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Going Home

"Cream or sugar?"

Those were the words of my brand-new husband as we settled in for our first breakfast. It was June, 1943, on a train taking us to our new home, the day after our wedding. We were seated in a crowded dining car with its crisp white tablecloths and attentive, white-coated waiters, making our way through west Texas. We were sharing a table with a nice looking "old" couple. (They were probably in their forties, but what did we know about age at that time?) They knew enough from our youthful appearance and my immediate announcement that I didn't drink coffee, "Thank you very much!" to assume that we were newly wed, but they left us to our own devices until we had been served. Then, they peppered us with questions about our wedding and our destination. We were happy to tell them about our wedding during a seven-inch rainstorm in Dallas, but Paul couldn't tell them why we were on our way to Portland, Oregon, except to say that he worked for the government. I thought it lent a nice air of mystery to our lives, transcending the lack of a long marital history. He was one of the few young men on the train who was not in a military uniform.

We had a bedroom and were able to spend the balance of the day alone, catching up on all the talk we had missed during our two years of separation. My sister Martha had volunteered to pack my bags, and I must say she did a superb job, layering approximately a year's supply of rice among the tissue papered folds of my clothes. There wasn't a wrinkle in any of my dresses, but the bedroom was a white mess of rice. So was almost every place we went on the train. That suitcase continued to shed rice for the next several years. She also thoughtfully included a deck of cards so that we wouldn't be bored as we journeyed halfway across the continent. We didn't break the seal of that pack until Paul was recovering from the flu several months later.

Later the next day after missing the last breakfast call, we were joined in our Pullman seats by another "old" couple, who were seeking a bit of entertainment as we made our slow way across Arizona. Our train was not high priority and spent much time on sidings to enable faster troop trains to pass. We didn't really need diversion but were willing to be friendly. Nevertheless, they tried to interest us in bridge, canasta, or several other games, none of which I knew, before we finally settled down to a lively game of hearts. Actually, I think now that they really wanted to verify their speculation that we were newly married and to wax nostalgic about their own wedding trip some twenty years earlier.

The game was interrupted by the announcement that the dining car had gone with the other half of our train to Barstow, California, when the train had been divided earlier in the day. The announcement continued that we were stopping at a small town for a few minutes to enable all travelers to get what food was available from stands along the track. We fought our way through crowds only to discover that all the snack food and drinks were gone. Finally, an Army Captain standing near us spotted a Sergeant holding six doughnuts. The Captain "requisitioned" four of the doughnuts, insisting that Paul and I

take two of them. I didn't think the maneuver was quite fair, but the Captain was insistent, and I must say that those doughnuts were a big help in getting us through the rest of the day. We arrived in Oakland several hours late.

Doc and Ruth Young met us at the station and took us to Ruth's mother's home for a sustaining snack before we left for an evening in San Francisco. Doc (Leroy) was a medical doctor and PhD, the translator in Paul's office. We began a long, close friendship as they showed us the sights of wartime San Francisco on the way to a large restaurant in Chinatown. Doc did the ordering in Chinese, ending every line with "family style." The waiter repeated the order in Chinese and with appropriately positioned "family style?"

It was a wonderful meal beginning with a tasty cabbage soup and progressing through dishes each of which surpassed the last in appeal and served as my introduction to chopsticks. Finally, we had to admit we'd made up for the lack of breakfast and lunch, for we had to hasten back to Oakland to catch our train for the remainder of the trip to Portland.

When we awoke the next morning, we were just leaving California, and, while we had breakfast, were able to watch Mount Shasta's splendid ice-cream-cone shaped peak. Oregon was even more beautiful with its many snow-capped peaks. The brilliant June sun and the clear atmosphere showed the Cascades in all their beauty.



Finally in Portland, we gathered our bags and took a cab to our home, where Paul carried me across the threshold into our efficiency apartment with its aromatic supply of "slab wood" stacked just outside our window in the front yard of our building. Those fragrant fir slabs will always remain my foremost impression of the beautiful city in which we began our life together.