

## Gasoline Signs

Cars were scarce but there was a variety of gas companies marketing their product in Vernal. Some of the companies are defunct today. I recall include these, because there were large signs that impressed me with their vivid colors and designs and images. The age of some of these images may be off, but not by much.

Sinclair Oil was one that stood out because it had a large green brontosaurus in the center of its ads. In Vernal this was an attractive emblem because we had the Dinosaur National Monument -we said the whole name when we referred to it.

The interesting thing about this symbol is that dad tried to squeeze some research money out of Sinclair in the 70's by trying to persuade them that it would be to their benefit for him to dig up the proper head for brontosaurus or some such thing. Needless to say, the company politely thanked him for his interest and the matter was dropped. He fumed about that for several years because he thought he really had them in the bag with his idea.



Figure

<http://www.automobiliausa.com/images/pro>

Gulf Oil was another one of the gas companies that featured signs that were simpler in design than they are today. This particular sign is primitive compared to others of the era. Somehow the orange band on white was washed out compared to others. Perhaps it was simply the shade of orange that made it less interesting than Mobilgas.



Figure 2

<http://www.automobiliausa.com/g701.html>

Mobilgas had the sign that fascinated me the most. Because of the image. A horse, a red horse, a red horse with large wings. Such a remarkable image to a farm kid who knew horses well



Figure 3



Figure 4

<http://www.automobiliausa.com/gs1301.html>

but wouldn't have dreamed that there was a horse that was red, or a horse that had these gigantic wings. I don't remember that an adult explained that this was "Pegasus" and that he was from a Greek Myth. Would I have understood the concept "Greek"? I doubt it. But I looked at the red flying horse sign each time we passed it. There was one on Highway 40 going to Naples and I remember well late in the evening sitting in the back of our car as we went home from grandpa and grandma's house, watching this lighted sign against the black sky, wondering how a horse could sprout wings and fly like this. The same image appeared on the glass globes -left image- that sat on top of the gas pumps.

Phillips gas was around but its sign paled in comparison to Mobilgas. All of them did, really. Who can top a red flying horse? The colors are somber and the lack of any symbol made it less interesting to this kid.

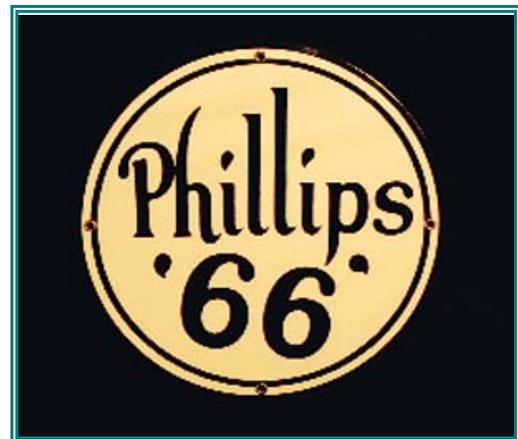


Figure 5

<http://www.automobiliausa.com/gs1609.html>

Conoco was prominent in the region with this particular version of its sign. The running together of the first syllables of the company name interested me. This is the company that owned the tiny tank farm across the road by the swamp where we hunted for frogs and polliwogs in the holes made in the purple mud by the dairy herd when it broke through the fence.



Figure 6 <http://www.automobiliausa.com/g3355.html>

Texaco was also a name created from the first syllables of other words, a trick that interested me. The star was the interesting part of the design, another red one. With a giant "T" standing squarely in the middle. When I looked at these designs with layers of pieces, I didn't see the overall design. I looked at the individual parts without reference to the whole design.



Figure 7 <http://www.automobiliausa.com/g3355.html>

## Vernal Rodeo

Man alive, I can still remember the excitement of going to the Vernal Rodeo. It has turned into one of the top rodeos of the whole US apparently. But to me as a kid I had no perspective on that sort of thing. "In the US"? What would that have even meant to me. We would go sit in the bleachers to watch cowboys ride horses and bulls and rope steers. The funnest part was the clowns. Their job was to distract the bulls after they'd thrown their riders because they turned on them. The clowns would run out in front of them, roll barrels, wave things to distract the bull long enough for the rider to get up and out of the arena.



Figure 8 <http://www.vernalrodeo.com/>

## Samson and Delilah

Cecil B. DeMille. A god among movie directors. I didn't really know what a director was but dad thought he was an amazing man and mom liked his bible-story-movies. So guess what. I liked him to. At least I could say his name with a certain amount of conviction as I parroted my parents. But I became a believer in his movies the year before we left Vernal. It was summer time I recall, and we went to a matinee of a new movie named "Samson and Delilah". Mom approved because it was directed by Cecil B. DeMille. It was a bible story that we knew well. Too bad. I fell badly in love again. Such a pushover.

The story line was familiar as we watched Samson fight the Philistines and, using the jaw bone of an ass - naughty word of course- kill a lot of men by himself before he escaped. Finally he ended up in the clutches of this woman Delilah. I knew her name well and there was even a woman in the town who carried the name. Just

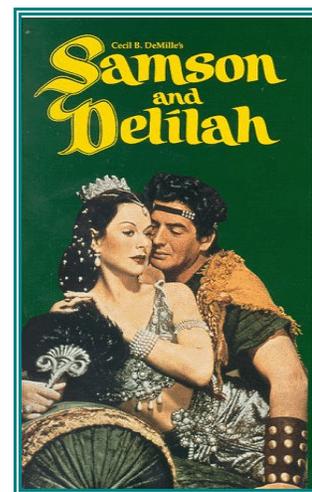


Figure 9  
<http://victormaturefanclub.tripod.com/gallery53.htm>

another funny name.

Except that this Delilah was not like any Delilah I had ever imagined.

She was Heddy LaMar playing opposite Victor Mature - and was a knock out.

The setting was vintage Cecil B. DeMille - always said his full name- with large casts, fantastic sets and costumes and drama spilling out of the screen on the audience. This was another of that type. Except for this woman, Delilah, aka Heddy Lamar. And a knockout. She was easy on the eyes and even though she was deceitful, I was stunned at her beauty. I had never been impressed by women's beauty up to that point, even Miss Isabelle was not really appealing because of her beauty. But this woman just stunned me.

After she finished her deceitful trickery of Samson, cutting his hair off and letting in the guards who tied him up and led him away, I could only see her, could only wait until she re-appeared. It didn't matter what she had done. My moral compass was blocked. I didn't care that she had just used trickery to defeat Israel's champion. Not at all. Just please come back so I can look up on you. Please.

When the movie was over and the theatre emptied, I naturally had to leave. But I was heartsick. This woman had deceived Sampson but she was stunning. The movie ended and the lights came up, but all I could think about was this Heddy Lamar. I mooned over her for a long time and today can conjure up the puppy love I felt for her.



Figure 10

<http://victormaturefanclub.tripod.com/gallery53.htm>



Figure 11

<http://victormaturefanclub.tripod.com/gallery53.htm>

## Shooting the Kitchen Window out with 30.06

Deer season in October meant that dad would be going out in the desert with Art Schafermeyer and some other guys to "sight in" their guns. I didn't really understand specifically what that meant but did understand that the point of the exercise out there in the desert was to make sure their guns shot straight, that they could aim accurately. That sounded reasonable to me. We needed the meat so it was important that dad should be able to get a deer for us. He did this every year and continued in Seward going out to get moose for our meat locker.

We never were allowed to go out into the desert with him. I don't know what he did actually out there even today. The process took half a day or so on a nice sunny Saturday so I imagine that dad was actually having a fine time out there without kids around. He and Art would plink at old tin cans or glass bottles that were left lying all over the place.

The "Litter bug" business hadn't happened yet so there was no particular shame in leaving junk lying around. True, many people cleaned up after themselves but they also felt free to drop whatever they wanted wherever they wanted. This guy showed up in the early 1950's after we were in Seward. It was another of those governmental crusades but this one affected me personally. Because I couldn't just throw something out the car window. There was a \$25.00 fine if we did that. I obviously didn't think there really was a creature that looked like this, but he was a good portrayal of "the kind of people who litter", stylized, inaccurate, but wholly believable. Unshaven, mean looking, just throwing trash right and left. Up to this time we were sort of lax in the car about throwing things out the window. Mom discouraged it but it happened now and then. But with the appearance of this guy, more particularly, the appearance of a fine, out-of-the-window became taboo and we didn't do it.

Anyway, dad went out in the desert to sight in his gun, his beloved Enfield 30.06 with the silver-engraved stock. He'd return in the evening worn out from

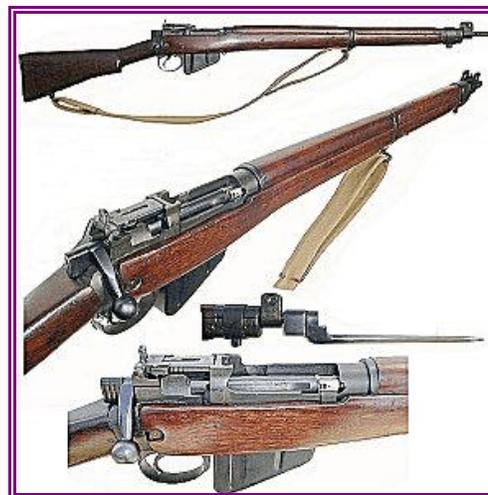


Figure 12 <http://www.prc.org/guide/litbug.gif>

the day, sort of out of sorts. You know how parents get. Well, this particular year he came into the house with his ammunition and rifle in hand and got started in a conversation with mom. I think we weren't actually in the room when it happened. I think it was the tenor of the conversation that caused us to put our bodies in our bedroom. Remember how small this house was, so even stepping through the doorway from the small kitchen into a small bedroom kept us in the proximity of the little argument. She was probably fed up with being left alone with the darn kids while he was out there having a good time with his friends.

Mom came from a line of kids who were taught from the age of about five how to handle guns. Grandpa Merrell, so mom told me recently, believed firmly that there would be no accidental shooting deaths if all kids were taught gun safety before they were six years of age. I actually tend to agree. Anyway, she apparently was acting from that frame of reference in this instant when she changed subjects in that irritated conversation and turned to gun safety. He probably felt he dang well knew what he was doing, he had been handling the darn thing all day hadn't he, and so on. Besides, they were both ruffled and irritated. So he did what to me is the most frightening things he did during my entire life.

In response to her question, 'is there a cartridge in the firing chamber?', he held the big heavy rifle up to her -probably with the sneer I know- so she could see it, in his right hand. She had asked him an entirely reasonable question, especially because there were little kids in the house who tested limits, and there was no "gun safe" to secure the gun in. The rifle normally just stood in a corner. But it was too much for him to be asked that question that did, from his point of view, imply that he might not have been careful about safety, that he might have overlooked something. So he aimed the rifle -at the kitchen window- and pulled the trigger.



**Figure 13 Enfield**  
See other copy for URL

**He blew the window out.**

I suspect you are unable to comprehend the loudness of that shot. Because

you probably have never heard a rifle fired up close. Especially in a closed space. It is terrifying. We ran to the kitchen, petrified, stunned, afraid to see what we would see, not knowing what we would see, but knowing it was going to be awful. We were in the other room because they were arguing. So there was a quality of dissension already. This explosion was beyond anything we had ever heard in the house and somehow fit with that dissension.

When we entered the kitchen, dad was staring stupidly at his rifle, mom was staring out the shattered window. We knew something really really horrible had happened. Gun safety had been drilled into us and the concept that he could have forgotten to clear the firing chamber was confusing and upsetting. How could he have been so stupid? All he had to do was open the damn chamber, pull the bolt back and just look inside! What arrogance! To pull the trigger on a rifle inside of a house was bad enough, but to do it on a rifle he obviously did NOT know was loaded or not was beyond belief. What if he had just aimed it at mom in that instant? I still can not believe he did it. I am just shocked to relive the event. He was callous beyond words.

Actually, based on my life experience with the two of them, I personally speculate -but admit I may be wrong- that he was just a hairbreadth from aiming it at her in his arrogance and anger and that something miraculous prevented him from doing it. He was so angry.

We understood that death walked through our house just then. And that He decided that us kids needed mom more than He did. I weep right now when I recall the incident.

## Hollyhocks

About the only color in our yard was a bed of pansies that circled one of the two large cottonwood trees by the driveway, the ones we hung a hammock between. Rocks were stacked to retain the dirt, about 18 inches higher than the ground. Mom planted pansies in this bed around the tree, watering them with a bucket. They thrived in the sun. When we sang



Figure 14 Little Purple Pansies  
<http://www.lakeviewbb.com/images/pansy.jpg>

"Little Purple Pansies", I thought of our beds of purple pansies standing around the bottom of a large cottonwood, in the sunlight, glistening with dew in the cool morning before the hot sun had done its job of heating everything up and driving the dew away, something I didn't understand.

This pansy bed is where we would find the fruit jars that had been emptied by a troll during the night of the tadpoles or frogs that we had managed to capture the previous day. No sermons about the sanctity of life but the message was received - better than with a lecture. The troll was Danish. So were we except that we didn't look like him, at least not on Saturday Night. It was a sort of vague puzzle in my mind why the troll would want to harm Billy Goat Gruff but would be tender enough to save my tadpoles. The contradiction didn't bother me too much. The mystery of



Figure 15 Billy Goat Gruff  
[members.tripod.com/~darrens/Goat.html](http://members.tripod.com/~darrens/Goat.html)

getting up in the morning to discover that the bottle was empty, and be told by mom or dad that a troll had released the tadpoles was wonderful enough to make me overlook the contradiction. The troll was, in fact, Danish.

House plants consisted basically of asparagus ferns and geraniums. My mom grew both. The geraniums developed yellow leaves probably due to under-fertilization. But the ferns seemed to do OK. Aunt Nelma kept an exotic enormous Christmas cactus climbing out of its pot on a narrow stand in her living room. It produced gorgeous pink elongated flowers in cold dark December, a puzzlement because crops and plants outside were dead or dormant and wouldn't bloom until the days were longer and the weather was warmer. In addition to the surprise at

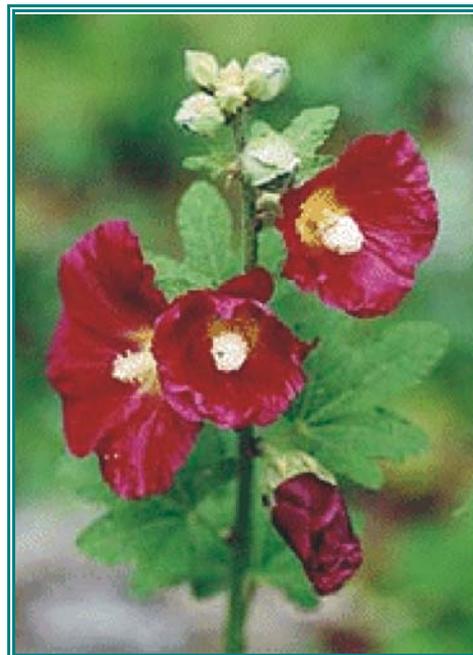


Figure 16 Christmas Cactus  
<http://www.femlea.com/xmas/pix/cactus.jpg>

seeing flowers in December, the hue and colors startled me. Fluorescent colors had not yet made their debut so these flowers were unique and wonderful to look at. Plus the shape of the leaves that were called cactus surprised me. Cactus in my experience out in the desert was dry and round and prickly with nasty spines. How could this be a cactus?

The other source of color in our yard each summer was hollyhocks. These flowers volunteered profusely every year. They were never watered so survived in this dry climate on the natural rainfall which was sparse, on the order of 14 inches a year. Yet they always grew into three to five foot tall plants, often taller than we were. The leaves were large and flat with a complicated pleasing shape. The flowers were the largest I had ever seen, made out of stuff that looked sort of like thick shiny tissue paper, wrinkled and iridescent if looked at from an angle. The stamen was tall and fuzzy, making them look a bit like the hibiscus flowers that dad painted from Hawaii. The buds opened slowly and looked sort of like a fat cigar that developed petals as you can see in the bottom right of the image. They had their distinctive scent like most flowers did.

Hollyhocks provided three forms of entertainment in an environment that would strike modern kids as boring. First, hollyhocks provided an irresistible opportunity to scare girls. If you didn't get stung in the process. The large blossoms attracted bees that crawled down inside to harvest nectar and pollen. While a bee was rummaging around down inside, you grabbed the ruffled outer edges of the blossom and squeezed them together to trap the bee. The guy in this image is in a different kind of



**Figure 17 Hollyhocks**

<http://surfsc.com/perennialhouse/images/hollyhock.gif>



**Figure 18 Honey Bee**

[http://pmwww.ncsu.edu/small\\_fruit/blpme2.jpg](http://pmwww.ncsu.edu/small_fruit/blpme2.jpg)

flower, so imagine him standing in the center of the large hollyhock blossoms like you see in the preceding image. Wide open and you are unprotected when you make your move.

You have to be brave. Really. Not a trivial thing for a 6 year old who has been stung various times already. The angry buzzing that erupts the instant you grab the petals and pull them up over the bee makes you think twice about what you were about to do next. The buzzing actually made the entire blossom vibrate, an odd sensation I hadn't felt before, but given the source of vibration, it wasn't exactly pleasing.

By gently compressing the entire bloom the bee was trapped without being harmed. Then you gingerly started opening the blossom from the open end a bit at a time. When the bee was exposed but still secured by the petals you were holding around him, you rolled the bloom over until you could see his wings. Then the tricky part. You grabbed the wings, making sure that you grabbed BOTH of them at the same time. If you got only one, you quickly let go and tried again until you had both. Then you released the blossom and held the bee there in the air, angrily kicking his legs and extending and retracting his wicked shiny black stinger that you could easily see. The next step was to hold him safely away from your anatomy while you squirmed around to get a piece of your shirt sleeve into your mouth or you would sit on the ground and bend your knees up. You wet the fabric heavily with spit because it worked better that way. Then you held the business end of the bee down against the cloth, watching the stinger working in and out. When the stinger went into the wet fabric, and stuck -you could tell by lifting him up to see- you pulled the bee away and his stinger and poison sac was pulled out. Stuck in your shirt to be flicked carefully away. That didn't kill the bee right away. Now you could let it crawl over your hand with impunity. Or tried to stick it down a girl's neck.

The second feature of hollyhocks that provided entertainment in our house was the leaves. We made candy dishes with them. Mom would get some clay, a rolling pin, a pointed knife and some waxed paper while we pulled several perfect leaves off a stalk in the backyard. Then we'd all meet at the kitchen table. She'd hand us a small ball of clay that we'd roll into a thin flat layer on the wax paper. The fun part was next, centering the leaf over the sheet of clay, veins down. We'd use the rolling pin to press the leaf down into the clay, the veins forming a negative mirror image. Now the hard part. Using the pointed knife, we'd painstakingly try to cut around the leaf, sort of like cutting the excess pie crust off a pie plate. It

was tough to decide how thick to cut the stem. Little hands had a hard time, particularly when the time came to lift up the excess clay that had been trimmed off because it stuck to the waxpaper. After the leaf shape itself was freed of the wax paper, the edges of the clay leaf were bent upward to make the candy dish itself. The thick stem was made into a handle by curving it over the dish and wetting it to stick onto the clay.

The third source of hollyhock entertainment was the seed pods. They were the most unusual we had ever seen. Instead of being shaped like a seed, a sort of spherical device, they looked like miniature car tires. The actual seeds were thin flat circles the size of a paper dot made with a paper punch. They grew tightly together side-by-side in a wheel attached to a flat center piece the size and shape of a dime. These assemblies were encased in a hairy husk, and resembled car tires mounted on wheel rims. It was obvious how god intended little boys to use them.

These seed pods were pulled off the stalk and stripped of their papery husk. Two of them stuck on the end of a small skinny stick produced axles for a car. That was the plan anyway. I doubt that we ever successfully manufactured any kind of vehicle but in the way of kids who relied on imagination for entertainment, the contemplation of the project was almost as satisfying as having the finished product in hand.

Being our father's sons, we tried to figure out a mechanical way to secure a small box to the axles. A matchbox was a perfect body. It had a sliding cover to hold cargo while going over mountains. But we never managed to finish the job. The basic engineering problem was bearings: How does one secure wooden axles to the bottom of the box so that they stay in place but don't fall off? The axles must turn freely while staying in place. We'd end up rolling the two wheeled axles on the ground or rolling the individual wheels on the porch until we got bored.

## Bees, Skunks, Cheese balls and Cyanide

**I**n our neighborhood we'd get a whiff of skunk every so often. It was a strange smell, not offensive in low doses. But adults made a big deal out of the smell, as if it were nasty or something. It wasn't to me. However, I played along with them and would exclaim, "Phew! Smells like a skunk!" when the scent came across the property. I don't think I ever actually saw a skunk on the property but the smell was there sometimes in the evening. We saw skunks dead on the road. The thing I liked about skunks was their sporty look. The white stripe running down a black back and an enormous fluffy tail made a sporty model. However, as I came to understand the fact that skunk scent really was nasty stuff when applied full strength, then I got a bit more careful in my approval of the animal.



**Figure 19 Striped skunk**

<http://www.tpwc.state.tx.us/adv/nphoto/images/wildlife/skunk.jpg>

Bees were all over the place. The alfalfa in the next field attracted them, as did the lilacs when they were in bloom and the wild flowers that grew along the creek north of us. They were not as common as the house flies but they were pretty close. Vernal was famous at the time for its honey, something that I later learned to appreciate though while I was a kid I wasn't too fond of the stuff. I'd eat it if it was forced on me but I didn't really get excited about it - unless it was on a peanut butter sandwich. Then it was good. Part of the reason I think I didn't like the honey was because we used home made bread which was pretty hard after a day or so and when the honey was put on it, the combination became very hard and unpleasant.

Vernal honey was famous because it was light colored and mild flavored. Some



**Figure 20 Beekeeper and Hives**

<http://outdoorplace.org/beekeeping/queens.htm>

honeys are dark amber and strong-tasting but the Vernal honey apparently came mostly from clover and alfalfa so it was mild to the taste. The image shows a beekeeper tending his hives, like the Goodrich family did.

Uncle Grant had bee hives on his ranch down on the Greenriver. I don't know for sure whether they were ones that he personally tended to, or whether he simply provided the space for another beekeeper to put hives, a reasonable thing for anyone to do with the alfalfa fields he irrigated from the river. I imagine that he was doing it himself because I don't expect he would have become as upset as he did about the skunks.

I found the story of what happened fascinating - even though it upset Grant. In the evening late after the bees had settled into their hives for the night, a group of skunks would come pay a visit. The smell of bees wax is strong and carries far so it wasn't rocket science to these skunks to find the hives which they, like humans, regarded as a treat. But their method of harvesting was different than ours. In fact, the object of their harvest was different than ours: they wanted the bees, not just the honey.

The opening to the hives was too small for a skunk to reach into the hive, and the hives were too heavy for a skunk to push over if they tried. So they used a technique that was effective, which took advantage of the stupidity of bees - though granting them the title of stupid probably also grants them more talent than they really have. The skunk would go to the small opening of the hive, and stand there expectantly. That didn't make anything happen until the skunk started to scratch on the hive with its claws. This noise stimulated the bees inside. They were sleepy and resting but there was always a few bees that were aroused by this noise, probably guards whose duty it was to investigate and drive the intruder away. So a bee or two would sleepily and grumpily walk out the doorway and stand there buzzing a bit, not wanting to fly because the sun was down and they couldn't orient themselves. While they stood there, the skunk would scoop them up into its mouth, keep scratching and eating until it had his fill.

This skillful performance didn't win accolades from the adults, especially the ones who had pecuniary interests in the little critturs -which are classified as "livestock" for tax purposes in Idaho. In fact, the adults were downright rude about these skunks. It was their considered opinion that the skunks had no constitutional right to bee lunch so they undertook steps to remedy the problem. In the form of traps of several sorts. But it turned out that the skunks were either smarter, or more careless, than the adults. The traps didn't not trap

anything. The skunks were either too stupid to recognize that they were being enticed by some kind of bait, or simply overlooked it in their joy at getting another batch of sweet bees for dinner.

This did not sit well with the adults. They thought it highly unreasonable, and unfair, of the stupid skunks to refuse to be trapped. They thought it mean of the skunks to keep taking the bees after they had been put on notice by the introduction of traps into the neighborhood, that the bees were off limits, that the bees belonged to someone else, that this someone else took a dim view of these after-dinner snacks. So the adults did what adults are wont to do.

They started to get angry and started to think of other ways to really solve the problem. They realized that half a dynamite stick cleverly rigged to go off when a skunk tripped over it wasn't really a good idea. That would annihilate the hive as well, the object in interest of all parties participating in this late night dance. So they considered fire, considered just sitting around with guns to shoot them -the skunks- and so on. I believe they actually did try the rifles but couldn't see well enough to do the job, what with the clever night-time disguise the pesky rodents wore. Black is difficult to see in the dark, even with a white racing stripe.

The ultimate solution they chose was simple and effective. Grant bought some cyanide powder which was loosely controlled in those days. Then he mixed it with some cheddar cheese. Formed small cheese balls and set them outside of the hives that were being decimated by these skunks. That evening when the skunks came visiting, they noted on their way in that there was a new scent, a decidedly interesting scent, indeed, a tasty scent. Sure enough, when they got there small orange balls beckoned. Cheese is apparently even more attractive to skunks than bees, so the skunks ate the cheese balls. And wandered away happily, for a while. They didn't return again.

## Linoleum Blocks and Hibiscus

When I was about 6 years old, dad began gluing plain old floor linoleum to wooden blocks, probably cherry wood, and drew pictures on the linoleum. The linoleum was a darkish green color and was backed with a loosely woven thick fibrous monk's cloth sort of stuff, that allowed the linoleum to bond readily to whatever mastic was applied to the floor.

Then he used tools to incise the pattern into the linoleum. That was the basic process of making blocks that could be used to "print" the pattern again and again. No different really than the techniques of using potatoes or bars of soap

for the same purpose. The process of creating a block involved great intensity on dad's part. Complete focus on the medium and method was his hallmark. In everything he did. The visible result was a pile of skinny slivers of fascinating-smelling linoleum that fell to the floor as he progressed. My attention was focused on these things, not on the actual image that he was creating. I couldn't see the image on the block, just a bunch of tool marks. I only saw the image after he rolled colored ink on the block with a squilgee and pressed it onto a piece of paper or fabric. Squilgees, particularly the spelling of the word, fascinated me. I ran into them again years later at 3 Auburn Terrace where I learned how to set manually print type and printed a brochure on a platen press than had a automated squilgee.

The common motif in my memory was Hawaiian flowers. Hibiscus and bird of paradise were familiar. Mom was an accomplished seamstress and capable of fitting the dress to the body so the result was pleasing. There are a few of these woodblocks surviving in the basement of 2821 N. 700 East.

Dad and mom joined forces in this project. The basic idea was that mom, as an accomplished seamstress, would create dresses for women and dad would paint or block-print images on these dresses. Women could choose the dress pattern and the image. The most common flower pattern he did was a flowing sinus shape from one shoulder down across the front of the dress to the opposing hip. This sinuous shape created from large blocks of colorful flowers created a startling image for the unsuspecting cowboy sitting on the porch chewing a piece of straw. I don't know today how many of these dresses were manufactured and sold, but there are some photos of several of them, like the one on the next page. He was 33 so she was 28. They had 2 kids, one 8 and the other 7.

I don't know how seriously they pushed the hand-painted tailored apparel business but dad's 4 page table of contents of his life specifically lists it as one of their enterprises in Vernal. Did he actually stop working for hire and concentrate



Figure 21 Proof of Dad's Hibiscus Linoleum Block

on the business at home? Over the years, I've imagined that he continued to work full time, but now that I've seen that entry in his TOC, I wonder if he might not have taken time off work. I don't know. Anything's possible where he's concerned.



## Magic Ant Lions

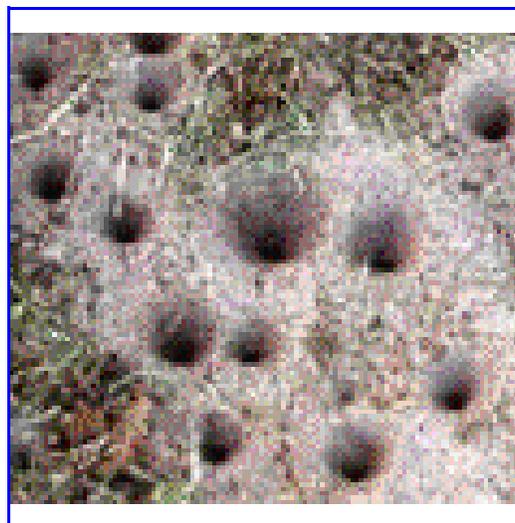
These odd critturs showed up in my world when I was about six years old. When we were in Split Mountain shouting echoes at each other and roasting wienies and charring marshmallows. I think they call the narrow canyon Echo Canyon now but there are disgusting federal rules against making echoes. Can't disturb the peace.

The banks of the river were gooey and muddy, but above the mud there is sand that extended up to the tan-colored sandstone cliffs that formed the narrow canyon. Into the base of this cliff the river had etched a cave that had a sandy floor. We were always attracted to the cave when we picnicked there because it was a cave. It is an atavistic urge to conceal oneself in any cave that happens along, a snug, secure place to be protected from monsters and predators.

On our exploration of the cave we noticed peculiar depressions in the smooth sand. They were perfectly shaped cones and were distributed irregularly across the sandy floor. Why should these lovely inverted cones like little funnels be there? I doubt that we figured this one out by ourselves. Probably we asked someone about those shapes. Dad was with us, we asked him, and then he worked magic.

Without giving us any explanation, he looked around on the ground, hunting for something. He carefully picked up a small ant, reached over one of the cones and dropped the ant. It dutifully started to climb up the steep wall. After it was half way up, the bottom of the cone erupted. Sand started spraying in tiny handfuls up onto the ant. The ant became frantic and scrambled harder to get out, but the sand lobbed up on it finally pulled it to the bottom of the cone. It disappeared at the same time the sand shower stopped.

We marveled at what had happened and wanted to know the secret. Dad said, "Here, it's magic. Scoop up one of the cones this way." He carefully scraped up a handful of sand that included one of the cones and held it. We did the same and asked "What do we do now?" He said, "Wait." but didn't explain what was about to happen. What a funny scene, a dad and two kids squatting still in a cave in



**Figure 23** Ant Lion "caves"

<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Loge/9474/antlions.html>

the desert holding out one hand filled with sand.

It got boring pretty fast for a little kid. But we knew. If dad, in his clear scientific way, pointed something out, then there was something. We just had to wait, so we waited. Probably no more than a minute but it seemed longer.

And then it happened. We felt something tickle our palm. The sand was scratching our palm and we didn't know whether to throw the sand because it might hurt. Dad reassured us and said, "Just hold it a bit longer." Now the tickle became pressure and we felt something move down between our fingers.

Dad said, "Do this slowly." He turned his hand carefully to the side and allowed the sand in his palm to pour off onto the ground. We mimicked him. When the sand was gone from our palm, only remaining in the crack between our fingers, we saw it, in the cleft where fingers joined palm. A tiny bizarre creature that was wiggling around, obviously trying to find a way out.

Now we tipped the quarter inch long creature from between the fingers of that hand into the center of our other palm and held it up for inspection. It had an enormous abdomen that was heart-shaped. Touching it with a finger revealed that it was soft and squishy, that it sort of felt like skin. It had practically no thorax and on the end of the head was an amazing pair of long curved pincers. Dad said this was an intermediate form of an insect and that one day it would molt into a flying adult insect. They are a kind of lace wing that looks like a small dragonfly or a damsel fly. He said that each of these cones was made by one ant lion because that was the only way they could get something to eat, most often ants, though they would try and grab any creature trapped in the cone.

He explained that the sand shower was the ant lions's way of keeping an ant or other insect from escaping, and that it caused the ant -or other insect- to fall to the bottom of the cone. The sand was thrown up with the long, mean-looking pincers. When the ant got to the bottom of the cone, these pincers grabbed it and pulled it down into the sand where the ant lion lived. It ate the ant and finally threw the dried carcass up and out of the cone and awaited its next visitor. The



**Figure 24 Antlion out of hole**

<http://www.ivyhall.district96.k12.il.us/4th/kkhp/finsects/antlion.html>

antlion was known locally as a doodlebug.

### Mom's Septoplasty in Salt Lake and Greyhound Ride

When mom was a little girl her nose was broken in an accident. As a result the septum was deviated, which made it difficult for her to breathe. I couldn't hear that it was difficult but obviously she felt it. In consultation with Dr. Spendlove the decision was made to send her to SLC so that a specialist could operate on her nose and repair the septum, a measure of the inconvenience of the problem. This trip was made around 1948 or 1949. She and dad scraped the money together to pay for the surgery and the trip and the day was picked.

I don't remember how we got out to SLC, whether we took Greyhound or whether dad drove us in the Wycoff truck, but I do remember our trip back to Vernal from SLC. We traveled by bus then, so I suspect dad wasn't working for Wycoff, otherwise he would have taken us to SLC and returned us from SLC.

Dick and I were small kids and did what we were told and went where we were taken, but not necessarily happy about it. This was a case where I recall not being happy about it. We were left with Uncle Carl for the time that mom was in the hospital, and for the few days she had to stay in SLC after surgery. Carl was always a considerate uncle, concerned about us and kind. He sort of kidded with us but was careful about how we felt lest we be upset - a contrast with a couple of other uncles. His son Lyle is a year younger than I was, so he and Dickie and I played together just fine.

This was the first time I remember being exposed to the concept of divorce. I think that Carl was still living with his wife but there was an undercurrent of uneasiness in the house, in his relationship to her. Things were said in my hearing that I didn't understand but which indicated that something very serious had happened to Carl and his wife. Later, Carl did divorce and that was my first contact with divorce. The kindest uncle I had failed in his marriage. He was not judged for the failure because she -Laverne I think her name was- was apparently the one "responsible" for the failure. [Today I am less inclined to accept stories that only one person was the "cause" of the divorce, that the other person "had no idea", etc., although Carl was probably as close to being innocent as I could imagine. The road to divorce is a rocky one that is well-advertised to both parties well before the rupture occurs.. So I imagine it was that way for Carl and he apparently was not able to remedy or repair whatever needed to be repaired.]

When mom got out of the hospital, she had an enormous bandage over her face over her nose. Both of her eyes were black from the surgery. The explanation for the severe periorbital bruising was that the doctor had to use a hammer and chisel to remove some bone from mom's nose to enable her to breathe better. Whatever happened, she looked terrible. The combination of the huge bandage over her nose and those black eyes made her scary to see and made me scared that she had been hurt so bad. We stayed in Carl's place for a few days and finally it was time to go back to Vernal.

She was not really ready to travel in that condition but for whatever reason, we had to be gone, so we were. Someone purchased her ticket and loaded our suitcases up again. Then Carl probably took us to the Greyhound station in SLC where we would catch the bus. The station was huge to a kid from Vernal. So many people and odd noises and uniforms and overhead public address system. I was intimidated by it all, not knowing what we were to do. Carl would have checked the luggage for us so all we had to do was wait until our bus was called. Then we boarded and headed out to Vernal.

The door hissed closed behind the last passenger after the driver had punched everyone's tickets. That was a long trip because the bus stopped at every little town to drop off or pick up passengers or parcels. The bus in those days served as a multi-function platform for everything from dogs to parcel post. That made the trip very long. After we got underway, the driver announced overhead whatever he announced. Just so much noise to me. The seats were large and soft, like easy chairs with cloth head rests to prevent hair oil from staining the upholstery. Mom had a pillow to lean her head on, although she couldn't sleep well. We took sandwiches so didn't have to spend money along the way at any of the café's the bus stopped at. The arrival in Vernal was unremarkable.

Over time, the bruises around mom's eyes cleared and she started to look more like my mom. The bandage came off and her nose shrank in size. Happily, the surgery was successful and her breathing was easier.

## Hair cuts

Getting hair cuts was as much of an irritation to me then as it was to my own children later. I think the problem stems from being confined for a while when you want to be outside playing. Plus an irritation that some guy is entering your own 'space' that you have designed entirely on your own. Plus the irritating scratchiness of pieces of hair down the back of your sweaty shirt. Some

of the first haircuts I remember getting were done by Uncle Leo who did a good job - at least as far as I cared or knew. No kidding. At least he was fun.

But later, probably after Leo left the area, sort of on the lam I suspect, we went to a professional barber to get our hair cut. This shop was the north-south main street that ran from by the Bank of Vernal down to Central Elementary School, several blocks south.

One of the interesting things about this little barbershop was the fact that across the street was a house where lived a woman who kept a large green parrot in a cage on the front porch where people could see him and talk to him. His size and colors were wonderful to a kid used to chickens and sparrows, who only knew parrots from comics. It was the talking which was the most fun. It seemed impossible that a creature that could speak my words couldn't understand them. Some of the things he said just killed me, coming out of a green bird in a cage. But eventually the lady who owned him finally had to keep him locked inside the house. He had learned too many dirty words from people who were trying to teach him dirty words, which he would blurt out at the bishop's or mayor's wife.



This barbershop was within a block of the center of Vernal, right next to a drive through service station on the corner of the block across from JC Penny's and 2 banks. I don't remember much about the barber himself. He did his job and we did ours and then he got a quarter and we got to go. On the wall outside his door was a yard-high barberpole tilted at an angle inside of a glass tube. It rotated creating the fascinating hypnotizing effect of an endless spiral that drew your eye upward regardless of how hard you tried not to let it happen..

There is an association in my mind between hair cuts and buying tubes of copper BB's for our BB guns. It must have been because we were sort of bribed to get our hair cut. After the hair cut in the barbershop by the corner gas station in the center of town, we would go to a store nearby and buy bb's in what looked like a shotgun shell. It was a red paper tube that even closed on the end like a shotgun shell and cost 5 cents. We'd buy this precious tube of ammunition that lasted for

weeks as we husbanded our shots, trying to annihilate the English sparrows that populated our lilac bushes. Of course, they were safe. Our shots invariably were deflected by the myriad branches between us and them, but it didn't stop us from blasting enthusiastically away in the belief -hope- that one time we would score a bull's eye and knock one of them out of the tree. Happily for both of us, we never succeeded. It would have been horrifying to actually kill one of these little guys who good-naturedly stood still for target practice..

## Cigarettes and Tobacco

This stuff was just part of the environment, like background radiation. Ads showed up everywhere. In movies, newspapers, posters, and magazines. Arthur Godfrey was familiar, always pitching chesterfields cigarettes. A nice looking, pleasant man. Who wouldn't try to sell anything that would hurt you. He had a radio show that was sponsored at least in part by Chesterfield. He stands out as the buy who sang the song, "I'm a lonely little petunia in a onion patch..."

Magazines had full-page ads on the back for tobacco products. Luck Strike and Camels showed pictures of movie actors and doctors who endorsed their cigarettes. The Camels ads were the most interesting because they featured camels against a background of the pyramids of Egypt.



Figure 26

<http://paperboynews.com/inventorydetail.asp?number=1a4510>

## Ichneumon Flies and the Fieldhouse

One warm summer day we saw the strangest insect I think we had ever seen out on the cottonwood on the north side of the cattle drive. This bug was large which was impressive but it wasn't size that surprised me so much. It was how it was built and what it was doing. I couldn't tell what it was doing.

These bugs stood on the tree trunk like the one in this photo and was doing what this one is doing. Can you tell what it's doing? It looks like a giant wasp, but it's drilling a hole in the bark with its ovipositor. The thing is hoisted up over the top of the body sort of like a curved filament and is aimed into the bark. I don't understand how it drilled a tiny hole that was used to deposit eggs in. Like miniature oil drillers. How does a long flimsy thing like this have the strength to actually drill into wood? I don't know. It's magic. My whole childhood was filled with the stuff.



Figure 27 Ichneumon fly

<http://www.cornellcollege.edu/biology/insects/damonkati/Images/ichneumons.jp>

We dragged dad out to look at the spectacle, both so that we could triumphantly show him something, but also so that he could tell us what was going on. He told us. Better, he was so interested in the critturs that he said he wanted to collect one or two. Now that was proof that we had struck pay dirt. Even if we didn't know precisely why this was more interesting to him than a bumble bee. He took a bottle with some rubbing alcohol in it, picked up two of the things and dropped them into it.

After they were dead, he pulled them out and use dressmaking pins to secure them to the end of large corks so they could dry. The ovipositor was positioned in about the manner in the image. After they dried, he took them to Ernest Unterman at the little Fieldhouse to see if he was interested in adding them to his insect collection. He was, so the specimens were put inside the glass cases with a small note that had the details that entomologists want to see for all specimens. I was proud that we had contributed to the collection in the fieldhouse.

## The Untermans

When I was a kid, Billie and Ernest Unterman ran the Fieldhouse and are probably responsible in part for it even being built. It was constructed when I was there and I remember its size and smell and the awe I felt walking through the front door, entering into a foreign fascinating world of dinosaurs. They had a vision of a museum that took advantage of the dinosaur world that surrounded Vernal. They did the right thing. When I took you kids to see it in 1984 had capitalized on that. The public swimming pool was north of the museum so we could take in both items on a single trip to town if we wanted. There was no admission fee to enter the museum.

Ernest's father was still alive when I was a kid and visited their home. He had liver spots on his hands and looked as ancient as rock, solemn and serious. There were stories about his having been shipwrecked and of the terrible hardships he had lived. I was in awe of him and this really is how he looked. He never spoke to use kids, and rarely to mom and dad. He wasn't rude nor was he friendly. He'd leave the room when visitors came probably so as not to interfere but I suspected he didn't want to be bothered by visitors. A solitary quiet man. Whom my dad admired. So I admired him. How else is a kid going to develop a measurement standard?



Figure 28 Tyrannosaurus statue  
[www.cactusventures.com/travtreas.htm](http://www.cactusventures.com/travtreas.htm)

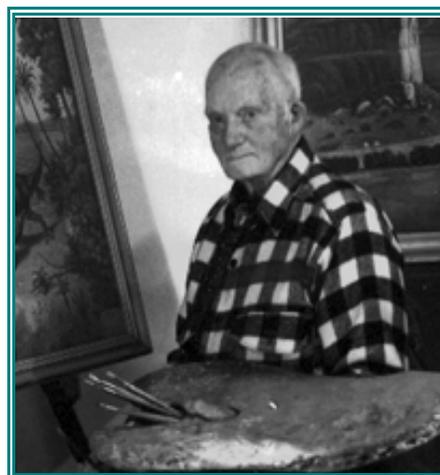
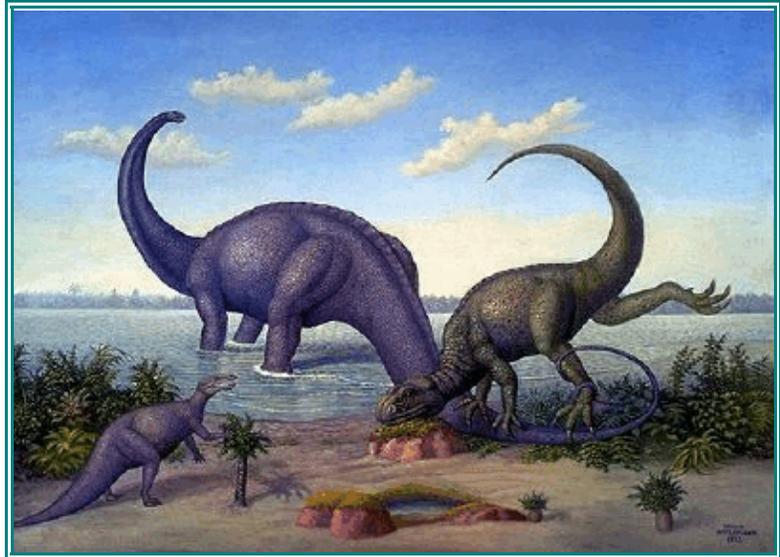


Figure 29 Gerhard Unterman  
<http://www.shs.nebo.edu/Museum/unterman.html>

Mr. Unterman was an artist and his paintings of dinosaurs were hung in the field house. He even did large murals in place on various walls, adding to the quality that pervaded the small museum. He was serious about portraying dinosaurs as accurately as he could so he sculpted models before painting them. This painting was done when I was 10 and in Seward but I probably saw it in the museum in 1953. Because of my exposure to his work at an early age, the aura of this image is the one I associate with dinosaurs. I know it's irrational but it is so. His attention to all details, the plants, the muscles, the skins, the water, rocks, everything was done with consideration.



**Figure 30 "Cretaceous Sauropods and Ornithomimids"**  
<http://www.shs.nebo.edu/Museum/unterman.html>

### Fireflies in a Jar

**T**alk about magic. Insects that glow in the dark. The large pastures behind Grandpa's place sloped slowly and longly down to marshes at the bottom. In the mild summer evenings a few fireflies would appear in the crepuscular light which darkened by the time we got out to where they were. We were each armed with a pint jar and lid that we snuck from grandma's store room as we advanced upon the flies. In our concentration on these mysterious flecks of light we forget where we were. So we stepped in cow pies and sticky mud. But when we got a couple of fireflies it was worth the irritation. Light in a



**Figure 31**  
<http://members.aol.com/llewela/images/fireflies.gif>

jar, cool pale light that flickered on and off, mysteriously from the abdomen of innocuous, unremarkable insects. If you squeezed one between your fingers the luminescence was transferred to your fingers for a while as the enzymatic process consumed the chemicals formed in the insect's abdomen.

### Braiding the Maypole

One of my oldest memories of a public event is of winding a maypole. I know that is what happened because I have since read about this ancient tradition from England, a tradition that was part of an old druidic religion, which was probably originally part of a fertility rite. This particular instance took place either at a public school or at a church. Same bunch in Vernal for the most part. The vivid memory I have is of teen age boys and girls, much bigger than I, who stood in a circle around a tall pole stuck into the ground. Each person held the end of what was probably a crepe paper streamer. The streamers were of several colors.

At some point after they were placed in the proper positions, which seems to have been one circle of boys and another of girls, they braided the maypole and I was mesmerized. The circle of boys went one direction and the girl's circle went the other, each person holding securely the end of his or her streamer. As they met the next person they would step to the right or the left of that person, depending on which direction that had stepped with the last person. That is where the braiding occurs.

The greatest miracle was that as the people did this slow dance, two circles moving in opposite directions, weaving in and out, the streamers they held began to braid on the pole. Starting at the top, the braiding progressed down the pole, further and



Figure 32 braiding the Maypole  
<http://www.conjure.com/TRINE/maypole.jpg>

further, the longer the dance went on. Amazing to my young mind that this magic could happen, just because boys and girls walked in circles weaving in and out. Now the magic is no longer magic because I see how it happened, but at the time I would not have been surprised to see a magician or elf appear out of the pole. It was a miracle that this beautiful woven pattern appeared on the pole and covered most of it before the dance stopped.

Nosegays and cones of candy were also part of the Mayday celebration. Nosegays were simply small bouquets of flowers that people gave to each other, boys to girls being something special I could tell though I didn't understand why that would be any different that girl to girl or boy to boy or teenager to adult. The candy cones were made of colored construction paper that was stapled or taped into a tight cone which was then filled with candy. A paper handle was secured across the open end of the cone so it could be easily carried without spilling the candy.

LOOK Magazine



Figure 33 LOOK Magazine - 1951  
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/images/vc123.jpg>

These large format magazines fascinated me. Fifteen cents in 1951 while I lived in Vernal. The color pictures of current events that I didn't know anything about, many of which I really wasn't interested in, did interest me. Their size was impressive and they hung around a long time. The characters on the cover are famous comedians of the time, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Jimmy Durante, Groucho Marx.

### Shooting in the Desert

This was a 'real' outing. You can tell because mom is wearing some kind of slacks.

Never levis. If she wore slacks, they were always of a nicer fabric than mere Levi. Even today I don't quite understand why. She's feeding Dickie something. The setting is somewhere north of Vernal as I recall it, though the whole country looks like this. It may be east near Brush Creek. Out in the Morrison



Figure 34 Outing into the desert to "hunt" in the 2-door Chevy with the blooey pipes.

formation desert that held dinosaur bones. Brush Creek was a location that a favorite of mom and dad because we went on a lot of outings in that vicinity.

The road is unpaved as most roads were at that time, though it was graded and was in good condition. Today one would feel deprived to have to ride on such a primitive road but that was all there was, so it was just fine. The finish on the Chevy had seen better days but the car had a wonderful muffler that rumbled and burbled much to dad's delight and mom's eye rolling resignation. I liked it. Kneeling

in the back of the car because the rear seat was missing, holding onto the front seats while dad rammed the car out Highway 40 up the hill out of Vernal toward Roosevelt for the pure joy of opening up the throttle and letting that pipe gurgle. I was in love with it all. What a thing! We could have gone all day and night and I wouldn't have tired of that muffler.

The firearms we hold are Red Ryder B-B Guns with mom sporting a Winchester lever-action 30-30 that she took deer hunting with Dad. That's the one I carried when I tried to shoot a mountain goat above Kenai Lake in 1955 on the Kenai Peninsular.

### Brush Creek and Terrestrial Snails

She's wearing some slacks again so this was a bona fide excursion. And look how lovely she is, how beautiful she is and how nicely her hair is done up. Today in my estimation the most beautiful hair styles are those that tightly pull long hair back from the face, highlighting the structure of the bones of the face, exposing the ears and letting the chin and forehead shine. Mom really was a gorgeous woman.

Her jacket was wool, like a man's sportscoat and she had on sensible oxford 'walkers' to accommodate the terrain that demanded more than a flimsy canvas shoe. She wore those shoes a long time. The discovery of terrestrial snails on this trip I believe was a monumental discovery. Vernal, a desert, had snails. And not just some tiny little corkscrew snail like we found in the slime in the irrigation ditch. These were inch across fat flat snails, whitish coils with tan bars. I knew of large snails, read about



Figure 35 Hunting Terrestrial Snails

them and found them fascinating. The notion of a creature that carried its home intrigued me and the sheer size of these startled me. The only snails that I saw regularly were quarter inch long specimens in the pond at the end of the culvert that crossed the road. They were little brown snails shaped like corkscrews with dark brown shells that were easily crushed. But these were whitish, thick shelled specimens and were conspicuous. They were all over and here mom is looking with us at an aggregation of their empty shells. I wanted to fill my pockets.

It was comforting and reassuring for her to stand guard there behind us so that we could forget our fears of something coming up behind us to nab us. While he maintained her vigil, stout stick in hand, we could kneel and let our hearts go, lifting dried grasses and leaves, hunting for more of these shell. Such a glorious experience for the primary care giver to be sympathetic and attuned to our state of mind.

Talk about dramatic settings. Have you ever seen a setting more dramatic than this? Brush Creek flowed through these sandstone walls. Narrow, steep and

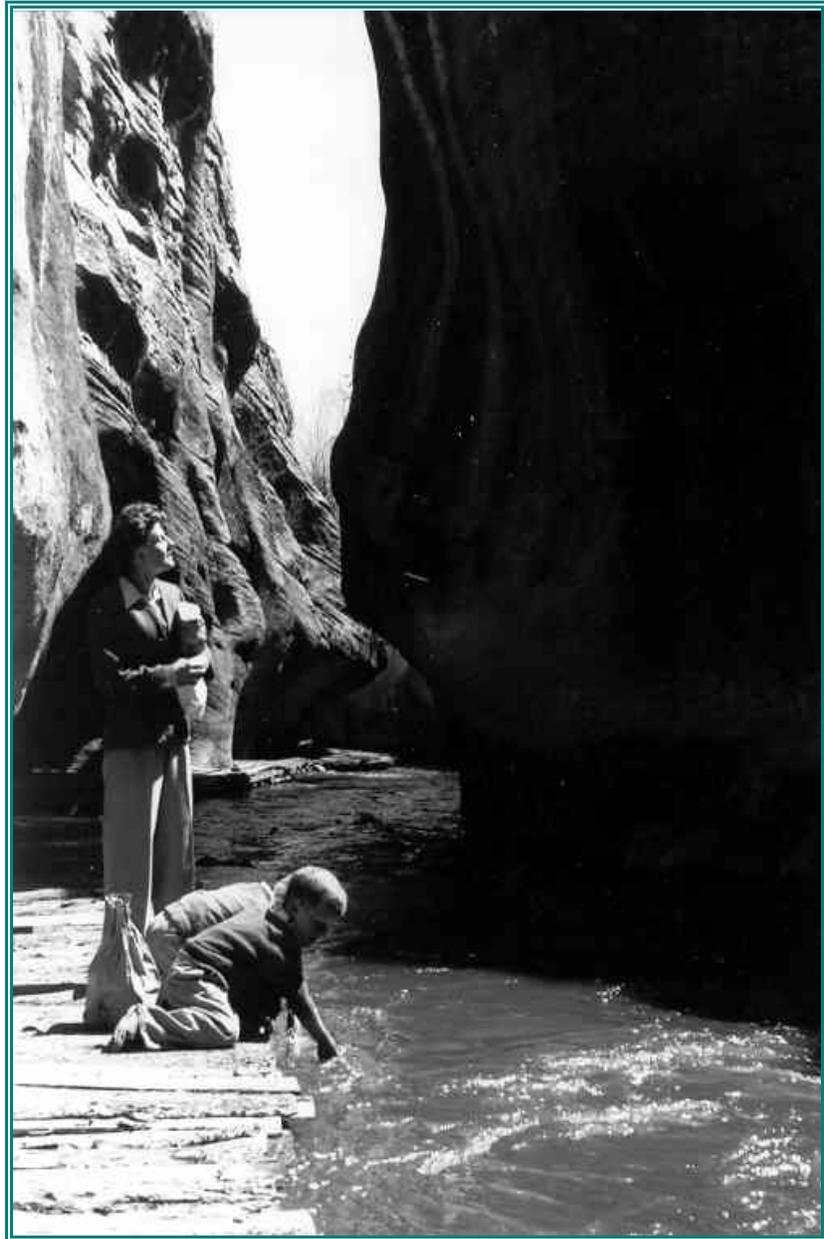


Figure 36 Mom, Dickie and Ronnie on temporary board walk in Brush Creek Canyon ~1949

tall, striped with moisture and iron pigment from seeps over millennia. So gorgeous.

You also have to admire Dad's eye. He was an excellent photographer. This is as dramatic as any he took. He saw how to take advantage of the light, the vertical nature of the picture, the stripes on the wall, the face upturned into the sun outlined against a back streak on the wall, the sun reflecting off the white hair, the ripples in the little river. Such lovely photography.

I like to see that I was there, I kneel on the temporary board walk that was washed away by the next floods that could result from a thunderstorm that summer or wait until the spring thaw the next spring when water would sluice through this declivity like powdered pumice blown through a crack in a wall. Actually, I remember this excursion with crystal clarity. I was petrified of a flash flood. I worried the whole time we were in this narrow channel. Worried that there might be a flash flood that would wash us all away and frownus. So while it was fun, it was a threatening time.

### Dinosaur Quarry

The Dinosaur National Monument was known in those simple days as the "Dinosaur Quarry", before the advent of true federalism, in all of its damnable, stifling forms that homogenizes everything it touches, reducing it to the lowest common denominator. We swarmed all over the dang place, climbing those hills when we wanted, collecting half-gallon paper milk cartons full of half-inch sandstone concretions if we wanted to. What a time. Unregulated life in the

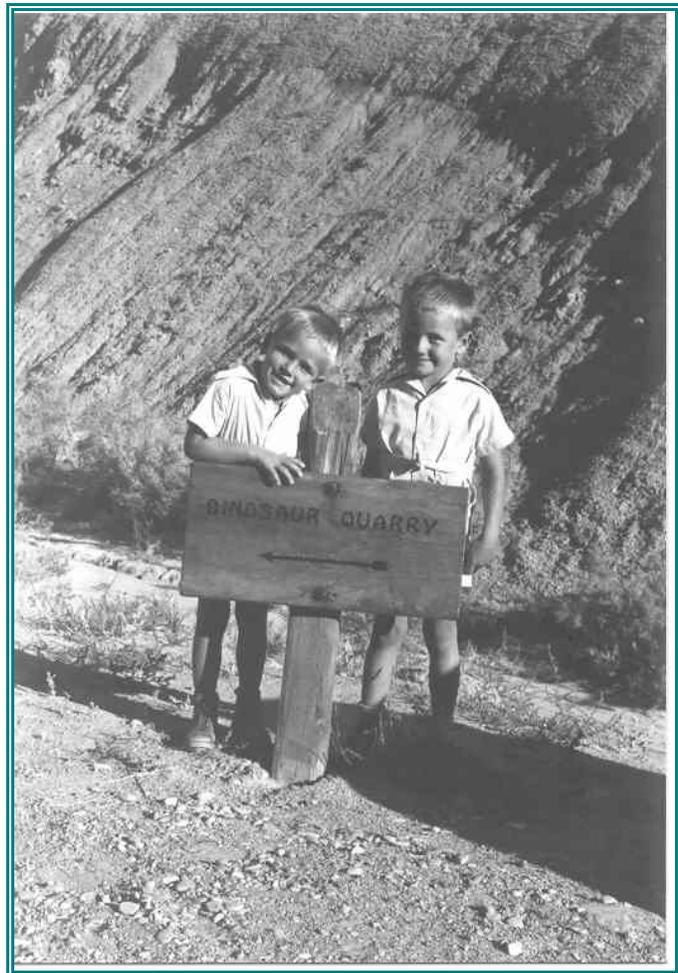


Figure 37 Dickie and Ronnie at the Dinosaur Quarry summer of 1947

wild. Today you'd be arrested for doing most of the things we did back then.

We were taken up there in our twin costumes, always twin costumes it seemed, because mom had this fetish -and it really was a fetish that I don't understand to this day- of being sure that both of us knew that we were being treated equally, being given the same amount of something that the other brother was being given. It didn't make a bit of difference to us, but we acquiesced. What were we to do? We didn't have a clue really that things could be different. We just knew somehow that it was critical and eternal and important to her that she tell us that she always treated us 'equally'.

Here we are in the quarry, in our sailor suits, standing agreeably by the sign so that dad could document for you what we did back then in 1947. A long long time ago. We loved the quarry.