

The author and artist of these creations is unknown but suspected. Our cabin has a double bed with a metal frame, Gilmore Hotel (Newport) style. It is painted bright blue and the musty old mattress silently leaks cotton stuffing (post-Civil War?) The large wooden cooking stove is in the middle ages of disintegration, rusty with its remaining doors sprung at all odd angles, as though the old relic at one time, perhaps near the end of its working career, experienced a tremendous explosion from within. There is no stove pipe. The top of this extinct beast makes a fine place to set up my camp stove. There is a mystery sink at eye level on the north wall — no pipes, no faucets, only secrets. Alemon yellow refrigerator hums asthmatically in a corner; its interior fosters exotic strains of fungus and fauna. Tomorrow it shall be brought under control.

The people who live here for the fruit season have come from all over the country. Some have worked the circuit for a lifetime, others like myself are first-timers. There is a man from Santa Barbara, California, who worked as a caretaker for a Jewish synagogue until he was laid off in the Spring. The last time he picked fruit was ten years ago. The couple across the way from us are from Mississippi. She is an Iroquois and has stories of the old ways which were told her by her grandmother.

Occupying the cabin two doors down is Al from Arizona, a fine looking man in his fifties whose face and hands shine like fine leather. He is a "lifer," having worked the fruit circuit since youth, and he likes to work at it for eleven months of the year. He says he has picked everything there is to pick. Cherries, he says, are the best work for the money.

Trinidad Timothy, a Russian Aztec from Los Angeles County, is the "old man of the orchards," in these parts. When David and I first arrived we saw him sitting on his porch. I thought he was a hundred years old and would disappear if a wind blew. He is dark, short, wizened and slight of build. Seemingly, his only ballast is a vast collection of turquoise jewelry on his person. He is a warm and friendly man with the unmistakable accent of an L.A. Mexican-American.

/Thursday

It is 5:30 a.m. and the camp is on its feet. Not all of us are awake, but we are dressed and off to the orchards to harvest the Bartlett crop. The Anjou variety will be picked awhile later. There are red Bartletts and green Bartletts, and each is to be put in a separate bin. There is a rumor that we will earn eight and a half dollars a bin (each bin holds one thousand pounds) but I will wait and see, since the going rate per bin was listed in the local paper at seven dollars.

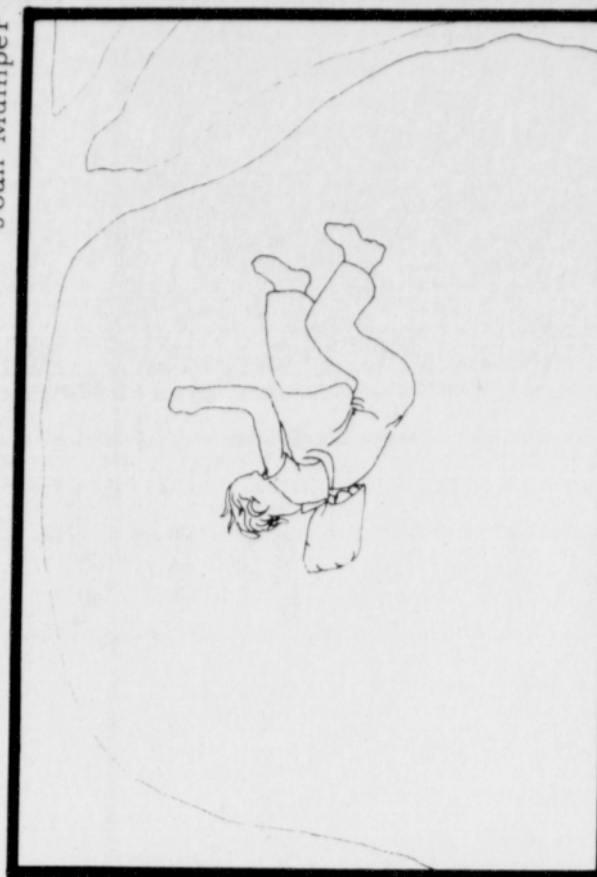
A pear picker is assigned two rows at a time and works two bins simultaneously — one for red pears, and one for green. (Understand, though, that all the pears are essentially green, that is, they are picked before they are ripe and so, ounce for ounce, in this stage they probably weigh more than rocks.) From time to time one of several roving tractor units comes by and with a fork-lift, moves the bins farther up the row so the picker need not walk forever with his or her load.

When a bin is filled, the pear picker gets to yell "Tractor!" to haul it off and replace it with another cavernous bin.

The average picker fills about three bins a day, although there are hot shots who do more, and I personally hope they all contract arthritis at an early age for being such show offs.

The fruit is picked into canvas bags with shoulder straps which cross over one's back. The bag itself is carried in front and is emptied through the bottom by unhooking side cords and thereby unfolding a bottom flap. When a full bag of fruit is being walked to a bin, the sensation is not unlike bearing a pregnancy of triplets during the eleventh month. Needless to say, I am not your regular picker who hotfoots it up and down ladders with this cumbersome contraption; in fact, I only agreed to the "Pear Caper" because David said he would do all the ladder stuff and I would work the ground. This later proved to be an unsuitable arrangement for my partner since he did not (as it turned out) like ladders, was afraid he would fall and break a leg, and felt he was being cheated of the pleasure of picking pears on solid ground. This last complaint I could sympathize with, since — my partner having fired me for these reasons — Trinidad Timothy hired me, and I was able to spend many sunfilled hours wandering under and around the pear trees, easing the burden of their heavily laden branches and hearing the trees sigh with relief. Trinidad, who lives by the maxim that "Everyone swings from their own limb, Man!", has turned out to be the most wonderful boss in the world. A pear Zen in the sun, it's been.

Joan Mumper



Orchard experts say that this year's Bartlett yield will be twenty percent lower than last, but this is okay, say the fruit growers, since it will give last year's crop, much of it still stacked in canning warehouses, a chance to get into the market.

So the Bartlett pear season draws to a close. We reluctantly say our goodbyes and leave what was so easily home, driving towards Sauvie Island and the last of the cucumber season. It will suffice until the Anjou pears are ready in another week, and then, of course, the apples will surely be next, and so on down the road of orchards and fields.

Loyola is spending the winter and perhaps part of the summer in Newport.

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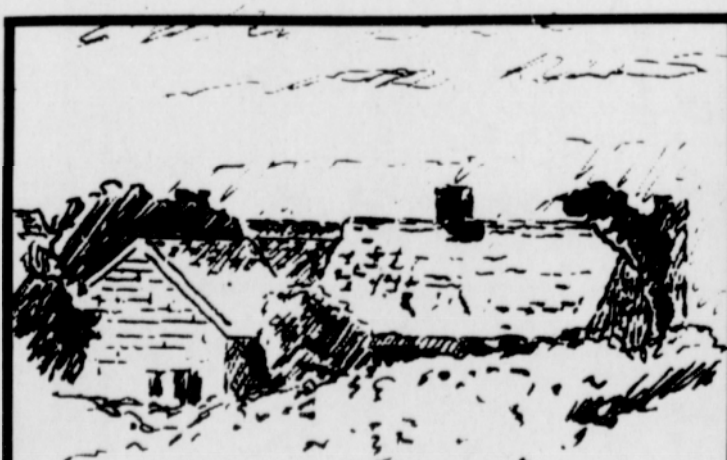
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