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Back When ... A Rationale (actually, ale wasn't rationed)

During World War II, our lives on the home front revolved around ration stamps - for gasoline, shoes, sugar, coffee, canned goods, and meat. In Portland, we had no car, so gas stamps were nothing to worry about. Anyway, public transportation was convenient and inexpensive. Before shoe rationing began, I had acquired a fine wardrobe of shoes for my trousseau; consequently, I did not need my shoe stamps and could occasionally help friends whose children's feet outgrew the family ration.

Sugar, however, was scarce enough that most of the time we conserved our supply by having fresh fruit for dessert. After all, in Oregon we were living among bountiful farms of raspberries, strawberries, peaches, Queen Anne cherries, and apples. I remember hesitantly baking one cake in Portland, using Mother's "never-fail" devil's food cake recipe. It failed. We ate it anyway, since we had used our precious sugar. We pretended it was chocolate cookies of a new design.

On the other hand, coffee was not a great problem, since I had not yet begun to drink the stuff, and Paul was happy with half a cup for breakfast. We were even able proudly to offer coffee to dinner guests now and then. The rationing of canned goods didn't bother us a great deal because of the abundance of fresh vegetables available in season. Nevertheless, in the winter we ate a great many more carrots than we might have preferred. Another Portland abundance that protected our ration books - this time meat stamps (remember Spam?) - was fish and seafood. Having grown up far inland before rapid transportation and freezing made seafood available to those not living on the coast, I had to learn about preparing such things, but it was a pleasure to find out how. I discovered blue crabs (purchased already cooked at the fisherman's market downtown), and soon learned how to cook smelts, oysters, fresh salmon – *especially* fresh salmon! -- and a variety of other fresh- and salt-water fish. We have been hooked on salmon ever since. (Incidentally, on occasions when I met Paul downtown and he didn't know exactly when he'd be off, I went to the cookbook section of the Portland Public Library, a block from his office, and studied methods of kitchen planning and cooking and copied interesting recipes.)

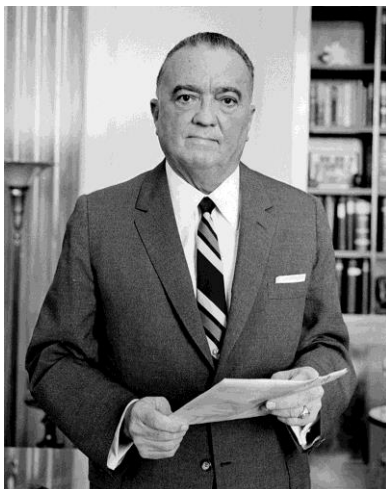
We were also fortunate that, during gas rationing, we lived in places with good public transportation. During the two years we lived there, we explored Portland by streetcar and on foot, enjoying the parks, the Rose Garden, and the ridges with their long vistas in that lovely city.



After we were transferred to Washington, D.C., we didn't need a car to visit all the sights of that area during a time when tourists were at a minimum: there were no lines to view the Washington Monument, for instance. Once, we even walked up and down the one thousand steps. We were able to enjoy in a leisurely fashion such places as the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Smithsonian, the Zoo, the National Cathedral, the National Gallery of Art, and wonderful Rock Creek Park. Once we rode a bus to Mount Vernon and spent a leisurely afternoon there, in the house as well as on the lawn, enjoying the views of the Potomac River.



We had other entertainment in Washington, too. Paul did classified work in a government bureau, but his office crew had a softball team that played its games out on the Mall itself. Paul was the catcher and often invited me to these games in the late afternoon. One time they needed a score-keeper, and I reluctantly agreed, under coercion, to try. Struggling to keep up with the play and the unfamiliar score book, I was embarrassed to find Mr. Hoover himself looking over my shoulder. I'd never met him, but I couldn't fail to identify that familiar face.



Necessary cross-country travel was by rail. Our wedding trip from Dallas to Portland, for example, took us across the lower southwestern states, over the Rocky Mountains, across the Arizona and California deserts to San Francisco, and thence north through California with its lovely vistas, past Mount Shasta, and into Oregon with its Cascades and majestic Douglas firs. Later we had a memorable trip across the top of the U.S. to Chicago, from where Paul went on to Washington and I to Dallas. The scenery in Oregon, Montana, the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin was breathtaking. I loved the Snake River which our train followed for many miles. Most of the trip down the middle of the country from Chicago to Dallas took place overnight, so I missed that scenery, except for the flatness of Oklahoma and across the Red River into Texas, where even the relatively bare landscape looked more and more beautiful the closer I got to Dallas.

The trip back to Portland from Dallas went through New Mexico, Colorado, Wisconsin, and Idaho. All the scenes in the Rocky Mountains were gorgeous. My favorite spot was the view from the railroad station in Boise, looking over the valley where the city was located. That was all we saw as we stood on the station platform and breathed the clear, fresh, invigorating air, but it's a scene that I recall whenever I hear the name *Boise*.



A significant aspect of long-distance rail travel used to be the dining car, and during the war food rationing apparently didn't apply to that menu. In the splendor and formality of its service and appointments - the white tablecloths and napkins - the traveler found not only a pleasant ambiance but also the promise of good food. On the morning after our wedding, Paul and I were seated at a table with an amiable older couple. When Paul showed that he wasn't aware that I didn't drink coffee, they chuckled that they had already spotted us as newlyweds, and we settled down to enjoy them and our breakfast.

We were glad about that delicious breakfast, for before lunch, the train was split into two segments, one loaded primarily with troops headed south for Los Angeles and our section continued on to San Francisco. Unfortunately, the dining car went with the troops, and we had no lunch nor dinner the rest of the day, nor breakfast the next morning. Near noon we stopped in a very small station in the Arizona desert. Everyone rushed off the train to storm a small food counter on the station platform.

We reached the counter just as a young corporal bought the last bit of food -- three doughnuts. Much to our horror an Army captain "requisitioned" the food from the corporal and handed two of the doughnuts to Paul and me. Both he and the corporal disappeared before we could object, and we were stuck with our ill-gotten gains. We re-boarded the train but could not find the legitimate owner. We ate them without much relish, but they did help our hunger.

When we arrived in Oakland several hours later, we were met by Paul's Portland friends, Ruth and Leroy (Doc) Young who took us to a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco for a magnificent feast. They were Chinese and initiated us into the joys of Chinese cuisine before we boarded our train for the final leg of our journey to Portland.



Doc Young taking a picture of Paul

Another memorable train trip happened after we were settled in Takoma Park, Maryland. My brother, Willett, stationed at Hicks Field on Long Island, was due to be sent overseas soon. (Incidentally many people made a big thing of someone named Hickman being at Hicks Field.) I took the train to New York to see him. I was fascinated by the fact that the train was powered by electricity from Washington to Baltimore, after which we traded the electric engine for a steam-powered one. I enjoyed the largely urban scenery most of the way to New York, but my primary concern was for the young sailor who slept peacefully and heavily on my shoulder until we entered Pennsylvania Station. He apparently was unaware of the comfort I had afforded him by keeping still all those miles with an almost paralyzed right arm, for he left with barely a nod in my direction. I forgot about any discomfort on the ride when I found myself in that mammoth station. The waiting room was much more enormous than the one in Washington, and all the people seemed to be in an extraordinary hurry. I managed to find my way through the station onto the street, which I had to cross in order to meet Peggy, my sister-in-law, at the Pennsylvania Hotel. As I stood hesitantly on the corner, a woman grabbed my arm and begged to cross with me. She said she was terrified of crossing the street, for she'd only been in New York City a year! I'd never been there at all until that moment, but her confidence in me gave me the courage to forget my doubts and to lead us safely across the street, where I continued my first adventure in the big city.

So much for train travel during the War. When we were transferred from Portland to Washington, we did get involved with gasoline rationing, when we bought a car for the trip. Because the trip was official, we had an adequate allowance of gas stamps. But in Washington, we had to sell the car in order to buy the furniture needed for the only apartment we could find to rent, so that ended our experience with gasoline rationing. Altogether, I'd say that we had a minimum of inconvenience and a great many happy experiences with the rigors of wartime shortages and rationing.