

# Earliest Memories





*Jean at age 2*



## Oregon Born

Looking back on it now, I can see why my parents gave me all the chores and let my brother hide out in his room, reading the encyclopedia. I was the kind of kid you had to keep busy. If I wasn't tap-dancing around the kitchen, noisily drying dishes for my mother, I'd be tearing through the neighborhood on my bike or rounding up my friends for a game of kick the can. Some children can spend a whole day lost in a book. I was the type who liked to get out and do something.

I've been an Oregon girl all my life and, for all but a few years, a devoted citizen of Corvallis. I was born in Portland on February 17, 1920. My father was working for the Western Pine Manufacturers' Association at that time, and our family lived in a small house quite close to his parents' home at 22nd and Alameda. My brother, Bruce, was two years old when I came screaming into the world.

Living in Portland didn't really suit my father. His job required him to travel a good part of the time, when he'd rather be at home with his young family. So when opportunity knocked in the form of George Peavy, a favorite professor from his days at the Oregon Agricultural College, he was ready for a change. Peavy had become dean of the School of Forestry at OAC. He offered my father a teaching position, and in 1922, our family moved to Corvallis.

For the first two years, we lived in the Reed Apartments down on 12th Street. There was a certain claim to fame that went with living in those apartments: they had been built by the family of Robin Reed, the famous Oregon State wrestler who won the gold medal at the Paris Olympics in 1924. The neighborhood was quiet, like most of Corvallis, but my father had a low tolerance for city life. He wanted to live out in the country.

The property he bought for our new family home was way out among the dairy farms, at the junction of NW 23rd and Van Buren. It's hard to believe, but those were both gravel roads at that time! People would ask my father, "Why did you build so far out there in the country?" Well, that was just the first time he did something that everyone else thought was nuts.



*Second grade class at Harding School. Jean is in the front row, third from the right.*

The house he built for us was modest by today's standards: just two bedrooms and a huge closet, which served as my bedroom. Eventually, he constructed extra bedrooms for my brother and me up in the third story attic. To get there, we had to pull down some little stairs, which folded up behind us when we got to the top. I had the back half of the attic and had to go through my brother's room to get to mine.

Back then, the town of Corvallis was small enough that you could walk or ride a bike just about anywhere you needed to go. The hospital was between Arnold Way and Harrison, and that was considered the outskirts of town. There was a city bus that ran a little loop, starting downtown at Albright and Raw on Third Street, up Van Buren, behind the hospital on Short Street, and back down Monroe. That was the extent of the town.

Corvallis had four elementary schools at that time: Washington, which was downtown on 7th Street; Roosevelt, which was over on Western Boulevard; Franklin, where it is today on NW 18th; and Harding, which was the town's newest school.

I went to Harding for my first two years. The next year, I started out there, but on the first day of school, I was sent away. It's the kind of thing that would never happen in this day and age – the school district wouldn't dare!

We were waiting to go into our classrooms when the principal came out and pulled four of us aside. He told us the school boundary had been moved, and we were to go to Franklin School instead. It was about 10 blocks away, and we were expected to just walk on down there by ourselves. The four of us started out, but along the way, we decided to revolt, and we all went home instead. We weren't going to that old Franklin School!

Well, the revolution didn't last long – I started at Franklin the next day and stayed there all the way through middle school. The best thing about Franklin was that down in the basement, the floor was cement. In the winter, when it was too wet to be outside for recess, we'd skate on that floor. I can remember the pillars that held up the ceiling of that big room, and the noise of dozens of kids rolling around.

## **My Darling Mother**

My mother was the heart of our family. Although my father was loving in his own way, it was not in a cuddly sort of way. My mother was kind and gentle, the type of person you could talk to about any subject and get a fair, thoughtful response. She was always there when we got home from school, with a snack waiting for us. Often, she would be ironing when we came in, which I now think was very smart. It was something she could accomplish, but at the same time, be ready and willing to listen if we wanted to talk about our day.

She was an Ostrander, a family that was genteel and well-connected. My mother was raised to pay a lot of attention to the proper etiquette, and I think because of that, people thought she was more highly educated than she was. She started dating my father in high school, and they kept up a correspondence the whole time he was off in college. During that time, she taught school, first in St. Johns and then, after they got married, in Sumpter, in the Blue Mountains of Eastern Oregon. In those days you could teach with just a high school diploma. The principal of that school in Sumpter later came to Corvallis, and they were quite good friends. He always raved about what a great teacher my mother was.

She never worked again after her children were born. But she was always active, especially at Oregon State. She was one of the first presidents of the college Folk Club, which was originally formed as a social club for women connected with the college. I can remember her standing behind a wing chair in the living room, practicing her speeches. One of the jobs of the Folk Club was to call on newcomers

when they moved to town. Every lady had a little silver tray at her door, and when people would come, they would leave their calling cards. My mother did a lot of calling, and she was known as a wonderful hostess.

She was extremely frugal, which was really essential for living with my father. For instance, she would always save little scraps of material to use for patching. If the elbow went out on one of my father's wool shirts, she would patch it with something that contrasted so that it looked OK. Eventually, she would be putting patches on the patches. After she died, I did that for my father for a long time, but, finally, I got tired of putting patches on patches. When he'd bring me a shirt that he wanted patched, I'd say, "I don't have time to do it right now" and put it away in my sewing room. Then he'd come back in a few days: "Is the shirt ready yet?" "No, it's not ready." And in a few more days: "Is the shirt ready?" "No, not yet." After a while, he'd forget about it and I'd throw the shirt away. By that time, he could afford to buy a new shirt.

## A Model Homemaker

My mother was a wonderful cook, but she was frugal in the kitchen as well. She taught me to always clean out the bowl. And she made a lot of things out of leftovers, so she hardly ever had to throw food away. She'd put on great meals, but they weren't fancy, expensive meals like we have today, with just the right olive oil for this dish or that one. It was just very good home cooking.

One of my favorite meals was pot roast. I don't ever remember my mother cooking a prime rib or anything like that – it was always pot roast. Sunday dinner was usually chicken fricassee or chicken and dumplings. In those days, you could buy roasting chickens, which were hens that were past their laying days. They were tough old birds, but she would cook them so they were really tender and just dropped off the bone. Sometimes when you cut the bird up, there would be little unhatched eggs in the cavity. She would boil those and add them to the lovely cream sauce she had made, then drop flour dumplings on the top and cook the whole thing till it was rich as anything. That was delicious.

When my aunt and uncle would come for football games, we always had baked beans and brown bread. She made the brown bread from scratch and steamed it. There were some different kinds of flours in it – not rye, but maybe some sort of very fine whole wheat, because it was something of the texture of B&M Brown Bread that you buy in a can today. I think she made that meal because we never knew exactly when my aunt and uncle would be coming, so she could just have it ready anytime anyone appeared.



*Margaret Ostrander Starker*

Up on Monroe Street, between 25th and 27th, there was a sanitary meat market. My mother did a lot of her shopping there, and I remember when she paid the meat bill, the butcher would always give her sweetbreads. I don't think anyone else in town ate them! But she had a wonderful way of cooking them, and I still love sweetbreads.

I think I owe a lot of my cooking skills to my mother, especially the things my children loved the best. She taught me to make doughnuts, cookies, and cake. I don't remember that she ever made too many pies, though. Before I married my husband, I told him, "You know, I don't make pies." When he told his mother that, she invited me to come learn from her. She didn't use a recipe – she did it all by feel: a handful of flour, a scoop of lard. I never did get very good at it.

One of my mother's many skills was needlework. She made some beautiful napkins, each of them embroidered with an "S" in satin stitch. I still have those, and I treasure them. Her hands were always busy.

When I was very young, we didn't have store-bought clothes. A dressmaker would come to the house twice a year, and my mother would choose the fabric and the pattern for our dresses. Then the lady would come and live with us for a week or so at a time, sewing the clothes on our sewing machine. My mother would do the finishing work: hemming and such. Later, when I was in junior high, I started making my own clothes. You really couldn't buy anything readymade in Corvallis. I only had one store-bought coat before I went to college, and that one came from Portland.

My mother was such a sensible woman – I think that was one of her strongest traits. A lot of people just don't have common sense. I think I do, and maybe I got that from her. Like her, I also love to cook and sew. And I give my time to the things I believe in, which she did as well.

## Small Town Fun

At the time my father built our first house, 23rd Street was a gravel road. I can clearly remember when he bought his first car, and the crunching sound of the gravel that brought all of us kids running to see the exciting new purchase. He'd gotten a speeding ticket on his way home from Portland for driving 25 miles an hour – uphill! That really impressed us. After that first car, my father always bought a Plymouth from his friend Charlie Whiteside, who owned the local dealership. Before he drove a new car home, he'd have Charlie's mechanics solder a metal pan to the bottom, for protection in case he hit a stump when he was driving around in the woods.



*Jean and Bruce, ready for sledding*

Even though we lived way out on 23rd Street, we still had a lot of kids fairly close by. I had several really good friends who played together in grade school and stayed close all the way into high school: Betty Ann Fox, whose father was a member of the Poultry Department; Genevieve Cockerline, whose father was in Engineering; and Jeanette Benefiel, whose father owned a dairy farther out on 31st Street. Jeanette was the youngest of several daughters in that family. Her mother often made fresh maple bars for us as an after-school snack.

Every day, my friends would ride their bicycles down to 23rd Street and stand at the corner of Van Buren. They'd whistle to let me know they'd arrived, and I'd ride up from the middle of the block to meet them. Then we'd all ride our bicycles down to Franklin School together.

Kids of all ages played together in that neighborhood. After school and on weekends, we'd congregate for big games of hide and seek, kick the can, and olly olly oxen free. One of my father's first community campaigns was to lobby the city to pave our street, and when we finally got a hard surface in front of our house, we played a lot of hop scotch. We also roller-skated quite a bit – not only on the street, but also at the rink that's north of town, out by Lewisburg. Sometimes for Halloween or some other special occasion, our whole class would gather for a party out there. It was a pretty big expedition, kind of like going to Portland in this day and age.

There weren't as many activities for kids as there are nowadays, but one thing we did have was 4-H. I don't remember when I started doing 4-H, but I stayed with it all through my elementary school years. Harry Seymour was head of the state 4-H organization, and his daughter, Erma Seymour, was my leader. She was a wonderful teacher, and I really loved the meetings at her house. In those days, boys and girls didn't do 4-H together. There were probably six or eight girls in my group, and we made things like crocheted hot pads and gathered aprons that tied in the back. I wasn't an animal lover, so I never had anything to do with that part of the organization.

Later on, when I got through college, I ended up helping the 4-H program in my job as a Home Demonstration Agent with the Extension program. My daughters were both involved when they were young, and I've been active with the organization ever since. I served as a trustee for the Oregon 4-H Foundation for many years. So I guess those early experiences can really influence a person's life.

## **A Year Out East**

After a few years as a professor, my father had the opportunity to take a year-long sabbatical, and he decided to spend that time at Pennsylvania State College. Orig-



*Jean cross-stitched this piece on the family's drive across the country.*

nally, he planned to go by himself, leaving my mother to tend the nursery he had developed down the street from our house. As a 10-year-old child, I wasn't aware of all the dynamics around this idea, so it surprised me when all of a sudden, the plan changed, and we were all packing up for the east coast. It seems my mother had put her foot down. She didn't do this very often, but when she put her foot down, she put it down firmly.

Arrangements were made for somebody to take care of the nursery while we were gone, and we loaded up the car. It was a Plymouth, with one of those trunks that could either be up and closed or down and packed with stuff – almost like a built-in trailer. So we packed everything we'd need for a year in State College, Pennsylvania.

That was a very long trip in those days, because there were no freeways, so there was a lot of stop and go. I think we must have been on the road for 10 or 12 days. To keep me busy, my mother had brought a cross-stitch project for me to work on. I stitched this proverb all the way across the country:

*Where we Love is Home*

*Home that our feet may leave but not our Hearts*

*The chain may lengthen but it never parts*

That cross-stitch project hangs on my wall to this day.

Our Pennsylvania home was a rented apartment above a garage. The biggest issue for my mother was laundry: she had to lug it up and down the stairs to the basement. What's worse, she had to negotiate with the man who rented another part of the building, who wanted to make wine in the washtubs. I remember vividly that she was very upset about the laundry situation.

Still, it was fun to be in a new town, and we enjoyed our time there. There were fewer things for my father to do, and he often joined us in the evenings for a game of hearts. While he was there, he got into playing the stock market. Each night after Bruce and I had gone to bed, he and my mother would walk to town to pick up a newspaper so he could check his stocks.

Before we left for the east, everyone had advised us to bring heavy coats because it would be so cold in State College. My mother bought me a lovely faux fur fabric coat, but it just so happened that Pennsylvania had an unusually warm winter, and I don't think we ever had snow.

Each time we had a vacation from school, we took advantage to explore a bit of the east coast. First we went to Washington, D.C., then to New York City, and later to Philadelphia. It was a great way to get a better understanding of our country and its history.

Everything went well until the trip home. Of course we had a lot of things in the pull-down trunk, and it made the back of the car very heavy. My father did not like to drive on what in those days was considered a freeway (today we would call it a paved country road). He preferred the gravel roads where he could look at the woods as he was driving. We were traveling through Colorado when we blew a tire, and with the load in the back of the car, we tipped over. My foot went through the window, and I wound up with a big cut across the back of it. My mother had a nasty gouge in her head. A country doctor sewed it up for her, but he didn't take care to clean it out, leaving hair and gravel in the cut.

We knew it wasn't good, but we thought we'd just keep heading home and have it taken care of when we got there. But in Denver, when we stopped to get gas, there happened to be a doctor filling his car at the same time. He told my father that he should get my mother to a hospital right away. It turns out she had a terrible infection. The doctor who cared for her at the hospital had treated wounds in World War I and knew just what to do. He shaved her head first and put glycerin on it. Every morning, he'd come in with a silver teaspoon and just scoop out the infection.

Oh, it was terrible. We stayed there for a week or so, and one day, to distract us, my father took us out to a place where they had airplanes galore and were testing them. This gave my father the opportunity to take a little jab at one of my habits that had always annoyed him. Like many young girls, I tended to scream sometimes. So he said, "Now you stand there and scream all you want, 'cause we can't hear you!"

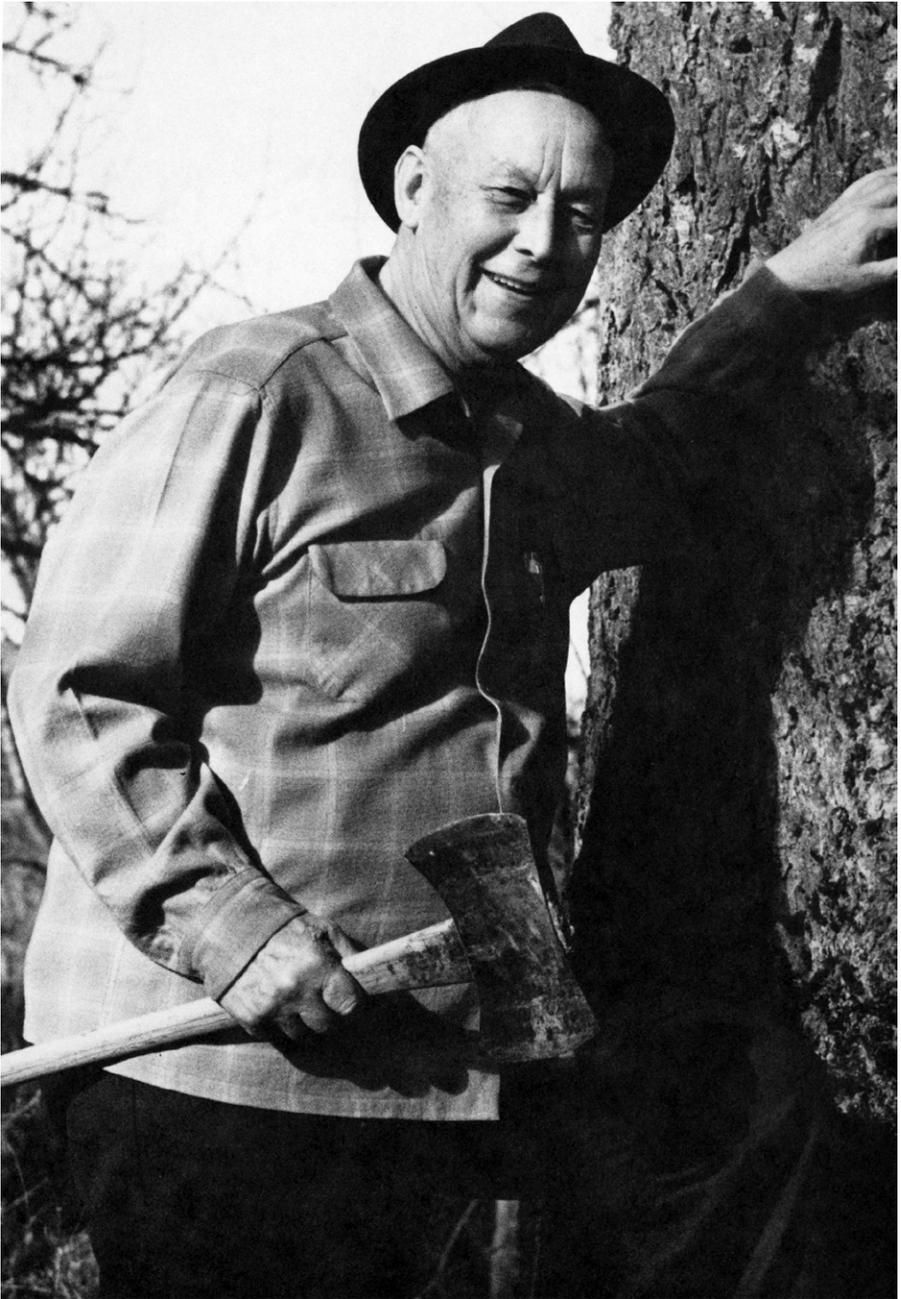
Anyway, that was quite a trip. When we finally got home, I remember my mother tied the four corners of a square handkerchief and wore that on her head. It seemed to me she wore that handkerchief forever, but you know it wasn't really that long. We were just so lucky to have found that man who knew how to treat wounds of that sort.

## **My Strong-Willed Father**

My father was the dominant force in our family. His ancestors were German, and he had inherited the patriarchal attitude of his forefathers. Smart, strong, and well respected in his male-dominated profession, he made little effort to hide his feelings for girls. They should be quiet and respectful and leave the running of things to the men.

I guess I was pretty strong willed myself. You might even say stubborn. My father and I had a lot of little spats when I'd try to resist doing something he wanted me to do. But my mother was wonderfully sympathetic, and she would smooth the waters. She'd start with a gentle suggestion: "Now Thurman, we need to realize, you know . . ." Somehow, she could represent my side of the issue without threatening his sense of control.

I've always felt that my mother's steady support was the foundation of my father's success. She backed him in everything he did, from writing a continuous stream of feisty letters to the editor to buying up thousands of acres of seemingly worthless timberland. They say behind every successful man there's a strong woman, and she was that woman.



*Thurman James (T.J.) Starker*

Everyone knows how my father made a fortune by investing in timberland during the Depression. He'd go out and buy property that other people had let go because they thought it was useless and they couldn't afford to pay the taxes on it. Timber sales often took place on the courthouse steps, and he and Rex Clemens would go down there and bid. Everybody thought they had holes in their heads. But I can't tell you how many people have come up to me at reunions over the years and said, "I sure do wish I'd listened to your father."

He and Rex were good buddies. Rex started out with just a log truck, and lots of times he didn't have the money to buy a tire or have his truck fixed. So Rex would go down to see Charlie Whiteside at the Plymouth dealership, and my father would pay for the repair till Rex could pay him back. Even with his small forestry professor's salary, he had more than Rex did in those days.

Whenever they went out to look at timber, my mother packed their lunch. The basket always had to have deviled eggs in it, because that was Rex's favorite. All day long, they'd be out driving, looking at parcels of land and deciding who was going to bid on what. I don't know how they decided, but I think there was a lot of good-natured arguing that went on. Sometimes they would bet on one thing or another, and as soon as they came back into Philomath, whoever had lost the bet that day had to buy the milkshakes.

Of course even at the rock-bottom prices of those Depression years, my father had to work hard to save enough to buy that land. That meant a very frugal lifestyle for all of us. I remember in junior high and high school, I could never go to the movies on Sunday with my friends, because it cost a quarter, and that was too much to spend on frivolous entertainment. His idea of a great Sunday was to have the family go for a ride in the woods, where he could look over the timber. Needless to say, as a teenager, I wasn't very interested in that.

Later on, when I was in college, I wanted to hang out with the other kids at a place we all called the El – the Electric Lunch. But my father wouldn't let me go there to have a Coke because, you see, a Coke cost a nickel. And a nickel spent every day of the week would be a quarter a week. And a quarter would buy an acre of timberland!

## Other Business Ventures

Timber wasn't the only thing my father was involved with. He also made money by doing financing. Up until that era, people generally paid cash for things. But sometime in the thirties, it got to be more common that you could pay for something