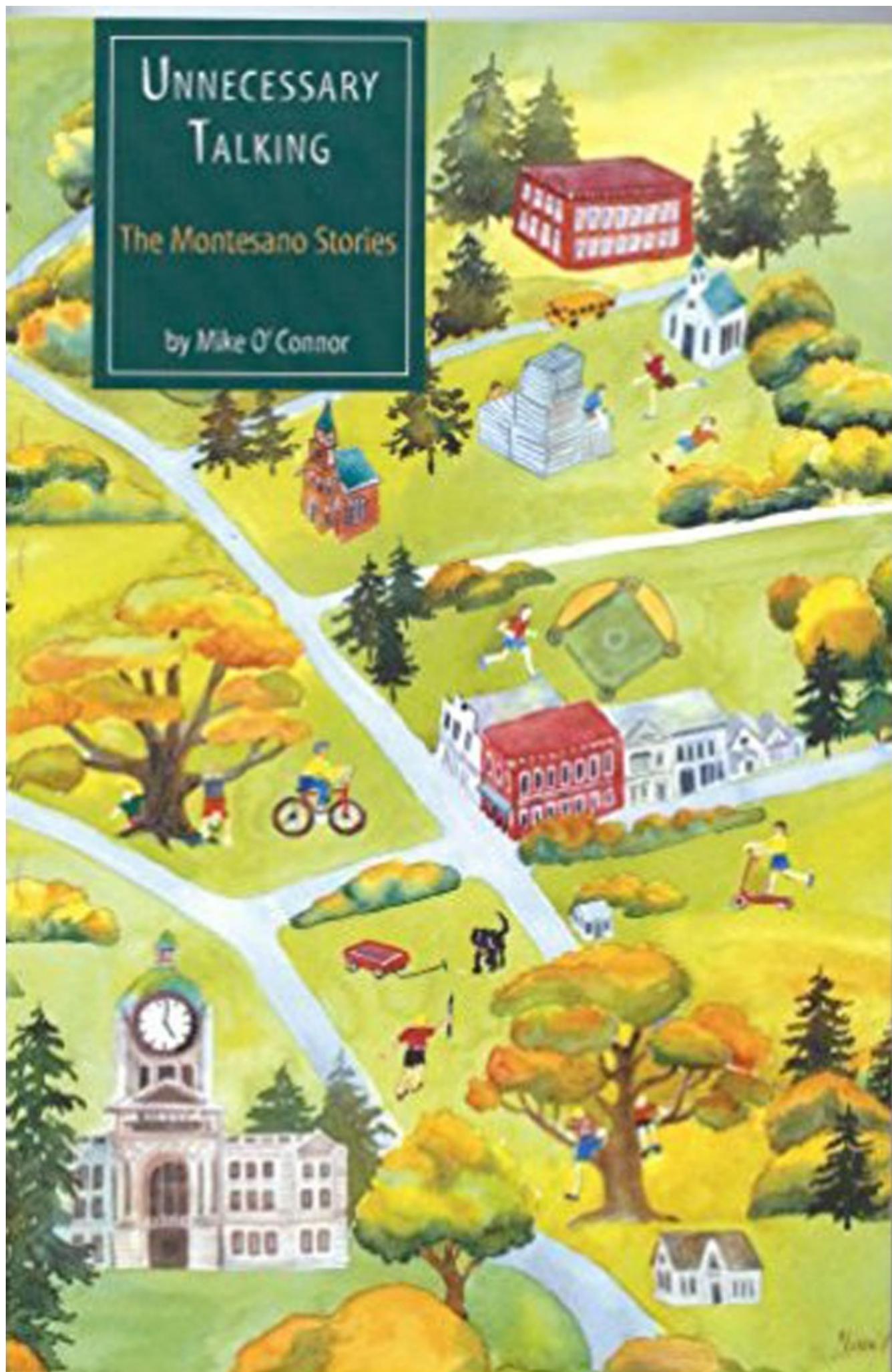


# UNNECESSARY TALKING

The Montesano Stories

by Mike O'Connor



MIKE O'CONNOR, a native of Washington State, is a poet, writer, and translator of Chinese literature. Beginning in the 1970s, he engaged in farming and forest work, followed by a journalism career in Asia that continued through 1995. He has published nine books of poetry and translation, and his recent long poem "Immortality" can be found on-line at *Narrative Magazine*. O'Connor is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Literature, and he is an Honorary Fellow of Hong Kong Baptist University. He currently serves as publisher of Empty Bowl Press in Port Townsend.

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# 1 THE FORT

WE BUILT IT from discarded wood from the torn-down Episcopal Church on Sylvia Street. As the new Saint Mark's arose, we hauled the old one — board by nail-embedded board — away. Although many kids from around town joined in the construction, it was largely the Ratchet brothers and I who built it, following my rudimentary design of 2 × 4 framing (an advancement from the two-sawhorse and sheet-of-plywood hideout design of my pre-school days) and Terry Ratchet's wizard carpentry.

When building the first story, we made a special room, a dungeon, that had a small hinged door (the genius of Terry) and a lock, the idea being to capture an enemy and put him in there, and then, as a team, a firing squad, pee on him from a trap door (kudos again, Terry!) in the second floor. We also made wooden pallets to serve as beds for when we were wounded, attended (we imagined) by the Ratchet boys' sisters, Emmy and Dottie, our Red Cross team. But the sisters rarely came around, owing to my mother warning they were too advanced for their ages.

Construction went well. Lots of kids in town dropped by to help us, as I said. Though we had to visit Doc Hopkins' several times for eightpenny nail punctures in our feet — we couldn't give up wearing tennis shoes, so had to take our tetanus shots and iodine swabbings without complaint — and though the three floors of the Fort went up pretty crooked, things got to the high-engineering point of our even pouring cement for a walkway, though the concrete never set.

We were building an addition under the pear tree when the Great Neighborhood Bean War broke out. Bean-Shooting War I should say. The Fort weathered many blistering bean attacks from Billy White's Catholic gang, but too many of our dozen defenders were exhibitionists and felt compelled to fall off the second story and die in dramatic fashion. One such capitulator, Ron Olsen, hit by a volley of lentils, threw himself off the third floor expecting a glorious attention-getting demise, but received for his effort a sprained ankle and, as he limped his way out of the yard, a merciless, stinging barrage of beans at close range.

Though we were able to just barely break the siege against the Fort, we were never able to capture anyone from Billy White's Catholic gang to put in the dungeon behind Terry's prison door. So after the war, which drained all the quarters I'd saved from my quarter-per-week allowance despite using — as the war and negotiations to end it dragged on — the cheaper split-pea instead of the higher-grade bean ammunition (the Ratchet boys had no allowances, their father a logger), we had no recourse but to draw straws, and then threaten to lock the loser, Little Johnny, the younger Ratchet, in the dungeon room and pee on him — an interesting idea to our credit we never took up.

That was just about the end of the active Fort period. The bean-covered yard around the Fort with a number of bent and discarded beanshooters on the grass were the only signs that a battle had taken place. There were no dead kids and the Fort itself hadn't been damaged by the warring, and soon spiders, banana slugs, and snails, which had taken refuge in the dank discarded lumber pile, moved back in.

A couple months later, with Father Frank's church now all but finished on the corner, a Seattle photojournalist, having coffee at the Bee Hive Koffee Shop, heard of the Fort. He came to our house and asked my mother if he could take a picture of the building with my sister and me on the top floor. The photographer got his picture (he didn't get the one of my mother which he had also asked for), but I really didn't feel comfortable with my sister up there with me; not that she wasn't a normal, okay sister (she was that and — to be magnanimous — more), but she hadn't helped build the Fort nor taken part in any way in the Great Neighborhood Bean-Shooting War. But it was peacetime now, and I guess in peacetime you have to bear a lot of things that you don't have to sit still for in time of war.

## 2 ANDY'S

TWO BLOCKS FROM our house and four blocks from school, just down the hill from the Spanish-style, adobe-roofed City Hall that also housed the library and fire station, was a little hangout for teenagers called Andy's. It had two pool tables and a jukebox, but wasn't a "greaser" place at all. Maybe certain things went on there I, as a fifth grader, didn't have the maturity to understand or even notice, or care to notice; but what was important was, thanks to Andy's, I was beginning to appreciate popular music and the fine art of playing pool.

The jukebox tune I most liked was Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill" and the flip-side "I'm Walkin'." I also somehow got bowled over by an instrumental tune called "Theme from The Man with a Golden Arm." I had no idea why the man had a golden arm but I would have thought, if I had thought about it then, it was, perhaps, a baseball pitcher's arm.

Anyway, I played a lot of eight-ball pool there and got pretty good; good enough the high school guys would give me a little change when I beat them. In time, the only person who could regularly best me was the owner, Andy, and when he'd play me, with others gathered round to chuckle and watch, he'd play real serious. Even sweat a little. He didn't like losing to me in front of the customers; he didn't like losing to a fifth grader. But he was very gracious when he did and would give me a free Green River or a candy bar; or he might just say, "Okay. Now go ride your bike somewhere, Shark."

When school let out for the year, I always felt the incredible glory of being free again under June's warm, if cloudy, skies. I loved the last hours of school when you spent it all erasing everything you'd written in pencil in your textbooks and then got your deposit money back. (Too bad you used ink, Timmy.)

A bunch of us would head down to Andy's to listen to the jukebox and play a baseball pinball game that Andy had installed for us tenderfoots. It was a fun place, and I shot pool like a shark, as Andy would say, and it wasn't a hard or tough-guy place as our parents' talk over coffee might have suggested.

And even if it was "tougher" than, say, the Sunshine Ice Cream and Bakery just down the block, I figured a little toughness — whatever exactly that was in the context of Andy's — why, it might come in handy when I met up with any of Billy White's Catholic gang.

Also, Andy's wasn't occupying so much of my time that I wildly neglected other matters in my off-school hours: long rides on my bike to the Wynooche River Valley past the house of my girlfriend, Mary, who played the harp but whose father was a communist (that's another story); Little League baseball practice; swimming at Sylvia Lake State Park (on the kids' side; the other side of the lake had a float and the big kids swam there, and sometimes drowned there, too); even church on Sundays.

Andy's was, to my mind, an improvement over my gang's dependency on Mr. Bowen's Little Store near the high school for the penny candy we needed to carry us through late innings or the bean wars. After getting sick from sugar overdoses, I'd always

swear I was never going back to the Little Store again. But in a day or two, with total amnesia, I'd be robbing my piggy bank — the pig had a cork plugging a hole in its belly — and heading off to the Little Store just three blocks away. When baseball cards became the craze, we chewed so many sheets of flat, pink powdery bubble gum trying to acquire the most famous players that our jaws would hurt all day. The smaller Korean War card packets were better in this regard; they came without gum, just Korean War cards.

But in truth I didn't know, I don't think, what the teens were up to exactly at Andy's. I don't remember many people smoking there, just a couple of girls or guys sometimes outside by their customized cars. My allowance bank was even growing again from the pool games, now with the truce in the Bean-Shooting War, though I fed quite a bit of it back into pinball baseball.

“The Man with the Golden Arm” really triggered my interest in popular music, as I noted, and new tunes became favorites, like the one that began “Lonely rivers flow to the sea, to the sea.” And I didn't even know I had a big sad heart until I'd heard that song. I must have been maturing faster than I thought, but for me growth was still measured by how much faster I could run than anyone else, excluding Patty Abendroth, a girl, which fortunately didn't count.

The high school girls, smelling like flowers in soft pretty sweaters sometimes would come up to me and ask if I would dance. And I would tell them, “If you put on ‘The Man with the Golden Arm,’ I'll give it a try.”

But they usually just laughed and went back to their boyfriends or girlfriends. When Elvis Presley's “Heartbreak Hotel” appeared on the jukebox, it was just about the time one of my friend's sisters in junior high was teaching us how to bop. It was also about the time Billy Davidson and I were cooking toothpicks in pots of water with various fruit extracts to make flavored toothpicks to sell at the newsstand downtown on Saturdays. It was also around then that I was forbidden to frequent Andy's.

When my mother told me I was thus forbidden, I figured she was probably doing the bidding of Dad to some extent. The two of them worked well together. When parents operated separately — as any half-savvy kid will tell you — it left the door ajar for counterarguments as well as tantrums, fasts, and threats to run away to the woods.

My mother said she was sorry, but I'd find other, better ways to spend my time. “You've just got to stop going with your friends to Andy's,” she explained without actually explaining.

“I can't play pool?”

“No. It's not the pool; you can play pool at Randy Hopkins', he's got a pool table.”

“But Mom, that pool table is a miniature. It's not real.”

So that was the end of my Andy's era. Not much later, someone told me there had appeared an article in the *Montesano Vidette* describing something that had happened at Andy's; and later, Andy's teen hangout changed into Judith's Yarn and Knitting Shop with strange tall bolts of fabric in all the windows. I didn't have to be a Mr. Wizard to know that Andy, of “Go ride your bike somewhere, Shark,” wasn't running *that* business.

Whenever I rode past the new store on my bike, seeing what had become of the pool tables, the juke box, and pinball baseball — and even missing old Andy, who was rumored in jail, or at least had got himself run out of town to Aberdeen (a bigger, rougher town) — I felt a momentary sinking of my heart. But happily my gang and I, though we did miss Andy's, still had the promise of the whole wide summer vacation before us, and, putting cards on the spokes of our bike wheels (using clothespins) and colored plastic streamers on our handlebars, and lots of flavored toothpicks in our pockets, we rode off shirtless and joyful into the Chehalis-Wynooche countryside, oblivious to all controversy and loss.

### 3 MUCH ADO

#### I.

IT WAS A very big deal in the way of surprises when Duke Elmsworth, in Santa Claus suit, came to our house tipsy.

The honor usually befell us Christmas Eve. He'd do the Ho, Ho, Ho thing with my sister and me in the front room by the heavily tinsel'd Christmas tree, strung with bubbling tube lights — a tree my father had stealthily felled on Weyerhaeuser land somewhere near Satsop at dusk while my mother drove getaway car and we kids in the backseat sang “Holy Night” — and then Mr. Elmsworth, Santa, would swing through the door to the kitchen where my mom, dad, and a few friends were celebrating.

There'd be a big hurrah and someone shouting, “Santa Claus! Duke Santa Claus,” from the glass-and-ice-cube clinking kitchen, and lots of Ho, Ho, Hos and other boisterous laughter, just as if Saint Nick and his elves were having a fete after sending off the last shipment of toy soldiers and candy canes to Grays Harbor. Once he was in the kitchen, we'd not see him the rest of the evening. He was as good as up the chimney.

I have to say, as much out of character as he was in that red suit, cap, and white beard on the eve of Christ's birth, he never quite masked from me the Duke Elmsworth I feared, the Lord of our hallowed halls, our grade school principal. I got scolded but never paddled by Duke Elmsworth, which recommends him, I dare say, as much as it commends my behavior. Everybody adult said he was a wonderful principal, patient, thoughtful, and lacking in sadism, which meant, I figured, he hadn't killed anyone yet. The power of his office, though — and his thick wooden paddle — could have easily tempted a lesser man into unbridled punitive fits resulting in more and more of us kids wearing books in our pants instead of carrying them in our satchels. (“Go ahead, Sir, right there on my *Dick and Jane Reader*.”)

We kids knew Duke Elmsworth as a large bald-headed menace, roaming the grade school halls like a bear that never had to growl or show its claws. Even when he scolded you, for, say, squirting water at a classmate at the drinking fountain, he did it quietly. He was aware when he spoke to you that your heart would quit beating, so he didn't have to speak up to be heard over it.

“I'm only going to tell you once ...”

That's how it would begin, even when, as in my case, he'd have to tell me more than once. Or, if his memory was keeping up with my offenses, he might say, “I'm not going to tell you again ...”

After that, I'm sure the paddle came off the peg on his wall into play, but like learning where all the electric fences were strung on my grandmother's farm, I learned to stay within the field of safe conduct, which after all is exactly what Duke Elmsworth wanted; it's what the teachers wanted too, and the school board, for that matter, and the PTA. It's what Montesano wanted; it's what the whole country wanted; it was the educational program!

I'm sure without it, us kids would have transmogrified instantly into thugs, forming bicycle and tricycle gangs and burning down at least one of the churches on my block (there were so many in the neighborhood, no one would have missed one). We might have raided the candy store and started open bean-shooting wars outside the firehouse and library (actually we'd done that once until Mr. Jacobson, one of three permanent firemen, asked us to move our war-play down the block so in the event of a fire, the fire truck wouldn't make split-pea soup of us).

Perhaps, without the authority of the paddle, it might have triggered a kissing frenzy; they'd have to bring in the Aberdeen police to stop us. We might have gone to the movies on week nights, and we might have never gone back to school in September, but waited until the Gravenstein apples were all red, ripe, and eaten, and Indian summer had given way to October's rain-black skies.

Some of these things we might have done and some of these things I'm only saying to make a point, of a kind. But whatever way I might describe it, it came down to: Duke Elmsworth was the Law. ("Now children remember that the word 'principal' contains the word 'pal.'") Much scarier than Emperor Ming on "Flash Gordon," (who, come to think of it, we liked better than Flash or his girlfriend). BUT — and this needs to be made part of the record — he was not as scary as those hooded Ku Klux Klan posses, as seen by my sister and me in movies — Klansmen riding around at night in white sheets in the South, burning crosses and shouting unfriendly epithets at the people in their homes who used to be their loyal servants.

## II.

In my second year of school, there was an incident that suggests something of the trepidation that pervaded our early school days. I almost confessed to a crime that I didn't even come close to committing, had never even conceived of as a thing of interest to do, just because of his, the principal's, apparent authority from some dark and higher entity than even the Shadow. "The Shadow knows"; but the dark and higher entity authorizing the principal knows better.

Duke Elmsworth came into our classroom and whispered to dear old Miss Whipple, also a bachelor, that he wanted all the girls in the class to go with her to another classroom; he would stay and have a little talk with us boys. This came while we were shouting out the names of colors on flash cards, shouting a little louder than normal because Miss Whipple was hard of hearing. "Brown! Yellow! Blue!"

The shouting died right there at "blue." The room fell as quiet as the inside of an abandoned boxcar on side-tracks along the Chehalis River, or the inside of an old tumble-down barn in which an owl has eaten all the doves, or the inside of the meat lockers on Main Street, or at the public library when strict Miss Webster was on duty. I swear you could've heard someone in the cloakroom sucking his thumb if someone had been in there doing it. (I wouldn't have minded being in there doing it rather than sitting trapped at my desk facing what looked to be bad music.)

Here is what the principal said: "One of you children used the wastebasket in the lavatory to go to the bathroom in, and it wasn't peeing. This was not a good thing to do; it was a bad thing."

His words cut the elevator cable that was holding my stomach on the ninth floor of the Bon Marché in Seattle. The fear of eternal damnation turned my face, if I could have seen it, as red as the one stoplight in Montesano when it's not green, when it's not yellow. My ears burned like fields of corn stalks set afire in fall. He wanted the boy (he assumed rightly, I figure, that it had to be a boy, though it would have been a good payback joke on us boys if it had been a girl, though I can't picture that!?) to confess.

The guilt I felt was so completely irrational (I would have felt no less terrified if I had done it) that I felt an impulse to confess that I *did* do it as some way to stem the tide of fear sweeping me out to a shark-infested sea, and part of that fear was that in some moment of confused non-repressed lavatory emergency, I'd actually done what I didn't actually do, namely substituted one white porcelain receptacle for a taller less-stable metal one. A confession held out hope of stopping the elevator on the third or fourth floor.

With this kind of neuron-surge, it's hard for a kid to find the rational handle. This was a lot scarier than the local theater's previews of *The Thing*. This was even scarier than red-haired Terry Ratchet, my neighbor, chasing me down the alley with a hatchet from his woodshed, looking every bit like one of the devils in the Sunday school comic books, after I tried beating him up for kicking my dog.

Duke Elmsworth, in demanding the guilty kid stand up and come clean, didn't say anything like "It'll go easier on you if you do." Oh, no. I had the distinct impression that for whoever confessed to this indiscretion, things were not going to go easier at all. Just confessing would probably bring on a seizure like the kind Billy Watson had in the playground running between second and third base with the noon sun too hot for him, apparently, and he falling down and writhing in the base path while Eddie Philips, the third baseman, ran over and tagged him out "just to be sure it wasn't a trick," as he later explained to the school nurse.

So, Duke Elmsworth, who resembled a bear more than any other animal in Seattle's Woodland Zoo, walked on his hind legs slowly up and down the aisles. He stopped now and then to lean over a kid sweating in his desk, or chewing great bites out of his fingernails, or fighting back little second-grade tears. He looked into each kid's face, taking his time like a famous pianist who spends about a half hour to adjust his coattails, the piano seat, his delicate hands before slamming into Rachmaninov's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in C minor, No. 2, Op. 18.

Duke Elmsworth was a he-bear waiting for a salmon to swim out from the shadows. He was the president of a serious and unhappy country declaring war on the Three Stooges ("Enough of their nonsense!"). He was Russia; he was the monthly enema for pinworms. He was liver at suppertime and a long year of rain. And I need not tell you the principal's face was not the Ho, Ho, Ho face of Santa Claus either; it was the red angry face of the Principal from God!

Finally, Duke Elmsworth spoke, "So, none of you did it?"

Every boy shook his head in unison like we were doing "The Hokey-pokey" in the Little Gym without the music. "And no one saw anything?"

Again the heads went hokey-pokey. "Then could anyone please tell me how they think this might have happened?"

Hokey-pokey. We were getting into the rhythm of it now.

“No one has any idea at all?” Hokey-pokey. Hokey-pokey.

“Don’t you care for your school?”

Hokey-pokey. Hokey-pokey. “What?”

There was a moment of confusion as some heads went left and right while others began to nod forward. “Do you want me to get my paddle?”

Now we were in disarray, some heads nodding “yes” and others shaking “no.” Duke Elmsworth was breaking us down!

I have more than once run through my imagination what it would have been like to be the kid who did the deed and confessed he did it, though no confession was ever forthcoming — but I agree with the principal, someone had to have done it. Either that or Duke Elmsworth had a bigger problem than just being principal.

Even as a partisan of outlaws like Billy the Kid and Jesse James, I must say the act was unsavory. But, on the other hand, who really knows the circumstances? And where was the lavatory monitor in all this? Shouldn’t he be grilled for the act occurring on his watch? Or maybe that was the solution: someone was trying to frame the lavatory monitor. Perhaps the lavatory monitor had begun to overstep his authority, watching everyone so closely it was hard to even get the pee flowing during the short recess. But I can’t even remember who our lavatory monitor was. It wasn’t me; I was the kid who cleaned the erasers. Let’s be clear about that.

But for whoever did it, how would they have ever lived it down if found out? If not found out, they might be having a good laugh right now, maybe thinking to get away with it again in a different school. I always brought home a report card that, among other things, was marked slanderously for Unnecessary Talking (a mere, if recurrent, misdemeanor to my mind), but how would the parents of the kid who filled the wastebasket feel when he brought home his report card that said: Gross and unnatural conduct; Johnny may need glasses. The Niagara of shame to the family and to the poor kid would force their immediate emigration to Elma.

If I had been the defense attorney for that kid, I’d definitely go with the insanity plea. My sister and her girlfriends sometimes laughed so hard at pajama parties they’d been known to wet their pants. And then would laugh even harder about the fact that they’d wet their pants. I could get one of them — not my sister — to testify about that kind of insanity.

Just before his leaving the room, Duke Elmsworth explained that the type of behavior exemplified by the wrongful use of the wastebasket was not only bad manners and a delinquent act, but that it posed certain health problems for all of us (which is how we kids viewed the principal). It also blemished the name of the school, teachers, and students alike. “Because no one apparently did it; you are all, in a sense, accessories.”

“Accessories?” a few kids muttered.

“Yes, accessories.” Then showing his own strain a little, he spelled “accessories.” He did this slowly and with unneeded emphasis. “You are all a-c-c-e-s-s-o-r-i-e-s.” He began

to spell it again but broke off.

An empty-handed Duke Elmsworth left the room like a bear leaving a honeycomb that has comb but no honey, and all was as quiet as a tomb. You would have thought we might try laughing it off or at least look around at the probable suspects, but we just sat there like wooden pegs in a cribbage board until Miss Whipple came back trailed by a file of girls, and that should have been some kind of relief, normally, but in truth, we felt embarrassed and hoped they, the girls, didn't know what one of our kind had done.

### III.

Several days later, we were being shown a film — a visual aid, they called it — in the same class, depicting the dropping of the atomic bomb on a Japanese city. Miss Whipple didn't want to show it, but the administration insisted. Of course, we'd watch anything; it was better than flash cards. The grainy film was the work of the Civil Defense people. It instructed us on what to do in the event the next bomb dropped our way instead of on the enemy. It wasn't fun.

After the showing, we were led in practicing getting under our wooden desks and covering our eyes because, they, the Civil Defense people, said the heat-flash from the bomb would blind us or peel us like a grape, even if it didn't land in the playground or on the school house roof. And Davy Lewis, a pretty good cut-up, barked out: "If they ever drop that thing on our school, whoever does it will have to go see Duke Elmsworth."

## 4 COMING TO A STATION NEAR YOU

I CAN'T EVEN now explain the mix-up. I can explain it, but I can't believe we were so mixed up. We had heard around town that television had arrived in Montesano. There had been talk before that it was coming, but the problem of getting reception had always been linked to having a station nearby. This was the source of the mix-up. We kids thought people meant by "station" a "gas station." "To get TV, you have to be close to a station," were the exact words of a mom. We were sure that meant a "gas station," though why we didn't think of "bus station," I can't say. We didn't think of "train station" either because the central one was in Aberdeen, and we didn't think of "a Station of the Cross" because — though we'd been taught something about such stations in Sunday school — we were too young to understand them.

Word spread among us of the imminent arrival. We even sang little ditties like "She'll be coming round the mountain, when she comes, when she comes," substituting "It'll" for "She'll"; and "Santa Claus is coming to town," with "Santa Claus" replaced by "Television's coming to town." And coming that very day! to Pete Baylor and Jimmy Dockers' neighborhood; their neighborhood presumably being closer to a gas station.

A few of us went over to Pete's house after school. We tossed the football around until about four o'clock and then went in and sat in front of the big cabinet radio. It was a wooden radio set with a long horizontal glass tuner. We assumed, since we had never seen a television set, that the picture would appear where the glass for the tuner was. It certainly wasn't going to show up at our knees where the fabric-covered speaker was. There seemed to be plenty of room right above the numbered slash marks to receive a skinny picture. Hard to believe, I know, but we and Montesano were at the end of America; we were the last place to get new movies, new models of car, most news generally. What is more, we lived a long way from Battlecreek, Michigan. Any toy we'd send off for with cereal boxtops, such as baking soda-fueled submarines & frogmen, stamp books, and decoder rings, would take even longer than it seemed to take Roy Rogers, our talkative but much loved barber, to cut our hair. We'd send our coupons off with a little money in great anticipation, but by the time the prizes reached us, we'd grown several inches, gained several pounds, outgrown a pair of shoes, and changed eyeglasses. Fortunately, our brains didn't seem to change much, so (surprise! hurrah!) when the toy in question finally arrived, we may have forgotten when we'd sent for it, or even what it was, but we still knew exactly what to do with it, and would immediately send for something else.

At four-thirty, on the day our senses were forever going to be changed by the new medium, there in the shadow of the courthouse, we turned on the radio to "The Lone Ranger." Some five or six of us crowded into a sofa and a big armchair or seated ourselves on the viola case that belonged to Mrs. Baylor, a University of Washington graduate, who always kept a box of Graham Crackers, a loaf of Wonder Bread, and a big jar of Skippy Peanut Butter for us in the kitchen, and who, after work, drank beer like a dad from the bottle. We always said Mrs. Baylor had a way with kids, though we'd heard mothers say that with her college education and talent for the viola, she was wasting her life working at

her husband's auto supply shop.

Anyway, there we were and about as excited as on the last day of school. We were listening to, and staring intently at, the radio. The Lone Ranger, Tonto, and Silver were embroiled in one of their usual harrowing episodes, but all any of us could see were the numbers and slashes in the murky yellow light of the tuner. We waited and waited, only partly following the plot. We kept hoping that the reception problem would suddenly clear up and there in the living room of Pete Baylor's would be the Lone Ranger in his mask, Tonto in his feathered headband, and Silver, white as snow, chomping on his bit.

"Why isn't there a picture?"

"It'll come. Just hold your horses."

"Something is wrong."

"How can you say that? You don't even know what television is."

"Well, this ain't it."

Finally, it was "Hi Ho, Silver away" and the program was over. The program was over! We hadn't seen a thing we hadn't imagined in our radio-trained minds. We felt robbed; experiencing that emptiness a kid feels on opening a Christmas package with only a pair of socks nesting inside. If television planned to come to our town, it had just lost five or six viewers, is how we felt.

Our irritation subsided once back outdoors, dissipating in the brisk air, but it was getting too dark to resume tackle football, so again we felt disappointment.

We must still be too far from a gas station, is what we concluded, grabbing our bikes by their chilled handlebars, riding home in the last autumn light.

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