

Chapter One

From Urban to Rural



Halloween is tomorrow, and this is our first October here, a basement apartment in Kellogg, Idaho, where we are living temporarily until our little house on Moon Creek is finished. We've been in Kellogg since the first of July, and we're all tired of this small, dark apartment, but the house is nearly ready. We'll be moving in next week.

The apartment is not much taller than Daddy. He needs to remember to duck under the single yellowed ceiling light in the kitchenette. There are just two small bedrooms, and we four sisters are all sharing one of them, sleeping in bunk beds shoved against the walls, with Kathie's crib in between them. Our room has just one tiny window up very high—almost to the ceiling. The apartment is the basement of a house the owners have turned into rentable space. It sits on a slope, the back part dug into the hill, so only the front of our apartment has decent-

sized windows, but even so, the sills are higher than normal windows.

Mom has taken my baby sister, Kathie, and gone out to get something she needs for dinner, and Daddy is still working at the new house. That leaves me, about a month shy of 6 years old, my older sister, Carolynn, who turned 8 in July, along with Ann, about 3-1/2, alone in the apartment. The sky is dimming quickly, and Carolynn and I decide we should put the newly carved jack-o'-lantern in the window for all to see. Okay, so it's mostly Carolynn's idea. There is already a small candle inside, and after I lift off the pumpkin's carved lid, Carolynn lights the candle, carefully replaces the top, lifts it up and puts it on the front windowsill.

"C'mon, let's get the table set," Carolynn says to me, and the three of us go into the small kitchenette.



We haven't been in there long when we smell charred pumpkin and smoke. Carolynn panics and it's contagious. So do Ann and I. We run into the living room. Pungent gray-black curls of smoke bob against the ceiling, more tendrils spreading out and up from between the teeth of the leering jack-o'-lantern. Carolynn grabs the pumpkin and blows out the candle.

"Quick, help me open the windows—Mom's going to be back any minute!" she says, coughing and fanning the air. We get the windows open, but we know the smell will not be gone before Mom gets home.

Then things get worse. The people who live upstairs have smelled the smoke too and called the fire department. Next thing we know, the fire truck is outside, and the crew is banging on the door. When Carolynn opens it, mostly what I see around her is knees and thighs, and a glimpse of the fire truck at the curb outside, lights glowing in the dusk. Just about then, Mom comes running up the street, carrying a small sack of groceries in one arm and Kathie in the other. She arrives just as the firemen are lecturing us about the dangers of playing with matches. Mom continues the lecture after they leave. We're lucky that's all we get. Mom's unpredictable. Sometimes I can do something that I am sure I will be punished for—like the time I cut off a big chunk of the ruffle from one of her curtains to make a doll outfit—and nothing happens. Other times, it seems like I can just look at her wrong and all hell breaks loose. I just never know with her. No spanking this time. Our punishment is no trick-or-treating for Carolynn, Ann and me the next day, and that's bad enough, but obviously, things could have been much, much worse.

When we move there in July of 1948, Kellogg is a small mining town with a population of about 4700 people. Bunker Hill Mine and Smelter, on the western edge of town, is the largest mine in the area, working the mountains for silver, lead, and zinc. The Sunshine Mine is east of town, off Highway 10 at Big Creek, and there are a number of smaller mines in the area as well. This place is known as Silver Valley for good reason. Between 1884 and 1979, the Coeur d'Alene Mining District produced 907 million ounces of silver—almost five times as much as Nevada's famed Comstock Lode. Mom says we're here because Daddy wants to be his own boss, and like so many others drawn here, dreams of striking it rich. He's been hired to manage a small mine on the West Fork of Moon Creek. It's the beginning of a new and very different life than the urban one we had in Lewiston.

It's not nearly as big and busy as Spokane or even Lewiston, but Kellogg still has a lot going on. There are people shopping in all the uptown



*The Miner's Hat today is a realty office. Built by Marietta Page in 1939, imagine it in the 1950's when the menu was posted outside, and we could drive up, sit in our car, and be waited on by a car hop.
Photo courtesy of my sister, Kathie Zaremski, 2007*

stores on Division and McKinley Streets. There are also restaurants doing good business, churches, gas stations, and the big multi-story YMCA, which is supported by Bunker Hill. The Y is a busy place with classes, meetings and other activities going on all the time. There's a swimming pool in the basement where Carolyn and I are taking our first swimming lessons. The smell of chlorine and wet towels assaults my nose the minute I get to the bottom of the stairs. It's kind of dark down there too, which makes it a little scary, and I wonder if the lifeguards would even notice if I went under and didn't come up. There are lots of bars in town too, and cars are parked out in front of them day and night.

Right after we moved here, we all walked down to Division Street to watch the Independence Day parade. There were a lot of people on the sidewalks, and I kept trying to see around them or through their legs. Suddenly a big man with a red Santa Claus beard hoisted me up on his broad shoulders so I could see better. He introduced himself as Chief McCoy and told Daddy and Mom his first name is Mace. He is the Chief of Police, and we all come to respect him, but I like him because he likes kids.

We don't eat out very often, but once in a while, we get a meal at the Miner's Hat, a drive-in that

looks like a miner's hat that would fit Paul Bunyan. It even has the light on the front like the real miner's hats do. Cars park around the building, and the waitresses come out to the car and take your order. When it's ready, they bring it back to the car on a tray that hooks to the car window. Daddy passes the food around. Coney Island hot dogs with spicy meat sauce, onions and mustard are my favorite. Yum!

There's one theater in town, the Rena, near the highway and Division Street intersection. I like the Saturday kiddie matinees. Once we get through the news, it's cartoon time. Wile E. Coyote always after the Roadrunner. Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny. Popeye the Sailor. I lose track of how many they show. Then comes the cliff-hanger main attraction. If we don't come back the next week, we won't know how it ends. It costs a dime to get in. For a quarter, we can get popcorn, candy, and something to drink too.

The first time I see Moon Creek it's August, and hot.

"Where are we going?" Carolyn asks.

"Up to see how our new house is coming along," Mom answers. She's holding Kathie on her lap and turns a little to look at us in the back seat. "Are you looking forward to moving in?" We nod.

We're heading east out of Kellogg, Daddy driving, the highway following along the south fork of the Coeur d'Alene River to our right. Carolyn, Ann and I are in the back seat, and I'm looking out the window, watching the world roll by. A few clouds dot the slightly grayed blue of the sky today, but the river is grayer still, like chocolate milk gone bad, and in places, there is a brownish foam on the banks. I also see a lot of junk—beer bottles, rusting cans, even an old chair someone threw away. We lived across the street from a river in Lewiston, and Carolyn and I were forbidden to go down the steep bank to see it up close because Mom was worried we could fall in and drown. We snuck down there once anyway, and when we were standing on the bank, I asked Carolyn to show me where the currents lived that



The fork on Moon Gulch Road—the left fork took us to our house and mine. This is where we caught our school bus.

Mom said would carry me away. I was picturing something alive, like a big fish or a snake, and was disappointed when Carolyn explained to me that currents were just the way the water moved in the river. But I'm older now, and I'm learning to swim, too. I wonder if I'll be able to explore this river once we get moved into our new house.

A little building and a cluster of houses at the base of the mountains come into view on our left, and I lean around Ann to see the sign as we cruise by—Elk Creek Store. Next, we pass a high rectangular red brick building with large windows, and right after we pass it, Daddy slows and turns left off the highway.

"That's where you birds will be going to school," he says, gesturing toward the building we've just gone by. We're heading north up Moon Gulch on a narrow 2-lane asphalt road. It hugs the mountains on our left. We pass by small homes and trailer homes, a few with a boat parked in the side yard. Some places have

a little bit of grass and flowers, but most of the yards seem to be a place to store old tires and other stuff, and for parking cars and trucks, some obviously being used, some being worked on, and some just rusted shells with shrubs and weeds growing up around and through them. I wonder who lives in these houses and if they have kids my age.

The houses begin to thin out, the paving ends and our tires begin to thump in a staccato rhythm as we continue up the washboard dirt road.

"Roll up the windows," Daddy says, "or we'll be eating dust."

So, despite the heat, Carolyn and I crank the window handles until there's just an inch or so open to let in air. It's high summer now, and any moisture the road had in the spring is long gone. Dust boils up behind us, and we can soon smell it inside the car. A long slow curve, a straight-away, and then we're staring at a mountain dead ahead. The tires vibrate over a cattle guard and a culvert, where the

west fork of Moon Creek flows beneath us to join the east fork. Daddy pulls over into the turnout.

"This is where you'll catch the school bus," he says. "And if you're late, it will leave without you, and you'll have to walk all the way to the school." Blue eyes look down at me and Carolynn.

"How far is that?" Carolynn wants to know. She will be making this walk come September if we're moved into our new house by then. I will too since I already finished kindergarten in Lewiston. Daddy tells her it's two miles to the school from here, and it's another mile and a half from our house to the fork. She and Mom get into a discussion of how long it will take to walk that distance. I sort of listen, but with little interest. For me, time spreads out like watercolor paint touched to wet paper, expanding in every direction. When I want to go somewhere, I just walk until I get there. Who cares how long it takes?

We all pile back into Susie, our blue and white Dodge sedan, and Daddy turns left onto the west fork of Moon Creek.

"What's our address going to be?" I ask, remembering that when we lived in Lewiston, Daddy and Mom made Carolynn and me memorize our address, 405 Prospect Street, so if we got lost, our rescuers would know where to take us.

"This is a forest service logging road," Daddy answers. "It has a number, but our address will be Post Office Box 898, Kellogg, Idaho."

I imagine being taken to a huge box if I get lost, and wonder if it will have windows and a door. How will I get home from there? I start to worry about that, but when I spot a cow and horse grazing in a grassy, small field next to a house on our left, my worries about my address are shoved aside. I've seen a horse before, but not a cow. This one is black and white with a pink udder. She looks exactly like the ones in my picture books. Her nose is busy in the grass near the fence, and she doesn't look up when we pass by. The valley is wider here, but as soon as we round the first curve past that house, it begins to narrow, the mountains quickly closing in on both sides.

BLLAAAT! An air horn pierces the air, very loud, even inside the car with the windows nearly shut. There's a blind curve ahead, and Daddy slows and stops, pulling as far off the road as he can. There's not much room. Susie is right up against the mountain, shrubbery smashed against the windows, a few outraged leaves poking their faces into the car through the cracked open windows on that side of the car. Ahead, the front of a huge truck appears around the curve. All I see at first is the grill, but as it clears the bend, I see it's stacked high with cut logs. Heavy chains hold the logs on the truck. It barrels by us, and I instinctively shrink away, getting a whiff of fresh-cut pine as the logging truck passes. I'm wondering how Daddy knew to pull over when he heard that horn. How do you learn that stuff? Close calls?

"Remember that horn sound," Daddy says as he pulls back into the center of the road, plowing through the dust cloud left by the logging truck. "It means GET OFF THE ROAD RIGHT NOW." Mom says the loggers have been told we will be living right next to the road, and they'll honk when they get near the house to warn us they're coming, but we will need to pay attention whenever we're on the road.

I look down at the scar running across my right knee. I've already been hit by a car. Lost control of my tricycle in Lewiston last year while peddling as fast as I could down the sidewalk, trying to catch Carolynn on her bike. I hit a hump in the sidewalk, veered off it, bumped down the curb and out onto Prospect Street. Wham! A car hit the back of the tricycle and knocked me and it back up onto the sidewalk. The poor man who hit me was so upset I felt sorry for him even though I was the one hurt. I was bleeding but not broken. Lucky. Or as Daddy would say, damn lucky.

But I've seen dead things on the road. Smashed flat as a pancake. I know exactly what that means. If they aren't cleaned up right away, the bodies get flatter and flatter. Carolynn and I found one in Lewiston once that was as dry and thin as a piece of cardboard, but we could still tell it had been a bird.

I imagine myself flat as a pancake, being peeled off the road. I'd look like a paper doll, sort of, and that's kind of interesting. But seriously; put logging trucks on a list of things to be scared of in this new place. I wonder what else there will be.

Once around that curve we see the mine ahead, the buildings perched high above the road to our right, on a flat area carved out of the mountain. Log cribbing holds the cut side of the mountain in place behind the buildings, and there's more cribbing in front of the buildings, holding the slope. We don't stop. We go under a high narrow wood trestle bridge over the road that goes from one side of the mine to a second flattened out place on the other side



Our mine, with Susie, our blue and white Dodge, parked in front of the hoist/shop building. We drove under the trestle bridge to get to our house—up the road (to the left in this photo).

by the creek. The house is ahead, a pale yellowish skeleton in the green woods. All bones and no skin. Daddy parks out in front, where a turnout has been scraped into the valley floor. About ten feet separate the edge of the turnout from the creek that flows past the house.

All four doors of the car open almost at once. My ears sort through bird calls, insect sounds, the

creek gurgling over rocks, and wind making a sighing sound through the evergreens that tower high above me. I smell pine trees and summer leaves, mixed in with sawdust and the smell of fresh lumber from the house. I don't know what to look at first—everything is new and unfamiliar. The house is dwarfed by tall trees and even taller mountains. I look up. Not much sky here—just a little slice. A few puffy summer clouds sail across as I watch. It doesn't take them long to go from one side to the other and disappear.

Carrying Kathie on one arm, Mom follows Daddy as he points out various things to her in the house. The rest of us trail along behind them. I hear him say that the walls and roof are ready to go on next, now that the framing is done. He points to the stairs. With no walls yet, they seem to float in space. He says us kids will have the whole upstairs. I can't imagine it with no floor above me yet, and no walls either. The bathroom is at the foot of the stairs, and we see where the kitchen and dining nooks will be. When Daddy and Mom start touring the garage, Carolyn, Ann and I lose interest. We are drawn to the creek. From where the car is parked, there's about a three-foot drop to the water, but the bank is sloped, not a drop-off, and we pick our way down. I squat at the edge of the creek and put my hands in the water. Icy cold. Clear too. Not very deep, though, and where it's still, you can see every pebble on the bottom.

"Look, tiny little fish," I point to a place behind a large rock. Minnows, which we'll learn later are trout, are swimming in the shadow of the big stone. We all three pull off our shoes and socks. We wade in, complaining how cold the water is, and how slick the rocks are. It's not easy to balance, but Carolyn and I gingerly pick our way out into the middle of the stream, and then, because it's hot, start splashing each other, and directing some water at Ann who's closer to the creek's edge. We all get just wet enough that our clothes cool us off as they dry. We sit on the bank in the sun, tossing small rocks into the water, waiting on the grown-ups, looking around at what will be our new playground. This is SO much better than Kellogg. I like it already.