

WINTER IN EVERGREEN

By Fred Hobbs

The year was 1938. Europe was in turmoil led by Hitler's maniacal aggression. Here at home, The Great Depression was easing slowly as workers had begun to find jobs in America's lead-up and build-up to eventual involvement in World War II. But, times were still difficult.

My mother, a widow with five children, was still searching for the best way to care for my siblings and me. She was particularly concerned with finding the best living environment under a very limited budget. Her solution lay in the tiny mountain town of Evergreen, Colorado about 30 miles from Denver.

Today, Evergreen is, sadly in many ways, a typical suburb. Supermarkets. Fast food chains. Even traffic problems. Like so many of Colorado's mountain towns, Evergreen originally had been inhabited by Native Americans, the Sioux and the Utes. In 1859, Thomas Bergen and his family from Illinois became the first white settlers. He built a log cabin probably not much more fancy than the cabin in which our family lived in the winter of 1938. It was essentially a one-room structure with an overhead loft. My sister had just turned 18 and was working for and living with a family on "swanky" East 7th Avenue Parkway in Denver. The rest of the family, my mother, my three brothers and I crowded into the limited space.

The cabin had no indoor plumbing, no electricity and, in the winter no running water. Water pipes were above the rocky ground and the flow was turned off each year before the first hard freeze. Water was supplied from a pump house at the bottom of the mountain.

My brothers were in their teens and the oldest, Bob, was able to drive our Model A Ford down a narrow dirt road to the pump house, where at age 7, I "helped" them fill 10 gallon milk cans with what I guess was "pure Rocky Mountain Spring Water." When the snow began to fly, even the sturdy Model A couldn't make the trip, and a toboggan was pressed into service. Being the youngest, I had the privilege of riding both up and down the mountain with my brothers providing the muscle power.

On some of these winter days, even the main roads were impassible. And, that meant the school bus couldn't make the climb to pick us up. On those days, we had fun with building snowmen, having snowball fights or staying in the cabin playing board games or listening to our portable battery radio. Occasionally, we gathered some newly fallen snow and brought it in the house, where my mother made "snow cream", with milk, cinnamon and sugar. Today's environmental gurus might be appalled at that notion of eating snow. Rest assured we kept our dog away from the place where we collected it!

My brothers and I often reminisce about the fun we had. I'm sure my mother had a more realistic view. She had to cook on a wood-fired old fashioned range; she heated water on top of it for cooking, washing dishes and clothes. At least once a week, she'd pour hot water from the kettle into a big tub for baths. The experience certainly couldn't have been a gloriously happy one for my mother, but over the years, I never heard her complain about her life during those troubling and uncertain times.

The cabin is still there in a section of Evergreen that used to be called "Wah-Keeney Park" named for their hometown by a group of Kansas wheat farmers who spent summers in Colorado.

Several times, our family has stopped by our old mountain neighborhood. Though we didn't own the cabin, we named it "Pine Lodge" and my brother, Sam, painted a sign with that name on it. The sign is gone now; electricity wires and a water meter are attached above where it had been placed.

Many years have passed; much has changed, but not my happy memories, as a seven year old, enjoying winter in Evergreen.