

## An Old Dog

By Pete Clark

I remember a time when I really wanted to grow up quickly and be rid of the authoritarian rule of my parents. During my time as a Second Grader, I was wandering around the yard of our rented house in Hartville, Wyoming, frothing about some terrible limitation on my activities decreed by my mother. I fumed and fussed to myself about the injustice of not being a grownup and unable to do whatever I wanted.

During that same era, I opened my mouth and got a lesson in the decorum of conversation. I got involved in a shouting match with a girl who lived across the street. I don't remember what she said to provoke my answer, "Your Pa has been in the Nuthouse twice and your Ma ought to be there!" Like Old Faithful, my mother erupted and I experienced one of the few whippings of my childhood. I asked my dad why the man across the way had been hospitalized in Evanston. Dad told me that the man had been standing with his arm around a light pole and laughing. My reaction was to wonder, *What is wrong with laughing?* Later in life I learned of a mental condition that can cause uncontrollable laughing or crying.

When we moved into Shoshoni, I had to give up my endeavors of selling rhubarb out of the garden and ducks and bum lambs that I had raised. Instead I had to keep my ears and eyes open for the occasional odd job that came my way. In a short while I developed a reputation for showing up when I was needed and getting the job done. Work became plentiful and I opened a charge account at the Gambles Store, paying the bill every month. I was part of the Gig Economy before there was a Gig Economy.

During my youth I kept myself busy learning and working, but made sure I had time for things that enriched my world, like walking along the eastern side of Boysen Lake, searching for sunburst moss agates and petroglyphs. I found moss agates along the shore where the water of the lake had washed away the soil deposits of glacial moraine and bared its rocky content. I found a petroglyph on a rock face that had once been a bluff overlooking the cottonwood trees and brush growing along the Wind River as it flowed north to the Wedding of the Waters, where it magically became the Bighorn River.

Life has always been an adventure for me, like finding a deposit of Iceland spar in a large lump of sandstone protruding from the prairie floor or watching a deep velvet night sky, looking for anomalous lights and studying and experiencing the paranormal. When I was a child, I was told that something magical is simply something we don't understand. That information has helped me to retain the magic and wonder of childhood.

I am an old dog now, but I still learn new tricks. If I ever completely grow up, bury me, for I will be dead.