

## Rhubarb and Ducks

By Pete Clark

When we first moved from Hartville to Central Wyoming, we lived in a small house with a full, unfinished basement. The place had a windbreak of Russian Olives and a well with a pump driven by an electric motor. Unfortunately, the water was too alkaline to drink, so we had to haul in potable water. We had two ducks, one white and one mallard. Both birds were drakes. I told my dad I thought we should get a hen to go with the drakes. A while later dad said he had met a man with a ranch on the Wind River Reservation near Crowheart. The man kept a flock of domesticated mallards and had told dad to bring me up there, so I could take my pick of the hens.

We drove to the ranch and I got my hen for a dollar. The ranch house and its outbuildings and corral were snuggled against the southeast bank of the Wind River, with a backdrop of fields, pastures and the ascending mountains of the Wind River Range. The rancher was a member of the Shoshone Tribal Council and a force for good on the reservation for many years.

The mallards were biblical. They went forth and multiplied. Soon after the ducklings hatched, their mother led them to a small irrigation ditch where they swam and learned to survive. The flock went with us when we moved down the road a half mile, to better water.

Our new home was on a large parcel of land that contained a farm's ensilage pit and a combination storage shed and garage. A good-sized garden allowed my mother to do a lot of canning in the fall and a patch of rhubarb provided spending money for me during the summer, as well as slices of rhubarb pie.

My Dad took us kids to Riverton every Saturday afternoon. He would park at the Conoco Gas Station so he could bat the breeze with its owner. My brother Bob and I would walk up Main Street to Tommy Knight's Acme Theater. There we could watch a double feature, complete with short subject, cartoon, serial episode and news reel. We each received a twenty-five-cent allowance, and the movie ticket was 12 cents, which left money for popcorn and candy.

When we were ready for the trip home, Dad would occasionally stop at the Wyoming Market to pick up items that were not available at the country store where he did his shopping between visits to Safeway. During one of those stops, I asked the manager if he sold rhubarb. He said he had no source for rhubarb. I asked him if he would buy rhubarb from me. He said yes and that he would pay me 12 cents per pound. I told him I would begin delivering the vegetable the following Saturday. My first delivery netted me 72 cents and I was ecstatic. My other source of revenue was guys who got skunked duck hunting and desperately needed something to show their wives to justify the money spent for time in the boondocks.