

CHAPTER 18

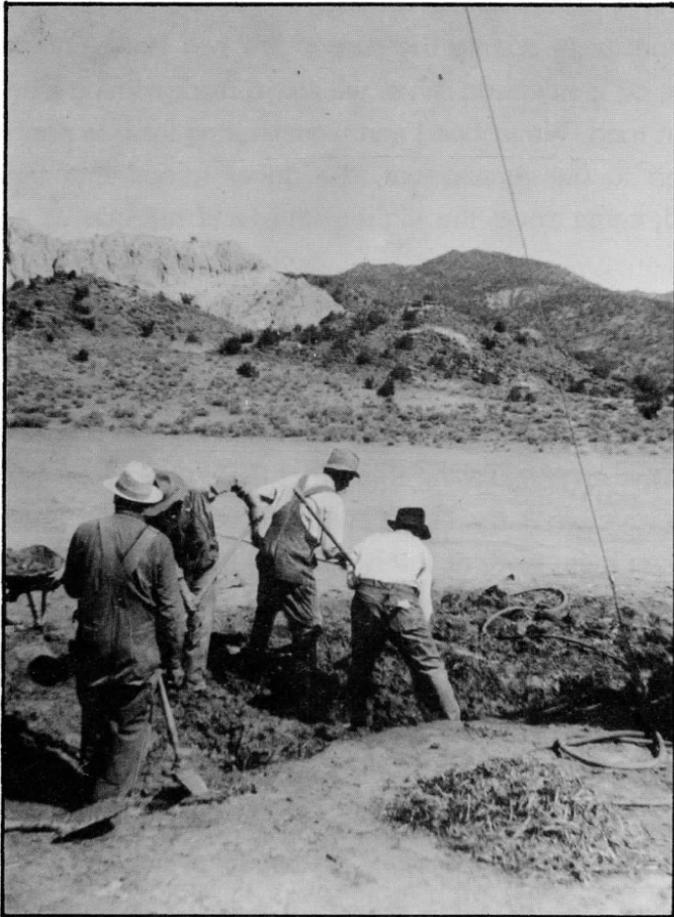
Simple Pleasures

One of our "simple" pleasures was observing and enjoying the beauties of nature all around us. One spring evening, with Lottie driving, a carload of us rode to Canoncita to admire the sunset. We had started home and were on a side road when we saw a truck coming along the main road. We stopped and were waiting for it to pass when much to our amazement, the driver turned into the side road, came down the slight incline, and ran into us.

Remembering my previous mistake, when I had failed to stop after my car oozed into another on a muddy road, I got out and began recording information. I wrote down the name and numbers of the driver's license, the license plate, and the engine. Telling them that they would hear from us, we drove off. A few hours later, two very nervous and badly shaken men, were at the hospital to talk to Dr. Bowen. The driver had borrowed the truck from one friend, the license plate from another, and the driver's license from a third. They would have our car repaired if we just would not report them. Dr. Bowen agreed to exchange car repair for silence.

The plans for the new hospital and staff home had been finished and accepted. Title to the land had been cleared. We all understood that work on the new hospital could not

begin until water was found on the land. After five dry drillings, a rancher donated some of his land near the river. We were all excited and had a big picnic celebration when on the first try the well driller struck water. Then men came from various plazas to donate their time and labor making adobe bricks. We made frequent trips to the building site. In about three weeks the foundation was in and the framing was taking shape.



Men making adobes



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On June 25, 1939 the Dixon Presbyterian Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. Many people from other plazas and many dignitaries from Presbytery and Synod came to take part in the celebration. Dr. Bowen and I attended the 11 a.m. church service. The little church was filled to overflowing with around 100 people. The entire service of hymns, scripture readings, speeches, and prayers was in Spanish, so I understood only a word or so. I skipped the afternoon festivities but did attend in the evening when, for our benefit, part of it was in English. The minister of the church, Rev. Ruybalid, was a graduate of Dubuque Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and had won a prize there for proficiency in English. Of course, it was easier for him to use Spanish, but after we learned of his prize we finally persuaded him to preach in English once each month.

I will never forget Christmas at Brooklyn Cottage Hospital in 1939. About a week before the holiday, Miss Cole,

“Wally,” began making cookies and candy. Each of us spent our spare time helping her chop nuts, beat candy, and so forth. Wally and Dr. Bowen packed twenty-four boxes of the goodies. They were given to Anglo friends, to the Spanish people employed at the hospital, to the driver of the public bus (which we often rode to Santa Fe or Albuquerque), the laundry man, the mail carrier, and many others.

Missionary societies had sent many wonderful toys and beautiful dolls to be given to the children at the plazas. Each present had to be wrapped. We set up a gift-wrapping assembly line in the children’s ward. One person made tags, another selected the gifts and checked the list, and two people wrapped. We wrapped one hundred gifts for the children of Chamisal and Llano and forty for those in Dixon. We also wrapped for the children of Truchas, Holman, Chacon, Embudo, and Rinconada. We also spent time wrapping and mailing gifts to our friends and family back home. Lottie had gotten sick before she had been able to wrap and mail her boxes. We all helped her. She had seventeen boxes, much of it pottery, which took extra care to properly pack.

It snowed the day before Christmas, so everything was white and sparkling for Christmas Day. Jim and Mary Craig’s son-in-law, Bob, acted as our Santa Claus, and I chauffeured him on the morning rounds. We delivered all of the special packages in Embudo and drove through Rinconada, stopping at each house and handing out presents to the children who came out to the car. Our special “goody” packages included one for Father Kupper. He was as interesting as ever. We

stayed almost half an hour, and Bob would have liked to stay longer.

Seventeen people sat down to a 5 p.m. Christmas dinner on Christmas Day. Wally had really outdone herself with the turkey dinner and the table decorations. On a white cloth she had a centerpiece of long-needled pine boughs with some of the big cones painted gold and some Chinese red. Glass Christmas tree balls of various sizes, some red, some gold were fastened on pipe stem cleaners wrapped in red cellophane and stuck into the centerpiece. The whole thing was set on gold doilies and around the edge of the doilies at regular intervals she had stuck gold stickers to the cloth. At each end of the arrangement she had grouped three altar candles in red glass holders. Each person's red paper napkin was decorated with his or her initials in gold sticker letters, and each glass was decorated with red, blue, or gold stars. The dinner menu included turkey, dressing, gravy, mashed Irish potatoes, candied sweet potatoes, tiny onions in cream sauce, peas, cranberry-orange jello salad, rolls with butter and strawberry jam, *Bûche de Noël*, coffee, and tea.

Our Christmas tree was a beautiful spruce tastefully adorned with store-bought decorations and a large number of things made by the children at Truchas Mission School. These included strings of popcorn, paper chains and paper stars, and snowflakes. An unbelievable number of gifts was piled around and under the tree. Mr. Craig was our "Santa Claus." There were so many things that he just handed them out as fast as he could, and we each opened them right away. There were lots of silly things, including crazy

clothes that had been sent in boxes to the mission. There were also lovely things sent in mission boxes, especially for the staff members. We had drawn names of the staff and were supposed to give only one gift. A few did not obey the rule. Each of us, in the privacy of our own rooms, opened the gifts sent to us by family and friends.