

Rubber Airplanes @ a Bar

One winter evening after I had been to Warner's Market to buy something and was headed home, I saw three black model airplanes. They sat on the doorstep into one of the bars next to Warners. I naturally coveted them on sight. They were gorgeous black models made of a hard rubber, imprinted with details of the doors, canopy and so on. One of them was a "Black Widow", the P-61, which I loved. I think I loved the name for a plane as much as I loved the plane. A stark, threatening name. I knew that black widows were black and that the female killed and ate the male. This was a unique plane for another reason: it was one of the first airplanes to be outfitted with the new technology called "radar". That's what really made it dangerous.



I stood there in a stupor wondering who owned them. Why would someone leave them there? They certainly weren't owned by a man were they? Why would a man go into a bar and lay these wonderful models on the sidewalk? Where "someone" might take them. "Someone" sounded like a good role to play in this act I thought. I looked around surreptitiously to make sure no one was watching me. They weren't. No one on the sidewalk nearby. I looked at the models and considered their weight, decided I needed to pick one up to find out. I picked the Black Widow up. What a beautiful plane with its double vertical stabilizers, and long sleek elements.

The other two planes were about the same weight and I discovered accidentally that they fit into my hands at the same time. I could carry the three easily. Meantime, I was working out the self-deceptions that we all do to ourselves. Like why it was OK for me to sort of borrow them for a while, like why it was stupid to leave them lying there that way, like their stupidity meant it was their own fault if "someone" took them and so on. Maybe someone even laid them there just so that a little kid could have them, one just like me for example. In

the end I persuaded myself that I actually had a right to take these three black models home with me, because they obviously had been either abandoned and lost which was the same thing and the person who lost them knew he'd never find them. Besides, if I didn't take them, someone else would and didn't I need them more? Didn't I deserve them more?

When I took them home and tried my best to sell mom on the idea that "they were just laying there, no one wanted them, so I can have them - can't I? Please please?" And her implacable reply was "Take them back and put them where you found them." I argued with her for a bit because I could tell by her face that she wasn't really into this fight - yet. You could tell that. It meant she was worrying about something else so was distracted and not really interested in matching swords with you. At rare times like that, I got braver than usual and dared argue more than usual - while I carefully watched her face to see if she was returning to the room. It happened. She came back in a flash. "Get them out of here and put them back or I'll punish you." I got it. So I put my coat back on in the dark and walked back to the bar. It was completely dark by now but everything was lighted so I found the bar without difficulty. I went up to the entry way and laid the three models down. Carefully, in a row, and turned and walked back home.

Weekly Radio Shows

In Vernal we were allowed to listen to certain shows on the radio, like the Lone Ranger. Since there was no T.V. we didn't think there was anything better. Radio was a medium that actually engaged your imagination so it was as much fun I think as watching TV that spells everything out. In Alaska we continued to listen to radio shows with mom's approval. That was always required. She had to say we could, and if she was in a foul mood, we didn't get to. This had a tendency, when we remembered, of making us a bit more careful of what we did on the evenings when there were shows we wanted to listen to.

Several of the shows were about detectives and police, like "Johnny Dollar". Radio shows, like TV shows, were sponsored by companies who put their lure out before the show started and somewhere in the middle. They ran half an hour or a full hour. Johnny dollar was exciting because it had the flavor of a Humphry Bogart movie except there was no picture. Johnny talked tough and risked his life to help beautiful women and always succeeded in catching the bad guys, narrowly escaping being killed. It came on during the week so we had to be extra careful to listen on a school night.

"Our Miss Brooks" was another favorite. It was on Sunday evening, which was basically another school night, so we had to be careful that evening. She was a school teacher who got into all sorts of jams with her students, the principal, a boy friend and other students. She had a great voice and sounded like she would be a fun teacher. I suppose I missed much of her humor that was probably aimed at adults but I got enough to think it was a funny show. I never saw what she looked like until I found this photo.



Figure 4 Amos and Andy
<http://www.tvparty.com/myskingf.html>



Figure 2 Johnny Dollar
http://www.thrillingdetective.com/dollar_johnny.html



Figure 3 Our Miss Brooks
<http://www.mbcnet.org/archives/etv/O/htmlO/ourmissbroo/ourmissbroo.htm>

"Amos and Andy" came on right after "our Miss Brooks" and was as funny. In this case there were two black men who talked in an odd way but they were understandable. They were always getting into fixes where one had to get help to bail the other out with humorous incidents along the way. I think there was a character

called "Kingfisher" who added flavor

"Jack Benny" was also on Sunday night and was a show I loved. His staff included an Irish Tenor named Dennis, a black butler named Chester and a lovely woman whose name I don't remember. Jack was a violin player, a terrible one and had a dry sense of humor. His hallmark was being cheap. So cheap that he wouldn't tip waiters, wouldn't pay to have his shoes shined and so on. Chester had good horse sense so tried to save Jack from himself and sometime succeeded. Dennis was a foil to make the story go as was the woman. Jack's other trait that is perhaps more famous than his cheapness was the fact that he wouldn't ever admit his age. His joke was that he was 39 years old - again. This is where that particular joke became famous.

"The Shadow" was another mystery show that captured our imaginations and gave us chills. It started off with the memorable words, spoken slowly and carefully:

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?... The Shadow knows!"

Then things developed but that phrase set the tone for murders, robberies, and general mayhem that the Shadow sorted out without the police understanding his contribution. The website for this photos summarized it thusly:

One of radio's most memorable dramas, The Shadow chronicled the adventures of Lamont Cranston and his companion Margo Lane. As The Shadow, Cranston used a "hypnotic power to cloud men's minds so that they cannot see him." This power was routinely used to battle crime lords, mad scientists, psychopaths

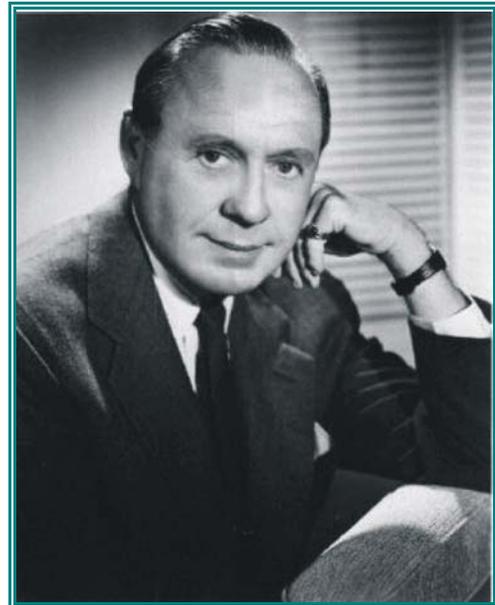


Figure 5 Jack Benny
<http://www.jackbenny.org/>

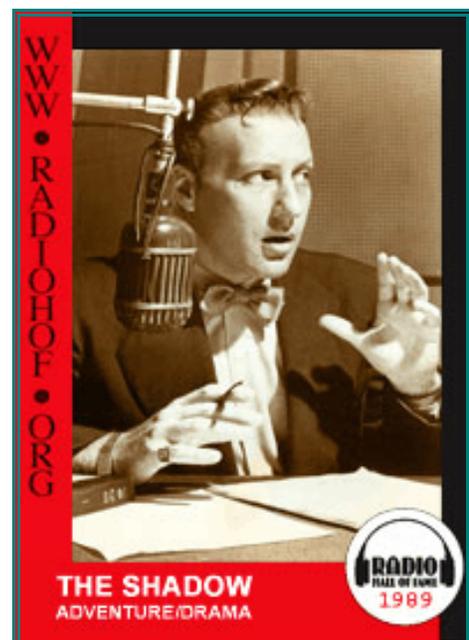


Figure 6
<http://www.radiohof.org/adventuredrama/shadow.html>

and even werewolves, all of whom learned from The Shadow that "the weed of crime bears bitter fruit...crime does not pay!"

Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy were a pair, a human who was a ventriloquist with a back-talking dummy. Comedy was the staple of the show that was enormously popular. Mortimer Snerd was one of the foils that allowed Bergen and McCarthy to play off each other. The webside says, "The Edgar Bergen/Charlie McCarthy Show became one of radio's highest-rated programs, a distinction it enjoyed until it left the air in 1956."

I think it was the concept of ventriloquism that really attracted me. One person speaking in such a way that it appeared another was talking seemed like black magic, even when I knew that was happening.

"Gangbusters" was obviously one of the cop and robbers shows. It featured the same set of officers in a big city like New York. Gangsters and small crooks participated to keep the show going. Detectives, cop cars with sirens, loud bangs, a few shrieks constituted the background for the tough talk that the characters all used. This comic book, Issue No. 14 was created to capitalize on the radio show appeal and success.

When we were allowed to listen to these shows, we were usually in bed and it was only if we were good. Mom would leave the bedroom door open so that we could listen, tucked in tight, lying on our backs. That was a treat, to lie in bed after dinner, warm and comfortable, eyes closed listening to the stories, sound effects and the canned laughter. It was as exciting as watching TV in my mind. Because we could think whatever we wanted to think, to think whatever came to mind when we heard the voices and the sounds.

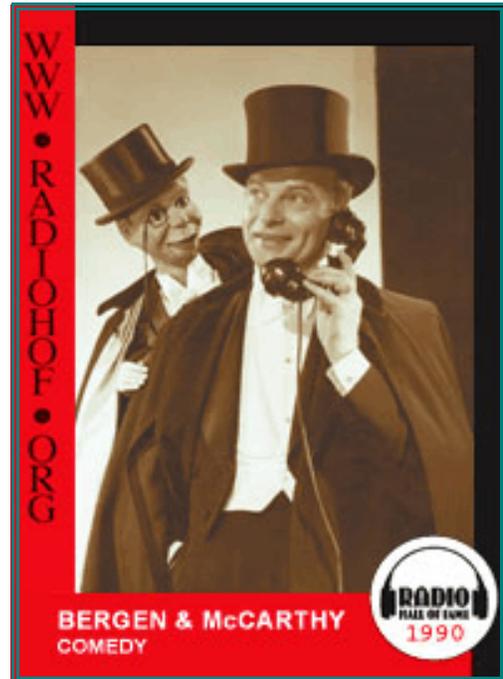


Figure 7

<http://www.radiohof.org/comedy/edgarbergen.html>

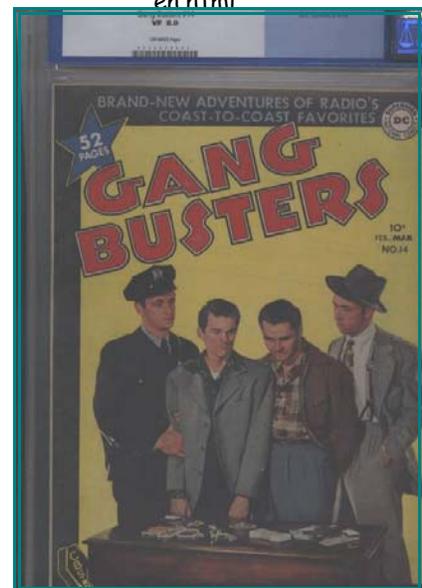


Figure 8

<http://www.socalcomics.com/gangbusters14.jpg>

The sound effects were as amazing as the stories. I didn't understand how it was possible to make sounds that were so realistic while standing inside of a studio. In those days sound-samplers weren't even dreamed of and tape recorders were primitive and mixing equipment didn't exist. So if you wanted the right sound, the right loudness at the right time in the story, it had to be manufactured in the studio. Some things, like breaking glass, were easy because all you had to do was break an appropriate size of glass during the dialogue. Other sounds were more difficult. How can you reproduce the sound of walking on dry hard snow? Easy, it turns out. Take an unopened box of corn starch and squeeze it in time to steps.

Some of the shows were specials, one-time one-hour shows on an interesting topic. The one that I remember clearest was the most frightening of them all. It was a show about an expedition in the Himalayas searching for "The Abominable Snowman." We lived in abominable snow, abominable snow and cold, with whistling mean winds and darkness. This creature was too believable. We were frightened by it after listening, whenever we were out alone at night in the snow. The sounds of whistling wind, the cries of lost frozen men, the shrieks of terror as the creature found and devoured them were too much for us because the sounds had a verisimilitude that harmonized with the world we lived each day. We had nightmares from that show for months and when they were particularly bad, we would get out of bed and go get in bed with mom if dad was working night shift. Oddly enough, if he actually was home, we were safe, even if we had bad dreams and didn't need to get in their bed.

Seward PD & Wrestling Team

Seward had few activities for young people which meant that kids had great opportunities to experiment and find ways to get in trouble. That seems to be the natural propensity of us when we are kids, find the limits by testing them. There were so few people in Seward that local businesses were limited to basic services and goods. The bowling alley and the theatre were about the extent of the commercial entertainment that kids could take advantage of, except that the bowling alley served beer so that limited who could go there. There was no skating rink, no museum, no stage groups, no dance groups, no parks, no gyms, nothing for kids.

The police department was the group that understood best that there was a

real need for some kind of entertainment. They started a wrestling program for kids from about 8 to the late teen years. At the time it didn't occur to me that the police were doing this because they saw the trouble that kids got into when they didn't have something to do, but looking back it's obvious that they did this because juvenile delinquency was probably higher than they liked it to be. This was a way to reduce the statistics.

The program was held in the USO building which sat just north of the fire hall. It was left over from the war and was a recreation hall for soldiers. It was set up like a basket ball court with bleachers along the walls. There were various smaller rooms that were used for wrestling practice.

Mom and dad signed us up for the program -worried about us turning into juvenile delinquents apparently- and sent us over at

the appropriate time. I don't think we were given any say in the deal. Or, if we were given as "say", it was simply an opportunity for us to endorse a previously made decision with a 'yeah' like in communist countries. We were destined to go so go we did.

We went over and stood in line with other kids, most of whom were familiar to us waiting to get 'signed up'. That was a slow process but the policemen were polite and moved things along. After we had finished signing up, we were told to sit down and to listen while they told us the rules. I don't remember what the rules were but I expect they were standard for any collection of rambunctious kids and included the requirement that we wear some kind of gym clothes. After that night was finished, we were sent home which was usually late for us kids who normally had to be in bed at 8pm. Mom couldn't stand us longer.

The next week at the same time we were sent over to the USO after dinner and this time I was more nervous because "practice" was going to start. I had never been involved in any kind of organized sport and had never wrestled. Indeed, I had never even heard that there were 'rules' for wrestling, that there were "holds", that there were matches. I understood wrestling to be the fun that kids got involved in when they were rough-housing, which usually led to a bloody nose,



Second USO building (later Seward CMA Center)

some yelling and crying. Here we were told a whole bunch of stuff I had never heard about, which I didn't understand, and therefore promptly forgot.

After the coach -that's what the guy was called, "coach"- we stood around the ring where the hands-on training was done. Kids were eyeballed by the coach and lined up by size. Then the coach matched us up into teams and put in line for our chance to practice. We watched other kids and I dreaded having to do the thing. It was an unpleasant thought that I had to get onto the mat with this other kid who I didn't really know and didn't like and wrestle him. What a stupid thing to do, but I knew that this was "for my good", that my parents "loved me" and so on. That meant if I tried to skip the practice and went home, I would be in real trouble. That's how much they loved me.

When it came my turn, I had a dry mouth and stepped into the ring with this kid. Neither one of us understood what we were to do even though we had watched what was being done. We understood the idea that one guy knelt on his hands and knees and the other guy knelt by him, put one arm on the bottom man's left arm and put his right hand on his shoulder or something. After the coach-referee was satisfied that we were properly position, he said "Go!" at which time we each were supposed to try to push the other kid down on the mat. That's what wrestling was to me. As we pushed and pulled and grunted, the coach was yelling to do this and do that, try this hold, don't do that, be careful and so on. As if I had a clue what he was saying, but I wasn't going to admit I didn't understand. I just proved it.

After the coach declared the other kid a winner, we had to start over but this time we changed positions. We wrestled wildly for a while with the same result. I didn't have a clue what I was doing and never did understand about the holds. In principle I could sort of grasp that a half nelson was such and such a configuration of arms and bodies, but when I was actually wrestling, an order to put a half nelson on the kid might as well have been an order in Chinese to launch a missile. I had no idea how to translate such an order into action.

It was so foreign to me to be physically fighting -that's what it felt like to me- that I was simultaneously afraid at a deep level that I was doing something wrong, and I was just plain afraid. I imagine my parents actually intended good for me out of this exercise but I disliked it and only went because I was told I had to do it. Nothing was learned. Besides, I wasn't a kid that was going to get into trouble. Are you kidding? The punishment from my folks would have been 10 times worse than anything the police and a judge would have done to me!

Fizz Pops, Canned Pop & Pop Tops

We drank soda pop from as far back as I can remember, considering it a treat because it was rare. Grandma would give us some when she had the little store, and mom would buy a bottle now and then in Vernal but it was the exception.

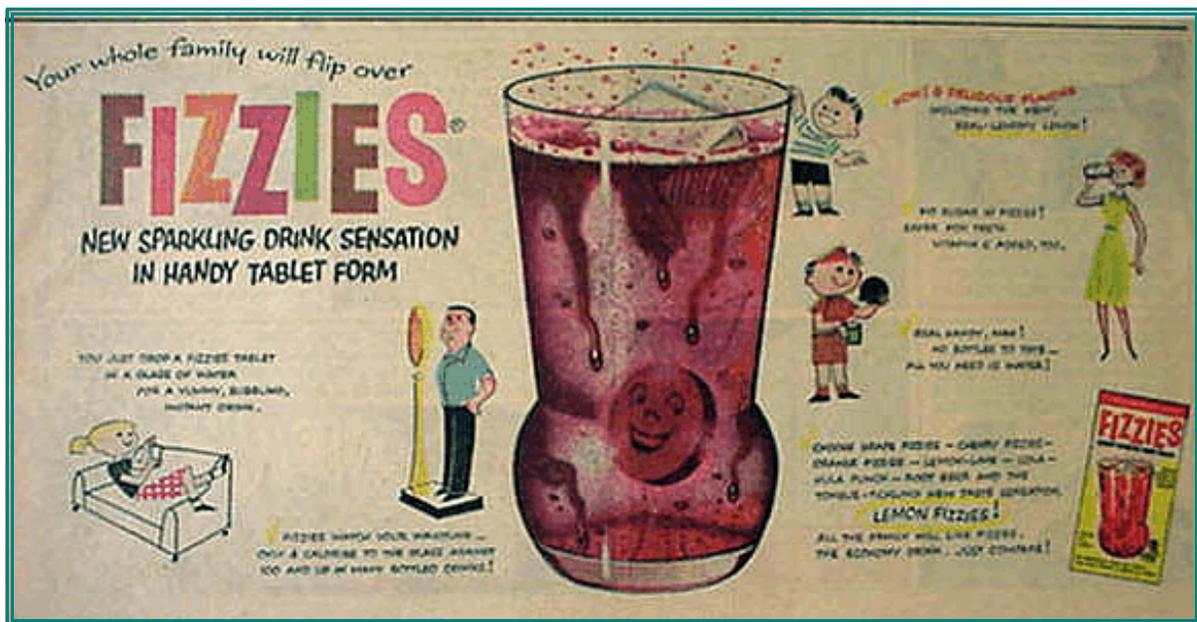


Figure 10

In the late 1940- and early 1950's there was a sensation amongst kids. I don't know what adults thought about the stuff. These things, Fizzies, were basically alka-seltzer with flavoring added. No kidding. They came in a flat package with a foil insert that contained 6 tablets the size of alka-seltzer. You peeled one out and dropped it into a glass of water and watched. It fizzed and bubbled just like alka-seltzer but was different because they were colored and had flavors. I liked them and didn't mind the fact that they did taste like alka-seltzer. Indeed, the fact that I like alka-seltzer today may well have something to do with this product.

They were great things to take on hiking trips because we carried canteens anyway so with these tablets we had pop without the added bulk and weight of a heavy bottle. The craze didn't last too long which was probably merciful. Most people probably hated them, as did most kids, but they were cool for a while.

Pop itself underwent a profound transformation at about the same time. It was taken out of glass bottles, the only container up to that point, and marketed in tin cans. Literally, tin cans, not the fancy 'new' aluminum cans you kids grew up with. These tin cans were considerably heavier and some of them were poorly lined in which case the acid in the pop interacted with the metal and created a peculiar flavor. But the durability of the tin compared to the glass made these cans appealing.

Cone Top Pop

A long toward the end of our time in Seward, we went over to Anchor River to fish for king salmon. We were in the brown and cream 1953 Chevy and stopped for gas along the way at a little store that sold everything a person might want - which actually wasn't too much in those days in that place because people knew not to expect too much. We got out of the car and wandered inside the store to see what we just had to have.

We found it right away: cone top pop cans. I found this particular image on the internet with the following quote:

"Nesbitt's Fruit Products Company with headquarters in Los Angeles, CA made their canning debut with an orange drink in a 12 ounce cone top can. It appears that they hedged their bets on the acceptance of the new container by introducing it in the Alaska market area, as the only known examples have been found there."

This can is identified as a 1951 can and was advertized at \$285.00. It cost a dime. It was the shape of the cans that made them appealing and naturally, us kids hassled our folks to get one. You never knew when you'd wear them down and this time we did, and we even persuaded them to buy each of us one with the admonition that we "better finish it." We didn't. We couldn't. It was too big and I suspect now, looking back, that mom and dad probably knew we wouldn't. Thank you.

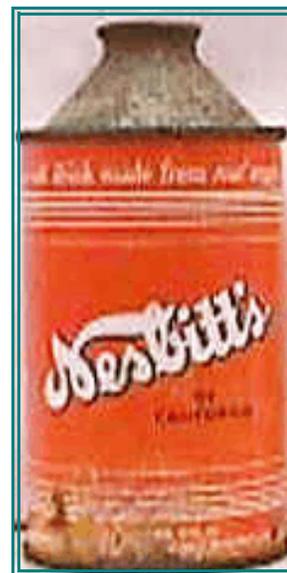


Figure 11

<http://gono.com/v-tours/sodacone/scone30nesbitts.htm>

It was a neat thing to have these cans, partly because they were safer to drink out of in a moving car that bounced over the rough roads. Perhaps that's why they bought it for us.

Pop tops didn't come along while we were in Seward I don't think. They doubtless existed in the lower 40 but I don't remember them in Seward. They were so novel that I think I would have remembered them.

Dances

"Junior Swingers" was a marvelous creation of mom and dad for us pubescent teens. I've talked about it elsewhere but wanted to throw in a list of some of the dances that they taught us because it amazes me today, based on the experience you kids had with your own teenagehood. I have to say in retrospect, without any criticism of you because you were "victims" of your community, that your experience with dance was pretty tepid. Not a big deal in the final analysis but take a look here at the variety of dances that I was taught. Pretty astonishing. And this was by my own personal mom and dad. That's perhaps even more astonishing. I complain and moan about how they were harsh on me and they were, but _____ (insert a few choice expletives here) they were astonishingly wonderful. Your own mom and dad did nothing of the kind, did they, didn't teach you a single dance - other than the polka that I danced around the front room with the girls, Nancy intentionally missing the beat just to get yelled at. Anyway, this list is an incomplete listing of the dances they taught us.

The Bunny hop was a very popular dance that most kids could dance. It was a line dance where you stood in a row, holding the waist of the person in front of you, kicking your feet alternately -usually- out to one side and ending the pattern by putting your legs together jumping forward and backward, at which point someone jumped in the wrong direction creating havoc and laughs. The leader got to pick the direction the line went and always snaked it around in loops that ran back along the end of the line.

"Put your Little Foot" was a pair dance that required a particular 'hold'. The boy and girl stood side by side and held arms and hands sideways. The steps were a sort of brush with your right foot, a step and brush and so on in time with the music, "Put your little foot, put your little foot, put your little foot right there..." The excitement was both physical and emotional, standing together dancing,

enjoying each other's company.

The "polka" was the most physical dance of all. You stood face to face, the girl's hands on the boy's shoulders and his hands on her waist. The steps are simple, one-two-three-hop, jumping back and forth from foot to foot. That is the dance. However, the music is frantic and you try to keep time while your bouncing up and down vigorously, usually moving the girl backwards in swirls and loops, the faster the better. Collisions with other couples happened with enormous amount of laughing, mock-accusing, and yelling. By the end of the dance, you were breathing hard, later in the night actually sweating. It was an athletic dance that you would have been hard-pressed to continue for long.

The "Schottische" -of which there are many flavors- was from Scandinavia I believe. The version we learned was another vigorous folk dance that wasn't quite as strenuous as a polka, but demanding nonetheless. These dances lasted the length of a 78 RPM record, the source of our music - the records are still at 2821 N and I need to snag them for posterity I suppose. By the end, we were breathing hard from the exertion.

"Waltzes" were a staple and totally different from the preceding dances that are so physical. Waltzes in 3/4 time are stately slow dances with a one-two-three pattern, the couple standing in a classic ballroom position, the boy's left hand and girl's right hand joined and extended upward to the side, the girl's left hand on the boy's shoulder and his right hand holding the small of her back. The steps started with the boy moving forward with his left foot -the standard ballroom start- and the girl stepping backward with her right. These were sort of intimate dances even though bear hugs and body-clutching wasn't tolerated and you had a few minutes to talk quietly while you moved slowly in swirls around the floor. Collisions were not part of this dance. It was a dance you wanted to share with someone special.

The "Foxtrot" was a faster dance an 2/2, 2/4 time. The dance position was the classic ballroom position but the music was faster than a waltz, though nothing as physical as a polka.

We experimented with the "Rhumba" but it was too difficult for us. I think actually that mom didn't really know it well enough to teach so it got scrapped. Us kids appreciated that because it was a lot of fancy foot work without much activity overall and we were into big time bouncing and jumping and moving fast.

Same with the "Tango". I actually disliked the tango and was glad it was only a passing experiment. Too slow, too complex. Just let me dance!

Individual song titles stick out in memory, like "Dark Town Strutters Ball" and the "Tennessee Waltz". The atmosphere created by the words and music were haunting experiences. Young teens are not used to that sort of thing, just becoming aware of themselves and their own emotions. That's how it was for me. I was startled I suppose at what was happening inside of my mind and in terms of the awareness I had of social things, of girls, of the fact that I had a mind and that I began to see things that had always been there but which had passed me by. It's interesting to see that the decision by mom and dad to create this dance group to keep us off the streets and out of trouble had an impact that went far beyond those practical concerns. They gave me gifts without intending to.

Library & Mythology

I hung out at the public library many evenings, particularly in the winter when it was dark all the time after 2:00 p.m.. Today I see that this tiny library which probably possessed no more books than I have today, was a center for some of the most formative experiences in my entire life. It was a small quiet place, located down a flight of stairs right at the center -don't put too much meaning on that word- of Seward. And the librarian, my neighbor Elsie Whitmore, was nice to me. That's it. So I felt a sense of liberty, of being granted the freedom to browse all books and a freedom to talk to her, to ask quiet questions that she quietly answered. I see that she offered me a fertile environment in which my burgeoning interest in intellectual things could flower safely. Not a trivial matter in a frontier town like Seward where a block away a man was arrested one night for running from a bar in his red underwear shooting his pistol in the air, harming no one but nonetheless violating several public statutes about various things.

Her kindness extended to the astonishing gift of a copy of the monthly news magazine sent to her by the Strategic Air Command. She received perhaps a dozen copies and she started giving me a copy of the new issue. That was like being given the key to the Library of Congress, to be admitted to her sphere of importance and intelligence. The gift, which to her was probably trivial, was an incredibly important thing. I was certified as a person, as a person worthy of such consideration, and my mind was permanently bent.

What happened is that she discovered that I loved

I'd take out several books a week and read them quickly and then return them the next week for more.

The Bobsey Twins were too tame for me so I read the Nancy Drew mystery series and the Hardy Boys mystery series, plus a sprinkling of some odd books about scouts being involved in mysterious activities in WW II.

During these years I devoured the kids' books and moved on. I don't know how it came about but Mrs. Whitmore would suggest books now and then in between pasting envelopes in books, checking out the few patrons. One that she recommended that I read was "Up From Slavery" but Washington. It was a heavy book for a 12 year old to read I suppose yet it wasn't. It told the story of a remarkable man who was an inventor, struggling with and for his. It affected me for various reasons. I had never lived with black people so they were exotic creatures to me.

Cheechakos, Snow Worms & Snow Caves

I really did see snow worms. Real worms. I know it today with a certitude that I find impossible to believe. In the snow. In February of March. Over by Little Bear Mountain just past Whitmore's house across the road across from the street light under the big pine we played under. In the snow, while I was building another snow cave in the densely packed snow put there by the wind all winter.

As I grew up, I learned more about the odd words that were bandied about by "old timers". And about the stories they told. And the things they did to confuse and upset and make fun of "new comers". But that did not change my perceptions, as stated in the previous paragraph. I really did see worms. In near the top layer of snow in about that time of the year when winter had become really old and we were really tired of the snow. And I was just trying to do something that was interesting. There they were. These little white worms, in clusters, not moving, but not appearing to be dead either. The bodies were robust, firm, and yellowish-white.

A cheechako is a new person to Alaska, therefore someone who (1) didn't understand about the Alaskan frontier and (2) was a ripe target for being ridiculed. One of the things they were told was that there were "snow worms" in the territory, with the expectation that the newcomer would buy the joke without

understanding that they were being made fun of and then ask about these 'worms' in another setting where they would be laughed at. Everyone would know the telegraphic message "Laugh at this fool!" and would do it. There was something of an elitist mentality in the old timers, called "sour doughs" that gave them license, apparently, to make fools of the newcomers.

I didn't understand that. Why should the old timers make fun of the newcomers? They were new, so if they didn't understand something, that was no reason to make fun of them, to ridicule them. Just explain the reality and go on. They'd appreciate knowing the facts and would incorporate them quickly into their reality. No doubt about that. But the sourdoughs took perverse pleasure in doing things to belittle the newcomers. Perhaps I was so close to being one that I was hypersensitive. Odd that a child would harbor such sensitivity isn't it. But I did and I was of two minds. There was in fact something funny about an adult doing something that revealed his or her gullibility. Probably made me feel not quite so stupid about things in general that adults all seemed, or pretend, to understand. Misery loves company.

One of the things the sourdoughs talked about to the cheechako was the 'snow worm'. Now it may be that there was some story about enormous worms that sort of breathed fire, ate dogs, and Eskimos. If that was the story, then my experience was totally different. But I did know what a "worm" was, and I do know that I saw small white coiled worms in clusters when I dug snow caves in that snow pack that year at the foot of Little Bear across the road from Whitmore's. Really. There is no doubt. I know today that I actually did see them. The problem today of course is that it seems impossible that any creature would be able to live in that icy hostile environment, at a level that had been chilled below freezing for 3 or 4 months. But I am crystal clear. I saw them and will die without being able to change that understanding. I was not hallucinating, I was not using drugs, it was day light, there was sun and these creatures were there. I know they were.

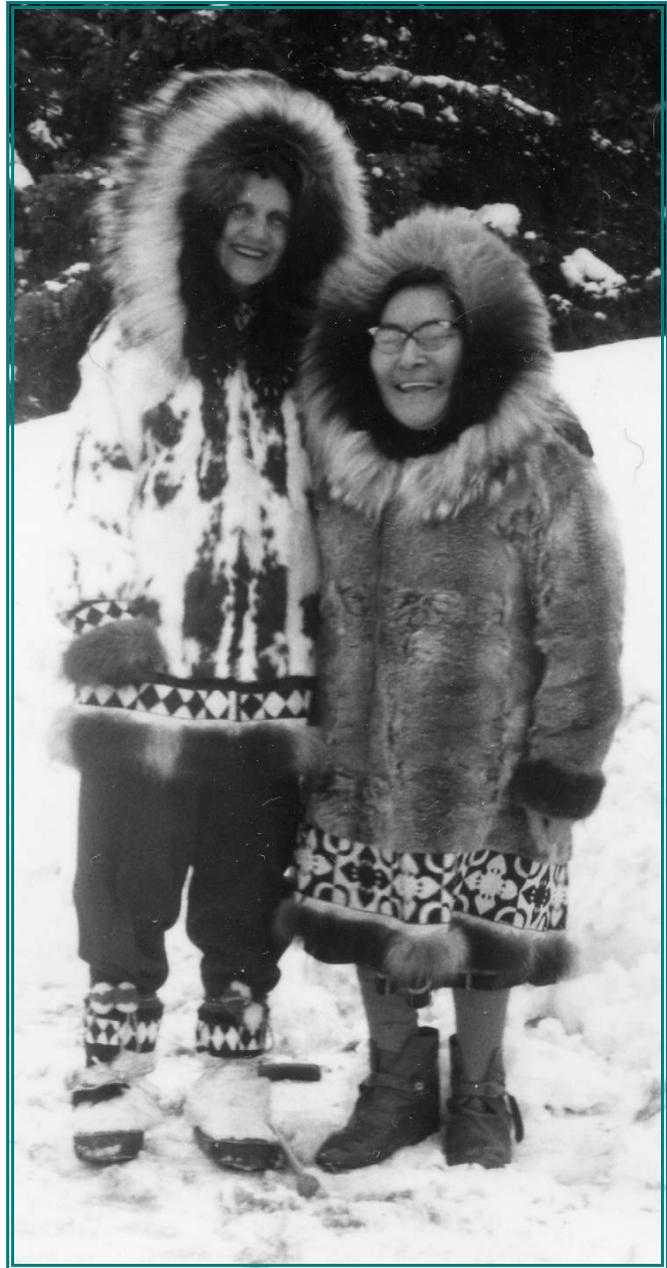
So perhaps I had relapsed into cheechakohood and was seeing what wasn't there. I doubt it however, in spite of the fact that the cold hard facts mitigate against my seeing what I saw. Perhaps it was a dream.

Mom Made a Harbor Seal Parka

May Titus was an Eskimo who TB of the spine and so spent time at the TB San. That's where mom and dad met her when they were volunteering. May was skilled at handling skins and made beautiful parkas. As a gift, dad arranged for May to make a rabbit skin parka for mom with a full aurora ruff. May is standing by mom, much shortened by her TB but she was generally in good spirits. She has laid her cane on the ground between them for this photo. She also made the mukluks that mom is wearing but not the soles. Those were provided to her by someone in a village where such work was still done. Then May sewed on the top.

The aurora ruff is beautiful. The first layer around mom's face is from a wolverine skin, the section across the shoulders that included the feet and claws that you can see. Next to the wolverine is a similar cut from a wolf hide so that the long guard hairs stand out, long with dark tips that form a band around the outside.

Being a seamstress, mom was interested in the method used by May to handle skins because it is different than fabric. One of the basic reasons is the thickness and toughness of the skins. Another basic reason is the fact that a skin must be cut from the inside with a sharp blade rather than scissors because scissors would cut hairs off. When May was getting ready to make mom's parka,



she had mom sit down by her. She took a piece of butcher paper and looked at mom first. Then she took her scissors and cut a pattern for the hood. Then she held the pattern up to mom's head and folded it into a parka. It fit perfectly. Mom paid attention to May as she worked and learned how to handle skins. As a result, she decided that she wanted to make her own parka out of harbor seal skins.

We started with harbor seal skins that had just been removed from the owners. I don't remember how it was but dad managed to buy two complete pelts from some Eskimos who had killed the seals out by Fox Island. The price was right but it was conditioned on one thing. We had to flense the blubber from the hides and return the blubber to the Eskimos along with the agreed-upon dollars. The skins came to the kitchen in a wash tub, smelling oily and bloody. Dad did the job of course.

The blubber was surprisingly thick, about 3 inches thick everywhere. After it was removed, dad hauled it over to the Eskimos who then did what they loved to do. They put the blubber in a poke -a tight bag made out of a seal skins where it would remain for 6 months or until it had liquified. During this time, the blubber ages and takes on a flavor that is used to flavor their food, and turns into a liquid that looks like but does not taste like cooking oil. We were given a quart bottle of the stuff by some Eskimos to take to May and on the way it leaked in the car, creating a pretty powerful odor that lasted a while.

Dad knew taxidermy so he knew how to prepare the hides to ship to a tannery stateside. As I remember the process, he turned them inside out and carefully scraped them to remove all bits of fat. Then he salted them heavily so that they would cure and be stable during the time they were transported. After he had them dry enough, he folded each into a bundle and tied it with ropes. Then he put these tied bundles into a canvas bag that he wrapped in paper and nailed into a wooden box for shipping to Seattle where they were tanned. When they returned, they were totally different of course and were ready so that mom could proceed to make her parka.

The first step was to make her own pattern. She did this with butcher paper like May did. She also procured the skin needles that are shaped differently than needles for sewing cloth and waxed threads of different colors. She also hunted down a tanned wolf hide that she would be able to use for her parka.

After she had prepared the parka it was gorgeous. She cut a wide swath of wolf for the parka and made a diamond pattern to decorate the bottom of the parka. She also installed cuffs of wolf fur. All of this was done under the direction or supervision of May who made sure that mom used the right skin needles and made the proper stitches in the hides. This is now in a trunk at 2821 N.



Flounder or Dungeness

Sometimes when I went to the small boat harbor to fish, I decided that I wanted to catch a flounder so I'd bait my hook, release the bail on my reel, and let the sinker pull the hook to the bottom of the ocean. Then I'd reset the bail and lift up on the line to find just where the bottom was because I didn't want my hook to be picked at without me knowing. I'd reel in a bit of line so that when the pole was about horizontal, the hook was just resting on the bottom. That way when something took hold of the bait, I'd be able to feel it, at which point I'd make a vicious swipe upward with the pole to "set" the hook. Today I'm not sure I

was doing that right, but no matter. I was persuaded that I had to yank the hook to make sure the hook set and I did it with enthusiasm.

After one such maneuver I rewound the line to see if the bait was still on. The reeling in was sort of slow because the bottom was probably about 30 feet down. That wasn't not really deep, but it seemed like a long distance when I reeled in a line using a reel that had a spool with a 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch diameter reel. Of course, the distance to the bottom from the floats depended greatly on the stage of the tide. The difference between high tide and low tide there on the small boat harbor mooring was probably 10-12 feet. I could see the difference myself. The access to the floating segments was a long ramp attached permanently to the dock that was moored in place to secure the small boat dock. The other end rested on two steel wheels about 8 or so inches in diameter that rolled along steel plates fastened on to the deck. When the tide was out, the floats were so far down that the ramp was steep but when the tide was high, the ramp flattened out. The difference was amazing.

When I had to rebait the hook, I was sure a fish had eaten the previous specimen. That encouraged me in the insanity called 'fishing'. I'd anxiously rebait the hook, and quickly drop it down to the bottom again in hopes I could land it on the fish that had taken the bait last time. It never occurred to me that the vicious yanks on the pole might have been the cause of the disappearance of the bait but that is obviously half the reason for the loss of baits.

While I stood there waiting, pole in hand, I looked at the breakwater that the military had installed during WW II. The rocks were enormous. The breakwater stood 8 feet or so above the water, depending, of course, on the stage of the tide. Adult men would go out to the end of the breakwater with their large salt water poles to fish. I never dared even climb out there, fearing that a rogue wave would come along and flush me off. I couldn't swim and was terrified of getting my head in the water so did nothing that exposed me to that risk. All the time I saw the men fishing over there, I never saw them catch anything. Patience was required for fishing like this where you couldn't see the bottom, where you couldn't see the fish, where your line was simply hung between small boats moored on the docks.

I felt tugs now and then and hoped I had a flounder because dad liked them. I didn't. In the 5 years of fishing there, I don't think I caught half a dozen flounder but fishermen are eternal optimists and I convinced myself that (1) there really were flounders down there because I saw a few specimens and (2) I wanted

badly to catch one. So I kept at it.

A bit of natural history here: see how both of the eyes are on the same side of the flounder head? That isn't how they hatch. As hatchlings, they swim around in the water like other fish, one eye on each side of their head but as they mature, they undergo several changes. As they adapt to living on the bottom as adults, the colors of their two sides change. The side on the bottom turns white while the top side darkens into a camouflage. At the same time, one of the eyes literally migrates from one side of the head to the other by moving over the top of the skull. But the mouth stays oriented for free swimming.



Figure 14
<http://www.oceanicresearch.org/booksample.html>

Sometimes I felt a tug on my line and instead of reefing on the pole like I usually did, I tentatively lifted the tip of the pole to get a feel for whatever was there. I don't know why I was gentle sometimes. Sometimes as I lifted the pole the line went taut and I could feel a heavy weight. If it wasn't a fish, this weight wasn't moving about. It was just there and I feared that I had snagged my line again on the debris on the bottom and dreaded pulling too hard. It didn't take long, however, to differentiate between a piece of garbage, a snag and a crab. The piece of garbage would pull heavily but would slowly come to the surface where I'd see a rubber boot or large can. If it was a snag, there was no movement so I whipped the pole one way and then the other, popping the pole up and down in hopes of dislodging the hook. Rarely did that work but I wasn't doing anything else so took the time to work the hook. Usually I lost the hook and the sinker.



Figure 15
<http://www.theworldwidegourmet.com/fish/crab/dungeness.gif>

If the thing was a crab, the process started out like reeling in the piece of garbage but the ending was different. There was no movement with either the garbage or the crab which was holding onto the bait with its pincer. Whatever was

on the line fascinated me as I slowly reeled it in, leaning over the edge of the dock straining to see what it was. Garbage was disgusting and wasteful, but sometimes the reward was a dungeness crab.

The crab would hold onto the bait tenaciously as long as it was in the water. Strangely enough, it didn't matter to the crab that it was moving upward, that he was moving in the water. I could pull him back and forth as long as he was in the water. I supposed that was because he was used to being pushed around by waves. But if I lifted him to the point that he broke the surface, he'd immediately let go and drift tumbling back to the bottom. If I was brave and wanted to impress mom and please dad who liked crab, I'd gingerly reach down into the water to take hold of him. I had been taught how to take them by pinching them from the back. I misunderstood however because I thought that it was necessary to squeeze the heck out of the tail to hurt them and make them stop trying to pinch. Handling from the back was simply a way to keep my hand out of the range of those nasty sharp pinchers. I could tell males from females and knew I had to throw females back which I did.

When I caught a crab, I immediately had to go home because I knew that you shouldn't let a crab die before it is boiled because it gets poison. Somehow I thought the things would die in the next half hour so had to gather up my stuff and get it onto my bicycle and head home. It was a challenge to carry my fishing pole in on hand while I pedaled when I had a crab suspended on the other handle bar by a piece of fishing line. I didn't want it to fall and didn't want it to pinch me.

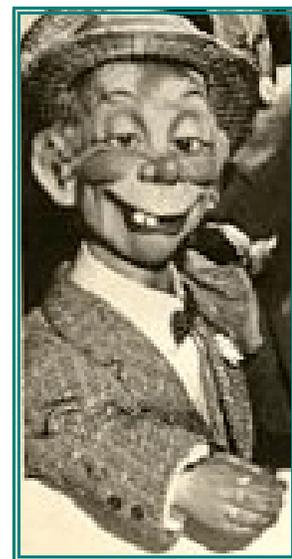
Charlie McCarthy & Edgar Bergen

A ventriloquist did things that weren't possible. Fascinating. I even saw one in school on a program, a man from out of town. He had a dummy sitting on his lap. It talked to him just like a real person but it wasn't. It was in Vernal and I was younger and I was astounded. The dummy really did appear to talk. Oh, I knew that the man was making it talk but when I watched the man's face, it didn't look like it was really moving, at least no where enough to make all of those words, so I was able to suspend dis-belief and almost believe that a dummy was doing it himself.



Figure 16 Charlie McCarthy & Edgar Bergen
<http://www.asv.co.uk/sleeve/5312.jpg>

Edgar Bergen earned a national reputation. He was eventually given his own radio show which was sponsored by Chase and Sandborn coffee and Coke. He appeared with two dummies, "Charlie McCarthy" and "Mortimer Snerd." Charlie dressed like a dandy with a top hat and a tuxedo, while Edgar wore a regular suit. Charlie's monocle was an affectation that didn't seem out of place, just different, because we saw them in movies.

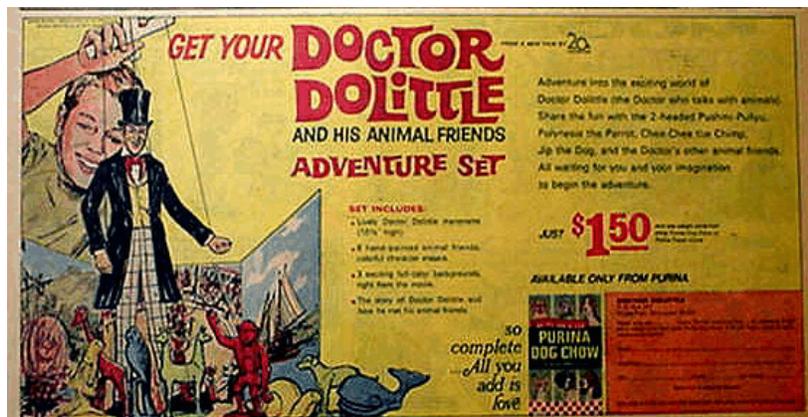


Mortimer Snerd was a country bumpkin who wasn't too bright, who was the straight man for the other two. He dressed in totally different style of clothing, a straw floated, bow tie and plaid sport coat and had freckles. Of course, we couldn't see these features when we listened to the radio, but the pictures in magazines revealed it all. Mortimer's favorite friend was his cow 'Bessie", and he lived on a farm with relatives. He was sort of slow but I liked him anyway. I had a couple of relatives like that and liked them. His name became a national synonym for a slow person.

We were allowed to listen to this show sometimes. We obviously couldn't see the dummy but we heard the different voice so it worked fine in our imagination. He was funny, sometimes saying things that made big people laugh that we didn't really understand. But we laughed anyway.

Dog Food

Dog food was an important commodity in our little world because we had a dog. He ate a lot and we had to buy the stuff with our own money. We bought it in 25 pound paper bags and took it home in a wagon. Mom never drove to the store. That was outrageous. She usually sent us to get what she needed, or walked with us and we pulled the wagon. We'd put an orange crate in the wagon to have 'side boards" so we could haul more groceries.



Figure

18 <http://theimaginaryworld.com/newsad26.jpg>

This food was powdery and looked like a mixture of corn flour, wheaties and other odds and ends. To make it we measured out 2 cups of the dry mix into a large bowl. Then we measured two cups of almost hot water and poured it into the dog food mix, and stirred it. This created a characteristic smell that I still don't know if I liked it or not. It wasn't really a bad smell but it was strong, probably revealing something about the original sources.

Then we set the bowl out by Kobuk's dog house and left him to eat. He was always hungry and devoured it all immediately. The warmth was especially important in the winter, not because Kobuk deserved warm food, rather because the food wouldn't freeze before Kobuk could finish.

There were different brands of dog food and different prices. Dick and I decided that Kobuk liked this particular brand the best. Because it also happened to be the cheapest. Nice coincidence.

McCarthyism

I think this was an evil man. His name was Joseph McCarthy and he was one of the most despicable politicians of the 20th century. Indeed, now that I think about it, I can see that he actually foreshadowed what the media do today, and doubtless taught them how to do it. For reasons that I sure don't know, this McCarthy who was one of the equivocal beings named 'politician' took it upon himself to launch a crusade that obviously attracted the media. Had the media ignored him, he would have not become the prominent thing he was.

His crusade was to root out the communists that had infiltrated our government and compromised our security. His most notorious attack was on Robert Oppenheimer and because of his disgraceful disregard for truth and propriety, McCarthy was able, with the help of Teller and a few others, to permanently destroy Oppenheimer's reputation. In the end, Oppenheimer was determined through trials to be a significant security risk because of his dalliance with a few professed communists in the late 1930's and as a result, he fell into disgrace. That was the disgrace.

Here's a quote from

<<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/mccarthyism.html>>

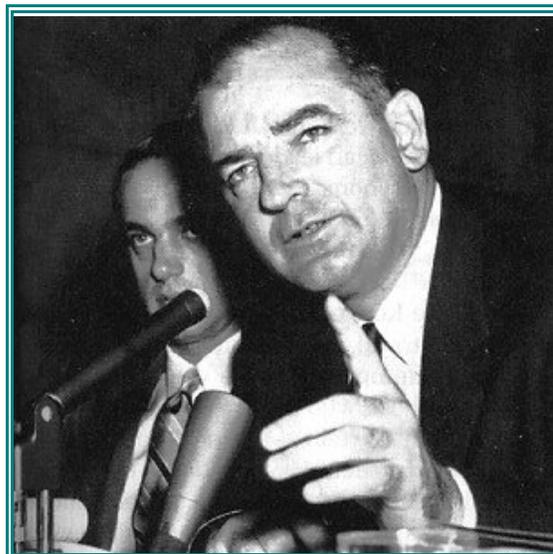


Figure 19

<http://www.vw.cc.va.us/vwhansd/HIS122/JoeMcCarthy.jpg>

"Throughout the 1940s and 1950s America was overwhelmed with concerns about the threat of communism growing in Eastern Europe and China. Capitalizing on those concerns, a young Senator named Joseph McCarthy made a public accusation that more than two hundred "card-carrying" communists had infiltrated the United States government. Though eventually his accusations were proven to be untrue, and he was censured by the Senate for unbecoming conduct, his zealous campaigning ushered in one of the most repressive times in 20th-century American politics.

While the House Un-American Activities Committee had been formed in 1938 as an anti-Communist organ, McCarthy's accusations heightened the political tensions of the times. Known as McCarthyism, the paranoid hunt for infiltrators was notoriously difficult on writers and entertainers, many of whom were labeled communist sympathizers and were unable to continue working. Some had their passports taken away, while others were jailed for refusing to give the names of other communists. The trials, which were well publicized, could often destroy a career with a single unsubstantiated accusation. Among those well-known artists accused of communist sympathies or called before the committee were Dashiell Hammett, Waldo Salt, Lillian Hellman, Lena Horne, Paul Robeson, Arthur Miller, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Charlie Chaplin and Group Theatre members Clifford Odets, Elia Kazan, and Stella Adler. In all, three hundred and twenty artists were blacklisted, and for many of them this meant the end of exceptional and promising careers.

During this time there were few in the press willing to stand up against McCarthy and the anti-Communist machine. Among those few were comedian Mort Sahl, and journalist Edward R. Murrow, whose strong criticisms of McCarthy are often cited as playing an important role in his eventual removal from power. By 1954, the fervor had died down and many actors and writers were able to return to work. Though relatively short, these proceedings remain one of the most shameful moments in modern U.S. history."

Unfortunately the media today engage in identical activities but they are able to get away with it - because they are the media. They single out individuals and groups and causes that they don't like and then mercilessly attack and criticize them, ridiculing them until they are diminished or destroyed, all in the name of "truth" that is an unknown quantity to journalists.

In truth, a few old journalists like Edward R. Murrow did object against McCarthy but as a group, the media was only too glad to report the sensational things McCarthy said and did.

Recording at Home

Today we make digital recordings of various kinds, DVD, CD, visual, aural, with an ease that is impossible to appreciate. In 1947 a far-sighted company offered a console model radio that included the ability to actually make your own 78 rpms. The same heart tugs were made then that are made today, though the visual styles are different. Family, memories, children, Christmas.

I never saw one of these at work, probably because the circle I moved in was too poor to afford such a thing in Vernal, and Seward simply was not a place that new technology found a place. It was too expensive to ship things to Alaska, and houses were small.

The ad contains no photographs. It is colored drawings, not too accurate, and text with a few "graphics", "cuts" as they were called in the printing industry. Notice also the class of people being teased with this ad. Dad is wearing a white shirt and a tie - apparently on Christmas Morning at home- and everyone was smiling, fully attired, hair combed and happy, without the presents being opened. Most of us wear pajamas or grubbies. I think that was true back then as well but this ad like many represented the "better class" of people. Perhaps they were the only ones with the money to buy stuff like this.



Figure 20 Recordio

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu:80/adaccess/R/R07/R0708-72dpi.jpeg>

Halloween

Dick remembered this. One Halloween we left out jackolanterns on the window sill when we went out to trick or treat. Mom must have gone with us because this wouldn't have happened otherwise. When we got home, we discovered that one of the candles had set a curtain on fire which obviously threatened the whole structure. We didn't make many points that night and were doubtless relieved that nothing worse happened.

Mom became concerned about the safety of things we were given so wouldn't allow us to eat apples, donuts or unwrapped candy. I don't know why she had this anxiety but imagine it was based on rumors in the town the some people had done things to harm kids. I don't know a single instance where a kid was hurt so perhaps she was overly protective, but there was also a positive effect of her attitude. We'd come home from going door to door and she'd have us pour our bags of candy into a dish pan. Then we picked out the items that we were allowed to keep and then she'd pass out what was left to the other kids who came to the door. Today I look at this act and begin to suspect ulterior motives in her ruling, i.e. a financially motivated one. And I wonder why she would hand out things to other kids that she thought might be harmful. Ah well, parents are impossible to comprehend. Right?

School had Halloween parties that consisted of some kind of punch and cookies and cupcakes. Moms were allowed to bring anything they made without any concern for the kind of rules that apply today about home-prepared foods. Costumes were allowed if a kid wanted to wear them but we reserved that for the trick-or-treating time in the evening.

Sleigh Riding

As noted above, Seward sloped down to the ocean everywhere. The point I didn't make, though, was that the slope was severe in many places. That made it hard to ride bicycles home since our house was about as high as it could be, but the upside was being able to use gravity and the steep slope to go down hill. I took this photo from the front porch. It shows Mr. Leonard's Crosley pickup, the Episcopal Church and the bay. Notice just how steep the decline is down to the beach, one long straight shot.



Sleigh riding was naturally a lot of fun on that street. It was one of the best because (A) it was so long, (B) so steep, and (C) so little traveled. Even third avenue one block over had more traffic than Second avenue. So we had a grand time on our sleds in the afternoons and evenings.

As a kid I didn't pay a great deal of attention to the reasons for some of the things in my environment. I noticed them when they impinged on my world but otherwise I didn't think about them. So I don't know why it was that several times in the winter barriers were erected across Second avenue right there in front of the Episcopal Church. The barriers were basically long saw horses painted white which wasn't a good idea in the snow. Small kerosene lamps shaped like bowling balls with a wick on the top were set at the ends of the barrier to warn people and vehicles. The net effect of these barriers was to improve the safety of sledding down Second Avenue because cars didn't go down it. The only cars would be those that came up from down below so we could see them in front of us in plenty of time to stop.

The sleds we used were all American Flyers. Here's one of them in the summer standing against the back wall of the house. Notice all of the debris and garbage hanging about. That was just how it was. Stuff was left lying around just in case it was needed, and no one expected otherwise. Fancy lawns and flowers and shrubs were basically non-existent so we didn't worry about how things looked, just about safety. This particular sled was the longer of the two. We had a neat one that I liked better which was about two thirds the length of this one.

The shorter sled was perfect for doing belly flops to get going fast. When we sat on the top of that hill to go down, we could stand, lean over the sled and run while we pushed it and then after we got going as fast as we could, then jump onto the sled, crushing our bellies. It worked, but if we held the sled in our arms at chest level and ran while in an upright position, we could get going much faster. The downside was that when we finally decided it was time to get the sled down on the ground and mount it, things got tricky. The force of this maneuver on the chest and belly was even more severe so we didn't do it too often, only when there was a girl or parent that we wanted to impress. In that case we'd sort of pray we could pull the maneuver off and just plan on suffering silently from the blow.

Either method was treacherous on the street, however. This was because the roads weren't paved. In the first picture above of the snow you'd think this wouldn't make any difference, but it did. I never wondered why because wondering about the problem was about like wondering why the sun came up. The problem was that small rocks managed somehow to work their way up through the snow. They lay embedded in the snowy/icy surface which was great for traction for car tires, but they were like small concrete blocks to sled runners. You'd hit some of them and stop like you had hit a wall.

Jay Clapp demonstrated that really well. It was during lunch hour while I was attending Mrs. Moore's class in the undercroft of the Episcopal church. Jay, Brent and I all ran home to eat and reappeared with our sleds to take advantage of the remainder of the lunch hour by sledding on the icy road. I had actually stopped sledding and gone inside when it happened. I became aware of Jay's accident when Mrs. Moore called me outside and asked me to tell her and Father



Clapp what had happened. I felt like I was being accused of hurting Jay.

What happened was that Jay, who was a scrawny weak kid who was less athletic than I had been doing one of those acceleration moves. I don't know whether he was doing one of the running belly flops or was simply squatting over his sled while he ran and pushed it. Whichever it was, his runners apparently came to a screeching halt in an instant of high exertion. Jay's body continued, however, and because his hands were still holding the sled, his head arced down to the ground. His face hit some of the gravel and the ice which produced an enormous bloody nose, cut lip, chipped teeth and an equally enormous amount of blubbering.

Jay apparently told Mrs. Moore and his dad that I had been with him, or something to that effect which is why they called me out of the undercroft to interrogate me. But I got the distinct sense that Jay had reported that I was responsible for his nasty fall that took him next door to the Hospital where Dr. Deischer took care of him. I didn't like it that I was falsely accused of having hurt Jay, particularly since I wasn't even outside with him when he did the deed to himself. But everyone knew that I hung out with him so apparently I was guilty by association in this case. In the end, I was let off the hook with some suspicious looks from the adults who could tell I believed I was telling the truth, who did not believe I was. Jay was bandaged and swollen up for a few days and developed nasty purple bruises. But I wasn't the cause. It was his own doing on top of those nasty rocks embedded in the ice.

Spring Run-off

Winter was long and dark which made springtime particularly welcome. Sunshiny days were like jewels. When we could go outside without coats in the relatively warm air it was like heaven. The roads were all covered with ice about 6 inches thick, built up over the winter from car tires compressing the new snow. Snowplows were used sometimes but never got down to the dirt so the icy layer accumulated over the winter. Springtime was fascinating when the ice started to melt.

The neatest part of the thaw was how ice melted into water and started running in thin sheets at first after which the sheets turned into tiny rivulets. These rivulets began to etch narrow troughs in the ice and as time passed, the troughs deepened until they reached the dirt road. By this time, there was basically a small river during the daytime running in this channel, which was an

invitation to little boys to become civil engineers.

We'd find pieces of wood and rocks and cans, anything we thought could be used to create dam and haul it all out to the icy road. Calling it a road misrepresents what it was because it was anything but a road. It was simply a sheet of glare ice that lay over the road. We'd plop our stuff down on the ground and then proceed to build little dams to prevent the water from flowing. I don't know why that was so interesting but it was. The water always washed the dams away creating enormous excitement. We'd yell to each other to do this or that to stop the water, as if it were a matter of life or death. It was simply two little boys out in shirt sleeves kneeling on the wet ice in the warm sunshine having a great time.