



In and Around Saxton

Now around my home town, up near where the traffic or red light was, there was a big, high, silver tower when I was a kid. On the top of the silver tower there was a whistle. And the whistle blew real loud, real shrill, every Saturday at 12:00 noon. It was called the fire whistle. And the only two times that that whistle would blow would be Saturday at noon (for some reason they blew it every Saturday at 12:00 noon), or they would blow it if there was a fire in the town. So sometimes when you went to bed at night you'd be sleeping and you'd hear the fire whistle blow. And it would wake up the volunteer firemen and they would all run down to the fire house and jump on the truck and go to the scene of the fire and work on it.

The siren was very, very loud and very irritating. Although I lived a block away, some people lived almost next door to it. It was necessary to sound the siren loud so people in Stonerstown and Saxton and Puttstown and East Saxton would all know that there was a fire and we need volunteers right away. But harder than on my ears or anyone else's ears were the dog's ears. And the poor dogs when that siren would go off real loud and real shrill, the dogs' ears would vibrate and you'd hear the dogs all over town barking and whaling and crying and woofing and stuff like that. It wasn't uncommon that when the fire siren went off for 2-3 minutes and stopped, you'd still hear the dogs barking and whaling two and three minutes later. But the only other exception to that rule about the fire siren going off at 12:00 noon on Saturday and during fires was the day the war ended. When the news came down that the war was over, World War II, I think they blew that fire siren for 15 minutes that day just to alert all the people in town that something very, very special had happened.

Going back to the period when the war was on, there was a lot of rationing. And rationing meant that because we needed clothing for the soldiers and we needed food for the soldiers and we needed metals for the soldiers and we needed lots of things for the war effort, the things that the public got—the things that the civilians got that stayed at home—were rations. We got less of different things. A couple of things that we didn't get as much of during the war that you would normally get was you were limited to four gallons of gasoline per automobile per week. That meant like your daddy, if he wanted to drive to work, he would only be able to get four gallons of gas each week. That was to encourage car pooling, it was to encourage people to walk to work, it was to encourage any kind of conservation.

So the four gallon rule was in throughout the war. Meat was rationed, so if you wanted hamburger or steak or a nice roast each family got a number of little red meat coins. They were cardboard coins that looked like something from a game board. You were allowed so many per person in the family, and you used those when you bought your meat. Because you had these little coins issued to you, when you paid for your meat and you gave these coins also, that was the check or the control that any family didn't get more red meat than any other family. Something else that became hard to get in those days was coal because a lot of coal was being shipped to factories where they made tanks and trucks and airplanes and armor and ships and boats and guns. And the coal was needed to melt the steel and also to heat the factories.

Even though Saxton was a town right in the heart of the coal region where a lot of coal miners dug coal and shipped it out of the area, coal became hard to get in Saxton. It was interesting because my home was heated by a coal furnace. We didn't have an electric furnace or a gas furnace, we had to shovel coal into a furnace, shake it, get a good fire going, carry out the ashes, and heat our house with nothing but hand-shoveled coal. Well during the rationing when we had a hard time getting coal, that meant that we kept our house at a lower temperature. We burned less coal. Some families burned wood in their coal furnaces.

Well, when I would go down to play with my friends Bob Bailey and some of the guys down where they lived, I noticed that the railroad trains that went from the coal mines through the back of Saxton and across that railroad bridge I told you about and went on down to Huntingdon and loaded on for Philadelphia, frequently those big coal trains just loaded with coal as they shimmered down the track would spill coal as they left town! So what happened was, on a day when I didn't have anything else to do, I'd pull my wagon down over the bank to the railroad track, maybe put in a burlap bag or two, and pick up lumps of coal along the railroad track. And that was OK. Nobody seemed to think it was stealing or taking anything that belonged to someone else. It was just a good way of getting coal and bringing it home. Well, sometimes I'd pull my wagon down to Bob Bailey's, play all day, fill it up with coal, and bring it home that night. My mother just thought I was a genius, because by having a wagon load of coal then we could throw it in the furnace, bank over a good warm fire that night, and get a nice night's sleep, and still have the fire going in the morning. So gathering coal in World War II was one of the ways that we conserved and also found a way to circumvent waste.

Next door to the house that I grew up in was the house of Bob Huff. As I think I told you, Bob was the undertaker in town, and he was very active in church affairs. He was the Sunday School superintendent, and he also was active in Democratic politics. He was the Democratic County Chairman in Bedford County. And he was quite a man, a very nice businessman, he was good friend of the Eichelberger family, and I always enjoyed Bob and being around Bob as I grew up. But I guess when I was real young I didn't know him too well and I probably did things that he thought were devilish or ornery or problematic. Back at his house he had a large garage which was situated next to the garage behind my mother's and grandmother's house.

The only difference was most garages are one story, but Bob Huffs garage was two stories high. The reason it was two stories was he had to have room upstairs on the second floor to store things like caskets and coffins and furniture and other items related to his business as an undertaker. To get those materials up and down he had a hand-pulled elevator. It was like a rope. When you stood on the elevator platform, if you pulled this long, continuous rope it would raise the elevator floor right from the downstairs or the main floor right on up to the second floor. Then you could unload what items you had and then come back down the elevator. It was a big, tall garage, probably 30 feet high and it had two places where he would park his hearse and his flower wagon and other types of vehicles in the garage. It was a huge garage.

Well, one winter during a heavy snowstorm, a couple of us were coming home from school one afternoon and we decided to roll a ball of snow down the alley-way from the corner where you entered the alley-way clear down to the other side of the block. We wanted to see if we could start a snowball at one end of the block and push it to the other. Well, one or two of us started the ball and it got pretty big, and pretty soon there were three or four guys rolling this ball of snow, and it got to be about two and one-half feet high and heavier and larger, but we continued to push and roll and heave and lean against it. We finally got it two-thirds down the alley-way behind all the houses, up where the garages were, and when we could finally roll it no further—we were out of breath, we were exhausted and we had this huge, huge snowball—there it was, right in front of Bob Huffs garage door. We were bushed. We were wet. We were sloppy. We were tired. School was out and we all gave up and went home.

Well, of course, the sun beat on it for a few hours. Later that night it sleeted and rained on it, and the next day it was bitter cold, and that huge ball of snow became a huge ball of ice. As fate

would have it, Mr. Huff had to get one of his vehicles out of the garage the next day, and he had to hire a man to come up with a pick and shovel and break that snowball or that ice ball up. It took him two hours to dig and break that thing apart and get it all thrown out of there. Of course, he asked around and he found out who were the boys that put it there, as though we had done it on purpose. And he came over and he talked to my mother and said, "Hortense, I don't mean to be a pick, but I know that son Allie and some of his friends put that snowball in front of my garage door out there." And my mother said, "Well, Bob, I'm certain that it wasn't done on purpose. They didn't mean any harm." But he was pretty well put out with me for some time as though it had been something that we had did on purpose. So I always took my time to be very nice around Mr. Huff and earn his respect again because I felt badly at what started out as just some fun ended up to be such an inconvenience for him.

Down the hill from where I lived about a block and a half was a guy I knew in grade school. His name was Calvin Elder. Calvin had a brother, Jim, and two sisters, Alice and Helen. Calvin was a year older than I. He always was doing something in business. For example, when he was in about eighth grade he had about 15 chickens laying eggs and he would sell eggs to people. And then pretty soon people would start buying his chickens, so he raised more chickens and he raised more eggs. He got to be such an entrepreneur in high school that he was giving out pencils to the kids in high school with a picture of a chicken on them and they said, "Calvin Elder's Eggs and Chickens, Call such and so phone number." He advertised and he had such a good business going all the way through high school. Well, Calvin had a dog by the name of Nipper, the same name as my dog. In fact, he had his Nipper before I got my Nipper. And his Nipper was a big, old, heavy, short-haired white dog.

Calvin, when he was in fourth grade, was followed to school by Nipper on many, many occasions. Calvin's next-door neighbor was a woman named Mrs. Sprow, and she was a teacher. She liked Calvin and she was tolerant of his dog coming to school. On cold days she would permit Nipper to come into the fourth grade school room and sleep on the floor in the back of the room. Well, this became very habit forming for the dog to come in every day when Calvin came to school and sleep in the floor in the back of the room, and if it were a cold day he would lay where the sun came through the window. The dog didn't disturb anybody and nobody complained, and so it became pretty much an institution.

When Calvin moved on to fifth grade and sixth grade and seventh grade, Nipper stayed in fourth grade. And so by the time I came along and was doing fourth grade we had a dog in our room every day. Calvin's Nipper was in the back of the room. And he was a nice dog. At recess time or at lunch time everyone would jump out of their seat and say, "Here, Nipper! Here, Nipper" And out to the playground they'd go or over to their homes they would go, and that dog Nipper would walk to his home from school each day for lunch and then come back to school just like he belonged in fourth grade, even though Calvin was now in fifth and then he would go to sixth and then seventh, and eighth, and on to high school. But Nipper was a regular in that school until the day he died. It was always interesting. The kids in second grade and third grade always looked forward to going to fourth grade because they were going to get an extra four-legged pupil in their class.

Many times when Allie was a boy he walked from his house or over to a friend's house where two or three friends would gather up a group of guys and we would walk over across through Saxton, up through the brickyard and up the mountain to Sunday Rock. The brickyard was a place at the foot of the mountain where years ago there had been a brick manufacturing operation. Apparently there was a lot of good, red clay in the area, and there was a company called The Saxton Block Company that made bricks in the brickyard, and they made them by mining out or digging out the red clay, mixing in certain chemicals, pressing them into blocks called Saxton blocks, and then heating them, drying them, and then selling them in truckloads.

Well, the brick yard was no longer in operation as far as manufacturing bricks, but the brickyard still existed as a pass-through place from the foot of the mountain, up the highland, to the road where we walked up to Sunday Rock. In summertime there were a gang of kids that hung around the brickyard, and we always called them the brickyard gang. There was a couple of small buildings still left standing in the brickyard, and then around the brickyard were piles of broken bricks and things like that. The brickyard gang was led by two guys named Hezzie Heffner and Poogy Shay. Poogy was a very broad-shouldered, strong, muscular guy, and Hezzie Heffner was about 6'3" and had big shoulders. And everyone was afraid of Poogy and Hezzie.

Poogy and Hezzie had one of those brick buildings over there fixed up with bunk beds and a heating stove, and that was their clubhouse. And we always knew that whenever we were going

to walk through the brickyard to stay away from the hut or the brick house where those two guys hung out. Otherwise, they would chase us up the hill or chase us back to Saxton and throw bricks at us. So we knew better than to hang around the brickyard very long. So we devised shortcuts or roundabouts to get through the brickyard without getting caught by Poogy or Hezzie because they just liked to torment us a lot. We used the brickyard of course as a pathway as I said to the mountain road and then walked up the road that I told you about whenever that Wiles had his horses pull the flagpole up the mountain for the flagpole raising on Sunday Rock.

We also went through the brickyard in wintertime. Sometimes we'd take a bag of corn. We'd go down to some of the farmers and get them to give us a burlap bag full of ears of corn, and when we were in Boy Scouts or just doing something in the conservation area we'd take a big sack of corn, tie the top end closed, put it on a sled, and pull it from Saxton through the brickyard and up on the mountain. Then we would take like a broken limb or a stick from a tree and take our pen knife and stick a hole in the bottom of an ear of corn and slide it onto that broken limb and hope that when a deer came by they would see the ear of corn sticking out of the tree and get a meal out of it. Probably a dozentimes when I was a boy it was just one of those things that we young kids did—get a sled, load it full of corn, put on our winter coats and boots, go up in the mountain, and put the corn out and hope that a couple of deer got fed in that way.

Another thing I remember about growing up in Saxton was in high school. The high school baseball team had a very, very good coach. His name was Allen Hoover. And Mr. Hoover was a good baseball player in high school. He played college baseball at Juniata College. When he came to Saxton to teach, he became principal of the high school, biology teacher, and also the baseball coach. And he knew his baseball very well. He was quite a man. He was a disciplinarian. Everybody loved him and respected him. Allen Hoover put together one of the best baseball teams on a high school level in Central Pennsylvania for a number of years. Saxton Liberty High School was a small school that graduated about 75 students a year. And we played teams all around the area that were similarly sized. So we played a lot of teams within our own size range.

One of the teams we played, however, was Altoona High School. Back in the 1940s, Altoona High School was the largest high school enrollment in the state of Pennsylvania. They graduated over 1,000 students a year. Because Altoona was only 28 or 30 miles from Saxton, it was occasionally arranged that Saxton High School would play Altoona High School. We had great success against

Altoona. I can recall one year that Altoona had won 33 consecutive games over a two year period and came over to Saxton to play, and we beat him 8-0. Then there was a return match when Saxton was to go over and play Altoona at Mansion Stadium, and at that point Saxton had the longest winning streak in the state, and we went over and played Altoona and they beat us 4-3 and avenged their earlier victory and broke our winning streak. But it was that kind of a team that Saxton had that they could play with the big boys.

If you ever talk to Aunt Polly, she'll remember one time when she was a young girl I took her for a ride down into a small town along Lake Raystown, and we visited Mr. Allen Hoover, and he still had lots of the baseball trophies from back in the 1940s and 1950s, with the various championship quotations on them and the list of the players and the different titles that were won. We stopped down at his store. He was also a postmaster at a town called Heston and operated a little store, and we went to see Mr. Hoover one day and I told him that my daughter was interested in softball and he got out these trophies and showed her some of the winning trophies that the high school had acquired over the years while he was their coach.

The local volunteer fire company used to sponsor a Bingo game every Monday night down at the local fire hall. People would come down and pay \$1 per card of Bingo, and they would play like 15 games. And there would be hundreds of people come down and play this game called Bingo. The fire company would take in the dollar bills, pass out a card of Bingo, give you a handful of corn that you'd use to cover the numbers that were called, and they called it the corn game. Well, on occasion I'd go down on a Monday night and I'd play Bingo at the local fire hall for a dollar. That was a good evening's entertainment. Sometimes you won a \$5 prize or a set of dishes or something like that. I never seemed to win, except one fall when they were playing turkey Bingo.

Now turkey Bingo was a game where you played for Bingo prizes, but instead of winning \$5 or a plate of dishes, you won a turkey right before Thanksgiving. In this case, it was a live turkey. And I never had any expectation of winning, but I went down and played turkey Bingo this night, and low and behold in the third game of a 15 game night guess who wins the turkey? Allie Eichelberger. And I was like 12 years old. And when I won it everybody cheered, and I went up to the get prize, and here was this great big turkey. It looked like it was about three feet long. It was laying on the ground with its feet tied together, squawking and squabbling and kicking and raising cain. And what you're supposed to do is pick up your turkey and go home. Well, I didn't know

what to do with a live turkey tied by the feet, squabbling and kicking and raising cain, and it had me frightened.

So I got one of my other friends and I said help me bring this bird home. Well, we picked it up and we held it between us at arm's length and carried it up from the fire hall, up the street, across the parkway to my house, and took it up and put it in the garage up behind my house because it made so much noise I knew we wouldn't be able to sleep in the house with all the squabbling and hollering that that turkey was doing. Frankly, I was afraid of it. It must have been 15 or 18 pounds in weight, and it was as wild as can be! Well, the next morning when I got up I came down and told my mother I won a turkey for Thanksgiving. And she said, "Well, that was very nice;" however, she had already ordered a nice, fresh, plucked turkey for Thanksgiving from the store. Consequently, now that we had two turkeys, she wanted to know what I was going to do with mine. Well, I said I was going to go to school and think about it and I'd talk to her about it that night. That day at school I went up by one of my friend's house, Jim Grove, and we walked to school together. I told him I won a turkey. He laughed and asked if it were alive or dead, and we talked about it and things like that. I realized that Jim and his brother Dick and his mother and dad were probably one of the poorest families that I knew at that time. The father of Jim was a very, very old man, perhaps in his 70s who was blind. He had been married twice and this was his second family. The father didn't work. The mother scrubbed houses and did chore work for other people to make a few dollars, and that's how they got along. I thought a lot about the Groves and I thought about Thanksgiving coming, and the Eichelberger's had two turkeys—one that we wanted and one that we didn't want. And when I got home that night I said to my mother after school, "You know what I think I'll do with that turkey?" And she said, "What, Honey?" And I said, "I think I'm going to give it to the Groves." And she said, "I think that would be a very, very nice thing to do." So she said, "Why don't you go up and talk to Mrs. Grove and see if she would welcome the turkey and be able to handle it, and then that way we'll be rid of it and you'll have done something nice for a family." So I went up after dinner and I went up to see the Groves and I sat around. Finally I had a chance to talk to Mrs. Grove alone. I said to her, "Mrs. Grove, I won a turkey at Bingo last night. And when I got home I found out my mother had already bought a turkey for Thanksgiving. I don't know what to do with my turkey. I'd like to give it to someone who would enjoy it for Thanksgiving. The only problem is that it is alive. Would you and your family be interested

in doing me a favor and taking the turkey off my hands?" She was delighted! She said, "Oh, Allie, I grew up on a farm. I haven't had a live turkey to kill in a long time. I wouldn't be afraid of it. I could handle it very well, and it would be an absolute pleasure." So, I said, "OK. You gotta do one thing. You gotta get Jimmy and Dicky to come down and get it because I'm afraid of it." And she laughed and laughed and laughed. So she sent her two sons down to my house and they got the turkey and took it back, and the poor old Grove family had a nice Thanksgiving with a big, fat turkey on their table. Incidentally, I never played turkey Bingo again just because I was afraid of winning!

One of the biggest events I remember as a kid was living in Saxton in a house that had lots of porches. And the house I grew up in had a front porch that was open to the street. It had a side porch that was all screened in and had nice furniture on it. It had a dining porch on the back with tables and chairs where you could eat a meal in a screened-in room. It had a back porch with a couple of swings on it and a wood box where you could sit and talk to your friends. And upstairs there was a fifth porch called a sleeping porch that was all screened in and it had two beds on it-it had a double bed and a single bed. And it was just outside of my brother's bedroom.

Often I'd sleep out on that sleeping porch all summer long with the breeze blowing through the screen porch, and it was really nice. And even on a rainy night the rain wouldn't blow in on the beds because of the side of the house the porch was on. It was protected. Well, as I grew older, my brother, Chippy, who was seven years older than I, went away to college and my sister who was four and one-half years older, she went away to college, and pretty soon I was home alone and I could sleep anywhere I wanted except my mother's bedroom or my grandmother's bedroom. Well, I started sleeping out on that sleeping porch all year round.

Summertime it was delightful! You'd lay out on that porch and you'd hear crickets, frogs chirping, you'd hear the sounds of night, car passing, you'd hear a horn blow or a dog bark, but it was just beautiful sleeping on that sleeping porch. In the fall and spring when the temperatures were changing, you would get chilly or warm or something like that, but it was just great sleeping out there then. Well, I got the idea it would be fun to stay there all winter, or at least into the winter as far as I could, so I told my mother I'm going to stay on the porch. And she said well fine, just stay nice and warm. So what I did was the bed had a bolster which was a huge, long pillow

about four and one-half feet long that went the whole way across the top of the double bed. I put on lots of blankets, and I put in a heating pad, not a blanket, but a heating pad and I would turn it on maybe 20 minutes before I'd get in bed and I'd go out and I'd jump in that bed at nighttime and I'd pile those covers up and snuggle down. I'd sleep there all night long, and of course I'd wake up in the morning nice and snugly warm. My mother would call on me, "Come on, Allie, breakfast time."

Well, I stayed there night after night as it got colder and colder into the winter every night, sleeping out there alone and the wind would blow through and sometimes the snow would be swirling. Some nights it got down to freezing and below. Well, one night it got down so cold that the temperature was recorded to be four below zero. I'll never forget this night because across the alley from behind our house there lived a family named Sam and Dot Kelly and their two daughters. And Sam Kelly's house caught on fire that night. Apparently Sam had a coal furnace and he had a big fire in the furnace, and the furnace caught on fire somehow and caused an awful fire on the inside of Sam and Dot Kelly's house. Now it's a big brick house and it's still standing up on Church Street, almost across the street from Mike and Nancy Enyeart's house and down one more toward the funeral chapel, but that big house of Sam and Dot's caught on fire that night.

I was piled under the covers so deep that I didn't hear the fire siren! The house caught on fire sometime around 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning, the fire company was called. Sam by chance happened to be a fireman. And they came up and they began to try to extinguish the blaze. Most of the inside of the house was badly burned. The fire company got up to Church Street and started pouring water onto the fire. There were lots of red lights, there were lots of sirens, there was lots of commotion probably only 500 feet from my bed, but I was so deeply under the covers I didn't wake up until about 3:00 in the morning.

When I woke up, the thing that caught my attention was the smell of wet smoke. When I smelled that I woke up in bed and I looked around, and I could see that there were red lights flashing over behind the building of our house, and then I knew something was wrong. So I jumped out of bed and I went downstairs where I could hear voices, and my mother was making coffee for the firemen.

What had happened was the firemen had come up and they had poured so much water onto Sam's house, finally got the blaze under control, many of the neighbors around made coffee, warmed up bread and toast, and some of them made soup, and brought it out to the firemen and invited firemen into their homes so they could get warm on this bitter, bitter four below zero night. I had missed the fire, but the next morning at daylight I got dressed and I walked up behind my house to Sam Kelly's house and I saw one of the most tragic sights I ever saw!

Here was this big, beautiful, three story brick house that had been ravaged by fire. The doors were burned off. The windows were burst out. Everything inside was destroyed. And the firemen had pumped so much water in through the windows to extinguish the blaze and to try and save the house that the front porch looked like a dirty waterfall of ice. The water had just cascaded down the front steps, out the door, down over the porch, and froze. There was just a mess everywhere. And it smelled of burnt sofas and chairs and rugs. Everything they had was lost. It was just a tragic night for Sam and Dot Kelly. Fortunately, they were able to rebuild and get back in their house later that year at a tremendous cost. But I often thought of myself sleeping up on that sleeping porch, listening to crickets in the springtime and listening to frogs in the summertime, and all the things that I ever heard on that porch. And one of the biggest fires in Saxton ever was right outside my bedroom porch and I never heard a thing that day until I finally woke up in the morning. Incidentally, that house has been remodeled very beautifully now and is owned by Robert and Christine Black. It's a very, very nice home and it has been restored beautifully. By the way, I did spend the rest of that winter every night sleeping out on that sleeping porch, and I never missed a night sleeping there that year.

This final story I'm going to tell you came from Coolidge Eichelberger, who was an elderly man, a brother of my Grandfather Allie. Coolidge told me when he was 9 or 10 years old back in 1898 or 1899 he had been badly burned in a gasoline fire in his home in Everett, Pennsylvania. And his folks could not get a doctor who could alleviate any of the pain. There was a woman who lived in town by the name of Mrs. Baker who had a reputation of being able to blow fire or blow her breath over the body of an injured person and stop the pain.

The parents called Mrs. Baker and she couldn't come to the bedside, but she said give me the boy's name and I'll blow fire from my home. Within 30 minutes the pain had stopped on young Coolidge, and he began to get well and was eventually healed. He learned about Mrs. Baker's story

and went and visited her and became friends with her. And later in life when Mrs. Baker became ill with cancer, Coolidge drove her to Cumberland, Maryland, to his doctor, who diagnosed where the cancer was. Mrs. Baker was forever grateful because, as she told Coolidge coming back from Cumberland from the doctors, "Now that I know where my cancer is I can cure it myself." Coolidge was startled when she told this story, and yet he claims that 15 years later Mrs. Baker was still spry and lively and, because of her incredible powers, had cured her own cancer. Now I'm telling you this because these were not ignorant people, these were educated people who believed in the power that they had over their own bodies.