

Back from the Haze

By Pete Clark

When I was much younger my mother referred to my head as a pumpkin shell full of muddy water and I am on the cusp of believing that her assessment of my intellectual capacities was on target. The job of retrieving early childhood memories is akin to wading through mud-saturated water, with my legs sinking up to my ankles into slimy ooze. Yet in spite of all of that resistance I came up with some recollections. Most of these memories are so hazy they are barely glimmers of the past. One is still bright and beautiful.

I turned four when we lived in Hanna, Wyoming. My dad was a Powder Monkey in an underground coal mine owned by the Union Pacific Railroad. Just going down the shaft was a risk to life and limb. In the short term, there were cave-ins and explosions. In the long term there were Black Lung and Silicosis. One day my mom put my brother and me in the car and drove out to the mine. There had been a cave-in and we were waiting to see if my dad came out of the cage with the rest of the miners. He didn't. He had been taken to the company doctor for treatment of injuries to his head.

My *Tyrannical Two's* must have stretched into the *Tumultuous Three's* and *Formidable Four's* as I had a knack for getting into situations during those years. One evening I decided I needed something out of a standalone china closet where dishes, bowls and glassware were stored. After I got the doors open, I discovered I couldn't reach the desired object. I proceeded to use the shelves for climbing up and was soon the centerpiece of a pile of broken crockery when the cabinet tipped forward and fell.

Another day, I decided to explore that dim and mysterious area behind the doors under the sink. I succeeded in worming my way into the maze of pots and pans and potatoes and kitchen trash. The journey was fun and interesting, but there was a problem. I was trapped in there and could not get out. An unhappy mother came to my rescue.

On New Year's Eve, 1944, my folks dropped us kids off at another house that had more kids and a babysitter, as they were going to a party. Our group of Rug Rats ranged in age from three to five but we were smart enough to know it was party time. The babysitter disappeared so we had a party. Someone came up with a bottle of cough syrup we used for booze and one of the girls put on a grass hula skirt that had been sent to her. We had a lot of fun.

My favorite early memory comes from when I began to take account of the world around me. We lived Hartville and had been to a movie. It was late evening and I noticed silver light glistening on the path, the grass and the bushes. I looked up and saw the full moon for the first time.