

My Life on the Gehrke Homestead and The Principle Events in the Life of Harry Beerman by Harry Beerman

typed by Dean Bones in 2020 and reformatted into 1 story in January 2023

(Note that Harry Beerman lived with his mom and step-dad near Niagara Creek about 2 miles off of Upper Nestucca River Road about 11 miles east of Beaver, Oregon. He attended Silver Falls School which was about 13 miles east of Beaver.) Harry typed two stories in 2002 at the age of 84 and sent them to me, Dean Bones, to add to information he had already provided for the Heritage Project at Nestucca Valley Middle School. Part of one of the articles was typed by Robyn, a Nestucca Valley Middle School student in 2003 as part of her technology class assignments. I corrected errors and finished the typing of the stories in the fall of 2015. In the beginning of January 2022 I got out both of the stories and realized that they really needed to be combined into 1 story as much of each story wrote nearly the same words while each story still had some separate parts to it. The story you are reading is the result.

Also, at some point in time Harry Beerman sold a small piece of the homestead property that had been deeded to him to his stepdad's brother, Al Gerke. Al later built a cabin on that property. Al was a customer at my dad's, Raymond Bones', Shell gas station in Beaver at the corner of Hwy 101 and Blaine Road.

I remember once that my dad was concerned about Al in the early 1960s as Al hadn't been to the station in awhile. So I rode with my dad up Upper Nestucca River Road turning to the right at Niagara Creek and then taking the very long about 2 mile drive in to Al Gerke's cabin. Al was quite old then, but was fine. I don't remember now if he had been sick or why he hadn't been out and about. But, of course, he had no phone or electricity. As I look back on that experience I am grateful for the neighbor checking on neighbor mentality that my dad modeled for me which we also did another time for another elderly customer, Chris Gableman, who lived far up Testament Creek off of Upper Nestucca River Road somewhat near to Camp Cooper, a Boy Scout camp. By the way, Chris, who was almost deaf, was doing fine also! db)

It was the Great Depression of 1928 that caused my mother, my sister, my step-father and myself to find ourselves living on a remote homestead on the upper reaches of the Nestucca River in Tillamook County, Oregon. In 1928 I was only ten years of age.

The records indicate the I, Harry George Beerman, was born somewhere up on the mountain above the small town of Clatskanie, Oregon, on March 22, 1918, hence I am now 84 years of age in this year of 2002 and much that I can write this time is with the aid of an old and hazy memory.

My mother's name was Edna Anna Beerman; my father's name was George Joseph Herman Beerman; my sister's name was Gladys Louise Beerman. They are all gone now, and I am the lone family survivor. My parents were divorced when I was very small, and I have no recollection of my parents living together. My earliest recollections are of my stepfather my mother chose to marry following the divorce from my father. My stepfather's name was Emil Gehrke, who then worked at a job as a molder in a south Seattle steel foundry. Emil was a partial invalid following an earlier bout with polio that left him with a badly deformed leg that made walking difficult for him.

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When my mother and father were divorced, it was agreed that my sister and I would alternatively live with one family and then the other. As it happened, my father never did remarry, but my mother's mother, my maternal grandmother, offered to keep house for my father, and this she did until old age made continuing to do so impossible. And so, when my sister and I went to stay with Dad, we stayed with my dad and grandmother.

My early schooling began in Seattle while staying with my mother and stepfather and continued in Portland, Oregon, when my sister and I were with my dad and grandmother. These early years accounted for my grades 1 through 7.

And as the events now being related begin to unfold, my sister and I were living with my mother and stepfather in Seattle, Washington. At some time previous to the Great Depression of 1928 my mother and stepfather acquired a smallish steam-powered laundry in the Seattle suburb of North Park, just north of Seattle and adjacent to old highway 99 that ran north to Bellingham and the Canadian border. I remember that the highway in our area was at the time brick-surfaced.

It was the pressure of the Great Depression of 1928 that pushed my mother and Emil into bankruptcy, and this in turn was the impetus that found us later on a homestead in Tillamook County, Oregon. In 1928 I was only 10 years of age.

At the time, I was too young to begin to understand the situation that confronted our little family in 1928 and the economic hardships that were involved. I was just not involved or concerned with these weighty matters. I am sure that my mother and step-father agonized for weeks and months, maybe even years, as they searched for a solution to the problems they then faced. In the end, it was decided that they would become "homesteaders," and, ultimately, the place would be in Tillamook County, Oregon. Only as an adult can I begin to understand the full magnitude of the situation that they faced.

Considering that my step-father was a semi-cripple and walked with great difficulty, I find it amazing that he was able to find the homestead property in the first place and how he was able to travel to and from Tillamook to conduct his business and to buy his needed supplies and then carry them the two miles on foot from the nearest road to the homestead property. Note that **he did not and could not drive, and he had problems even walking.**

He did manage to find a place of remarkable beauty probably then available only because of its remoteness. It was approximately two miles from the nearest road and on the wrong side of the Nestucca River with only a footbridge suspended by cables that swayed alarmingly when used to cross the river. The Forest Service had built this bridge sometime earlier to access the area south of the river. My step-father had to carry everything he needed across this footbridge and then walk the two miles to the property

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using an old Indian trail up the valley of Niagara Creek. He then managed to build a cabin on the property largely built from small native poles for framing and covered by hand-split shakes. How he did this and how he lived while doing this I can only guess.

Anyway, when Emil let us know that he was ready for us, my mother, my sister and I proceeded to join him on the new homestead. The cabin had a full-sized wood-burning kitchen stove that must have been a real problem transporting to the property. Anyway, when Emil thought everything was ready for us, he sent for us. Beulah Creek flowed into Niagara Creek on our property, and since it was closest to our cabin, it served as our source of water. We hand-carried all needed water up to the cabin. An outhouse served as our toilet, the creek was my normal bathtub, and electricity never graced the premises. Emil undertook tasks in this undertaking that few could understand, and that fewer still would be willing to undertake. As an adult I can now understand and appreciate the difficulties he faced and can give him, belatedly, the credit he deserves.

I recall that this 640 acre homestead property is located in Section 15, Township 4 south, Range 8 west in Tillamook County at the confluence of Beulah Creek and Niagara Creek, with old Mount Hebo to be seen in the background.

This country was truly a fine place for a young lad like myself to grow up in. There was, literally, thousands of square miles behind us that was mine alone to explore and hunt as I wished. Even though I was still very young, I became, by default, the family hunter. I had my own rifle which I usually carried when in the "back-country" and the game I was able to shoot provided the fresh meat that graced our table. Nothing went to waste. Mother canned everything that was not immediately eaten. I well remember one fine summer day that my little dog "Tippy" and I decided to go exploring the back-country. On this day we went way back, further than ever before, and, of course, I carried my rifle. I had some sandwiches for my lunch, and it was well into the afternoon when we turned about and started home. We were still further away from home than I thought when I saw a nice big buck which I shot.

I went through the appropriate routines to make him ready to carry out only to find that he was too big and heavy to get him off the ground, let alone carry him. So I cut him in two and tried again. This worked, but each half was still all I could manage, so I had to carry each half for a ways then go back for the other half. Anyway, darkness caught us before we could get home that day. We did get back to a trail with which I was familiar, and there we spent the night. I built a small fire to keep warm. I always carried matches in the event of need. When dawn broke, we walked home without the meat. I saddled the pony and went back for the deer. My mother was not overly concerned about my spending the night in the woods. She said she thought I could take care of myself.

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While I can assure you that life was ideal for me I also know that my mother and sister would declare the life to be something of a hardship. Nothing in those days would make life easy for a woman on that homestead.

In time we were able to buy a pony, and that made it much easier for Emil to get about. We also built up a flock of chickens, acquired a cow and some young stock, and we also acquired several milk goats. During the summer months, we found trees that produced Cascara bark, which we peeled, dried, bagged, took to town and sold to supplement our meager income. We also built a homemade barn out of local poles and hand-split shakes. It was my job, when not going to school, to find and bring in the cows for milking at night. They traveled widely during the day foraging on wild feed, and I had to learn some skills to track them down because they could travel in many directions each day. I also milked our two goats both morning and night.

In the fall of 1931 I enrolled and attended the little one-room school, Silver Falls School, that was located some two miles or so further up-river from the place where we left our car down at the road where we crossed the Nestucca River to travel to our cabin. I was in the eighth grade at the time. A private automobile was used as a school bus to transport us to school. I walked the two miles of trail twice a day to and from the road. Some of the kids rode to school on horseback, and the horses had a shed on the school property where they were kept during school hours.

Our school was a one-room affair and our young female teacher, I would guess she was around 25 or 30 years of age, taught all eighth grades. She conducted class with one group while the rest studied or did his/her homework. and I have come to believe that she had her hands full. We did not take work home, because that did not work at all well. All or most of us had chores to do when we got home, and it was often dark during the winter months when we did get home. No one had electricity in those days, and no one seemed to expect us to do homework. I guess it all worked out okay.

The teacher lived with the Bohna family a short walk from the school, and she must have been one busy lady. When school started each day, the school was already warm, and our teacher must have arrived early to build the fire in the old wood-burning stove that warmed the place. I can't begin to imagine what other duties she faced in managing our little school.

I remember our young female teacher as pleasant and a very nice lady. I do not recall that she had any problems maintaining discipline in our school. I would like to meet her again to thank her for her dedication to duty that could not have been easy for her, but that, of course, is not going to happen. She, very probably, is long gone.

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As a guess I, would say that our school accommodated around 20 or 25 kids. I seem to recall about four columns of desks and, perhaps, about 6 desks per row. As I think back today, I'm sure our teacher was a very busy person. She stayed with a family that lived near the school and within walking distance. She must have been the person who got to school early enough to build a fire in the old wood burning stove to get the school house warm before we arrived.

The schoolhouse was on the primitive side. We had a hand-pump for water, a privy out back for the boys and girls. Some of the kids came to school on horseback and we had a shed to the school grounds to cover the horses during the school day.

I became, over time, rather adept at traveling the trail to the homestead during the hours of darkness (because of necessity) without the aid of flashlights or lanterns. It was easiest to look up at the sky on a very dark night because tree trunks could usually be seen vaguely against the lighter sky thereby providing a reference to one's progress. At one point along the trail we came to a small creek that we could jump across in daylight very easily, but at night it was necessary to carefully listen to the sounds the creek made as it flowed past and gauge when it was time to jump. I remember one dark night when I misjudged the distance and landed in the creek, and I had to walk the rest of the way home with very, very wet feet.

I was young, I was healthy, and I do not recall any problems at all with life style that I lived. Rather, I think, It was all very good for me. It was years later after I was older that I began to realize and appreciate the efforts of the many folk who did so much to make life easier and better. I did graduate from the eighth grade at Silvers Falls in the spring of 1932, and in the fall of 1932 I enrolled in high school at Nestucca Union in Cloverdale. A private car collected us and delivered us to Blaine, where our regular Ford model A school bus was kept that took us on to Cloverdale. A Mr. Ayers was our bus driver. He ran a small store and post office in Blaine.

I attended Nestucca Union High school until the middle of my junior year, at which time I transferred to the Canby Union High school in Canby, Oregon, where I was living again with my father and grandmother. I graduated from Canby Union High in the spring of 1936.

I visited the old homestead again in 1936 and soon after found myself working as a lumberjack in the woods around Tillamook. After a few years, I took work with the Oregonian newspaper and operated the auto-route out of Tillamook that carried the newspaper northward throughout the county. I saved enough money during this period to enable me to quit work and go to college at OSC in Corvallis, which I was able to do in the fall of 1941.

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The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in the Fall of 1941, and I was able only to finish out my freshman year because my deferment from military service would end with the school year.

So it was necessary to go back to work again. I went to Seattle and got a job in war work. A year later, I read in the paper that Pan American Airways was in a hiring mode for their Alaska division. I went to see them and was hired as an Aviation Machinists Mate (a mechanic in the maintenance department). Pan American was at that time operating the Alaska division for the needs and pleasure of the Navy into most of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. The Navy actually owned the airplanes and we were actually working for the Navy. The Navy decided that everything should all be reduced into the Naval Reserve and that is just what happened.

While employed by Pan American, I was able to attend classes that enabled me to acquire both the FAA licenses required for an aircraft mechanic, the Airframe and the Power Plant licenses that have stood me in good stead ever since. During this period, a group of mechanics that included me decided to organize a flying club, and we bought a used Piper aircraft. We proceeded to learn to fly. Along the way, I bought an airplane of my own to help me get the flight ratings I wanted and needed. At one time I owned an airplane, but not a car. In due time, I had acquired the needed ratings to qualify me as a legal commercial pilot, and I was legally qualified to function as a co-pilot for business aviation. The ratings I then held put me in demand as a co-pilot even though I had relatively little flying experience at the time. Even so, I was in demand and I never lacked for a job thereafter for any extended period.

I was first to fly for a department store in Seattle, later for Morrison-Knudsen Company in Boise, Idaho, and still later for Peter Kiewit Sons in Omaha, Nebraska.

I now had both mechanic certificates and my flight certificates included everything up to and including an airline transport rating, with a type rating in DC-3-type aircraft, various smaller airplanes and a single-engine sea endorsement. I was now at the top of my class and on an even par with any and all airline pilots who had only type ratings in the specific aircraft that they needed to fly their specific equipment.

I was offered a job in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1957 flying for a manufacturing company that owned five plants in the eastern states. Here I was hired as a captain. This company was for a time owned by the Aluminum Company of America, a company that most people will know quite well.

I retired completely in 1981. My career in business aviation spanned 35 years. I would call it an interesting life.

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As of this writing in the year 2002, I have celebrated my 84th birthday, and, the Lord willing, I anticipate celebrating yet a few more.

Some recalled events of living on the 640 acres on the homestead at Niagara Creek:

We undertook to do a bit of trapping in those days. We had game of all kinds in the area. We were most interested in coon and mink whose pelts were worth money. We had steel traps and box traps out in strategic locations in an attempt to capture some of these animals. One day as I was checking our trap line I found one of our box traps had caught a civet cat, a small skunk common to the area, and I decided to carry this prize home under my arm. Well, suffice it to say that a skunk or civet cat is not happy when handled in this manner. Anyway, when I appeared at our cabin, my mother would not let me in. She made me head for the creek for a bath, and my clothes stayed outside. That was one very smelly day.

On another nice sunny summer day, Emil and I decided to go hunting together, so we spent the preceding night in the woods so we could move higher in the early morning where we were sure the deer would be feeding at first light when daylight followed a very dark night. This worked out just as we planned, and Emil spotted and shot at a moving deer. But he was not sure if it had been hit or not. It was last seen leaping over a sizable embankment, and it fell my lot to check it out. I was unable to find any sign or evidence of the deer, but after a bit I decided to bark like a dog to see what might happen. I heard noises that could have been made by a wounded deer traveling through the brush, so I followed the sound. When the noise stopped, I would bark again like a dog then follow the resulting sounds. Eventually I found myself in a small wooded glen that was a small basin. Every way ahead was up except the way behind me. This glen was in deep shade, and giant fern clumps were everywhere. I paused to study the best route to move up to the higher level, and I was very much surprised to see the head of a bear looking at me over a clump of giant fern.

Instinctively I brought up my rifle and fired a quick shot at the bear's head, and that made the bear rear up on his hind legs obviously very mad. I discovered later that my first shot made in haste had burned a furrow at the very top of his head and between his ears, never touching any bone. anyway, he was VERY BIG and VERY MAD. On his hind legs he presented a big target, and I shot him again. Then he started down the hill heading directly toward me. He was not very far away even when first seen, and he presented an ever larger target each second as he came down the hill. I shot him again as he came down the hill. He seemingly was already dead when he wound up very close to my feet.

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By now I was beginning to realize that I had embarked on a dangerous enterprise, and I was scared. I knew very well that a big old bear was not easy to kill and that I had taken some risk in this event. I shot the bear again as he lay at my feet. My gun was then empty (it had a three-shot clip, and with one round in the barrel, it held a total of four rounds.) so I reloaded while I speculated on what I had just done. I had a strong feeling that I should make certain that the bear was really and truly dead. After I had reloaded, with the hammer back and my finger on the trigger, I poked that old bear in the face to see if any part of him moved even a little bit. And, if he had, I was prepared to shoot him again. My bear was a big old male, and much of the day was used to get him home. He required two pony trips to carry him home.

We tried to eat his meat, but it was so strong and inedible that we gave up. We tacked his hide up on a wall in the barn and were surprised to find how difficult it was to drive a nail through the hide. In retrospect I believe that I would choose NOT to repeat that experience. I was probably about 13 at the time.

Another event that comes to mind occurred some years after I had gone to work in the woods near Tillamook working as a lumberjack. It was a Saturday, and I drove out to the homestead to visit. There I learned that something, a cougar we were sure, had killed one the young heifers. A plan was formulated that would involve spending the night in the woods nearby in the hope that we might encounter the cougar and kill him. A young man who was also a guest at the homestead agreed to go with me. We took rifles, food, and some other needed supplies with us, and we hiked back to the location of the heifer kill and prepared to spend the night. We had several big steel bear traps that we set near the carcass of the heifer then settled down in a protected spot to spend the night. It was agreed that one of us would stay awake at all times and that I would take the first two-hour watch. After my two-hour period ended, I awoke my companion to take the next two-hour watch; then I promptly went to sleep.

I awoke several hours later to find my companion also asleep. It was then that I heard noises nearby that I took to indicate that the cougar we were after had caught our scent and was checking us out. I became very alarmed and spent the rest of a miserable night afraid to sleep again and very much aware that I did not know nearly enough about cougars and their habits to know if this one might attack us or not or if there would be any kind of warning or not. This episode ended without anything really happening. The cougar went away, and we did not see him. He did not get into one of our traps or disturb the carcass of the heifer again either.

Today, I fondly think back on those days and those events as being some of the very best of my entire life. I wish I could bring them back again, but I know that can never happen.

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Today there is a vehicle bridge across the Nestucca where once we crossed the river on a rickety cable bridge. The Forest Service built the bridge and roads all over the area to access and protect the forest lands. This enabled the building of a road all the way to the homestead, but it is almost unusable and the old homestead property is now unoccupied. The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde purchased the land. The Forest Service also built a road northward from our river crossing (Clarence Creek db) that eventually joins the Trask River Road near Tillamook. I have traveled many of these roads since I have retired and returned to Oregon, and, of course, these drives bring back many old memories of those days of so long ago.

I would very much have like to have bought the old place when it was for sale, but it was sold before I realized it was available for sale. All my wishing has little purpose, though, because it would have been difficult to find enough money to conclude the deal. It sold for a lot more than I could have afforded to pay. Life can be that way.