

## Rock Flat

Our rock welcomed us with an apparent grin during the playful days of early years at my grandparents' ranch.

Our rock encouraged a variety of activities and was a challenge to climb. Narrow crevices, creating its smile, made it possible to gain footholds during difficult climbs. A slip was painful and all too often the result following challenges from friends.

But our rock always remained our friend. It was a giant measuring 12-14 feet in height and almost 100 feet in circumference. It towered over us while also entertaining us and welcoming our presence.

Insects frequented its hard, dark-gray surface, including wasps which discouraged climbing in areas where they made their home. Snakes found comfort in the shade at the base of our rock but were harmless and fun to catch. Small trees grew from its surface. Moss was abundant. For us, our rock was alive.

During those early years my grandparents' ranch was surrounded by mountains and Ponderosa Pine. The ranch stood alone in an area known as Rock Flat. It was a time which called for simplicity; when sticks and rocks were our toys and nature our playground.

I sometimes visit the rock of my preschool days reminiscing of that time over 70 years ago. Homes on small plots have replaced the ranch. Trees have been cut for more dwellings. But our giant rock remains.

Children are not seen embracing the rock of my youth. Video games have taken the place of nature's playground.

Our rock no longer smiles.

Bob Fontaine

10/4/23

## **A Precious Gift**

It was Christmas eve, 1952, and my family's final Christmas in our McCall home. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were among extended family members gathered with my parents and my sister, Rosemary.

Although I was only five, I recalled the language of the Old Country, Finnish, being spoken among the older relatives.

McCall was covered in a deep snow, which was the norm for this time of year. There was never a question of snow being present at Christmas. The only question was the amount. I remember viewing through the open door a tunnel entryway with huge mounds of snow climbing seemingly to the rooftop.

Dad was dressed as Santa Claus handing out gifts; first to the children. My sister's name was first called and then my cousin, Don, and then I heard my name.

"Bobo," Santa yelled, "It's for you!"

"Thank you, Daddy," I responded.

I recall mom sharing years later that Dad was surprised and disappointed that I recognized him in his Santa outfit.

Having received my gift, I rapidly tore the paper off discovering that the box contained a "Happy Time" electric train. I was thrilled.

Memories passed are often precious and remembered always. I still have my electric train. It is now 70 years old and surrounds the Christmas tree each year for our grandchildren (and me) to enjoy.

It remains a precious gift symbolic of the gift of happy childhood years and the simplicity of life in a small central Idaho town which always seemed a little closer to heaven.

Bob Fontaine

10/15/23