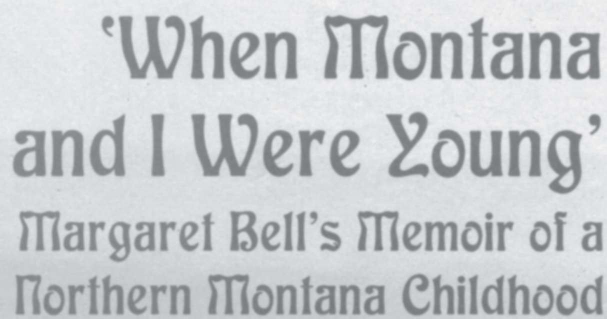


'When Montana and I Were Young'

Margaret Bell's Memoir of a Northern Montana Childhood

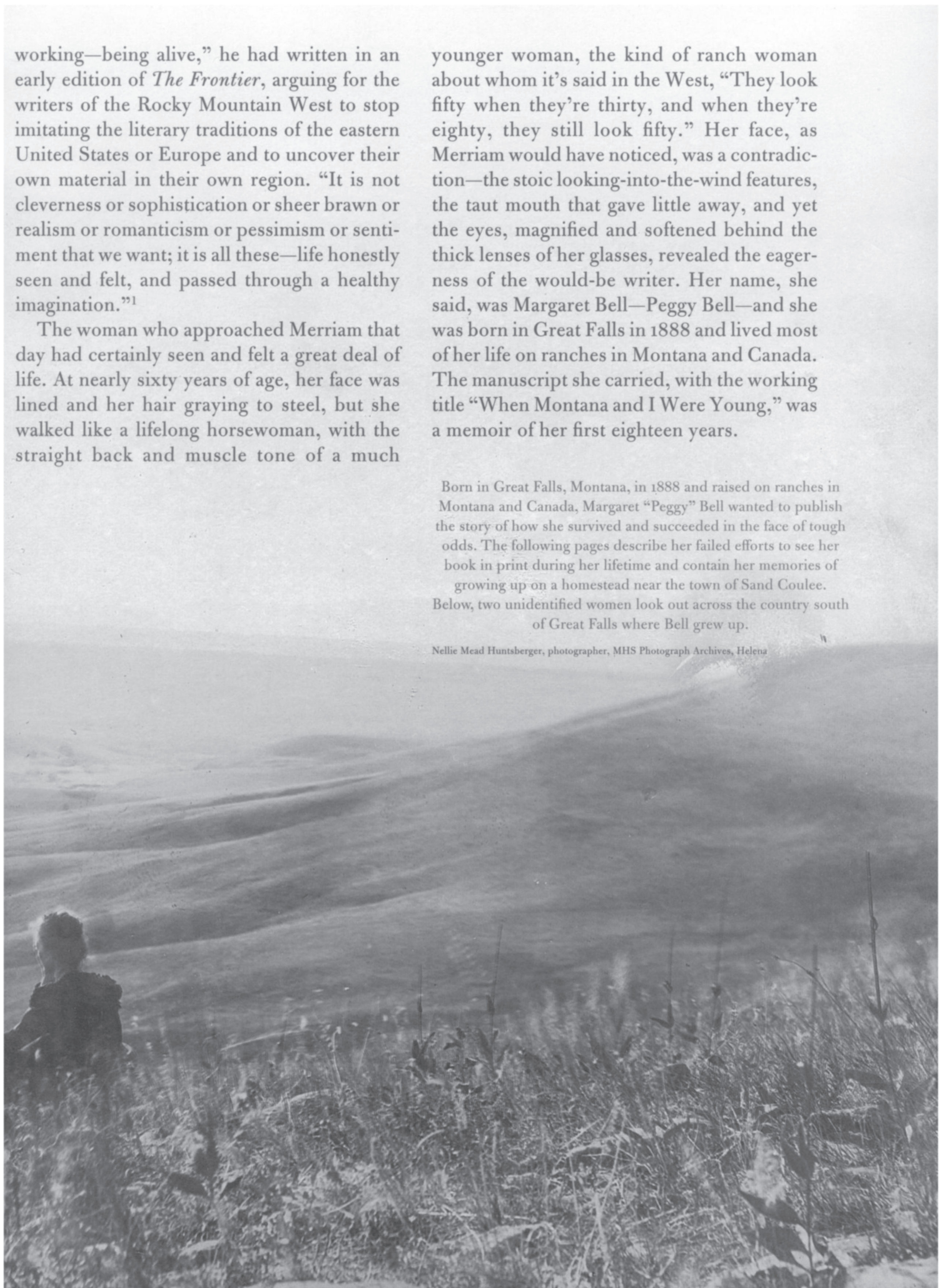
edited by Mary Clearman Blew

At a meeting of his newly formed Montana Institute of the Arts in 1947, probably in Great Falls, Montana, the legendary University of Montana professor H. G. Merriam was approached by a middle-aged woman with a manuscript under her arm. Unlike many professors of creative writing, Merriam was generous with unpublished writers. A former Rhodes scholar and founder of the influential journal *Midland* and, later, *The Frontier*, Merriam had devoted much of his life to discovering, encouraging, and publishing the work of otherwise unknown writers in the Northwest. "Out of our soil we grow, and out of our soil should come expression of ourselves, living, hating, struggling, failing, succeeding, desponding, aspiring, playing,

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

working—being alive," he had written in an early edition of *The Frontier*, arguing for the writers of the Rocky Mountain West to stop imitating the literary traditions of the eastern United States or Europe and to uncover their own material in their own region. "It is not cleverness or sophistication or sheer brawn or realism or romanticism or pessimism or sentiment that we want; it is all these—life honestly seen and felt, and passed through a healthy imagination."[1]

The woman who approached Merriam that day had certainly seen and felt a great deal of life. At nearly sixty years of age, her face was lined and her hair graying to steel, but she walked like a lifelong horsewoman, with the straight back and muscle tone of a much younger woman, the kind of ranch woman about whom it's said in the West, "They look fifty when they're thirty, and when they're eighty, they still look fifty." Her face, as Merriam would have noticed, was a contradiction—the stoic looking-into-the-wind features, the taut mouth that gave little away, and yet the eyes, magnified and softened behind the thick lenses of her glasses, revealed the eagerness of the would-be writer. Her name, she said, was Margaret Bell—Peggy Bell—and she was born in Great Falls in 1888 and lived most of her life on ranches in Montana and Canada. The manuscript she carried, with the working title "When Montana and I Were Young," was a memoir of her first eighteen years.



Born in Great Falls, Montana, in 1888 and raised on ranches in Montana and Canada, Margaret "Peggy" Bell wanted to publish the story of how she survived and succeeded in the face of tough odds. The following pages describe her failed efforts to see her book in print during her lifetime and contain her memories of growing up on a homestead near the town of Sand Coulee. Below, two unidentified women look out across the country south of Great Falls where Bell grew up.

Nellie Mead Huntsberger, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In 1947 Margaret Bell, pictured at age seventy-five at right, sought help with her manuscript from University of Montana creative writing professor H. G. Merriam (below right), who recommended she collaborate with his protégée, writer Grace Stone Coates (below center).

Unless otherwise noted, photographs courtesy Cascade County Historical Society, Great Falls

In her own way, Peggy Bell was as much an advocate for regional art and literature as was Merriam himself. What with her scant four years of formal education, she knew little and probably cared less about a European cultural tradition, but she had known and admired the cowboy artist Charles M. Russell from childhood and shared his love of prairie landscape, the unfenced freedom of the open range, and the customs of the lost cattle frontier. She knew that she had experiences as deep and tales to tell as valid as any man's, but she also knew that she was up against dimly perceived forces of culture, gender, and class that silenced women like herself and her friend, the self-taught artist Evelyn Cole, oil painting her stiff murals of cowboys up in Chinook, Montana.[2] Peggy Bell probably had never heard of feminism in 1947 and would have disdained it if she had, but she was certain of a couple of things—first, that she had survived her childhood in spite of the abuse inflicted upon her from a man's world, and second, that she had grown up to be a better cowhand than most men she had known. She was determined to get her life story told.

Courtesy Lee Rostad

By all later accounts, Peggy Bell was an engaging raconteur whose humor and natural sense of storytelling could keep an audience entertained for hours. On that first meeting, H. G. Merriam probably was attracted by her wit, but he also would have been struck by her background, recognizing that her unique and absolutely authentic material grew "out of our soil." He introduced Peggy to his friend Joseph Kinsey Howard, the Great Falls newspaperman and author of the acclaimed *Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome*. More importantly for the eventual outcome of her memoir, he also put her in touch with his protégée, a poet and writer of short fiction who lived in the tiny community of Martinsdale, Montana, named Grace Stone Coates, who Merriam thought might be able to help Peggy Bell rewrite and revise her memoir for publication.

K. Ross Toole Archives, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula

At first the Bell-Coates collaboration seemed to go well. Coates invited Bell to stay with her in her Martinsdale home while they worked together on Bell's book. "She spent the past month with me, and we got something done on her projected book," Coates wrote to Merriam. "We are both tough, so we survived the close association in an inconvenient, non-modern house."[3] But the going was hard. After their month of intensive work, Bell went home to Great Falls.

Coates's interest in Bell's manuscript continued, however. In May 1949 she wrote to Bell, apparently in response to an advance offered to Bell by Harper's:

> Would you consider coming over here again for a month, say? I know I was upset and nervous when you were here before, and probably disagreeable;

1. H. G. Merriam, "Endlessly the Covered Wagon," reprinted in *The Years and the Rain: A Biography of Dorothy M. Johnson*, by Steve Smith (Missoula, Mont., 1984), 35.

2. Margaret Bell's notes and letters regarding Evelyn Cole, ms. 55, folder 4, box 1, Margaret Bell-Dobin Papers, accession 89.156, Cascade County Historical Society, Great Falls, Montana.

3. Grace Stone Coates to H. G. Merriam, November 7, 1947, in the collection of Lee Rostad. Lee Rostad, a friend of Grace Stone Coates, was instrumental in bringing Margaret Bell's story to light. In the mid-1990s, Rostad received a phone call from a friend who had found a box of Coates's papers. Among letters and other scraps of writing, Rostad found a book-length carbon copy of a manuscript

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

but that was because I had one idea in mind (not to let you be a household drudge) and you had another (not to let me be.)[4]

In September of that year, Coates wrote again to Merriam:

> Mrs. Bell is a fine woman. . . . But she is determined and headstrong, and in spite of my expressed opinion that she whould [*sic*] wait about submitting her mss until she had it as perfect as she knew how to make it, she let Howard send it to his publishers, and others.[5]

And that was that, at least for the collaboration. Peggy Bell apparently never availed herself of the invitation to spend another month in Grace Stone Coates's house, although correspondence between the two women continued sporadically until at least 1957.

But Bell never stopped trying to get her story told. Her letters and papers contain a sad litany of near misses, of publishers who might have but somehow did not make her an offer for her book. Over the years she lost the typescript of the manuscript she and Coates had labored over during summer 1947, so in her old age she started over. In a nursing home herself, with the help of a retired schoolteacher, she rewrote her entire memoir and added it to her massive magpie stack of letters, clippings, essays, and keepsakes. She died on September 19, 1982, at the age of ninety-four.

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

One of Bell's earliest memories was of fearing her stepfather's wrath for losing the family milk cow and being rescued by a young Charlie Russell who brought the cow home and gave her his own picket rope.

What is it about Peggy Bell's memoir, I have asked myself, that has lured so many—H. G. Merriam, Joseph Kinsey Howard, Grace Stone Coates, the retired schoolteacher, and finally me—to devote hours and months bringing it to light? Why should this story be heard?

To begin, readers will find in *When Montana and I Were Young* a unique documentation of frontier childhood in Montana and Canada during the twilight of the cattle frontier and the beginning of the homestead movement that eventually would transform Montana. Statehood was still a year ahead for Montana Territory when Peggy was born as Margaret Olson in Great Falls in 1888 to a cowboy and a nineteen-year-old hotel waitress. Although the town had been platted some five years earlier, in 1888 Great Falls was still a raw village where families who wanted fresh milk kept a cow and grazed her with the town herd. One of Peggy's earliest memories was of chasing her family's milk cow until her legs gave out. Knowing that her stepfather would beat her for losing the cow, she despaired, but was rescued by a young Charlie Russell, who brought her and her cow home and gave her his own picket rope. Peggy experienced homesteading firsthand after her family moved from Great Falls to a claim near Sand Coulee when she was about six.

Second, the book is written from a viewpoint unique among women's frontier narratives, which typically describe the landscape and the living conditions from the point of view of a cultivated newcomer—say, the points of view of Isabella Bird Johnson, Mary Hallock Foote, or Mary Austin. A good comparison in time and place with *When Montana and I Were Young* is Nannie Alderson's *A Bride Goes West*, which describes the narrator's shock and disillusionment when, as a young bride from Virginia, she came to live on a cattle ranch in eastern Montana in the 1880s. Peggy Bell, on the other hand, born a generation later than Nannie Alderson, writes not as a shocked outsider, but from her own center.

Born and raised on the prairie, Peggy is incurious about the world beyond her own and never yearns after a different life in a different place. Hard work is what she knows and expects; in fact, she is proud of how hard and how competently she can stack hay, for example, or seed wheat. She fears coyotes in packs and the wrath of her stepfather, Hedge Wolfe, but she loves animals and open spaces, and when she daydreams, it is about escaping Hedge and owning a good horse and a ranch of her own with plenty of feed and water for her cattle. She never whines, never pities herself, never asks more than the chance to stand on her own feet without being brutalized. Peggy's matter-of-fact descriptions of the mistreatment she suffered at the hands of her stepfather, described in the excerpt that follows, underscore her tenacity.

---

that she thought might be the manuscript that Coates referred to in her letters to Merriam, and she contacted me with her hunch. Rostad's meticulous research established that Peggy Bell was indeed a real person and uncovered information about Bell's life that verified the accuracy of details in the memoir and provided facts about her later life.

4. Grace Stone Coates to Margaret Bell, May 30, 1949, ibid.
5. Grace Stone Coates to H. G. Merriam, September 16, ibid.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Adjusting seemed to be the order of the times. Fort Benton, the great distribution center, the head of navigation for the vast Montana Territory as well as Canada, was fast losing out to the incoming railroads, which in turn were putting the big freighting outfits out of business. Most of the freighters had met the riverboats at Fort Benton and picked up the freight and hauled it overland by horse and wagon to the various towns in the Territory and Canada, and when the freighters went out of business, there was no longer much demand for horses. As a result, the two horse ranches south of Great Falls went out of business. Tom Carter owned one and old Major Fields owned the other.

Father went to work for a short time breaking horses for the owner of a livery stable, who was doing a big business locating for homesteaders. During the winter when work was slack, Father was often told to help the livery stable boys clean the stable and haul hay when it was needed. This kind of work irked Father, because after all he was a full-fledged cowboy who had served his apprenticeship a long time ago. When spring came, he was off looking for a riding job of any kind.

He found a job once in a while, breaking a horse or two for a rancher or maybe just taking the rough off some old horses who needed breaking again after a rest, but these jobs barely kept him in spending money. He never had any money to give Mother and often stayed away from home for that reason. To make a long story short, he turned to gambling. In the saloon atmosphere, he began to drift lower and lower, morally and financially, until Mother could no longer stand the embarrassing gossip that came to her almost every day. She finally divorced him and accepted full responsibility for my care and support. . . .

I don't know how much later Mother met Hedge Wolfe, a sturdy young Canadian wrestler who was causing quite a sensation in our little town by betting any man fifty dollars that he couldn't give him a hold and then throw him on his back. Hedge was so quick and experienced that he seldom lost to anybody.

My earliest recollections of him are a blur, but of one of his visits I am sure. It was my first awareness of the man who became my stepfather. Mother was still

Bell's father was a poor provider and her mother divorced him when Bell was very young. She remembered first meeting the man who became her stepfather, Hedge Wolfe, in Great Falls's Park Hotel, pictured below in 1898, where her mother worked and they both lived. "His scowl frightened me," she wrote, "and I stood staring over my mother's shoulder with jealous resentment, while his pale cold eyes looked into mine with malice."

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

After Bell's mother married Wolfe, the family moved to the coal mining town of Sand Coulee, shown above circa 1905, where Wolfe occasionally worked in the mines. "Mother was much in favor of the homesteading plan," Bell recounted. "If Hedge got out on a ranch, he might stop gambling. In the meantime [Mother] could keep the boardinghouse going to earn money" for a house, livestock, and farming equipment for the homestead.

working and living in the Park Hotel, and she had bathed me. I even remember the glycerin soap that she used because it looked transparent and so much like candy that I tasted it. I was standing on a chair in front of the mirror while Mother dressed me and combed my hair, and I was completely happy.

There was a rap on the door. Mother opened it and a stranger entered. Mother turned from me to him. She seemed to be very happy. The stranger came nearer. I tugged at Mother to make her turn back to me and got a stern scowl from the invader. I stamped my foot at him, which seemed to aggravate him more. His scowl frightened me, and I stood staring over my mother's shoulder with jealous resentment, while his pale cold eyes looked into mine with malice.

Mother continued to work at the Park Hotel until shortly before my first little half sister, Beck, was born. From then on her life would be just a series of moves. But she was deeply in love with Hedge and completely in his power until her death at age twenty-eight, when my third half sister, Rose, was still a baby. It is one of the unsolved mysteries of my life how she could have loved such a man.

Shortly after marrying Hedge, Mother used her little savings to buy a gentle team of horses, a buckboard, and a set of double harness. She didn't have enough money to pay for it all, but the man she bought them from knew her well and let her debt go on Jaw Bone, as they used to say. Hedge promptly decided to take the team and make a trip back across the Line, as going to Canada was called in those days. He told her he would make some money boxing or wrestling. By this time Mother was expecting a baby and begged him not to go, but he promised to be back soon. She waited and waited for him to at least write a letter, but none came.

Finally Mother sent a train ticket to her mother, who had just arrived in New York from Ireland. When Mother explained her circumstances, Grandma Travers lost no time, and both she and the new baby arrived before Hedge did. . . .

Hedge must have come home broke when he finally did arrive. He was in an ugly mood, more surly than ever, and angry because Grandma was with us. It was Grandma's first experience with Hedge, and she never got over it. She and Uncle Mike talked afterward how Hedge treated Mother so harshly that she was afraid to ask for the money she needed. Then he would make her so miserable that she would be quick to give him money when he asked for it, to get back in his good graces.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The evening he came home, I made a mad dash for the door with one arm in my coat, but Grandma called me back and said, "I want to see if the stage brought us a letter from your Uncle Mike. He's coming to see us and get your Grandma a homestead of her own. Now get your bonnet, and don't run down the stairs, you might fall and get hurt." . . .

Hedge had sold Mother's gentle little team while he was in Canada and spent or gambled away the money. But still she gave him ten dollars so he could go to look for work in Sand Coulee. Jim Hill owned the coal mines in Sand Coulee at that time, and the little coal camp was booming, with gambling wide open and money flowing like water through the saloons on payday. Hedge knew this, which was why he was so anxious to get there. . . .

Hedge got a job hauling coal for Sam Dean, who had a little mine near Sand Coulee. Sam said that Hedge could use one of his big wagons, and Hedge bought a team of old plugs to do the job until he could afford a good heavy team. . . .

Of course Hedge quit his job in the mines for the usual thousand reasons. The straw boss was a son of a bitch, the barn boss always gave him the worst mules to drive, and so on. He wasn't going to skin mules, he was going to file on the homestead that Mike had told him about.

Mother was much in favor of the homesteading plan. If Hedge got out on a ranch, he might stop gambling. In the meantime she could keep the boardinghouse [in Sand Coulee] going to earn money for a few horses and cattle to get started with and a wagon and harness. Above all, she wanted a warm log house. She made plans with the carpenters who boarded with her, explaining just how she wanted her house built.

"It will be a good place to raise the children," she told Grandma.

Shorty Shope, untitled pen and ink, MHS Museum, Helena

"But my child, that all takes money," Grandma warned.

"Yes, but I am making more money than I ever made before. With the mines working steady, we can soon have enough to get started."

Mother and Hedge filed on the land, and she managed to have a good two-story log house built on it. She also bought three nice young mares from Tom Carter, who always ate at her boardinghouse when he came to town and gave her advice on ranching. He looked after the mares until she got settled, branded the colts with his brand, and gave her a bill of sale. Mother also bought eight head of good two-year-old heifers at a reasonable price. Mr. Carter branded her heifers for her, too. That made nine head of cattle, counting the old milk cow she had had to buy when she took over the boardinghouse.

She overworked constantly and finally grew so sick that she had to offer the boardinghouse for sale. It was some time before she found a buyer, and then she had to take two yearling colts and an old lumber wagon in part payment. The worst of the deal was that the buyer insisted that she leave him her good cookstove. By the time the sale was completed, Mother collapsed. Uncle Mike came and took her out to his ranch where she could rest while Grandma took us kids in hand again.

While Mother was trying to get back on her feet, Hedge was supposed to move everything from the boardinghouse and have the ranch house ready for us. . . .

When he was ready to go to Great Falls, Mother gave him money to buy the cookstove and a few other little things she needed. He took me with him, in case a tug came unhooked or something on the wagon broke or got lost off because he wouldn't dare take any chances on relaxing his hold on the lines with that team. They made that old lumber wagon rattle over the rough prairie! I sat in the bottom of the wagon box, and what a jousting I got before Bess and Mollie were winded and calmed down.

In Great Falls Hedge drove into the hay market, unhitched the horses, put hackamores on them, and tied them to the wagon wheel. He told me to pick up hay and put it in the wagon box for them but to be careful not to scare them or they'd break loose.

Bell's mother worked hard to provide a two-story log house and a few horses and cows, but her stepfather squandered both money and possessions—as Bell aptly illustrates with the story of his trip to buy a cookstove. He returned with neither stove nor her mother's money and became abusive when her relatives gave them an old one.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Bess and Mollie were fresh off the range and didn't care much for the trampled hay I could pick up, but as the day wore on, they would take a nibble now and then. I wished I could climb up to the wagon box, but I was afraid of scaring the team, so I sat on the wagon tongue and waited hour after hour until it was dark. All the teams but ours had gone from the market. I knew the horses must need water, because they had been too warm to drink when we pulled in. I wasn't thirsty myself because I could drink at the horse watering trough, but I was hungry and wished Hedge would come back and bring me something to eat.

Once a man with a load of hay talked to me when he put his team in the barn. He came back with some doughnuts and an apple and asked me if I didn't want to go to the hotel where it was warm. He would leave a note for my stepfather, telling him where I was. But I was afraid Hedge wouldn't like it. I kept wondering whether Hedge had bought the stove.

He hadn't. He came back without a single thing—except two slices of buttered bread for me. He must have had his supper at the Farmer's Hotel, where food was served family style and a customer could help himself to as much as he wanted for twenty-five cents. . . .

Hedge waited the next day until Uncle Mike had gone to work, and then he took me with him to Mike's place and told Mother to bundle up her duds and get home. She could look after the baby all right, he said, and he was afraid to have all that grub in the house with nobody to look after it. When Mother asked him whether he had bought the stove, I got scared and went outside.

Grandma tried to persuade Hedge to let Mother stay a few days longer, but he insisted that she leave right away. Grandma could not come with her because she was on a confinement case. She did her own housework early, walked a mile and a half to the neighbor's house, bathed the baby, made the beds, put the house in order, baked bread and prepared whatever food was on hand, then came home to do her own evening chores, bringing the cows along with her as she came, then milking them, feeding the calves and chickens, and preparing supper for Uncle Mike. There was plenty of work at Uncle Mike's, but he and Grandma were happy.

Mother must have been eager to get settled in her own new home that she had looked forward to for so

The presence of Bell's maternal grandmother and uncle Mike Travers (below) on a nearby homestead made life somewhat better for Bell, her mother, and her three half sisters, but her stepfather resented his wife's family and took his hostility out on his wife and daughters.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

long because she went readily when Hedge asked her. She was afraid to ride behind the spunky little team, especially with the new baby, but Hedge assured her that he could handle them. She could sit in the wagon box with me, out of danger. I had my own ideas about the danger but kept them to myself.

We had no trouble with the team, but I'll never forget going inside the house with Mother. She cried as though her heart would break. Hedge had dumped everything from the boardinghouse in the middle of the floor. There was no cookstove—and five people to cook for. But she got over her tears while Hedge was watering and picketing the team, and when he came in, she was making up the bed to have a clean place to put the baby.

"I'm hungry," said Hedge. "Let's have something to eat."

"Yes," she said bitterly, "you want your supper and I want a stove to cook it on. I've worked myself down to this to make money for a home here. I trusted you with that money to buy the most necessary thing in the house. Now give me the money and I'll go to town and do my own buying. Then I'll know that it will be done."

Hedge stood looking at Mother for a moment as if he couldn't believe she was talking back to him. He walked over to the corner, picked up his saddle and bridle from the floor, threw them over his shoulder, and started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Going to town to get my supper."

Hedge stayed away several days. While he was gone, Grandma came over to bring Mother some butter and cottage cheese. She was disgusted to find her trying to cook on the heating stove.

"We will go right over and get that old cookstove I had in my homestead shack," she said. "It's not very good, but it beats this."

She and Mother drove back in the buckboard and somehow got the old stove loaded. They set it up, but found they had forgotten the crosspiece that holds up the lids. They couldn't light a fire without it, so I went back with Grandma to get the missing part. I was hurrying home with it, when, from the top of the hill, I saw Hedge heading for me at a high lope.

I knew he wouldn't be riding a step out of his way to help me. I had been running along, but now I slowed to a walk, wondering what he was angry about and how I figured in his rage. I soon knew.

"Where have you been?"

"At Uncle Mike's. I had to get this," I said, holding up the crosspiece, "before Mother can make a fire in the stove."

"Didn't I tell you and your mother not to be running over there?" he roared.

I hung my head without trying to answer, which only added to his anger. He jumped off his horse, jerked the crosspiece out of my hand, and threw it on the grass. "Leave it there, and get home, and stay there—do you hear?"

With that he shook me and gave me a slap that sent me sprawling and frightened his horse so that she almost pulled the reins out of his hand. For that, he jumped on her back and drove in his spurs. "I'll take the scare out of you!" He spurred her until she was racing over the prairie at top speed.

When I got home without the crosspiece, I found Mother crying and cleaning up soot. Hedge had knocked the stovepipe down and dragged Grandma's stove outside. . . .

Great Falls, Montana area

Map shows modern highways and roads.

Mother worried about her eight head of heifers and kept after Hedge to round them up. She wanted to give them a little salt and get them used to watering at our spring. This was no easy matter because they were constantly being scared away from the spring by horses. Our homestead lay between the two big horse ranches, and until we moved in, the horses had come to the spring every day. It became my job to watch for them and set the dog on them when they came close.

Hedge figured out a way to really scare the horses, although by stampeding them, we also scared off the heifers. Our dog was a good heeler. When an old mare

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

with a colt would stop to fight him off, the dog would nip her heels. After he'd been kicked several times, Hedge decided to put a stop to it before he got killed. He fitted the dog with a little harness to which he attached two tomato cans with pebbles in them. At first the dog hated the arrangement, but when he found out how he could make the horses run from the racket, he would almost ask for the harness.

Mother was afraid her heifers would get picked up by rustlers, who were active around there at the time. Once when Hedge was away and he didn't come and didn't come, she decided to put the baby to sleep and walk with me to the top of a high hill and see whether she could see them. Climbing the hill overtaxed her strength. She had to sit down and rest many times, and when we got to the top, all we saw was horses.

Hedge came home the next day. Aggie looked as though she had had nothing to eat since he left the ranch. She was so weak that she almost had the blind staggers and gentle enough now that I could lead her to water and picket her. All she wanted was grass and more grass. I had a time keeping her from stepping over the rope as she kept reaching for bites of grass. Finally I picketed her where the grass was good and left her to feed.

As soon as I got back to the house, Hedge sent me to the spring with a ten-pound and a five-pound lard pail to get him a fresh drink of water. He always slept and slept after he had been away on one of his jaunts, but this time it seemed to take him an unusually long time to get his rest. Aggie was rested long before he was and too frisky for me to lead to water. Mother tried to help, but she was strange to Aggie and scared her worse than I did. Mother was afraid of animals, and they knew it and were the more afraid of her. She never learned how to win an animal's confidence, but she did her best to save Aggie and me from a beating in case Hedge had to be disturbed to water her himself. And she wanted him in a good humor so she could persuade him to go bring the heifers home.

It took a lot of coaxing, but he finally went. He came home with Bess and Mollie, the mares, but said he couldn't find the heifers. He would take another look around as soon as he had given the team a workout. He had heard about a stove a fellow wanted to sell cheap in Great Falls. I'd have to stay home and milk the cow and water the saddle horse, but he'd hunt up his nephew Pete in Great Falls if he needed help hitching up the team in town.

He came home with an old stove and Pete.

A day or so after Hedge and Pete got back, a fellow by the name of Rasmason drove up to our house in a single buggy, something we seldom saw. I was all eyes and ears to know what was going on and sat on a log at the side of the house while Rasmason told Hedge he wanted to trade the gelding he was driving for the black mare he had seen Hedge driving the day before.

"Why do you want to get rid of the gelding?" Hedge asked.

"I want a mare that will raise a colt and pay for her keep. All the driving I do is for pleasure, and I want to get something back from the money I put into it."

"I don't want to trade. My mares match up well. Same size, same gait."

"A bay and a black ain't a good combination. This gelding's a lot better match for your bay than the black mare is."

After more dickering, Hedge said, "I'd want twenty dollars to boot."

"That's too much. I can buy a horse for twenty-five dollars."

When Hedge looked at the gelding's teeth, he remarked on a strong odor of whiskey. But Rasmason invited him to get in the rig and see how the horse could travel. The horse had lots of go in his, and that was what Hedge liked. Yes, Rasmason explained, he had too much life for the little driving he wanted to do. He'd had to put a kicking strap on him because they were just breaking him to drive single, but he had never offered to kick.

When they pulled up at the house again, Rasmason got out of the rig and offered Hedge a ten-dollar bill. Mother had come out, and she spoke up opposing the trade. But Hedge had seen that ten spot, and he wanted it. "Make it fifteen," he said.

"I'll split. I'll make it twelve and a half," and Rasmason handed Hedge the money.

Bess was picketed not far from the house. The men drove over to her, unhitched the gelding, and hitched up Bess. Hedge told Rasmason that Bess wasn't broken to drive single, but Rasmason was in a rush to get away and took the chance. Of course he was in no danger, not with a good kicking strap, new harness, and buggy.

Mother couldn't believe Bess was gone until she saw Rasmason drive her away. She and I were both sick over it. And of course with money in his pocket, Hedge couldn't stay on the ranch. He threw his saddle on Aggie and was off for town, leaving Mother to get over the loss of her mare the best she could.

Mother sat up late waiting for him, but he didn't come home. In the morning the cow and Mollie and the gelding all had to be watered and have their pickets changed, and she didn't know how we were going to manage it. She got the babies to sleep while I milked the cow. Then we took the cow to water and picketed her where she could get her fill.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Next we tackled Mollie. She wouldn't let us get near her, so Mother said we would carry the water to her instead of trying to take her to water. I ran home and got the jelly bucket for her to drink out of, but range horses are fussy, and Mollie didn't want water bad enough to drink out of the jelly bucket.

Mother said, "We'll water the other horse first and then leave the bucket where Mollie can come up and drink if she wants to."

The gelding was jumping around like crazy. When he saw us coming, he started to meet us on a high lope, but his picket rope stopped him and threw him off balance. Mother and I were both afraid of him, so we set the bucket down where he could reach it and got out of his way just as he landed upside down on it, smashing it.

Just as that happened, Tom Carter came riding up.

"Keep back," he shouted. "Keep away from that horse. He's locoed. I'll water him and change his picket for you."

I wondered how he was going to do it. He rode up to the picket pin, picked up the rope without getting off his horse, took two half hitches around his saddle horn, pulled up the pin, rolled up the rope, and put a hackamore on Mr. Gelding. The brute sat back on his haunches in true loco fashion, but Carter didn't let that bother him. He kept the gelding backing right to the spring, where he was glad to take time out for a drink.

"Where did you get the loco?" Carter asked Mother.

She explained about the trade and asked, "What makes him so crazy today? He acted fairly good yesterday."

"He may have been doped, for he is sure locoed now," Tom answered. "He is vicious. Keep away from him."

Mother remembered the whiskey odor that Hedge had remarked on, and asked whether he could have been doped with that.

"A lot of strong liquor might have calmed him down for the time being. Maybe that's why he is so much worse than any loco I ever saw before. If he were mine, I'd shoot him before he kills somebody."

Locos were numerous on the range. You could always tell them by their peculiar actions and by their manes and tails, which were always thicker and longer than other horses'. They would get so stupid that they didn't know enough to go for water and would die of thirst.

Mother thanked Mr. Carter and asked him if he had seen anything of her eight heifers. "If you do, let me know."

"I would, if that would do you any good," Carter answered and rode away without looking back.

Mother puzzled over his remark. She couldn't make herself believe that Hedge had gambled them away. But she remembered how little concern he had shown when she had worried about them and wanted him to look for them.

Horse herds like the one below, photographed south of Fort Benton, Montana, muddied the neighborhood springs and frightened Bell's mother and the children, who were often alone on the homestead. One night in Hedge Wolfe's absence, herdsmen terrorized the family so badly they moved back to town in spite of the danger that these men might jump their claim.

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

When Hedge came home the next day and saw his crazy gelding, he was furious. Tom Carter had left the hackamore on, thinking it might prevent him from breaking the rope, but the horse was too locoed to be careful even when the rope cut into his nose. The hackamore did make it easier for Hedge, who rode up and threw a half hitch around his saddle horn. The loco made his backward lunge, almost throwing Hedge's horse and unseating Hedge, and the battle was on between a man accustomed to beating animals into submission and a crazy locoed horse whose sense had been destroyed by a poison weed.

What Hedge had in mind was to take the gelding to Rasmason's place, where he had Bess picketed, and exchange them while Rasmason was at work in the mines. But he soon found his method of brute force wasn't going to work because Aggie couldn't drag the gelding. The rope might snap and the loco would be free on the open range. Still, he managed to get the gelding to follow Aggie, and he did switch the two horses.

Of course Rasmason was furious when he found Bess was gone. He rushed right up to the ranch on foot and found Hedge thinning out Bess's tail. Rasmason had cut it off square, Canadian Mountie style.

"So you came and took the mare back, like a goddamned Indian," he sneered.

"You gave me a bill of sale stating that your horse was sound."

"He was when I turned him over to you. You must have hit him over the head or something. I'll take my mare that belongs to me."

"Why didn't you ride your good sound animal over here?" Hedge asked.

"You done something to that horse."

"That horse of yours tried to kill my wife. You better go home and kill him before he kills you."

Rasmason wasn't quitting. "I'm demanding my mare, right now," he said, taking a step toward Bess's head. But Hedge's hand went to his gun, and Rasmason weakened.

"I'll have the law on you. You'll see whether I get my mare or not!" he shouted as he walked away.

Hedge stayed around home for a few days, in case Rasmason should come back, then took Bess to Tom Carter's place and turned her loose.

The weather was hot and dry. There were only two unfenced springs in the neighborhood. Ever since we had been putting tin cans on the dog to scare them away from our spring, the horses had had to go to the other, which didn't have enough water for them. And one night the horse herders must have decided to water their horses at our spring because the dog kept barking all night long, and what a mess our spring was the next morning! Hundreds of horses had trampled around it. Mother was alone with us children and afraid to send the dog out. If any of the buckaroos were still around, they would shoot our dog for sure.

The men must have watched and known when Hedge wasn't home because this night watering went on for several nights. Mother couldn't sleep when she knew the horses were at the spring, and she waked me to keep her company. We were sitting and straining our ears, listening to the horses milling around the spring, when we heard hoofs close to the house. Mother was terror stricken.

The men rode up to the front door and pounded on the top panels until they broke, then threw the rock into the room. We thought they were coming in, but they didn't. They rode around the house and broke out the window on the other side.

One fellow said, "Let's set fire to the damn thing."

"That's what we're going to do if they don't get the hell out of here," another retorted.

I hid under Mother's bed until I heard the horses leave, then I came out. Mother was sitting on the edge of the bed trying to quiet the babies, who, frightened by the noise, were crying at the tops of their voices.

I peeped out the window and said, "They are gone." As I spoke, Mother must have fainted and fallen to the floor. I thought a man had jumped through the broken window. I made a dive for my hiding place under the bed, fell over Mother, and struck my nose on the edge of her bed, giving myself a bloody nose and two black eyes. I was so scared I didn't know I was hurt but lay listening and waiting for our dog to make a big fuss over the men breaking into the house.

I was confused when the dog didn't bark at all. I couldn't hear well because the babies were crying, but I was sure no men were walking around the house. When Mother began to groan, I found the courage to crawl out from under the bed. I could hear the dog licking Mother's face, and I whispered, "Are you hurt?" I thought one of the buckaroos' rocks must have struck her, but she soon came to, explained that she had fainted, and asked for a drink of water.

A baby's crying bothers me at any time, but that night my baby sisters' crying almost drove me wild. I wanted to listen for horses coming near the house. The dog would warn us of unusual noises, but if I could hear, I would have a better idea of what was causing the disturbance and whether it was near or far away.

Nobody who has not gone through a night like that knows what a relief daylight is. When Mother saw me in the dim gray dawn, she thought I had been struck by a rock, but I remembered falling against the bed after the riders had gone.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

When Hedge came home and Mother told him about the terrible night we'd had, he said, "We've lived on the ranch long enough. We can prove up. Maybe we'd better move to town for a while."

"What will we do with our cattle and horses? Who will look after them?"

"They'll be all right. We'll turn the horses out, they'll take care of themselves. We'll take the old cow to town with us and put her in the town herd."

"What about the heifers? They'll all be coming fresh in the spring and will need a little hay and shelter during the bad weather. I thought maybe you could get Mike's mower and put up a few loads of hay for them and the milk cow."

"No, I'm not going to ask Mike for his mower. If I can find the damn heifers, I'll get somebody to look after them, or I'll trade them off."

Mother was sure, then, that the heifers were gone.

She had spent most of the time in bed since the dreadful night, but she got sicker. Finally Hedge sent me for Grandma. He went for the doctor, who brought us another baby girl.

Uncle Mike advised Hedge against leaving the ranch when the horse ranchers needed water so badly. They might hire someone to jump the claim. He also reminded him that he had better break the required amount of ground. So Hedge got Pete to come and stay on the ranch with him, and they plowed a small patch by the house. And what a reception they gave the range horses with some specially loaded shells when they tried to come to the spring again!

Mother was making plans to go to work in town for another grubstake, as Hedge called it, as soon as she was able. Our dog used to get lonesome for Mother and me and would trot over to visit us for a while and then go back to the ranch. It was only two miles. The buckaroos must have seen him going back and forth, for one day we found him lying by the roadside, shot. . . .

Rasmason made good his threat to bring suit against Hedge for taking back Bess, but long before it came to trial, the locoed gelding was dead and so was any friendship between Uncle Mike and Hedge. Mother had gone to Belt to work in another boardinghouse, leaving us four children with Grandma, and Uncle Mike had laid off work in the mine to put up some hay. He asked Hedge to help him.

Hedge, who was living on the ranch again, agreed to help Mike put up the hay, but as soon as the work was done, he asked to be paid for it.

"Hasn't my mother been taking care of your family for the last six months?" Mike reminded him.

"Truleen expects to pay for all that," Hedge told him, "and I've got to have money to hire an attorney for that Rasmason business."

Uncle Mike paid him but told him that was the last dealing he would ever have with him. Hedge went to town and hired his attorney, then drove to Belt to get Mother, telling her that he and Pete were tired of batching.

Grandma cried whenever she mentioned that homecoming of Mother's. It was a chilly, rainy day, and Mother was numb with cold, but because Hedge was angry at Uncle Mike, he wouldn't let her get out of the wagon at Grandma's house, not even to warm her hands. We children, who had anticipated Mother's homecoming with great joy, were crushed. I was afraid to speak a word for fear Hedge might not approve, and poor Grandma—who had taken care of us four children for six months, washed for us, sewed and cooked for us—this was the thanks she got. But Hedge was smart. He wasn't giving Mother a chance to offer Grandma any of the money he'd talked about so glibly to Uncle Mike, and more than that, he gave all of us to understand there was to be no visiting back and forth.

We children forgot a lot of the disagreeableness when the wagon was unloaded and we saw the good things to eat and the yards and yards of calico and outing flannel that Mother had bought to make us new clothes. . . .

Mother had a terrible time with the baby. It didn't know her and wouldn't go to her for several days. Instead, it clung to me night and day, keeping me in the house when I wanted to be outdoors. At that age—about seven—I loved to be outside, riding a stick horse and gathering pretty rocks to build a corral to keep my imaginary horses and cattle in. As I played, I told myself I was not going to be like Hedge. When I got big, I was going to build warm stables for my stock and put up big haystacks so they would have something to eat when the grass was covered with snow; and I would build a fence around my ranch so we wouldn't be bothered with range stock getting in the spring and eating up all the pasture; and I wouldn't be mean to little kids.

Walking over the prairie, I was always picking out nice grassy spots where I was going to built a fence for my horse pasture. As my childhood dragged on, I resolved to get away from Hedge when I was sixteen, a wonderful grown-up age when I would be able to do everything with ease. . . .

Rasmason's suit must have hung fire for some time until it came up for trial. Mother was so confident of winning as soon as the evidence was presented that she thought the trial wouldn't last any time at all, so she left us children at home alone.

The baby, Rose, was pretty good until bedtime. Then she cried herself to sleep. I went to sleep, too,

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

but she wakened me bright and early and cried more. I did everything I could to quiet her, but the only time she was quiet was when she was asleep. It dawned on me that she might be sick. If she was, she might die before Mother got home. If I could only see Grandma, she might know what to do, but I was forbidden to go near Grandma's. I debated with myself for a long time.

My other half sisters, Beck and Nora, began to cry; and with all three crying at once, I didn't know what to do but go to Grandma's. I thought maybe I could get back before Hedge came home, and he might not be so angry if he knew the baby was sick and might have died if Grandma hadn't fixed her.

I put coats and hoods on both the little tots. It was a hot day, and the baby didn't want to be bundled up. She cried louder and did her best to pull her blanket off, but after I got going, she quieted down somewhat. I was used to carrying her around the house but soon tired when it came to carrying her any distance. I tried letting her walk, but she fell down so often I saw I would never make the two miles before dark. Beck and Nora were not good travelers, either. They fell down, and cried, and wanted to go back. I told them to hold on to me and we would soon be there. Grandma would give us lots of nice things to eat, maybe even candy.

I was afraid the baby's crying would attract the attention of wild cattle or horses. I wasn't so anxious about the horses, but the wild cattle gave me plenty of worry. One bunch had a well-known black-necked steer that had chased several men afoot on the prairie.

It wasn't so bad as long as there was light, but when the sun went down I was almost panicky. I thought of leaving the three little tots by the road and running to get Uncle Mike to come and carry the baby the rest of the way. I knew I was headed in the right direction because I had watched the sun go down and the sky was still a little lighter where it had set. But I wasn't sure I was on the road, which was used so seldom that the grass wasn't worn off, and leaving my little sisters was too risky. They might wander off or wolves or coyotes might attack them. No, I must stay with them. How I would protect them hadn't entered my mind.

By this time I was played out and so were Beck and Nora. They must have been too tired to cry but kept sniffling. But the baby would stop crying for awhile and then break out in a wail I was sure could be heard clear to Uncle Mike's. Once a coyote answered her with a weird bark that almost took the last bit of starch out of me.

Uncle Mike's house was down in a coulee. You

In need of another grubstake, Bell's mother moved to Belt (below, circa 1895) to work in a boardinghouse, leaving her daughters in the care of their grandmother and uncle. After six months her husband tired of "batching" and brought her and the children back and, according to Bell, "gave all of us to understand there was to be no visiting back and forth" in the future.

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

couldn't see it until you were almost on top of it, but the dogs had heard us and were setting up a frantic barking. Uncle Mike lit his lantern and came to investigate.

The dogs came to meet us, with Uncle Mike following with the lantern. Was I ever glad to see the glimmer of that lantern and was Uncle Mike horrified when he came close enough to hear the baby crying!

He called, "Is that you, Peggy?"

I couldn't answer. I couldn't get breath enough. I tried, but my voice was so husky he couldn't hear me.

"In God's holy name, what's this? What are you doing here at this time of night?"

Of the four of us, I was the worst off after we were safely in the house. I couldn't stop shaking, and Grandma couldn't find anything to make me stop, although she tried all her favorite remedies. Knowing that I still had to face Hedge and what he would do when he found out I had gone to Grandma's was what kept me shaking. There were no excuses with Hedge. I was in real trouble and I knew it, and nothing Uncle Mike or Grandma could say would make a difference.

I felt better after a night's sleep, and we had a wonderful time with Grandma and Uncle Mike. One of Uncle Mike's horses was sick, and he had been staying home from work on that account. He spent most of his time playing with us and singing to us between giving the sick horse doses of aconite. But he was just putting the aconite bottle back in the attic when Hedge stepped into the doorway. He was in one of his worst rages and wouldn't let Mother stop for the cup of tea Grandma considered so necessary.

Uncle Mike told Hedge off, just the same, and he warned Mother never to leave us alone again or he'd do more than tell her off. Mother knew it was a terrible thing, but she said nothing because Hedge was already in such a rage.

On the way home I wished the wolves had killed me. Anything would be easier than to take the beating I knew was coming.

Hedge began unhooking the team and told Mother to hurry up and make him something to eat. She sent me out for chips and wood to start the fire.

Hedge couldn't wait to take his anger out on me. As soon as he had finished eating, he told me to go out and get the bellyband off the harness. This was an extraheavy strap about two inches wide with no buckles that he always used to beat me with.

I brought the strap, and he said, "Now pull off your duds, and I'll tan your hide for you."

When I got down to my undershirt, I hesitated, and he jumped up and jerked my shirt off. "So you won't mind what I tell you? Maybe you will after I get through with you this time."

He started beating me from one corner of the room to the other. Mother went into the bedroom with the little girls, who were frightened and crying, but Hedge hollered at her, "You come out here and shut that door."

Mother came. He handed her a little light strap off her valise and said, "Help me give her a good trimming."

I was covered with stripes already. I was tender skinned, and in many places he had drawn blood. Mother hesitated, but when he roared, "What's the matter with you?" she, too, started beating me—a thing I'll never forget, even though Mother has been dead many years.

I felt myself getting weak and thought maybe I was going to die—I said, "O God, please let me die."

Mother dropped her strap and choked, "No more," and rushed from the room. Hedge kept on beating me, but it didn't hurt so much now. He ordered me to get up from the floor, but I couldn't, so he picked me up by one arm and one leg and threw me on my bunk, striking my head against the log wall. I lost consciousness and didn't come to until the next day.

Mother was worried and wanted Hedge to go for the doctor. He said it wasn't necessary, but he must have been scared, for he began drilling me in a lie. In his gruffest voice, he demanded, "What did Grannie give you to eat last night?"

I was so frightened I could hardly speak, much less remember, but I managed to whisper, "An egg, some cottage cheese, and some potatoes."

"Didn't she give you some bread and butter?"

"Yes."

"What did she put on the bread before she put the butter on?"

I didn't know what to say because butter was all she had put on it.

Hedge came back at me with a smack across the face. "Why do you try to lie to me? You know she put some of that medicine on, that Mike was putting back in the attic when I came. What was Mike doing with them bottles from the attic?"

"Old Brownie was sick, and he gave her some medicine. I think it was the red kind."

"Didn't Grannie put some of that on your bread?"

"I don't think so."

"Listen here, Skin-'em-alive, I'm going to make you tell the truth about that old woman putting medicine on your bread if I have to give you another licking like the one you got last night."

He grabbed me as if he were going to start beating me again. Mother was afraid he might, too, for she came over and spoke in a soft voice. "Now tell your father all about what you had for supper last night. You never

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

mentioned cake or pie, and Grandma always has something like that for Uncle Mike's lunch pail."

Her sympathetic tone brought on a crying spell, but I did my best to tell her, through my sobs, that we had cake and applesauce with cream on it.

That gave Hedge the opening he wanted. He turned to Mother—"There you are! She won't tell the truth. First she says all she had to eat was eggs and cheese and potatoes. Now she tells you she had cake and applesauce. I had to force the bread and butter answer out of her, and I'll force the answer about the medicine out of her, too. Listen to me, you skinny little trollop, didn't Grannie put some of that red medicine on your bread? Why won't you say yes? You know she did, and that's what you are to tell the doctor if he comes."

"I will, I will," I sobbed.

Mother pulled open my shirt and asked, "How are we going to explain this to a doctor?"

"We'll tell him one of the horses got scared of a rattlesnake and she got tangled in the rope and dragged before I could catch the horse and carry her home." He went over the last part several times, so I'd know just what to say. Mother shook her head. She was still worried.

"She don't need a doctor! She's all right! I'm going to take a little nap. I didn't sleep much last night."

"I'm afraid! I worried all night. Don't you know if anything happened, we'd be in a worse spot if we didn't have a doctor? If you won't go, I'm going to Sand Coulee myself."

She got ready and left. It was seven miles there and back, and she had to walk because she couldn't handle any of our horses, but she went anyway. I knew from

Bell grew up dreaming of the day she could escape her stepfather and, unlike him, become a successful rancher. "I told myself I was not going to be like Hedge," she wrote. "When I got big, I was going to build warm stables for my stock . . . and I would build a fence around my ranch so we wouldn't be bothered with range stock getting in the spring and eating up all the pasture; and I wouldn't be mean to little kids." At age nineteen she married Phil Criviansky, pictured below in 1908 behind the counter of his Sand Coulee meat market. Margaret ranched and raised five children while he ran the business in town.

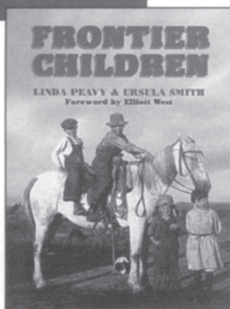
This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

their conversation that I was in a bad way, and I was glad. Whenever I was conscious I prayed that God would let me die. I would go to heaven, where Grandma had told me everybody was kind and good. Thinking about Grandma brought back the lies I was to tell the doctor about her giving me bad medicine. I prayed that God would let me die before the doctor came. Grandma was my best friend, and how could I tell the doctor that she had done something terrible? She had told me God always answered prayers if you prayed for what was good and right, and I thought dying would be a wonderful thing for me.

Mother had set a little pail of cold water beside my bunk, and before she came back I had drunk it all. My prayers weren't getting results, I was feeling better instead of worse. My faith in prayers took an awful tumble that day, and I doubt whether implicit faith ever returned.

Mother had come back without the doctor. He had been out on a case. She had waited in his office as long as she dared, and when she got home, she found me better. Luck was with Hedge; if the doctor had seen me, the course of my life might have been changed.

The beating and fear described in *When Montana and I Were Young* will linger long with readers, partly because it is so shocking but largely because it is described in such a matter-of-fact and unadorned voice that never asks for pity. Spare the rod and spoil the child was a saying that seemed common sense fifty or a hundred years ago, and some contemporary ideas of physical child abuse probably would have baffled Peggy Bell herself. But even allowing for changing mores and the exaggerations of recollection, Elliott West in *Growing Up in the Country* notes that enough violence and child abuse is mentioned in frontier reminiscences and memoirs to show that it certainly was not unknown and cites Mari Sandoz's bullying father in *Old Jules* as an example.[6] Elizabeth Hampsten, in *Settlers' Children*, quotes the psycho-historian Lloyd De Mause to the effect that the history of childhood is "a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused."[7]



In her own research, Hampsten says, she has been struck by how often the violence described by De Mause coincides with the recorded experiences of settlement children: "It is as though in personal and family relationships the settlement experience briefly leapt backwards through the centuries."[8] Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, in *Frontier Children*, follow Hampsten in asserting that one of the strongest impressions some children retained of their home life was of beatings and overwork.[9]

Peggy's is a story of survival, of growing up poor and female in a frontier world controlled by men. She wanted readers to know the "truth," in a larger sense, about her childhood, and she did not want that truth distorted. Growing up isolated as she did after her mother's death, kept from contact with adult women or even other girls, she lacked even the language to tell authorities about Hedge's abuse. I believe that, having once been robbed of language, she was determined to regain the power of language and exercise that power in telling her story. She tried all her life to have her story published, to validate her life; and here it is at last.

MARY CLEARMAN BLEW is a native of Montana, now a professor of English at the University of Idaho, Moscow, and author of several books, including *All but the Waltz: Essays on Five Generations of a Montana Family* (1991), *Bone Deep in Landscape: Essays on Writing, Reading, and Place* (1999), and *Sister Coyote: Montana Stories* (2000). LEE ROSTAD, a historian, longtime resident of Martinsdale, Montana, and former member of the Montana Committee for the Humanities, contributed greatly to the project. This article is adapted from *When Montana and I Were Young* by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright 2002 the University of Nebraska Press.

6. Elliott West, *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far-Western Frontier* (Albuquerque, 1989), 152.
7. Lloyd De Mause, "The Evolution of Childhood," *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1 (Spring 1974), 17.
8. Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers' Children: Growing Up on the Great Plains* (Norman, 1991), 17.
9. Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Frontier Children* (Norman, 1999), 65.

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Doris Studio, photographer

Margaret Bell ended her memoir at age eighteen, but later in life she wrote: "Many years I have hoed my own row, mostly in the business world, and fared as well as the average, sometimes a wee bit better. I raised a family of five, two girls and three boys. . . . I now have at age 88, three of my children living, seven grandchildren, twenty-one great-grandchildren, and soon will have five great-great-grandchildren. . . . maybe they will do something great. They are smarter and have an education, that I didn't have. Oh, I almost forgot, I did get a good education in cowpunching, and to be good at that you must know something about horses."

This content downloaded from 161.7.99.150 on Tue, 4 Jun 2013 16:28:42 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions