

THE HUT IN THE TREE IN THE WOODS

Preface

Over thirty years have passed since I first wrote *The Hut in the Tree in the Woods*. My wife and I were teaching school in Chinle, Arizona, in the middle of Navajo land. We lived across the street from the high school and had access to the building in the evenings. As you might imagine, there wasn't much to do in beautiful downtown Chinle after school hours, so I took advantage of the electric typewriter in my office at school.

By the time I had completed the first draft, rewritten sections, revised and retyped the manuscript, I had spent many hours huddled over the typewriter. But by the time the book was finished, so was the school year. We prepared to move back to Salt Lake City.

The manuscript was placed in a cardboard box, which in turn was placed in the bottom of a corrugated packing box. Many other items were placed in the box, topped off with my microscope, which was too big to allow us to close the top of the box completely and seal it with tape. That packing box joined nearly two dozen others that were stacked in our living room.

I picked up the rental truck in Gallup, New Mexico, and drove it to our apartment in Chinle. The next morning we began loading the truck. One of our neighbors, a twelve-year-old boy named Junior, offered to help us load. Carefully we loaded our furniture and the packing boxes. Junior expressed considerable interest in the microscope as he helped us load. Finally, we waved good-bye and started the five-hundred-mile trip to Salt Lake City.

The next afternoon we unloaded the truck at our new home and discovered one of the boxes was missing. As you have undoubtedly guessed, it was missing. As you have undoubtedly guessed, it was the box containing the microscope and the manuscript. Gloom.

Over the years the thoughts of rewriting the book surfaced on occasion. Our children encouraged and then finally demanded that I devote the time to chronicle what it had been like to grow up with Cousin Bill. Their question always had been, "How much of these stories is true?" My response is that while there is a kernel of truth in each of them, time has added its own patina that colors the lens through which I view these tales.

I hope you enjoy *The Hut in the Tree in the Woods*.

CHAPTER 1

My Uncle Willard used to say he had been President Roosevelt's personal attorney. I believe him for quite some time one day he confessed that he had been one of minister the Roosevelt family's affairs. Uncle Willard had graduated third in his class from George Washington Law School at the height of the Depression and had been hired by a law firm that worked for the Roosevelts. At any rate, he had continued to work in the Washington D.C., area until near the end of World War II. Following the death of President Roosevelt, my uncle decided to move back home to Salt Lake City.

When Uncle Willard went to work for the Roosevelts, there had been considerable consternation among members of my mother's family, who had long been staunch Republicans. In fact, my grandfather had run as the Republican candidate for governor against Simon Bamberger. My mother never understood how her father lost to a Democrat. Her family rejoiced that my uncle was separating himself now from the Democratic scoundrels in Washington and was returning home.

Uncle Willard flew home to find a place for his family to live. The competition was keen. The war had just ended, and thousands of soldiers were arriving home and looking for houses. My uncle learned through some of the political contacts he had cultivated that a new penitentiary was going to be built and that there was some land for sale near the old prison. No one seemed anxious to build next to a prison, and my uncle was able to buy a building lot for a song. He then located a contractor who agreed to build a house, and flew back to Washington.

Building materials were difficult to acquire just after the war, and my uncle's contractor had several dozen houses to build. All of the other home builders lived in Salt Lake. Uncle Willard lived a continent away. The contractor kept contact with my uncle by mail. His letters indicated that the construction was underway but a little behind schedule due to the demand for materials. My uncle was reluctant to reveal to any of his family in Salt Lake where he was building his house because it was so close to the prison, so none of his family knew where to go to check on the progress of the house. In fact, the contractor had not even dug a hole for the footings when the summer drew to an end.

My uncle was convinced his family would be moving to Salt Lake before Christmas. He called my mother long distance, a major event in those days, and asked if my cousin Bill could stay with us for a couple of months until their house was finished. He didn't want Bill to get started in school in Maryland, where they lived, and then have to transfer to Salt Lake schools partway through the year. My mother agreed to let Bill stay with us for a few months. The few months stretched to nearly two years until the house was completed.