

John Westlake
1979?

To Roberta Yoder

It seems only a few years ago that I started to attend San Dimas Grade School. I went to school with my older brother and sister. It was a new world for me. I was all dressed in nice clean clothes and had a pretty little comb in my pocket (which a well groomed young man should have). I don't remember seeing it after the first day.

My teacher, Mrs. Owens, soon became a second mother to me. She and her husband raised flowers next to the train or street car track and station that was on San Dimas Ave. It was not used for people, seldom used for freight, and after a few years, I believe it was removed.

I started school with Jean Johnstone, Dean Way, the Walker Twins, the Broady twins, and Jack Clark. This was the class of '37. I don't remember when each one started in San Dimas, but I'll never forget the little sweetheart of the first, second, third and fourth grades, Jean Johnstone.

I can remember Jean more than the others in the first and second grades. The girls had little houses laid out in the dirt under the pepper trees. They looked more like a layout for an archaeologist trying to find the walls of an ancient city. But the point that impresses me most now, is the way those little girls could be such total bosses of the house at such a young age and we boys would jump when they said jump. Fifty years later we are still jumping.

Do any of you remember little Willie Weaver? (I believe that is his name.) We were still in the old school building when he started. He was just a little fellow and I believe that at his first recess he wanted something to eat, so he took his lunch and laid it out on the running board of the nurse's Model 'T'. It looked like a layout for a picnic, but he didn't seem to know how to put it together again.

Ida Dugay's older brother was in grade school with us as were many of our older brothers and sisters. I was afraid of the big kids a lot of the time. The school kept us separated from the big kids most of the time.

Do you remember our first principal, Miss May? I was told from the start that she was a tough one. And she was!

That big old building was like a haunted house to me. It was so large and mysterious with a basement, two stories and an attic. I believe the first four grades were down stairs and the others were up stairs.

I was very sick all summer after my fifth grade year and also half of my sixth grade year. I still have some problems with my throat and ears from my illness. Doctors have said that very few even live through the type of Diphtheria that I had. When I started back to our new school, which was built during the summer, I couldn't make up the half year, so I went back to the fifth grade with all of you, except Jean Johnstone. She was then one class ahead of us. When Jean was out of the eighth grade she was still quite young, so I believe her folks had her stay in the eighth grade another year. She said she wanted to stay.

I didn't get to partake of many of the school and town activities because there was a lot of work to be done at home. We lived two miles from school and had oranges and lemons and there was always weeding or something to take care of. Our folks went to church in Pomona so that put me out of church activities in San Dimas. I believe many of you went to church during those times. I hope you haven't quit.

Forty-five years have now gone by since we left the eighth grade, but I can remember many of your faces in the picture of '34. I don't think I would know many of you now. In the front row were Dick Reedy, Gwyndolin Jones, Winnie Rouse, Ruth Simmons, Doris Way, Edgar Sutton, etc. I was in the back row and Jean Johnstone was in front of me. There are many more I could name. All of you looked like beautiful young women and handsome young men.

I remember the day Red Flader got a ball bat for Christmas I think. He would take it to school and that gave him a better chance of getting to bat first during recess and noon hour.

I could go on and on, but as we left grade school we became mixed with hundreds of others our age and older, so I remember you most from grade school.

I left Bonita after my junior year to be able to get the classes I wanted. I didn't pass my junior year of English so I was to take it over. If I had taken it over at Bonita, I would have lost my shop class. I didn't make many friends a Covina, but did make my grades. I liked machine shop better than auto mechanics. Covina didn't have an auto mechanics class, but had a good machine shop.

After high school I didn't find much work, so I roamed the country doing what I could. I went about twenty to twenty-five thousand miles in the fall and winter of '38 and the summer of '39.

In the fall of '38 I thought I would head for Canada to see what it was like. I was hitchhiking and was let out in the middle of a cold and foggy night somewhere along the Columbia River. I could hear fog horns, but couldn't see anything. I figured that was close enough to Canada, so headed south as daylight came.

The winter of '38-'39 I drove two new cars from Flint, Michigan to California. One was for my oldest brother and one was for Bernard Bayes, our local jeweler.

In the summer of '39 I found myself in Indiana with \$3.00 and a borrowed credit card headed for San Dimas in an old worn out car. On the Fourth of July it broke down in Missouri, but I had relatives there and was able to borrow about \$4.00 for a generator. They fixed me up with a good lunch so I was on my way again. The lunch had a few green apples in it. I ate them a day or so later and was I sick! I was in desert country, I think Arizona, and I spent my last money on a little ice cream trying to cool my insides. In Arizona the radiator started to leak a little, so I stopped at a little store and station and asked for some water. The boy that I talked to said he didn't think they could let me have any because Ma had been saving it all week to do some washing. I could write much more, but it would probably bore you so I'll move on.

In the summer of '40 I met my wife. She was going into her senior year of high school. After she completed high school we were married.

It was war time in Europe and I worked at building construction for awhile, then in a machine shop in Portland, Oregon. I didn't like Portland so I came back to the Eugene-Springfield area (Creswell) and went to work in sawmills until I went into the navy. After getting out of the navy, I went back to the sawmill. Then twenty years ago I transferred to the plywood department. Afterwards I started building our present home. I didn't have any hobbies for several years, then I started raising Quail, Pheasants, Partridges, Francolins, Tinaou, etc.

About three years ago my heart and back were in poor shape. With feed and material running from \$500 to \$1,000 a year, I went out of the bird business. I don't know how many hundred birds I had at that time. My friend Bobby the Bobwhite Quail had disappeared long before I quit raising birds.

Last year I started making high quality, professional spinning wheels. I make them from my own plans that I keep in my head and they are all different. I'm not trying to sell any yet, but a University of Oregon professor found out that I had one with all brass fittings made of Myrtle wood so he bought it for \$550 cash, no guarantees. I don't think you can find better ones any place, but there are a lot of wheels cheaper. Many people in Oregon spin as a hobby. My wheels run from \$300 to \$1,000. I don't work on them very much because my health isn't very good right now.

I have had a new pacemaker (my second) and back surgery this year. I haven't worked much since the first of the year. I'm down from nine doctors to two now, so I'm either getting better or they are giving up. At the price they charge I can't see them giving up, so I guess I'm better. I'm putting in a lot of time at the hospital for physical therapy. I would like to visit San Dimas and see all of you, but at this time I can't travel that far.

I have three children, two boys and one girl. My youngest, a boy, married a few days ago and left home at the young age of 26. I have two granddaughters and a grandson that is out of high school now.

I hope you like the little gifts that I'm sending you.

The story of Bobby was never meant to be a short story or anything like that. I was writing to a niece in Ohio about $1\frac{1}{2}$ years ago and I wrote a letter to her twelve year old daughter and the story just developed. It is true and I guess a book could be written about him, but I'm not a writer. I've read the story many times and I still miss him.

I hope you are all well and happy.

We have raised our own garden of vegetables for years, but now there are only two of us, my back is bad, and my wife is working full time. We have $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres with plenty of water and the best of soil, but we don't plan on any garden next year. My wife has lots of flowers and shrubs to take care of.

If I get to feeling better, I'll try to get to southern California again. In the meantime, take care of yourselves and I wish you many more years of health and happiness.

Your Classmate of '34,

Grade school

San Dimas Ca.