

Allie's Stories



Growing Up

Across the street from where I grew up there was a movie house called the Aldine Theatre. It was on the corner near the traffic light in the middle of town, and it was owned by a man named Tom Hickes. Tom Hickes was an old man whose wife seemed even older than he, and he was very, very wrinkly. Behind his back the kids in town referred to him as Prune Face. He had wrinkles that ran up and down through his face, and he always seemed like a very strange old man. He sold the tickets at the theatre, and inside the theatre his son worked. His son would then tear the tickets in half when you went in to see the movie. In those days, back in the 40s, most movies cost about 150 or maybe 250, depending on whether you were older than 12 years old.

Each week you would have several movies to choose from, and because movies weren't very expensive and we didn't have television, it was an inexpensive form of entertainment. So it was not uncommon for Allie to get to go to the movies once or twice a week if I had spending money that I had saved from my odd jobs. One of the favorite nights to go to the movies was on Monday because after the first movie was over there was a free game called Lucky, which was played similar to Bingo. So whenever you went to the movie and you bought your movie ticket, you also got a card and it had a place where you could punch out the letters as he would call the numbers from the stage after the first movie.

So for 25 cents you could see the movie, get a Lucky card, and then after the movie was over the lights would come on and Mr. Hickes (Prune Face) would get up on the stage and he would roll a wheel and call out the numbers to LUCKY. The first person that won the prize would get five silver dollars. Well, I never won the five silver dollars, but it was always a thrill at getting the chance of winning five silver dollars. The other favorite night was Thursday night, because on Thursday night usually they would show two movies. Most often they were cowboy movies or western movies. That was really a night when many of the children in Saxton went to the movie theatre. If we were going to the movies with maybe 5 or 6 guys, we would gather at one of the guy's front porch and then all go down together and sit in the same row.

Prune Face we always accused him of picking up candy off the floor that had fallen out of people's boxes and putting it back into empty boxes and reselling it through the candy machine

because you could buy a box of candy for a nickel, but sometimes when you bought the box of candy for a nickel through the machine it seemed like the candy was awful hard and stale and sometimes the boxes weren't completely full, so we suspected that either he was taking candy out of one box and putting it in another or picking up candy that had dropped on the floor and was reselling it. We never knew that was true, but we believed that anyhow.

One November night as I was coming home from a movie, it must have been about 9:30 at night, and it was dark and cold. As I walked up the street from the movie theatre I heard a little whining or whimpering sound, and I looked around to see what it was. There was a dog shivering cold and wet along the sidewalk. The dog looked at me very, very pitifully, and I bent down and I brushed him and I put my hand on him. He was so cold and he was so shivery that I encouraged him to walk home with me. When I got him up on the porch, I said to my mother, "There's a dog out here and he seems so cold and so wet, could I bring him in the house and give him something to eat?"

Well, my mother was a little reluctant to do that and she said that maybe he belongs to somebody else. Maybe he just lost his way home. You better let him outside until he finds his way home. Well, I appealed to her to please let me bring him in, just into the basement. So she said OK to bringing him into the basement. I went upstairs and I warmed up some milk and put it in a bowl and took it downstairs, and the dog lapped the milk up. Then he curled up on a little rug down there and he fell asleep. He spent the night at the house.

The next day I inquired, asked around and tried to find out whose dog could this dog be. He was an all white dog with a black ear and a black spot on his head. He was a cute little dog—just a mongrel, short hair, nothing special-but obviously he didn't seem to have anyone looking out for him. He didn't have a collar or a license or anything like that. Well, nobody seemed to know whose dog it was and I continued to prevail on my mother to let me keep the dog until the owner was found. Well as it turned out the owner was never found, no one ever claimed the dog, and we called him Nipper, and he lived with us for five or six years.

He was a good dog. He was a short-haired dog and his hair didn't drop off or shed on the rugs and the carpets in the house. He became pretty much my constant companion for about five years. Everywhere I went, Nipper went. He was a good dog. My mother even got so she

would let him sleep in my bedroom on the floor, and on a cold night he might even jump up on the bed and sleep up there without her knowing it. The only thing I think that Nipper ever bothered my mother about was on a hot summer day he might go up on the upper yard behind our house and dig in the cool dirt and find a place to lie down, but in digging might disrupt some of her flowers or something like that. But my mother was real good about letting me have Nipper, and he became part of the household for a lot of years.

In the spring and fall of the year it wasn't uncommon for the boys I ran around with to go to different places to play. One of the places we went was a big hill up on Church Street near the edge of Saxton between Saxton and Stonerstown, and it was called The Knob because it was like a big knob of ground highest in the area. The Knob was covered with scraggly pine trees and big rocks and some grassy areas. There were no houses up there at the time. It was just a very unusual site. It was a fun place to go on a fall day or a spring day. The boys I played with, we would carry big long sticks and pretend they were rifles. We would get behind the rocks and shoot at each other. We played war and we played cowboys and Indians on The Knob for many, many, many years. We never knew who owned The Knob, whether it was some land owner or something like that, but years later when I grew up and no longer played on the knob, a man named Perce Foreman purchased that land and built a beautiful ranch home on The Knob overlooking Saxton. But as long as I was a kid it was always like a free playground, a place to go with your dogs and your buddies, and go up there and play and then you were within 2-3 blocks of your home whenever lunch time came and everyone ran home to get their lunch.

One summer I became pretty sick, and I didn't know what it was, but I just seemed to be very, very run down, I wasn't gaining weight, and it was just about the time school was out and I was sick to my stomach a lot. My mother was very worried about me, and she took me to the doctor's to see what was wrong. I was about 14 years old. He examined me and he suspected that I had an attack of appendicitis. Now appendicitis is where you get an inflammation or an irritation of a little tiny organ called the appendix, which is down in your right side of your abdomen. If it gets real bad sometimes they have to go in and operate and cut the appendix out.

Well, I didn't know it at the time, but I was headed for the hospital in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, for that operation. But the sicker I got the more essential it became that we get

down to the hospital and have it taken care of. So for me I had a new experience that spring/summer of going to the hospital. When my mother took me to the hospital she checked me in, and I was put in what was called a ward. A ward was like a big room with about 15 people in it, and they were not like private rooms of 1-2 people in a room. It was like 15 people in a big room. Well, when my mother left me I was in my pajamas and then I was in my bed. There were people on my left side and people on my right side and across the floor. I got my dinner that night and I had some books and magazines to read.

When I tried to go to sleep that night it seemed like half the people on the ward were in great pain because I could hear them moaning like "ahhhhhhhh!...nurse!...nurse!" And the nurse would come in and give them medication or look after them or something. As the night went on, I thought this is terrible! My mother has left me here on this ward. Half of these people sound like they're sick and dying. This is a terrible experience! So I didn't get much sleep that night and I was very worried about this. Was this going to happen to me? Was I going to get so sick or be operated on that I would lay awake all night calling for a nurse or calling for relief for medication? What was I faced with? Well the next morning the doctor came in to see me. His name was Dr. Dobel.

Dr. Dobel came in and he examined me and he looked me over, and he said, "Yes, I think this appendix should come out. I would like to schedule Allie to have his appendix out the first thing tomorrow morning, but I'd like to have him moved to a semi-private room." Well, I didn't know what a semi-private room was, but later in the day after lunch they moved me to a room that only had one other person in the room. It was a man about 45 years old.

At the time I was about 14, so I was in the room and this guy was laying in the next bed and he had both legs all wrapped up with bandages in a cast. When I went in the room he was sleeping. So they walked me in, put me to bed and settled me in there, gave me some magazines and stuff. I was over there reading and the guy in the next bed woke up. He said, "Who are you?" I told him my name. "What are you in here for?" I told him what I was in here for. He said, "What do you think happened to me?" I said, "I don't know. It looks like you've injured your legs." And he says, "Yea, let me tell you about it."

This man went on to tell me that he was a railroad detective and he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. One of his jobs was to ride on trains and to make sure that anyone

who got on that train had a ticket, and anyone who didn't have a ticket he threw them off the train. That usually meant bums, hobos, tramps, and things like that who would try to get from one city to another and hide on a train without a ticket. According to the story he told me, some bum or hobo had gotten on a train and he had set out to throw him off the train. This bum had gone out the back door of one of the cars as it was going down the track, had gotten up a ladder and had gotten up on the roof of the moving train. This railroad detective got up there and was going to get him off. He told him to get off, get off. This hobo said, "You're gonna have to push me off." And the two of them engaged in a fight on top of the railroad car, and the bum pushed the railroad detective off the top of the moving car, over the edge down by the tracks, and he rolled over a bank and broke both legs.

Well, the railroad detective was pretty much proud that he had earned his injuries in the line of duty. However, it was obvious that he was in a great deal of pain. So the next night I spent in the hospital it was the railroad detective in the next bed going "ahhhhhh!...nurse! get me something for my pain!....my medication!" So the second night in the hospital I didn't get any sleep either. Well, I was beginning to think that when I had my operation it was my turn to lay in bed and moan and cry and ask for more medication. Much to my surprise, on the second morning, when Dr. Dobel and the staff came in to take down to be operated on, they put me to sleep, and I never felt any pain or any discomfort. They used a special anesthetic. I fell asleep and the next thing I know I was sitting up in bed, my mother was there holding my hand, I became awake, the operation was all over, my tummy was all taped up, and I was feeling pretty good. After a couple days they let me go home. The only stipulation was that I wasn't supposed to run for 2-3 weeks and I wasn't supposed to go swimming for 2-3 weeks. Well, that was pretty tough when you're 14 years old not to run and not to swim, but I toughed it out and I got very, very healthy, and I think that summer I must have gained 15 or 20 pounds.

I do know I got well enough to get back into Boy Scout activities because one of the things we did that summer was we went on a camp out to a place called The Cabins. Now The Cabins years and years and years ago, I mean like back in 1910 and 1920, was a place where my grandfather and grandmother owned a cabin and so did a couple of other families owned cabins, and they were where the families would go for the summer and visit and to enjoy life along the river outside of town.

It wasn't far from town. It was like maybe only two miles out to the cabins. Well the cabins have since been lost in a flood, but the area where the cabins used to be was a big forested field that was still referred to as The Cabins. They were located outside of Saxton, across Rhodes Bridge, and across an old wooden rickety bridge to the left, up along the river toward Riddlesburg, and if you went up there about 2-3 miles there were some farms and a great big open area that was good for camping out. And that's where the Boy Scouts would go frequently to this area called The Cabins. Well, one time we were out there as a Boy Scouting group and there were probably 15 boys and Bob Williams, our leader, who had to come in town during the day and go to work, but he would come back out in the evenings and check on us and go over and make sure that we had done certain things around the area. Like he would give us assignments. He would say, "Now, I need four of you guys to cut firewood today. I need a couple of you to work on swimming merit badge. I'd like to have 2-3 or you run errands. A couple of you sickle some weeds and cut the weeds down on this bank." And he would leave us during the day and come in and work at the bank, where he was employed. Then he'd come back out in the evening and check on us. But that left us all day long to pretty much do what he assigned, plus in some cases get into mischief on our own.

Well, mischief we got into. There was a farmer nearby by the name of Fuzzy Night. And Fuzzy Night had a corn field where he grew field corn, or corn which he would sell to other people to feed their cattle. When we would go out on a hike we would always go by Fuzzy Night's corn field. It became very tempting for some of us as we would pass that corn field to get the idea that maybe what we could do is go into that field, steal a few ears, bring them back to our camp, and cook them up and have them with our meals. Probably for a day or two out there camping at The Cabins we resisted any temptation to do anything wrong because we were Boy Scouts. But after several days without too much adult supervision, it became clear that one of these days were going to get into Fuzzy Night's corn field. On one occasion we did.

Two or three of us went down to Fuzzy Night's with knapsacks on our backs and got in and we picked what we thought were the tenderest possible ears, because really field corn is not good to eat like sweet corn is. But this was field corn and we thought if we cook it well, if we picked small ears, it would be reasonably tasty. Well, we got in, we picked the corn, and we

took it back to our camp at the cabin and built a big fire and got a boiling pot of hot water and proceeded to cook the corn. In addition to cooking the corn, we ate it. All around the camp fire was the corn shocks and the stems and the mess from having gotten this corn. We didn't know whose corn it was. We didn't know Fuzzy Night. But after we ate our corn that day down the road came a fellow walking along and he stopped and talked to us. He said, "How long have you guys been here?" We told him. "What are you guys doing here?" We told him. "Where did you get the corn?" We told him. "How long are you going to stay here?" And we told him.

Well, what we didn't realize is that the man we were talking to was Fuzzy Night, the man who owned the corn! So as he left the camp where we were apparently he went down and found that sure enough we had stolen his corn. He was very angry about it, but he didn't come back to us. What Fuzzy Night did was he walked into town and he talked to our Scout Master about it and told him that he knew what we were doing out there and that we had taken this corn, that he was very upset, and that he was going to call the law to have us prosecuted. Well, when Mr. Williams got back out that night he told us about it. He said, "You guys are in big trouble." He said, "You've stolen the corn. You've told Mr. Night about it. And he's going to get the police after us." And we were petrified. We thought, "Oh, my! What would our parents think?" We had done this thing wrong. We should have never taken the corn. It didn't even taste good! So we were in big trouble. Well, as time went on a couple of days later, we had another Scout meeting and we talked about what we could do, and finally we agreed among ourselves—the boys—that what we had better do is get in touch with Mr. Night and offer to pay him for the corn we took and try to get out of this mess in a proper way. And that worked. We got 2-3 guys together. We contacted Mr. Night. We apologized. And we gave him \$5.00 or \$10.00 for the corn that we stole and told him that we would never do it again. Although he seemed like a pretty brittle, mean man, he accepted the money, he accepted our apology, and believe you me, I was glad that we were able to settle the caper of the stolen corn because it would have been terrible embarrassing to the Boy Scouts and to each one of us as individual Scouters.

Later that summer, My Uncle Eli called from York and wanted to know if I was going to go to Boy Scout Camp that summer. I said yes, that I was going to go back to Wissowannack Blue Knob for a week, why was he interested. And he said, "Well, his son, Eli Junior, was

now a Boy Scout, and he wanted him to go to Camp Tuccaho down in York County, and Eli Jr. didn't want to go to Scout Camp. So my uncle said if I wanted to go to a second week of Boy Scout Camp and come down and be his guest at Camp Tuccaho he would pay for me to go to camp a second week so that I could go along with Eli Jr.

Well, I liked that idea a lot because not only was it fun to be with Eli, but here was a chance to go to camp for free. So I agreed that I'd go down to the York/Adams area, Camp Tuccaho, with Eli Jr. and some of his friends. It was a great summer. So besides camping at The Cabins, I also got to go to Scout Camp in Western Pennsylvania, and I also got to go down to Camp Tuccaho. Camp Tuccaho was a very well organized Scout Camp, and I think I passed maybe 3-4 merit badges while I was down there, partly because I didn't have a lot of friends of my own and I could concentrate on advancement in the Scouting rank. But it was a good summer. Besides getting in trouble at Fuzzy Night's place of farming, I think we really had a good summer of camping out many, many times. I was always thankful that my mother would let me go camping that often and to enjoy the woods and the trees and the rivers and the various areas around Saxton. It was really wonderful growing up in a small town and having access to so much of nature and so many opportunities to pretty much roam free. Throughout this time my mother was working the evening shift at the hospital, 3:00-11:00, and it made her very, very willing to give me freedom. She trusted that I would enjoy the community and not go too far, and she also trusted that I wouldn't get in trouble too often.