

Hi Mom, Did
You Miss Me?

Hi Mom, Did You Miss Me?

Volume 1

J O S E P H R O U S H



© 2009 by Joseph Roush. All rights reserved.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—with the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

The author of this book has waived the publisher's suggested editing and proof reading services. As such, the author is responsible for any errors found in this finished product.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, *NIV*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked *KJV* are taken from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture references marked *NASB* are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-323-1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009901357

CONTENTS

Part I: The Montana Years 1936-1937

Deerlodge and Twin Bridges Montana	1
The Parsonage Days	11
The St. Helen Years 1937 - 1941	19
Back Home Again in Indiana	33

Book V

Tippecanoe County	57
-------------------	----

Book VII

Margaret and Jimmy Leamon	93
Fort Riley, Kansas	111

PART I

THE MONTANA YEARS

1936-1937

DEERLODGE AND TWIN BRIDGES MONTANA

June 10, 1936

I GUESS THAT it will be a long time before I get to see you again, and I want you to know everything that is happening to me. Since I can't write good yet, my words are put on paper by my new friend, Jerry. I'll tell you all about Jerry later.

You know you and Dad really scared us kids that last night when you were yelling at one another and hitting each other and screaming all those ugly words. When you finally took your fight outdoors, we three kids piled up together in that big bed. I knew that Dad would be gone again soon. Seems like he always goes away after a big fight. We knew you'd be back, and you'd crawl in bed with us kids, and everything would be right with us for a little while. I'd snuggle up to you all warm and cozy, and everything would be just great again. That's what I was counting on.

Well when I woke up in the morning, the house was cold, you weren't home, Billy needed his diaper changed, Sissy was scared, and I was hungry. We all were hungry.

There came a knock at the door, and two ladies came barging in like they owned our place. One old lady was fat and loud, and she waddled like a duck as she went through the house complaining about the place being cold and dirty. Why? She wondered wasn't there some food in the house. The other lady was tall and skinny. She had a nose like a chicken beak, and her throat bobbed up and down when she talked.

Well before you knew it these old ladies had us kids dressed and crammed into the back seat of this long, black car. We were motor-ing down the highway heading south away from Deerlodge and our mountains.

Well I put up a real big fuss. I told them that you and Dad would get 'em good for stealing us kids. "You better take us back because Mom will be home any minute," I said.

Then Old Chicken Beak spoke up. "Your mother is not coming back. She had an accident last night. She was killed."

Well, that shut me up for a little while, but then I told these two old ladies what I thought. "You're lying," I said. "You just made that up."

I don't think they liked me calling them liars, but I meant it. They weren't telling the truth were they?

We were in the back seat of that car for a long time before we came to a little town called Twin Bridges. It was a town full of kids. This place is called The Montana State Children's Home. There are nearly four hundred kids living here.

They put Sissy, Billy, and me in different brick houses. I think that was because boys and girls can't live in the same house, and the babies like Billy are in a different kind of house because they take a lot more looking after like changing diapers, bottle feeding. You know what I mean, don't you?

They gave me my very own bed upstairs. It is a fine bed. A large wooden box sits at the foot of my bed. That is where I am supposed to keep my underwear and socks.

Now I am going to tell you about Jerry. He's the boy who is putting my words down on paper so someday you can read all about my adventures. Jerry gave me that word, adventures, it's a good one, don't you think?

I was sitting on my very own bed in this upstairs room where twelve other boys my age each had their very own beds. The other boys were playing with tinker toys and Lincoln logs. Mostly they were not paying attention to me at all which was okay with me because I was sad, and I had a lot of thinking to do. Things were happening so fast that my head was hurting just trying to sort things out.

I looked up and saw this big kid looking down at me with this funny little grin on his face. "Hi," he said, "My name is Jerry. I'm Miss Black's special helper."

He sat down beside me, and he said in a low friendly voice, "This place ain't so bad, you'll see. The first couple of days can be rough, but I learned to like it here just fine. I've been here for ten years already."

Well I let the dam go bust right then. I bawled like a little lost doggie. "They told me my Mom was dead," I snuffled.

"Don't you believe that," Jerry said. "They tell that to every boy who comes here. You'll see her again, you'll see."

I believed that. Soon after that Jerry started me keeping this journal. I will tell him what to say and how to say it, and he'll write it down for me. Jerry tells me that I do a great job telling about things. He read this back to me, and it sounded right. We decided that anytime something important happens we would write it down for you. I won't be able to write everyday because there are a lot of days when important stuff doesn't happen. I'll bet that someday this will make good reading for you.

July 15, 1936

Something happened today which should make you proud of me so I'm having it put down in my journal. A group of us boys were out in the playground messing around with a bunch of old worn out tires. We'd make a big pile of these tires, and then we'd crawl inside the pile. My favorite thing to do with the old tires was to curl my body up inside the tire and then a couple of guys would roll me around the playground. Once in a while I get dizzy doing this stunt, but it sure is fun.

When the bell rang for us to go to the lunchroom today, I was very, very hungry. When we all got to our places at our tables, we had to stand and wait for the lunch room boss lady to blow her whistle before

we could sit down to enjoy our food. The whistle blew and I sat down hungry as a bear, and there staring up at me was this bowl of pudding with fish eyes in it. Those fish eyes all seemed to be staring hard at me. Jerry whispered to me that it was tapioca pudding. You know that I always hated that kind of pudding, but today I was hungry, hungry, hungry! Guess what, Mom. Today I ate my tapioca pudding. I love tapioca pudding. Aren't you proud of me?

July 17, 1936

I see Sissy nearly everyday at lunch time. She sits at a table next to mine. We don't get to talk to one another very often. I have not seen Billy since we've been here. I sure do hope he's OK.

Mom, I don't think Sissy likes this place at all. She probably does not have a good friend like Jerry. I can tell that she is sad. This day the lunch room boss lady tried to make Sissy swallow her green beans. You know how Sissy had always hated green beans. Well, Sissy bawled and the boss lady shook Sissy like a rag doll. She shook her so hard I thought her head might fall off. I got up from my seat and headed for that mean old lady. I meant to kick her as hard as I could. Jerry grabbed me. "Uh-uh," he said. "You don't want to get shut up in the attic. They make naughty kids strip down to their underwear, and then they put them upstairs in that musty old attic. There is no heat and no light up there, and the place is full of ugly spiders."

Jerry keeps me out of trouble. He is a real friend.

Mom, it's kind of nice having all these kids around me all the time. But I do miss having you to myself. Remember when Dad would shoot some varmint out of a tree back at Beck Ranch? Remember how gun shots scared me so bad that I'd take off running around the house, and I would keep running and yelling until you'd come out to settle me down. You'd grab me and hug me, and then you'd tell me that everything was okay. Well, I sure could use one of those hugs right now.

The grownups here don't give out hugs to anyone. Jerry says they are not allowed to hug kids because some of us might get the idea that the folks who work here could replace our parents. When I grow up, if I ever had the chance to run a place like this, I would make everyone of those grownups hug at least one kid every day!

What we do is when one of the boys gets really sad or angry and they start to cry, why the rest of us gather around and we do the hugging and stuff like that. This usually works really good, but we always have Jerry to fall back on. Jerry isn't with us all the time. Sometimes Jerry has chores to do somewhere else. I guess you could say we are really a family of kids, and Miss Black is there to see that we are safe and that we know the rules. I think guys like Jerry are really important, too. Don't you?

September 10, 1936

Guess what. I'm going to real school now. Soon I'll be able to read better, and more important I'll be able to write better. My teacher is Mrs. Gable. She says that I am real smart, and that I will be a good writer someday. If she thinks I am so good at writing, how come she makes me stay in at recess time to do all these crazy writing exercises? We smart kids should get a few breaks shouldn't we? She makes me practice so much that my arm hurts. Jerry says that when the teachers here find out what we'll be good at they make us practice a lot so we'll be able to use our talents to help us make a living when we grow up. Jerry says that a lot of us will never have families to help get us started. That's kind of scary isn't it? How did you like that new word – talents? I'm learning new words everyday.

October 3, 1936

Two things happened today and earlier this week that you should know about. One was really funny. Jerry and I were getting ready to write in my journal when we heard a bunch of kids yelling and carrying on just outside our cottage. We rushed out just in time to see this big cowboy beating up one of the men who run the house of older boys just two cottages down from our cottage. When the cowboy was finished the beaten fellow was sitting with his back up against a big old tree.

"I ride past here just about everyday to see about my cows," the big cowboy said, "I see you whipping another boy with that belt you'll wind up in the hospital, understand?"

Well that poor man sitting by the tree just nodded his head. He had a split lip, a bloody nose, and a purple eye. Cowboys can be real

tough, can't they? Sort of reminds me of Dad. I don't think of Dad as often as I do you, but I do miss him from time to time. I think about you every day.

The other thing which happened was that several of the boys and I came down with some kind of chicken pox. They put us in the hospital so all the others would not get what we had. I was covered all over with those itchy things. I even had a couple of them in my nose. None of us were very sick so we had a fine time getting each other to laugh. Our favorite game was to see who could pass gas the loudest. That's a polite way of saying who could fart the loudest! Jerry laughed so hard he nearly cried as he was writing this down for me.

October 9, 1936

I am 6 tears old today and I really like the Mickey Mouse sweater you sent me. I would like it better if you could give it to me in person. Where are you?

March 6, 1937

Jerry has been training this other big boy named Danny to be a special helper for Miss Black. He's also showing Danny how to help me with my journal. I'm doing some of the words now myself, but it takes me a lot longer than it does Jerry.

Jerry is going to graduate from high school this year, and he may have to leave us. Full grown boys are not allowed to stay here. Danny is to be our special helper when Jerry leaves for the Army at the end of school this spring. I will miss Jerry, but I will never forget him. Next to you Jerry is the best friend I've ever had. Danny will be fine, but he isn't Jerry.

March 16, 1937

Its spring now, and Miss Black and two other house mothers got a bunch of us kids together to take a long hike away from the Home. Jerry and Danny went along with us to help keep us out of trouble.

This was a fine, sunny day, and all the snow was gone. There was lots of green grass, and there were wildflowers everywhere. The Beaverhead

trout stream was full of cold fast moving water. I found a really neat bamboo fishing pole next to the bridge we had to cross. Miss Black said she'd keep it for me. If she couldn't find out who had lost it, she'd let me keep it as my very own fishing pole.

Well we walked for over three hours, and we never did get off our own property. I told you this was a big place didn't I? We saw horses, cows, and pigs. I saw that the work was being done by the older boys who lived at the Home. I think that these boys did not get to play like us little guys. I believe that they have to work all day long. Jerry said that all the older boys and girls had important jobs to do. He and Danny were called care givers. Other boys were farmers, carpenters, or cowboys. The older girls worked at the laundry, the kitchen, or the garden. And they learned how to sew good enough to make their own dresses. I guess if I stay here as long as Jerry that I will have one of those important jobs too.

Sissy's group took the hike with us, and she seemed to be happy. She found a dried up snake skin. It must have been left over from last summer. It was a big one. I hoped that we would not walk up on a big snake while we were on our hike.

May 20, 1937

Bad news! Jerry is gone. He left this morning. He is going to be a soldier. Jerry waited just outside the main gate for the bus which would take him to Butte. At Butte he will get on a train which would take him to the Army. All the boys from our cottage waited by the gate with Jerry. We all liked Jerry, and we would be sad when he was gone.

When we heard the bus turn the last corner in downtown Twin Bridges, Jerry turned to take a last look at his home. There were tears in his eyes. Mom, did you know that big boys could cry?

I turned to try to see what Jerry was looking at. I had never tried to look at the whole place from the front gate before. I saw the administration building with several brick cottages on each side. There was the lunchroom, the schoolhouse, the power plant, and standing tall above it all was our water tower. This water tower was bigger than the one in town.

Jerry saw that I knew about the tears in his eyes so he told me how he felt. "This has been the only good home I ever had," he said. Then he stepped up into the bus. We boys watched and waved until the bus disappeared around a curve. I had the feeling that I would never see Jerry again. He'll make a fine soldier.

June 1, 1937

This is another one of those times when things happen so fast that a fellow does not have time to get ready for it. It just happens. The words in my journal right now are written by Miss Donna Sims. Miss Sims came to get Sissy, Billy, and me to get us ready for a long train ride to a place called Indiana. I convinced Miss Sims that I should take my journal along with me because I sure did not want to lose it. Miss Sims thought my journal was a good idea, and she agreed to help me with the writing.

Mom, you'd really like Miss Sims. She isn't bossy like those two old ladies who stole us kids. Miss Sims said I shouldn't believe that we were stolen, that those ladies probably saved our lives. Maybe she is right, but I still do not like Old Duck Waddle and Chicken Beak. They were not nice people.

We got on the train at Butte, and I wondered if this was the same train that took Jerry to the Army. The four of us had a special room to ourselves. I sat there looking out the window watching the countryside float past. We saw sheep on their way to summer pastures and fields full of cows. Little towns whizzed by, and sometimes roads for cars ran right along side the tracks.

I had this feeling that the train was taking us further and further away from you. Miss Sims did not tell us much about the trip. I guess she wants to surprise us. We were on the train three days and two nights, and Sissy and Billy were so good I was proud of them. Miss Sims was proud too. She told me so.

The train came to a stop in a city called Lafayette. I saw Dad standing beside this little house they called a depot, but you weren't anywhere to be seen. For a moment I wondered if those two old ladies were telling us the truth. That you really were dead and gone, but then I decided that

I was the one who was right about you. Some day you will get to read my journal. You are alive somewhere in Montana. I just know it!

There were two older people standing there with Dad. Miss Sims said that they were our grandparents, and we would be living with them for a time. I thought that this was good. We'd be staying with people you know, and Dad would be there too. Miss Sims made me promise to keep putting things in my journal because someday the journals could be really important to my own children when I grew up. I told her I would try to do that. I suppose I will not see Miss Sims again.