

Memories of Montana and my father -

THOMAS JOHN OBACH

by Paula Obach

October 1998

We lived one mile from the Canadian border in Meharry, Montana, in Phillips County. We used to see the Royal Canadian Mounted Police securing the border - often they would stop by for a meal. They allowed us to freely cross the border to buy coal from the Canadian mines. Sometimes, Canadian jail escapees would ask for a handout, at that time we didn't know they were escapees. They would eat and be on their way - walking fast.

Our family and Uncle Mike Wachula's family had range cattle grazing on our ranch - extending many miles and some into Canada. Very few fences. There would be the annual 'spring' round-up to brand the newborn calves and later in the year the round-up of cattle for shipment to the slaughterhouse.

This was all routine until the sheep people began encroaching on cattle country. Sheep graze much closer to the ground than cattle, taking the grass longer to regrow. A group called the 'Black & White Outfit' gave the ranchers a bad time until the ranchers fought back by getting on their horses and driving the sheep pell mell. I used to feel sorry for the sheepherders and their dogs. One time when things were really bad, dad sent me to Uncle Mike, about a mile away, with the message, "Come quick on your horse and bring your gun!" They fired the guns to scare the sheep.

There were herds of wild horses crossing back and forth between our ranch and into Canada. Sometimes we young ones would walk to Canada to visit a young family and always taking our faithful dog, Reuben. This made the horses nervous and they would make a large circle around us and snort at us. As we kept walking in their circle they kept us surrounded. The only time they would break away is if we sent Reuben into their midst. They'd run like crazy and turn and snort some more.

I remember during haying season I would help dad by climbing on top of the hay rack to trample down the forkfuls of oats or

wheat he'd toss up. This was just harvested and put in huge stacks to feed the livestock in winter. Once Rose was helping dad when he accidentally threw a rattlesnake on the hayrack with a fork full of oats. She frantically scrambled off and dad found and killed the rattler.

Uncle Mike was a rambunctious Russian. He was a very good horseman but not really a kindly family man. He was married to my mother's half-sister. He, dad and two other ranchers would sometimes play poker. One time he got annoyed at dad - took the knife he always carried, threw it across the table at dad and very angrily said, "Kill me then then!"

Some Relatives

Pete Walchuck was dad's nephew, Edith, Pete's sister too. Edith was married to 'Summy' Boyd who was an FBI agent. She was so very proud of him. I can't remember how he died. Summy must have been his nickname. I remember dad had a woman relative in South America. Same last name, I never knew the relationship I vaguely remember reading something about her (Mickie thinks she was mom's relative).

Edith lived with mom financially during her stay. I think she was a little emotionally unstable.

(ED. note; these incidents took place in eastern Montana in the 1920's)

Aunt Paula

Paulin Julia Obach was the fifth of eleven children of Anna and Thomas Obach. She was born on May 21, 1920 in the community of Obach in Eastern Montana on her parents homestead. Those that loved her most commonly called her Paula, or especially Aunt Paula.

Anna, her mother had immigrated from the Ukraine to Canada where she had met and married Paula's father, Thomas. Thomas, who was born and raised in Poland, had immigrated from Ukraine to Canada. The young Obach family then immigrated from Canada to Eastern Montana to begin a new life where Paula was born in 1920. The community of Obach

was named after her family who had donated their original sod house for the local school.

Paula began school at the Obach School in 1925 and continued her elementary education at the school until graduating from the 8th grade in 1933. It was then onto high school at Hinsdale High School. She was raised on the farm with her siblings and shared in the daily chores. The winters in Eastern Montana can be brutally cold and the summers can be intensely hot. The success of an Eastern Montana farm rests solely on the amount of rain. After several years of drought the Obach family decided to sell the homestead in 1936 and move to Charlo in Western Montana where the water supply was more plentiful and dependable. This meant that Paula would have to transfer from Hinsdale High to Charlo High School where she graduated in 1937. Paula continued her education by attending Montana State Teachers College in Dillon, Montana earning a teaching degree.

Paula's first teaching assignment was at the Mountain Brook School, a one-room school in the forested mountains north of Kalispell, Montana. Paula enjoyed teaching but had trouble adjusting to the isolation of a one-room school in a small community. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the isolation was broken by the outbreak of World War II. Paula followed several of her siblings to Seattle to work for Boeing Aircraft Company as 'Rosie the Riveter'. Paula's actual job was in the tool department of the division that made bombers for the US Army Air Force.

At the close of the war Paula found herself in Hawaii but shortly returned to a job in San Francisco Where her sister Marge had settled.

Paula worked for several years in San Francisco before transferring to Los Angeles with the Atlantic Richfield Petroleum Company. She had now joined several of her siblings who had settled in the Los Angeles area after the war.

A quick anecdote about Aunt Paula. After the end of the war, Aunt Paula was offered and purchased stock in a Philippine oil company. She bought \$500 worth of stock, probably her life savings at the time. Everyone ridiculed her telling her how foolish she had been. Five years later the \$500 stock investment was worth \$12,000. There were no further comments about Aunt Paula's stock investments.

Aunt Paula never married but she did have several suitors. She did go on a blind date with Otto Graham of NFL football fame. At one point Aunt Paula was even engaged, but the engagement was broken when the fiancée continued borrowing money - and forgetting to pay it back. It never appeared that Aunt Paula needed a man to be happy or feel fulfilled. She always took a lot of comfort and satisfaction in large and loving extended family.

While working for Atlantic Richfield, which eventually became ARCO, Aunt Paula lived in several sections of the west Los Angeles area. At one time she lived in the Wilshire district before moving to the Koreatown area. She lived in the Koreatown area after her retirement from ARCO. Aunt Paula's sister, Helen, or Mickie as she liked to be called, invited her to live with her in Mission Viejo. They lived comfortably together until Mickie passed away from lung cancer. Since Mickie's condo was up for sale after her death, Aunt Paula moved to Colton to live with her sister Elka, or Elsie in English, or Pat, as she liked to be called. The sisters lived comfortably together until Pat had to sell her mobile home.

Aunt Pat moved into a small apartment and Aunt Paula moved to Mission Commons, a retirement community that looked like a resort hotel. Aunt Paula was very happy at the Missions, as it was called. There were shuttle buses that took her shopping, to medical appointments, to church, to entertainment and other venues. When Aunt Pat could no longer live on her own, the sisters were moved in together until Aunt Paula passed away on December 9, 2007.

My Aunt Paula, a very shy person, a very loving person, and a person you could have a wonderfully quiet conversation with. Aunt Paula always showed such appreciation, whatever the occasion. I remember my wife and my sister and me taking the aunts to the apple country for the afternoon. It was a beautiful, sunny day to visit the forested mountains, a reminder of the mountains back home.. We treated the aunts to lunch and they kept insisting on paying their share. It was truly a joyous occasion to treat the aunts.

Memories Of Montana -

HOW I GOT FROM THERE TO HERE
by Paula Obach December 1998

Christmas in Meharry

The Wachula children would come over for Christmas Eve, not the adults, there was never a Santa or presents. I remember a Christmas tree in the schoolhouse and they lit real candles on the tree. The folks traditionally cooked wheat, whole wheat we had harvested, and we all ate some for Christmas Eve, wheat along with the regular meal, then dad would toss a spoonful to the ceiling and if the wheat stuck it meant a good crop year.

Two weeks later we children would go to Wachula's for their Christmas. They celebrated the Orthodox Christmas rather than the Roman Catholic, and we looked forward to spending the night. I think mom and 'babu' were also Greek orthodox then converted to Roman Catholic - they really revered the Pope.

The Obach and Waschula families seldom visited. Aunt Polly Waschula was a midwife when mom had babies and mom did the same for Aunt Polly. I don't think any of us were born in a hospital.

We all got new Easter hats - through the mail order catalog, even if we didn't go to church. Pete and Pearl Walchuk and family would often visit Easter Sunday - but not the Wachulas. There were no churches close by.

The Obach School

We went to school, the Obach School, from first through eighth grade at old sod house that used to be the family residence. It consisted of a small room for a teacherage, teachers lived there and some ate meals with us. A little larger room was the schoolroom, with desks, blackboards, etc.

The various teachers would have Christmas plays and we would all participate. the adults held dances there, too for the locals mostly. Music by an old record player with huge records.

Hinsdale School for Hinsdale.

We went to school in Hinsdale, about 50 miles away. I remember living in a residence hall with gals downstairs and guys upstairs. I was one of the cheerleaders at the guys basketball games. Still have my 'H' for Hinsdale.

Charlo High

The family moved to Chalo my senior year. The Charlo valley area and other small towns used to be a Flathead Indian Reservation, I think. I think the Indians moved to the foothills, sold the land back to the government, that then sold it to us. Charlo was named after an Indian chief.

I played basketball with the Charlo girls team, played guard, and made some out of town trips with the guys team. Traveled separately.

Mountain Brook School

After graduating from Montana State Normal College, Dillon, Montana, a two year college, I taught school for one term at the Mountain Brook School at the the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. It was a one room school, grades 1 through 8, about 12 children. I got 'board & room' with a family across the road. It was a beautiful and peaceful place. I used to spend weekends with sister Rose and Bob in Kalispell.

I stayed home and worked for one year after high school graduation - helped mothers by baby-sitting while they worked the fields and farms. I got to attend college after mom somehow got tuition fee so I shared a room on the campus with this a neighbor friend, but I worked both years while in college. I cleaned ladies rest rooms for a short time then washed dishes and worked in the kitchen of our residence all. I also babysat neighboring families kids.

WW II

I served with the Hollywood Canteen. Acted as a hostess to our servicemen, served coffee. Once we gathered at Marion Davies (movie star) home on the beach. They had a special dance for the blind veterans and I remember one brought me home in a taxi. So sweet.

I worked for Boeing Aircraft in Seattle, during the war, in the Tool Room, parts department. In building one of the airplane someone, a riveter, signed their name to the part they were working on. It caught on. Everyone signed their name till the plane

was totally signed. My signature is to the left side of the cockpit. That airplane never went to war. It was used and flown all over to sell War Bonds.

California, Here I Come

Sister Mikie was a stewardess for an airline in Anchorage. She and the airline owner arranged for me to fly one time as a stewardess from LA to Anchorage so I could visit her there. One of my passengers was a little boy traveling alone with a sign in front, with his name and destination. We stopped to refuel enroute and most people disembarked, but one fool stayed on and lit a cigarette, after being warned not to smoke during the refueling, I was so shocked I just took it out of his mouth and smashed it out !

Misc travels

I was in Anchorage in July, the "Land of the Midnight Sun". It's so light at night they played basketball games at midnight.

I sailed the Matson Line to Hawaii (Honolulu). Five days sailing and loved it, and I lived there six months. I worked for the Honolulu Iron Works Company in their Inventory Department, and visited the submarine sunk by the Japanese when they attacked Pearl Harbor. The USS Arizona, they let us go below deck, it was so sad, especially since there are still our men's bodies there in the hold of the ship way below.