

VIRGIL

## BELLYACHE MOUNTAIN AS I KNEW IT

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These are events leading to our going up on Bellyache Mountain to live as homesteaders.

In the summer of 1918 we had been living in southern Missouri. My father came down with malaria and was very sick. He had had malaria in Oklahoma before that.

My aunt living at Emma, Colorado, told us in a letter that there was no malaria in Colorado. So my father said, "When I get well, we are going to Colorado."

About the time he was improving and was preparing to go to Colorado, my Aunt Florence, Mother's sister in Iowa, died because of influenza. Everyone was having a bad epidemic of flu that fall of 1918.

My mother and we boys, Virgil and I, left Missouri on the train to go to Iowa to attend my Aunt Florence's funeral. Afterwards we went on to my mother's mother's in Brighton, Iowa.

While we were there in Brighton, there was a big celebration on November 11th, known at that time as "Armistice Day". After World War II it was changed to "Veteran's Day".

Later Mama, Virgil, and I went on to Emma, Colorado, where we lived with her sister Aunt Etta and husband Uncle Frank on a small farm near Emma. The cabin they lived in is still standing as of January 1991.

My Papa came a few days later with our two mules, two cows, and what household goods we had. They all had been loaded into a box car, while my father rode in the caboose on the freight train to see to it that the mules and cows were fed and watered.

That winter we rented a small farm about a mile from my aunt's and uncle's place, and kept our mules and cows there. My father got a job feeding cattle for a Mr. Sweet, who lived out from Carbondale. He stayed there while my mother, Virgil, and I stayed at Aunt Etta's. Mama would walk to our little place to feed the mules and cows, milk the cows, and carry the milk back to my Aunt Etta's.

I went to the grade school there that winter and had an awful time with the children and the teacher. The boys wanted to fight me. I had never been treated that way in Iowa and Missouri; so it took me a long time to adjust to their ways. I finally fought back and found

out I could get the best of most of them; and for sure I could whip a boy who was 20 pounds heavier than I. I got along with the children pretty well from then on. But with the teacher, it was another story. I had always had Spelling orally. This teacher had us write the words, and I could not keep up with the other children. It seemed she pronounced the words so fast that I would scribble down the words. She could not read them and would mark them all wrong. She said she did not have time to wait on me when the other children could write the words faster. To make it worse for me the teacher boarded and roomed with Aunt Etta. So my mother would get after her in regard to my bad spelling grades. It seemed the teacher took a special dislike to me. My time at school with her was not good at all. I began doing bad things. One thing, I drew a picture of the teacher, wrote a vulgar note under it, and handed it to another boy. The teacher caught me, took the note, kept me after school, and was tempted to expel me from school.

She said, "You never learned such vulgar words from the children here, did you?" I said "No", of course.

Later I used to bring .22 cartridges to school and throw them into the heating stove; but they didn't make a loud enough noise to suit me. So I brought a 30-06 cartridge to school and during class time fixed the fire and threw that cartridge into the stove. When it went off, a lid on top of the stove flew up to the ceiling. The front door of the stove flew open, the one where the drafts were flew open, and ashes went everywhere.

She did expel me that time. It was late in the spring; so my father said I did not have to go back to school to her. Neither he nor my mother liked her by then.

We farmed the little farm that summer. My father was gone most of the time working at jobs too far from home to walk back and forth.

He had collected a few hives of bees. When fall came, and the honey was to be taken from the supers, I thought I could do the job since I had watched him quite a lot as he worked with the bees.

I was ten years old then and did harvest all the honey without getting stung once.

Virgil, playing outside one time, came into the house crying, "Papa's bugs bite!". Trying to play with the bees, he had been stung several times.

That fall my mother got a job cooking for a wealthy family in Carbondale; Virgil stayed with Aunt Etta along with our dog, Frisk. We had had him in Iowa and Missouri and had brought him with us to Colorado. I went with Mama, attended school in Carbondale, and got along fine there.

A story about two boys, twins of the Sheriff of Garfield County, and me is interesting to me. I had raised some popcorn in Iowa. After it was harvested, I wanted to sell some of it. My Aunt Etta had written for me to mail some of it to her. I did, and she sold it for me to the Winters family. Later, after we had lived in Missouri and had moved to Colorado, here I was, going to school with the Winters twin boys.

In the early fall of 1919 my father went as far as Eagle looking for work. He met Mr. Charlie Penny who lived on Bellyache Mountain. Penny said if Papa wanted to go up on Bellyache Mountain and on up to the pine timber, he could cut logs for him. My father took him up on the offer, went first to Penny's farm, then on up to a cabin in the woods where he was left to cut logs.

I have heard two stories about why the area was called "Bellyache Mountain". One, the stage coach line used to go up Squaw Creek from Wilmore Station on the railroad over Bellyache and out Road Gulch to Brush Creek and on down to Eagle. The stage coach would stop at a spring not far after reaching the summit. If the horses were watered too soon while they were hot from the climb they would sure enough get a bellyache. The other story was that the spring had alkali in it which would cause some people to get diarrhea; therefore the name Bellyache.

While he was cutting logs, it started snowing hard the day before Thanksgiving. It was getting so deep that Papa decided to walk out to a lower altitude as the snow was getting too deep to cut logs anymore. He had a rifle at the cabin and carried it with him. I don't know whether he took any food with him at all or not. He shot a grouse that evening, found a place where down timber crossed each other, whittled shavings, and started a fire. It got real warm and melted the snow off around. He roasted the grouse, ate it, and walked on out to Squaw Creek the next morning. Then he had to walk up Squaw Creek on the road on up to Penny's. When he arrived there in the afternoon, he found out that Penny had gone after him by team and a bobsled. He had done all that walking, but could have ridden out.

That same storm put down 4 1/2 feet of snow in Carbondale. My mother and I slept in a small house a good fifty yards from the main house. When she got up and dressed and opened the door to 4 1/2 feet of snow, I heard her mumbling that she could not walk in that. So she called the main house and told the lady she could not get from our little house over to the large house in all that snow. Mrs. Van Sickle said, "Oh, come on. You will have to get used to a little snow." But my mother insisted she could not walk in that much snow. Finally some men came with a team of horses and an "A" shaped plow and made a wide trail for my mother. When we got to the main house, the woman was raving because Mama hadn't walked over there sooner so breakfast could be over and the Thanksgiving dinner started.

Papa had always wanted a farm of his own, not one he rented or share-cropped, so when he saw some of the nice vegetables that Penny

had grown on Bellyache, Papa wanted to take up a homestead for himself if one could be found.

He found just about the last 320 acre homestead that was on Bellyache Mountain. It had one 80 acres the far end of which was two miles from the house. Another 80 acres of the place cornered over the other side of Trail Gulch as the creek was called. Up above our house about 800 feet was a nice spring that could have been piped down to our house, but never was. We boys carried all the water for the house from a spring near the house, but below it. So all water had to be carried up the hill.

My father found some corral poles which he purchased and with which he built a 16' x 20' cabin right by the side of the Trail Gulch Creek. None of the poles was over 6" in diameter. When we arrived to live in it in the spring of 1920, the cracks were all open to the wind; so in April it was plenty cold in that cabin at night.

To go back a little, my father had gotten a job on a bridge gang on the D & RG Railroad. A cook was needed; so my mother quit the job in Carbondale and went to Woody Creek on the branch line from Glenwood Springs up to Aspen and took the job of cooking.

At that time it was in December. I did not go to school all the rest of that school year until April. I was enrolled in school in the old log cabin school on lower Brush Creek. Mama had been tutoring me all winter. She talked the teacher into putting me in the 4th grade; and when the school year ended, I passed into the 5th grade. I went to Brush Creek School then till I graduated from the 8th grade.

When we moved from Carbondale to Bellyache, George Guenon and Alex McDonald, both bachelors, lived west of us. Alex soon married and moved down on Brush Creek, where he lived till he died. Walter Webbs were southeast of us. Nick Edwards was south with part of his place east of us. Then a school section. Then Pennys were beyond the school section. Then Bushes at the head of East Squaw Creek and partly on Bellyache. The Fennos were east of Pennys on Bellyache and partly on West Squaw Creek. Over the hill from us towards "Ground Hog" (so called because lots of groundhogs lived on it) the ridge extended on towards the Southeast where Bellyache Ridge is today and where several homes are at the present time. Over on the Groundhog side were Earl Van Horn, the Neff place, Mrs. Buffington, her son Charley Buffington and a boy they raised, Robert Buffington. I never did find out who were his mother and father, but we had suspicions. Also, Ed Hammer, Polk Howe, Mrs. Van Alstine, and the Burris family. We always called the father "Dad Burris". His son Johnny lived with him. Next came the Howaters and Sholenbergers. A little later the Miller family arrived. Pete DeGraw was another homesteader. He was over on the Wolcott side of the mountain.

In the spring of 1920 Mrs. Webb gave birth to twins weighing about three pounds each. She kept them in shoe boxes on the oven door while she cooked for the family. The boy twin still lives and likes to tell you he was the first white boy born on Bellyache.

My folks had always attended church and made me go to Sunday School; but on Bellyache it was nine miles to Eagle to church or four miles to Brush Creek where we could go to Sunday School at the school house.

With the mules turned loose and no fences it was hard to get them in in time to go nine miles to church or four miles to Sunday School. A few times we would get the mules down and try to catch them, but they would whirl around and run back up to the sagebrush pasture. After two or three tries to catch them it was too late to go to church or Sunday School; so although my folks had gone to church once or twice on Sundays and had never worked on Sunday except to feed and water the chickens and animals, they quit trying to go either to Sunday School or church; and gradually they started working on Sunday. I was happy not to go to church, but seven days working week after week and month after month got tiresome too.

We eventually got the place fenced with three barbed wires at first, expecting to go back and put on a 4th wire; but that never happened. We were obliged to fence the place, plow 40 acres of farm land, build a house, and live there five years in order to prove up on the place.

We had started with two mules and two cows. By buying calves and keeping all the heifer calves we finally had 75 head of cattle, eight mules and horses; and the place was proved up on and was ours with no debts to speak of in the prescribed five years. And I was proud and did not want my parents to mortgage the place ever and take a chance of losing it. We found we could homestead another 320 acres west of our place when all we had to do to prove up on it was to fence it. So we acquired that too and had 640 acres then.

We were told by the cattlemen that Bellyache was not good for anything but pasture, but for years we raised good crops, very good vegetables, potatoes, for example, good, but not so large as the ones in the valley where they were irrigated. We raised oats that we cut when it was somewhat green. It was pretty good hay, somewhat green and partly filled out grain. We got to raising "Turkey Red" winter wheat, which did very well. We raised some of the best cabbage I have ever seen, and a lot of it, and used to sell it for two cents per pound.

Our neighbors the Webbs had moved to Eagle in order to send their two boys to high school. By the way, Alvin Webb was in my grade at Brush Creek, and his brother Robert was six years younger; but for one reason or another Alvin and Robert graduated together from high school in Eagle.

We eventually bought a 1928 Chevrolet truck. Soon after that a family named Martin who lived on the Webb place hired me to take a load of 40 sacks of potatoes to Leadville. We started for Leadville at 3:00 A.M. We peddled them all over town until they were sold early in the afternoon, and returned home that night.

By the way, we had built on two more rooms to the west of the 16' x 20' cabin we had built originally. We used larger logs in that addition and put a dirt roof on top and it was quite warm. When it rained for a long period, our dirt roof part of the house leaked! In the meantime we had built a pretty large cellar and a barn. I tried my luck at raising tame rabbits. We used to trade dressed rabbits, eggs, butter, and sometimes cottontail rabbits, all this, for groceries at the Lewis Store. It was a general store that had just about everything a person needed, all kinds of vegetables, groceries, and dry goods.

Several times during the summer my mother would give me a list for groceries, and I would ride to town, either horseback or muleback. The elderly fellow who worked for Lewis's would make up the list, put them in gunny sacks, and go outside to help tie them on for me, and I would ride home. Sometimes I would have to re-tie things on as they worked loose.

We started taking potatoes, carrots, rutabegas, cabbage and cauliflower to Leadville, peddling from house to house and began getting some cash for our produce.

Furthermore, we had began quite a business of tearing down a house and store building and taking home the good lumber we could save, expecting to build a larger house sometime.

We had lots of work, never could get caught up. We had lots of struggles. My folks always quarreled a lot. Finally, in 1928 I just walked off from building a fence around a place Lee Dougherty had homesteaded west of ours. I went to Eagle, got a cream check to which I felt I was entitled, cashed it, and started hitch-hiking toward Glenwood Springs. I did not have enough nerve to thumb a ride; I just hoped someone would stop and give me a ride. I walked as far as that swinging bridge at Dotsero. As I was sort of wary of someone coming along that knew me since I was running away from home and I just didn't want to tell anyone, I crossed that bridge to get on the railroad and walked all the way to Glenwood Springs. I was 19 years old. I was hot and tired, and instead of going to buy a meal, I went to a soda fountain and bought a dish of vanilla ice cream. With an empty stomach, I sat on a stool at the counter to eat the ice cream. As I finished, things went black before me and I almost fell off the stool, but I rested on the counter till the feeling finally went away, and I walked out. By the way, our dog, a fox terrier, went with me. We slept in a small hotel near the railroad that night.

The next day a fellow named Moore gave me a job helping him on his small farm up above where West Glenwood is now. He put up with my dog and me for about two weeks until I quit, took the dog back home, left him there, and took off again.

This time I tried riding freight trains. I got out in Utah. One afternoon I was put off the train about five miles before we got to Soldier Summit. Again I tried to get on a freight train. The same

"bull" that had put me off in the afternoon caught me and that time locked me up for a while in a very small room, thinking he would scare me, I thought. Well, it had its effect; so I slept out on the hillside in scrub oaks that night and walked to Thistle Junction the next day, about 30 miles, with no food at all. I bought a loaf of white bread and some sardines and walked out into a farming area, found a haystack, and proceeded to eat the bread and sardines. The bread was moldy, so I picked out the mold spots and ate the rest. It was pretty stale.

The next day I walked till I saw a threshing crew. I went there at noon time and asked for work, but did not ask for anything to eat. A fellow sitting in his car called me over as he said he felt sorry for me; the fact that I did not ask to eat impressed him. He took me out to a sheep wagon on his dry-land place. I batched there, hauled rock off of his place, etc. He paid me what he thought he owed me and advised me to go to Pocatello, Idaho, to look for work. He and all the other people around there were LDS people. They worked together and did not hire outsiders unless all of their kind were working and they needed more help. I guess that didn't happen often. But this one man did help me out.

I bought a ticket to Pocatello and arrived at night with only 50 cents in my pocket. I slept what I could on the steps going up to a hotel and spent 35 cents for breakfast the next morning. I asked whether they knew of any jobs. They told me about a new cement highway that was being built on the outside of town. I went, got a job, pick and shovel work, for 50 cents per hour for 10 hours a day. That was the best wages I had ever worked for. At noon one man would give me a part of a sandwich and another one would give me something till I had a pretty good lunch. Then I said I would have to find someone that would board and give me a room for a week till I got my first paycheck. A young man said he thought that where he was boarding and rooming would do that. He took me home with him. They boarded me, and I roomed upstairs in a good bed.

I stayed at Pocatello until the highway was finished.

Then I went to Blackfoot where I got a job working on building a schoolhouse.

When I was laid off from that job, I went out near American Falls, Idaho, and got a job on a farm threshing alfalfa seed for \$4.00 per day and board. At night I slept out in the hay.

I had written to my mother from Blackfoot to let her know I was all right. When the threshing job was finished, I went back to Blackfoot and checked General Delivery for mail.

There was a letter from my mother asking me to come back to help harvest the grain. I felt sorry for them being all by themselves and no money to hire help. Winter was coming, and I didn't have any job lined up; so I did go back home and help with the harvest. I stayed all winter as there was always plenty of work for me.

In the meantime the Edwards family, including Nick Edwards, Pansy, his wife, and Buelah, their daughter, all moved away from Bellyache. They had gone broke because of a new house, carbide light system, big horses, etc.

My folks talked me into staying on. I would be a third partner. They bought the Edwards place because my father always had wanted to own 1,000 acres or more up there on Bellyache. By that time we had 1,180.

Also, in the spring of the year when the crops were to be planted, Papa became very sick. We had an International tractor by then. I would start plowing at daylight, plow till noon, eat lunch, and go on plowing till dark. My mother did the chores and the cooking. There were cows to milk and chickens, pigs, etc. to be taken care of. After the plowing was done, I would work one team of horses from daylight till noon, eat dinner, hitch up another team and work till dark. I worked that way haying too, using a bull rake. I would use one team till noon and another till dark. I would haul loads up near the stack until Papa got the chores done. Then we would stack hay until the chores had to be done again. Then I would haul hay with the bull rake up near the stack until darkness forced me to quit.

What really broke my heart was that each night Papa would ask me how much I had gotten done that day. I would tell him, and he would invariably say, "Oh hell! Is that all you got done?"

When I got grain planted and would go to another part of the place to work, it would be weeks before I saw how the grain was growing in the first part I had planted.

An interesting thing that happened while we lived up on the Edwards place was about a couple living at a sawmill about 10 miles from us, the same place where Papa had cut logs in 1919. The woman was pregnant. When they thought her time was about up, they got in their old car and started to go to Eagle to the doctor. The baby was born in the school section. The man left his wife and baby in the car and came running down over the hill to ask for help. We sent him on over the hill to Mrs. Van Alstine's house. He drove the car with his wife and baby on over to Mrs. Van Alstine's where she played mid-wife. The wife and baby did fine.

The more land my folks had the more work there was; and the more they quarreled. Even though I was to be a third partner, there was nothing in writing to that effect. I decided when I was 24 years old that I couldn't take all that quarreling. I would rather not own anything than to put up with the constant quarreling. In the fall I left and went to Offerson's at Avon, where I worked that winter for \$10.00 per month with board and room. That was not much at all; but the home atmosphere was calm and I was comfortable.

While we lived on Bellyache during the depression there were plenty of deer, and I liked to hunt. So we ate a lot of deer meat,

cottontail rabbits, blue grouse and sage grouse which we all called sage hens or sage chickens. One time when I was quite young, I went hunting with the 12-gauge shotgun and saw a sage hen. I shot once and when I went to pick up the hen, there were two dead ones!!! This was my first time shooting sage hens, and the only time I shot two with one shot.

I enjoyed that part of my life on Bellyache.

That was the end of my life on Bellyache.