

Edited and retyped in 2021 by Dean Bones

Our family moved to the Hebo area in February of 1943, buying the farm now owned by the Dennis Love family (south of Hebo with the long lane running west across from the Nestucca Valley Community Cemetery). We came from a backwoods area near Newport which was much more rural than Hebo. We had hiked two miles over a mountain to attend school in a little one-room facility with one teacher for all eight grades. There was no electricity or running water, and it had wood heat. The restrooms were outhouses. The bigger boys took turns dipping a bucket of water from a little spring for our drinking water. Everyone drank from the same dipper in the water bucket.

On my first day at the Hebo school I was terrified. It seemed so big with THREE different classrooms. One of the boys said, "Let's go out to the gym." I asked, "What's that?" We'd played in the woodshed during rainy weather at my old school. I didn't have a clue what a gym was.

My two brothers and I worked on the family dairy farm. Before graduating from high school I worked on about half of the farms in the valley for fifty bucks a month plus room and board.

We had an old mixed-breed cow that we called Lightning. She was so ornery that we each hated to be the one to go out to the pasture and bring in her calf. She'd chase us off. She was the leader of the herd. One day a battle-scarred old bear made the mistake of trying to cross our cow pasture. Old Lightning and the other cows saw the bear and gave immediate chase. The bear climbed to the top of the closest shade tree and looked down at the herd of bellowing cows surrounding the tree. Dad got his old model 12 shotgun and loaded it with #6 birdshot as he had no rifle. And he went after the bear. A neighbor stood way back up the field holding an axe. About 3 shots from the shotgun brought the bear down. The old bear was skinny, and his meat was as tough as rawhide.

It seems there were a lot of winter storms in those days. Almost every time there was a storm the power went out. We would have to milk the entire herd by hand by lantern light. Our old farmhouse had been built around 1900 now with the foundation completely rotted out. The house was a tall two stories and stood broadside to the windstorms. We slept upstairs with the old house rocking and rolling all night.

During haying season in the summer we worked at almost every farm in the valley. The farmers gathered together in one big crew moving from farm to farm until the hay was all in. It took about a month to get it all done. In those days the farmers all believed the coast was too damp for the hay to dry properly if baled, so it was all put into the hayloft loose. At first I was usually in the hayloft "mowing back" the hay. When I reached my teens it was usually Dad and me on top of the load of hay building the load as the loader pushed it up. They usually had about three or four wagons going, so we'd jump off one and climb onto another. A few years later the farmers started baling the hay, and it seemed to work fine.

During the summer of 1944 when I was twelve I worked for Cliff Loudon. The hay crew was at the Ben Olsen farm near the steel bridge (Conder Bridge) north of Hebo. They decided to have me drive the tractor pulling a big load of hay to the barn. Trouble was, nobody showed me how to drive it. I parked the load of hay in front of the barn and then proceeded to climb up into the hayloft to help mow back the hay. Old Frank Wilson climbed onto the trailer load of hay to set the big grapple forks which were used to lift the hay into the loft. I heard a big uproar outside, so I ran out to see what was happening. Frank was suspended about 15 feet in the air swaying to and fro hanging onto the rope holding the grapples. The tractor and load of hay were nowhere to be seen. I spotted a hole in the

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pigpen fence, so I walked through it to where I could see the bottom of the hill as the barn was at the top of the hill. Sure enough, the tractor and load of hay were piled up at the bottom. I had failed to set the brake. I lost my tractor-driving job. Back to the haymow.

Also during the summer of 1944 when I was working for Cliff Loudon he wired his house for electricity. I helped him as much as a 12 year-old could. When I returned home to live while attending school I must have thought I was some kind of electrical engineer. I hooked some baling wire to the electric fence which ran across a pasture behind our outhouse and ran it through a crack between the boards of the outhouse wall. I ran it under the seat and around the toilet hole. Anyone sitting down on the seat would get a “charge” out of it. Mom and Bob both got zapped pretty good. Dad sat on it and felt the pulse of the electric fence throbbing through his long johns. He thought he was having a heart problem. I wasn’t very popular around there for awhile. I don’t know what made me do it . . . maybe the devil.

There were many small cheese factories throughout Tillamook County. I think there were 7 in South County. Each was an independent co-operative with a board of directors and were banded together under the Tillamook County Creamery Association who acted as their marketing agent. My dad, Milt Johansen, served many years both on the Hebo board and on the TCCA board. There was a shortage of workers to run the cheese factories during the WWII years. Most of the able-bodied young men were in the service. It was essential to keep the cheese production going, so women and teenage boys were utilized to fill in. My brother, Bob, and I both worked in the cheese factory at about the age of 14. I wasn’t strong enough yet to lift and weigh the buckets of curd to be “hooped up” and put into presses to form the 25 lb. wheels of cheese.

We didn’t really suffer a lot of shortages during the war. There was quite a bit of rationing of coffee, sugar, gas, etc. The government made sure the farmers had enough gas to run their farms. We had drives to collect salvage scrap metal and rubber. There were also basket socials in the Hebo school gym where you could bid on a picnic basket. The highest bidder ate lunch with the donor of the basket. The money went into government war bonds, so it was a good investment and helped the war effort.

A daily reminder of the war was the Navy blimp that came chugging up the Nestucca Valley every evening returning to the base from a day of submarine patrol. We attended the open house at the blimp base in 1944. I was fascinated by the huge hangers, the biggest wooden buildings in the world. Little did I know that most of my working career would involve the facilities at the base. I played baseball there in 1953 after discharge from the service. I worked in the veneer plant in one of the hangers in 1959. In the 70s and 80s I had a warehouse facility there for Reser’s Fine Foods. In the 90s I drove school bus from the Tillamook School District’s bus garage facility located on the base. I still stop at the School District #9 offices twice weekly on my courier service with the Tillamook ESD. The old base buildings, built for temporary wartime service, have shown a lot of longevity.

I well remember the events of August 1945. Some big things happened. Our president, Franklin Roosevelt, had recently died, and the war in Europe had ended. In August of that year, the war with Japan came to a sudden and dramatic close. We had dropped the Atom Bomb on two of their cities, killing many thousands of people and forcing a quick end to hostilities. It seems very inhumane but in the long run it probably saved thousands of lives, both American and Japanese.

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Another big event locally was that the third great Tillamook burn was raging unchecked. It was sending huge clouds of smoke into the sky easily visible from our farm. The three great fires of 1933, 1939 and 1945 (the six year curse) destroyed more timber than any other in recorded history. The huge fire in 1845 burned the entire coast range from the Nestucca drainage to south of Newport, a much larger area, but there were no records at that time of amount of timber lost. Although it was almost 100 years later when we moved to Hebo, the hills were still covered with stark dead snags from this fire.

I guess that my favorite teacher and coach was Lloyd McKillip. He was a dairy farmer as well as teacher, so I got to know him soon after moving to Hebo. That summer of 1945 Coach McKillip and I were working together in the hayloft of a barn. I was 13 years old weighing 113 lbs. and would be a freshman at Nestucca High School in September. Mr. McKillip, always the coach, asked me what position I wanted to play in football. I knew nothing of football never having even seen a game, and because of my lack of size had not intended to turn out. I responded to his question with, "I don't know. What positions are there?" He laughed and said, "You're pretty small, so you'd better play halfback." So, that was my position.

In high school we barely had enough kids out for football to have both an offensive and a defensive team for practice, so when we scrimmaged I butted heads with the varsity offense all fall. There was no freshman or JV team. I took a lot of punishment, and I wanted to quit. But my pride wouldn't let me. Besides, I didn't want to disappoint the coach. Eventually I was one of the big guys beating up on the underclassmen.

We wore old brown canvas pants and leather helmets with no face masks for protection. The only change from practice to game uniform was that we had a game jersey. During the war, they bought new jerseys for us but couldn't get black and orange, Nestucca's colors. We wore blue and gold until my junior year when we got the right colors as the war had ended. We always played on Friday afternoons as none of the fields had lights. We didn't even have bleachers. Many of the adults sat in their cars along the sidelines and would honk their horns when we scored a touchdown. Coach McKillip did a great job. We had some good teams, and we only had seventh period to practice. Mr. McKillip was the only coach covering all positions.

During my junior year, I worked for Coach McKillip on his dairy farm near Pacific City. I had to milk about 60 cows before and after school. It was sometimes pretty tough coming home from a basketball trip sometime after midnight and then getting up at 5:00 AM to milk and then go to school. I used to say that it was quite a price to pay in order to make varsity in football and basketball. We had no baseball program. I'd like to believe I'd have made the squads without milking the coach's cows.

I paid a big price for participating in high school football. I got my front teeth badly damaged because of no face protection. I eventually lost them. I also nearly lost a leg from a football injury. I had a big mushy blood clot on my lower leg most of my senior year but played anyway. I wore a big sponge rubber pad around it that acted just like a beacon saying, "Hit me!" Other teams seemed to key in on it. About a year later after I'd gone into the service it developed into osteomyelitis, infection of the bone. I was in a navy hospital for 6 weeks getting shots every four hours. Drunken corpsmen would come on duty in the middle of the night and seem to play darts with my posterior. I finally recovered enough to go back on active duty.

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Wes Schulmerich, former Oregon State great in football and basketball and ex-major league baseball player refereed most of our high school home football games. He had a river fishing guide service and owned the house and cabins located in the beautiful grove of fir trees just west of the Nestucca Valley Middle School in Beaver. (At the time it was Beaver Grade School.) Wes was a big burly man with a booming voice and could have a very intimidating manner if needed. His two daughters, Betty and Cecile, were students at Nestucca High. Wes tried very hard to be impartial and unbiased in reffing the games, but a situation arose in one game where he showed his real feelings. We had possession of the ball, were ahead by 1 point and had only a couple of minutes left in the game. We should have played it safe and called running plays running out the clock. I was calling the plays and thought only of trying to score again, so I was throwing long passes risking an interception. After about two long incomplete passes Wes couldn't keep quiet any longer. He stuck his head into our huddle glowering at me with those steely gray eyes and rumbled, "You throw another pass, and I'll kick your . . . 'butt'. I didn't throw another pass, and we won the game.

When we were in high school a favorite dress for the boys was a white teeshirt and letterman sweater with blue jeans, preferable genuine Levis with a little red tab on a hip pocket. Levis were almost impossible to get during the war, and if you owned a pair you were much envied by the other boys. I couldn't get any Levis in Tillamook, but my aunt in San Francisco sent some to me . . . very prestigious.

The girls dressed so cute and feminine. They wore pleated skirts, soft sweaters and bobby sox. They also wore ribbons in their hair. They didn't wear jeans but occasionally did wear white pedal pushers.

I was one of the few students in school that owned a car. About six of us boys drove Model A Fords ranging in vintage from 1928 to 1931. We used to squirrel in the mud just south of school where the cafeteria and gym now stand.

Our main recreation during the summer was swimming down at the "Big Hole" on the Nestucca, a few hundred yards below the mouth of Three Rivers. It had a high-cut bank on the far side and a sandy gravel bar on the near side where we'd bask in the sun. Quite a few Hebo area kids would swim there. The hole was deep and kind of treacherous in the middle. I had progressed past the dog paddling stage and could now swim sidestroke.

One day a couple of the boys tried to take Guy Leabo, a non-swimmer, across the river to see the big trout (sea-run cutthroat) that lay along the far bank. Guy had his arms over the other boys' shoulders to stay afloat. The boys began to labor, thrashed around, abandoned Guy and then struggled back to shore totally exhausted. Guy finally stopped struggling and bobbed face down just below the surface. I side stroked out and grabbed his arm. He immediately came to life and was all over me like an octopus dragging me down under. We both drank about half the river, and I was totally exhausted. I finally got him close enough to shore to where I could push back up off the bottom for a gulp of air. The other boys finally came back to help. Guy was very sick and vomited up a lot of water. The next day my mother and I went to the Hebo Grocery which Guy's parents owned. His mother asked if I was the one who pulled Guy out of the river. I puffed up a little and modestly admitted that I had. Her reply was, "Oh." So much for being a hero.

We always had a big vegetable garden, and Mom canned a lot. Dad butchered an old cow occasionally for meat which was canned. There was no freezer. We also butchered pigs. Dad cured

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the bacon and hams in a brine before putting them into the smokehouse. When we needed bacon, we'd just go to the smokehouse and cut down a slab. One time we'd caught some big chinook salmon and had brined them and then smoked them.

Tom (?) and Delmer Johnson decided to go spotlighting one night on Buzzard Butte. They decided to take a few chunks of smoked salmon along with them. They got it out of the smoker in the dark. They drove around that night munching on the fish. One of them noticed the fish tasted kind of "crawly" in his mouth. They turned on the dome light and discovered there was a layer of maggots in the fatty area under the fish's skin. They both barfed all over Buzzard Butte. And they got no deer.

Deer hunting was great in the forties and fifties. In the hills across from the swimming hole behind Loudon's farm bucks were dying of old age. There were no elk in that area at that time. Cliff Loudon, Bob, and I were the only ones that hunted deer there at that time. We got to know every deer trail in the area and bagged quite a few bucks at various times of the year. It was legal to hunt with a .22 caliber rifle at that time, so I'm sorry to say that some deer got away from us. When we'd hear Cliff's old 300 Savage bellow we'd know it was packing time.

An evening drive up to Mr. Hebo between the lake and summit was a great deer viewing area. While driving up the old dirt road it wasn't unusual to see about 50 deer. The mountain was much more open then. And in 1955 I helped with the construction of the first radar towers on the mountain which changed things drastically.

In the late 40s and early 50s the Tillamook burn was probably the best blacktail deer hunting area in the world. It was all fireweed and fire-blackened snags, and there were hog-fat bucks. It was common to see a herd of 15 or 20 deer strung out across a hillside. I didn't get to hunt there very often, but when I did it sounded like a war zone. And the old railroad grades and burnt-out steam donkeys from logging operations caught in the fires fascinated me.

In 1946 my dad and Cliff Loudon were hunting off of Toll Road down into the east fork of the Trask River. Cliff killed a monster six-point buck that probably field dressed at 300 lbs. The halves, minus the head, each weighed about 120 lbs. They carried the deer up steep shale slides to the Toll Road. They were late for the evening milking.

The upper Nestucca River between the mouth of Elk Creek and Meadow Lake was a beautiful pristine unspoiled stream. The river road ended just past Elk Creek. On opening morning of trout season, Delmer Johnson and I would hike up past the road's end about a mile and then fish back down being the first ones to fish that stretch of water. Each pool usually had 2 or 3 trout up to 18 inches. They seemed to have a pecking order with the biggest fish biting first. They were mostly native cutthroat with an occasional German Brown escapee from Meadow Lake. Also there was an occasional steelhead. It was great fishing until the road was built right up the riverbank. Then, when the Meadow Lake dam went out in 1963 the river bed was scoured out and the fish habitat destroyed. With the road, the dam break, and the intensive logging the river has never recovered.

Elk Creek was also a simply gorgeous stream. It was entirely roadless with many cool pools shaded by a moss shrouded understory. Towering ancient old growth firs and cedar trees line the stream. Elk Creek was located in the narrow strip of land that escaped both the 1845 fire and the Tillamook burns. One time Tom Hall and I bailed off Boundary Road along the summit between Elk Creek and

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the Trask and hiked the entire length of Elk Creek to where it entered the Nestucca. Naturally we had our fishing rods. It took eight hours of fast walking just stopping to fish a pool now and then. There were plenty of fish up to about 12 inches a little smaller than in the main river. But what a beautiful hike through that primeval forest. Now only a few pitiful remnants remain. And Bear Creek was also a very pretty stream.

The great Columbus Day storm of 1962 destroyed many barns and killed a lot of cattle. The cows were kept in their stanchions in those days before loafing sheds and milking parlors. When a barn came down with the weight of a loft-full of hay it crushed the cattle underneath. My dad was still on our old farm at that time though he was dying of cancer. The barn nearly blew down with the cattle all inside. The barn was leaning way over and was all askew. The wind was howling, and the tortured timbers holding up the barn were creaking and groaning. Dad loved his old cows and risked his life getting them out of the barn. They didn't want to leave the shelter and go out into the storm.