

A PLACE CALLED TOPOCK

By: Christina Klohr

It was so isolated, so unreachable, you literally were forced to find it the first time so you could follow your own ruts the next time.

The U.S. Geological Survey Gauging Station on the Colorado below Topock was a spirit-breaking exile for most engineers. The river took precedent over everything else. My husband accepted a job at Topock in July 1925 to the delight of an engineer there who had been trying desperately to be replaced.

Jim, our two children, (Helen, three years old and Jimmy eighteen months), our big woolly dog Bouncer, and I vacationed in Flagstaff and then headed our new Dodge car west. In his early life Jim had been a cowboy and had ridden and packed many horses. He knew how much a horse could carry, but packing a car was something else. In those days a car could really be loaded. The running board was equipped with different colored cans, fitted into a rack; one for oil and extra gas (marked red), and a blue one for water. We had plenty of food, canned milk for the children, cots, bedrolls, coffeepot, Dutch oven, a medicine kit which we never went anywhere without, and all our belongings. We felt we could cope with any emergency.

On the back of the car was a special rack holding an extra tire. On top of this Jim had draped a beautiful six-point set of deer horns. Why we had not left them at Lee's Ferry, I will never figure out. The Dodge was carrying more than any car should, much less a brand new one.

We left the George McCormack home around noon and drove to Seligman before stopping for the night. Jim rented a "furnished" cabin, which wasn't much, a roof and four walls equipped with wood stove, home-made table and benches, an old iron bedstead with a dirty mattress, and an old rickety dresser with a cracked mirror. Before we unpacked the car we made a thorough search for some little critters called bedbugs. If one got into my clean bedding, the family it would grow could be mighty hard to get rid of. Most cabins built of new lumber were well infested with bedbugs.

Rains came almost every day during the summer in the high country so this made the evening air quite cool and damp. As we prepared our

evening meal, the fire in the wood stove was cheerful and comfortable. I am glad my memory can dwell on the joys and comforts of the old wood stoves and the cherry fireplaces, the crackle of the fire in the morning, feeling the first heat as it came slowly from the stove, the filled teakettle, the old coffeepot with its black bottom. Mingled smells of cooking food and burning wood were good together.

When we arrived in Kingman the next day the town was sizzling in 111 degrees of heat. Jim stopped the car in the shade of a big tree. We decided to wait until the sun was down and we would be more comfortable on our way to the Colorado River and a place called Topock. Bouncer was the most uncomfortable of all even though Jim wet him to his skin and wet his canvas, he still panted from the heat. Mercifully we did not know what lay ahead.

Highway 66 was little more than a cow trail and, leaving Kingman, the road was very rough. The car would have bounced even more if it had not been so heavily loaded. Jim did well to guide it in the dust-filled washboard ruts while we all held on for dear life.

We reached the top of Oatman Hill after dark and started down, passing through the mining town of Gold Roads and Oatman. The mines were working and people were moving about in the dim light doing their shopping in the cool of the evening. Jim took the dog out and again wet him with the canteen of water. The rest of us enjoyed a cold pop, and then we were ready to start down into the valley below. The narrow winding road was hard to follow, so progress was slow. We traveled down, the air became hotter; we had a feeling we were entering a valley of fire. At last Jim guided the car out of a sandy wash and we saw dim lights ahead. We crossed the railroad track near the depot and joined other campers on a flat above the river. The sliver of a moon was little help in finding a camping place, but we managed with the help of the car's headlights.

Bouncer was on top of the load in the back, so he came out first. We all shared in his discomfort. The children were asleep, Jimmie on my lap and Helen on the front seat between Jim and me. When the cots were set up, I covered the children with a damp sheet but this didn't help for long. The desert wind was blowing so hot one's skin felt as if it could blister. The sheet would become dry but the person underneath felt as if he were in a Turkish bath. We had never experienced anything like it, and it was near midnight.

Even though the service station and store were closed, cars rattled

across the bridge all night, some coming from and some going to the Promised Land of California. More than once we heard cars coming in on their rims, trying to reach a service station without too much damage. Between the heat and the pounding on the washboard road, bumping from rut to rut, a tire had a short life. The gas stations did a big business fixing flats. Lucky was the traveler who went any distance without some kind of tire trouble. We had been fortunate not to have had a blowout; however, we still had eight miles to go down a sandy wash, over a road we could hardly see as it wound its way to the U. S. Geological Survey Gauging Station on the river below Topock, but our luck held.

Neither Jim nor I slept much that night. The picture of a dim young moon being pushed out of sight in the heavens by a ball of yellow fire will be one of the last things erased from my memory. Heat rays were dancing across the earth from the day before as the giant ball of fire climbed out of the earth, and it seemed to linger on the horizon as if to give those who wished a chance to run away and hide. Only there was no place to go. The campers had been restless all night, and with the dawn they began to prepare for the day ahead. Children cried from the discomfort of the heat, and mothers fixed food as quickly as possible as dust floated and hung in the air. Flies swarmed, and even had dust on their wings.

Men waited to buy gas, to get flats fixed, and to get supplies to move on to the next town. Needles was the first town in California, and Oatman was the first place in Arizona, both across some very hot and dry desert.

A large shade, made from willows hauled from the riverbank, was a refuge for the traveler during the day. A water faucet, and two dirty tables swarming with flies, graced the shade, but crude as it was many people found comfort there after the long drive from either Arizona or California.

Jim folded the cots, cooled the dog and put him in his place, filled the water bags and canteens with fresh water, and we took off down the dim road which led to our new home. The car was put into low gear to pull the load, and as it settled into the soft gravel Jim knew he would have to keep the wheels turning or we would be stuck. A trail of dust rose from the wheels and drifted lazily back to earth.

After executing eight miles of sharp curves, we came to a very steep hill. Jim wondered if we could make it with the load we had. However, the car had plenty of power and all at once we reached the top-and then we looked down. There we saw the new station sitting on a high rock bluff, with

the whirling Colorado River below and nothing between. I am sure that at that moment we both thought of the two children and made a vow never to allow them out of our sight, and this vow we kept.

Our friend, D. A. Dudley, the engineer who had built the station, was still asleep, and he was much surprised at our early arrival. However, ours was a warm welcome because there was never a fellow more anxious to leave a place than Dudley was to leave Topock. He was to be married, and had spent many months building the station. All the material had been brought down the river in boats by the Mohave Indians, whose reservation was across the river from Needles. That was no easy job. The road we had just come over had been built later, if one could call it a road, and before all the supplies were back-packed in or brought down by boat.

The car had to be left on top of the hill and all our belongings were carried down the trail to the dwelling. Jim and Dudley made a number of trips just getting the necessary things for the children. The dog with his long black hair was very miserable, and he got a haircut as soon as Jim could find the time. But at a U.S.G.S. gauging station, the river came first; to get the best record one could of the amount of water passing through the gauge well. The river was either rising or it was falling. When falling, the gauge well had to be watched very carefully, so as not to let the mud stop the free swing of the float which kept the pencil drawing as the water surged up and down. I have heard Dudley say that sometime he would like to start a school for engineers, give them a pick, a shovel and gauge well full of mud, so they would know what it was like to really be an engineer.

Dudley and Jim went down another trail to the gauge well on the side of the cliff and spent some time in the well. A report was telephoned to the railroad station master at eight o'clock every morning. He in turn sent telegrams of the river record to the office in Tucson and to Yuma. At least we had one modern contraption, a telephone. At Lee's Ferry we had received mail once a month and had gone to Flagstaff once a month, so a telephone was an improvement in communication.

As soon as the report was in, the men went out on the cable to measure the river. The cable car was just a few feet from the door, so at least Jim would not have to walk a couple of miles and pack his equipment on his back up a rope ladder after he reached the cable car.

Measuring the river was never too easy. The meter used was a delicate instrument and its care had to be considered at all times. Depending

on the river, the meter was placed on a line weighted with either a fifty or a hundred pound weight. The cable car rolled from station to station. Often when one was ready to record from the meter down the water, drift (floating mostly under water) would cause the meter to have to be hauled up to wait for the drift to pass. It took strong back and arms to handle the cable car and roll the meter up and down for the recording of a measurement. This was done every day.

The first crumb the children dropped, I discovered that ants come by the dozens-and small children drop crumbs no matter how careful one is, so that was my first problem.

As I went about unpacking, I took large washcloths and a pan of water and set the children on the floor of one room to play and every now and then I would take a cloth and wet my face and arms. There was no electricity or icebox. We were fifty miles from Kingman and twenty miles from Needles. The station was not far from the Needles Peaks. It would have been hard to get ice even if we had something to hold it. Outside a window, on the east side of the one solid room, was a desert cooler. This was built by putting burlap over a frame. A specially built pan was placed on top to hold water, wool cloths placed in the pan and over the burlap to siphon down the water, and this evaporation kept food cool. A hose suspended about a foot above the pan dripped water at a rate to keep it all operating. Once the wind blew a string up into the hose and it rested on the cooler pan. All the food in the cooler had to be thrown away-ants swarmed by the millions. They dearly love butter and bacon. One loss like this and I learned to check and be careful.

Through the car had to be left on the hill, a garage had been build and also a tent house nearby to house any guest we might have. About half-way down the hill was the privy. It had been placed there because there was no other place to put it. The ground was rocky shale, and all the flat places had been man-made with a pick and shovel. The privy was in a convenient place, even if it was conspicuous. I am sure that anyone coming down the trail for the first time wondered why it was there.

When the men came off the cable on the first day at the fine new station, my Jim was sick. Between the heat, little sleep, and helping roll the weight up and down the many times necessary to take the measurement, Jim was exhausted. I had never seen him so ill before. He never complained; still I was scared. It was miles in either direction to a doctor.

One would never come to the station anyway, and for sure Jim could not go to him in such heat.

Around the one room was built a screen porch. On the south end the screen extended to the floor. A breeze blew through that section and we hung our water bags and canteens there to keep cool. I wet the floor and spread a quilt over the wet spot and Jim lay down. I soaked some towels and put them around his head and part of his body. And then gave him some coffee. I knew nothing about how to treat a person overcome with heat, but later I learned that this was about as good as one could do.

How long Dudley stayed I do not remember, but he carried on the work until Jim was able to take over. Jim didn't go out on the cable for several days, but he did do a lot of figuring. Once when the men were talking I heard Jim say, "Dudley, if I hadn't just bought that new car I would go right on down the road.

Dudley's disturbed answer was, "For goodness sake, Jim, if you are thinking of doing a thing like that, at least let me get away first!" I smiled to myself at their conversation. Dudley left in a few days, and the next thing we heard he was married. In the three years we were there, he never did return to the U.S.G.S. Station at Topock.

Keeping cool water was a big job. The law of the desert was that when one emptied a canteen or water bag, that person was to refill it right away. To do otherwise meant that he was either lazy, or a tenderfoot who had better catch on quick. At night one made sure the bags and canteens were full so the water would be cool the next day. This I took to be one of my household duties, but filling a water bag or canteen when it was empty was still the job of the one who emptied it.

One thing there was plenty of was water. A well had been sunk back from the river, and a pump with a gasoline engine pushed the water into a galvanized tank on top of the hill above the house. This gave gravity flow into the house, so we had a sink and hot and cold running water—hot water in the summer and cold in the winter.

In the summer the water I drew to do dishes was let sit a while to cool—and I like very hot water to do my dishes! This story came to us after we left Topock: W.E. Dickenson, head of the district, visited the station and decided to shower in the heat of the day. He let out a yell when the water hit him and he shut it off quick. He then held a thermometer under the water and it showed 116 degrees, I had tried to warn him before about the water.

The house was one large room with a desk and drawers built across one side. This was Jim's office as well as our dwelling. The upper side of the house had been built solid into the shale hill, but the lower side was sit on stilts almost as high as a man's head. Along the river side was the sleeping part of the L-shaped screened porch. In the corner were benches to sit on while eating. The kitchen and shower part of the house were also built into the shale ground and extended out a good six feet, but the dining corner was on stilts. The only door we had was built so one could step out on solid ground, but the hill dropped off sharply and it was with care that one went in and out. Another door was built out to the end of the sleeping quarters with steps leading down to the ground, but we had closed this for all time, on account of the children. And as I have said before, everything we used had to be brought down the trail from the top of the hill.

So our life began, eight miles down a wash from the bridge which crosses the Colorado River at the place called Topock. We were just beginning to find our way up and down the trail when a letter came from Jim's brother Walter, who lived in Illinois. He said he was bringing Jim's father, mother, his wife and little girl to California for a vacation and that they would stop with us for a week or so. To say the least, Jim and I were certainly not ready for company. However, Jim answered by return mail and said we would be expecting them and I added a paragraph saying that we might just find a gold mine around Needles Peaks with a little luck.

Jim and I had been married for eight years but I had never met any of his folks except one brother who had visited us in the oil fields of Texas after Jim had received his discharge from the Cavalry in the spring of 1919. We had come to Arizona to find a homestead after failing to make our first million in the oil fields. We were used to camp life, but for folk with comfortable homes who knew nothing of inconvenience, well, I had some misgivings.

One thing life had taught me in my young years was to make the best of any situation without fretting; so when the telephone rang at ten o'clock in the evening about three days before we were expecting our visitors, I didn't even bat a eye. Jim's brother announced with great gusto that they were in Topock and asked, "How do we get down there?"

Jim, knowing they could never find their way down the dim road said, "I will come right up and show you." The disturbed look on Jim's face as he hung up the phone showed me he was happy to have his folks, but wondered what in the world we were going to do with them all.

Our children were in bed sleeping peacefully, so I lit another lantern and with the dog already ahead of me at the top of the trail, I went to the guest tent and fixed three beds, one for each of the men. Jim had left a lantern hanging in front of the garage, so the dog and I returned to the house where Bouncer kept wagging his tail and getting in my way as I made beds for Jessie, my sister-in-law, and her little girl Betty, in the main room of the house. Mother Klohr could bunk with me on the screened porch.

All of these preparations were finished with time to spare before I heard the motors of the cars grinding up the long steep hill, out of the wash. As the cars swung around on the top of the hill, their lights shone down the trail and on the little house that was our home. I climbed up, with lantern in hand, to greet my in-laws. There was plenty of confusion with greetings, and getting them all down the hill by the flickering light. Inside, Jim managed to give me a look of gratitude for having the beds fixed to give his folks a place to sleep and rest after so long a trip.

Walter was proud of the fast time he had made in his new car. Illinois was a long way and he was at least three days ahead of schedule. Our children were roused by all the noise and were a little startled to suddenly meet their grand-parents, an uncle, aunt, and cousin. Jim was proud to show them off, and Bouncer came in for his share of attention.

At last the men went up to their bunks, and we women began to make ready for bed. Mother Klohr opened her suitcase and let out a startled yell. I turned to see what was wrong, thinking she had seen a spider or a scorpion, when to my surprise, there on top of her clothes in here suitcase was a Gila Monster about eight inches long. Jim heard the yell and came running; one look and he had the situation in hand. He took a large fruit jar from the cupboard and slid the Gila monster into it and went back up the hill once again. We never knew how that little beast got into Mother Klohr's suitcase, because she hadn't opened it since they visited friends in New Mexico on their way to our place.

Jim was an expert camp cook, and sourdough bread and hotcakes were his specialty. So when he started to stir hotcakes, boil coffee, and fry bacon, I busied myself elsewhere. Soon he had his folks sitting around the table, and while he talked and they visited, he proved himself with a spatula and coffeepot.

In order to keep the ants off the table, Jim had placed each of the table legs in a large can half filled with kerosene. These things we were getting

used to, but his folks must have found it a little odd and like nothing they had ever seen. However, Jim made no excuses and neither did I. I am sure that Jim thought they could take a little of what we were living with all the time.

Jim's breakfast was the best ever. He kept all their cups filled with coffee from the pot which he set on the floor at the end of the table. Just being together was great for us all. (Jessie talked about this trip for the rest of her life.) When I think back now, I wonder how Jim kept the stove under control. It was a regular monster if one did not know how to keep it regulated. First, you took a can with a long spout and poured gas into the burners, and after they were hot, then you turned on the kerosene. Many is the time the children and I took to the yard while Jim waited with a blanket, ready to smother the flames if they went too high. I do not remember this happening even once, though, while Jim's folks were there.

The day they left, we drove as far as Needles with them. There were no paved roads in California, and our cars bounced along over the washboard road leaving a trail of dust to be blown away by the wind. After twenty miles of this we arrived in Needles. We were hungry, but when Jim started into a Chinese cafe, Jessie balked. She had read somewhere that the Chinese cooked just about anything, even fat rats, and she refused to go inside. Jim, however, convinced her that the cafe served the best steaks in town, and to a cowpoke like Jim, there was only one part to a cow—a juicy steak. I still remember how the nine of us lingered around the table, they hating to go, and we sorry their visit was ending. There was a tearful goodbye, and I had never seen Jim cry before.

They headed their car on to California while the children, Jim, and I returned to the station where Jim had a job, and where we were starting to raise a family.

One day before Dudley left, I asked him about rattlesnakes. He assured me he had seen none, but I was a little dubious. Part of my bringing up had been on a homestead in northern New Mexico. If it hadn't been for a big dog that was always at my side as I roamed the canyon near our house, I undoubtedly would have been bitten. Before I ever saw the snake, the dog would grab him just behind the head. Snake fat would fly in all directions. The dog didn't let go until the snake was in snake heaven or wherever good snakes go. I felt a little sorry for him; he had been there first.

I have heard that an Indian can smell a snake, but while I didn't have a smell for them, my mind was always keyed to a sound, a buzz, or a rattle.

Call it what you will, but I felt it would come sooner or later. Jim had plenty to do so I never said anything about this premonition to him.

Bouncer hadn't ever come face to face with a rattler, but I was sure he would at least bark and this was some comfort. Rattlers never crawl in the hot sun. They move about in the cool of the evening, at night and in the early morning.

The work on the river came first at any government station, so anything else had to wait. However, as soon as Jim could, he started building a yard, picking up the shale in small pieces and hauling it by wheelbarrow until he had filled the gap on the door side so nothing could crawl out from under the house. This was a lot of work. Then he put up a six-foot fence extending from the corner of the house, on the river side, out about ten or twelve feet and along the trail to the privy. A gate was placed at the corner of the house on the river side, with the lock on the outside. We felt better with the six-foot fence between the children and the river. Small children have to be watched all the time. The fence, as well as the yard, was a protection. Nothing could come from under the house, only down the trail or from above.

A couple of times a week we went up the winding wash to Topock to get the mail and bring back supplies. Once our car was pulling along in low gear with soft gravel flying in all directions, and when we rounded a curve we were surprised by a mother quail and about a dozen little ones, no larger than my thumb.

A piece of gravel had hit a little one and it lay kicking in the sand as if it were going to die. The frightened mother flew out of the close quarters in the wash, but the little ones just scurried to the side of the road and tried to hide under a big rock. Jim got out of the car and picked up the one that had been knocked out. He took the canteen of water and poured some over the little fellow in his hand, and to our surprise the tiny quail stood and began drinking water from Jim's palm. He was so dry. We knew the mother was on her way with her family to the river for a drink. So we left a can of water under the big rock to help out, as the river was at least a half-mile away.

Johnny and Lila Carrara, who ran the store and post office, were most friendly and we enjoyed seeing them on those trips. They had two children a little older than ours, so our friendship grew. On one of those trips Lila asked if we would like a kitten. Someone had dumped an underfed, scrawny runt off at the store and Jack was going to kill it. Its chances to grow into a well

animal were doubtful. However, being animal lovers, we decided to give the little unwanted cat a home. Love and care can do wonders, as you will see.

Our evening meal was never eaten until the sun had dropped behind the rugged hills on the west side of the river. The reflection of the sun on the water and shining upon the house made our dining comer doubly hot. Evening brought a long twilight and we enjoyed sitting and watching the river pushing itself along, whirling in its hurry to get to the ocean.

Before we ate, Jim always checked the gauge well to make sure that everything was in order. This evening was like many others as he came up, locking the gate on the outside. Then just as we were sitting down, I heard that noise the little warning sound that I had been listening for every since we had arrived. "Jim," I said, "I hear a rattlesnake."

The children were making their usual noises and I didn't think Jim heard me, so I again said in a louder voice, "Jim, I know I hear a rattlesnake." At this he turned around and replied, "Are you out of your mind? I don't hear anything."

By this time I had located the direction the sound was coming from, the end of the sleeping porch which had been nailed shut. There, just a few feet away, sat Bouncer, and between Bouncer and the end of the porch was a large snake, coiled and singing his song. One look by Jim and we both made a dive for the gate, which was locked and took a little time to open. When we did get around the house to where the snake and Bouncer were, the snake had moved up to the edge of the house where it went into the hill. Jim and I stood there helpless, having nothing with which to kill a snake. The only thing handy, beside a rock, was a long piece of pipe left over from the building. Jim made a jab at Mr. Snake and he disappeared under the house where we couldn't even see him.

Bouncer followed us as we turned back through the gate and looked as if he were trying hard to understand what we were so excited about. That night Jim unpacked the shotgun and we were never caught so unprepared again. I wish now I had kept track of all the snakes we killed; they were a goodly number.

A few days after the rattler crawled under the house and about the same time in the evening, I heard the second snake. This time we got through the gate and around the house in a more orderly fashion. Bouncer was near some low brush out along the trail which went down to the river. He barked to let us know about the location of the snake, which was hard to

see in the twilight because of the shale-colored rock, even though the snake was singing away. When Jim raised the gun to shoot, Bouncer left the scene. He disliked the bang of the shotgun.

Jim took a stick and pulled the snake out from under the bush and we saw at once that this was not the snake that went under the house, so we turned back disappointed. We knew the other snake was still lurking under our living quarters. Like it or not, this was going to be a way of life.

About two weeks passed and we were beginning to hope the big rattler had gone his merry way when returning from Topock one evening after dark, we received a real surprise. Our first trip down the hill was to carry the children who were asleep. We had just laid them on their beds, and Jim was lighting another lantern to return up the hill for the supplies, when a terrible noise broke loose under the kitchen part of the house quite near the only door to the outside.

By then the kitten had begun to get a little strength and was always at the door to greet us, but this night he had not been there. All at once I knew what the noise under the house was all about. The snake had the kitten and was trying to make a meal of him. I jumped up and down and yelled with all my strength and the noise stopped. I then grabbed a flashlight from the table and ran outside to the fence just in time to see, by the dim moon, the kitten run down the trail toward the river.

Poor little kitten, he must have been scared almost out of his hide and we wondered if the snake had bitten him. Jim took the lantern and tried to see up under the house, but the snake was so far it wasn't visible. At least we knew it was still there.

The kitten was gone three days and we were afraid he was dead. However, after sundown on the third day he came up to the house. My, what a mess-head swollen twice as large as it should be; eyes running bloody water; and we could see marks where the snake had almost swallowed him. As the kitten pulled away, the snake had struck and caught the kitten along its jaw. The story was all there.

Jim's training while in the Seventh Cavalry had taught him much about animals and their treatment. He took the kitten, cleaned it up with mild disinfectant and made it as comfortable as possible, saying that if the kitten had been going to die it would never have come up from the river.

That little kitten grew into a beautiful cat. His name was simply Tom,

the only name he ever had. Tom earned his keep many time over, because he was instigator in the death of many snakes. When he'd find one he'd place himself a short distance in front-and that cat seemed to know just how far back safe was if the snake would strike. There Tom would sit with his tail moving side to side cooking Mr. Snake squarely in the eye, while the snake sang and watched the cat.

Early one morning Jim and I watched Tom and a snake, at least six feet long, put on quite a show. The snake didn't coil as most snakes do; but watching the cat he began to sway back and forth while lifting himself off the ground until he was at least two feet up, swaying and rattling and looking the cat in the eye while the rest of his body was stretched out on the ground behind. It made one think of the pictures of a cobra coming out of a basket. Too bad we didn't get a picture before Jim broke the little game up and killed the snake.

The snake was a beauty of his kind and we were both sad to think he had run into our cat. It would have been interesting to see which would have won, but we lacked the nerve to let the battle of wills continue. About a week after the snake under the house tried to make a meal out of the kitten, Bouncer spotted him as he was crawling away and he, too, received the shotgun treatment.

Our cat and dog were very valuable possessions. The snakes held a charm for Tom who never showed any fear of them. Bouncer, though, felt a keen respect for a snake and always kept his distance.

That fall the store changed hands. Lila and Jack Carraca moved back to their home above Oatman, and the Jones brothers, Bill and Morgan took over the service station and the store at Topock. Bill and Morgan Jones were cattlemen who lived around Kingman all their lives, but the drought had wiped them out. This was before the days of hauling cattle by truck from place to place, and a drought could break a cattleman. Since Jim had been a cowboy and cavalryman we made friends with the Jones family without any trouble. Bill and Florence had four children, the oldest one twelve years old and the youngest the same age as our son.

Spring and high water came early that year. A young fellow just out of school, Kenneth McCarter, came to help Jim. We took our vacation in August and I remember the heat and terrible roads across the desert from Needles and Victorville. We slept at Amboy on cots the first night, then drove on to Yorba Linda to the home of friends, Ed and Lorine Speckman,

the next day. They had a fine orange grove, and this was the first time any of us had ever seen an orange on a tree. Jim and Ed had come from the same town in Illinois and had gone to school together.

McCarter left for Tucson as soon as we returned. He said the temperature had been 130 degrees in the house while we were gone. I was so thankful we were away. Summer lasted well into fall that year and I could see that Jim was restless and had something on his mind. He kept talking of the future when we could buy a business or get a ranch. This had been our goal when we came to Arizona in the first place.

Life at the station was ever a strain. Scorpions, we never put on a piece of clothing or our shoes without first checking for a scorpion. Then in the early morning when one could have slept, this being the coolest part of the day, a tiny black gnat would begin his day with breakfast off anyone who was around. All these things were more than Jim wanted his family to put up with forever. He began to talk of leaving. Holding a steady government job had not yet lulled Jim's mind into a state of complacency.

That fall, W. E. Dickenson, head of the U.S.G.S. in Tucson, received a letter from Jim stating that he would like to be relieved at Topock. Dickenson replied by asking if he knew one Frank B. Dodge who had applied for a job with the U.S.G.S.

This came as a surprise as the last letter we had enjoyed from Dodge had been from Alaska where he was working with a survey group going toward the North Pole. He and the others were mapping the vast oil lands there and we had no idea he was back in the States. We had been friends since 1921, when we first went to Lee's Ferry. His letters were filled with many interesting stories, full of color, and spiced with a thread of comedy. These letters were lost when our home in Yuma burned in 1938.

Dodge arrived in November with more paraphernalia than we had brought in 1925. There were boxes, books, guns, reloading equipment for reloading ammunition, and two overgrown pups Dodge had rescued from the pound in Tucson. Jim looked in dismay at all the boxes and at Dodge who kept talking about the many things he was going to do while running the station. He seemed to think the job was play. Jim did the best he could to teach him about the work and to impress on him the importance of the job and keeping records.

On January 1, 1927, Dodge took the job over and we were headed once again to California, hoping to find a business.

In May a letter arrived from Dodge asking if Jim wanted to take the job back. Dickenson was unhappy with the records and had told Dodge if Jim would return, he could leave. Life in the big city had been rough on us country Klohrs or Jim never would have considered returning to Topock, but just six months from the day we left we were back, having learned a lesson of value—a man with a family had better stick to a steady job. This time we knew what we were in for.

Dodge was like a cat on a tin roof on a summer day, and a little put out with us because we would not take his two Airedale pups, which by now were big dogs. We felt with the children and Bouncer and the cat, we had enough.

On morning Dodge came bustling into the house, when the stove had been temperamental, and wanted to know why there was no coffee. He was one person who wanted coffee as soon as he got out of bed, and as yet the coffee had not boiled. Then Dodge made a remark about taking the dogs to Parker with him and if he couldn't find a home for them he would just shoot them.

This remark hit me the wrong way, so in a catty tone I said, "You know, Dodge, if you had a wife and you decided to go somewhere and she were in your way then, no doubt, you would just up and shoot her." This really shook him and he dashed out of the house to find Jim who was down at the gauge well. Dodge told Jim I was sick and he should take me to a psychiatrist no less. But Jim was far too busy getting ready for high water to bother with our spats, and anyway all was well as soon as the coffee was ready.

Jim, the children and I stood on the riverbank one hot afternoon while Dodge loaded his gear into an old canoe left at the station by some movie people, who had shot some pictures while we were away. We felt sorry for the dogs and for not being able to keep them, but Dodge was off to another exciting job, building some special boats to make a trip through Grand Canyon.

This had been the third crossing of our lives but was not to be the last. Goodbyes were said and we watched our friend and his two dogs drift out of sight around the bend of the river. When Dodge got to Los Angeles he sent the children some lovely gifts, a big red bus for Jimmie and for Helen a doll as large as she was. He also sent a wooden swing to enjoy in our yard.

John and Margaret Baumgartner, a pair of newlyweds, came to be with us at the station through high water. How wonderful to have a woman

around. We had a good summer.

Margaret was quite an acrobat, so while the men were out on the cable and doing important work, we cooked, cared for the children, and did all kinds of stunts. When I was thirteen I could ride a horse with the best and milk at least six cows before going to school; but to stand on my head would have been un-ladylike, so this I had never learned. Margaret was trying to teach me and had me balanced in a corner of our only room, when I slid to one side and my foot went through a window. The children thought this was very funny and we all had a good laugh. When the men came in we had to tell them how the window was broken which ended with all of us trying different stunts in the evenings. The Baumgartner's and Klohrs enjoyed many years of friendship.

Watching the drift float on the water is a way of life when one lives by a river. Once I saw a dead cow, floating high on the water, get caught by a whirlpool. It spun around the edge a few times and was sucked under, never to appear again. And I could see some others two or three miles downstream. Tall trees would drift along with only a few branches showing, then all at once the current of a whirlpool would catch the tree, stand it up straight, suck it under and it would be gone forever. We talked about this often and wondered why these things never came up. Well we, our family, nearly found out.

One morning Bill Jones called from the store at Topock and told Jim he had just seen three large rowboats, fastened together, pass under the bridge on their way down the river. Bill thought if Jim knew in time he might rig up a weight or something and drop it into the boats and stop them. This Jim did; but by the time he finished with the measurement the boats had not come in sight. We decided to take a lunch and go have a picnic up the river a mile or so and see if the boats were hung up in a big eddy just above a jetty of rock which pushed the water out into the canyon.

Jim took the canteen and Jimmy on his back, Helen and I walking behind with the lunch and snakebite kit. Bouncer would run back along the trail between Jim and me as if to tell us all was okay. We kept an eye out for snakes, but also watched the river for boats. At last we topped a hill and looked down. There, floating lazily, were the three boats, caught on the drift out in the center of the eddy.

Jim had lived as a boy on the Illinois River, and we had been on the Colorado since 1921 so there was never any doubt in my mind as to what

Jim could do with a boat. Soon he had the three boats pulled to shore and we found a name plate that told us they belonged to some Indians who lived on the Mojave Reservation across the river from Needles.

As we enjoyed our lunch on this beautiful day, we discussed how to handle the three boats. We needed wood for the heater, which was hard to get during the winter, so we decided to fill one of the boats with wood from the drift piled high on the bank, and leave the other two tied up in the eddy. We would bring them down one by one filled with wood.

A jetty of rocks extended out into the river, forcing the water over into the canyon. High waves splashed and rolled over and round these rocks, sending white spray high into the air. I asked Jim if he thought there was any danger; he assured me that he could pull the boat upstream to the top of the eddy and then shove out into the main current and we would never get near the point.

This sounded fine to me, so we filled the boat with choice pieces of drift and were ready to cast off. The children sat at the stem; I sat on the seat with my back downstream. Bouncer barked from the shore as Jim pulled away, but he knew the way home so was left to follow on foot.

Jim was pulling away when the children demanded my attention and when I looked I saw that Jim was white as a ghost. He yelled for me to get down, we were going to hit the point. He only had one oar; the other oar lock had broken off. We hit what seemed like an endless group of waves. Each time the boat climbed over a wave we took on water. I was trying to cover the children with my body and watching Jim struggle with the heavy craft. All at once the boat sailed around the point and I looked down into the biggest whirlpool one could imagine. Jim was pulling with all his strength to keep the boat from its rim, and each time we went around I tried to grapple with the shale ledge rising several feet above my head. Then my memory left me. I don't know how it happened but in some way I climbed over the children, Jim and the wood and got the anchor chain, and climbed up that wall.

My senses returned when I felt the dog licking my face and Jim calling to me to help get the children. I never knew when Jim took the chain from me. We all sat on that cliff with tears flowing and feeling nothing but thankfulness. But for the grace of God we would have been at the bottom of the river, no one ever knowing our fate, because Jim was the only one who could swim.

When our composure returned, Jim was able to work the boat out of

the corner of rough water and bring it to the station. The children, Bouncer, and I walked back to the house and that was the last time we ever took them on the river in a boat. I had never been afraid before.

During the hot weather few people came out into the rough country around the Needles Peaks. But in winter, prospectors came to their diggings to do assessment work on mining claims. We were never surprised to have a visitor. All the miners were friendly and liked to come for a meal and to swap yams.

One evening that fall, after the children were in bed, I stepped outside in the gathering dusk and stood by the fence waiting for Jim to come up the trail from pumping water. He had been gone longer than usual and it was getting dark.

I turned around to go into the house, thinking to light a lantern, and there stood a man just a few feet from me. Where he came from we will never really know. I had not heard a sound of anyone walking. He didn't come down the trail from the garage or up the river trail leading to Topock because he would have seen Jim first. He just appeared out of nowhere without making a sound.

I was frightened, silently praying that Jim would soon come up the trail. The fellow was between me and the door and I couldn't get back into the house. So there I stood, listening to a story of where he came from which I did not believe. He had bright red hair and was rather unkempt, and his build was such that I would have hated to tangle with him.

At last I heard Jim's footsteps coming up from the river. Up to this time I suspect the man thought I was alone. Bouncer had been down the trail with Jim so there was no warning bark. To my misgivings Jim asked the fellow in, but we really had no choice. Jim got the lantern going and asked if he had eaten, to which he replied that he hadn't. We fixed him something to eat while he told a story of riding a freight train and meeting a fellow who told him that some twenty miles or so below Topock Bridge was a camp with plenty of food, a tent and everything to get one through the winter. The redhead claimed he was trying to find that camp. He said he had been told the camp was there for anyone who wanted it. Jim listened to his story and surprised me by saying come morning he would go with the fellow downriver and help him find the camp.

The next morning after the gauges were read and the report was sent, to my dismay Jim and the redhead took off down the river with back packs,

water and a lantern to help them see the trail if dark should catch them. The only good thing about it was that Jim talked to Bill Jones before he left. This was my only comforting thought as the children and I watched the two men disappear around the bend of the river I prayed earnestly for my husband's safe return.

Fall days are short but this was one of the longest days in my life. Darkness came. I fed the children, told their favorite stories and sang their songs, "Old Dan Tucker" for Jimmy and "Preacher and the Bear" for Helen. I sang until both were asleep. Bouncer sensed my uneasiness and we both had our ears tuned to one thing, a sound from down the river trail. My hearing was of the best and many of our friends kidded me about hearing from long distances, long before anyone else could detect a sound.

Once when we were at Lee's Ferry, Jim and Kassel, the engineer helping Jim through high water, sat reading and I came in from the outside and told them I had heard a car grinding out of a wash but could not tell which direction it was coming. Neither of the men looked up, but one of them remarked, "No doubt the cars are coming over the divide at Flagstaff 150 miles away and will arrive sometime tomorrow." Both men laughed as I went out to wait for the car, but sure enough half an hour later one came around the point from Paria Creek.

What a relief when I saw the dim light of the lantern as Jim and the stranger came around the bend of the river trail. Both men were footsore and tired, for their packs were loaded with all kinds of food. They had found the camp in disarray, a good boat with a hole chopped in its side and the ax thrown down in the mud, flour sacks ripped down the side with a knife, the same for sugar, canned goods thrown in all directions as far as a man could throw. A fire had half burned the tent. The camp looked as if someone had gone berserk and deliberately wrecked everything. Whoever set the camp up had brought canned butter, and bacon hung in slabs on a tree with treated strings of some kind to keep the ants away. So, what a mystery. Jim paid the redhead what both decided was a fair price and he was on his way.

Bill Jones was a Deputy Sheriff, and Jim told him about the camp; Jim also made another trip down the river to see if he could find out what really had happened. Officers from Kingman worked their way down from another direction, but the true story remains unsolved, just another incident lost to history.

In the spring of 1928 we were expecting our third child. I wanted to

return to Flagstaff where I knew a doctor and had friends. In April, before high water, Jim took the children and me to Flagstaff. We rented a house from Alf Dickerson, who owned the old Pine Hotel. John Baumgartner was sent to Lee's Ferry to help in the high water so Margaret came and stayed with me. Joe Gatewood arrived to help Jim at Topock and stayed on when we went to Yuma in July. Going to Yuma was a little like going to heaven; we could have ice, a fan, and best of all, people for neighbors.

As I think back over the years and the many wonderful people who touch our lives, I am thankful for everyone. Hardships never counted – just the friends.

