

## MEMORABLE ADVENTURES

## 1

## "DON'T TELL!"

Every community center, I discovered, had its own personality. Sometimes we never saw the patrons we served; but the avid readers were watching for the arrival of the Bookmobile so they could greet us, talk a bit, browse through the collection that the Library-on-Wheels was carrying, or pick up special titles they had requested earlier.

I really enjoyed the trips to Tyus, though I almost got more than I bargained for one fair day. Our center was set up in Barr's Store. It was my custom to pull up a chair or crate and chat with Lee Barr and other business men who sauntered over as I drove up, or they just happened by at the time.

Lee and Dura Barr also owned a citrus grove down in Florida somewhere near Ocala and whenever they had made a trip down there, they'd bring me back some oranges. Lee knew I liked hoop cheese better than nearly anything else, too; so he'd cut me a hunk, open up a box of crackers, and we'd share experiences as we nibbled.

Well, at Barr's Store I'd change the collection, checking books in and out, getting requested packets of books properly tabbed for the patrons so the right ones would get them, and new requests filed; then with the routines out of the way, I'd take my place in the group for a stimulating verbal exchange (usually political).

As I said, I took a lot of ribbing from my friends at Tyus, but nothing like the day I tumbled in the well. This eventful day I was alone, driving the big new Bookmobile, of which I was immensely proud. I tried to look bored sitting under the wheel, perched like a jaybird on a high limb; but I was far too delighted to hide my true feelings. I drove in by way of Bowdon, where I had served our book center there.

Now right in the middle of the Tyus business center, with stores on both sides and on the corners, was an abandoned well. It was not totally filled in, lacking, I'd say, about two or three feet of being with the roadbed. (I was told later that it had been filled in but had weathered and sunk.)

Well, anyway, I rounded the corner and stopped right in the center there ready for business. Several people boarded the Bookmobile to select books. I checked out materials and went into the store to get the collection to be returned and to leave a fresh collection as well as to check on requests.

It was a blistering day. Finishing my work, I went back into the store, having found it rather cool and comfortable inside. I pulled up a chair and sat sipping a soft drink. Lee and others came along and we talked.

The afternoon was getting away and I knew I had to prepare the Bookmobile for the next day's work; so I finally made my adieux, climbed up under the wheel and got the motor going. I was not thinking "well". In actuality I did not notice the well since the vehicle shielded it from my view. It's a little difficult to drive a Bookmobile into a well, but I nearly made it. As the front left wheel plopped down into the hole, it sounded like thunder. Men came running from every direction. Surrounding my beloved Bookmobile, they hit their knees with each guffaw or slapped one another on the back. I wasn't hurt, as they could well see. I quickly stuck my head out of the door and said:

"I'll kill you if you tell this!"

They squatted down, examined, discussed, and informed me that they could get the Bookmobile out for me. One or two ran to get planks and they prized that so ill-used front end backwards out of the hole. I backed up around the well and as I pulled away, I yelled back: "She fell in the well — but don't tell!"

## 2

### A LITTLE POCKET KNIFE

Closing down a center was usually upsetting. Sometimes it even left scars. Once I nearly received physical scars. The day was hot, a drowsy July day. I was there at the request of the community leaders, since the building housing the center was to be closed. Families had moved away, the youth had grown away from their stagnating community, and the older heads were tired of trying to keep things going

and finding money to pay for maintaining the community house. The building had been an elementary school that had closed three years before but after that for a while the community carried out a series of College in the Country programs. Now, three years later, one year after the community house had "died", there I was reluctantly resigned to remove the books. On this day I was to speak to the Carrollton Lions Club (long a strong booster of our program) at their luncheon meeting. I had time, I felt sure, to get out to the community for the four hundred books and back before the meeting time.

The key to the building was at the home of the family whose members were considered to be the leaders in the community. I went there to get one of them to accompany me to the old school building.

"The key is at the store," Mrs. "Henry" said. (I have changed her name,) "Come on. We'll go to the store for it. My husband is working with several men at the big barn this morning, and I'll have to keep the store alone for most of the day. I'll give you the key and you can go on to the center."

We got into the wagon and drove up the road about one hundred yards to the family store, where she got the key for me.

"Please come with me," I begged.

"Are you afraid, Edith?" she asked me.

"No, but I have an odd feeling about going there by myself. It isn't fear." I really did have a sense of dejection — I suppose a sense of personal loss in the community loss.

She could not leave the store; so I drove alone on down the road and across the weed-choked schoolyard, parking at the foot of the front entrance steps. As I climbed the steps and stood there looking at the large double doors, memory flooded my being; this was the place where Ellie had fallen at my feet in sheer ecstasy at having read a library book. Now I almost wept!

The door had the biggest lock I had ever seen. I had an awful time getting the key turned and in lifting the lock off so I could enter the building. I went in to the deserted meeting room and over to the Library Center. The books were all right. I decided not to work the records there, but rather to wait and do them in the headquarters at the college.

About one-half the collection was loaded in the wagon when I changed my procedure and started stacking the books on the ledge at the steps, which were steep and rather far apart. As I straightened from laying down the last armload, I noticed a quick movement to

my left. Looking, I saw a man dressed in overalls climbing a fence about twenty yards or so to the west of the building. As he landed on the ground, he reached into his pocket, pulled out a knife and opened it, all the while coming towards me, shouting at me.

I slammed the side door and locking it, climbed under the wheel, closing that door and locking it, cracked the window and stepped on the starter. It was acting up again as it had been doing for two weeks! I could still hear the man shouting at me as he jabbed that knife about:

“That’s the trouble now! People like you are coming and stealing everything we have!”

“Oh, please,” I tried to explain to him. “I’m the Regional Librarian. These books do not belong to your community alone but to the Region. I was told by your own community leaders to come and get them. . .”

“You’ve got to quit this stealing and ruining us!”

I dared not continue trying to start the motor; so I moved over to the other side of the front seat, and opening the door, I hit the ground running.

In undergraduate school I was on the LaGrange College track team, number one in dash, and third leg on relay; however, never had I covered ground so effortlessly as did I that hot morning. I think I flew. Some two hundred yards away was the store. I did not break stride even to look back. Dashing through the door, I plopped down on a handy cane-bottomed chair.

“Edith,” my friend said, “what on earth is wrong? You’re white as a sheet!” She ran to get a soft drink for me . . . I told her a man came at me with a knife.

“Describe him,” she said “I can’t imagine anybody around here doing that. Everybody loves you and appreciates all you have done.”

“He was rather nondescript looking. In overalls . . . There he is now!” (He was walking past up the road.) “He’s changed clothes! He has on a suit!”

“Oh, that’s ol’ man So-and So,” she said. “He’s a nut. Been in and institution once. He’s dressed up to walk to his mailbox to get his welfare check. He probably thinks he ran you off.”

“He did,” I answered meekly.

About that time a Coca-Cola truck drove up to the door. The driver (alone that day) came in, spoke to us, and was checking to see about the day's business when Mrs. "Henry" said:

"Miss Foster has had a scare down the road. She was picking up the library books and somebody chased her away. She left her books and the wagon won't start."

"Come on, Miss Foster," our soft drinks driver said. "Get into the truck. It's not so nice and comfortable; but I'll drive you over to the building, help you finish loading the books, and start the wagon for you."

As we were working, I noticed that the man who threatened me was peeping out at us from behind a hedge. I told my "rescuer" about it and he said, yes, he saw him, but not to pay any heed. The fellow had evidently been watching as he went to the mailbox and now was lurking on the east side of the building.

I refused Mrs. "Henry's" offer to call the Sheriff or even to report the episode to any authority. I did not want to embarrass the community nor involve the "Henry" family; instead, I wanted to continue to talk of the wonderful hours spent among them and to keep fresh the memories of experiences that had helped to make our program meaningful and enriching.

After all, it was just a **little** pocket knife!

### 3

## "RURAL ROUTE WOMAN"

About seventeen or eighteen miles from Carrollton, in the north-eastern part of Heard County is one of the loveliest little villages. In Glenloch I found many warm friends and friendly storekeepers who were delighted to maintain a library center for the community very early in my library career. I recall that this was also the only community I have ever served where the store burned to the ground, turning our collection to ashes along with everything else therein. The books had all been returned by the patrons, ready for the Book-mobile trip the next day. I'll never forget the sinking feeling I experienced when I drove up and viewed that smoldering heap of rubble.

One unusually bitter cold winter, I was due to go to Glenloch to change the collection. Now I never allowed myself to renege on my "accustomed rounds" because of rain or snow or whatever. It had snowed the night before, with a mixture of sleet thrown in for good

measure. The road towards Glenloch looked all right (white, hard packed) but challenging. Across from the junction was a cabin. Usually a very old black man would be sitting there in a rocking chair on the stoop. I customarily waved at him but did not stop.

This morning I decided to speak to him; so I pulled off the highway and walked over to sit on the edge of the steps.

"Aren't you cold, sitting out here?" I asked him.

"No'm, I aint cold. I be wrapped up good in this ol' shawl."

"Well, I see you often at a distance as I drive down this way. Now I'm glad to see you close up. If you don't mind my asking, how old are you?" His hair was the color of cotton and his hands calloused, lying still on the arms of the chair, impervious to cold, I supposed.

"I been aroun' a long time — ninety years. I worked ever' day on this land as long as I could. This is home."

I told him about my job and about serving Glenloch.

"Tell me," I said, "do you think I can make it over that hill this morning?"

"They's been two cars over the hill this mornin' since I been sitin' here. You might. Then you mightn't."

"I believe I'll try," I said, as much to myself as to my new-found friend. "You take care now. It's cold out here. Don't stay too long."

With that I got back into the Library Wagon and started up the icy hill. Just before reaching the top, I could not get the car on over. I decided to try to slide back down the hill. This was ticklish, with a fair drop-off on either side of the road. I wondered what my friend on the porch was thinking. I looked in the mirror, but he seemed frozen in time against the backdrop of his home.

I was always a pretty fair country driver in spite of the mishap at the well; in fact, my brothers used to tell me I was the best woman driver they had ever seen (obviously some sort of illusion they had). I maneuvered successfully. I figured I had not put enough speed on the effort; as I pressed down on the gas pedal and hit the hill running and I made it.

My friends were amazed when they saw me driving up.

"You think you're Uncle Sam's Rural Route Man?" they teased me.

"No," I replied, "I'm Heard County's Rural Route Book Woman. How about swapping some books?"

Most of the road trouble I encountered was due to mud. Sometimes, especially in the winter, the roads would be cut to deep ruts. I would plough along, bumping and scraping, thinking positively. It paid off, for nearly every single time I was in some difficulty, a truck driver would be waiting at the top of the hill or further on, to be sure I made it.

I actually was stuck helplessly only one time. It happened at Simpson, in Heard County. It was pouring rain that day. My poor little Book-Wagon slid down into the deep ruts and stayed put. When I realized I could not rock it out (no pun intended) I sat there trying to make myself get out to find help — a mule? — to pull my wagon and me out.

I heard a car coming and lo and behold! the Ephesus basketball team was enroute to play at Franklin. The boys and their principal rolled up their trousers' legs (Sunday clothes, no less), gathered loads of brush to put under the tires and along the deepest ruts. In no time at all, we were merrily but muddily on our different ways again. Oh, I left my heart behind — with the boys. We had a mutual love affair going — the village of Ephesus and I — anyway.

We opened our first Ephesus center in 1944 in a store owned by William and Fannie Rogers. In the spring William would get into the fields to plough and plant while Fannie managed the business. She was especially interesting to me because she never wasted time. She kept a sewing machine going when not serving customers. Nearby would be the inevitable cane-bottomed chair, which I occupied a while during each visit as we talked of books she had read or needed. We were friends; so she had no hesitancy in discussing quite frankly with me one time her need for a book on sex.

“Is this an odd request from an old married woman?” she asked me.

I appreciated her confidence. I had a book in mind which I had just added to the collection. The next day back I went by Fannie's store to leave her the book. Later she told me it certainly served their purpose (a marriage manual).

Finally this store was closed because of Fannie's ill health.

The following summer, I approached Vivian Rogers about helping me carry out a Vacation Reading Program with her house as the center. This appealed to her not only because she had young children who were avid readers, but also because she and Lonnie are such wonderful leaders in town and county and she saw it as a means of serving the neighbors. Later on, they were to play a key role in getting a branch



library started for Heard County, as well as in promoting the West Georgia Regional Library. That home center flourished, serving the lovely little community of Ephesus on the western side of Heard County, though many of the people travel to the county seat — Franklin — to use the Heard County Branch Library there.

#### 4

### “BUCKSHOT, HUH?”

Every year I had to plan the exact daily routes of the Bookmobile, following the arrangements made for local canters. Exactly what and how many books to be carried on any given day was important. The distance to be traveled was of concern as the furthestmost point might be forty miles from Headquarters, thus making the round-trip at least eighty miles.

I had to determine the number of “Deposits” I could handle on each day’s run. The condition of the roads to be traveled was another important consideration. I did not always know how to travel to some communities. In such cases I asked the advice of knowledgeable people. These interviews invariably were interesting.

Take, for example, the rural community in Heard County — Ridgeway. I went down to the County Seat to talk about it with Alvin Rogers, my key Board member in the County.

“Alvin,” I said, “I’m down here to find out how to get to Ridgeway.”

“It’s beyond Frolona,” he said with an engaging grin. “You see, Frolona is the name of the Fourth Class Post Office in that settlement; so the settlement is called Frolona. If you can make your way there, it’s a simple matter to go on to Ridgeway. That’s where they send their children to school. By the way, it is the highest point in Heard County.”

I thought about it a little bit, then asked him to point me in the right direction.

He did. I made it, just as I ultimately “made it” in every situation, most of the time in routine fashion, though once in a while I encountered a little more than I bargained for or expected.

I am going to relate just such an odd experience right now; however I shall draw a curtain down on the exact location in the area lest I — “pop the wrong cork!”



I had traveled over this part of the region only once before, and someone else (a native in the parts) was driving then. We were visiting certain communities for me to consider the possibility of setting up service centers.

Now I was alone, driving one of the college utility wagons, headed toward a certain community which I shall call "Joyville" because my subsequent visits there were always so much fun.

I had already made one stop that morning, arranging shelf space at a crossroads store. Now I was headed deeper into a sparsely settled part of the county, trying a direct route to Joyville.

I was to take the left fork, I recalled; but as I came to the fork in the road, in a flash I remembered that I had previously noticed **two** forks in this road and I could not remember whether I was to take the **first** left fork or the **second**. I stopped to think. It seemed more reasonable to try the first fork; so I turned off on this road, driving very slowly. It was a pretty day and I was happy as a lark, singing and keeping time by patting the steering wheel.

Suddenly I rounded a curve tucked in on either side by pine thickets and there was a house with a row of people lined up as if to have their group picture made. The most peculiar part of it was that some five or six of the men had guns held close to chests, pointing skyward. They were gazing upon me with stolid, frozen looks. Not an expression changed that I could detect.

Don't expect me to classify the guns. I don't know the makes and types of guns. I only know that I said to myself: "Ol' girl, you have taken the wrong fork. Obviously this is a deadend road." Without even hesitating, I leaned out the window, and yelled "Hi!" and kept that wagon moving around in the most perfect arc you ever saw, heading back to the turn-off point, wondering all the while when the first gun would go off.

I went back to the second fork and made it to Joyville, saying not a word about my — to say the least — unique experience. Completing plans there, I drove on and told one of my members of the Board about the exciting event. He laughed and laughed at my description of the reception committee.

"Well, Edith," he said, "you have now visited one of our county's prize bootleggers."

After that, he often teased me about this experience. "Buckshot, Huh," he'd say, because when I was relating the episode, I said while

I was turning and skedaddling out of there, I was wondering all the time just how it would feel to be peppered with buckshot.

I would not take anything for the testing of those first, experimental years. Since I had little experience by which to gauge, I never did know how any effort would turn out; but I had a high old time starting out each day on a new adventure. There never was a dull moment!