



Our House - Our Home

## The Boxelders

Just east of the house Dad had planted a row of boxelder trees which grew into a thick hedge. The branches were low and quite stout, strong enough for us kids to climb around on and play house in, or hide in to get out of doing the dishes, or to read a book, or watch the colorful little ladybugs that fascinated us so. These bright little fellows seemed to prefer the boxelders for their home. And they were our friends! Dad told us how important they were - how they destroyed aphide and plant lice. Oh, Dad knew everything! And Mama knew ALMOST everything! Isn't faith in one's parents grand!

Our outdoor bathroom (toilet) was hidden in the trees on the extreme left - a two-holer.

A late summer snowstorm hit Flathead Valley one June or July night in 1922. The big trees, being all leafed out, broke down under the weight of the wet, heavy snow. Everybody cried! Our trees were ruined! Then Dad, with the skill equal to that of a tree surgeon, repaired the damage. They were ALMOST as good as new; however, we couldn't climb around in them ever again. The branches were weakened and we were getting heavier, so we played house and had tea parties under them.

In the background, if you look closely, you can see the orchard, of about 500 fruit trees, that Dad planted on the most unlikely spot - the big sand hill, about three blocks east of the yard. I remember how opposed Mama was to the idea. She felt Dad had been taken into something. That it was a wildcat scheme, only she didn't call it by that name then. They'd never grow in all that dry sand anyway, nohow. Surprisingly, the trees flourished. Not only Mama, but everyone else

had predicted they would dry up, but they did no such thing. In fact, in a few years they produced so well that harvesting and marketing became one of the big problems. Most of the trees were apple with a few peach, plum and cherry trees thrown in to see "How they would do". As a sort of an experiment! Most were sweet crabs, known as Whitney Crabs, quite a bit larger than the regular crab apple but they were not nearly as tart and NO good for making jelly. (In those days apple peelings and crab apple juice were the only source of pectin for jelly making.) They had a delicious flavor, mild and juicy but within three or four weeks they would turn soft and tasteless, just not a good apple for the market. Mama used to make wonderful sweet-sour pickles out of them, in two-quart jars. They were so good we'd eat a whole jarful at one meal. The promoter, who sold Dad on the merits of this NEW apple, either failed to tell Dad, or did really not know, the poor keeping quality of the Whitneys. When the two- to three-year-old saplings came, they didn't look very promising, but in spite of all the odds against them and all the dire predictions of their survival, they flourished and grew into shapely, oval, compact trees that didn't seem to require much pruning, and produced beyond everybody's expectations. A dozen Whitney Crab trees would probably be excellent in an orchard of 500 or so other "Good Keeper"-apple trees, Dad later concluded but not a whole orchard full of them. The Flathead Valley winters were too cold and the summers too short to raise the less hardy fruits such as peaches, apricots and cherries. Apples thrive on the short, frost-free growing season. Dad was a great believer in diversified farming and an apple orchard, not only, appealed to his sense of adventure, but also, to his desire for security for his family. Should a crop of grain

or potatoes fail, there would be the fruit crop to fall back on.

The pine and fir trees in the background are on the 80-acre pasture land Dad bought from a Mr. Fischer. Beyond that was the Whitefish River, down below a several hundred-foot bench. In the early days, 1903? to 1912? Dad used to help float logs down this river to the sawmill near Kalispell about six miles as the river flows south. At that time the landowners cleared their land as fast as possible so they could raise crops - in between the stumps which they would grub out later, or dynamite and then burn them out. It was their only income. One could always judge the type of person a farmer was by the length of time it took him to get the stumps out of his land, so the pioneers' tale goes!

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