

Going to the Klondike

Oh Ralph! Hey Ralph! We are going to the Klondike. Won't that be something!

Ralph, my four year old brother, piped up, "I don't want to leave home and what would happen to Bub, our dog? Anyway, how do you know?"

Yeah, I know. I heard mother telling Aunt Leshar that she had the money from Dad and that she is going to take us three boys and Aunt Leshar to Dawson. She is going to leave Bub with Granddad.

My oldest brother, Ed, wasn't home. He was six years older than I was. He never played with us. He always was away with a gang of older ones that never paid any attention to us. When Ed got home, he danced with glee! "What will the gang say? I'll bet they wish they could go with us!" Well, Ralph and I were mighty glad they couldn't.

Mother had been teaching me not to fight with the boys. Yesterday on my way home from school, a couple of my enemies took after me. I started to run home, but they were gaining, so I jumped into a yard hoping they wouldn't come after me. But they did. It happened that it was their yard! I started to fight and they hollered, "Mama's boy---Georgie Porgie, pudding pie kissed the girls and made them cry." I went home pretty much torn up.

Mother said, "Now we are going to Dawson and you won't have those boys to contend with." I wondered what kind of boys there would be in Dawson.

When we had been out to the chinese gardens and seafood, we traded some musk melons to the street car conductor for a ride home. We noticed the horse would take so many steps then he would lift his feet high like he was stepping over something. The conductor said that he worked in a basement with no light and he became blind so he would take so many steps then he would have to step over the rope.

We didn't have enough beds to go around. I slept with my Aunt. Yes, she was pretty and I would lay as still as I could all night. I wanted to hug her but I was afraid.

Mother was busy packing and Aunt helped her. At last we were off. We hated to say goodbye to Granddad and Bub. We wanted to take Bub, but Mother said that she would be lucky if she got us all to Dawson and she wasn't going to be bothered with a dog.

It was a great treat to ride in a train. The first thing that happened was Ralph got his head stuck in an arm of the train chair and no amount of maneuvering could get it out. Of course he cried and everyone that went by offered suggestions and some left fruit and candy. After about three hours, he got his head loose.

At the hotel in Frisco, we all got lousey. Mother went to build a fire in the heater. It was full of paper and the stove ran away. Sure scared the wits out of all of us.

We nearly missed the train as Ed did not show up. He was always getting lost or in trouble all the time.

I saw a little colored girl and wondered if she wouldn't like to sit with us. She did, and I got a little

rough with her and she scratched me with her finger nails on the back of my hand. Mother said, "Serves you right." Well it got infected and I had an awful time with it. Sure cured me from monkeying around with colored girls.

We were always pestering Mother to buy us candy and peanuts from the news butcher. Ed used to be a news butcher out of South Bend Washington.

One of the things we asked Mother about in Portland was the water marks on the buildings. Mother told us they had a flood awhile back and the dirty water left its marks on the buildings. Must have been fun rowing around the streets in boats. We went to the docks in Seattle to take the steamer, Walla Walla. The cracks were so wide I nearly fell through. Ralph had to be carried. Ed was away somewhere else.

"Mother, Mother, I am stuck with the umbrella."

Mother said, "Well, of all the things I have to do, it's a wonder you couldn't take care of just the umbrella. There, now you broke the point off. Well, maybe we won't need one in the Yukon."

"Well," I said, "it's a wonder you wouldn't make Ed do something."

Mother said, "Well maybe Dad could handle him, but I give up. Here he comes now. Where have you been?"

"Oh," he said, "I was talking to some miners just off the boat and they said that Dawson is no place for kids and, clothing....Have you got enough to keep us all warm?"

"Oh Mother, there's a lady smothering a cigarette," I said.

"Shhh," said Mother, "haven't I told you a hundred times not to point to people or say things about people."

When we were in the stateroom that night, I was still worried about the woman with the cigarette. Mother said that she was probably a dance hall girl. Say Mother, "what is a dance hall girl?"

"Well," she said, "little boys should not be so inquisitive."

Well, I was going to find out. "I'll ask Dad. He'll know. When I see him."

It was a great thrill for us to be on a boat for the first time in our lives. It was about the middle of June 1899. First thing I knew, the steward was ringing the triangle, calling us to dinner. The tables were loaded and I ate until I thought I would burst. When we pulled out it was dark. Everyone was talking about the rough weather we might have and how long would we be on the boat and could they find a gold mine in the Yukon. I had it pictured all one had to do was to drive a team of reindeer in to the mine tunnel, load it with nuggets, and haul them out.

Mother, Aunt, Ed, and Ralph got seasick. I was hungry all the time, but was afraid to go to the dinner table alone so Mother got up and took me to dinner. She just barely made it and said, "George you will have to go by yourself."

I got so hungry, I went alone next time but I didn't know what to order. ,

When we crossed Queen Charlotte Sound, the old Walla Walla rolled until I thought she would roll over and I enjoyed it all the time. The rest of the family were all in bed.

Ketchikan was our first stop. Our first sight was of fish, fish everywhere. They were salmon. We had boiled salmon with egg sauce that night.

We went ashore for awhile. Ketchikan was a ramshackle town with board walks. I was walking ahead of Mother and stepped over a loose board. It flew up and caught Mother on the foot, tripped her, and down she went! "George," Mother said, "why don't you watch where you are going?"

"Well, I don't see how I can with so much to see. If I don't look, I won't see it, and we have to go back to the boat now." I wanted to go fishing but the whistle blew and they would be taking up the gang plank.

We all piled on board and the gang plank was hoisted. There was a commotion on the wharf. A man was hollering, "I want to get aboard." The mate had one of the winchmen lower a freight platform. He jumped on and was hoisted aboard. Gee, it was exciting! Ketchikan was getting smaller and we once again were on our way to the goldfields.

There was a launch on board that I used to admire and wondered what it was, for, one day the boat stopped and a man and his wife got in it and the winch lowered it into the ocean. Away they went. They were going to their island home. I would like to have been a stowaway.

Wrangel Narrows. We had to wait for the tide. The captain said that too many ships had been wrecked and wasn't going to take any chances going with the current. We didn't know what that meant but hoped he did. The channel was crooked and full of buoys. Mother said it was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen. But the Captain didn't like it. He said it was the riskiest piece of the whole trip. Wrangel and Petersburg were fishing towns. Juneau was a mining town. We got a chance to see the Treadwell Goldmine and the Gloryhole. They gave some pieces of gold ore but I couldn't see any gold.

It was at Juneau I saw the fish around the boat. While we were at the dock, I rigged a line and hook and threw it overboard but someone pulled it into a porthole below, so my first fishing expedition was ended.

Skagway was the last we saw of the Walla Walla. Everyone was changing from the boat to White Pass Railroad. It was beautiful but not finished. A tram made of logs and wooden wheels. We had to walk for about half a day. We ran out of drinking water. Finally, someone found a puddle for me but it had wigglers in it. Mother strained it through her handkerchief and I drank it from the brim of my hat.

The mosquitoes and gnats made their appearance. Ralph said they had sharp eyes.

It was a mad scramble to get tickets for the river trip. Men and baggage was everywhere. Not very many children. Mother had a time getting tickets on the river boat. She finally got them. Then the boat was sold and Mother, with her gang, had to hunt again. We finally got the tickets and piled on the long sleek stern wheeler, the Clifford Sifton. It was sure a mess; miners, dogs, and baggage everywhere! The current was swift and with a full head of steam, we were soon through the Rink Rapids and the dangerous Five Finger Rapids.

It was on this boat, that the table was so narrow that I told Mother that one could eat out of the other fellows plate across the table from you on some sharp bends in the river.

I forgot to tell you that Mother ran out of money at Whitehorse and had to send to Dad for more. That was the first Dad knew we were on our way.

We passed Indian villages on the way down the Yukon. The boat only stopped at wood camps and took on cord wood for the boilers on the boat. The men carried wood on their shoulders or in their arms. The river was a muddy color and whenever the boat stopped the mosquitoes swarmed on board and bit us. Some of the old timers said, "This is nothing to what will be on the mining claims." We were all looking around the bend in the river for Dawson, but we started too soon. The river was getting bigger all the time. There was lots of excitement at the last wood camp. The men said that the next stop would be Dawson City. We could hardly wait now! After the steamer pulled away from the shore, we started getting ready to leave the boat. We wondered if Dad and Uncle Ben would be at the dock to meet us. It had been four years since we had seen Dad and about a year for Ben.

"Hey, Ralph! Mother! That's Dawson," I cried. "A man just told me and he has been here before." As the steamer pulled up to the wharf, we looked at the crowd of bewhiskered miners hoping to see Dad. Yes, Mother spotted him. Everyone was hollering hello. The boat finally landed at the dock, and we were strewn with loose boards.

After much embracing Dad and Uncle Ben, we edged our way through the throng of bewhiskered miners and dance hall girls. It was the most exciting time of my young life. Some of the men said, "Here, let me give you a hand with the baggage." The baggage was carried up to the street front of Dawson. There was a dog team hitched to a wagon. Our stuff was loaded on while Mother and Dad talked. I heard Mother telling Dad of the illness of my brother, Russell. She said, "Dad, he was just sick three days and Doctors couldn't do anything for him."

Dad said, "Well the rest of the boys have grown a lot. But George looks kind of spindly."

The dog driver was anxious to go. Soon as he got directions from Dad, he untied the rope that was fastened to a log. "Mush, Prince!" and they were off. Thought we would

get a ride, but Dad said that the load was too big, so we walked.

When we got down the street aways, we heard an awful commotion. It was a dog fight. Our load of stuff was at a stand still and some stray dogs had jumped on to the leader. Of all the cussing I ever heard, Dad and Ben pitched and pulled the dogs off. The harness was all twisted up and some of the dogs were bleeding. But the driver said they weren't hurt much, and he was on his way again.

In a few minutes, we were in front of our house. No paper on the walls. Ralph looked around and said, "Gee, we are going to suffer here." The walls were bare and there was a sheet iron stove called a Yukon Stove. The top was warped and Mother sure was going to have trouble cooking on that!

The food was different; eggs dried, potatoes, onions, carrots, apples, pears, prunes. The potatoes were something awful. Mother couldn't get used to the dried stuff, canned milk, canned butter, but it was the only way you could get the food.

We weren't in Dawson City long. Dad took us all to the mines on 31 Bonanza Creek, where he and Uncle Ben had a claim. We walked all the way and Ralph had to be carried most of the way. French John came along riding a horse and put Ralph on behind him. I was so tired and hungry when we got to the claim, I could hardly wait as Mother made us a meal. Omlet made of dried eggs and bacon.

Next morning, we ran around like wild men. Dad had a dog team, Buster, Prince, and Queen. They weren't used to children and we were all bitten right away. I tried to flank Buster and he promptly bit me on the top of the head and made it bleed. Ed got hold of a bottle of turpentine and turpented all of them. Dad didn't know what he had done, so he thought that the dogs had gone mad. He was going to shoot them when Ed finally said, "Dad, I rubbed turpentine on their butts." The dogs finally jumped into a water hole and Ed nearly got his first licking in four years.

The cabins weren't quite finished and I slept in a tent. The bed was made on the ground. I ran in one day with muddy feet and got on the bed. When Dad found it out, he gave me a licking and said, "Keep your mud hooks off things!"

There was no school except in Dawson, so we didn't have to go to school.

Dad's mine had tunnels and open cuts. The gold was in the gravel, sand, and clay. We could dig out about \$12.00 worth of gold a day, but there wasn't any stores so we couldn't spend any money. All transactions were made with gold dust and nuggets weighed out on balanced scales. Dad showed us how to pan and rock gold. A rocker is a square box, about three feet, with aprons made of canvas to catch the gold. It has a hopper at the top where you put the gravel and gold in the box, and a handle on one end, which you shake with one hand while pouring water with a dipper

made from a 10lb. lard pail with the other hand. The gold stays in the aprons and riffles and the sand washes out of the trough end of the box.

I begged Dad for a pair of hip boots and he got them for me. I no more than got them on and called Ralph to watch me go wading. The first puddle I came to I tried. I got the surprize of my life. I went down to my ears. It was an old abandoned toilet that had filled with water. Was I a mess! Mother said, "George, I don't believe you are worth cleaning up."

Dad gave Ralph a pan of gravel one day to pan for gold. I heard Ralph hollering, "George, George, I got a nugget! Get me a hatchet." I got the hatchet, very much excited as it was the biggest nugget I had ever seen. Ralph said, "I'll cut it in two pieces and you can have half." But Dad was watching and came a running. He said, "Here, here, nothing doing, that's mine. I just put it in there to fool you." Of course, we were very much disgusted. As he took the nugget from us, Ralph threw the gold pan away and ran for the house. I sure thought he was a mighty good little brother to want to half everything with me.

Mother and Dad had to go to the Forks one day. Mother said, "I'll leave the pie on the shelf." When lunch time came, no pie. Ed had eaten it all. Our hearts were broken for Ralph and I divided everything we had and expected the other fellow to do the same.

Dad had a crew working for him. The ones we liked were Charlie Magee, George Brunletter, and Leonard Gues. The men are gone now, but we cherish very dearly their efforts such as making wagons for us and getting us fishing tackle. The only place we had to go swimming was in the creek and it was the color of yellow mud for thousands of miners had used it to wash their gravel and muck to get the gold. A bunch of us were swimming one day and one of the boys' sister, Daphne Moodey, came to the bank to see him and tell him his mother wanted him to come home. We drove one of the boys out in front of her. She didn't stay long after that.

There were a few rough boys in the neighborhood and it was the same old story. They picked on me and knocked the tar out of me. Dad said, "George, we've got to do something about that." And mother said, "Don't make a fighter out of him." So Dad said, "I'll put the logs on a saw horse in the morning and you saw it up during the day. That way we'll get wood and you will get strong." I wanted to get strong enough to lick the toughies and cut the wood. Along towards spring Dad said I was in good shape. The more I worked the more I ate and got real husky. I picked the worst one of the tough boys one day and told him that he would have to fight. Well, I licked him and after that I never had any trouble with those kids.

Ralph and I called ourselves the Hans and Fritz. I was Hans and Ralph was Fritz, after the Katzenjamer Kids. When Mother was cooking beans, we would get her to give us a pail full and we would take some bread and butter and go up on

the hill and build a little fire and finish cooking the beans. We had much fun cooking the beans and loved the outdoor life.

There wasn't any wagon road at first. Everything had to be packed by mules and horses. They used to get stuck in the mud in front of our place. The skimmers were exasperated and tried every means to get them up. They would tie ropes to their tails and cuss and swear. One day a man had his horse down to his ears in the mud. He put a pole in his nose to make him struggle. That was more than Mother could stand. She ran down the hill and scolded the skimmer. Boy, he was tough. He told Mother to mind her own business. By digging and pulling with rope in his tail the poor horse was pulled out of the mud. He sure looked bedraggled, but he was loaded up, the diamond hitch was put on again, and they were off to the mines. In the winter, on upper Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks, the frozen ground was thawed with wood fires and steam boilers. (Mostly wood fires) Standing on one of the hills you could see smoke coming out of hundreds of prospector holes. I was playing the second winter and came home kind of late. I was pretty cold and I saw quite a large fire by the road and pulled off my mitts to warm myself. I was enjoying the heat when all at once, there was an explosion in the fire and I was pretty much covered with hot horse manure. I ran home as fast as I could wondering why I was ever born. I was a sight! Mother scraped and cleaned and washed me up. I wasn't seriously burned, but badly scared and had to stay home a few days. I found out afterwards that a horse had died and the owner had built a fire to burn the dead horse up. When his stomach got hot and filled with steam, it blew up.

Shortly after that, Dad said, "Now you kids don't ever go up any of these log chutes, for a log might come down and hit you." Mother made bread for the neighbor miners and us kids used to deliver it. One Sunday, I delivered the bread and looked longingly at a log chute and said to myself that there wouldn't be anybody up there on Sunday and Oh boy, I would like to see where those logs come from. Dad and Mother would never find ~~them~~. So, up I started on my hands and knees and, bingo, something hit me. The next thing I knew I was back at the prospectors cabin where I had delivered *the bread*.

(From Fairbanks newspaper when George and Ralph enlisted)

A JITNEY JINGLE
The Keys Boys Have Gone

Two chaps that lived in our town
Have gone to face the Boches' frown,
And take up arms against the Hun.
They've swapped the pick for trusty gun,
And "over there" where all the French is,
Instead of shafts they'll enter trenches.
And as they mined, so will they fight,
With all their strength and brains and might.
With head held high and steady step,
They'll keep up Alaska's "rep"
Of men that are men from heels to head,
And help avenge the innocent dead.

Shining lights 'midst a khaki crowd,
Boys of whom their father's proud,
The idols of a mother's love,
With faith in Him Who rules above,
They'll help to stop a tyrant's reign,
And then come marching back again.
But now they're gone, around the place
We'll miss their smile and cheerful face,
But as they march through old "Paree",
Their thoughts will turn to you and me,
Kindly thoughts of their Northern home,
Though back to us their minds will roam,
They'll march with ne'er a lag
Beneath the folds of Liberty's flag.
This is the word we send the two,
"Aur Revoir and good luck to you".