Eagle Rock with a message for the lookout and to make some pictures for the record. By now the fire had ravaged Little Basin and headed up the seaward slopes of the ridge toward the Empire Grade, probably one of the most inflammable areas in that part of the entire Coast Range. Rank with wild lilacs and pines that were dried crisp, it would soon turn into an inferno.

Ethel went with me, and we drove downcanyon to just below Boulder Creek, took a fast climb up the steep and winding Jamison Road to the upper end of the Empire Grade, thence through the Locatelli Ranch vineyards, and up the short corkscrew to the tower, high atop a rocky outcrop. Forestry's dispatcher had asked me to calm any cabin owners

and ranchers I might encounter. I encountered them all right; I tried, but by the time we got there, no one saw much to be calm about. Some of their structures would be going up in smoke before very long.

As we turned into the vineyard, the front, less than a half mile away, came roaring up the ridge the other side of the ranch house before a stiff onshore wind. The big trees, silhouetted along the crest, began to whip wildly as if in their travail they strained to escape their earthbound roots. Among them, combustion had grown so intense that it had created its own firestorm.

Racing between two rows of vines, we ascended that last pitch in one big hurry — with just enough time to spare to shout my message and be evacuated. The lookout rushed out onto the catwalk as I pulled up, listened to my abbreviated report, then yelled, “Okay! Now get out of here quick! Drive like livin’ hell!”

I filched two seconds exactly to snap a picture of the dark wave of smoke and sky-high flames as they burst into full view. And then we roared away.

Once safely below again and looking up toward Eagle Rock at the end of the Empire Grade, Ethel and I saw only a mass of wildfire; miraculously, both tower and the lookout were to escape.

Back on the North Gate, I was besieged with dozens of cars, filled to capacity with the awestruck and curious; sometimes with reporters and photographers; other times with farmers and construction men, hauling water tanks and Cats — volunteering, often pleading to be allowed to help. Needless to say, they soon pulled up in front of Headquarters.

Sometimes an hour or more would pass that nothing but the sun, heat, wind, and wildlife kept me company. Once a pack of coyotes came loping through. They took little notice of my presence, but went bounding down China Grade, the old logging road that crossed there.

I would have wished them back rather than the car full of youths who appeared soon afterwards. They were truant from a Bible School conference going on at Mt. Hermon, downcanyon, they told me. Seeing all their energy, I suggested they backtrack to Forestry at Felton and volunteer for the emergency. All laughed as if I had just told the funniest joke

ever, yawned elaborately, and commented that my suggestion was just too much work — and a bit out of their line. Besides, their conference wouldn't end until Monday. To that, I remarked that I hoped Mt. Hermon would still be there on Monday; that perhaps they had better go read their bibles again. I thought they had missed something.

Times like those always bring out the best in people, and the worst — including myself, no doubt. You see both angels and half-wits. You feel like hugging some and wringing the necks of others. Not always high minded and charitable, to be sure, but human, I suppose.

Perhaps I might have been construed to have been human the next afternoon down in Park Center.

In roared two young men on a motorcycle from the Gazos Creek Road. Somehow they had cleverly evaded the police barricade at the other end, and had endured the nightmare of chuckholes, bumps, and endless curves and dust of this seventeen-mile, little-used road in from the ocean. I was astounded to see them.

I wanted to know: Why did they ride all of that way to volunteer, when all they had to do was —

“Volunteer? *Volunteer!* Not on your life, lady!”

I took a deep breath. “What a pity,” I said, shaking my head sadly. “Best then that you turn around and ride right back the way you came. Now. You see, our roads are all closed to everyone but emergency vehicles. We will contact the Highway Patrol over on the coast about when to expect you — to verify your safe arrival.” Cocky grins faded as I took down the license number. Those two probably never did show their blisters of the day.

I worked myself into being Just Plain Mean when I thought of the heroic men risking their lives on distant fire lines.

By the sixth day of the fire, 16,000 acres of beautiful timber and brushlands had been blackened. Big Basin's old-growth redwoods remained safe, but much of nearby Little Basin was gone. Lloyd invited me to jeep down into it with himself, Don, Lennie, and Clyde to check and make some pictures.

Right off, we happened into the part that hadn't yet gone up but was in the process. Suddenly finding ourselves in a tunnel of fire, Lloyd uttered his immortal words: “Let us get the hell hence!” Somehow managing a tight turn on the

narrow strip of dirt, we did just that with all possible speed, with no more than some holes burned in our shirts.

Next day, after the front had passed, leaving only smoke and small flare-ups, we again went down into Little Basin. This time it was to gaze disconsolately at what remained of one of the really unique coast range ecosystems, now naked down to mineral soil, and to stare in amazement at the long-forgotten accoutrements of pioneer lumbering days.

Once abandoned, then covered over by the natural debris of many decades, these relics had vanished from view and memory, not to be a part of the world again until this day. Before us in the charred and smoking ruins of a splendid forest, they had become history revealed: over here an ancient iron stove, a pile of cracked and broken dishes, and a part of a table, still recognizable; over there, leading up a draw and in full view once more, an old corduroy road, used some time in the century past by teams of oxen as they dragged great red logs from the cut to a little sawmill.

Lloyd took the jeep back to the park. The rest of us followed Clyde, who had grown to manhood just over the hill, and headed out on foot to inspect the area between Little Basin and Pine Mountain — possibly a mile of ashes and the blackened stems of trees and bushes.

The day felt eerie. Death — and worse — lay everywhere. Animals writhed, burning, some only half dead, but beyond screaming any more. With shovels, the fellows quickly put them out of their misery. I who had always been terrified of anything faintly resembling a mouse or rat went sick with pity as I walked among their agonized remains and those of other wild ones that had been so hopelessly trapped.

No one really understands and comprehends the full horror of a forest fire unless he can see what the flames do to living flesh. Convicted arsonists and thoughtless citizens should, as a part of their punishment, be required to tramp the havoc they have wrought, so they can see — and if they have any feelings — *feel*. Perhaps it would make Christians of them, or at the very-least, give them a right to live.

We walked across what had once been a beautiful meadow of unusual exotic growth, and then started to climb. Soon we encountered mop-up crews of convicts. Then came the deep ravines.

To cross them, we had to ease down one side by digging boot heels into the soft ashes, and lowering ourselves from one shrub to the next, and then by inching up the other side, hand over hand. Before long, our clothing inside and out was coated with ashes; and as we gasped for breath, the acrid smoke burned our lungs.

All about us now, convicts — shirtless and sweating — labored to put out the flames that sprang up anew in tiny patches of dry vegetation skipped over by the fire. The going got rough. It taxed all our strength and endurance. There were moments when I wondered if I should have come, yet I wouldn't have missed the experience. Besides, I was grateful to have been included in this expedition. For me, there would never again be another like it.

The heat and smoke worsened as we scaled the second ridge. Often we rested awhile, braced between what was left of two manzanita bushes. A half hour later, we descended into the bottom of the next ravine. Down there it was stifling. I leaned back against the slope and tried to relax before heading upward again. At that moment, an artery in my nose broke. Blood spurted in bright red jets. Just the thing for the couple of ridges yet to go to reach Pine Mountain, three miles by trail from Park Center!

Thank goodness the men were on ahead a ways, talking with some convicts. I curled into a wad, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, lest the fellows notice. To stay the bleeding, I grabbed a big red hankie out of my jeans pocket, clamped it over my nose, and held a fist full of face together as tightly as I could. This would stop the flow of blood and start the clotting. However, now the blood poured down my throat. But no time to lie back quietly and wait. The men were moving on.

"Okay, Petey," they called, glancing back, assuming I was merely blowing my nose.

Clyde grinned and waved me on. I got up and concentrated on the stony cliff before me. By gripping my face with one hand and pulling myself up, bush over bush, with the other, at the same time shoving with the utmost leg power, I made it to the top.

As we all flattened and gasped, the men saw me — and the problem. Their eyes widened and their faces registered

amazement and dismay as they hurried toward me, all concern. Then they caught themselves.

Had they blown up in disgust and shouted something like, "That's a woman for you!" or made a big fuss or gone gooey with sympathy, I would have died of mortification right there. I wouldn't have blamed them one bit if they had pointed out what a weakling and a liability I had proved to be; that they should have known better than to have brought me along. I'll always be grateful that they acted as they might have with one another, and said casually, "Huh! Well I'll be darned."

I played down my "little nosebleed," and they didn't become aware of how serious it was. With no streetcar in sight just then, what else was there to do but go ahead and climb that last ridge. Perhaps they were wondering right along with me whether I'd have the guts or not, and praying hard that I would.

Down into the last ravine was by courtesy of the seat of my pants, heels acting as brakes. At the bottom, Clyde waved five convicts to my side after he and Don and Lennie had huddled briefly.

"Get on your way," I called. "This thing's almost okay now."

Slowly they turned and headed up that last pitch. The convicts offered their canteens, which I declined; then, they applied muscle power and helped me to the top. All were kind and gentle, and I doubt that they ever realized I was a woman, for my voice was hoarse and my short hair tucked up tightly under a beaked cap. More than anything, I resembled a mass of ashes, almost unrecognizable as a human. Just above, the fellows kept glancing back, which embarrassed me beyond words. But I was growing weaker. As I rolled over the top of that last ridge, I fought blacking out.

All at once, my feet dropped onto a flat surface. Without opening my eyes to look, I knew it had to be the Pine Mountain Trail. From it, the way back down into the park was all easy going. Almost instantly I revived. I sat up and grinned, made some inane remark, and was joyed to note the relief on the men's faces.

Clyde cleared his throat. "Guess we'll move on out over that next ridge for a look before we go down," he said, not directly to me but more like thinking aloud. *No barking,*

“Here’s Pine Mountain Trail, Petey. For God’s sake take it, and get out of our hair!”

I remarked casually that I guess I’d go on in; that I was hungry. The response, just as casual, was that if I had worked up all that appetite, might be a good idea. Had the nosebleed stopped? Yep, just about. I’d sit a minute and then amble on down the trail.

So, tossing each other a wave, we went our separate ways.

After what we had been through, the three-mile path into the campground was a cinch. All I had to do was take my time and stay conscious. Once, a rattler that had probably gone underground to escape the fire came along to challenge my right to the path, but I just sat down and waited out his rattling until he had slithered on down the embankment. We were both simply trying to do the best we could with what strength and options remained to us.

Another hour and I arrived at the bottom of the trail, only to discover that the fire camp, teeming with kitchen and trucks and men in various states, blocked my way through the campground. Preferring not to claim emergency and become one more problem, I took the long way around, up Bloom Creek through an adjoining section of campground to the highway, thence into Park Center and to my cabin, where Ethel gave me some first aid.

Every hot afternoon afterwards, which was all of them, the artery in my nose broke loose again, and I finally had to go down to Boulder Creek and have it cauterized. The next day, though, I was quite able to take over at the South Gate. One of those freak spearheads of flame had boiled up out that way, threatening the park from a new direction.

By sundown, the entire San Lorenzo Canyon appeared to be doomed, and ashes were falling like snow on Santa Cruz. For three days, it was touch and go as angry billows gave the skyline above the canyon a hellish red glow, and folk of the little towns — Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, and Felton — began evacuating.

Then came the miracle of another wind shift and a determined last stand of firefighters and equipment along the Empire Grade.

Chapter Eighteen

Me, the Public

A summer to remember was the one after I left the park system and became a part of the Great American Public. The sight of a fish so far out of water must have made strong men faint and women weep. Yet, senselessly, I had looked forward to the time when I could roam to my heart's content the parks I had loved and served in and all the others I had zealously promoted when talking with tourists and at campfires. What excitement to finally be joining the vacationers I had cheered on and secretly envied. Happy days! Let freedom ring!

Well-equipped with war surplus nylon pup tent and mummy bag and other camping accouterments, I set out, unfettered by responsibility and bubbling with anticipation. On this, my first real vacation in twenty-five years, I had programmed myself to "live it up" or bust. Those who witnessed me sweating my head off to do just that must have been amused at some of the pickles I got myself into. Suffice to say that not since then have I determined anything with such fierce tooth-grinding resolve. Still, those two months on the loose did bear fruit. I learned how to let go and let whatever was right and good and enriching fall into place, and thereby, after a struggle, came to know myself.

Straight up the Great Central Valley my friend Ethel and I whizzed in my new station wagon, past Sacramento to Redding and across to the coast to Crescent City near the Oregon border. There, late in the afternoon, I put Ethel on the bus for a summer at home in Indiana. With soaring spirit I waved goodbye. I even stood still long enough to watch the bus pull away. Then I turned around — and at that high point in my liberation, slumped into an abyss of loneliness. Loose ends scattered all over the place.

Nonsense, I told myself sharply. Let's get on down the line to home territory, to the state parks I knew so well.

While stationed at Richardson Grove, I had visited the area around Crescent City several times on my day off, yet had felt no particular affinity for the village or for the big-tree logging that backboned its economy. Besides, the "no law north of the Klamath" reputation tended to repel me. Years later, after

the terrible flood of 1964 and my subsequent book based on it [*Beloved was Bahamas, A Steer to Remember*], the viewpoint was to change mightily.

This afternoon, however, I headed south with all the motivation of a lone covered wagon at full gallop across a clearing, hell-bent on beating the Indians to yonder pass. By the time I reached the Klamath River, I decided to call it a day.

In a wooded area alongside the mouth of that great stream, I pitched the pup tent, cooked beans and hamburger, and until dark, watched some small craft skimming around the estuary. One, a jet boat filled with people, headed for the little dock directly across from me. Next morning I was aboard, roaring upstream for a day's outing with a load of other sightseers, and determined not to act like them.

This was redwood country, wasn't it? Here more than anywhere else I knew my way around. Sure I did. Easy self-confidence determined to take over my ego as of then. I would not be making tourist goofs. No, not me, for I knew better.

But no one told me — or maybe I hadn't heard — that it would be noon before we'd pull ashore to the one-holers nestled against the cliff. And in that Indian reservation land, no convenient service station did I see around any next bend.

With an hour yet to go, things became critical, the limit beyond which... was fast approaching.

Glancing around the boat, I noticed strained expressions where once ebullient smiles had been. Presently, the lady next to me leaned over and whispered, "What does this boatman think we are — camels?" The suggestive lapping of the river against the boat hull wasn't helping matters for either of us.

About the time my back teeth seemed to be awash, we veered over to a tiny landing with a long flight of stairs leading up the cliff to a cabin among the trees.

"Pickin' up a guy and his dog here," the boatman explained. We watched the fellow and his beautiful red setter start down the stairs.

In growing distress, I surveyed the possibilities alongside the boat and saw no more than a step away, wettish-looking ground densely populated with cattails. What a haven for anyone in my condition!

The more I studied it, the more it beckoned me and my

problem. Anyway, what choice did I have. Just two. Bulrushes or boat.

I glanced up the stairs again when the man shouted, "Oops! Forgot the grocery list. Sorry. Have to fetch it." Then to the dog: "Seeker, go on down. Go on down." Obedience personified, Seeker did.

As an only child, I had been brought up to be resourceful. Suddenly, the delay offered a resource beyond my wildest expectations. My years of making do in parks and forests had been a liberal education of sorts. Now I was about to graduate magna cum laude.

With careless abandon, just as if time were not of the essence, I stood up, shaded my eyes, gazed shoreward with what I hoped was convincing surprise, and exclaimed, "Oh, I see a rare specimen over there. Got to get it!"

Climbing over the side, I plowed into the cattails. No matter that the sediment deposited by last winter's flood was still somewhat squashy. To heck with a little mud on my sneakers!

"Back in a minute," I called happily (because I'm a big ham) and disappeared from view. That is — disappeared from human view.

Seeker, however, didn't need to seek in order to find. Every inch the hunting dog, he bounded down those steps, sniffed a presence in the cattails, or perhaps heard my Ah! of relief. Anyway, with game lurking somewhere among all those green and brown stalks, his interest in a boat ride detoured. He trotted to the edge of the patch and without preamble, went into the classic stance of the trained bird dog, nose and forepaw aimed and poised, tail straight out behind, not a hair moving. No fallen duck could ever have been more professionally pointed out than me — there among the cattails, being resourceful while steadily sinking deeper and deeper in the mud, by then halfway to my knees.

Now came the race between the man bounding down the steps, two at a time, yelling, "Hey there! Seeker's found something. Hold up a sec 'til I go look!" — and me, trying desperately to accomplish my mission before he could burst upon the scene or the mud could close over my head, or both.

By some kindly miracle, I was through and mostly presentable, although hopelessly mired, when two gnarled

hands cautiously parted the stalks nearby. To his everlasting credit, the big woodsman didn't leap into the air and bellow, "Well, I'll be damned!" or something equally revealing. Instead, being a gentleman to the core, he simply grinned shyly and whispered, "Hi there," and extended a helping hand.

No use pretending. The "specimen" forgotten — if it ever were believed — the boatful burst into uproarious laughter. Red of face, I allowed myself to be towed to the water's edge. By the time my woodsman had me unstuck and cleaned up enough to join the others, everyone was warmly friendly and understanding — all but the few still-miserable ones, who had had the longing but not the daring. They suffered the rest of the way upriver.

From then on, nothing detracted from my appreciation of the day. I had made peace with physiology and had passed my tourist tenderfoot test rather spectacularly. Best of all, Seeker, having seen what he had sought, chose to sit beside me from there on, occasionally licking my face as if to assure me that it was just as easy for former park rangers to make asses of themselves as anyone else on vacation — and right in home territory, too. Actually it set the stage for the weeks to come.

Next day, leaving the Klamath behind, I headed south again on the Redwood Highway. All the way through the magnificent forests of Del Norte and Humboldt counties, fog drifted softly amongst the trees clear down into the ferns and the rhododendrons. And where the redwoods stood alongside the sea, I reveled in the eternal surf, pounding great promontories to bits; then transporting them to downcoast embayments, where in future times they would finally mass into solid bottomlands veined with streamlets green, and dotted with flowers. This country, dank and dripping, magnificent in its wildness, soothed much in my restless spirit as I strolled through some of the memorial groves that afternoon. Yet something was missing.

Because it had always been a part of my nature as well as my job to greet everyone I met, habit still prevailed, although not with the same happy results.

When I spoke, response was often guarded. Fellow travelers had a tendency to view me with suspicion. A lone

woman on the prowl? No one rushed toward me, arms outstretched, as in years past. No kids ran to take my hand and pull me into their camp. Out of uniform and therefore without identity — and with dizzy speed — I had become faceless, one of the throng. The effect was nothing less than crushing. It never occurred to me that my own inner uncertainty might be reflected strongly enough that others could sense it. Instead, I thought of different friends who had wanted to take this maiden voyage with me, and I wondered if I might have been wrong in insisting that to go solo for the first time would be grand fun and an adventure.

As I approached the gate of Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, I decided to turn in and camp there for a while — or else. Or else *what!* Well, I'd make darn sure to remain incognito. I'd be accountable to no one. I'd see what complete freedom was like, so help me.

The checking station ranger and I didn't recognize each other. So far, so good. Before I could open my mouth to say I'd take a run through the campground, select my site, then come back and register, as I had told thousands upon thousands of others to do, he said crisply, "You want to camp. Okay. Campsite 1 is yours."

"You mean the park is *that* full?" I asked after I had had time to absorb this unusual procedure.

"Nope," he replied courteously, "we're just assigning campsites now."

Seeing my hesitation, he added, "Oh, it's a nice spot and very convenient to facilities."

It was that all right, except that me and my campsite straddled a newly-established flyway between a troop of cub scouts and the combination building for that section of the park. After all, no normal, happy kid would dream of going around if he could cut through.

I proved to be no barrier to exuberance. In fact, who noticed me! Two, three, a half dozen at a time, the boys ran, chased, and tore through #1, stumbling occasionally over my tent stakes, stopping long enough to check on what was cooking over the fire, pausing once or twice a minute to make faces in my mirror, nearly mowing me down when I passed between the fire pit and the table carrying a steaming coffee pot. And because the center of the site was "a little risin'" as

one of the cubs said, it became the perfect outpost for relaying shouted directions and exhortations, everything but smoke signals, between the scout encampment and the showers and restrooms of the combination building.

I ate dust and my ears rang until close to midnight, when all of that, like most other things in life, eventually passed, and I slept.

All at once there was a dull thud beside my face that jolted me awake. Holy smoke, I thought, I'll bet one of the bull elks has wandered over from the prairie and plunked himself down out here. My heart almost stopped. You don't fool around with those big critters if you know what's good for you. So I eased farther inside my mummy bag and saw to it that I didn't move for the rest of the night, lest he think the pup tent alive and object to sharing his bedding-down place with it.

Come daylight, I cautiously stuck my head out, expecting to look into flaring nostrils blowing hot breath on my face. Instead, my face rammed something cold and hard. One of the six redwood "toadstool" seats that encircled the round picnic table had finished rotting away at the base during the night, and toppled. Just inches from my head landed the seat of it, made of concrete, typical of early-day park equipment. The dent it made in the ground was impressive. So much for a near miss.

In order to get my full 50¢ worth, I decided to go on the eleven-mile round trip hike to the sea the following morning. The day was foggy, the forest dripping, and some of the trail through stands of man-high Woodwardia ferns.

Returning late in the afternoon, every muscle asserting its right to be felt, I found a note on my campsite post saying I had become delinquent and please call at the office. Never before had I been called a delinquent, so I hurried forward to pay another 50¢ and restore myself to upstanding citizenship. That night I celebrated by going to campfire.

For the first time, I sat in a campfire circle. I didn't know the naturalist or anyone else there. I tried to be responsive to the songs the ranger tried so earnestly to lead, but I kept wanting to jump up and say, "No, that's not the way to do that!"

Instead, I suffered in silence; suffered through a poorly

prepared talk on redwoods — suffered because as soon as that was over, so was the campfire. No such thing as entertaining ourselves for a while just to unwind and close the day on a carefree note. Since the previous September's annual "reorganization," that was *verboden*. Now we were going to have some singing, but otherwise, conservation education only. Period.

I was about to meander disconsolately off to camp when I heard a low voice say, "Aren't you a long way from your own campfire?"

I whirled around and in the firelight saw a family of smiling faces, vaguely familiar. But oh my! so welcome.

Spontaneous reaction set in. Where I had wanted to go strictly alone and incognito, I was now pathetically pleased to be recognized. We grabbed and wrung each other's hands and hugged and made happy noises. In my park service years, thousands had come up to introduce themselves after campfire and to shake hands and talk, but never again would there be such unbounded joy at a meeting as there was that night. From then on I was to be recognized everywhere I went that summer on my slow trek down through redwood country.

One thing that continued to accompany me as it had done ever since 1937 was my apparent likeness to Amelia Earhart. The night she disappeared, several Big Basin campers and I drove down to the Santa Cruz boardwalk after campfire to have a bit of summertime at the beach.

The place was busy. Like everyone else there that beautiful evening, we were enjoying the bright lights, the concessions, the music of a local band, and the silvery path of the moon, stretched across Monterey Bay.

All of a sudden, we were assailed by husky kid voices shouting over the top of all the chatter, "EXTRA! EXTRA! Amelia Earhart lost! Plane down in the Pacific! Get your extra right over here!" That did throw the boardwalk into an uproar.

Not long afterwards, pushing through the crowd, one of the newsboys saw me, dressed casually in green cord slacks, plaid shirt, and beat up suede jacket. The youngster stopped, stared, gasped. Then pointing vigorously at me, he yelled, "Amelia can't be lost. *She's right there!*"

That was only the beginning of what was to haunt my comings and goings for years to come; yet considering what an

illustrious person she had been, and how revered her memory, I accepted it as a most precious responsibility. With it went a deep humility.

The incidences of public exclamation are far too numerous to recount here. One thing sure: it took me a long time to get used to people constantly staring or whispering to one another or stopping me to question or comment. More times than I can recall, I was spontaneously seized and hugged, not only by friends of Miss Earhart's but also her aeronautical associates — one of whom actually thought I was she, playing some kind of joke.

At old Mines Field, now Los Angeles International Airport, former fellow fliers gaped unabashedly when I went in for some information, then explained their behavior and even took my picture beside one of the planes. At Burbank Airport, an entire lineup of plane watchers turned to gawk as my parents and I strolled along the fence beside the field. At Warner Brothers, the first autumn of Miss Earhart's disappearance, a casting director dropped a telephone he had been speaking into when he glanced up and saw me standing nearby. I had gone in on a dare made by a group of Big Basin campers who had read that the studio was preparing to do a film on the famous aviatrix's life. I had hooted at the idea of a reception other than a polite "So what?" even if anyone should happen to notice the resemblance. Later, after the script had been written, George Palmer Putnam called me to say that he had requested cancellation of the film; he wanted another Navy search of the South Pacific — a decision I readily understood.

Some years before, Miss Earhart, herself, had commented about our likeness. That was the day I had rushed to Mines Field like a horde of other excited folk who had wanted to watch her take off on what proved to be a flight that established a women's non-stop transcontinental speed record. Why? Because solo flight across vast distances was still very young, and so was I. And I suppose, too, that such bold pioneering seemed incredibly wonderful to me.

Therefore I managed to content myself with merely watching eagles and seagulls — and now men and women with wings.

Not too long ago I began to think people didn't notice my

resemblance to Amelia Earhart anymore, or else, because of the passing of time, the likeness had ceased to be.

Then one day, as I came out of a church I had been visiting, an elderly lady approached with that old familiar, "Bet you don't know who you look like." I played along with her apparent excitement and said, no, I couldn't imagine. Smiling happily, she replied, "Why, you're the spittin' image of my cousin."

That stopped me. Surprised, I explained that this was something different; that I had often been told how much I looked like Amelia Earhart.

Her laughter was a joy to hear. "Dear girl," she said finally, gripping both my arms, "Amelia Earhart was my cousin."

Continuing on my vacation down the Redwood Highway, I reached the more familiar scene around Garberville and achieved a sense of belonging at last. I had sat in the sea spray on the rocks of Patrick's Point and gazed at the reflections in the several lagoons; I had walked up to the lighthouse on Trinidad Head and had savored two bowls of chowder at Clam Beach; I had ambled along the streets of Ferndale, that little valentine of a Victorian village near the mouth of the Eel River and had revisited the humming redwood sawmill at Scotia — but always where people were, whether they chose to speak or not. Just then, nothing in me wanted to re-explore the cathedral-quiet stand of giants at Bull Creek Flat or any of the stately memorial groves along the Avenue of the Giants or the black sands at remote Shelter Cove or the railroad tracks jutting out over the water at Bear Harbor after the pier that supported them had been destroyed by the winter seas. My freedom was still too new and much too raw to be of comfort in such heavenly but far reaches as these — no matter how much I had once sought them when needing relief from an overabundance of human sights and sounds.

At Burlington Campground and Williams Grove, I was told that I couldn't stay. The park was full. What did it matter? As at Prairie Creek, I didn't know these rangers either. How big the park system had grown. I didn't belong anymore; my fight with separation and loneliness grew bitter. After darkness lowered, I got a bowl of soup in tiny Redway, pulled

over behind a redwood, and curled up in the car for the night-licking my wounds, immersed in self-pity.

But the next morning, with a warm feeling of coming home, I pulled into Richardson Grove. And when I stepped cautiously onto Headquarters porch and saw big Bill Weatherbee from the Basin standing there — a towering hulk of good humor and smiles, one of my favorite people — I all but melted and ran down the nearest chipmunk hole. Bill and his Dee had always been special, our memories joyous. In no time, my pup tent went up near their home close to the river.

I remained a while and of course came to know the ranger crew, and renewed my acquaintance with the concessionaire. Campers I had enjoyed when stationed at Richardson Grove nine years earlier welcomed me in noisy, heartwarming reunions. Gradually, they helped me learn how to vacation and to mature into a person apart from the park service, although some of it took considerable doing.

My schedule soon settled into place: up at six, breakfast over and cleaned up by seven; the daily hike, then lunch; a sunning and a swim in the river; then from four until five *sharp* Out Front, lolling in one of those carpenter's monstrosities, guaranteed to cripple the strongest back.

And so at last I realized my dream. I went and sat and looked, much to Bill and Dee's amusement, but by the clock, as I had lived much of my life.

Within ten minutes I'd had enough of such unaccustomed inactivity — but I wasn't due to get up and go cook dinner for fifty minutes yet. So I continued to sit, glancing at my watch every few minutes. Five days of that, and my endurance ran out.

Only one cure. Somehow I had to face it.

My last day came, and still I couldn't make myself go near the campfire, led by a fine, capable young man I remembered well as a youngster at my campfires there. And I still persisted in trying to luxuriate in those heavy wooden chairs out on the porch of the concession building — to watch the cars go by. Like a brand imprinted by a flaming iron, it kept reminding me that long ago I'd declared over and over, "Oh blessed be the day when I can sit out there like other folks, and do nothing but look." Those must have been days when I was weary beyond words.

On down the Redwood Highway I went, alongside the Eel, wending its placid stream through the towering redwood forest. I revisited beloved scenes and friends — the Tall Tree House with its souvenir shop inside; the Shrine Tree at Myers and the Chandelier Tree at Underwood Park, where I had sent tourists who wanted more than anything a tree they could drive through; Lane's Redwood Flat, that magnificent grove in the bend of the river. Then across the range to the sea.

From there on down our fantastic coastline, I renewed my affection for the steep rocky headlands shrouded in fog and battered by heavy breakers; the narrow sea shelf — pastures for the sheep ranches backed against forested uplands, dark and mysterious; all of it clinging nostalgically to a bygone era, when New Englanders settled our north coast and left their mark. Along here, time stood so still that without realizing it, I took hold and slowed my rush through life.

Miles apart, and in likely settings, were commercial fishing coves and weather-beaten logging villages, their mill saws whining noisily — Fort Bragg, Noyo, Mendocino, Little River, Albion, Elk, Anchor Bay, Gualala. One after another along the way were state parks. Their campsites nestled among dunes densely populated with yellow bush lupine and beside creeks trickling their last across pocket beaches to saltwater; on grassy alluvial fans at the mouths of fern-lined canyons, themselves overlooked by heavy stands of second-growth redwood, fir, and Bishop pines. Fantastic country, this; something to be lingered over according to whim.

During my time along there, I saw a number of familiar faces. More often now, people recognized and hailed me. And those I'd never seen before smiled back and seemed anxious to exchange on-the-road information and camping experiences. All of this apparently prodded my old writing bug. I commenced to jot down notes for articles I might like to try. Thanks to this unexpected turn, my state park umbilical cord began to give way, and the vacuum it left began to fill with new ideas. Gradually, in a deepening appreciation for our natural wonderlands and heartwarming world of fellow vacationers, the other me of the Gemini twins began to awaken and emerge.

Next down the line was friend John McKenzie, curator of

historic old Fort Ross on the headland overlooking the ocean. I looked forward to seeing him and hearing more of his well-researched and cleverly told stories of the early-day Russian occupation. Pouring on the gas, I whistled into the stockade and up to the Russian Orthodox chapel. There on the porch stood John, just as if expecting me, which he wasn't.

We hadn't seen each other in many months, so all the things we found to talk about and examine around the fort took us merrily through the afternoon and an evening fish fry and on to ten o'clock. Suddenly the thought occurred to me: where do I set my pup tent tonight?

John laughed. "No need for you to pup tent. Just move into the new State residence. Since there's no water supply for it, nobody lives there and won't until The State figures where to get water. Just throw your sleeping bag on the floor in the living room."

"Not me," I said stoutly, still playing the hardy adventurer. "I'm tenting all the way. I've promised myself that."

John shrugged good-humoredly, went to the window, and pulled back the curtain. "We've got one dilly of a fog out there tonight, he said, trying to discourage me.

"No problem," I told him, "but where do people camp around here?"

"Well, if you insist, down in the cove. It's nice and flat and partly grassed. Shoreline slopes easy-like."

"Sounds fabulous," I enthused.

John argued in favor of pitching my tent alongside the stockade not far from his cabin, but the notion of a little cove beside the sea had caught my fancy.

Finally giving up, he piloted me to the little road that descended the cliff, cautioned me to take it very slowly, and to make camp on the first grassy spot I came to. He then said goodnight like I was some kind of retarded child, which may have come close all right — or else I'd been born a century too late.

At the bottom of the cliff, my headlights illuminated flower-studded green, bordered by gently lapping wavelets.

Ah! I thought. This is great. The black soupy void that enveloped me might have been like the night the world began. With no moon, no stars, no planet except for a small patch of

earth and water within the range of my lights, I was alone in a vast infinity, whirling through time and space.

Leaving my headlights on until I could get my chores done, I dragged the tent out onto the grass and in a few minutes had it up and floored with air mattress and mummy bag. Then, completely carefree of spirit, I proceeded to change into pajamas, hurrying just a bit so as not to deplete the glow of the battery too much.

Once the lights were out, absolutely nothing could I see, I suppose from most viewpoints this night was right out of Sherlock Holmes. To me it was heaven.

Slowly I felt my way the few steps to the pup tent; even so, almost stumbling over it. Already, I had become one with the drifting fog, the soft swish of water curling onto the sand, the seals barking dismally from offshore rocks, and darkness more peaceful than any I could remember. I crawled through the round pup tent entrance and snuggled down in my mummy bag; zipped up to the chin, I fell instantly and contentedly asleep.

Sometime near morning I awakened to a chomping going on outside, and the sound of hooves in the grass. I rose up and peered out through the mesh. Sure enough, hooved ones; sheep that didn't spook when I called to them but went right on chomping. I sighed. Happiness filled me.

First light of day was something else. Other noises began now; noises new to me: a grating of metal against sand; footfalls, none hooved; not animal but human.

Puzzled and a bit disturbed, I rose up on my elbows and watched a steady migration of men tromp by, lugging assorted outboard motors and fishing gear.

What was this! I squirmed around until I could see out the entrance of the tent. Dawn's early light revealed a flotilla of small boats drawn up on shore; others moored out a ways. Boats, boats, boats, and sports fishermen all over the place; swarming past me on both sides, bound for water and the day's catch. My private cove had come alive.

I scrambled around and peered the other direction again. Through the fog and gathering light I could see well enough to make out a whole row of assorted cars, trailers, and canvas against the base of the cliff. Women were there, cleaning fish and preparing breakfast, while their menfolk milled around

and plodded back and forth between cook fires and the water. Was I ever in the middle of the soup!

And my clothing was a good twenty feet from my goldfish bowl of a station wagon!

Between singles and clusters coming and going, I crawled out of the pup tent and raced for the car.

In the front seat I scrunched down beside the emergency brake and tried to dress. Everyone that passed glanced my way, observed what I was struggling to do, grinned amiably, and called a cheery greeting, just as if this sort of thing happened every day. Small matter that my hair stood on end or that my slipover blouse got hung up on my nose and one shoulder blade, driving both arms into grotesque contortions overhead. In no time I learned what it would be like to change from the hide out in a telephone booth in Pershing Square.

In the midst of the mad scramble, a thought hit me full force: why in blazes hadn't John told me about the fishing hordes down here? Then I had to laugh. It simply hadn't occurred to him. The night before, his thoughts had been greatly absorbed with the July 4 celebration to take place at the fort this day. Besides, John was somewhat absent-minded. Besides that, I'd been pretty headstrong, and had a long reputation of being able to handle unforeseen situations. Now it had come home to roost.

That morning I had not quite finished with handling situations nor were they through with me.

The moment came to seek relief. I saw the Chic Sale up there atop a gentle knoll, an apparent community one-holer. I walked toward it, saw a line waiting, and walked back down, busying myself with breaking camp until necessity should ride herd more insistently.

Then I made another try. By now the line had shortened. But again, rather than stand around with my legs crossed, I decided to finish packing. On the third hike up the knoll, I moved more desperately. I thought, anyone who beats me up there has got to be strapped to a rocket; yet before I could reach the door, a moose of a man passed me on a dead run, bellowing, "Gangway there, Honey, I'm loaded."

This time I waited outside, and just before my luck ran out, finally gained entrance to our flimsy mecca.

Not for many minutes, though, was I to sit in thoughtful

solitude. Soon a hand tried the door and rattled it politely. The hook held. I wasn't killing time. My needs may have been inside that cubicle but my sympathies stood around outside. Memory was fresh. I had been an Outsider my share of times on this trip. I knew how it felt. So for the woman who waited, I did my best.

It wasn't good enough. She grabbed the knob and rattled again — and again — and still again, growing more insistent each time. I cleared my throat. Thirty seconds later, she cleared the hilltop.

She must have been a lady wrestler. Certainly she didn't know her own strength or the privy's weakness. Together we were to discover both. In her resolve, not to be denied, she seized the doorknob and gave it one almighty wrench. With a shrill skreek of rusty hinges, the privy door and its hinges gave in to this Amazon of the fish heads. Clutching it to her bosom, she went reeling backwards into the grass and wild flowers.

There I sat, totally air-conditioned and on display. But that was only the beginning. The sides couldn't take it without the door and the roof couldn't take it without the sides, so the whole works caved in. With what was left of my dignity, I was left to rise out of the ruins.

Lindbergh's triumphant return from Europe couldn't have received more attention and acclaim than I did from the assembled multitude which, upon hearing the commotion, had stopped and given it their undivided amazement. All I needed right then was a lighted torch held high to complete the illusion of womanhood indomitable.

Thus began the Fourth of July — the big day of the year at Fort Ross State Historical Monument.

John thought my night and early morning down in the cove absolutely hilarious, although he apologized abjectly for being so preoccupied with plans for the events of this day that he forgot about the "few" fishermen camped down there. I understood. Too many Russians on his mind. Or maybe it was his puckish sense of humor. It could have been both.

Anyway, about 9 o'clock, through a heavy veil of fog, here they came — more than seven hundred Orthodox Russian-Americans — in private cars and buses from the Bay Area and loaded down with cameras and picnic baskets. The stockade

soon filled with colorful jabbering people. Among them I saw much hand kissing, so I knew nobility was present.

At last, a long black limousine arrived, and silence fell upon the fort. I could feel a murmur of wonder and reverence surge over the crowd as out of the limousine stepped six robed fathers from the Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral in San Francisco, then a tall, slender old man of flowing white hair and beard — the Metropolitan Leonty, Presiding Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church of North America.

The scene seemed unreal, almost as if I were in another part of the world and of another time, long past. All but neglected were three cameras and a light meter draped around my neck. With awe I watched John greet the stately Presence.

What a day to remember! In my mounting excitement, I tried to recall what John had told me about this celebration. Here, to the remaining structures of the only Russian attempt to colonize America, came fugitives from the present Russian regime. In 1917 they had migrated to escape oppression, and while they still clung fondly to their mother tongue and native customs, they had also become fiercely American. Every year since 1925, they had assembled at Fort Ross in commemoration of their escape and independence from Soviet Communism and at the same time, the Independence of their adopted land. Fascinated by it all, I was deeply impressed.

The first minute the occasion permitted, I sought out the Russian who seemed to be in charge, and said, "I'm taking pictures today for some writing I'm doing. Could — would it be at all possible to make one of the Metropolitan and the fathers on the front porch of the chapel after the services?"

Indeed it would be possible. Absolutely. Turning me around, the man, with no further ado, presented me to the personage who was just then approaching — Metropolitan Leonty, himself. I would have lost my power of speech just then had it not been for the gracious and kindly man, who smilingly consented to pose at the close of Mass. Yes, the porch would be ideal.

Into the chapel walked the splendid procession. The ancient altar, so barren throughout the year, now glowed with candles and religious objects. A meaningfully ornate robe and mitre was now donned by the Metropolitan, and the Mass began.

The tiny chapel could hold fifty persons or so. Therefore, Mass had to be said a number of times so everyone present who wished, could take part. Members of the denomination participating in the ceremony made their offerings by buying candles and placing them in tables of wet sand beside the candelabra in front of the altar. Throughout the services, a robed cappella choir chanted, reminding me of the famed Don Cossacks I had always enjoyed so much.

Outside the chapel, many of the throng knelt while the voices of the choir drifted out into the fog, still swirling round. For me, it was so ethereal that it blotted out my longing for the busy holiday I knew to be in full swing at Big Basin, about which I had been thinking and grieving all the way down the coast.

In the Russian chapel there were no pews, chairs, or even benches. "We do not sit before our Lord," one of the Russians told me. This meant then that the stately seventy-five year old Metropolitan and his fathers and choir stood all morning and well into the afternoon — until all members who wished had attended the services. When Mass did conclude, everyone would scatter to their picnic baskets, already placed on the long outdoor tables in the stockade.

Time now for pictures, I thought. So I headed into the chapel, hoping to make some shots of the clergy at the altar before they divested themselves of their robes.

Hurry, hurry, hurry was upon me. Quickly I took a meter reading of the dark interior with its flickering candle lights. Then I tucked myself into a far and secluded corner to set the apertures of the three cameras still hanging around my neck — one for color, two for black and white but containing different types of film. It all involved somewhat more than my mechanically illiterate self could cope with perfectly and easily and in such a rush. With fumbling fingers I tried.

Finally setting all three cameras to meter specifications, I turned to make the picture of the century — the vested hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church beside the brilliantly glowing altar of our historic chapel.

Only the altar awaited.

In the few minutes that I had struggled to be technically adequate, the Metropolitan and fathers, still in their vestments, had moved outside to the porch and arranged themselves

shoulder to shoulder across the open doorway, facing the throng.

Inside the chapel, I stood alone, hopelessly marooned.

Nothing in my family tree, my education or experience, had ever prepared me for just how to exit a building, its only egress solidly blocked. Aghast, I tiptoed up behind and saw no sliver of daylight through which I might squeeze, pardon me, pardon me, pardon me. Out front, dozens of camera bugs were snapping pictures like mad. Some of their shots had to have included a very un-Russian woman photographer's face, wild-eyed with frustration, glaring over black robed shoulders. Irreverent and unthinkable that I should presume to shoot the rear view of such ecclesiastical eminence.

So, in dismay, I retreated and glanced around the empty chapel interior, trying to figure how to bail out.

A single way lay open to me: the big, open — and glassless — window on one side of the building. Actually this had once been a door, although never with a porch or stairs outside. Sill high off the floor, to correspond to the level of the wagon bed of a hearse, it was known as the Funeral Door.

I scurried to it and looked out. A drop of a dozen feet or so to the sloping hillside did not encourage gymnastics. Yet how else? How to hoist myself over the sill with nothing more than my own muscle power; how then to land squarely with all legs intact and with three dangling cameras undamaged and still operable?

Perhaps clean living and a lifelong tolerance of spinach, provided it was swimming in vinegar, boosted me over that edge and down onto earth. It took a much loftier power to keep those cameras safe. The crash landing, while not the most graceful maneuver of my life, did end my isolation.

As soon as I could reassemble spine and wits, I dashed around the corner of the old hand-hewn redwood structure and into the midst of the Russians gathered before it — just as they started dispersing. The Metropolitan and fathers, having posed obligingly for some minutes, were now descending the porch steps and walking slowly toward their well-earned repast and rest.

My cameras I simply fastened inside their respective cases and along with everyone else, made my way toward that which satisfied the stomach rather than the spirit.

Chapter Nineteen: Back to Big Basin Pandemonium in a Pup Tent

And then I came home at last, to Big Basin.

Moving in past longtime giant friends, I heard an unspoken welcome. A lump rose in my throat. My emotions began to run riot. Because I couldn't quickly sort them out, I slowed down and coasted — dreading to pull up at Headquarters feeling strange, not belonging anymore. I wanted nothing so much as to crawl off by myself so no one could look into my eyes and read the pain there.

But I didn't. I pulled up alongside the big log ranger station with a flourish, got out, and received the welcome of my life. Lloyd, Bud, Art, Lou, Bill — the whole crew around just then, undoubtedly sensing my confusion, went all out to include me in the fold. Forthwith, Lloyd hustled me up to the meadow, and Christine, who hugged me and announced that their spare room was mine for as long as I cared to stay.

Bless good friends like these! Needless to say, I was touched beyond adequate words of response for such understanding and generosity; and although Chris and Lloyd have remained two of my most cherished friends, that day they must have felt like giving me up as hopeless. Here I was, a free agent for the first time in my life, declining their kind invitation in favor of a low-slung war surplus pup tent down in the campground on a Friday when campsites were at a premium. Chris grinned, but Lloyd took a couple of turns up and down the living room, muttering over and over, "Incredible. Honest to gosh darn incredible. After all those years You feel all right, Petey?"

I felt fine. In the first flush of mummy bag, pup tent, coffee pot, and frying pan, the thought of retreating indoors was more than I cared to contemplate, even if I did love Chris and Lloyd to pieces. Not yet anyway. Just now I had a transition to make, and I had to make it my way — head on.

Lloyd made signs at his temples relative to my mental condition, and perhaps he was right. Anyway, we went back down to Park Center to see about a campsite.

"Don't forget," Chris called, laughing, "The room is here any time you change your mind."

Out in the north campground I discovered a Nebraska family about to vacate one of my favorite sites. All happiness, I moved right in. Up went the pup tent, in went the air mattress and mummy bag. Soon Bud appeared. He took one look, shoved his Stetson onto the back of his head, and grinned. One by one, as they could, others of the crew dropped by and gawked at the Old Timer making like a tenderfoot; finally Lloyd in the green pickup.

With the air of one tending a basket case, he got out and ambled all over the site, studying its longtime occupants -the giants, firs, and tanoaks -inspecting their surface roots, their trunks and limbs, craning his neck to study their crowns. My skin began to crawl. I knew well why he was doing all of that.

The verdict trailed a sigh of resignation. "Petey, everything *looks* pretty sound," he said. "Fir over there has a crack in it, and the heat of the past week has been pulling the sap of the redwoods up to their crowns, but I guess you can take a chance on it."

So I did. Despite the fact that most redwood country rangers vacation and retire in wide open spaces and often develop strong preferences for desert and coastline — as I was soon to do — there was just this sentimental journey I had to complete before turning toward the rest of my life.

Again some of the boys dropped by, told me to call if I needed anything, and shook their heads in disbelief. I even declined Bud's invitation to dinner at the Lodge, instead, asking him to share a tossed salad and grilled hamburgers before having to head for campfire. It was *his* show now — his and Austin Coggin's. Don had been transferred to Calaveras Big Trees State Park in the Sierra. How I missed him.

Bud didn't ask if I'd go with him to campfire. He knew how strange this homecoming had to be for me and was wise enough to let me work it out in my own good time. After he had walked down the road, I settled back against a fallen giant to spend my first evening in Big Basin as one of the campers. I needed to be alone. At that moment I somehow had to let go and let God.

Bud had scarcely disappeared from view when a young man walked into my camp and offered his hand.

"I'm Austin Coggin," he said, a happy smile lighting his face. I liked him instantly. Any resentment I might have built

up in the lower centers of my consciousness vanished. Just as if we had known each other all our lives, we sat and talked until we could hear the big fire crackling in the distance, and he had to leave — to do *my* job. By then, his good humor and friendliness had crumbled my unworthy defenses.

During our hour or so together, and without the slightest reference to my reason for being there, he related many incidents about how he'd met various situations in his life. All were very funny. But the story of his aged grandmother really undid me for the evening — and from then on out.

It seems she was in her late eighties, bedridden, and in great pain from her back.

"We tried to comfort her," Austin said earnestly, "but there didn't seem to be much either we or the doctor could do except simply let her rest as quietly as possible. She, herself, felt the ailment to be terminal and asked, as a last request, that all the family come to her bedside. She had things she wanted to say before leaving this world, and bequests to make from her treasures. So we did a lot of telephoning that afternoon. My uncles and aunts and cousins came from everywhere. Several flew out from Virginia and Illinois. The rest we rounded up from all over California and Arizona. You know, we loved her. We didn't want to deny her anything in her last days."

I nodded. Austin went on. "Within little more than twenty-four hours, the entire relationship had filled our house to wait for the end."

I nodded again.

"Well, after the last ones had arrived we all gathered around Grandma's bed. It was hard to see her dear face wince with pain every little while when that back pain struck. But she tried to be brave and did seem to be at peace. Taking a deep breath, then speaking fondly to each of us, she told us how she wanted her last rites."

I overflowed with sympathy. Austin went on: "Then Grandma stirred a bit and another spasm of pain crossed her face. It got to all of us, I'll tell you. She was so fragile. I thought she was going, so I moved in, determined to make her last moment as comfortable as possible. Nice and easy I slipped both hands under her back, thinking maybe to try and soothe someway." With both palms up, he demonstrated.

I almost held my breath. A faint smile flickered across Austin's lips. He hesitated a few seconds.

"Well, under there my fingers touched something besides Grandma's skin. Something hard. I took hold and drew it out. And there in my hand were Grandma's dentures."

Surprise gripped me. Austin straightened, his face illumined as if by floodlights. He rushed on. Exuberant words poured out.

"Well — Grandma gasped clear from her heels, I think. 'Oh, that's where they went!' she piped. 'I guess I forgot where I put them the other night! Then she took the dentures out of my hand and put them in her mouth — and lived ten years more.'"

We both blew. Austin and I laughed until the forest rang. Squash! into a heap of wet noodles went all my nerves and tied-up insides. When at last we finally regained what survived of our so-called composure, Austin and I were totally simpatico. To top it all off, he hugged me and said in that offhand way I grew to know and enjoy, "I suppose sometimes in life we all get bitten by our own teeth. But then, someone or something nice always comes along and back in they go, where they belong."

With a toss of his hand and a happy smile on his face, he went swinging down the road — to *his* job.

I didn't go to Park Center that evening but remained where I was, thinking over what he had said, tranquil at last. I didn't even hear the bubbly chatter and singing as families camping out my way strolled back to their tents much later that evening. I had climbed wearily into my mummy bag, after having pulled tight the tent's drawstring, so no mouse could wander in.

That mummy bag, however, was beginning to annoy me. My feet were too cramped within its form-fitting confines, and the only way I could lie comfortably inside was to fold my arms across my chest; then, maneuvering two fingers, pull the zipper those last inches to the chin. I did have freedom of mouth and eyelids, but by morning my hair was always pancaked and radiating to all points of the compass. As nearly as I could see, the only difference between a straightjacket and a mummy bag lay in whether it encased something crazy or

something dead. Before morning I came close to qualifying for both.

With the first gray light of dawn, I was suddenly and violently jackknifed into action. The dreaded crrrrraaaaack and r-i-i-ip of long and vivid memory under the redwoods jerked me bolt upright, all senses alert and radared full circle for the rest of the shattering that was sure to come. Or had it been a bad dream?

No dream, that. Less than a minute later came a longer and deeper rip as the parting of wood fiber ranged farther down some huge bole. My thoughts flew around Park Center. *Sure!* That burned-out old redwood way over there by the Picnic Area — it could reach this far. I had known it would happen someday. I pictured five hundred tons of giant already on its way to the ground and headed for me.

Armless and legless, I lurched forward. Like a freshly hooked fish I flopped all over the pup tent, working frantically to uncross my arms, to stretch a couple of fingers enough to grasp that zip. Peering cross-eyed down my nose at it, caught there on my upper lip, I struggled to free myself and get the heck out of there. First the top of the tent heaved with my thrashings, then the sides strained this way and that until the poor thing bulged from every angle, coming alive, popping its stakes, contorting as if in mortal agony. Finally managing to squirm out of the mummy bag and shed it like a reptile its skin, I dove for the tent drawstring. Just as dying timber tore away from the mother stem, the pup tent gave birth to a woman.

No one saw me spill out of that round hole and into the great outdoors, although the whole north campground was fast collecting. The crash over, the danger past, the forest quiet once more, everyone safe and agape with wonder at the huge redwood limb now lying creekside nearby, we began to notice one another. Loud was the happy reunion then, for many of the onlookers were much-loved campers of other years in Big Basin. An old-time friend of us all, in casting one of its mighty arms, had brought us together. Later, I sat down at my picnic table and added a few grateful words to my gradually filling notebook.

Bacon, eggs, and coffee over with, pup tent reinstated to its former elegance, I decided to go to Santa Cruz that morning

after mail time, deposit the mummy bag in the city dump, and buy a new sleeping bag, one from which escape would not be like trying to escape one's own skin.

I never made it.

While walking toward Park Center and the Post Office, I got sidetracked. A black Labrador came trotting along the road just ahead. At every campsite he made himself at home, piddling generously and impartially on huckleberry bush, campsite post, and table leg. Because he wore a brightly studded collar, I knew he had to be somebody's darling. But a leash?

The former ranger in me reacted at once; far more strongly, however, my natural concern for an animal with a problem. Nothing in me cried out, "Weaver — this isn't your business now, remember?" The doggie needed to be protected until claimed. At how many dozen campfires had I announced that we held one for its owner!

"Hiya, chum," I greeted when he veered toward me.

Chum could have been his name, for with no hesitation he hurried to my side. All the way to Headquarters he was my willing buddy, even though I stopped a few times as I recognized familiar faces or was hailed, which of course involved time and visiting.

At Park Center people milled around in the same way they always had, ogling the splendid Compass Group, taking pictures of the Auto Tree, feeding and petting the deer who gathered expectantly, passing in and out of grocery store and souvenir shop. Headquarters porch was hosting its share, too. Some of the visitors were peeking into the Rec Hall or studying the Daily Hike Schedule; others had lined up several deep at the Information-Registration window. We joined them. After all, I was one of the Public now. I had to fight a tightening in my middle.

Suddenly a voice from the Inner Sanctum boomed, "What for the love of Mike are you doing out there, Petey? You know where the door is."

I knew. Around the side of the building.

The tightness in my middle relaxed. Taking my canine friend gently by the collar, I led him off the porch and around the side. We had almost reached that door when a shrieked "AHA!" rent the air.

The strange woman's eyes were peeled back by the time she hurtled through the crowd, and all breasts flying, charged into my presence.

Everything on the porch, inside Headquarters, and as far away as the Crater, froze. Before so much fury I stood, rooted to the spot. About that moment the side door opened, and just in time to witness trouble incarnate stood Lloyd and Art.

The woman snatched the poor Lab away in one fierce jerk and tore into me. "I *knew* someone had stolen Rocky, but somehow I never would have expected that of a *woman*. The idea! You brazen thief — and in broad daylight! We'll just call the law in on this!"

I think my face stopped dead.

I opened my mouth to explain, then became painfully aware that I was out of uniform and had no right, actually, to be taking the doggie in. And no help came from inside that open door. My confused stammers brought only lopsided smiles from there. I knew those foxy smiles! They had always led to dastardly practical jokes. I could sniff one just then being born.

Lloyd stepped outside and with a straight face suggested to the woman that sometimes these things happened. His manner — mild, conciliatory, and understanding — suggested that shouldn't we be generous toward those, who purely through a sense of love for animals, sometimes erred. Gently lowering the Polite Powers, he sympathized with her anxieties and rejoiced with her that her precious Rocky had been sprung from sinister influences and was safe at last in her loving hands. Doubtless, though, after such an unpleasant experience, it would be advisable to follow the state park regulations and leash her pet, lest this regrettable thing occur again.

Well — all right, but would he be sure to investigate the incident thoroughly and make a complete report?

Indeed he would. She could depend upon it.

Lloyd then pinioned me with his most administrative stare and said as pointedly as if I were some invading criminal element, "Madam, will you kindly step into my office, please?"

You bet your life I would! With eyes blazing, I stomped into the Inner Sanctum. Scarcely had the door closed behind

me than the room erupted. Surrounded as I was with boisterous good humor, what could my fires do but cool. Soon I was laughing as hard as the rest.

Then presently there came what I had always termed “a pregnant silence.” From across the desk, tipped back in his swivel chair, Lloyd was cocking an eyebrow at me. I sensed a milestone looming ahead, and I was right. The Chief Ranger spoke softly and gently. “Wouldn’t you like to go up to the house for a while now, Petey?” he asked. Then after a pause, “Like for the rest of the summer?”

Come to think of it, I would.

Before that day I had never really known how tranquil the meadow; how free of supercharged humanity and overhanging limbs the size of full-grown pines; how easy it was to think and write. Soon all adjustments smoothed, all tensions vanished, and my onward vision became so optimistic that I half expected to see coons putting lids back on garbage cans. Perhaps it might just be a good idea to make the transition from Park Woman to Taxpayer somewhat more gradually.

And so it was.

Photos

Photographs provided by Petey Weaver for *Me and the Mother Tree*.



Petey, at her first visit to Big Basin Redwoods, in 1929.



Petey, about 1940, wearing the first official state park uniform.



Petey, about 1950.



Petey with Frosty the Raccoon, 1946.



Petey uniform portrait.



Petey Weaver stands out in this picture of Big Basin rangers in 1945. L-R are Petey, Aralan Sholes, Charles Fakler, Melville Whittaker, Roy Cushing, Bill Weatherbee, Floyd Saddlemire, Arthur Parvin, Darrell Knoefler and Louks Donaldson.



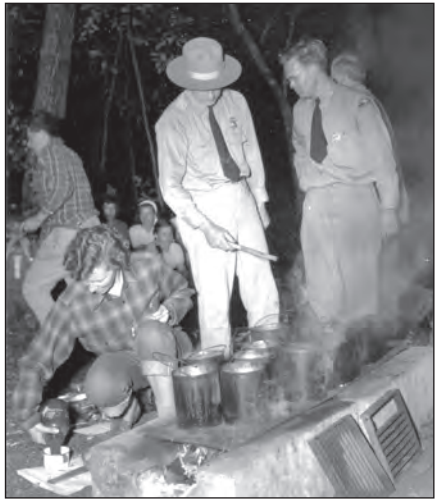
Len Penhale produced beautiful natural history displays at Big Basin.



Don Meadows, Petey Weaver and Bud Reddick at Big Basin 1947.



Big Basin ranger station.



Petey (kneeling), Don Meadows and Len Penhale at a nighttime coffee hike.



Entrance arch at Big Basin.



Deputy Park Warden Charlie Lewis calling in the deer to feed at Big Basin.



Petey at Big Basin.



Petey leads a campfire program at Big Basin. Ranger Arlan Sholes is on the stage working the sound system.



Petey transferred to Richardson Grove in 1938.



Petey wrote that a hysterical visitor mistook the Richardson Grove sign as a "Richardson Grave" stone.



Bill Kenyon was Chief Ranger at Richardson Grove.



Petey leading a campfire program at Richardson Grove.



Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park sign in 1945.



Right: Assistant Ranger Lloyd Lively had charge of two tame bears at Big Sur during Petey's time there.



Big Sur Ranger staff in late 1940s.



Petey at the entrance station



Part of Petey's 1946 drawing of the Big Sur area.



Petey reported that everyone at Big Basin “came running to park headquarters” as the siren sounded the end of WWII in 1945.



Naturalist Bud Reddick and Petey at Big Basin at the Mother Tree.



Petey at the Father Tree.



Seacliff Beach State Park in the 1940s, about the time Petey worked at the park.



Raccoon friends of Petey.



As Frosty grew up, he started constantly flushing toilets.



Petey wrote of Frosty, "I took him to campfires when I made my raccoon talks. He sat on my shoulder."



In 1950, Petey left state parks with her "DEP. RANGER" badge number 105.

Book Partners

Publishing of *Me and the Mother Tree* was made possible by the support of two organizations, the California State Park Rangers Association (CSPRA) and the California State Parks Anniversary Committee (CSPAC), a private non-profit group.



The **California State Parks Rangers Association** is an organization of State Park professionals dedicated to advancement of the highest principles of public service, established to port and preserve California State Parks for present and future generations. For over 50 Years, CSPRA has been the professional organization that truly cares about protecting and preserving the values of California's State Park System. CSPRA holds training and regular membership meetings throughout California. CSPRA is the organization for every State Park Professional.

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The **California State Parks Anniversary Committee** (CSPAC) is a private non-profit that started life as the 125th Ranger Anniversary Committee in 1990. The Committee was formed



to organize, promote, and celebrate the 125th anniversary of the appointment in 1866 of the first state park ranger Galen Clark. After the 125th Ranger Anniversary, CSPAC sponsored and promoted the 150th State of California Anniversary in 2000, the Lifeguard 50th Anniversary in 2000, the Off-Highway Recreation 35th Anniversary in 2006, and the K-9 Program Anniversary in 2009. In 2010, the 125th Anniversary Committee became the California State Parks Anniversary Committee. CSPAC sponsored the Firearms Program 40th Anniversary in 2011 and was one of the primary promoters and sponsors of both the 2014 California State Parks 150th Anniversary in 2014 and the Ranger 150th Anniversary in 2016.

www.parkanniversary.org

Me and the Mother Tree

By Harriett E. "Petey" Weaver

Petey Weaver is considered the first woman park ranger in California State Parks. In *Me and the Mother Tree*, she recounts in vivid prose her 20 years working at what was the beginning of the California State Park System. She brings to life the early parks, some of the inimitable park visitors, and the rangers and other park personnel who operated, protected, served, and educated the public.

During her park career, from 1929 to 1950, Petey served in four parks; Big Basin, Richardson Grove, Pfeiffer Big Sur, and Seacliff State Beach.



Harriett "Petey" Weaver

"A charming memoir by California's first women park ranger, who served in the earliest days of California State Parks." Rodi Lee, historian and author.

"I love this book. Petey Weaver was an exceptional writer. For those who didn't live through the Depression and World War II, when many females working in our country were undervalued, this book serves as a vital time machine." Jennifer Reeves, filmmaker.



Ranger 150th
Anniversary
Project



Petey Weaver and the rest of the ranger crew at Big Basin Redwoods in 1945.

