

THE FISHER STOVE STORY

by Claudia Lynn

Bob Fisher's imagination, determination, and hot headedness so far had led him into trouble, made a mess of his life, his marriages, his jobs. But it was those qualities that made him an inventor, an entrepreneur, a success. And then nearly killed him.

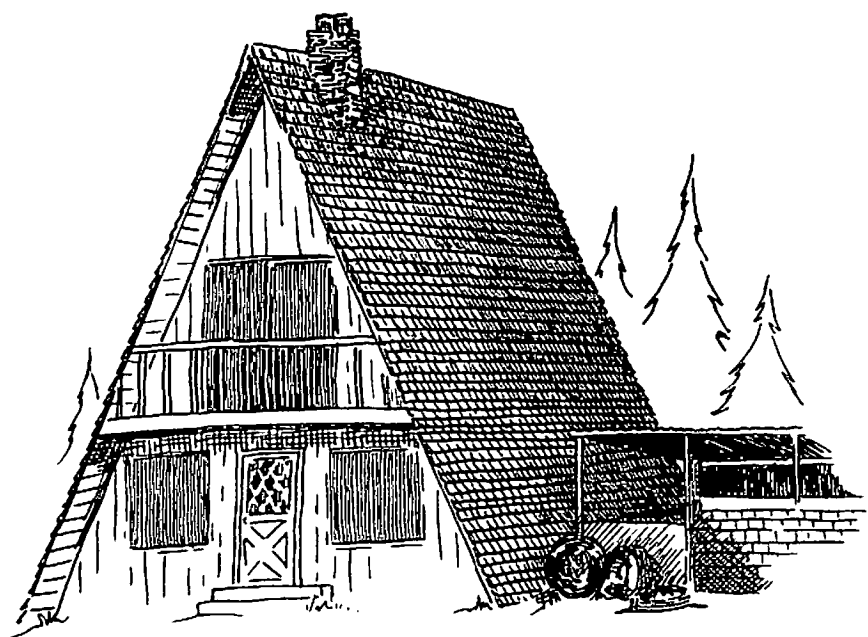
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CHAPTER I

Bob Fisher shivered as he stepped out of the bathtub. He hated baths. Regular bathing was not part of his Western way of life. But he had come inside covered in mud and pitch after cutting a supply of firewood in the forest out back of his two and a half acre property in Upper Camp Creek, about twenty miles from Springfield, Oregon.

He rubbed the towel briskly over his stocky body and curly, dark hair. He couldn't get dry. He still felt damp and chilled even after he put on his tee-shirt and levis. He slipped on his boots before crossing the cold wooden floor and stood in front of the new stone fireplace he had just installed in his A-frame house. Damn! It's colder than a bear's ass, he thought.

Outside, the October rains made the fields and distant hills look dark and dismal. The vine maple trees were dropping their leaves and soon the branches would be bare.

The 6:00 p.m. newscast on the television was about the Arab oil embargo, the energy crisis, inflation and recession. Things looked bad in America in this year of 1973. Maybe the good times were over. But then it all had been overdone. Technology, taxes, credit, welfare, luxuries. Everybody had been living too high, too long.

Now even Steelcraft was hit. Yesterday the boss asked Bob, as foreman, to lay off some of his welders. Bob hated laying anybody off. He felt too damn sorry for the guys and their families.

Suddenly Bob turned glum; depression came over him. A familiar feeling. A mood he spent six months wallowing in not too long ago. Two bad marriages, reaching thirty-two and not having a pot

to piss in. Six months wondering if he was a misfit, doubting his sanity and if he had a place in this world. Only his two kids gave him a reason to keep going.

Carol, Bob's wife, handed him a clean checkered shirt. It was still warm from the iron. Her rosy face and pleasant smile added an extra sense of warmth and well being. Since he married Carol a year ago, he was getting his strength back, his confidence, his wholeness. She gave him stability, like a rock to hold onto.

He knew he had to pull himself out of the dumps. What he needed was a challenge, something to get into. Work had always been his healer, his escape, even when he felt down and outcast as a kid. All kinds of work — farming, succoring filbert trees, feeding chickens and turkeys, building, logging, barbering, working as a mill hand and eventually becoming a millwright.

He stoked the fire and added another piece of fir. He heard the fan of the oil furnace go on. On and off, on and off. It happened every time he got the fireplace going. The chimney was drawing heat out of the living room.

“Damn fireplace isn't worth two bits! Stand here and burn your balls while your ass freezes off,” he said.

Jesse, his eight year old boy, giggled and looked up with adoring brown eyes at his Dad. Kelly, also eight, still blushed a little at her new father's language. Tammy, Bob's daughter of nine years, was well accustomed to her dad's vocabulary and went on studying her spelling.

Bob took a pinch of snuff out of his can of Copenhagen and put it inside his lower lip, then he looked around his A-frame house. Still only a shell. He and Carol had been building on little by little, putting in the plumbing, electrical wiring, kitchen cabinets and the fireplace. Three times their application for a small loan from Pacific First Federal was rejected because of Bob's past bad credit record. Finally it came through after Carol wrote a letter assuring them of Bob's change of character and her personal involvement. But the money was buying less and less. Materials were going up. And Carol deserved better. She was a real lady.

“How about if I lay off a while? Finish this place off. I'm making

\$45 a day but I could save \$100 by working at home.”

Carol looked up questioningly. She was stirring a stew. Two days after he got this job they were married. They had figured they could just make it with the social security check Carol received from Kelly’s deceased father and from the \$150 rent coming in from Carol’s place. They were \$15 short, so Bob had even pledged to give up beer. Once in a while, however, he had weakened. They were still paying off the bills his second wife had run up for clothes and entertainment, for the pickup . . .

Bob saw her concern. He was about to give up the idea. But Carol’s face brightened up.

“It’s up to you. Whatever you think,” she said. Her assurance made him confident, eager again.

“And you know one thing I’m gonna build? A stove! A wood stove that’ll heat this house.” He rammed another piece of fir into the fireplace. “And it won’t burn a cord of wood a month like this bastard!”

Carol didn’t look too enthused. “I hope it won’t be dirty. Smoke and soot all over the place.”

“You call that beat up old oil furnace clean? Blows dust all over! Our fuel bill is eighty bucks a month. And you heard the news — it’s going to get higher.”

Carol came from behind the counter that parted the kitchen from the living room. She wiped her hands on her brightly flowered apron.

“Who’s going to get up and start it in the morning?” she teased.

“My stove is going to hold a fire overnight. And it’s not going to be made out of cheap tin, either. I want to build something strong. My stove is going to last forever. I’m going to build a stove like you’ve never seen before.

“Where are you going to put it?”

“I’ll make it fit into the fireplace — hook it up to the fireplace flue.”

Bob waited for Carol’s approval. He never once had been discouraged or put down by her. She always seemed to draw out his best side, saw only the good in him.

She knew he liked tinkering, a project. Last spring he found a cheap buy on a river boat for fishing on the McKenzie. He wanted to build a trailer and had an idea for a new type of axle. But it wasn't until she encouraged him that he finally did it. He was in seventh heaven working on it. And his leaf spring axle worked great.

"Well, go ahead with it then," Carol said, returning to the kitchen stove. "Just build one I can cook on — so we don't have to depend on the electric company at all."

"I can make it two levels to create different temperatures — the air currents might work better."

He excitedly began to draw pictures on Tammy's school notebook paper.

"I want a nice design — not a round pot belly or just a box," he said.

Then he made a list of material and equipment he would need. His doubts and glumness came upon him again.

"I still have my welder but I'll need a cutting torch and a welding hood. It'll take money," he said.

"The Lord will provide," Carol replied with certainty. She put the pot of stew on the table along with hot biscuits and called the kids to eat.

The next morning Bob approached the supervisor at Steelcraft a bit timorously. He seemed to get tongue-tied and nervous around his superiors.

He didn't see the supervisor in the factory. He waved as he passed by the men who were already welding on the frames for trailer beds. Not much to do. The orders for log trailers had fallen off.

The supervisor, a short, dark-haired man, was intently leaning over some papers on his desk in the office. He stopped scratching his head and looked up at Bob with a worried face.

"Say, I think I'll lay off awhile," Bob said. Both hands were tucked in his back pockets.

"No, you can't," the supervisor said.

"Why not?"

“When I said I wanted to lay off men, I didn’t mean you. I need you.”

Bob was the best welder there. For some reason, everywhere Bob worked, he tried harder, put out more than the others. Like he had to prove he was worth something, get approval.

“I’ll just lay off for a while. I want to work on my A-frame but I’ll be back when things are lookin’ up again.”

“You be here Monday!” the superintendent said. He got out of his chair and poked his finger into Bob’s chest.

The guy normally wasn’t mean or ornery. He must be on edge, Bob thought. Well, he better not take it out on me! He felt himself heating up inside. He hated anyone to dominate him, push him around. This guy didn’t own him and wasn’t going to tell him what to do. He resented anyone in authority treating him like a lowly inferior. All his life he dreamed of telling some big-headed boss, “You can take this job and stick it up your ass” and then walk off. But he never had. He became flustered too easily. He could get so damn mad he couldn’t see straight. He was afraid he would lose control and hit the guy in the face.

This time he was going to handle it. He was going to stay rooted right there to the floor and stand up to him.

“Nope, I don’t think I’ll come back Monday,” he said.

The supervisor threw up his hands abruptly, turned away and sat back down to his desk.

“Problems, problems. What’ll be next,” he grumbled. “Okay, Fisher. Go collect your pay.”

Carol was waiting outside in the pickup. She waited until he pulled out before she spoke.

“How did it go?”

She listened, capturing his feelings, ready to side and sympathize with him. Once again she reassured him that he had made the right decision.

They headed straight for Square Deal to pick up some lumber.

They had agreed to finish off the interior walls, the bathrooms, enclose the back porch where the washer and dryer were now sitting in the open, put down carpeting, and maybe build a deck off the upstairs master bedroom where they both could look out toward the hills, the sky and the farmland that was once Fisher property.

Then he would make the stove. Thinking about it filled him with anticipation and impatience. It was like having a goal, a reason to finish in a hurry. Anyway, working on the house would give him time to think about his idea. He liked to think about things a long time before making a decision. It bothered him to be wrong or fail at anything.

The salesman at Square Deal was helping a customer in the wall panel department. Bob asked him if he had any rough cedar, the salesman pointed outside to a pile of reject mill ends.

“Got fencing number three,” he said. “How much you want?”

“About twenty bucks worth.”

“It’s five cents a board foot. Help yourself,” the salesman said.

Carol rummaged through the pile and picked out the prettiest pieces while Bob loaded them onto the pickup. They kept adding one, two pieces more. Bob lost count of the board feet but knew they were running over.

When Bob went back in, the salesman was still occupied. Bob lay the twenty dollars down on the counter, hurried out the door, then he and Carol took off. What the hell, he told himself, someday he’d make it up in some other way — to someone in the world who really needed it.

All during the six weeks that he and Carol worked on the A-frame, Bob kept talking about the stove. As he measured and ran the arm saw through the cedar board that Carol was holding, he said, “I want to use steel plate. Cast iron cracks and holes burn through easily.”

They went to collect barn boards from an old barn Bob’s grandfather and dad had built 60 years ago across the creek. As Bob

nailed them up on the bathroom walls, he figured aloud, "I don't want a grate in my stove. Better to line it with fire bricks. They hold the heat and protect the metal from corrosion."

Hanging up the mirror set inside a frame made out of a horse halter and tacking stirrups and horse shoes up for towel and wash cloth racks, he said, "I'll have a hand fit, airtight door seal — make it more efficient."

On the trip through the woods to find a piece of yew wood for the handrailing along the stairway and to cut fir trunks for the railing around the bedroom deck, he remarked, "My stove will have drafts that can be controlled, so the heat can be turned up or down."

Each time he went into town for more nails, bolts, wiring and chains to hang carved overhead light fixtures, he would shop at various hardware stores to look at any wood stoves being sold to get some ideas. But there were very few available.

"Sorry," nearly all the salesmen said. "I wish we had some to sell. People are coming in and asking for them lately."

They usually sold screens, tools, grates or glass doors for fireplaces. Sometimes, he noticed electric heat circulators on sale. Hell, they are still using electricity, he thought.

Some nights he couldn't sleep, mulling his stove over in his mind. He spent evenings drawing out blueprints, diagrams, figuring the proper dimensions.

Finally, they were almost finished with the house. Only a few more things to hang — old things that he and Carol had been collecting: an old kerosene lamp, washboard and wringer, an antique wood match box, a sickle, saw, a block and tackle that had been discarded in the old barn. Carol had a few pots she had made in a pottery class, some brass bells from India, and an old '41 license plate she had found along the roadside.

The loan was used up, but Bob's first unemployment check came through. With \$72 he and Carol went to town to get hooks and pick up a few groceries. Before returning home they stopped at the Springfield Welding Supply store. It couldn't hurt to at least check out the prices.

Bob browsed around the store awhile. When he came back, Carol was standing beside a torch, an acetylene tank and a welding hood.

“What the hell are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m making a down payment on your equipment.” she said.

“What? That money has got to last the week. What’ll the kids eat?”

“We’ll make do. We’ve still got that quarter beef in the freezer and all that food I canned from our garden last summer. We’re not going to starve.”

Bob still had misgivings. But Carol buoyantly told the salesman to go ahead and start loading the equipment into the pickup. “If you’re going to build a stove, then get with it,” she said.

There was something else worrying Bob. “I still need steel plate, angle iron for the legs and channel iron for the door” he said.

“Maybe we can charge it,” Carol suggested.

“Hell, no. I hate paying interest,”

Bob looked at the expectation on Carol’s face, then at the shiny, sturdy new equipment in back of his truck. It made him anxious to get going. His dream was becoming possible. The time was here.

“Let’s go ask Mom to help out,” he said.

He drove to the end of Hayden Bridge Road. He remembered when he was a child it was a dirt road. Their twenty acres used to be all countryside — filbert or walnut orchards, alfalfa and bean fields all the way down to the river. Now it was a new housing development. He burned at the thought of it. Damn idiots! What a waste of rich loam soil. Why didn’t they put houses on the hills where you can’t grow anything?

They stopped in front of a forty foot mobile home at the edge of the old twenty acres. His mom had kept one acre for herself. He took notice of the condition of her aluminum awning and the yard. Now that she and Dad were separated, it was up to Bob and his brother Donny to take care of her place.

His mother opened the screen door and waited for them to come

in. As usual, her house was spotless. She wore the same knit pants, blouse and sweater that fit her years ago. She never seemed to put on any weight. She was busy making a patchwork quilt. Always busy. Work, work. That was all she knew. Even as a small boy he had marvelled at her working in the brooders — flushing them out regularly, mixing milk mash, carrying the droppings to the garden as fertilizer. At one time she had as many as three thousand turkeys. A year before Bob was born she had a miscarriage from hauling hundred pound feed sacks to feed them. On Fridays she used to dress about one hundred chickens to take to the Saturday market where women rented stalls to sell their homemade wares. She used to make her own soap, sauerkraut in a crock, butter and cottage cheese. He could remember splitting wood to feed their old Monarch stove for her to boil water for washing clothes and to heat the old flatiron.

Bob noticed the cigarette burning in the ashtray. He wished she would give them up at her age of sixty six. But he didn't say anything. It was a touchy subject, one which his father and mother had quarreled over for years and which finally sparked off the big battle leading to their divorce only last year. It came after forty nine years of marriage. Of course, Bob knew the smoking was only a side issue, a small thing. What really was at the root of the problem had been building up over the years. Resentments, bitterness, hurt feelings toward one another over hardships, the back-breaking work, the disappointments. They both had been ambitious, starting this or that scheme to get ahead until they reached an unbearable point. It was too much, and rather than drawing them together, it had torn them apart.

Immediately Ann poured out a cup of coffee for Bob and Carol. Black, strong. They sat around her kitchen table. What the hell anyone built living rooms for, Bob didn't know.

Carol and Ann talked about the quilt she was making. Carol worked hard at getting along with Bob's relatives because she knew how much they meant to Bobby. And they liked her. The most important thing was she wasn't lazy. And she didn't try to be a

sexpot like Bob's last wife. And then, too, she had straightened Bob out.

"Mom, you know the stove idea I've been telling you about? I need some money for it," Bob said.

Bob was a little worried. In the past he had been a spendthrift. Money didn't mean much to him. Maybe she felt he would never amount to anything, that her money would be wasted.

"Sure, I'll help you," she said without hesitation. "I'm glad you're going to do something with your stove idea. I could give you a little out of my savings."

"I don't know how much it will be yet. Maybe around a hundred."

Ann got up to get her purse. "I'll write you out a blank check," she said. "You fill in what you need."

Bob was moved by her faith in him but didn't say anything. They were not a mushy, openly affectionate family. Yet they never failed to back each other up in time of need. Bob wished he could make something of himself, make her proud of him. She needed something to lift up her life. There had been so much misery. The worst was when Bob's younger sister, Joyce, died from rat poisoning at the age of three. Ann had consoled herself that maybe others would learn from her experience, but only a few weeks later, she read in the newspaper of another child who died of exactly the same thing.

Bob looked at his watch. Still only a quarter to four. He left Carol there at his mom's while he went to American Steel. He knew exactly what he wanted — a piece of 4' by 8' quarter inch plate and a piece of 4' by 4' of 3/8" thick plate, angle iron for the legs and channel iron for the door seal. The price of steel was up, and he felt guilty as he filled in the amount of \$118 on his mother's check. Uncertainty and self-doubts plagued him again, and he wondered if he would ever get the money back to her. Maybe he ought to give up this stupid idea that was causing hardship to his kids, his mother. But he thought of Carol. She was waiting for him to make some fantastic stove. By God, he was going to do 'er too. It was going to be a great stove — he just knew it.

The next day was miserable weather. It was one of those dark, dreary days that brought Bob low in spirit. He poked along at pounding in the hooks, puttered around at tacking weather stripping on the door — putting off the time to go out and start building the stove. What he needed was a couple of beers to perk him up. It tasted bitter. He was not used to drinking anymore. He thought of his pledge to give up beer when Carol and he married. Just goes to show he was no angel.

His enthusiasm improved after the second one. “Guess I better get to it,” he said to Carol.

He and Carol set up his gear outside on the concrete slab meant to someday be a carport on one side of the A-frame. There was a layer of water over it. It was still drizzling. Carol wore a plastic raincoat that Bob used for fishing.

“You’ll need a work bench,” she said.

“Hell, I’m rarin’ to go right now. I don’t want to take time to build a work bench,” he said. He began setting up his torch.

Carol came back dragging a chrome dinette table. “How about using this?” she said.

It was Mom’s table she had given them to store after the divorce. Well, he would try to be careful. Bob threw a piece of plywood siding over the top.

Cutting the steel went slowly. Drops of rain ran down his goggles, and it was difficult to see exactly where to aim the torch. He wanted to cut precisely so that none of the steel was wasted. And it was his nature to want a perfect job — clean and neat.

The pieces were ready for welding. Using a long extension cord, he hooked the welder into the outlet for the clothes dryer around back. He had decided it would be best to tack or “skip” weld to allow for the expansion and contraction of the metal when heated by fire. A continuous joint would warp. But his hands were damp, his levi jacket was soaked through, and the stinger was wet. When he held the welding rod, he felt a shock run through his hands and up his arms. Each time he swore, Carol grimaced in sympathy.

“This won’t do, Bobby. You need a shelter,” she finally said.

Bob was into it now. He didn’t want to stop. He liked to give

something all he had. Distraction, side problems broke the spell. Much of his intense concentration would be lost.

So Carol took it upon herself to rummage through a pile of odds and ends around the back. She found an old half piece of plywood and two-by-four poles to hold the plywood up over where Bob was working. Then she stood there gripping and bracing the poles against the strong wind.

As Bob welded the firebox together, he continually asked Carol's opinion. "How does the two-level top look? Shall I tip the drop piece at an angle or have it vertical?" They settled on about 22 degrees off vertical.

"What do you think of the shape? Does it look ugly — too heavy?"

Each time, Carol answered in a positive and constructive way. It kept up his fervor to continue working.

By afternoon the November wind had died and the rain had stopped. Carol's hands and feet were cold. Her pant legs were soaked up to her knees.

"I'm going inside," she said.

But before she was in the kitchen long enough to get the floor swept, Bob came in. He was distraught.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"This stupid thing looks like an ugly black box. It isn't going to be worth a damn," he said.

"Yes it is. It's going to be everything you said."

She got him talking about it. Going over the advantages of the stove made him enthused again.

"Come on, let's go back out together," she said.

Carol went outside again. Bob noticed he worked better if she stayed with him. He wanted to finish this project. There had been others when he reached a certain stage and lost interest. He was a dabbler. He became hopeful about an idea but soon afterwards the challenge was gone and the project was never completed.

Finally the fire box was finished. Bob chose to put the pipe outlet on the side because the length of the stove would cover more of the fireplace opening. He could have put it on either side or the back —

but not on top. He wanted the outlet low and extending horizontally into the firebox — then less heat would escape up the chimney. Just so he made the outlet higher than the door so that the smoke would go up the pipe and hopefully not out the door.

Next day came the door. This was going to be his masterpiece. But the detail work was painstaking, and it took two days. First he cut out the door opening. He decided he didn't want to use any asbestos, screws or bolts in his stove. They created air holes and lessened the control of the fire. The answer was in hanging the door on a soddered hinge. He used two nine inch spikes from an old bridge plank as rivets.

He made it airtight by a triple seal. The channel iron that framed the inside of the hanging door had to be hand-fitted into the groove of the channel iron that framed the door opening.

Now, how was he to make two controllable draft openings without using screws or sliding panels that would not completely close off any incoming air? He cut two moon shaped holes into each side of the lower part of the door so the air would reach the wood at a level for maximum combustion. It had occurred to him to weld a bolt in between the two holes, using a nut on the inside of the door. Then he could screw a pipe cap up and down the threads, thereby closing or opening the two holes. Immediately Carol was dispatched to Springfield to bring back two pipe caps.

Now the gravity latch had to catch at exactly the right point to lock out all air. He found a half inch round stock rod off his boat and soddered it on for a door handle. But there had to be something to protect the hand. So again Carol took off in the pickup for town to find a chrome ball to put on the end of the handle.

Bob went ahead and began welding angle iron onto the corners of the firebox, letting it extend about four inches past the bottom to become the legs. He heard the crunch of a car pulling up over the gravel. Carol was making better time, he reflected. Then he recognized his father's '68 Ford pickup. Bob was pleased but not surprised. His father lived only two houses down the road. And in the past, hardly two or three days went by without one visiting the other.

But then since Mom and Dad's divorce, he and his dad didn't get together as often. Baxter had been wrapped up in a woman about twenty years younger than himself. She seemed presentable enough, but Bob and his brother Don and his sister Delores couldn't stomach someone else other than Mom with him.

They didn't want to give it much importance — hopefully it was just a fling. Baxter had fancied himself as a ladies' man all his life. Now maybe he was getting it out of his system.

Bob hoped that someone else would not get a hold over the Fisher land that was left. Baxter had already sold off the 150 acre parcel across the road which the kids hated to see get in the hands of another name other than Fisher. Nearly the whole Upper Camp Creek was owned by uncles, cousins and Bob's brother. Bob himself only had two and a half acres. But it had always been Bob's dream to own land, to farm, maybe raise horses. It wasn't that he expected anything from his dad. After all, it was his land to do with as he wanted. It was up to the kids to make it on their own. But it was just that the Fisher land was three generations old now. And Bob liked the idea of family tradition.

Baxter walked slowly over to where Bob was working. He had on his bib overalls. Bob noticed how stooped he was. The spring in his stride was lessening now at seventy-one. Bob recalled how in his childhood his father had seemed strong and invincible to him. He could do the work of three men. There was a presence about him that commanded respect and obedience from the children even without harsh words or punishment. Bob could not remember one lickin' from his Dad. Sometimes, however, his eyes could burrow right through you.

There wasn't anything his dad couldn't fix with baling wire or a piece of scrap iron or timber. He could figure out anything mechanical — repair a water pump or generator, improvise an engine to cut timber for fences or a barrel stove for a hunting trip.

Bob guessed he took after his dad in that way. But in other ways he was more like his mother. Like when it came to feelings, Baxter seemed slightly detached. He never let things bother him or lost control of his temper. There was never a sign of dark moods; Bob

could not remember a day when his dad wasn't chirpy.

"Yep, Bobby. What're you up to? Gettin' that stove done?"

"Putting the legs on 'er," Bob said. He went on working — measuring and cutting the angle iron for the second leg. There was no need to worry about protocol in this family. Visits were a casual thing.

Baxter watched a moment. "Looks like you're making that leg a mite too long, Bobby. You want it sturdy. Better cut that leg down to one and a half inches."

"Think so?" Bob studied it a moment. He respected his dad's opinion. Ever since he could remember his dad was making something. He had built five houses and two barns in his lifetime, an irrigation system for the peach orchard that died out from aphids, a homemade tractor, even a sausage grinder. Once he made a boiler to heat Mom's brooder house by steam. Bob had learned quite a bit about the way heat travelled and how to control fire.

"Guess you're right. I'll take another inch and a half off her."

Baxter continued to study the stove, occasionally helping Bob turn the heavy metal box over to fit on the back legs.

"Should have made it taller instead of longer," he said. "Maybe put an oven in."

"I'm more interested in heat efficiency than baking cakes," said Bob. He should have guessed Baxter would start his usual fault-finding. Always analyzing, improving on something. Trying to out do.

Bob remembered once when Baxter bought his first and only new car, a Packard. Back in 1948. Could he take it as it was? Hell no. He had to find something to change, make it better. He put in reclining seats. "Nothin' ever made that can't be improved on," he always said.

Just then Carol pulled up. She smiled warmly as she welcomed Baxter, then she handed Bob a small packet containing three chrome balls.

"Why did you get three?" Bob asked.

"I thought we would add a little decoration," she said.

Bob quickly welded two of them on the back corners and the

other one into the end of the handle. "That just about finishes it," he said.

He opened and closed the door several times, proudly showing Baxter the close fit.

"This door has been a bugger but it's worth it."

"Why didn't you use aluminum?" Baxter said. "Easier to work on and lighter."

"Cause the damn stuff will deteriorate in a year. This steel will last a lifetime."

"Didn't use a baffle plate? You'd get more out of your fuel."

"Hell, I figure this rig don't need a baffle plate. The top level will act as a secondary combustion chamber."

Bob smiled to himself. The old guy couldn't find anything wrong with it so far. For everything Baxter could come up with, Bob had a reason for making it that way. He had thought this thing out, and it gave him pleasure to know this time he was meeting his dad's test. He loved this old man and had always wanted to measure up to him. He wanted his dad's approval and admiration and to be praiseworthy in his eyes.

There was one thing, however, that he hoped his dad wouldn't bring up. He knew his stove was going to be efficient, sturdy, long lasting — but would it smoke? The very things he had done to make the stove hold the smoke back and make the heat last longer — no damper, the two step design, the low flue, the draft caps — might cause the smoke to back up and come out the door when it was opened.

He couldn't stand waiting to find out any longer. The stove construction was far enough along to try it out. Later that afternoon after waiting patiently for his dad to leave, he called Carol out and said, "Let's fire her up and see if the bastard's going to work."

"But you haven't put in the firebrick yet," she said.

"No sense in bothering about the brick if she's no good."

He took the stove off the chrome table and set it on the concrete. He had to ease the weight down slowly. Shit! Was it ever heavy! He put a pipe stack in the side vent — an elbow and three lengths of pipe, six feet altogether. Carol brought some kindling from the

woodpile out back. In only a few moments the wood was crackling and soon blazing.

He waited in suspense. Smoke blew out of the stack — but not out of the door. The smoke was trapped in the upper chamber of the two levels, and the door was at the other end of the lower chamber. He added larger pieces of wood and closed the door. Soon they felt heat coming off the steel plate. They hovered around it, arms around one other, both giggling with happiness.

The next morning, while Carol went to town after the fire-bricks, Bob cleaned out the fire box to install the clips that were to hold the bricks in place. He noticed very little ash was left. And the pieces of coke that remained were still smoldering. Since he had left the stove to go out just before supper, and it was now 9:00 a.m., that meant the stove had held the fire for nearly fourteen to fifteen hours.

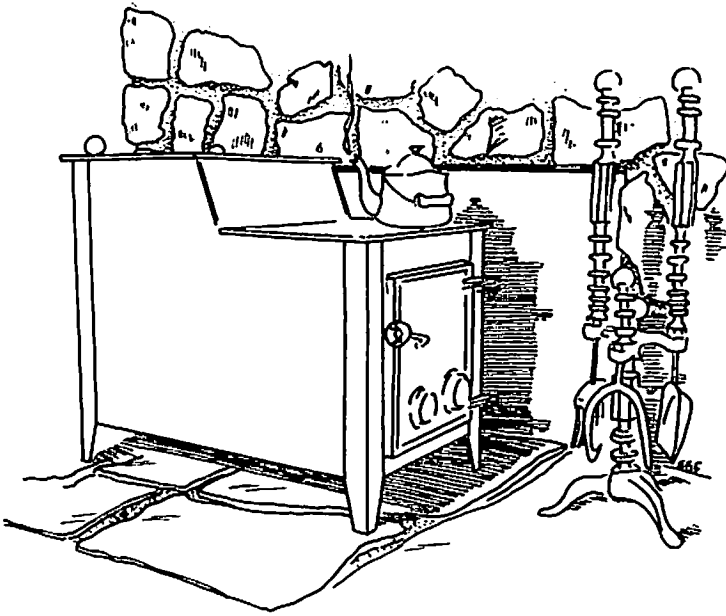
After cutting the bricks to fit, he found that they slipped easily in place. It was still early in the day and time enough to paint it. Back again went Carol to buy a type of heat resistant paint.

“What color?” she asked.

“Any color as long as it’s black,” he said. “Red, blue or brown will discolor in certain hot spots — but black never does. Anyway, I like the looks of black.”

Carol helped with the painting, so it was finished late that evening. Bob had covered the fireplace opening with a piece of sheet metal that had a hole cut out of it for the pipe. He and Jesse had to slide the stove into the house on boards. Then he hooked it up. Within one hour of lighting it up, the house became the warmest it had ever been. The three kids had stayed up later than usual on a school night to watch the installation. They warmed a pan of milk on top of the stove to make hot cocoa and then sat on the floor in front of the stove sipping from earthenware mugs. Bob’s heart soared to see them so snug and cozy.

The next morning Bob raked through the hot coals, lay kindling



inside, added more logs and opened up the drafts. Shortly, he had a roaring fire again. At about 8:30, it was so warm he had to turn the drafts down again. Carol put a large pot of beans on the upper level to boil.

Bob sat around awhile basking in warmth and glory. But he couldn't stand it any longer. He had to tell somebody. Other people should know about this great thing he had made. He called his mother.

"Come on over and see where your money went," he said.

Mom loved it. Not that she thought any more of Bobby. She had always loved him — in spite of his past mistakes. But he wanted for once to bring some happiness and joy into her life.

“I can make you one for your mobile home,” Bob said.

She was thrilled. “I believe it might help my arthritis. Take that dampness out of the air.”

They drank coffee and discussed the best place to put it, how Bob could put pipe up through her ceiling and lay an asbestos stove pad over her carpet. The aroma of the beans filled the room. Carol put them on the lower level to simmer.

The back door opened, and Uncle Ed from next door walked in. Since he worked in excavation which was not too regular in the winters, it wasn't uncommon for him to drop over for coffee or a beer on the days when he was in between jobs.

He had run across the small patch of woods that was between their two houses and was shivering and rubbing his hands together.

“Looks like we're in for a cold one this year,” he said. The prospect didn't bother him. He was a happy-go-lucky type that made the best of any circumstances. Many times during that period when Bob was at a low ebb, Ed had cheered him up. Even though Ed was his uncle, he was only seven years older than Bob.

The difference in age between Mom and Ed did not interfere with their closeness. They were a close Polish clan, and Bob could remember many parties at one of the homes — Aunt Stella's, Aunt Sophie's, or Mom's — the accordin music, wine, rice rolls, borsch and “put ah yeh.” Everyone did Polish dances until the floor joists gave. And, of course, Dad did his Irish jig.

“Boy, it's toasty in here,” Ed said. “Hey, what the hell's that?” He looked at the stove closely and walked around it.

“That's the new Fisher Stove,” Bob said.

“You make that stove?”

“Sure did.” Bob showed him how the stove operated.

“By god, that's the best rig I've ever seen.”

“You want one?”

“Damn right! I'm tired of fighting that sawdust furnace. Damn stuff isn't cheap anymore, either.”

Bob knew exactly where to put Ed's stove. He knew every inch of that house, because he had visited it often when Carol was living there.

He liked the idea of doing something for his family. As far back as he could remember, they all helped one another, haying season, borrowing tractors, trucks. For a while, his life had been so messed up, he couldn't even help himself. Now he had something to offer.

Bob spent most of the next few days experimenting with his stove: how best to lay a fire at night, getting the stove to draw, rekindling a small fire, and studying the life cycle of a fire. He experimented with different woods — green, dry, pitchy, and punky as well as the many species. Carol tried out various ways of cooking — frying, roasting, toasting, even baking without an oven. Everything they tried worked. Bob grew more and more happy with it.

But eventually he knew it was time to go back to work at Steelcraft. The house was finished, his stove was completed and he didn't like the idea of staying on unemployment. Besides, he needed money now for material to build two more stoves.

He and Carol agreed he would start at the beginning of next week. He telephoned the boss at Steelcraft.

“Didn't you know, Bob? We folded up two weeks ago. There's nothing to come back to.”

Bob was stunned. He thought of the boss, the welders, the owners. He then thought of his own predicament. What the hell was he going to do now?

After he hung up, he hadn't time to tell Carol before a car drove up. It was the Petersons who lived farther up the road. Carol met the elderly couple cordially at the door.

“We came to have a look at that stove of yours, Bob. Your Uncle Ed told us about it and we're interested in getting you to build us one.”

When Bob showed them the stove and told them how well it performed, they were excited and impatient to get one as soon as possible. They wanted to know the cost.

“We’d be glad to pay you \$100 for making it,” Mr. Peterson said.

Bob began figuring the cost of materials, his time — this one would go faster now that he knew what he was doing. His thoughts were interrupted by the telephone ringing. This time it was Mr. Evans in Springfield.

“What’s this about your stove, Bob? I’d like to come out and look at it. I’ve been wanting a good woodburning stove, and from what your mom told me, yours sounds great.”

“Sure, come out anytime,” Bob said.

The wheels were turning in his head. He didn’t have a job. But right here was the answer. He could turn his predicament into an opportunity to grow and improve himself. He could make it a challenge.

After the Petersons were gone, Bob was bursting with excitement.

“Carol, we’re going into the stove business,” he said. “My stove is good. I think we can make it.”

Bob then told Carol about Steelcraft and his idea. She could see he was determined. She went through the considerations. She knew Bob didn’t like to punch a time clock, and it would drive him batty to be one digit in a production line of a factory somewhere. He was different. She knew that when she married him. He was ambitious, had ideas and liked to march to his own drummer. Maybe if he built two or three a week, they could live comfortably. And she admitted she enjoyed having him at home the past six weeks.

“Okay, I’m behind you,” she said. “The Lord is guiding us, I know He is.”

CHAPTER II

Bob lingered over each brush stroke as he finished painting the inside of the door on his Uncle Ed's stove. He almost hated to see it completed. He was worried now that his four orders for stoves were filled. What the hell was he to do? How could he sell more stoves? And even if he had orders, where could he get the money for materials? The money he made off the Petersons' and Evans' stoves was used to buy materials to make the stoves for Mom and Ed, buy some groceries and gas and to pay some bills. But his mom's stove was in payment for the money he had borrowed. And Bob decided not to charge Ed — after all, the stove was going into Carol's house for which Ed was paying rent.

There wasn't going to be an unemployment check for this month of December. That meant they were down to Carol's social security check for Kelly and the rent from Ed. What a shitterree! He owed a payment on the loan to finish off the A-frame and was two months behind payment on the Ford pickup. Glancing at it parked in the driveway, he felt it loom over him.

He stood back and looked for any spots he might have missed on the stove, at the same time wiping his hands on a rag that hung from his back pocket. He could see small improvements over the first stove he had made. He had used ready-made hinges and rivets and new iron bar for the door handle that Carol bought in town. Also, he discarded the decorative chrome balls Carol had suggested to put on the top. They had cracked and peeled. Just goes to show — stick to the basics. Solid, simple things were always the best. She had only laughed about it. "I guess we know who is the stove

stove expert around here," she said.

He put his brush to soak in a coffee can filled with solvent, rubbed a little into the paint spots on his hands, wiped them again on the rag, and began picking up the tools that were lying about. There was now a shed built over the concrete slab that Bob had made out of two-by-fours, four feet by five feet telephone cross arms, and two pieces of rusty galvanized tin his dad had given him. The chrome table he was still using as a work bench now had holes burnt in it. He wondered if the day would come when he could afford to replace it for his mom.

He hooked the stove up to a block and tackle hanging from the front rafters of the shed. He pulled the table out from under it and backed the pickup under it. He stopped within a fraction of an inch of centering the stove on the bed. Maneuvering any kind of machinery came naturally to him. He began running farm equipment when he was seven years old — discing for his dad, harrowing and pulling the dump rake with the little Model Fifteen Caterpillar.

And it was especially easy with this baby. This was the first and only new vehicle he had ever owned. He had bought it when he got his job at Steelcraft. He liked the feel of the wheel and how the seat fitted against his back.

But he frowned as he thought of the two \$118 payments he owed. And it needed new tires that would cost \$225 more.

He lowered the stove on the back, honked the horn and signalled Carol, who came to the window, that he was taking the stove next door to Ed's.

It was near supper time. Ed would be home now. Unless, because it was Friday night, he might have stopped off for a couple of beers. He had just landed a contract on a backfilling job for a developer.

He drove slowly down his driveway to the highway, and after going about two hundred yards, turned up Ed's driveway. Ed's van was there. He came out the door smiling.

"Got 'er finished?"

"She's ready to rip," said Bob.

Ed helped him carry the stove into the house. They both became red in the face and puffed hard.

“Man, really a bear, ain’t it?” Ed said.

“Yeah, a Papa.” Papa Bear. Bob liked the sound of it. In fact, that was what he’d call this bugger from now on — the Papa Bear.

They put the stove down in the kitchen. It couldn’t have been a better set-up. The back of the fireplace faced the kitchen. Bob had only to make a hole from that side and install the pipe.

Ed’s wife was setting the table. Bob liked the way she kept up Carol’s house. You’d think she would get lonesome out here in the country day after day. She was Ed’s second wife and still young. But she was a really homebody, like a house cat — soft and purry.

“Go ahead and eat your supper,” Bob said. “It’ll take me a while to chip a hole in the brick.”

Bob cut into the brick with deftness and power. They had to move the table against the far wall to keep the dust from settling on their food.

In about forty minutes, he was still tapping at a few last rough edges around the hole when the chisel slipped from his hand and fell down inside the chimney. Shit! That chisel cost six bucks. He fished around amongst the ashes and debris down below but he couldn’t find it. He kept digging, faster, desperately. He broke into a sweat. The importance of the chisel mounted, became an obsession. He was in debt, had no job and no income, was risking everything he had on this stove idea — and he couldn’t even hang on to a goddam chisel.

“Son of a bitch!” he grumbled.

Ed left the table, picking his teeth. “Hey, for Christ sake, Bobby. It’s no catastrophe. There’s more chisels in the world.”

He laughed, his blue eyes twinkled like a leprechaun who thought the idea of people grovelling for a pot of gold was humorous. He helped Bob place the asbestos stove pad on the floor, position the stove and hook up the pipe.

“It looks great. You ought to sell a million of them,” Ed said, looking at it.

“Yeah, the market’s good,” Bob said. “Hell of it is, I don’t have

enough money to build anymore.”

“You need money? How much?”

“You mean it?”

“Hell, yes. I mean it. I’m doin’ good and I got all I want. My gut full, a place to sleep and a good piece of ass.” He reached over and gave his wife a swat on the rump. “Besides, I believe in you, I know you’ll pay me back.”

Bob forgot about the chisel. Why did he let little things upset him? Ed was right. He had to remember to keep sight of the big, important things.

“If I buy materials for ten stoves, I can get a cheaper rate. They cost me \$61.80 each for the steel,” he said.

Ed whipped out his check book. “Here’s a check for \$618,” he said. “Now let’s see what you can do with it.”

As Bob pulled his pickup out of Ed’s driveway onto the highway, he tucked the folded check into his shirt pocket behind his can of snuff. By god, he had to produce now. He sure as hell wasn’t going to let Ed down.

He came to his own driveway but didn’t turn in. He drove on into town, through the lighted streets and Friday night shoppers until he came to the Ford dealer on South A Street. He parked the pickup in the used car area, locked it up, walked into the showroom and handed the keys to the salesman.

“I figure I’ll save you the trouble of coming to get it,” he said.

He had already paid \$1200 on it, but with depreciation, two back payments due — what the hell. He’d take that \$445 he would have to pay out on it and put it in the old green ’62 Ford his dad had loaned him four years ago. It needed a carburetor, fuel pump, wipers, a couple of tires — altogether it would run about \$200. He was good at mechanics; he could fix it up himself. Nothing wrong with old things if taken care of. He didn’t need that new pickup any more than he needed a hole in the head, anyway. Surprising what we can get along without. Just too many pressures to have something bigger and shinier. No wonder the country was going to pot, our resources being used up. Well, his stove was going to help change things. It was going to give people pleasure and warmth, save them

money and conserve energy. His stove would not only benefit the consumer, but all of society.

He telephoned Ed, then waited for him to come get him on his motorcycle. As he stood on the corner, the December air was cold but crisp and clean. Bob breathed deeply. The air filled him with vigor and strength and gave him a cleansing feeling. He was at peace with himself. He liked the idea of belonging to himself and felt grateful for the chance to be on his own. He seemed to be all together, in one piece. He thought of Carol and the kids waiting supper for him and couldn't remember a time in his life when he had been happier.

Bob thought hard on ways to sell his next stove. What he needed was to get the stove where people could see it, to put it on display somewhere. Anyone who saw it was bound to buy one.

He remembered how when he was a kid, he had sold Christmas trees — cut down from the woods in back of Dad's old house — in a parking lot on the corner of 5th and Q Street in Springfield. He sold the trees for fifty cents, seventy five cents if they were good and even one dollar if they were beautiful. When he got down to about twenty five trees, he sold out to a man for twenty five cents each.

He smiled as he thought of all the schemes he had tried as a kid — raising rabbits, a Holstein calf and fighting cocks. After a lesson from his Uncle Steve in woodworking, he was certain he would make some quick money from bird houses. Once he decided to trap raccoons and sell them as pets. He had hollowed the heart out of an old thirty inch by twelve foot long log by fire and chipping. Then he rolled it down to the chicken house and set a trap in it using Royal Ann cherries as bait. It took days to lure a large female. He gave her

lettuce, fruit — but she wouldn't eat. He seemed to see tears in her eyes. Finally, he decided he was being cruel and let her go.

He had learned a lot about the traffic of people on the corner of 5th and Q Street. This was the first week in December. He tried to think of a good parking lot that would have a steady coming and going of Christmas shoppers. He decided on the Bi-Mart.

He and Carol loaded up his stove, the sixth one he had made, in the back of the '62 Ford pickup he fixed up and parked as close as possible to the store entrance.

Carol walked back and forth holding the cardboard sign Bob had made and put on a wooden pole. Bob stayed up on back of the pickup to show any passers-by carrying groceries or packages the features of the stove. People stopped, listened kindly to Bob talk, seemed interested but when on about their shopping. A stove was not something they picked up on the way home.

Then Bob thought of the flea market held every Saturday morning at the Fairgrounds. It had started as an outlet for hippies and students from the University to sell their handmade wares as well as expound new ideas about peace and ecology. Bob was a little leery. Hippies conjured up memories of the 60's — drugs, filth and laziness, abuses in welfare. But the market was drawing large crowds. People were interested in pottery, plants, antiques, organic foods, wood carvings, jewelry — anything to do with the earth or back to nature and the past. Well, his stove certainly fit into that picture.

The next Saturday morning, he and Carol set the stove up on a small allocation of area outside the Cow Palace. The rain poured down and the wind blew at the tarps that covered several of the stalls. His homemade cardboard sign was soon saturated; the paint became diluted and ran down in streaks.

The Fisher Stove, however, kept burning, and the few people shopping there crowded around the stove for warmth. Bob, with his levi collar up over his ears, his pant legs tucked inside his boots, repeatedly demonstrated the qualities of the stove. Nearly all of the people were interested. They asked questions about the installation, the price and the space the stove could heat. They seemed

impressed, but no one ordered one.

One young couple said they definitely wanted one, but they had to wait until they could afford a new home to put it in.

Bob decided he could get even more exposure if he put his stove inside one of the shopping centers. The stores would be full of people during the Christmas season. They would be in a buying mood.

He received permission to put it in Payless at the Old Mill Mall. An old flour mill and a railroad station had been converted into several shops.

He cleaned out the stove and installed clean bricks. He wanted the stove to look like new. There could be no fire in it, and people would be looking inside.

He placed his display at a busy intersection. Hundreds of people passed through on their way to the various stores. There was also a choral group selling Christmas wreaths and a ladies' church group holding a baked goods sale.

Bob showed the stove time and time again, pointing out the two-step design, the brick lining, the airtight door, the draft controls. He couldn't get to each person soon enough, and many left rather than wait for him to finish with someone else. His knees and back became sore from crouching in front of the stove, his mouth was dry and his tongue grew numb. When he occasionally went to get a drink of coke, he came back and people were gathered around the stove, opening and closing the door, looking inside.

He realized he needed some brochures to hand out to those people going by in a rush or for people to pick up when he was not there.

As tired as he was when he came home after the stores closed at 9:00 p.m., he stayed up until two in the morning taking pictures of the stove against the background of his stone fireplace, making a list of the features of the Fisher Stove and drawing out a brochure design. Carol took it down to a printer on Fourteenth and Main the next day. The printer rushed the job, and Bob was able to hand them out after the third day.

By Friday night, the fifth day, Bob was still going strong. The

response from the people was favorable, but he wondered why he hadn't sold a stove yet. He tried not to let his disappointment dampen his enthusiasm; he didn't want to get down. He forced liveliness into his voice as he talked to a woman who was pushing a stroller full of packages, holding a baby in the other arm while two other small children were whining and tugging at her coat.

When he turned around to show the woman the triple purpose of the stove — as a cooker, trash burner and a heater — a heavy set man in a red parka was holding a tape measure along the front of the stove and next up to the sides.

"You need some help?" Bob asked. He hoped the man was figuring a fit for his living room.

"I'm getting the length and width for size of this thing. I might build one of these stoves myself," the man said and went on measuring across the top.

Bob could feel his pulse quicken and his eyes saw red. This stove was his and this son of a bitch was going to copy it! But he stopped to think. There was really nothing to stop someone from copying his stove. He had no legal hold over it.

He decided to play it cool and look unconcerned. He didn't want the guy to sense Bob had anything to worry about.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. There's a patent pending," Bob said, trying his best to conceal his lie.

The man put away his tape but even as he walked away, he was still looking back at the stove. Bob felt panicky. He had to get his stove protected. Every damn Tom, Dick and Harry could make his stove. Why should anyone buy it from him?

That night he and Carol talked it over, and the next day she went to a patent agent on High Street. It cost them \$250, to be paid in five installments, for the patent search. Bob was bothered over the money, but he fell asleep that night reassured over what Mr. Givnan had told Carol.

"As long as you got your application in, nobody can copy you now," he said.

Ten days went by and still Bob had not sold one stove. He sat

slouched on the couch, his boots off, his feet resting on an old hassock. They burned from standing so long — every day until 9:00 p.m. now that Christmas was so close.

The Fisher Stove was going, and he got up to turn down the drafts. It was a great stove. If only he could sell one, the stove would verify what he was saying. It could sell a hundred more.

The sewing machine was whirring across the room. Carol was up late making Christmas presents now that the kids were in bed. They had decided they could spend fifty dollars on all three kids. None for each other. So Carol was making blouses and nightgowns for Tammy and Kelly, pajamas and a shirt for Jesse. She had made placemats, toaster covers and hot pads for the relatives. Even the Christmas tree was decorated with stuffed cloth stars and balls made of gingham.

Things were getting tough. The freezer was down pretty low. They were eating soup bones and there was only a few pounds of hamburger left. Carol was cooking mostly dishes made with macaroni, noodles, potatoes — and those damn carrots! On the way into town last week, Bob and Carol saw where a truck hauling carrots had spilled on the side of the road. They scooped up as many as they could. Now everyday they had carrots boiled, raw, creamed, mashed, or roasted.

He tried to shove the doubts and apprehensions that were creeping into his mind. He didn't want them to overcome him. Shit, hadn't he had bad times before? Hadn't he been through two divorces, three near drownings, been lost in the wilderness, had a near fatal shooting? And he could think of a hundred more. Yes, and all of his bad experiences had strengthened him. They helped him to see he could face any crisis. He learned that he could take what comes, make it through whatever was next.

Make the best of it; you can't linger over your failure. So what if the stove didn't sell at the shopping center? By god, he wasn't going to give up. He'd try something else. He just wasn't getting to the right people. There must be people who were energy minded. There was more about the energy shortage just now on the 11:00 p.m. news.

“How much do you think it would cost to run an ad in the newspaper?” he asked Carol.

Carol sat back from the machine, stretched and pulled her golden hair back off her forehead.

“Pretty expensive around Christmas time,” she said, knowing he was talking about the stove. They talked about it every night. Did anyone seem interested? How many took brochures? What did they say about it?

“After Christmas I’ll bring the stove back to the house and sell it from here.”

“We’ll scrape up enough,” she said. “I’ll call the Eugene *Register Guard* tomorrow. It shouldn’t be much for the classified ad section. How about that paper they give out at the grocery store? *The Money Saver*. That would be cheap. We could put a picture in that one.”

Her receptiveness confirmed his idea. He sketched out a design for the ad. He had difficulty keeping his words to a minimum, he had so many things to say. He didn’t put the price or an address. His tactic was to wait until the call, talk a while and tell them about the stove. *Then* get them here and sell the stove.

They waited nine days after Christmas for the first phone call. It was a Hawaiian named Charlie White who lived in Vida. Bob was visiting his mom, so Carol took the number to call back. It was the number of the Cougar Room in the Blue River Tavern.

“What’s so damn good about your stove, Fisher?” Charlie asked when Bob finally reached him. His voice was loud, jovial. It had a slight accent. He sounded slightly tanked up.

“It doesn’t smoke, holds a fire all night, you can cook on it and it’ll last a hundred years,” Bob said.

“I’m coming over to see it in the morning,” Charlie said. “It better be all the things you say.”

Bob and Carol spent the next morning getting the scene ready to make their first sale. Carol cleaned, polished and made coffee. Bob wiped off the stove and fired it with clean burning wood. He wanted it half full to show how the fire can be cut down or opened up.

But Charlie was no easy customer. He sauntered in at about 11:30 and took his time looking over the stove. It took great effort to lift his huge frame of about 250 pounds each time he knelt down in front of the door. Bob noticed he had trouble with one foot but didn't say anything.

"Too damn colt here in this country, Bop," Charlie said. His d's and b's were staccato. "Not like Hawaii."

"You new to Oregon?" Bob asked. He was making friendly conversation now.

"Been here a year. I'm a retired fisherman. Ran a commercial tuna boat until a shark bit off half my foot."

Bob offered him something to drink. Charlie chose beer over Carol's coffee.

"The stove looks pretty goot. Tell you what," Charlie said. "I'll give you \$150 for it." Jewing it down from \$225. Bob needed the money. Well, better to make a sale. If Charlie likes it, he'll tell someone else about it.

"Okay, make it \$175," Bob said.

Charlie was not done considering. "Don't know where to put it," he said.

"You got a fireplace?" Bob asked.

Charlie shook his head. "Don't want to plug up my fireplace," he said.

"You can put it on the floor beside the fireplace, sit it on an asbestos plate or bricks — "

"Can you make it higher? Easier for me to put wood in it — so I don't have to bend over?"

"Sure, I can make a box and put brick on top of it."

Charlie again deliberated. "Don't know how to hook it up."

"Cut a hole in your chimney about three feet above your fireplace opening and run pipe into it."

Charlie still looked uncertain. "You put it in for me?"

"Okay, I'll install it for you," Bob agreed.

"You got pipe?"

Now he wanted pipe. Hell, Bob thought, he wasn't going to make a dime off this. He'd have to figure it as a promotion.

He no more than nodded his head when Charlie warned, "By got, Bop, hope she don't smoke. You can take her back if she smokes."

Bob loaded up the stove onto the pickup, and he and Carol followed Charlie's Plymouth station wagon out to Vida. Before they entered Charlie's small, single story house, they took off their shoes and left them on the back porch. Charlie's very fat wife seemed shy and spoke only a little English. She sent the two children into the bedroom. Charlie told her to bring some beer, and she obeyed right away.

There was a thin, emaciated white man sitting in the living room. Three empty beer cans were next to him. Charlie introduced him as a friend visiting from Hawaii.

Then Charlie showed Bob the location for the Fisher Stove. Bob was staggered. It would take at least eight feet of horizontal pipe from where the stove sat over to the hole he would make in the fireplace. He would need to use two elbows. He began to have qualms whether or not the smoke would back up and start coming out the door.

"Remember, if the son of a bitch smokes, I'm not paying for it," Charlie reminded him.

Bob brought in his tools and chipped out the six-inch hole. Carol stayed in the kitchen talking about recipes with Charlie's wife. She was cooking black cod in a soup. The white man got up to get another beer. Charlie saw him staggering across the floor and became aggravated.

"Why don't you go take a shower?" he said.

They went outside to bring in the stove. When Bob halted a moment to take his shoes back off at the doorway, the stove almost fell back on him. He gave a short yell, and Carol came running.

"We're getting a dolly no matter how much it costs," she said aside to him.

They put the stove down on the wooden box, and Bob began rigging up the pipes. He was nervous and worried about Charlie rejecting the stove if it smoked so he had a couple of beers to calm down. If she don't work, I'm broke down now, he thought.

His heart was pounding and he was almost breathless as he laid the wood to fire up the stove. The kindling came ablaze. He added wood, shut the door and opened the drafts. They all waited tensely to see if it smoked. But it didn't. Bob was happy to see that Charlie was exuberant. A while ago, he had the feeling Charlie was wanting it to smoke.

"By got, Bop. It's a fine stove." He called his wife to bring more beer, laughed loudly and even gave the emaciated white man, who was by now out of the shower, a big bear hug.

For six months they ran the ads on and off. If the people came out to Upper Camp Creek and saw the stove, they bought one. They were mainly country people — like the Helms from Marcola or the elderly couple from Harrisburg who were in the firewood business.

Bob and Carol celebrated each stove they sold. They were overjoyed when the Sullivans called back to say they were pleased and when Bill Tatum rang to say he was impressed with its sturdiness and efficiency.

They were grateful for selling two or three stoves a month. It was enjoyable having few pressures and shooting the bull with people. They all seemed interested in Bob and eager to see him succeed.

By May he was on his tenth stove. This was the last of the material he had bought with the money Ed loaned him. He had managed to pay Ed back, but he still hadn't found enough to pay the \$1000 fee to finalize the patent after the search was over back in March. Well, he would just have to delay it.

Each stove he made had gone faster as he perfected his system. Cutting the steel plate, leaving a drop off on the sides, welding the pieces together to make the box, welding the three pieces together for the top and cutting the hole for the door.

And he had added an ash fender to the front of the stove. He used the piece cut from the side, rounded it and framed it with channel iron. Now there was hardly a scrap left out of all his material. No waste, streamlined construction, minimum of parts, fewer things to go haywire. He was satisfied.

Except when he came to the doors. Making a picture frame on the inside of the door and another on the outside of the door opening, welding on the hinges, the latch, cutting holes for the drafts, welding a nut inside of the door, welding the pipe cap onto a bolt — on and on. Damn doors took as many hours as the rest of the stove.

One bright spring day Bob felt more frustrated than ever. His brother was out ploughing up his fields, getting ready for seeding. And here was Bob pinned down to this tedious detail work.

He stood fitting on the door, cursing a blue streak. It felt good, a release he had found very early in life. It didn't hurt anyone, not like violence or destructiveness. He tried to refrain from using God or Jesus or Christ. He thought it just as much a sin to use the Lord's name in vain as were the other nine commandments. Sometimes he slipped, but he never made any claims about being a saint. He like to use words like "piss," "asshole," or "shit." Somehow, they only dirtied things up a little.

He was so engrossed in rattling off all his favorites, he didn't hear his dad walk up behind him.

"Somethin' botherin' ya, Bobby?" he asked with a devilish smirk on his face. His dad had never been an angel, either. Always telling dirty jokes, pinching fannies, taking a snort whenever he could get one. More than once Bob had listened to the story about his dad being arrested for moonshining back in the prohibition days. They forewarned Baxter, but he wouldn't stop. He never made any money at it. He was just proud of his formula. And of course, he thought his still, a thumper keg connected to a condenser and coils on the dome, was the greatest of all inventions. His final touch was to bring the whiskey to a boil in a copper boiler and pour in oak shavings all browned in the oven to give it age and color it to a nice amber.

His mother had to appeal to the Governor for Baxter's release from jail on the grounds of need for support. Not that his dad was suffering. He easily made friends with the inmates, was made a trustee and ate his meals with the deputy jailor on the promise of slipping in some of the stuff he had hidden away.

He always thought of himself as a fox, smarter and more cunning than anyone else. Maybe he was, but he sure never got rich from it. Bob thought of his uncles, Baxter's brothers, who were prosperous, successful. Uncle Gene was in timberland, Uncle George had farmland. As hard as Baxter worked and schemed, was resourceful and inventive, none of his ideas ever came to fruition.

"Ah, these doors are a pain in the ass," Bob said.

"Here, let me help ya," his dad said.

"Okay. Hold the door steady while I get the hinge lined up."

As Bob welded, he watched Baxter out of the corner of his eye. Baxter was looking the stove over, closely examining the door. Bob knew what was coming.

"Why don't you go to a foundry and have a cast door made?" Baxter said.

There it was again. Always thinking, suggesting, looking for a better way, especially labor saving devices. Anything to "save the back," he used to say. Bob figured the practice came from Baxter's childhood, the long hours of endless toil day after day. Bob thought of the deep furrows in the palm of his Uncle George's hands and the way he couldn't straighten out his fingers. They were curved inwards from always holding onto a pitchfork, a shovel, a hammer or saw. Even his feet were covered with callouses and distorted from no shoes or wearing his father's castoffs. He thought, too, of when his Uncle George told him that Baxter's ideas came as a welcome relief. He had added that Baxter's humor and good nature were also a help.

Actually a cast iron door was a good idea. Bob liked it. He would have to keep it in mind, talk it over with Carol.

Bob noticed Baxter's hands were shaky as he released them from the door. And his color wasn't good. His face was pale with patches of red around the nose. Probably drinking too much. That

woman was taking her toll.

“What’ve you been up to?” Bob asked.

“Same old monkey business,” said Baxter, grinning again.

“Been feelin’ all right? Had any more of those dizzy spells?”

“Nothin’ wrong with me,” Baxter said. “I’m as strong as a horse.”

“You better lay off this fast livin’ before it kills you,” Bob said.

“Not me, I’m still going strong,” Baxter smiled. He gave a little jump and clicked his heels together.

No matter what, Baxter wouldn’t admit he was losing stamina in his old age. Particularly his virility. But just to coddle the old man, Bob went along with his dad’s line of baloney.

“You should have stayed with Mom. She wasn’t as hard on you,” Bob said.

“How’s Anna doin’?” Baxter asked, much to Bob’s surprise. So he *did* miss her.

“Why the hell don’t you go down and see for yourself?” Bob asked.

“I just might do that, Bobby,” Baxter said.

Bob finished the stove shortly after Baxter left. He went inside to look for Carol but found her on the other side of the house setting out geraniums and asters next to the garden.

“Carol, we need to talk over something,” Bob called out.

“Yes?” she responded and walked over to him.

“It’s time to buy more material for stoves. This time I’d like to buy enough for fifteen stoves.”

“I did like we agreed and kept the money from the last few stoves aside,” she said.

“What do you think about having patterns made for cast iron doors?”

“If you think that’s what we should do, then it’s fine with me,” she said.

But there was no more money. Well, it couldn’t hurt to go check it out.

He walked into Oregon Pattern in Eugene somewhat sheepishly. He felt guilty over taking up the pattern maker's time telling him about the Fisher Stove and his ideas of a door since he wasn't going to be able to pay out anything.

Mr. Heine seemed a sober and intense man, and Bob thought maybe he would find Bob crude. He couldn't explain it but everytime he was around a serious person, he felt like breaking the ice, sometimes acting a little obnoxious. But to his surprise, Mr. Heine took a liking to him. And he was particularly interested in the Fisher Stove. He willingly came all the way out to their home to have a look at it, and by the time they had measured, made layouts, and discussed thickness, Bob was feeling like a heel. If the guy had been a son of a bitch, then he wouldn't have cared, but he wanted nice people like Mr. Heine to think well of him.

"I have to level with ya," he finally said. "I haven't got two cents right now, but I sure would like those patterns."

Mr. Heine gave him a blank stare, very straight faced. Maybe he's going to turn out a bastard after all, Bob thought.

"Well, tell you what," Mr. Heine said in his competent, methodical voice, "those patterns would normally run about \$400 to \$500. But if you build me one of those stove, we'll call it even."

Bob felt his throat choking up. About some things he was a real softy — sentimental things, tenderness, loyalty. There were times when he could be hard too, however. Like if someone tried to take advantage of him or tried to lord it over him.

"By god, Mr. Heine," he said, giggling to cover up his emotions, "you'll get the best stove I've ever built."

It took one week to finish the patterns, then Bob took them to Valley Iron. The attitude was a little different there. Material was scarce, the demand high. They were only interested in big accounts or ones which had a growing future potential.

Bob knew he had to make this good. They wouldn't be interested in making fifteen doors. He told the red-headed foreman, who was in a hurry to return to the hot, noisy factory, that his fifteen was just a trial order, that he would be ordering fifty a week, and probably later on, he'd have to find another foundry to supplement this one

because he didn't think they could make enough. The foreman showed more interest and took a little more time with him.

In about two weeks Bob brought the cast doors home. They were beautiful — heavy, solid 3/8" thick; on the front was printed FISHER STOVES, SPRINGFIELD, OREGON.

The side hinge, the door lock, the triple seal channel and the draft openings were already a part of the mold. Now all Bob had to do was drill a hole, "tap" or thread the hole, screw in the bolt for the draft cap and plug weld the pipe cap into the bolt.

The first door he tried to drill broke his bit. Damn! That bit cost \$5.50. He did his best to sharpen the point on it again. He tried once more but it broke again. He tried another door. Another and another. Carol went to town for more bits.

What the hell was wrong here? Out of the fifteen doors, he could only drill through two doors. He had to take them back. What he discovered had happened was they were taken out of the molds too soon, that they cooled too fast and had become tempered.

So he had to wait two more weeks for new doors. Son of a bitch! This was going to screw him up. He was getting orders coming in now. Three last week, two this week. The customers would be looking for their stoves. He was discouraged but he wasn't going to be a quitter. He would just have to try harder. It was his orneriness and stubbornness coming out. He couldn't let anything beat him.

He worked like hell to catch up. He was getting faster. With the new doors he could finish off a stove in four or five hours. It was the deliveries and installations that took so long — even with the new dolly Carol had insisted he buy. Sometimes he spent a whole day laying brick against a combustible wall or making an opening and positioning chimney pipe.

On the day he finished with the last of the back orders, he was feeling smug and relaxed as he cruised down 42nd Street toward home. He passed a building with a "for rent" sign in front of it. He turned the pickup around and went back to see it.

It was a long white building with aluminum siding on it. It had an office toward the front and an upward sliding door at the side that could be used for loading. A toilet was attached to the other side of

the building, but it had no door.

Bob thought it over. It was at a good location. He needed more space. It was hard to be efficient in that little shed of his. Carol was always running back and forth to town to pick up odds and ends — a pint of paint, two rivets. And he needed a better showroom. People were reluctant to drive all that distance out to Upper Camp Creek. Yessirree, he just might be interested.

He mentioned it to Carol that evening.

“I have faith in you. I know you will do well. Whatever you decide, I’m for it,” she said.

The next morning he called the number that was posted on the “for rent” sign and asked how much it was. The owner gave the price — three hundred dollars! Shit, that was more than they had been living on for the past six months.

But he thought further. He had a few orders and he was making ninety dollars a stove. He still had materials for nine stoves left. He could pay half of the rent out of the \$450 he made off the last five stoves, not counting Mr. Heine’s.

He told the guy he would take it. Then he drove over to the shop and tore down the sign that said P & C Garage. With a black marker he kept in his toolbox in the back of the pickup, he wrote the words FISHER STOVE WORKS on the front door.