

THE BIG YELLOW BLOB

By Fred Hobbs

At about the age of 10 or 11, my pals in the neighborhood and I often spent Saturday afternoons at the movies. Typically, we munched our popcorn while viewing a double feature, a short subject and at least one cartoon, maybe two.

This ritual held us glued to our theater seats for up to four hours. Most often, we sat in the front row of the theater. I wasn't sure why, but probably because that made us feel special and I supposed that as kids we could see more clearly there than the adults in the back rows did.

Often, I would return from what was otherwise a great time, experiencing a mild headache. I didn't think much about it and never mentioned it to anybody. The headache always went away during a good night's sleep.

We made these cinematic journeys by one of the big yellow streetcars, specifically those on Denver Tramway Company's route 14 that, back in the 1930s and 40s, lumbered along East Colfax and onto 15th Street downtown, a trip that included the presence of multiple motion picture "palaces." On the downtown stretch, the number 14 shared the tracks with trams serving other routes.

On the trip home, as we waited for the appropriate streetcar, I became visibly impressed when one or more of my buddies would cry out: "Here comes the 14." How did they know? All I saw was a big yellow blob, but they were always right. When the tram reached about ten yards from my view, sure enough, it *was* the 14. Not wishing to admit my shortcomings, I never asked them how they knew. Nor did I think of my after-movie headaches as being connected in any way to the supposed clairvoyance of my friends.

A couple of years later, the school nurse was conducting basic vision tests. She was holding up a card and asking the student to read out loud the different sized letters printed on it. Again, I was amazed that kids in front of me could decipher the letters while all I saw was a blur. Still being either incredibly dense or somewhat vain, I squinted and was able to make out some of the letters which I had heard spoken. So, I attempted to memorize them before my turn in front of the nurse. As I approached her, she flipped over the card she had been using and held up a different one.

Smiling, she said, "Now what do you see?" Brilliantly, I stammered: "Nothing." She promptly wrote out a form to take home for my mother to sign and return, recommending a visit to an optometrist or an eye doctor, a suggestion Mom heartily carried out.

When I first put on my glasses, a new and wonderful vision of the world opened for me. I could see clearly the tops of tall buildings, the schoolroom blackboards and the images on movie screens (without sitting in the front row.) The headaches disappeared.

And, oh yes, I could see from far down the street, the sign "14" on that big yellow streetcar.

