

# **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.**

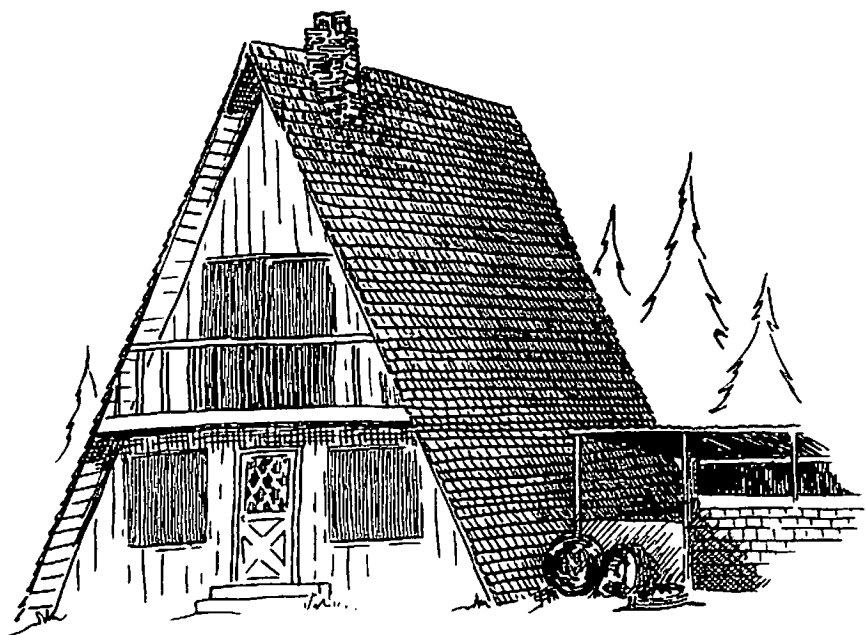
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## CHAPTER I

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.

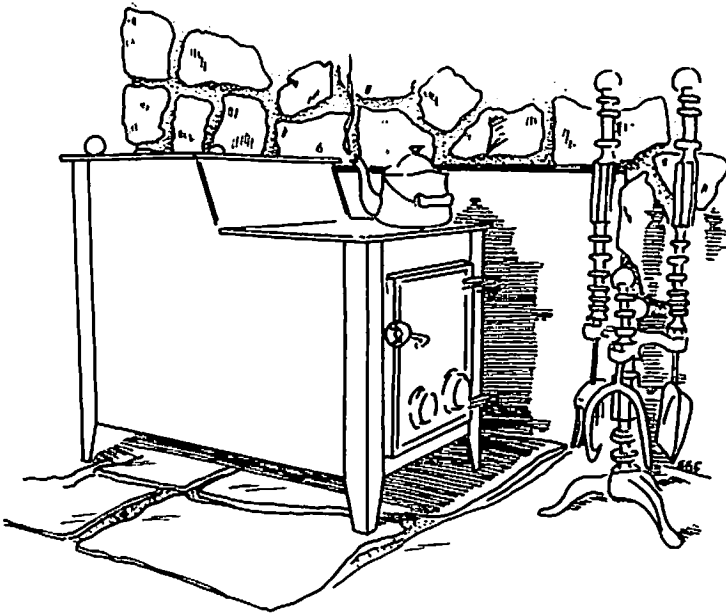
After cutting the bricks to fit, he found that they slipped easily in place. It was still early in the day and time enough to paint it. Back again went Carol to buy a type of heat resistant paint.

“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.

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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.

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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.

## CHAPTER III

The shop seemed so large and roomy to Bob as he took six bricks from the stack against the wall. He felt proud but also very humbled by his new property. There was something scary about having your own establishment. It was demanding, something you had to live up to.

Nearly one month ago, on the first of June, he had loaded up his jigs, welding equipment, brick, paint, pipe caps and tools and moved in. The shop was about twenty by eighty feet of space in the back which he divided into work areas for welding, bricking, painting and storage. He built shelves and work benches; the outside was completely whitewashed, and FISHER STOVE WORKS in large black letters was printed across the top of the outside front wall.

Carol and the girls had scrubbed the grease and grime off the floors, walls and windows of the office. At the moment Carol was using an old dresser that Ed's wife gave to her for a desk. The large mirror was off; it had three drawers down each side and one long center drawer along the top. She sat on the low stool that fit under it to do her paperwork and answer the phone. Carol had suggested that a proper desk might look better, but Bob refused. A fancy looking desk wasn't important. They weren't in the furniture business, were they? It was hard for her keeping books with no calculator, but at least he bought her a small portable typewriter.

The office was small, only nine by ten feet, and there was room for just one other straight back wooden chair in the corner across the room. But somehow Carol had made it look homey with a



planter hanging in the front window, a picture of an Oregon countryside on the wall, a calendar and a coffeepot perking on a small table in the other far corner.

Bob finished cutting a firebrick and showed his son Jesse how to install it. Jesse learned quickly and was especially eager to please his dad. Bob felt good about having the kids close by during the summer school vacation.

He heard voices out in the office. He immediately put down his saw and hurried out to the front. Hopefully it was a customer. Things were slow and not many people came in. Most of them were Bob's old friends stopping to chew the fat. A few were salesmen trying to sell office supplies or advertising space. They were running ads now in the *Valley News* as well as the *Register Guard*.

It was a man and his wife. Carol had greeted them. They both ran to meet any customer. It was a joke between them as to how many sales they made. They counted each customer who said he would think it over and who they were certain would come back; they counted the invoices, even the number of deliveries and installations. Of course, it totalled up three times as many as the actual sales were, but it kept them charged up.

Carol turned them over to Bob as soon as he came into the office. She was a little shy, and apart from staying around to talk to the ladies about cooking on the stove, she usually let Bob do the talking.

“How’s it goin’?” Bob asked.

The man appeared to be a farmer. He wore old faded levis mended in several places and manure was caught under the heels of his boots. His nose and the part of his forehead exposed under a straw hat were peeling and sunburned from working outside.

Bob always analyzed his customers so he could fit his talk according to what they were. He could gear his spiel toward ecology for an environmental advocate, wood to a logger, rising costs to a businessman, or hunting and fishing to a sportsman. He could even talk about the Lord to a religious person. Of course, he had to keep Carol on hand for help on that one.

No matter what kind of guy a customer was, Bob always agreed with him. Win them over. You can catch more bees with honey than vinegar.

“We come in to have a look at those stoves of yours,” the man said. He spoke slowly and was in no rush.

“You want it for your house? Where do you live?” Bob asked. Feel them out, get to know them. He felt he had to take his time with this old codger.

“We own a farm up by Marcola. Raise a few cattle,” the man said. He took off his hat and was beginning to relax. “We’re thinking about putting a wood stove in it.”

“Come on back, You can have a look at it,” Bob said. He showed them the stove he had installed for display on the wall just on the other side of the office. It was a windy but warm day, and he had the heat turned down. Carol had a pot roast braising in a metal skillet on the top level. She usually cooked their dinners — spaghetti, stew or chicken and noodles — here at the shop, and it was ready to eat when they returned home in the evening.

“This stove doesn’t emit smoke even when the door is open,” Bob began. “It’ll burn wood all night — you can start the fire in November and it keeps going until June. It requires wood only

twice a day. Ten dollars of wood a month will heat a two thousand square foot home."

Bob didn't try to sell himself. Stick to the features of the stove. And be honest. People can tell when someone is giving them a line of bullshit. And he didn't like the idea of being a greedy money hungry SOB, either.

The wife lifted up the lid of the pot and looked in at Carol's roast. Her hands were coarse, strong.

"Do you really cook on it?" she asked. "I can remember years ago having a woodstove. How warm and happy our kitchen used to be." Her eyes became a little misty.

"How good does the thing work?" the man asked.

"Nearly 100% efficient."

The man walked around the stove, opened it up, felt the door, the latch.

"How long before the damn thing'll wear out?" he asked.

"Shit, this thing will last longer than you do," Bob answered.

The man chuckled. Use a little humor. If the customer swore first, then Bob could, too.

"How much is it?" the man asked.

Bob hadn't brought up the money; he usually left that until the last. "Two hundred and twenty-five. This stove will pay for itself in six months. I'll give you fifty bucks more than what you paid for it if it doesn't do what I say."

The man fidgeted with his hat. "You take trades?" he asked, looking down at the floor.

"Hell, yeah. What you got?" So far he had worked out a deal for a CB radio and a three hundred H&H Magnum rifle. The idea was to get a stove out there. Hell, it would sell ten more.

"Can you use half a beef? A Charlois. Maybe as a hundred dollars down payment, anyway."

"Sounds good to me," Bob said.

They walked back into the office. Carol took out the big red ledger book and wrote down their name, address and the date. The couple said they would pay off the balance at ten dollars a month. As usual, Bob set no finance charges. He was in the stove business,

not making money off poor people.

They talked about the delivery date and the installation a while. When they left, it gave Bob a sense of fulfillment to see people satisfied by something he had made.

Carol was typing up a statement.

“That finishes up our materials,” he said to her.

“We’ll have to buy another lot,” Carol said. “We’ll do what you said — plough back what we earn into the business.”

“I’d like to buy for twenty stoves this time, but I don’t know if we should. It’s the end of the month, the rent on the shop will be due. We have our household bills — ”

“Things are going to pick up, Bobby,” she said. “We have to think positively, go ahead with things. If we pray, God will see us through.”

“God is going to help the son of a bitch who helps himself,” he bantered back.

Bob often razzed Carol about her religion. But down deep, he admired her strong faith. What he showed on the outside wasn’t really how he felt on the inside. There had been too many miracles in his lifetime for him to ignore God. Such as the time when he was alone in Mom’s old ’37 Plymouth and it started to roll down the hill while she went into the store a moment. He was only three years old but he could still remember vividly the car ramming a woodpile that just happened to be on the bank before it would have gone straight into the McKenzie River. Or the time he had disobeyed his mother and taken his tricycle down the street during the 1945 floods and his Uncle Jim just happened to be coming by and fished him out, half drowned and clinging to the limb of a bush. Or the time he had made a slide out of the water trough in the chicken house and caught his throat on the wire going down and nearly choked to death. He wouldn’t be alive today if something hadn’t just happened to make his mother come outside to hang up her washing.

He didn’t get to church much as a kid. Once his mother sent him to a Catholic Bible school, but he didn’t like the strict nuns. He left, came home and began picking filberts with his brother. His mother



said nothing more about it.

And he didn't act too religious. In fact, he sometimes covered up his beliefs by acting like a horse's ass. But inside it was a serious matter. What it all boiled down to was conscience. It will get you if you do something wrong and make you pay. He thought of his past — chasing around, raising hell. It sure had worked on him, anyway.

Five days later, rent for the shop was due. Bob had gone ahead and bought the necessary materials for twenty more stoves, and they didn't have any more money. He paced the floor, watching the cars go by out the front window. The sun was shining, hardly the kind of weather to sell stoves. No one had come in for two days, and it was only one hour until they closed.

"What the hell are we going to tell the owner?" he growled at Carol. She was sitting with her head bowed, her hands clasped together in her lap.

"The Lord will give us an answer," she said, without lifting her head.

Carol had turned to the Lord after her previous husband was hit and killed by a car. She came out to Upper Camp Creek to find peace and serenity, taking in foster children for income. She waited patiently for the Lord to put a man at her doorstep. The only one showing up was Bob, and most of the time it was to have her launder his shirt or watch his two kids awhile. After they became chummy, he tried to put the make on her. But nothing doing — it had to be the real thing with her.

Just then Bob heard the sound of a car motor drawing closer. A car pulled up outside. A man dressed in a three piece suit and tie walked in and said, "I want to buy one of your Fisher Stoves. My neighbor has one and it works great. I'd like to get it in during this good weather." He paid cash right then and there.

Bob took the money that same evening over to the landlord and paid the next month's rent. He guessed he had better chalk up his fourth miracle.

Everyone seemed to have that same idea of buying and putting in

their stove during the summer. Things started rolling. By the end of July, Bob was selling four stoves a day, and it kept him moving.

He came in one hot day after installing a stove out in Walterville. He was sweating, and the six pack of beer he had picked up on the way back tasted good. It seemed to pick him up, keep him on the go.

He walked quickly back to the shop. He had one more stove to load and deliver this afternoon.

He was provoked when he saw Tyler idly looking out the window. Tyler was using the striker to light his cigarette. He was a young kid, big and strong, but it drove Bob crazy that he was so slow, especially when Bob was paying him by the hour.

Bob had hired Tyler only last week. He needed someone to help weld. There was just so much Bob had to do — figuring, pricing steel (which was still going up), buying parts, testing paints, loading, delivering, installing as well as waiting on customers.

He and Carol traded off serving out front now. She had enough to do, too. She worked alongside him in the back, standing there handing him his gloves, torch, helmet or welding rod. Or she bricked with Jesse, painted, or cleaned up with the girls. It wasn't easy for her to keep the books straight either, because of Bob's habit of jotting down prices, names and addresses, or dates on the nearest wall.

Then only a few days ago, another problem had come up. A customer had returned to complain that his cast iron door had cracked. It cost Bob \$100, but he replaced it. He was going to stand behind each one of his stoves and his word. Then it worried him afterwards that there might be others. He couldn't stand to think of his stove as being flimsy or faulty in any way, so he became occupied making new patterns for doors. The crack had occurred between the draft caps, so he decided to put trees across the middle of the door to give it extra thickness and strength. Fortunately, the new design even looked more decorative.

He had added a new model to his line, too. The Mama Bear. The Papa Bear put out too much heat for some of the smaller homes, so he made the Mama five inches shorter and two inches narrower.

Another matter which he had taken care of was the patents. At

last he could afford to pay for the finalization of the patent papers. Now he felt proud that the stove was really his, his own creation, offspring and contribution to society. There were others who did nothing but talk about saving energy and burning up our unreplaceable resources, but he had done something about it.

Bob crunched in the empty beer can and threw it in the garbage pail then went over to the work shelf.

“Come on, Tyler. We have to get this stove done. I’ve got to take it out to Goshen and put it in tonight. Bring over the door and I’ll help you put it on.”

Bob began to examine the firebox Tyler had welded that morning. It was not as good as Bob would have done it. He was very picky, a perfectionist at welding, and it made him mad to see Tyler’s sloppy workmanship. He wished he could point out to Tyler in a calm constructive way all of his mistakes, but he felt himself getting riled up. He might fly off the handle, start to stutter and make a fool of himself.

He heard a loud crash over by Tyler. He looked around. Tyler had dropped the door and broken off the hinge.

Bob came unstrung. He could feel the veins in his neck tighten, his blood heating up his face, neck and the top of his head.

“What the hell is the matter with you?” he yelled. “We only have one door left and you drop the son of a bitch.”

Needless to say, Tyler didn’t last the month. Carol, however was the one to let him go.

“I can’t do it,” Bob said. “If I get started, I might punch him out.”

By next month, Bob had gone through three more welders. He wasn’t too sure he was going to keep the two hippies he had now, either. The problem was taking too much of his time. Right now he needed to concentrate on improving the draft caps. Two people had complained that the pipe caps on the stove got too hot and burned their hand. After much brain racking, he came up with the idea of adding a bar made of thin metal, extending about one inch horizon-

tally out from the cap. It would be air cooled, insulated and wouldn't be hot to touch.

As he sketched out the design, he couldn't get his mind off his troubles as an employer. He had hired Mac, a guy with whom he worked at Weyerhaeuser. Mac was on the bottle and couldn't keep a job. But Bob felt sorry for him and took him on. He couldn't turn away a down and outer, a loser. It made him feel good to give somebody a new chance, a break. But Mac didn't show up once too often and Bob had too many customers waiting for stoves. So he and Carol had made up the story of business being slow and gave him notice.

Then came Billy. This time Bob decided to hire on a piecemeal basis. He paid Billy so much a fire box, a top and the leg. To begin with, there was the clash over that damn rock n' roll music. Bob had bought a small radio and put it on the window sill so he could listen to the Fisher Stove commercials that were now playing. Also, he liked to listen to Johnny Cash and Charlie Pride. But everytime he turned his back, Billy would change the station. Finally Bob exploded, "If you touch that goddamn radio again, I'm going to bust your skull wide open."

Even a few days after that, when Bob came back after bringing in a load of new supplies, there was the radio again blasting out that rock n' roll. But it was when Bob caught Billy turning in an overcounting of his work that he wanted him out. Bob was so inflamed, that again Carol had to do the firing.

"I'll kill him," he said. Bob hated anyone to cheat him. He could bawl like a baby over a wounded dog, but he would slam a two by four over the head of anyone who cheated him out of three cents.

He didn't know why he couldn't seem to handle employees. He had been a foreman over as many as twenty or thirty men, he hadn't thought twice about chewing a man out for sluffing. He was working alongside them and he expected everyone to pull his weight. But now it seemed different. They were working for *him*. Somehow he didn't feel right about demanding a lot. And they seemed to sense his softness and took advantage of him.

These two hippies were no fireballs, either. But this month was so busy, he decided to put up with what he could get.

Even Mom started coming down to help with the painting. And Dad was running the hacksaw — cutting the channel iron for the door seals, the legs and the two inch hinges out of twenty foot flat bar. He spent a lot of time tinkering, however. He was forever working on some improvement to the stove, either water coils or various styles of legs. And, of course, the oven he was always talking about.

His woman had left him. Although Baxter said she had run off with money from his bank account, Bob suspected Baxter had paid her off to leave him in peace. Now Baxter was being nicer to Mom — helping her with her garden and laying new linoleum in her bathroom. She was warming up, but she said she refused to move back in with him at Upper Camp Creek.

Baxter was looking over Bob's shoulder now, watching him draw out the new handle on the pipe cap.

“Think that'll block the heat, Bobby? Kind of ugly. Sticks out — might catch on someone's leg. That's what you made up your mind to go to?”

“Yep, going to apply for the patent tomorrow. Probably cost me a good \$750 bucks.”

No matter if they were selling stoves, seemed like they were always short of money. It all went back in, and they never seemed to get ahead.

Just then the Murrays came in through the door. They were going to pick up their stove five days ago and hadn't shown up. He signalled to Carol, busy on the other side of the shop chipping off slag, that he would take care of them.

He told the Murrays he had stored the stove in the back, to wait and that he would wheel it out for them. But he searched the entire storage area and couldn't find the stove. He grew impatient. Where the hell could it be? He had so much to do, and it pissed him off to waste time looking for something. He called for everybody to help. Everyone began searching except Baxter. He had slipped out the side door and driven off.

Bob had an intuitive feeling. He looked in the far back area where Baxter had been tinkering around that day. Sure enough, there was the Murray's stove, only it was about five feet tall and had a glass door oven. Baxter had completely modified the whole thing.

For the first time in his life, Bob was furious at his dad. He could overlook his tinkering, his meddling, his criticisms, but this was going to take hours to redo, time he didn't have.

He had to make apologies to the Murrays. He promised to have them another stove ready that evening.

It was already four o'clock and that meant he wouldn't be home till 8:00 p.m. Son of a bitch. He wouldn't be able to eat with the kids again. He missed talking to them, teasing and telling them jokes.

He walked over to where Carol was working. She was on her hands and knees. There were black smudges on the front of her smock, her arms and around one eyelid. The hair along the base of her neck and around her temples was dripping wet from perspiration.

"We'll have to get this stove ready to give to the Murrays," Bob said.

Immediately she stood up and moved over to make room for him. He looked the stove over. There were still berries in places she had missed.

"That looks like shit," he said.

Carol's eyes widened into a glare. The black around her eyes emphasized their ferociousness. She threw down the scraper onto the floor.

"If it's not good enough for you, then I don't want to do this job anymore," she said. She had been working hard and wasn't going to put up with Bob's temper.

But Bob was fit to be tied. "If you're not going to do it, then I'll do it myself," he said.

He grabbed her wrist and pulled her over to the entrance to the office. Then he took a piece of soapstone out of his pocket and drew a line across the threshold.

“You keep your ass over that side of the line from now on,” he said.

He stomped back to the stove, took hold of the scraper and knelt down to begin chipping. Just as he started, he saw a brick fly across the room, hit the wall and splatter all over the floor. He looked up and saw Carol still standing at the doorway, tears in her eyes, her arm still suspended from throwing the brick. Then he looked at the scattered pieces of brick.

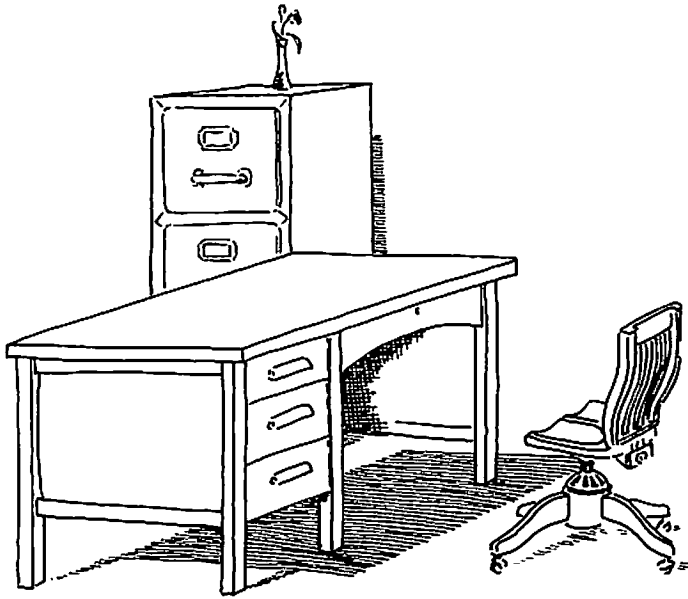
“There goes another thirty five cents down the drain,” he said in a sarcastic tone and turned coldly back to the stove.

It took him only one and a half hours to clean, paint and brick the stove. By that time he had cooled off and felt sorry for the way he had spoken to Carol. He looked into the office and saw Carol sitting at the dresser desk, still crying. No use in trying to say anything. He knew it would take her a long time to get over it. She didn't forget about things like him and stayed mad longer. One of the faults Bob had tried to overcome all of his life was his hotheadedness. Blow up, let off steam, say things without thinking. He would like himself to be one of those people who were always cool, collected, in control of every situation. But try as he did, he never seemed to get there. He felt particularly bad about taking his frustrations out on Carol. She just seemed to be an easy target and yet she was the one who meant more to him than anyone in the world.

He decided to make it up to her. The next morning he went shopping and bought her a new calculator and a large desk. It was second hand but it was solid oak and had lots of drawers. He even splurged for another fifty dollars and bought a file cabinet.

The next day Carol was calmed down and as loving as ever, but Bob's problem was still there. He just wasn't getting enough production. His Mom, bless her, was hard at it, Carol was rearranging her office, the hippies turned up late, and his dad spent the morning trying to convince Bob of all the advantages of his remodelled stove. There was no use in trying to change him.

Frustration and irritability were coming back on Bob. Then Ron



Correll walked in. He and Ron had worked together at Steelcraft, but Bob hadn't heard from Ron since he went to visit him in the hospital after the shooting accident. Ron was hunting deer last fall with his bow and arrow in the archery area when a double-ought buckshot hit him dead center in the chest. Even though Ron had thoracotomy surgery, the injury was so severe he didn't return to work. Bob took up a collection from among the workers and took it to him while he was recovering in the hospital.

"I hear you are making stoves now," Ron said. "Susie and I been looking for one for our place out in Veneta." Ron looked thin, and there was a drawn, tight look to his face.

"Give you a special deal, Ron," said Bob. They shook hands. "Good to see you. What've you been doin'?"

"Things haven't been so good," Ron said. He took out a Camel



and lit it. "I lost my case. The court made me look like some kind of nut and the guy who shot me got off scot-free. I went back to welding in February, but it was too heavy for me. I didn't feel like I was doing my part, so I quit. Call it self pride, I guess. Then I went to Lane Community College, decided to learn a new trade — drafting. But goin' back to school wasn't for me. So I got a job in a factory sitting on a metal stool screwing together pipe fittings. That nearly blew my mind. I couldn't take it. Since then we've been barely makin' it."

Ron had already smoked his Camel down to a small butt. As he turned to toss it out the window, Bob saw a gun and holster attached to the back of his belt.

"What the hell is that thing for?" Bob asked.

Ron gave the gun a firm pat. "I've decided a man needs to carry arms in this country to protect himself. I got four kids to think of," he said. "A couple of weirdos high on something flagged Susie and I down in our Volkswagen one day. They waved a 22 automatic rifle at Susie and threatened to shoot both our heads off. I managed to speed out of there and called the Sheriff to report the incident, but you know nothing was ever done to those kids."

"Looks like you've had some bad luck," Bob said. "Want to work here?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Same thing I do."

"Only if I can be an asset to you," Ron said. "I have to feel I'm earning my pay. I don't want to be overhead."

"Okay, we'll just see how she goes."

"Just one thing, Bob. My contract has to be based on the scriptures — a slave-master relationship. You're the boss. Only by being subservient to you do I serve God fully. And that comes first in my book."

"Sounds good to me," Bob said.

"I'll be there in the morning with my tools, coveralls and hood."

Bob broke him in on the first day. Before long, Ron could weld together a firebox, burn out the exhaust hole, put the exhaust vent

in, construct an ash fender, install the door and put in the draft caps at the rate of five to six stoves a day. Within two weeks Bob put Ron in charge of the entire manufacturing.

Ron took his responsibility seriously. "I figure my job is to keep you out of the shop," Ron told him. "Leave you free to coordinate your sales, installations and advertising."

The first thing Ron did was fire the two hippies. "Hell, you or I could accomplish more with a stick rod than they do with a wire welder," he said. "I want somebody working not picking his nose."

Ron showed Bob a box of burnt out drill bits and taps. "They weren't careful or shop wise, either," he said.

Bob went into the office and brought back a few scraps of paper. "Here, start pulling a few names from these. I scribbled down a few men who came in and applied for work."

Ron began interviewing and hired an eighteen-year-old kid for making small parts. But the most reliable worker he could find was his own wife, Susie. She quit her job at Williams Bakery and worked a full eight-hour shift welding, painting and bricking as diligently as any man Bob had ever seen.

The only allowance Bob made for her was to watch his swearing. He was afraid it might offend her religious beliefs. Carol and Susie, however, spoke the same language and developed a deep friendship. And Carol was now able to spend more time out front in the office and serving customers.

## CHAPTER IV

The territory was getting too damn big, Bob thought, as he looked over the names and addresses of his long order list. People were buying stoves from all over — Portland, Corvallis, Klamath Falls, Salem. Even out of state — Seattle, Washington; Boise, Idaho; and cities in North California he hadn't even heard of before. Of course, for those long distances, either the customers came over for their stoves or Bob shipped them by truck or rail. But still, his deliveries were getting pretty far out — Florence, Newport, Coos Bay, Bend and Medford. He had to hire one more man to help out — his nephew, Jerry Hodgins — which meant he now had four guys plus Ron and Susie.

And to think he was just touching the surface of each one of those towns. Hell, if he really promoted those places he could sell thousands more stoves. But even with bustin' his ass more than he was now, he knew he couldn't supply enough stoves. He had a hard enough time just supplying Springfield and Eugene.

The only way would be to start up shops in those other locations. But that meant he would have to go there himself, find a building, hire people, do the promotion work. He didn't have time to be away. Besides, he was a home town boy. Even going as far as Portland made him nervous, and his thoughts were only occupied with getting back to Upper Camp Creek.

The perfect setup would be if someone else opened and ran the shop. Just pay Bob, say \$15 a stove. The idea was appealing. He began to envision . . . If there were 200 shops situated all over the United States, and if each one sold just one stove a day, then he

could sit back and collect \$2500 a day. He smiled at the thought. Bob Fisher a rich man. He could do anything he wanted or felt like doing. Take it easy, have a few beers, go fishing, diddle a lot, visit the relatives, buy some of that land he always wanted — a new tractor, maybe a new combine. He would be in seventh heaven instead of struggling every day to survive like he was now.

His daydreaming had to come to an end when two customers came in through the door. Carol had gone out for some doughnuts, so Bob had to take care of them.

“Howdy, I’m Bob Fisher. Anything I can do for you?”

They were two young men dressed in cotton tee shirts, cutoffs and sandals. “My name is Paul Zyri and this is Claudio Querin. We saw these stoves advertised in the newspapers and grew curious to see them,” said the one with dark hair. The other was heavysset and had long hair. Both of them looked like hippies but were clean and didn’t look like dopers.

“Sure thing,” said Bob. “Greatest stove there is.” He took them to the back and showed them the stove. It wasn’t burning — August was too hot. Sometimes, however, if the customer requested, he would light it up temporarily.

“You from around here?” Bob asked.

“No, we are from British Columbia,” Paul said.

Now Canada. What a market that would be! Cold winters, even higher energy costs, and lots of timber.

Paul and Claudio began looking the stove over. Bob ran through its high efficiency, adaptability, longevity, and explained the natural circulating system. They seemed to be interested in how it was constructed. Bob guessed them to be mechanics. He had an idea.

“Hey, how about you guys makin’ these stoves?”

They didn’t answer. They smirked a little as though they thought he was joking.

“I’m serious,” Bob said. “The stove business will grow. People like to burn wood, that is why every house has a fireplace. But they are only five to eight percent efficient. Wood is replenishable, and there is enough slashwood to heat every house in the country without depleting the forests. It wouldn’t take much money

to start up. This is an opportunity for young men like you."

At that moment a car pulled up outside the shop, then another followed behind it. "You can see for yourself how good the stoves sell," Bob said. "It'll be busy like this for you once people get to know about Fisher Stoves. Word gets around."

The two young men looked at one another. They seemed impressed. "It's worth a try," Paul said. "What kind of a deal would we get?"

"I'll sell you a franchise. All I ask is \$1000 for the area and about eight percent of the gross.

Bob had no idea what a franchise was worth. He had very little background in business administration or finance. But he had a strong sense of fairness. Eight percent of the gross worked out about eighteen dollars a stove.

The people outside were out of their cars and coming in the shop now, and he would have to serve them.

"Tell you what. Go back and have Ron Correll show you how to make these stoves," he said to them. "Then come on out to my place at Upper Camp Creek for supper. We'll talk about it some more."

He called to Ron and turned them over to him. Then he tended to the customers. He gave his best sales pitch because he knew Paul and Claudio were watching to see if he had made a sale. Fortunately, both parties bought a stove.

Carol came back with the doughnuts for the 10:30 a.m. break. Bob noticed the bulging bag. She was always thoughtful and bought for everyone.

He was busting to tell her. "I think I just sold a franchise to build Fisher Stoves up in Canada," he said.

"That's great, Bobby," she said calmly and went on putting the doughnuts on a large tray at the small table in the corner. She never disagreed. If he was going to go to China to sell stoves, she would back him up just as long as she was assured of his love. The only time she got edgy was when he gave her a bad time. She took it wrong, as if it was her own doing, when it was really only his own bad mood that made him spout off at her. Right now he felt very

loving. He took the tray out of her hand, laid it on the desk and gave her a long, strong caress.

That evening while Carol and the girls were preparing supper, Bob and the two young men discussed the terms of the short homemade contract he had drawn up. Bob had called the patent agent that afternoon to apply for a patent in Canada. The agent advised Bob to sell licenses to manufacture the stove plus a royalty. A franchise, he said, carried too many restrictions.

"All it says here," Bob said, "is that you have to sell in your own territory, build the stove according to specification, pay a \$1000 license fee and minimum royalty of six percent — that's about \$15 a stove."

He had lowered the percentage after thinking it over later in the day. He felt guilty over making too much money off beginners. Anyway, he figured the less money they sent him, the more they would put into the business and that eventually would make Bob more money in the long run.

"I'll supply you the doors from here. No sense in you going to the expense of having patterns made. I'll keep tabs of your sales by the number doors I send out."

Paul had a few questions. They sat up talking over a few beers until 1:00 a.m. in the morning. Carol made up a bed on the couch, and they spent the night there. The next morning they all signed the contract, and Carol took it into town to have it notarized.

From then on, at every chance that came his way, Bob tried to solicit customers, relatives, old friends, and even salesmen, as Fisher Stove licensees.

Frank Jorgenson and his wife Barbara, who was also Bob's cousin, were down from Seattle to visit her folks, Uncle George and Aunt Hestor. On the night of the family get-together, Bob spent the evening discussing the stove business and showing them the one-page licensee contract. Frank at the time was an armored car driver, but he was having trouble with his knees. Bob convinced him this was a way out of his predicament. They bought a license

for the Seattle area, brought a man down for Bob to teach to make stoves, went back to Seattle and began to manufacture.

Then there was Ted Howe, a short, husky man who came looking for a sawdust furnace. He was in the heating and sheet metal business.

“What the hell do you want with one of those outdated things when you can have a Fisher?” Bob asked him.

Ted looked the stove over and was thoroughly convinced it was the best heater he had ever seen.

“Why don’t you build these things yourself?” Bob asked. In two days Ted was a licensee in Newport.

Mat Cullen had already seen a Fisher Stove. He knew its advantages and the favorable response it brought from people. Bob didn’t have much trouble talking him into buying a license for Canby.

Jake Jackson only wanted someone to build him a barbecue. Bob and he hardly became acquainted before he was off to Redmond making Fisher Stoves. There was one initial holdup, however. Jake was short of money and needed \$1000 to buy steel before the price went up again. Bob saw Jake as a sincere, hard-working type. Tall, thin and fair, he wore a cowboy hat and a wide belt buckle. Bob did not hesitate to loan him the money.

Everywhere Bob promoted or displayed his stove, he was on the lookout for potential licensees: The rodeo, the garden show and the Springfield parade, where he won first prize for the most original float.

At the Eugene fair in September, he had floor space in the Commercial Building. He was feeling rather cocky, because he had sold over one hundred stoves. A handsome man with silver grey hair and wearing a striped suit stopped to look at Bob’s display. Bob gave him a brochure, let him have a moment to look it over and was about to begin his sales speech when the man asked, “Are you satisfied with your present building as a manufacturing facility? I am a representative for the Hi-C Construction Company. We sell pole buildings. They serve very well for small factories, warehouses and such.”

He whipped out a card from a pocket inside his coat. Bob looked

at the card. Dunagan. Arnold Dunagan. Here was a switch. He was trying to sell Bob. The guy was a smooth talker, cool, polite. Bob liked his style.

“Hey, I’ve heard of those, I’ll keep it in mind,” Bob said. He tried to pretend he was interested. Can’t turn the guy off, he might buy a stove. “What do you think of my stove?” he asked. Better get back on the track.

“Very impressive,” Dunagan said. “I might be interested.”

Bob smiled. Dunagan was using the same tactic. He knows how to peddle, all right.

“What would you think about making these stoves and selling them?” he said.

It was Dunagan’s turn to smile. “Right now I’m pretty tied up in these pole buildings. But I’ve been around enough never to turn my back on something good. I’ll keep in it mind.” He held out his hand, and Bob shook it.

“Nice talking to you, Mr. Fisher.”

“Call me Bob. Hope to see you again.” Bob had a hunch he would, too.

As the Fisher Stove was getting more and more known, the licenses became more attractive and sought after. The television commercial helped. Bob had decided the script the producer wrote out did not have enough pizzaz. He was paying \$1000 for it, and by god, he wanted some punch to it. He figured he could do better.

He told Jerry his idea one afternoon over a beer on their way back from an installation. Jerry laughed and said, “You wouldn’t have the guts to say that in front of all those people.”

That cinched it. Now he had to show him he could. He rehearsed aloud in his pickup all the way to the television recording room. The station manager listened to it first to give his approval.

“Go ahead if you want to, but I think it will offend people,” he said.

Bob wore his new leather jacket with fringe down the sleeves



and around the bottom. His recently grown moustache was neatly shaped. He was in good physical shape from long hours of heavy labor, and he knew he looked good.

But when the cameras started to roll, his heart thumped hard inside his chest and he began to rock to and fro on his heels.

The shot showed Bob standing beside his stoves. "Howdy, I'm Bob Fisher," he said. "If you're tired of high energy costs, then you need a Fisher Stove." He had thirty seconds to mention the triple seal door, the two cooking levels and the superior craftsmanship, and to point out that the stove didn't smoke and held a fire overnight. Then came the punchline.

"Remember," he said, "these bears are super heavy. So if you've been drinking prune juice, don't try to lift one."

Immediately people came into the shop laughing to beat hell. There were phone calls from all over the county and state complimenting him on his performance. One little boy saw him walking across 42nd Street and shouted from a car window, "Hey, Mr. Fisher, been drinking any prune juice lately?" He then stuck out his tongue and went 'pfffft.' Bob heard everyone in the car squeal with laughter.

Bob was getting lots of attention in the newspapers, also. There were feature stories in the Portland *Oregonian* and *Oregon People*. One article in the *Register Guard* printed Bob's whimsical tale of how the Baby Bear was born: "We left a Papa Bear next to a Mama Bear stove one night and the next morning, there it was — the Baby Bear."

Art Beevor from Beaverton had followed the Fisher Stove progress in those feature stories. He told Bob he was looking for something to do when he retired. Maybe bring his son in on it. He came down with his wife to buy a license and soon was making a fine product. A craftsman and perfectionist like Bob, there was some debate as to who made the superior stove.

Mark Williams called from Silverton. He wanted out of the real estate business. The Red Carpet Company had grown too big for him. He liked the idea of a small home town business and bought a license for a thirty mile radius just outside of Salem.

At the end of the year, there were eight licensees in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. But in the early part of 1975, people began coming in from all over. Bob had put an ad in the January edition of a magazine called *My Little Salesman*. It was directed toward loggers, truckers and heavy equipment dealers. He tacked on two words at the bottom of the ad — “manufacturers wanted.”

Eugene Robinson, a small, soft-spoken man from Colorado, read the ad. He had been in logging and earth moving but was now sixty-two and wanted something less strenuous. He and Bob spent until late at night talking over his contract in front of the Fisher Stove in the A-frame. He came back again and brought his foreman for Bob to teach how to make stoves.

Floyd Gullickson spent his vacation learning to make stoves for his Wisconsin territory. He caught on quickly, having spent his life at manual labor and as a millwright. He found such a good market back in Wisconsin, he had to call in his son to help.

Roy Smith and Loren Trachsel were not welders or mechanics and had some doubts about their license for Minneapolis. But Bob urged them on.

“Here’s how you should do it,” he told them. “Find a shop with an experienced factory superintendent. Give him these blueprints, and he’ll know what to do. All you have to do is worry about the selling.”

It seemed to Bob like he spent most of his time training people to make stoves, drawing up blueprints and writing out measurements. He gave them doors, patterns, small parts and sometimes financed them to get started. Each time he watched the licensees take off for their territories, he wondered how they would fare. Which ones would make it? He later learned that some of his early predictions were not always accurate.

And there always seemed to be somebody staying at the A-frame. Carol was constantly cooking, trying to be a gracious hostess, watching the kids and still put in her hours at the shop.

Once they had a guy who was a real know-it-all. Bernard Mulligan.

Marketing, advertising, production — you name it. He tried to tell Bob how to do it. And Bob could tell Mulligan irritated Carol the way he was always bragging up Canada. “Canada is so much more scenic” or “The people in Canada aren’t spoiled and soft.” Bob wished to hell he would get back up there, make his stoves and get out of his hair. He was driving them all nuts with his morning exercises — screwing up his face and neck, flopping and jumping all over the floor. And Bob didn’t see why he had to add wheat germ and sunflower seeds to Carol’s perfectly good chicken casserole.

The time came when Bob began to have doubts about the short one-page contract. In March, a bald, tall and thin man in his middle thirties came in the shop to sell Bob a booth in the Eugene Home Show.

“My name is Cal, Cal Cotton. Praise the Lord. I’m here to give you a fantastic break. This might be the best deal you’ve had all year,” he said. He flipped out his papers and showed Bob a drawing of the available spaces left on the homeshow floor plan. He looked over at Carol, who was quietly listening at her desk, smiled and said, “Jesus loves you.”

Who does this guy think he is, the Messiah? thought Bob. He had a stubby reddish blonde beard and thick lips.

“How much?” Bob asked.

“Special price — just for you. Three days for only \$250. This is a great opportunity to show your product. We have large crowds, and many people will pass your way.” He spoke like he was calling you into the fold.

Bob wasn’t interested. It was too much money. And he was tired of all these salesmen coming through here. He was constantly bombarded by people promoting the bowling alley, magazines, the ball games. Once he had given away a stove to the Lion’s Club for the Blind Children’s Society. Bob knew of a partially blind child up around Camp Creek, gave them his name and told them to contact

him. He saw the boy a couple of months after that and he still didn't have any glasses. Bob called them and told them what he thought. The boy had glasses within a week.

Cal wasn't easily put off. "I can see you have a fine product," he said, looking through the door back into the shop. "You ought to show it off."

This was Bob's chance to get the guy off the subject. "You want to buy a stove?" he asked.

"Look like fine stoves. Mighty fine," Cal said.

Bob talked ten minutes about the stoves, then about the licensees.

"You owe it to people to tell them about this stove," Cal said. "Praise the Lord. This is a contribution to our degenerating society. Put it in the homeshow, let the people see it." Cal kept at it until Bob was talked into it.

After Bob signed the contract, he said, "Anybody who can sell a crock of shit like you, ought to be able to sell a million stoves. Do you weld?"

"No, but I could learn. What areas are still open?"

"Idaho."

"Let me think it over," Cal said.

He was back in two days to learn to make stoves. Bob gave him the blueprints, patterns and doors. Cal loaded them up in his Volkswagen van with his wife and five children. A Bible lay on the dashboard.

They didn't hear from him for nearly three months. Cal didn't send money for royalties nor did he pay for the doors.

"Better call him up," Carol finally said. "And stop sending him more doors."

"Why? He's doing real good up there. I'm impressed with how many stoves he's selling."

"I don't like to see anyone take advantage of your generosity and good heartedness, Bobby," she said.

"He's an honest man. He'll pay up," Bob said.

"He is a sharp. Can't you see through him?"

"Okay, *you* call him. I don't want to get in bad with him." He stood there while Carol called.

She held the telephone a distance from her ear so he could hear Cal.

"We need the money," Carol said. "We are a little short this month."

"Don't worry, I'll get it to you," Cal said in his boisterous voice. "Did you think of Jesus today?"

Cal had set Carol to thinking. That night after they had gone to bed, she said, "Most of the licensees seem to be good men, but there's bound to be a couple of rotten apples in the barrel. Do you think we ought to hire a lawyer to look over our one page contract?"

"Okay. But look for one in a crummy office," Bob said as he yawned. "He'll be cheaper."

"Then he will be a crummy lawyer," Carol laughed. "Let's look one up in the yellow pages."

She crept softly down the stairs in her frilly eyelet nightgown and brought back the telephone book. She began reading down the list of names. When she came to Watkinson, Bob said, "Get him. It sounds like that nice 'Watkins' man that used to come round selling stuff."

The next day, in late afternoon, they both went to keep the appointment Carol had made with Mr. John Watkinson. He was young, slender and wore thick rimmed glasses.

"Don't I know you from somewhere?" Bob asked.

"Yes, Mr. Fisher. Over a year ago, you gave a brochure to my wife and me at the Saturday flea market."

Bob remembered. It was that young couple who wanted a stove but didn't have their home built yet.

"You ever get a stove?" Bob asked.

"We are still working on it," he said. "I'm just getting started in business, too. Now, how can I help you?"

"We've been using this short contract for our licensees. But we're getting so many, we better have you draw up something proper and legal like," Bob said. They gave him the names of Brian Higby and Trent Johansen who had just bought Utah. Trent had a good job as bailiff at Lane County and Brian was in real estate. But they were Mormons and liked the idea of starting a new

life in Salt Lake City.

Mr. Watkinson looked the short contract over. He had the habit of taking off his glasses and putting the part that rests over the ear into his mouth. He used a lot of "ums" and "ahs." He asked endless questions about the business, the debts, the sales, about the royalties, the patent, the trademark. On and on.

Carol answered most of the questions. Bob couldn't sit still. Every five minutes he stood up to shake out his levis or get a drink of water. He hated these legal details. A lot of mumbo jumbo with big words. He didn't see it getting anything done; nothing solid that he could see and touch came out of it.

Now Watkinson was telling him he had to refer to a patent and trademark expert. They make everything so damn complicated. If this was what it was going to involve, he was glad he was turning the shitterrie over to somebody else. He had to have a lawyer — they were a necessary evil. And this one seemed like a nice enough one. But he hoped he would have as little to do with this kind of thing as possible. At the time, he had no idea of the extent of the legal matters that were to come.

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Before Bob knew it, the summer had flown by. It was already September. Never seemed to be time to get everything done. Continually running back and forth, he always seemed out of breath.

Right now he needed to go out and buy new equipment. He walked through the shop checking over the condition of the machinery. He noted he needed a hoist, disc grinder, drill press, and a hacksaw. It was smoky and hotter than hell inside even though it was still morning. And noisy — loud banging of stoves being flipped over, the buzzing of the drills and whirring of saws.

They were really putting the stoves out now. About fifteen a day. Ron had sometimes up to twelve men on a mass production system: One parts man to cut the hinges, drill holes in the doors, run the band saw, and cut the door channel, handles and clips to hold the brick in; two men in the bricking department, usually one in the painting, one in the cleaning, knocking off slag and berries and Jerry and another guy to help Bob load, make deliveries and install stoves.

Right now he was short a guy. In a way, he missed spouting off at Stan. He was an irritating little bastard but a good scapegoat for blowing off steam when anything went wrong. One Saturday a few months ago, Stan Chaney came in to the shop to buy a stove. He was about twenty-two, small and skinny. He had tucked his pair of green army combat pants inside a pair of tall boots.

"It's for my wife's birthday," he said. His voice was high and whiney. His dark eyes seemed only an inch apart and had a scared look.

"You came at the right time," Bob said. "I happen to have about four extra stoves in stock."

"I don't have any money," Stan said. His shoulders stooped slightly as though his chest was caved in. He looked helpless; another no-hoper, Bob thought.

"We can make some arrangement where you only have to pay \$25 a month," Bob suggested.

Stan was happy with that so they loaded the stove, a Mama Bear, into the back of Stan's 62 Chevy pickup. But only a few days after Stan had carted it off, he was back again.

"I lost my job," he said. "I won't be able to pay for the stove." He looked pathetic, nervous, and his eyeballs shifted from side to side. Bob's heart softened, and he felt sorry for him.

"Why don't you work here?" he said.

Stanley smiled a sheepish smile and signed on. But little did Bob know what he was getting into. The kid was always messing things up. He put the bricks in wrong or he forgot a brick entirely. One time when unloading at a delivery, he let go of the four wheel cart with a Papa Bear on it. It rolled down off the ramp, down a busy

street and into a concrete storage building. Thank God no one was hurt. And only one leg of the stove was slightly bent.

He was the joke of the shop. "Wonder what Stan will do today?" someone would say. They called him "Stanley" whenever they were teed off at him.

But if someone got after him, he broke into tears. He was temperamental, erratic. Sometimes he threw tantrums over a mistake when cutting small parts. Then Carol would calm him down and encourage him.

After about three or four months, Stanley came to Bob. "I want to go out and build stoves in my own territory," he said.

Bob refused. "You don't even know how to wipe your own ass," he said.

"I'll apply myself, try to learn more." He put on his pitiful, wretched face.

"No."

"I think I could do it."

"No."

"It would give me responsibility, new direction."

"No."

Everyday he was after them. He worked on Carol with tears in his eyes.

Bob found himself spending a lot of time dodging him, ducking around corners. Finally he said, "That skinny ass kid is driving me ape shit. Send him to Arizona. Anywhere. Just get rid of him!"

The next day Stan drove up to the shop with his pickup loaded up past the sideboards and covered with an old dirty tarp. Bob thought he was taking a load to the dump.

"Where the hell you goin'?" Bob asked.

"I'm headed for Flagstaff, Arizona," Stan said, his ridiculous grin on his face.

Bob wondered how Stanley was faring out in the wide world. But right now he was too busy and had too many things to do to think about him very long.

He walked quickly through the shop. Better order some more steel and small parts supply, too. They really go through the



materials, he thought. Ron had said Dad was taking some home with him. Wonder what he is fooling around with now. Bob knew Baxter was sometimes a nuisance to Ron, and he felt a gratitude to Ron for his patience and good humor with the old man.

Bob went into the office to call the steel company. Carol was serving a customer even though it was only 8:30. They had a bookkeeper now, but she was still doing the invoicing, payroll and selling.

There were three men waiting in there for him. Short, square heads, brown hair — anyone could see they were brothers.

“Be with you in a minute,” Bob said. They nodded and leaned back against the wall to wait.

First Bob called American Steel. They had better stuff — not rusty; nice and flat — and they had better service. If they said they’d have it by Thursday afternoon, then they had it. But they were one cent more than the others.

Far West Steel was cheaper, but sometimes their steel was a little warped. If the metal was off 1/4”, the welders were screwed up about one hour because they had to re-cut it with the torch.

He dialed American. “Yeah. This is Bob Fisher. I need material for about five hundred stoves this time. Figure it out and give me a quote.”

The answer was a flat 23.75¢ per one hundred pounds.

“I should get a better price if I’m buying this much. Come on, give me your best shot.”

The answer came back 23¢.

Bob did a little figuring. He knew they were making about ten percent. And they were hungry for business now that high prices had put a lot of companies out of business. And they could see Bob’s business was growing fast.

“I just got a bid from Far West for 21¢,” he said. This little lie could save him three to five hundred bucks. “I’d pay a little more because your stuff is better but —”

This time the answer was down to 22.5¢.

“Okay, deliver it on Friday morning,” he said and hung up the phone.

He beckoned Carol over a moment. "I just ordered \$5000 worth of steel. How much money we got?"

"Only \$2000. But if you give them a check on Friday, they won't send it in 'til Monday. Maybe we'll have a good weekend and can rush over Monday to cover the check," she said. Would they ever be able to stop worrying about money?

More people were coming in, Bob turned hurriedly to the three brothers.

"What can I do for you?"

"We're interested in getting a license to make Fisher Stoves. We are the Dunn brothers. This here is Roy and George. I'm Walt."

The heavyset one did the talking. He had a soft toned voice. Roy, the thin one, seemed quiet, reticent. George, the youngest, looked a little skeptical but said nothing.

"How about you guys having a look around while I take care of these customers?" Bob asked.

"Sure," Walt said, shrugging his shoulders. "Whatever you say . . ."

There were two customers. Bob had seen the lady pull up in a white Cadillac. She looked like she expected immediate attention. Bob chose to serve the young couple first. On his way back to show them the display model, he felt the sole of his boot begin to flap as he walked. Damn boot! He had just tacked the sole back on yesterday with a couple of small nails. He didn't seem to have time to buy a new pair. And his hair was getting so long, he could feel it on the back of his neck. He couldn't even get to a damn barber.

He did not come back front for over an hour. While he was in the back, he had finished off a stove and loaded up three more for buyers who had come to pick up the stoves they had ordered weeks before.

There were more people waiting by now.

I believe I'm next," said the lady with the white Cadillac. "I would like to see Mr. Fisher."

"You're lookin' at him," Bob said.

"You're Bob Fisher?" the woman asked, aghast.

"Excuse me, I have to go take a piss," Bob said. He went

outside and ducked underneath the old army blanket stretched across the doorway to the toilet. Still didn't have a proper door yet.

When he came back, the woman looked a bit indignant but she was determined to be served.

"I want to see a Fisher Stove," she said.

He took her to the back.

"Is this the only model you have? It's ugly."

"I'm ugly, too. But I work good," Bob said. Then he added, "This stove will fit into any decor — antique or modern. And I wouldn't change a line of it."

"But I like to see the fire," she said.

"This thing is meant to be efficient," Bob said. He was getting impatient. "You can get stoves with tempered glass but it breaks too easy and soots up so you have to keep cleaning it. I get those ornamental stoves as trade-ins every day."

The lady noticed Bob glancing over at the people lined up out front. She sensed his rush. "I'll take one."

"What kind?"

"A Papa Bear. My house is about fifteen hundred square feet."

"You don't need that big a one."

"I think I do."

"I don't and besides I can't sell you one today. It'll be five weeks before I can give you a Mama."

The woman whipped out her check book. "How much will it be?"

"\$300."

"Here's the check. My son and son-in-law told me about these stoves and in five weeks I'm coming back and getting mine."

Bob took the check into the office and handed it over to Carol. Then he took care of more customers. At about 11:00, Carol gave him a bag containing two MacDonald's cheeseburgers. It was his breakfast and lunch. She nodded her head in the direction of the corner of the room where the Dunn brothers were still waiting. Bob noticed the ashtray was full of cigarettes.

Bob chomped into his cheeseburger. "What territory do you want?"

“Someplace on the West Coast,” Walt said.

“Nothing left on the West Coast. Only the East Coast left.”

The brothers looked at one another. They talked quietly among themselves. Walt was for it. George argued against it. Roy seemed to mediate between them.

“Which states?” George asked.

Bob looked at his map he had tacked to the wall above the desk. There were pins with red heads stuck in most of the states. Not much left.

Only two weeks ago he had sold New Hampshire to Arnold Dunagan, the man who tried to sell a pole building to Bob at the County Fair. Bob had guessed right on that one — he somehow had sensed Dunagan would come around again.

Then Woody Taylor, a dark, overweight man in his sixties, drove up in a Lincoln Continental one day last week, looked over the operation and bought four states at once — Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Some kind of a business tycoon. Always talking about his condominiums, shopping centers and apartment houses. He was the kind that snapped his fingers and people jumped.

And of course, he was used to luxuries. Bob laughed to himself as he remembered when Woody and his wife stayed at the A-frame. The fresh water spring was drying up with a long summer drought. Sometimes they would only get brown water coming out the taps.

“Why don’t you fix things up around here?” Woody ranted. “You deserve a better life. Get yourself a Mercedes.”

His wife, Ginny, was different — down to earth, a little embarrassed by the rocks Woody bought for her fingers. And she was so good to Carol. While she was outside pulling weeds with her, Ginny told her, “You forget about this garden. You can only do so much. Don’t push yourself or you will get sick.”

Woody had big ideas about the business, too. He talked about shortcuts to manufacturing — like using a one piece pre-bent top instead of the three pieces welded together. And better advertising. “Get yourself a first class brochure,” he said, “Not some backyard amateur stuff.”

Bob wondered why a big tycoon like Woody bothered with him. Until, on the last day before leaving, he turned to Bob and said, "You know, Fisher. There is something about you that makes people care."

Bob swished down the last two bites of his cheeseburger with the coke. He wished it was a cold beer instead, but no chance of Carol buying that. He had given up coffee last spring. He was too uptight and was having trouble going to sleep at night.

"Take your choice of what's left and stick a pin in it," he said to the Dunns, pointing to the map. He made a beeline for the door. "I'll be back in a couple of hours. I've got to go out and buy some equipment."

The parking lot was so jammed that afternoon when he came back, he couldn't get through to unload his pickup. Son of a bitch! It was after 2:00. He had to sell all these people, unload this damn crap, make four or five deliveries and one installation tonight. He felt his legs begin to tense up under him. He shifted gears, rammed on the gas pedal and sped over the stubble grass in the vacant lot at the side of the shop. He positioned the pickup and called out for someone to help him unload.

Ron brought over a young red headed kid about twenty years old. "This here's Dick Higgins," Ron said. "He's lookin' for a job."

Bob looked at him. Looked like another hippie trying to find himself. Just hope he's not another Stanley. "Okay, Higgins. Let's see what you can do. Soon as we're done here, I've got a delivery for you to make."

The kid was soft and began to sweat as they carried in the equipment, but he kept up pace and didn't complain. They put a stove on the back of the pickup, and Bob gave him an address.

"Make it snappy. I've got more after this one," he said.

As soon as Bob entered the office, he was hit by a customer. "Have you got a used Mama?"

"Hell, ya, my Mama is used," he said, chuckling and pointing his thumb over toward Carol, who was making out a sales slip for a stove she had just sold. "Na," he said seriously, "I don't get any Fisher Stoves back — unless it is for a different size. 'I got one

Franklin that came back four times, a Wards Circulator and a Montague."

As he talked he saw the Dunns over in the corner again. Get to you in a minute," Bob said, apologetically.

The telephone rang. Someone wanted to talk to him about wood species. After that he sold two more stoves, and it was almost 4:30 before he got around to the Dunns.

"You decide what territory you want?"

"We'll take West Virginia and Virginia. We took a short trip to the library while you were gone and checked out an atlas. Those states have got good population, timber and climate. They are right directly across the U.S. from Oregon, and from what we read, the Roanoke Valley is very much like the Willamette Valley," said Roy. George looked a little more agreeable and Walt seemed anxious to close the deal.

"Sounds good to me," Bob said. "Better spend a couple days with Ron making the stoves. You got someplace to stay?"

"We're staying at George's place. But we'll be here tomorrow at 1:00 sharp," said George.

Bob shook his head as they left. They'll never make it, he thought. Nice guys but too quiet and not aggressive enough. This was one of the times he was way off in his predictions.

The Dunns no sooner were out the door when Dick Higgins came in. "What's next Mr. Fisher?"

I'll be damned. Only took the kid thirty minutes. He just might go places in this Fisher outfit. This time he was right.

Bob coordinated more deliveries for that afternoon, checked over the orders, talked over the phone to licensees and took care of more customers the rest of the day.

Just as he and Carol closed the shop at 6:30, Ron and Susie Correll came up front. They looked serious and slightly apologetic, like they had a confession to make.

"You got somethin' on your mind?" Bob asked.

"Bob, I've been working here for a year now. And I'm deeply grateful for the job. I've enjoyed working with you and grown to love you like you was my brother. I've tried to keep my contract to

you and to God. I've spent a lot of time training people to make stoves and watch them go off and make money. Call it lust if you like, but I can't help wanting the same for myself."

Bob felt a little saddened. What would he do without Ron? Shit, he was already swamped up to his neck now. But he looked at the two of them — tired and dirty, honesty and sincerity in their eyes. He hated to lose them, but it would be selfish of him to hold them back. He had to think of what was best for them, and they deserved something good after all their tough breaks.

"You got any money to get started?"

"About \$700 saved. But we have our sons to help us work."

Bob walked back to the shop. He collected a welder, torch kit, his new grinder and hacksaw and put them in a pile.

"Take these and enough material to build 10 stoves," he said. "I'll give you Medford out of my own territory. Get down there and get your business going. And remember, call for help if you need it. I won't let you sink."

Bob took off with Jerry at 7:00 to make an installation. He didn't get home until almost midnight and he was fairly juiced up. He tried to sneak upstairs quietly without knocking anything over, but Carol was still waiting up for him.

"Where have you been? I've been worried," she said.

"Guess what?" he said, trying to act gay and excited. "Jerry and I stopped off for a beer on our way home. We got to talking to some contractor building homes out near Coburg. He bought fifty stoves. What do you think of that?"

She didn't seem too thrilled. "Have you had anything to eat?" she asked.

"Na, I'm not hungry," he said.

The beer, the heat, the constant rush of the day suddenly began to churn his stomach. He felt nauseated. He took off his socks and boots, stripped down to his shirt and shorts, then lay down on the bed. His head was swirling not only from the beer but with all of the figures, names, things he had to remember to do tomorrow. He had

to hold everything in his head because there wasn't time to write anything down.

He looked over at Carol picking up his shirt and dirty levis and putting them in the clothes hamper. There was only a small lamp on over by the dresser. He could see her soft, round curves through the nightgown. She had a fresh glow to her skin and she smelled of lotion and shampoo.

He thought back to the carefree times they had together before the stove business — the way she laughed and scolded when he teased her, the time he took her down the McKenzie River in his fishing boat and how she sat calmly smiling in complete trust even when they were caught in a swift current and Bob had to row like hell to keep the boat from crashing into the rocks. Then downstream a ways after the danger had passed, he had taken her over to the bank . . .

Yet they hardly had time for one another anymore. Always talking business until late at night — where to advertise, when to buy steel, how many stoves they were selling.

"The kids missed you," she said, crawling into bed.

The kids. Damn, how he felt guilty that he never saw them now that school started again. Never sat down to supper together, never went anyplace together. It was like running them by remote control — over the telephone or by notes on the refrigerator. Even when they were around and he and Carol were talking about stoves, the kids seldom interrupted. Once, Carol had set the rule that they never discuss business at home. But it didn't last long.

"Just this one thing . . ." he would say, and off they'd be talking stoves again.

Even tonight, there was something he had to bring up.

"I didn't get a chance to tell you. Smith and Trachsel called. They have a problem. Do you remember they didn't want to be welders? I told them to get a fabricator? Well, they found a company called Self Sufficiency who got the idea they would make the stove without paying for the royalties or for the doors. Can you beat that? I told them you'd talk to John Watkinson about it."

He looked over at Carol. She was fast asleep. He leaned over



her, stroked her back and kissed her on the shoulder. Then he settled down under the covers but he couldn't relax. His heart was racing too fast. Thinking about someone stealing his stove made him fume. It was like finding someone with your wife — you get hairy all over, he thought. He didn't sleep all night.

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Bob hurried to finish his bath. He still hated them. Stripping down, exposing his body to soap and water seemed an intrusion, an invasion of his privacy.

It was a cold day in January, 1976. He had left the door open to let the heat from his Fisher Stove radiate into the bathroom. At least it wasn't as cold in Oregon as it was in some places back East. A cold snap had just hit there. He had heard stories over the news of people without energy, wearing three or four layers of clothing, huddled together in school rooms or depots. Bob felt sympathy for them and wished he could send some of the desperate cases a free Fisher Stove.

It was 8:00 p.m. Already late by one hour. He was going to a birthday party at his sister Delores's house down on Hayden Bridge Road near Mom's. Delores was giving a party for Teresa, her daughter. Bob hadn't seen much of his relatives lately and was looking forward to seeing them. He had missed the Christmas and New Year get-together because he was too busy. He and Carol just barely had time to get something bought for the kids.

Bob wondered if his relatives thought he was turning into a snob now that his business was going good. Not Mom or Dad — because they knew anything he had was theirs to share. But his brother and sister admired the status of money and success. Bob felt sorry for Donny. He had worked at Weyerhaeuser for seventeen years now, raised cattle, farmed his land, built his own home. Steady, reliable,

a quiet plugger. His sister Delores was a hard worker, too. Like Mom. Sewing, yardwork, raising beans, working in a nursery. Bob felt a little guilty that he had more than they had.

He came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel and passed by the kitchen on his way upstairs to get dressed. Carol was busily fixing a cheese platter to take to the party. She had come home a little earlier and had already changed clothes.

"Don't forget to take that beer that's in the refrigerator," he reminded her as he passed by. Boy, he would really like to hang one on tonight. Get blotto. He needed a break, forget all his recent worries.

This guy Schrader was bugging him. He had come in sometime last September with a picture of a stove he had built.

"What do you think of this?" he asked. He was a husky man with dark curly hair.

Bob looked at the picture. It was an exact replica of a Fisher Stove only it had an oven built into the top level of the two step design. It had Schrader Home Baker written on the door.

"It will probably work since it's just like a Fisher," Bob answered sarcastically.

"Well, I got a few orders for them but I wanted to see if you'd mind before I went ahead and built them." He smiled, trying to be a nice guy.

"Well, I would mind," Bob said. "You know you're doing wrong or you wouldn't be in here." His respiration rate had speeded up.

Schrader knew exactly how he stood with Bob when he left there. But he went ahead with making his stoves. Since then, Schrader Stove ads had been appearing in the same papers that carried Fisher's ads, Schrader made television commercials similar to Bob's, and he opened a showroom.

Bob checked it out with Jim Givnan, his patent agent. He found out that Schrader had taken his drawings there, but the agent told Schrader his stove might be an imitation. So Schrader then filed for his patent with a Portland agent. Bob believed it would be only about three months before Schrader's patent application would be

denied. But in the meantime, Schrader was selling stoves. True, Schrader had by now changed the stove a little. He was using aluminum doors instead of the steel or cast iron door, and he was also using a different door handle and a squared off ash fender. Even so it still looked like a Fisher.

It burned Bob up every time he thought of it. How the hell was he supposed to enforce his patent? Wrap it around the barrel of a '44, maybe that'd do it. Or else throw the goddam thing in the fire. It obsessed him so much he couldn't think straight. He had to work at keeping cool, controlling his thoughts.

Then the thing came up with one of his licensees, Jake Jackson. Jake brought into the shop a modified model of the Fisher Stove which was wider and had two doors.

"People can open the doors and put a screen over it. We can call it the fireplace model," Jake said. Bob noticed he was wearing a fancier, more expensive belt buckle.

Bob hesitated. He didn't want to rush into a decision. He had the other licensees and their reactions to think about. That meant they would all have to alter their manufacturing processes.

But later, Bob heard rumors Jake was making his fireplace model on his own. Bob went to Redmond and walked into Jake's showroom. There it was — a Fisher Stove adaptation with double doors. Jake became rattled and tried to explain that he felt strong on his double door stove.

When Carol heard Bob's story after he returned home, she wanted to take on the double door line. "We could make two sizes — call them the Grandma and Grandpa," she said.

But negotiations over the royalties during the next few weeks were charged with too much pride and hurt feelings. Jake broke away and began his own stove — the Frontier.

Once someone turned on Bob, he never felt the same again. He knew it was wrong — better to forgive and forget. He worked at it, but it still gnawed at him.

At least Jake had settled up fairly. Not like Ray Bruce, a licensee from California, who wanted Bob to take on another adaptation of the Fisher Stove with a double door oven on top which he now

called the Buffalo Stove. When he went off on his own, he owed \$27,000 for doors and royalties but still hadn't paid up.

Bob slipped a clean white tee-shirt over his head then began to comb his hair. As he stood before the mirror of the bedroom dresser, he saw that his neck was turning red and the flush was spreading up over his jowls. His skin over that area was hot, burning. It was a symptom that he was smoldering, boiling inside.

It was always something. One thing after another. And today Dick Higgins left. Not that Bob wasn't glad to see Dick get his own territory. The red headed kid had been a good worker. Never idle, didn't walk but ran. He would sweep, clean, deliver stoves, anything Bob asked. And when Bob trained him to weld, he caught right on. It was like he suddenly had found what he wanted to do. No use in holding a kid like that back — better to make use of him somewhere. So Bob suggested he go build stoves. Today Dick took off for Post Falls, Idaho, with two other friends — Jerry Hilperts and Nicky Parrish, who had previously worked with him at the Eugene Feed Mill. They, too, chose to give up a hippie way of life and go after something.

Bob knew it was better for both Dick and himself that Dick left. But it was just that there was the constant change, turmoil, coming and going of people.

Only a few days ago he had two new licensees from Canada to break in at the shop and stay at the A-frame. Chuck Dynes and Gary Wismer. But it had paid off. It pleased Bob that Canada was going so good. That health nut Mulligan was out of the picture now ever since Jim Craig and Bob Warman, two earnest, industrious young men bought him out.

As Bob snapped up the buttons on his new western shirt that Carol bought him for Christmas, the telephone rang. They had put another extension into the bedroom because there were getting to be so many phone calls lately. Sometimes the licensees back east often forgot the three hour time difference and woke them up in the early hours of the morning.

He picked up the phone. "Hello."

"Bob, this is Doyle Hawks calling from North Carolina."

Bob remembered a blonde, slim man in his thirties who had bought a license back in November. He had been a parts manager for Buick for twelve years but wanted to do something on his own. His brother Theo had the states of Tennessee and Mississippi, and Doyle was also related to Linda, wife of George Dunn of the Dunn brothers. While the Dunns were back in Eugene to attend a funeral, they convinced Doyle to try the Fisher Stove business.

“How’re you doin?” Bob asked.

“No good, Bob. We don’t think we can meet the minimum royalty or the 600 stoves.”

“What seems to be the trouble?”

“It’s these Southerners. They look, they seem impressed but they don’t buy. They seem to take a long time to convince.”

“Don’t get discouraged. After you get a few stoves out there, word of mouth will spread.”

“Bev and I are down to nothing. I got my inventory built up but our money is almost exhausted. I don’t think I’ll be able to send the money that is required in our contract.” His voice was desperate. Bob recalled him to be a serious conscientious type.

“You’re tryin’ your best, aren’t you?” Bob asked.

“I’ve tried everything I could think of.”

“Then don’t worry about the money you owe me. That minimum royalty clause in the contract is for those people that take a territory and don’t work on it. Use your money to keep the business going. That’s good for both of us. Keep your chin up. This cold snap ought to pick up business.”

“Maybe so,” Doyle said. He sounded reassured.

“By the way, how’s the Dunns doin’?” Bob was surprised at the large royalties the Dunns were sending in.

“We keep in touch back here. They’re selling stoves like hot-cakes. They work well as a team. George handles production, Roy the distribution, Walt does the purchasing and Linda works in the office.”

Just goes to show you can’t tell people by the first impression, Bob thought, as he hung up the phone.

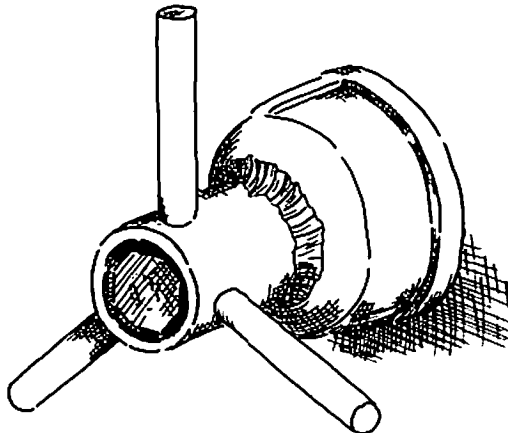
Bob, Carol and the kids let themselves into the back door of Delores' house. No formalities were necessary; relatives were always welcome. They heard the voices and laughter of everyone in the living room: Mom and Dad; Don and Tony with their children; Delores, Jim and their three kids — Jimmy, Mitch and of course Teresa, the birthday girl.

Before Carol could set the cheese tray on the kitchen counter, Tammy and Kelly had to make space for it amongst all the dishes of food — sausages and sauerkraut, fried chicken, beans and pork hocks, pickles and pepper relishes. Bob opened one of the beers he brought and put the rest in the refrigerator. It was spotless. Delores was an immaculate housekeeper like Mom.

When they went in to join the crowd, Dad was passing something around to those sitting on the couch, the hearth and the floors.

“What’s this?” Bob asked as he drew closer.

“My cap to my stove,” Baxter said.



Bob saw a small scale model of a draft cap made out of bolts, pipe and a cut up pipe cap.

“Your stove?”

“Yep. I built one. The Baxter Stove. Already applied for the patent.”

Baxter began to describe the stove and show him the cap. Bob hardly listened or looked at the cap. He was too upended. He felt both pain and anger that his dad would do this behind his back.

“So this is where all my parts, paint and brick have been going to? Why the hell did you keep it so secretive?”

“I wanted to surprise you,” Baxter said. His familiar smirk came over his face.

“Is that why you peeked over my shoulder while I was designing my new cap? Watching my drawings?” Bob accused. Bob wanted to call him sneaky, underhanded but held it back.

“But I didn’t copy, Bobby. I’m not one of them ‘imitators’,” Baxter said.

“How could you do that?” Mom said to Baxter. “You can’t go against Bobby . . . compete with your own son.”

“I did it for you, Bobby. Hep your business. Give your customers a choice. Some of them like an oven.”

Baxter’s eyes twinkled with mischief. Cagey. You could never pin him down. Bob couldn’t feel any hatred. Dad was his best friend. Always happy, never complained. Bob couldn’t let anything destroy that relationship. Better to swallow, forget about it.

“Do you think you could put Dad’s stove in your shop and try to sell them?” Don asked. Bob could tell Donny was on his second or third beer. He was more confident, talkative.

“Hell, no. From Dad’s description it must have at least thirty-five parts to it. Mine has eight.”

“Do it for Dad. You have guts and ability. And with all your money . . .” Don always spoke highly of others — like he was inferior. Don was good at real estate, and one time he wanted to build horse stables on his land. But he had no confidence in himself. Sure, Bob had a lot of self doubts, too. But with Carol’s help, he hadn’t let them get him down.

“That would be like admitting my stove wasn’t the best there is,” Bob answered. “Besides, do you know what it takes to get a stove started?”

“Maybe if we all helped promote it,” Delores said. “Get brochures, run ads, get in home shows.”

Bob saw Delores’ eyes light up. Leave it to Delores, the organizer. She had gone to college and had a way of getting things done. Even more so now that her three children were grown.

“If we all pooled some money . . .” she was saying. Bob stood back and listened to them discuss plans for Baxter’s stove. He saw their enthusiasim. Maybe they didn’t know how hard it had been. Maybe they thought they could get rich.

He had two, three more beers. But he found he couldn’t subdue his hurt, resentment. He felt like an outsider, like they were ganging up against him. His neck felt hot and flushed again. He felt a little sick to his stomach and remembered he hadn’t eaten lunch that day. The snuff turned his stomach.

Carol came up beside him. “You look a little green. You feel all right?” She looked a little perturbed herself.

“Let’s go home,” he said.



## CHAPTER V

Bob woke from a restless sleep breathing hard. His body was wringing wet with perspiration even though it was a cool, balmy morning in August, 1976. It took him a moment to realize he was in his own bed. The bad dreams he had during the night lingered in his mind. They were getting more frequent. Frustrating, horrifying dreams. Somebody or something coming after him and he couldn't get the shells in his gun or he couldn't lock the door. Sometimes he was putting things together but try as he did, they wouldn't fit. Dreams of puzzles he couldn't figure out or things he couldn't get done. Even of Sandy, an old girlfriend in high school who had rejected him in favor of his best friend. His stomach had been in such butterflies that day years ago, he felt he was going to throw up in class so he asked to be excused. He walked up and down the halls, disillusioned with his school life and self image. The sun was shining outside. He walked out the door and never returned to complete his last year.

Bob rolled over. His body was tired and ached. He had several bruises and burns from being in too much of a rush at the shop to watch were he was going. He ran about twenty five miles a day, was sleeping about three or four hours a night, not eating regularly, living on snuff and beer.

About fifty things began racing in his head. He couldn't turn it off. He couldn't let down his guard, like he had to be prepared for what was coming next. He expected the worst and had to be ready. Got to be alert, keep himself up and going. It was like being in a

hundred mile foot race but he never seemed to get through the last ten miles. He might think his goal was just six months away, but it never seemed to get to the stage of running smoothly. He waited for his day of rest, but it never came.

He wondered if it was worth it. Every damn dime. He had wanted to make something of himself, to be proud. But how come he was doing so good and was so damn miserable? Money was the biggest disappointment in his life. He almost wished he had never started this whole thing. He used to be happy . . . get off at four o'clock, forget about his job, be a homebody.

The last few months were a blur in his mind. Everyday he could see it growing, growing. Taking orders, testing new paints, talking to foundries, steel companies, building inspectors, advertising people, employees, licensees — there were 21 now — and customers. A constant flow of customers. He would go through the same speech over and over and over. They asked a thousand questions. Can you give me a deal on three stoves? Can you make the flue bigger? Hook it up to a swimming pool? Hot water tank? Sometimes he would get into natural convection, moisture on windows, wood permits, where to get wood, chimneys. Then when he came home there would be five or six messages for him.

Bob heard Carol downstairs getting breakfast on. He put the pillow over his head to drown out the noise. How he would like to stay home today! Then he heard the muffled, angry sound of yells through the pillow.

He got up, slipped on his levis and went downstairs to see what was going on. The kids were pushing and shoving one another in the bathroom. It was crowded in the mornings with all the showering, blow-drying and toiletries.

"You kids knock it off," Bob said. His voice was cross and commanding. After he said it, he felt like an ogre. It was about the only way he was communicating with the kids these days.

He changed to a more gentle tone. "How're you bums doin' today?" Maybe now would be a good time to chew the fat a little.

But they were in a rush to eat and catch the school bus. "Okay, Dad," they answered in an automatic, disinterested manner and

without hardly looking at him.

After they were gone, Bob went to the refrigerator and opened a can of beer. Carol gave him a scowling glance.

"Do you have to drink like that?" she asked.

"Ah, quit henpecking," Bob said, again in a cantankerous tone.

They often snapped at one another nowadays. She, too, was tired and strained. She had to deal with tax people, work closely with John Watkinson, their lawyer, bolster the licensees, and now she was even trying to do all this canning. And as usual, there were all the people coming and going.

At least she had enjoyed her sister Betty and her family during their stay here for a few weeks. Merle Bidwell, Betty's husband, had not been satisfied with his present engineering job and had grown to hate the San Francisco Bay area. Bob talked them both into building Fisher Stoves. Betty went back home and in two weeks had sold their home, packed up and went to join Merle in their new territory, Indiana.

But having Duncan, the pig farmer from Indiana, wasn't any picnic for Carol. A bald, big man of two hundred pounds, Carol didn't like him as soon as she met him at the Eugene airport.

"I'm just a poor pig farmer," he said in a southern accent. He seemed to be playing a role, like he was proud of being crude. He wore heavy laced up boots, the spaces between his teeth were too wide.

When the discussions over the license fee began back at the A-frame, he wanted to dicker. "I haven't got any money. It took all the money I had saved to make this trip," he told them.

At first he insisted on Indiana, which had just been given to Merle and Betty. Only after listening to much moaning and groaning, did Bob convince him to take Southern Illinois. Since then he was constantly crying about one thing after another and calling repeatedly about how he couldn't find any paint, rivets, firebrick. Then he didn't want to use Bob's doors; it was too far to ship them from Oregon. He wanted a foundry at his back door, but he didn't have the money for the plates. And naturally, he wanted to borrow the money from Bob and Carol so he didn't have to risk

losing his farm, pigs, and land.

And thank God, they had finally got rid of Cal Cotton and his clan. Cal drove down to Springfield from Boise to get some more doors. What a fiasco! Cal parked his new Winnebago next to the A-frame, his five kids running back and forth through the house, Carol doing all the cooking. Cal's wife, Joyce, had changed. She seemed to be plain and humble before. Now she had her hair in a pouf and was dressed to a T. The only contribution Bob could remember her making at suppertime was a bowl of noodles. And it didn't do Carol any good to listen to Cal talk about the new drapes and carpet in his Boise showroom considering Carol had nothing but linoleum, a secondhand desk and homemade curtains here in Springfield. She began to complain when Cal invited them up to go fishing in his new boat.

"Shh, don't say nothing," Bob whispered to her. "You'll get him upset, and he is our largest licensee so far."

But Carol put her foot down when Cal made his proposition. He wanted New York.

"He has to catch up on his bill," she said. "He is just trying to pull one over on you."

One night Cal got hold of Bob when Carol wasn't around. Cal was a fast, convincing talker. His sense of self-importance had a way of overwhelming Bob.

"The Lord brought us together," Cal said. He held his six foot frame to stress his righteousness. "You are the greatest person that ever happened to me."

Bob noticed Cal was on his second beer. Wasn't it only a few days ago Cal had been onto him about giving up drinking?

"I'm number one, aren't I?" Cal was saying. "You couldn't give New York to anyone better than me. How much do you want for it?"

Bob thought for a moment. He had just sold Maine and Vermont to Arnold Dunagan for \$25,000. New York ought to be worth at least that.

"Tell you what. I won't charge you much so you will have

money to get it started. Beings you are a good guy, I'll sell it cheap. Five thousand."

"Praise the Lord," Cal said. "I'm going to multiply that money you saved me tenfold for you," he bragged. "I'm going to make us both a million dollars. I know what I'm doing. I'll get into New York before the competition hits."

The latest Bob had heard was that Cal hired a manager, Rick Cornish, for Boise and moved to New York to set it up. But so far, he was still way behind in paying what he owed.

Bob drained the last drop of beer from the can and let out a loud belch. Carol gave him another glowering look as she hurriedly cleared away breakfast dishes and wiped off the table. The telephone rang.

"I'll get it," Bob said. The beer had taken the edge off his stiffness.

"Hello."

"Well, it has happened again." It was his cousin, Barbara Jorgenson, calling from their shop in Seattle. Her voice was frantic, angry. "The new man we taught to build our stoves ran off and began building his own. Calls it the Sigman Stove."

The same old thing — imitators. There were getting to be more and more every day. Son of a bitch! How they plagued him! It was getting so he hated to pick up a magazine or go to the fair — he would see all the Fisher Stove adaptations: Schrader's Homebaker, Jake Jackson's Frontier, Ray Bruce's Buffalo, Self Sufficiency's Sierra.

As Bob listened to Barbara tell her story, he couldn't help but feel sympathetic. This was the second time the Jorgenson's production manager had struck out on his own — making a stove along Fisher lines. The first time, Bob had called the man up, faked like he was a customer and asked several questions about the man's stove. Finally, he said, "Do you know who you're talking to? This is Bob Fisher. And that's my stove you've just described."

Sometimes Bob could scare imitators off with just such a chewing

out or threats. It had worked when Smith and Trachsel had that trouble with their fabricators. When Bob and Carol's lawyer, John Watkinson, wrote them a harsh letter threatening to take them to court, they immediately stopped manufacturing Fisher Stoves. What they eventually did, however, was change the design a little and call the stove Sierra.

"Why can't you put a stop to these imitators?" Barbara shrieked. "That's what we paid for when we bought our license is this big patent of yours. We are sending in royalties for some kind of rights . . ."

"Carol has been working with our patent attorney," Bob said. "Patents are very complicated."

"All we get is the same run around," Barbara scoffed.

"We have spent thousands on it," Bob said. "Take it from me, you can spend all of your energy and money over lawsuits. It leads nowhere. I guess the best thing to do is concentrate on making the best stove there is. That's the only way of beating them."

Carol was right beside him, listening to the conversation. Funny how they might be feeling hostile toward each other but would instantly pull together when faced with a common problem. He handed Carol the phone, and she took a turn at calming Barbara down. They talked about ten minutes, then Bob took it again for a while.

After Bob hung the phone up, he felt like leaving it off the hook or yanking the plug out of the wall. There never seemed to be a time when that phone stopped ringing. And everytime he answered it, there was a new problem. A customer was having trouble with creosote or a licensee complained about the unclear set of blueprints or was out of doors or chrome balls. Or it was something to do with the foundries. Bob had set up foundries with patterns at four locations over the nation. But there was always some problem with warpage or getting the doors delivered on time.

Then there were squabbles to settle between the licensees over boundaries. Art Beevor and Tofflemer argued over their advertising overlapping into one another's territory. Of course, it was partly Bob's fault because he hadn't made the borderlines more

specific. But who would have guessed things were going to get this complicated?

Disputes were going on up in Canada, too. Jim Craig and Bob Warman claimed Claudio Querin and Paul Zyri were not putting out quality stoves and ruining the Fisher Stove reputation.

The worst was between Ted Howe and Dee Pererra. Bob had given Howe all of the Oregon Coast. But when he gave Pererra a certain county that extended into a small piece of the coast, there was trouble.

Pererra was mad and accused Bob of going back on his word. Howe was upset but did not hold it against Bob. He understood the mistake and eventually gave up that part of his territory.

But as much as Bob wanted solitude and quiet, he could not cut the phone off from the licensees. Bob felt a responsibility, a personal tie to each one. They were industrious, courageous people who left good jobs to take off on a lick and a promise to build his stove. They had seen opportunity, but Bob knew what each one had to go through — working off little money, and as they grew, ploughing what they made into equipment, fork-lift trucks, more material. He couldn't stop worrying about them. He took every one of their problems onto his shoulders, feeling as though he himself were the cause of them all.

Carol finished the dishes and started upstairs to get dressed. She would be ready to leave for the shop soon, but somehow Bob couldn't get himself stirring. He sat down in his big chair in front of the television. It felt soft and comfortable. He never had time to sit in it anymore. It was always go to work, eat, sleep and go to work again. And the only television he watched was occasionally the late news, and then he only caught the parts about energy shortages, unemployment and inflation.

How he would like to stay home today! Maybe watch Redd Foxx or a quiz show. He thought of visiting a few of his relatives a little later on, but he quickly gave up that idea. They would only want to bug him about Baxter's stove or talk about the draft caps.

They had formed a group to finance and promote Baxter's stove, following in Bob's footsteps by taking it to fairs, the flea market,

home shows and trying to sell licenses in Montana and Idaho. But Baxter's stove didn't sell. So they were back again to get Bob to take it on.

Just three months after Teresa's party, Don took Bob to the tavern to discuss it over a beer.

"Hell, no," Bob said. "The only thing that stove has going for it is the draft cap." After Bob had got to studying it, he saw that Baxter's cap was far superior to his own.

"Okay, if you only want the draft cap, why don't you buy it?" Donny said.

Bob thought a moment. If he made money off the draft cap, he was afraid his relatives might accuse him of cheating them.

"No. You better keep the draft cap in your own names. You can make more money off royalties," Bob said.

"Ah, we'd never sell enough," Don said. The pessimist again.

Bob told him how many Fisher stoves were being sold all over the nation, but Donny seemed disbelieving. That sounded too preposterous to him.

"We could charge \$4.50 a set," Don said worriedly. "At least get our money back."

"That's too much," Bob warned him. "Better to sell cheap, go for volume."

But Don was still doubtful of Bob's large figures, so the group decided to stick to \$4.50 a set. Bob sent all the licensees a sample, and they started ordering the caps. As Bob predicted, the price was too high. Now Utah was making their own. Just yesterday Bob told Delores, who was running the operation out of her home — counting nuts and bolts and mailing them out — to write a letter to each licensee and bring the price down. Damn, he had all their worries on his shoulders, too. Seemed like everyone was leaning on him.

Thinking about it, he began to get uneasy, fidgety. The chair suddenly felt confining, binding him down. As tired as he was, he couldn't be still; he had to get up, get to moving. He went upstairs to dress and went to the shop with Carol.

As soon as they arrived at the office, Carol set to putting out a



newsletter to each licensee. The first thing facing Bob was the monthly bills. There was no end to them. *Big* bills, up in the tens of thousands. The better he did, the bigger he grew, the greater and more frequent the bills were. It used to be so simple, he knew exactly where he stood. He sold a stove and made a profit. He paid expenses, fed his family, and bought more material. But hell, now it was all on paper. He never knew where he was. He was financing foundries to the tune of \$20,000; lawyers and accountants bills had reached as much as \$10,000 a month. His advertising bill for such magazines as *Mother Earth*, *Organic Gardening*, *Country Side* and the *National Enquirer* ran anywhere from \$8,000 to \$10,000 for national coverage. It had been another of Woody Taylor's ideas to get some correlation and uniformity into nationwide advertising. He was still frequently calling to give advice.

"Listen to what I'm telling you, Bob," he would say. He seemed to sense over the phone Bob's preoccupation with five things at the same time. "I'm trying to be helpful. Are you paying attention? Promise me you'll follow through on this."

Bob opened the bill from Gas and Mechanical Laboratories in Los Angeles — \$5,000. Testing, testing, testing — it was costing him a fortune. It had started when the building inspectors and fire marshalls began to get concerned over all the wood stoves going into homes. They were getting fanatic about it, afraid of the liability connected with fires started by faulty stoves or installations. Codes and regulations became stricter. Finally, it was required that stoves had to be ICBO\* approved.

Bob knew his stove was safe if attached to a good chimney or pipe and properly installed. But he had been the first in Eugene to play ball. He took his stove to a testing laboratory in Portland and sent the report to ICBO to get a listing. But ICBO would not recognize that laboratory so then he sent the stove to Gas and Mechanical Laboratories in Los Angeles to be tested by Alan Dudden and spent another bundle. Since then he learned that ICBO approval was accepted only by twenty nine states. The southern

\*International Conference of Building Officials

states went by the standards of the SCBC\* and the northeastern states only acknowledged the BOCA\*. Shit, how many times did they have to go through this rigamarole?

And they were practically ruining his stove in the name of safety. They wanted to put heat shields on the bottom and back, change the flue size to eight and ten inches, modify the draft cap to allow less air intake and put on a barometric damper. Anything to decrease the output of heat.

The trouble was that the Fisher Stove was too efficient. The BTU per hour factor was far beyond the Franklin, the cone stoves and so many others. Yet those cracker boxes could pass easily through the tests. No wonder — they didn't put out any heat.

Now Bob was faced with a dilemma. Should he sacrifice the efficiency of the stove to satisfy the codes? Damn, how he hated rules, laws and regulations, distrusted beaucracy. All a bunch of bullshit! Just screwed things up. It seemed like there were no freedoms left, like the Russians were here already. You couldn't even do what you wanted on your own property anymore.

He remembered when he was young how he rebelled against permits or licenses to hunt or fish and the times he went salmon snagging down in the river and deer poaching in the forest behind the house. He felt he had a right to the wildreness. Why should the government tell him what he couldn't do? They didn't own it, they didn't develop it. Now, of course, he wouldn't think of snagging or poaching. He didn't even hunt moose or bear anymore because he felt sorry that wildlife was becoming extinct.

Before paying the bills, Bob thought over his money position. At the present, the accounts receivable from the licensees were large. A few of the licensees were in pretty heavy. One of them was Stan Chaney. Stanley had messed things up as usual down in Arizona. He became involved with his accountant by giving him ten percent of the business, and he later, so Stan claimed, robbed him blind. The accountant, of course, gave another side of the story.

Most of the licensees, however, sent in their royalties regularly:

\*Southern Codes Building Congress

\*Building Officials Conference Association

Gullickson, Robinson, Bidwell . . . Even Doyle Hawks who was worried about making his royalty minimum, began to pick up shortly after his phone call the night of Teresa's party. He had made his six hundred stoves easily. Doyle now had about thirty-three to thirty-four dealers set up.

Most of the bigger licensees were using dealers now. Walt Dunn flew to Oregon from West Virginia last April to talk about selling wholesale versus retail. Originally, Bob had wanted to keep the licensees in small, family type operations — manufacture in the back room, sell out the front door. Like Art Beevor, Dick Higgins and Ron Correll. Build about ten stoves a day, make about \$100 profit on each one. It was a good, clean living. This way the middlemen were eliminated — salesmen, shipping clerks, distributors. The man who made the money was the man who did the labor.

The idea was perfect until all those damn imitators got in the picture. Now it was a race. He had to outrun the competitors. Build it better, faster; market it more effectively. It had become big business.

Now he had to think about some kind of a national organization. Arnold Dunagan had been onto him about the need for some guidance from a main office here in Eugene. Arnold was right when he said there was too much duplication among the licensees in the way of advertising, laboratory testing, lawyers. There should be some centralized program for insurance and bulk purchasing of component parts and brick. There should be a quality control man to go around to the various manufacturers to give advice on production efficiency, the best type of equipment to use, prices of steel and paint, and to make certain the high standards were kept up.

Bob could see that setting up and running a national organization was a necessity, but the idea seemed an additional burden. It meant more headaches, worries. He would need more staff, there would be more paperwork, more expenses. How could he put it all together? He thought of having a convention to bring all the licensees together to discuss problems and share ideas. But having to stand up and speak in front of several people was petrifying. He was sure he would pass out. And he worried about his vocabulary

— maybe he would offend some of them.

He felt himself tense up and wished he had stayed home. He threw the bills down on the desk and walked back to the shop. He began to hammer on a piece of channel iron from the border of an ash fender. Doing something physical might help to work off some of his tensions. He hammered more and more fiercely. He felt his blood rushing through his veins; even the outside surface of his skin tingled. He began to sweat. He didn't feel any relief; he seemed to be working himself up even more and more.

Just then Carol came back to where he was working. She held a paint chart and some carpeting samples in her hand.

"Which colors do you like for the new office?" she asked. They had decided to rent one unit of the motel around the corner as a temporary measure for more space. Bob had bought about seven acres on 42nd Street as a site for a bigger shop and eventually the office for the national organization. But last week Carol had announced she couldn't wait any longer. She said it was just too congested in there with her, Jean Trobough the new secretary, and the bookkeeper.

Bob looked at the carpet samples. "What the hell you lookin' at those for? You know we are going to be tracking in and out with dirty boots. You better order linoleum."

"I want it to look nice, Bobby," she said, trying to reason.

"It's just temporary. Why the hell do we have to do a lot to it?" he growled.

"Just a few touches make a place more presentable. I thought maybe a nice planter just outside the window — do you think you could make one for me? Get some dirt?" She meant to be cheerful, get him out of his bad mood. Well, he wasn't buying it.

"Hell, no. I'm not going to build no goddam planter. I'm sick and tired of doing this, doing that. I'm sick of working my ass off night and day. I'm sick of everyone on me all the time. Including you. And do you know what? You can take this whole damn stove works and shove it."

His whole body was shaking. He wanted to hit something, smash something. He felt he had to blow off steam, somehow get

some relief or he would blow his own brains out.

He stormed outside and walked in circles around the parking lot awhile but couldn't calm down. He knew he had to get away from there, get away from everything. There was only one place he could go — to the stump.

He got in his pickup and drove toward Upper Camp Creek. On his way, he stopped at the neighborhood grocery store for a six pack of beer. He tried to be as quick and inconspicuous as possible but before he could get out the door, one of the elderly members of the community had sighted him.

"Hey, Bob. How's the stove business?"

"Great," Bob said, forcing a cordial smile, but he kept moving through the check stand and out the door. Damn, he was tired of people. He couldn't stop at the tavern for a beer or fill up at the gas station without people accosting him.

"Do you think the stove business is just a fad?"

"How long will it take to build your new shop?"

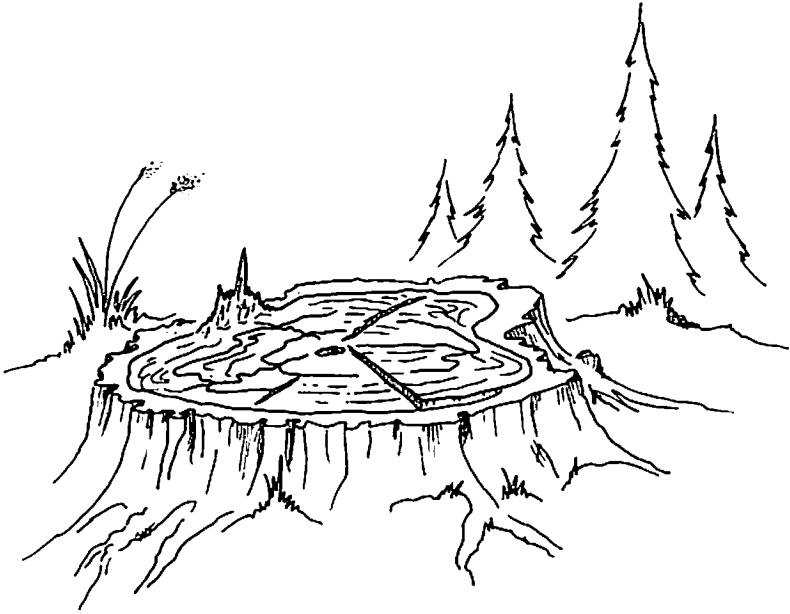
"How come you haven't sued Schrader yet?"

Son of a bitch! He was tired of people. How he'd like to lock himself in the closet somewhere.

He drove on about 1½ miles past his house, parked the pickup and walked up to the woods until he came to a large stump about six feet in diameter. He hadn't been here since his previous wife, Gloria, had left him and he was about to crack up. Shit, what did he know then about building a marriage relationship? All he knew was work, work. He thought of his harsh words to Carol and hoped to God he wasn't going to blow it this time, too.

He opened a can of beer, lay back on the stump and stretched out. There were white, wispy clouds in a blue sky, the fir trees swayed gently in the breeze, the leaves of the maple trees shimmered in the sunlight. It was so quiet he could hear the birds twitter and the chipmunks and squirrels scampering up and down the trees, clicking and chattering to one another over the nuts and seeds. A hawk flew overhead, and Bob watched it dive the moment something caught its eye. Their little world, their life cycle were so simple. Nature seemed the opposite of the hassle of society. It was

peaceful, certain, balanced — everything followed its natural course, there was a reason for everything.



How Bob longed for order and equilibrium to be restored to his mind. He wanted to be at peace, feel relieved, in harmony with himself and nature once again. As it was, his mind was so bogged down, it couldn't run free. He needed dreamtime, to let his mind drift, mull over what had happened and what to do about it, to focus on what he was doing and where he was going.

He felt like the time as a child he had crawled under a road through a 150 foot drain pipe about 16 inches in diameter. He got a cramp in his leg, panicked and started to fight. He couldn't turn around to go back and yet was too scared to go on. Since then he had a phobia about tight places — and that was exactly what he was in now. He was in a bind, a trap — even if it was of his own making — of customers, licensees, suppliers, relatives. He had wanted

independence, being on his own, no one telling him what to do — but now he had everyone pushing and pressing in on him. He had liked people — but now so many were draining him. He had liked the simplicity, the uncomplicatedness of his stove business but now it had to go big.

He dropped his empty can of beer and covered his eyes with his arms. He felt a large knot, a lump moving up from his chest. Uncontrollable. A loud guttural croak, then a groan came out of his throat. He began to sob, gruffly and in deep spasms. He couldn't stop; finally he didn't try. There was too much to let out.

## CHAPTER VI

Throbbing pain ran down Bob's arms as he handed Carol a pair of socks, underwear, and a tee shirt from the dresser drawer. Carol lay them neatly beside her things in a suitcase laid out on their bed. He had a pulsing headache, his legs were shaky, his entire body felt limp. He was nervous about flying; he hated airplanes and had always been afraid of heights. And he dreaded negotiating with all the big executives at Hesston.

He had a feeling something bad was going to happen. Something was coming. He tried to bolster himself up, to be ready, but he was too weak and tired. He never would be on top of it all — people chewing on his ass, lawyers, imitators, regulations. He felt like he was loaded on a chain saw — the teeth just kept coming and soon were going to get him.

It was raining outside, a heavy April downpour. He felt cold and clammy even though the Fisher Stove was going and the room temperature was up to 72°. The flu he had over two weeks ago was hanging on and draining him of strength.

He should never have gone to the party last night at Delores' house. She had invited the relatives over to celebrate the completion of her new swimming pool, and Bob drank too much beer. He was feeling angry over hearing a few days ago that Baxter had offered the draft cap to Pioneer. Damn it, he had a right to be pissed off. Hadn't he spent thousands of dollars promoting the thing?

The tension in the air came to a head when the arm wrestling began. There were twenty dollar bets on, accusations of cheating,



and it ended in a free for all, everyone swinging out, bouncing furniture, and Carol screaming lest Bob was hurt.

Now he had to wear this pair of glasses with one broken lens that he had just recently acquired because of a growing dimness in his eyesight.

He sat down on the bed. "I don't feel so good," he said. "I think I'm going to have a heart attack or something."

Carol looked alarmed. "You want to stay home? Maybe we had better not go."

Bob thought a moment. This trip to Hesston was necessary. They were negotiating a contract with Hesston to make stoves for the large licensees. Back in January another cold snap had hit the eastern states. President Carter in his fireside chat stressed energy conservation. The licensees back there couldn't manufacture enough stoves to keep up with the orders — Dunns, Dunagan, and even Hawks, who had been worried last year about making his minimum royalty, was one thousand stoves behind. It was evident that some outside manufacturing source was needed.

Arnold Dunagan had made arrangements for himself, Bob and Carol to meet with the people of Hesston Corporation, near Wichita, Kansas. Hesston was a large manufacturer of farming equipment, but at the moment sales were down, they had huge production capacity going to waste and they were centrally located.

The negotiations had put an extra strain on Bob. He had been nervous about the trip then, too. Old self doubts, fears of inadequacy came back upon him. He might not measure up to corporate bigwigs, they might get the better of him and he would let the licensees down.

Sitting on the plane, he became self-conscious of his dirty lizard boots, the same old leather jacket that he had bought two years ago. To cheer him up, Carol suggested he pick out some new clothes somewhere in Wichita. So, after arriving and checking into the hotel at the airport, Arnold rented a car and they stopped at Sheplar's, the world's largest western store, on the way to Hesston. Bob tried on sport coat after sport coat. He became weary — they were all expensive and he dreaded more decisions. Finally he chose

a blue denim suit and vest. With the new shirt, tie and boots to match, the price was high, but Carol insisted that he was worth it.

They met with eight Hesston executives in a big conference room — the vice president, production manager, purchasing agent, the sales manager — and Bob didn't know who the hell the rest were. They all sat around a big table; their faces were serious. Bob knew the company had Mennonite origins, and the stiffness made him nervous. He had to tell a joke to get relief, loosen the atmosphere.

“Do any of you know the definition of a hypotenuse?”

They looked puzzled.

“The plane we were just on,” Bob explained, “a high pot in use.”

They gave a friendly laugh, but Bob still felt tense. Then he stood up, swirled around and pointed to his new suit. “This is the first time I’ve had a suit on,” he said.

Carol, Arnold and the others began to laugh. Carol leaned over the table toward him and pointed to the back of his collar. He had been so nervous, he had forgotten to take off the price tags.

Things got somber again as they buckled down to discussions. Bob went over the drawings and advantages of the stove then told them why he needed Hesston. The executives began talking about projections — for as far into the future as six years. Bob began to feel uneasy again. He had no background in long term planning; he had just gone by the number of customers he had at the time. Then he felt foolish, too. After telling them of the great demand for the Fisher Stove, he still wanted to be cautious and not be overextended. Fortunately, Arnold stepped in and helped by projecting for his area.

Bob couldn't tell how it was going over until a middle-aged man hurriedly entered the room. He was introduced as Nelson Galle, the general manager.

“I’m sorry I can’t stay but I’m on my way to another meeting,” he said.

Then George Goering spoke up and said, “I think you’d better stay and hear about this.” He recapped what Bob had just told them

and right away Mr. Galle buzzed his secretary to postpone the other meeting. It was then that Bob realized they were keen on making his stove.

They cordially offered to show Bob, Carol and Arnold their manufacturing facilities. A bus was ordered to take them across the twenty-five acre grounds of Hesston Corporation. Inside one of the huge factories, where parts for hay conditioners were being made, they all watched huge coils of 1/4" steel rolling out, being pressed and cut a by massive panel of dials and buttons. The patterns were being stamped out by a giant cookie cutter. It was fast, clean, precise.

They went back into the conference room to discuss costs. Some sandwiches were brought in while they worked out an estimate, some kind of bid Bob could offer the licensees. Bob was certain it would be low with their mass production techniques and large quantity buying of steel. He was surprised when they came up with a price ten dollars over what the licensees could make them for.

Bob didn't know what to say. Did he have to play a game of poker?

"That's rock bottom price. We thought you would be excited," Mr. Galle said.

"It's too high. We wouldn't be ahead," Bob said.

"It's the lowest we can make it," Mr. Galle said.

"We can't do 'er," Bob answered. He was uncomfortable. The tie was too tight, he couldn't breath. "We'd be stupid to pay more than our own price."

For the next five hours, they reviewed the fabrication processes, demanded more definite projections, hassled over price. At times the executives grew silent, sat back and looked piercingly at him.

"You are either the shrewdest or most honest person I've ever met," Mr. Goering said.

Two or three of the executives would leave awhile and come back again with more figures. Other people were brought in to be consulted on packaging expenses, warehousing, and fixed costs.

By 6:00 p.m. they were still in a deadlock. Finally, Arnold drew it to a close by saying they would seek another manufacturer.

Bob was exhausted and depressed when he, Carol and Arnold returned to the hotel. It had been a gruelling, sapping ordeal. Being confined in a stuffy room, encountering intense closeness without personal involvement, racking his brain without moving the limbs or muscles of his body, dealing with abstracts, future potentials and not the here and now. Hell, they had used words he couldn't even understand — contingent liability, capital reserve, gross profit ratio, revenue potential, on an on.

He and Arnold had a couple of drinks and were about to go to bed when the telephone rang. It was Nelson Galle. "We'd like to talk further on your stove," he said.

"We have an early flight at 8:30 in the morning back to Eugene," Bob said.

The next morning they came at 6:30 sharp and quoted Bob a lower price. Bob accepted, and a preliminary agreement was made.

Now, weeks later, tired and sick, and with one broken lens, Bob had to go back again to Hesston to finalize a contract for the Dunn brothers. He was grateful this time that he and Carol were taking John Watkinson. Let him sit there through all that bullshit, he thought.

On the plane Bob told himself to keep calm, try not to worry about his feeling that something bad was coming. The pain in his arms had subsided, his headache was better, so he settled down to a game of twenty one with John Watkinson, and the trip went by quickly.

At Hesston, Bob left Carol and John and spent the morning with company engineers going over the components and detail work of the stove. He joined them later in the same conference room they had met in before.

Nelson Galle and the same eight executives were there, this time with three company attorneys. On the other side of the table sat Walt Dunn and his lawyer, Carol and John Watkinson.

Walt Dunn's lawyer was on the warpath. "I don't like the deal you're trying to pull," he said to the Hesston lawyers.

Bob sat down beside John Watkinson. John was angry also. "We won't sign if the 'no compete' clause is not included," he said emphatically.

Bob looked questioningly at Carol. "What the hell is going on?" he asked her.

"Our lawyers feel Hesston should be refrained from making other kinds of stoves for a certain period after our contract with them expires," she whispered. She looked distraught.

Bob felt his body go rigid, his pulse quickened. Another problem, more hassling, turmoil. Pain came back into his arms again, he felt pressure in his chest. Then his whole body began to throb. He felt like his head was going to blow up.

Everything became dim, his vision was tunnel-like. It was like a part of his brain was going to sleep. He felt dizzy, the floor began moving.

He tried to shake it off. He had to be alert, responsible; people were counting on him.

Suddenly blood gushed out of his nostrils. Huge spurts. He caught it in his hands.

Carol looked petrified. "What's wrong, Bobby?" she asked.

He didn't want to scare her. "Just a nose bleed," he said.

He rushed out of the conference room and headed for the restroom. He held large handfuls of toilet paper up to his nose until the bleeding stopped. Rich Huxman, the manager of manufacturing, had followed him. He insisted on taking Bob to the infirmary. At first Bob refused. He wanted to go back for the discussions, but his knees were wobbly, his tongue felt thick and he noticed he couldn't pronounce his S's when talking to Rich. He felt nauseated and he was afraid if he went back, he would throw up on the conference table. Finally he agreed to Rich's offer, and they rushed out of the building to the infirmary.

The nurse immediately ordered him to lie down on the examination table for ten minutes. She checked his blood pressure. It was 180 over 120.

"You should be in a hospital," she said.

Things began running through Bob's mind. Carol's tender touch, picking wild blackberries with the kids when they were young, the huge willow tree in front of the old place on Hayden Bridge Road. If only he could be in the woods now, lie down on the stump and cry. He knew he was washed up and at the end of the line. If he could just get through this, get back home . . .

He lay on the table for about twenty minutes more then said, "I'll be okay."

Bob re-entered the conference holding his handkerchief up to his nose. Nelson Galle was saying, "I can't understand why you lawyers can't come to some agreement." He looked exasperated.

Carol saw Bob and rushed to his side. "You look as white as a sheet. Maybe you ought to go to a hospital."

"No," Bob said. "Let's get this over with."

He saw down at the table. Walt Dunn looked disappointed and dejected. His attorney was gone. "Where's Walt's attorney? Why haven't we got a deal?" Bob demanded.

"We came to an impasse. The thing fell apart, and Walt's attorney walked out," John Watkinson said.

Nelson Galle was concerned over Bob's ghostly appearance.

"We are not going to copy your stove," he tried to reassure Bob.

"We are a strong, upstanding company with a long Christian heritage."

But Bob held firm. "We can't sign without the 'no-compete' clause," he said.

Just then the door opened. A hush came over the executives and lawyers as Howard Brenamin, president of Hesston Corporation, walked in.

"What's the problem?" he asked. He was a distinguished looking man.

"I'm glad you could come," Mr. Galle said. "I called you because I thought maybe you can settle this." Briefly, he explained the situation. Mr. Brenamin glanced occasionally over at Bob as he listened.

"I see no reason why we can't agree to the 'no compete'

clause," he said, very staunchly. "These lawyers are not running this company, we are. Now let's get this man back to Springfield where he can get some medical attention." He then apologized to Bob for the delay, shook hands, and said he was looking forward to a good relationship.

That night, Hesston secretaries worked until late hours of the night to get the contract typed up. In the morning, Bob and Carol signed the contract authorizing Hesston to make stoves for Fisher Stove licensees, and Dunn made out the first purchase order of five thousand stoves.

Bob had slept well that night, a deep sleep, almost in a collapsed state of coma. But he still didn't feel up to par that morning at Hesston nor on the plane going back to Springfield. The moment they returned, Carol made an appointment for Bob to have a physical examination the next day.

Doctor Thomashefsky was very blunt. "You have extremely high blood pressure. that is highly dangerous to your heart, brain and kidneys. There is already blood in back of your eyeballs and in your urine. What you had back in Kansas was a mild stroke. You should be in the hospital right now."

Thoughts of going to the hospital scared Bob. It was bad enough coming to the doctor. He was shy and self-conscious about his body; he had even refused to remove his underwear for the examination.

"I'd recuperate better at home," he said.

"Bob, I'm warning you, if you don't take it easy, you'll be dead in two weeks," Doctor Thomashefsky said.

Bob thought of all the things he had to do . . .

The doctor seemed to sense his thoughts and sounded emphatic. "You have to make up your mind to change your way of living. Either you get someone else to run your business or you'll have another stroke soon. And there is a possibility you may end up as a vegetable."

That penetrated, and Bob flinched. He was not afraid of death as much as being half there, disabled. Very early in life he had made up his mind never to be helpless, dependent.

The doctor gave Bob a prescription for Inderal and Hydrochlorothiazide and demonstrated to Carol how to use a blood pressure gauge.

She was broken up and in tears. "Bobby," she said, half demanding and half pleading, "you are not going to set foot into that shop or the office. You are worth more to me than all the stoves in the world."

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Bob lay back on the living room couch for his afternoon rest. His eyelids would not stay shut; he felt wide awake. Learning to relax was tough. He felt guilty over being idle and not getting something done.

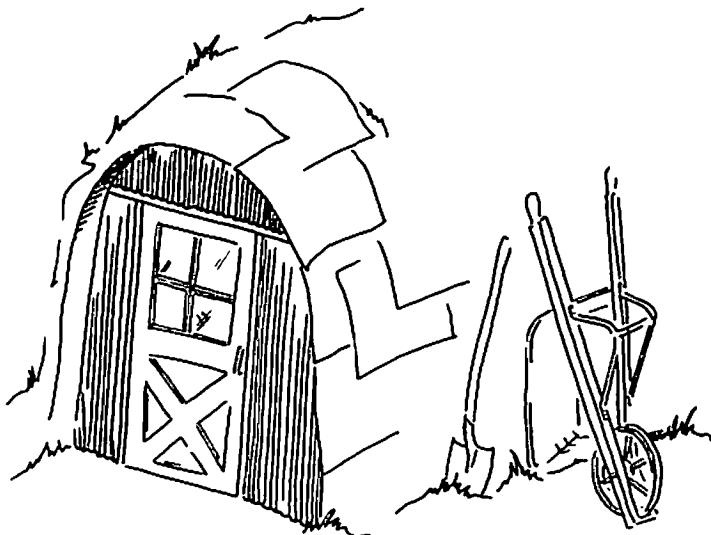
He had been out farming his new 115 acres of land just up the road. If he ever had a chance to be born again, he would choose to live in the pioneer days. Be self-sufficient, raise his family away from the hassle of society. He was a farmer at heart; he loved to till the soil, smell the freshly ploughed ground. Sometimes he would piss on the tractor exhaust pipe and watch the steam roll. Make it stink, let the orneriness come out of him.

It was August, and he had just mowed the hay. Physical work was good for him, the doctor had said, as long as there were no worries or stress involved. Out on the plough, things were simple and mechanical and he didn't have to rack his brains.

Sometimes he would get caught up in projects like clearing off old fences, putting in ditches or cutting away foilage. He had built a root cellar to store potatoes, onions, squash and peppers from his garden and a smokehouse in which he used a Fisher Stove. Once in



a while he would have to check himself. It was difficult for him to realize he didn't *have* to do anything. He worked for three or four hours in the morning, then took a nap. Sometimes he stopped at the house of his old friend, Dan Ray, for a visit. He was starting to feel good again. And he was drinking very little.



He shifted position on the couch and fluffed the pillow under his head. Just as he had become comfortable, the telephone rang. Jesse and the girls were not there; Bob had taken them to the Springfield swimming pool. He felt happy about spending more time with them.

He answered the phone. It was a trucking company calling about shipment dates for a load of stoves to Alaska.

"Would you mind calling my attorney, John Watkinson, or my wife Carol?" Bob asked in a rather ashamed voice. "I'm sorry I can't help you."

It bothered him to have to turn people away when they needed help or advice. It was a large load for Carol to carry, too, until they had hired someone to run the business. He and Carol had thought of hiring one of the licensees — maybe Dunagan — but each had his own territory to run. Carol and John Watkinson had been interviewing a man named Henry Eaton for the past three weeks. Carol had described him as a tall man in his late fifties and in good physical condition. He had been an independent lumber broker for several years but now was retired. The Fisher Stove business intrigued him, but he was only interested in the challenge of getting a national office going, after that, in about six months, he had another man in mind — a business associate named John Lynn, who would take over.

Bob tried to stop thinking, but try as he could, he still worried about the business. He knew the licensees needed direction and unity. He felt he was letting them down.

Right now there was a meeting taking place in Roanoke, Virginia, among the eastern licensees. Cal Cotton was heading it up, Dunagan, the Dunn brothers, Hawks, Bidwells, Marion and Mary Moore from Pennsylvania, Duncan, John Jordan from Mississippi, Carl Baughman, and Chuck Dynes from Ontario were there.

Carol had flown back to attend. When she telephoned last night, she reported there was an atmosphere of dissension. There were complaints over screwed up patterns, no available component parts and not enough national advertising as was promised.

The hottest issue was the imitators. An ex-Fisher Stove dealer had come out with a close facsimile in the New England states called the All Nighter. And Carl Baughman, a licensee in Georgia, was extremely wrought-up over an adaptation of the Fisher Stove in his territory called the Huntsman, made by Atlanta Stove Works. He wouldn't let up, repeating over and over again, "What are you going to do about it?"

Carol said John Watkinson answered the questions being fired at him as best he could but, of course, had to be honest about the limitations of patents.

What troubled Bob the most was Cal Cotton. Carol had learned

that Cal was trying to sell licenses to build his own new stove — another adaptation of the Fisher Stove called Timberline. Carol said it warmed her heart when the Dunns, Hawks, even the Moores who were relatives to Cal, had turned him down. They said they felt an appreciation, a loyalty to Bob for giving them the opportunity to get started on their own.

Of all the people who had turned against him, Bob felt most hurt by Cal. Bob had listened, lapped up all of Cal's empty words — "You are the best thing that ever happened to me" and "I'm going to make you a million dollars." Bob now regretted having not heeded Carol's early distrust of Cal.

The old familiar tenseness and pressure began creeping up on Bob. He immediately heeded the warning symptoms and tried to shut Roanoke and Cal Cotton out of his mind. He sat up — maybe watching some television would occupy his thoughts.

Before he could turn the set on, the telephone rang again. He wondered if he should answer. Maybe it would be another problem or crisis to upset him. He went ahead and picked up the receiver.

"Hello."

It was an unfamiliar voice, panicky. "Mr. Fisher, your shop is on fire. You better get down here."

As Bob drove down the road, he repeated over and over in his mind — don't get excited, don't get excited. About one half mile away from the shop he saw the smoke, then he could smell the fumes. Fire trucks were there; police and people were offering to help. Carol's father, Barney Evans, who had come up with his wife from California to work for Bob, was organizing work teams. He told Bob that someone had stacked cardboard boxes too close to the chimney of the Fisher Stove display model, the elbow had become dislodged and the cardboard caught fire.

Bob had to fight to keep down his fury. Stupidity! This would probably be another feather in the caps of the fire marshalls and building inspectors. Woodburning stoves would be blamed again when it was the carelessness and stupidity of those who installed or operated them improperly.

Bob worked a couple of hours trying to salvage parts and pipe.

He bought diesel from a nearby gas station to soak the elbows so they would not rust. As he worked, two people came up and wanted to know when they were getting their Fisher Stove they had just ordered.

After the commotion died, Bob hung around the shop, looking it over, thinking about his predicament. He never had taken out an insurance policy on the contents of his shop and had only assumed the landlord had insured the building. He had lost \$25,000 worth of inventory and he guessed he had lost about two or three months of sales. Maybe he would even have to pay damages on the building. All in all, he figured this fire had cost him around \$50,000.

He had about \$20,000 in the bank after buying his 115 acres of land and equipment. This was going to put him pretty low. Usually he could count on about \$12,000 to \$50,000 a month in receivables from licensees. But now that was uncertain. What if the licensees decided to pull away?

What could happen next? The world seemed to have toppled over on him. He had the urge to fight back, struggle. That had been what he had done ever since he could remember. Toil, strive, wrestle through. But he couldn't now. He had to think of his life. He pulled himself together; he wasn't going to let this kill him. It wasn't worth it. He decided right then and there on the most important things in the world to him — life, loved ones, peace of mind.

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In the spring of 1977 came the Fisher Stove national convention that Bob had hoped and dreamed about for two years. Three intensive and jam-packed days were spent in conference rooms and private suites at Eugene's beautiful hotel, the Valley River Inn. All of the licensees representing forty-nine states and Canada had

attended — with the exception of Cal Cotton, whose territory was being revoked, along with Duncan, the pig farmer, who chose to go with Cal and Timberline. Also, much to Bob and Carol's regret, Woody Taylor had recently suffered a severe heart attack, retired, and sold his territories to Arnold Dunagan.

On the last evening, a banquet was held in the Willamette Ballroom. Before sitting down to dine, Bob intermingled with the licensees, listening to their comments, watching the expressions on their faces.

At the opening of the convention, he had been anxious about their reaction. Would they feel they now had the leadership, the organization they wanted? Did they feel a sense of unity, centralized strength to compete with and win over imitators? He had spent his last \$10,000; everything he had worked for in the past four and a half years hinged upon the outcome of this convention.

Henry Eaton and his assistant manager, John Lynn, had done well at putting things together. They brought in speakers on future economic trends; specialists in advertising, patents, and laboratory testing; consultants on foundries and insurance. There were seminars on marketing, warehousing, financing inventories, stove accessories; panel discussions on chain stores. And Hesston executives had made a presentation of their facilities and capacity to provide volume.

Bob had watched Mr. Eaton and Mr. Lynn frantically working in the past months setting up the national headquarters in the large office building across from the Valley River Center. Toll-free Watts Lines were installed, more staff was engaged to better service the licensees, the accounts receivable were brought to a current status, new territories were opened up and joint ventures were formed. They had set up bulk purchasing systems, launched a research and development program for adding new models, stepped up and improved national advertising, surveyed overseas markets, set up warehousing facilities and promoted tax credits for wood stoves in Washington, D.C. They seemed to thrive on organizing, systematizing, schedules and procedures. That was good. As for him, he knew he wasn't of the same breed. The reason

he had started his stove business was to avoid all that.

Well, let them run it. Every man has to be what he is. He was tired of trying to be something he wasn't. He was too much of an individualist, a maverick. And now he accepted himself for what he was and chose to live according to his own nature.

It was time to eat, and everyone began taking places at their tables. All of Bob's relatives sat with him and Carol at the head table. Mom had on a new dress, Dad was happy as a lark and had been dancing a jig a moment ago. Donny wore a new sports jacket and looked more confident than Bob had ever seen him, and Delores looked radiant as she discussed draft cap royalties with John Lynn. They were once again a happy group. The marketing and manufacturing rights of the draft caps were now turned over to the national headquarters, and Dad was thrilled and proud over the bronze plaque hanging on his wall for his invention of the draft cap.

After dinner, the awards ceremony began. The Dunn brothers received a large silver trophy for the largest number of units sold, and the Hawks second. Ron Correll won for the highest number of sales based on population and John Jordan won the Gorgeous George award for being the best dressed man. Dunagan's wife won a special recognition as the wife whose husband was away from home the most.

In a moment Bob would have to stand before everyone and give a speech. Thinking about it gave him butterflies in his stomach. Sure as hell he would goof up, make an ass out of himself. But he approached the podium undaunted. He was what he was. Anybody who didn't like it could go to hell. Maybe he'd tell the story of the two tomcats.

Bill Byrd, a young, good-looking and witty sales representative from California and the master of ceremonies, was finishing his introductory remarks — "So if ever a short, curly haired guy chewing snuff says 'follow me,' grab ahold of his checkered shirt and hang on."

Bob stood before the group but had to wait several minutes to tell his story. Everyone was standing, giving him a thunderous ovation.