

RASMUSSEN MYTHS
Compiled (With Embellishments) from the Memory of
Kortner Nygard
1997

OLD MAN PEDERSEN

In the days after Robert Isaksen died of appendicitis the family fell on hard times. Johanna was unable to make a living on the ranch. In spite of turning it into a way station for travelers from Pagosa Springs to Durango, she and the family had to move. Johanna found help in the form of housekeeping for "Old Man Pedersen," as he was called.

Old Man Pedersen was known for two things. One was his Danish accent: every other word, it seemed, had a Danish "sen" at the end, if you knowsen what I meansen.

The other thing he was known for was being a bit too enamored of the taste of spirits, and I don't mean he liked to lick ghosts. He was, according to Norm Nygard's recollection, fond of going into town (Bayfield?) and getting likkered up purty good. To the point, apparently, that he hadn't a prayer of finding his way home.

Not to worry. In those low-tech days he didn't need a Designated Driver. He'd just pour himself into his wagon and call to his horse, "Go homesen!" His faithful nag knew the way well, and would plod home, almost literally without a hitch.

Both his accent and his fondness for the bottle must be true, because both of those elements survive him in stories from such disparate quarters as Norm Nygard and Christine Soens.

According to Christine, one such evening in Bayfield he and another Danish expatriot, let's call him Morie Hansen(?) had finished quite a night of it. Morie was either a heavier drinker or less able to hold his liquor, because he went out and got on the road...literally. He apparently ended up too close to Old Man Pedersen's wagon (...possibly under it, since horses are usually careful creatures.)

Unaware of this setback, Old Man Pedersen crawled into his wagon and mumbled, "Go homesen!". At which point the wagon promptly rolled over Morie, who apparently made no sound that would awaken a drunk. Fortunately, Morie survived relatively unharmed. OMP made it home and to bed, quite intact and quite unaware of having run over his fellow Norski.

The next day, a distraught friend told OMP what he'd done to Mr. Hansen the night before. In spite of his friends' agitation, OMP was nonplused. He apparently brushed it off in typical Pedersen style: he dismissed further discussion as a waste of breath, saying, "Weren't no 'count; I've got a light wagonsen!" End of discussionsen.

INDIANS!

Buckskin Charlie was a friendly chief of the local Indian tribe. He seemed to have a rather cordial relationship with the Isaksens. This is surprising, in light of the current view of Indian treatment by the Europeans. Nonetheless, Buckskin Charlie may well be responsible for the survival of all the Rasmussen descendants.

Dog Food

Early in the friendship between the Isaksens and the Indians, some squaws came to the back door of the ranch house. Johanna was terrified: Indians! They managed to communicate that they were hungry and wanted some food. Johanna wanted to get rid of them, but was reluctant to just run them off. Her compromise was to get a dish that she could afford to lose and give them some food. She picked up the dog's metal dish off the floor, gave it a quick rinse and piled some food on.

To Johanna's great relief the squaws thanked her and left.

To Johanna's alarm, they returned the next day. (I remember hearing this story as a boy, and being full of fear at what would happen next.) She was sure they were going to push past her and storm into the kitchen, looting all the supplies and maybe even killing everyone and burning the house.

To Johanna's chagrin the squaws were merely returning the dog dish. They had gone down to the Pine River and scrubbed it with sand and water until it shone like new. To the Indians' credit they graciously overlooked the insult and did The Right Thing. To Johanna's credit, she learned a lesson and was more trusting and friendly with the tribe after that.

War Path

On one occasion, some of local braves were riled up and on a rampage. Buckskin Charlie had tried to contain them and "talk them down", but to no avail. Realizing that there was real danger to local Whites, he rode out to the Pine River Ranch to warn the Isaksens. Robert promised he'd keep an eye out, but BC disagreed, saying that it was not safe anywhere that they could easily be found. He felt confident that the family would be safe in the willows down by the edge of the river. He said he'd come back and tell them when it was safe.

It would be a good ending to say that the Isaksens got tired of hiding and came back to find Buckskin Charlie and a group of braves sitting around the ranch house having a pow-wow and laughing about the great joke they had played on the White man. But that's not how it ended. BC came back in three days and told them the danger had passed. The family returned to find all intact. It is a sobering thought to realize that a small act of kindness can become mythical. Here I am, 100 years later, writing of a stranger who did

something he might not even have put in his own memoirs. It makes me wonder what effects "random acts of kindness" might have.

Medicine

In addition to small acts of helpfulness and cooperation, he sometimes came by in times of need: clearly the kindness between the Indians and the Isaksens was not a one way street. Friendships are rarely based on lopsidedness.

Once, according to Christine Soens, one of Buckskin Charlie's tribeswomen was in labor and was doing badly. BC came by and asked Johanna to come and do what she could. Johanna was not a midwife but she had "been there" a half dozen times. Sadly, the mother was beyond Johanna's abilities, and she died. Being the reasonable man that he was, rather than being angry or vindictive, BC thanked her profusely for dropping everything and coming to do what she could.

When it came to medical care, I imagine it was frustrating living on the edge of settled America in those days. I am sure that Johanna realized that more skilled care, had it been nearby, might have saved the mother.

Likewise, when Robert's appendix became fatally infected, there was time to bring a doctor, but he was helpless to save Robert. The fever, tender belly and nausea were well-known symptoms of a usually fatal affliction in the 19th century. The cure was close enough to be imaginable, but it was not yet developed. The physician told Johanna that, "Someday we will know how to cure this. I only wish it was today."

A Talk With The Dead

I visited the Pine River Ranch three years ago. Upon seeing Robert's tombstone I was moved by how anguished he must have felt, being a 40 year old father of a sizable family and the debtor on a sizable mortgage, laying there dying of appendicitis. I wished there were some way to reassure him that things turned out all right. That night, laying in a dark tent in Valecito I thought about him, whether he might still be in the area, trapped between this world and the next. I tentatively sent some thoughts out to him. I promptly became very uncomfortable. It felt as though I had peeked into a place that was full of fear and agony. It was strong enough that I recoiled and thought that I didn't want to do that again.

Oddly enough, last April Dee Ann and I were visiting Greece. On the island of San Torini we met some other Americans and spent an evening eating, drinking, laughing and having a good time. We really enjoyed them, but gave little thought to seeing them again. On our last night we were in Athens standing on a hill watching the sun set when who should climb up to the top of the hill and bump into us, but our friends from San Torini! We all remarked at what an incredibly unlikely coincidence it was to bump into each other. We resolved to eat our last dinner in Greece together.

At dinner I was talking with two of the group. One of them told me a story about feeling she was visited by an aunt who's estate made it possible to come on this trip. She

described it as very pleasant, but a little loony-sounding. I said I didn't think it sounded loony, but my only attempt to feel in touch with a dead relative had been very unpleasant. I told the "tent" story. At that point one of the other new friends looked very serious and confessed that he didn't think it was THAT big a coincidence we had met a second time. He said he had had the strong urge to tell me something when we met the first time, but he could think of no reason to tell me, so he'd let it slide. He told me he had some experiences with "ghosts" that had become trapped in this world under similar circumstances. He told me that you needed to contact them and tell them to let go and move on. He said he had not known why he wanted to tell me about that until I had shared the story of Robert Isaksen.

This all seems a little "California", but who knows. I did what he instructed, and it felt right. I don't know if it had any effect on the world, but I certainly hope so. The thought of Robert leaving behind his family and mortgage, knowing the hard times that were ahead is daunting. I would like to think that this improbable meeting of that friend from America, via San Torini and Athens was in some way purposeful.

Golden-Haired Girls

I recall a scene, more than a story, that Margaret Smith shared. I "discovered" storytelling as an art form during the "middle ages"...my own. I love to hear stories, and in this age of MTV and 7-second shots on t.v., it is a wonderful and relaxing change to hear someone spin a yarn. I find that children love storytelling, too, which is surprising given that there are no explosions, music tracks or astounding stunts in storytelling; at least not outside your head.

I heard that Margaret was the family storyteller, and I resolved to pay her a visit. At this time she was living in an assisted living facility but was still sharp-witted. I went with Roland and Hazel, since they knew how to get there. To my dismay, R&H were tired of all those stories. I would try to fire Margaret up, and they would try to cool her down. This tug-of-war was not fruitless, however, and I managed to hear a few old chestnuts that were tolerably short. One was the Golden-Haired Girls On Ladders scenario. I say scenario because it does not span time, it is a verbal snapshot. I like to think of it as a picture in a photo album from a time before anyone in our family had a camera.

Apparently, the Isaksen girls were quite fair. Obviously they were pretty, else how could all of us have come into being? But, they were fair in the sense of being light-complected: clear white skin, blue eyes, and golden tresses that fell down their backs. All of this was quite a contrast to the brown skin and black hair and eyes of the original settlers in this region.

While I am a fan of long hair, having cultivated a little of it in the 70's myself, I respect anyone who can do the work. It is a maintenance problem that reminds me of the probable challenge of running a restaurant or living on a dairy farm. But these were hardy pioneer

women, and washing and drying and brushing all that flax was apparently all in a day's work.

One such day the whole troop of Isaksen girls had undertaken the laundering of their tresses. Being caught without hairdriers they expedited the desiccation process by leaning over and letting their hair fall forwards, away from their faces and shoulders. This, coupled with a bit of waiving about, considerably shortened the drying time. Standing bent over is not only tiring, but it does a poor job of keeping your hair out of the dirt if your hair is quite long. It was common for these white, blue and gold maidens to bring a step ladder outside for the longest-tressed one to climb up and lean over the top of. Chairs and porch rails sufficed as a leaning post for those with "short" hair.

Apparently, the girls had deported themselves about the landscape in front of the house one sunny morning like so many mermaids washed up from the sea: perched on ladders, chairs, railings. Then they became aware of the uneasy feeling of being watched. They slowly looked up to see a silent group of Indians standing in the road - motionless and staring at this spectacle. They were either mesmerized or in fear of what these strange beings might do next. It is likely that the Indians had seen blond hair only rarely, and to see so much of it being waved about in such a faceless, contorted way was surely riveting for a moment.

After a brief exchange of shocked expressions, the Indians wordlessly continued along the road. I did not hear what the Isakesen girls did, but I imagine they quickly set about inventing the hair drier.

JOHANNA AND THE LAWYERS

For the brief period after Robert Isaksen's death Johanna attempted to hold on by taking in overnight guests on their way from Pagosa Springs to Durango. This must have been an arduous trip that required a stopover in those days.

A lawyer from Pagosa stopped at Pine River. Since he was heading on to Durango Johanna asked him to take an installment of a regular \$25 payment to the county judge. Being a lawyerly type, the gentleman began asking questions about what the payments were for. The account she gave seemed totally without basis in the law. Eventually, the lawyer told her she didn't need to be paying the judge that money, and that the judge was simply abusing his office. It is not known how much she paid in total, or what effect it had on the losing of the Ranch, but it couldn't have helped. As Woody Guthrie wrote, "Some men will rob you with a pistol, some with a fountain pen."

AUNT MARGARET, SKIPPY AND THE BOGY-WOMAN

Aunt Margaret was, like all of those solid Danish girls of the Rasmussen guild, no push-over. They were, every one I recall, kind and generous, and inclined to avoid a confrontation; but they were not easily buffaloed. Must have been their Wild West heritage. Aunt Margaret is remembered at Mills College as being one of the oldest to matriculate and graduate. This was part of a life of keen interest in ideas and people, especially foreign people.

It is ironic, then, that she was arguably the most undone by someone as like her as it is possible to be; in fact, *more* like her than it is possible to be. She was a properly doting grandmother, and she often took young Skippy out for lunch. These were fun times for both: just the two of them trying out some traditional Danish cuisine: milk shakes and burgers. One of these lunch-adventures took them to Lumm's or some such cafeteria in downtown Oakland. Having dispatched the car in some convenient spot, they made for the splendor of glass and carpet, mirrors and booths...and treats for the kids: both of them.

The first (and nearly last) order of business was to find a good table, away from the door and toward the back of the room. There they could savor their treats and share their secrets in private. Margaret had little Skippy, all 4 years or so of him, firmly by the hand and made her way past the first booths and tables. She soon came to a narrows between a table and a booth. She could see with her aging eyes that there was yet another room with more booths just beyond. The perfect spot for grandmother and grandson. The only problem was a woman approached the same space 'twixed table and booth, and slowed to a stop right in front of Margaret! Margaret knew that if this matron had an ounce of civility she would step aside and let Margaret and her young friend past.

But nay! Her opponent took on fiendish traits as she stood implacably in the road. Margaret waited for a few moments, hoping this boor would get the hint and step aside. Failing this, she resorted to verbal contact. "Excuse me." No response, just some impatient body language. "EXCUSE ME!" she demanded. Still this nettlesome ninny stood her ground and refused to let Margaret and her protege past. Finally, Margaret was quite irked and said, "Madam, PLEASE let us past: step aside!"

At that point Margaret's attention was finally captured by a growing wail from down and behind her. She realized she had been hearing some sort of snuffling, but it had grown into an-un-ignorable, agonizing explosion of fear and dismay. She spun around to find Skippy pulling on her coat, cheeks shiny with tears, and reddened eyes swollen and streaming tears. He yanked again on her coat for emphasis and cried out, "Grandma!!! It's a *mirror*!"

KORT'S QUEST FOR DANISH COOKING

Some years after the airing of the series "Roots" on t.v., I realized that I knew nothing of Danish customs, language or food. Agnes (Rasmussen) and Chris Nygard went to the usual lengths to Americanize, hence we were all swimming about in this meltingpot culture. Thinking back I could recall some Danish foodstuffs. Agnes used to get little wood boxes of salt cod (I suppose): about half the size of cigar boxes. She would boil the contents amidst clouds of pungent steam, and then serve the result to Chris, but noone else. She seemed protective of us: not wanting to subject mere children to the vicissitudes of True Danish Cooking. I was of an age to recognize the resemblance between the wooden boxes with sliding lids, and periscopes. So, I borrowed two of Agnes' mirrors and made a periscope: great for spying on her in the kitchen.

But I digress. The other foods I could recall were Aebleskiver (or however you spell it): little pancake balls with bits of apple in them. We cousins would have contests at Agnes' dining table: who could put away more of those delightful balls of dough.

Then there was rhubarb. Sitting in a little jelly dish at the supper table, it looked confusingly like a vegetable, but tasted a little like a sweet. Plus, it was sour underneath the sweet. All a bit disorienting to a mere youth, but intriguing nonetheless. Pickled red cabbage made an appearance from time to time, and I suspect it was a Danish subversive, although it was never identified as a foreign agent.

Oh yes, and apricot preserves with bits of boiled pit mixed in. I remember picking the fruit from a ladder (or by masterfully climbing the trunk) in the back yard. Then I'd help crack the pits and put the "meat" into a pan to boil. The result was a slick, white nut that could be slivered and added to the sweet preserves for contrast. It was the best fruit preserves ever conjured on this earth! Years later I learned that apricot pits, unboiled, are quite poisonous. All Danish ills are cured with boiling water. I like to think that this was a Danishism, but probably not.

But aside from that, there was little-to-no Danish food in my youth. There is a reason for this. In America, most Danes sought to diffuse their national origins, so the language and customs slipped into obscurity.

After much memory searching I could never come up with the cream-filled pastries, the rolled cold meats, the plates of all white foods that I heard were the hallmarks of True Danish "Cuisine". When we went to Agnes' for dinner we always had fried chicken, mashed potatoes and green peas. I loved that dinner, though, and I remember complimenting Grandma Agnes on her mashed potatoes: they had wonderful little lumps of real potato. She got a look of pain and shock on her face, and cried, "Oh no, my potatoes have LUMPS?" Oof-Da! An early lesson in knowing when to read your audience.

Innaways, it was in the midst of my quest for Real Danish Cooking that I came upon a Danish town. While living in Iowa and working at the seminar business, I had opportunity to drive all over that part of the country. It didn't take long before I came across the little town of Elk Horn, IA. It had the distinction of being the largest Danish settlement in the U.S., and it was the home of the Danish-American museum (soon to be built), a Genuine Danish Windmill, and a Real Danish Restaurant.

Well, the first thing I did upon arriving in Elk Horn was head for the Real Danish Restaurant. I walked in and looked around. The waitresses wore embroidered aprons and little Tutonic-looking caps (they could have been Dutch, for all I knew.) There were pictures of Denmark on the walls, including The Little Mermaid statue in Copenhagen. "At last!" methought; here's my chance.

I looked over the menu, which had all manner of things I could not pronounce and had never tasted. The featured selection was their Smorgasbord. Since I didn't know what to order, I thought I'd go with that. That way I could sample a variety, and I could see what I was getting before putting it on my plate.

The waitress in the pretty Tutonic apron and cap told me to get a plate at the Smorgasbord. All along one wall was a steam table, and she gestured in its direction. I happily procured a rather ordinary restaurant plate and made for the steam table. At first, I could not make out anything because the "sneeze guard" was clouded (from the backside, no Norwegian Bachelor Farmers *here*), but I quickly learned to bob my head up and down in order to see under or over the Sneeze Guard.

To my chagrin, the first pan was brimming with...fried chicken! Hmmph! Must be for the faint-of-heart tourists and children who don't want the Real Thing. I moved on. The next pan held...mashed potatoes., and the next, gravy. Surely not! I could barely contain my Fear Of Peas as I moved to the next pan. Sure enough! A little ocean of glistening, smiling faces stared back at me from beneath the clouds of steam. On down was some pickled red cabbage and rhubarb. Hmmm.

At first I was crestfallen. I had come, at last, to the home of American Danish cooking only to find American American cooking. The only roots I had uncovered were the potatoes. Since I was still hungry, although less so, I took some chicken, potatoes and peas...and rhubarb and red cabbage and went back to my table to eat this meager fare. It was only when I was nearly finished that it struck me: I hadn't been defeated in my quest for Danish cooking. I hadn't been defeated in my quest for my ethnic Danish roots. I had discovered a shocking truth: I had been eating Real Danish Cooking every Sunday I went to Grandma Agnes'. The Danes must eat that dinner with such regularity that it goes without saying that it is The Real Danish Dinner, suitable for the Real Danish Restaurant. A glow of peace and fulfillment filled me. I went back for seconds and savored every exotic, ethnic bite. Home at last, Home at last! Thank God Almighty, I am *Home At Last!*

A VERY BELATED MERRY CHISTMAS

I encountered Carl Nygard's (OK, not official Rasmussens, but related by marriage) children by the strangest introduction. When I was about 5 years old, Norm was still deeply involved in black-and-white photography: his true calling, in my opinion. He left behind a wonderful gallery full of small but striking portraits.

One Christmas he took a picture of Louise and me standing with candles and a "Merry Christmas" message. This was our 1948 Christmas card, and it was sent to relatives all over the country, apparently. Thirty-some years later I had moved to Iowa and started a business which offered workshops for nurses. We sent out brochures about upcoming workshops (30,000 such brochures each quarter) and were accustomed to receiving piles of mail from people around Iowa, signing up for our courses.

One day the secretary who processed the mail gave me one of the envelopes: it was from a small town - Laurel Iowa. She said, "Here, this one's addressed to you personally; maybe you should open it." I did so, thinking it was another workshop registration. To my shock, a picture fell out of the envelope and landed face up: there lay a picture I had not seen in 20 years: Louise and I wishing Merry Christmas from 1950! I felt like I was dreaming or flickering back and forth between Iowa 1980 and California 1950. It didn't take me long to look for a note inside the envelope. There was a letter from Carl's daughter in Laurel Iowa. She was a nurse and had read one our mailings. She decided there couldn't be two Kortner Nygards on this small planet, so I must be Cousin Norman's son. She unearthed that old Christmas card (kept all those years, like her California cousins still do). She extended an invitation to come visit. That led to dinner, a tour of the old neighborhood, and introductions to her brothers...and to Carl's shoe shop. It was still standing, although I'd warrant that most of the neighborhood was unaware it existed, having long since closed up and musted over. She made a lasting impression on me with that letter. I am embarrassed to say that I have forgotten her name, but I remember her letter and that picture that came fluttering out across a third of a century.

CARL'S DONATION TO NEW YORK HARBOR

In the late 19th century, being an obvious Danish immigrant was not a badge of honor. It was not unlike being an obvious Irishman. Norm told an odd bit of information about his paternal uncle, Carl Nygard. Norm recounted that his father, Chris, and Carl were preparing for landing at Ellis Island. Upon entering New York Harbor they changed out of their traveling clothes into something more American looking. I imagine they looked the part of "A Couple of Wild and Crazy Guys" no doubt.

Innaways, Carl and Chris came up on deck with their hand-baggage. Standing at the railing, wind blowing their hair, they watched the sights of gleaming office buildings shoulder-to-shoulder on the land. In those days they were the work of masons, not steel workers. Two brick masons, surveying the work of their predecessors. The mouth of a great nation, sliding by, seeming to ingest them. Manhattan must have been all at once exciting and intimidating to these two brothers.

All at once, Carl took his Danish clothes out of his baggage, tied them in a bundle and threw them into the water! Chris, recovered his voice after a moment of watching those perfectly wearable clothes sinking down into the dark water. He demanded, "Why did you do that?" Carl stood there, his great square face framing two sparkling blue eyes and a great strawberry of a Danish schnoz, and said, in a thick Danish accent, "I don't vant to be taken for a Dane; I'm an American!" And so he became. At his death, decades later, he left a modest legacy for his country: a simple cobbler shop in Des Moines, which I had the honor to see, and three American children, with whom I had the honor to dine.

NORSMAN AND THE GREAT BEAR (CUB)

What is there about animals that draws us? If I were thumbing through this collection of stories I would stop at this one, just because it had an animal in it. The same was true of Willamena Penelope Johns Nygard. Billie loved animals, as did Norm. They cared for a fair collection of cats and birds (some of them inside others) through the years. And toward the later years they were avid watchers of birds and ducks.

Bear Prisoner

Bears were a favorite spectator sport when my family vacationed in Yosemite. We usually stayed in a "housekeeping tent" near the river, and in those days the bears had pretty free run of the valley, including the campgrounds. After dark, the bears would come out to play in the river, fight over territory, and graze the sumptuous garbage cans of Camp 16.

The cans offered great entertainment to the bears. They were made of galvanized steel with a lid. They were not protected or immobilized, so the bears had a good time brushing off the lids and foraging for cantaloupe, hamburger and candy wrappers.

One night the bears were putting on a good show in the river next to the tents and the adult humans called to the children to wake up and watch. The tents next to ours were occupied by friends of my Aunt Louise (Billie's sister). Their teen-aged boy staggered out of bed in his "prisoner" PJs, you know, with the black and white horizontal stripes.

As he wobbled around the corner of the tent, a bear decided to take a shortcut to the garbage cans along the same route, but in the opposite direction. They met as they rounded the corner. Fortunately, the stripes seemed to have had an unnerving effect on the bear, who turned and ran...just like the teen-ager. They were both shaken by the experience, but only the good sense of the bear prevented a second meeting a few tenths of a second later at the opposite corner of the tent: the bear ran straight, the boy did not. He emerged around the opposite corner, more cautious than the first time, but infinitely more nimble and wide-awake.

Cantics and Bear Hugs

Norm decided to teach the bears a lesson...or maybe he just wanted to tease them a mite. Anyway, he spent some time with the garbage cans one evening, squashing them out-of-round just enough that the lids now fit very tightly- when properly jammed down. That night the bears came out for their usual games in the river. Having worked up an appetite they retired to the cans. In the dark by the garbage cans there was a period of wuffing and grunting accompanied by clunking and clanking. Silence. Then the grunt of an Olympic weightlifter followed by the metal-against-metal of a garbage can sliding up out of its steel pipe cage. A pause. The sound of sheet steel warping under tremendous pressure, then, "Sproing!" followed by the clatter of a garbage can lid hitting the ground. After that quiet contented sounds of rummaging through culinary delights.

The next day revealed a collection of cans scattered about the landscape, devoid of lids and bearing an oddly-contorted shape: slightly elliptical at the rim when viewed end-on, and having a slight "waist" when viewed from the side. They all seem to have acquired this slightly feminine deportment from having been lovingly squeezed in the middle while held aloft.

Bad Bear! Bad Bear!

I am sure the memory of this demonstration of bear power was not far from Norm's mind when he had his only paternal relationship with a bear. Our family had gone for a walk up near Mirror Lake. When we returned to the car we eagerly broke into a package of Ranger Cookies. These were iced molasses cookies available in the local grocery; excellent for reviving flagging hikers.

We discovered that a large adolescent brown bear had heard the crinkle of cellophane (and possibly the ravenous grunting of children snacking) and was coming over to us to join in. Billie ordered us into the car at once. We were extra obedient and got safely inside with the doors locked. The bear, however, was not dismayed, yet, and it came right up to the car looking for a little crevice to pry open. Billie later claimed to fear that the bear might get its toes run over if we just roared away (I suspect she was just enamored with the citter), so she opened her window a few inches and threw a Ranger Cookie 10 feet from the car. The bear was far more interested in what was inside the car, and being smarter than the average bear, grabbed Billie's hand!

Billie gave a yelp and Norm jumped, without hesitation, from the car. To our collective horror, he ran around the front of the car, strode right up to the bear (still hand-in-mouth) and proceeded to whack it across the nose! Norm was the only one of the assemblage who seemed to have any idea of what was going on. The rest of us, bear included, were ready to wet ourselves. After a short look of utter disbelief, the bear let loose my mother's hand, turned and ran 50 feet. He then stopped and turned around to see if his memory served. Assuring himself that this really did happen, he turned and ran off, making frequent checks to the rear to assure that he was safe.

Norm explained himself by saying he had seen many mother bears cuff their adolescent cubs in the nightly river frolics. He said he judged the bear to be young enough to remember his own cuffs, so Norm took on what might aptly be described by the Latin phrase, *in loco parentis*; very aptly. Since that day, those cookies were known in our family as, "Bear Cookies". Apt again

FINIS

The stories continue to accumulate. They are not without purpose. They serve to entertain in the moment. They serve to round-out the pictures of our ancestors, giving dimension and humanity to a mere name on the family tree. They serve to remind us that the little things we do each day are largely just little things: the pebbles that line a stream bed. But mixed in among them are the gems that will survive 100 years or more. If we only knew which was which we would prize those gem-moments and ignore the pebbles. Instead, not knowing which are "worthy", we must prize each moment, each story as a potential "keeper". It is an easier task with our friends and family: they are all keepers.