



THE POCKET KNIFE

Parsons' Hardware was located on the town square midway between my dad's Rexall Drug store and the Carnegie Library. Its big display window, filled with hammers, saws, shovels, ladders and the like, fascinated me, especially the array of pocketknives.

I would press my nose against the glass and study those knives intently. Some had bone, wood, even mother-of-pearl handles. Some were big, some small, but the one my heart was set on had a beautiful cherry wood handle and was just the right size to help a small boy meet the challenges of his formative years, like whittling a whistle from a green willow stick, carving a heart in a tree trunk...a heart with your initials and those of your true love in it, and playing "Mumblepeg". Mumblepeg is a game in which you flip a knife from various positions of your hand and hope the point of its blade will stick in the ground.

I had to have that knife. My future depended on it, but what if my dad didn't agree? This was a risk I couldn't take. Mustering my courage, I pushed the heavy door open. Mr. Parsons looked down at me benignly from behind a counter.

"I would like to see that knife," I announced, pointing to the one with the cherry wood handle.

"It's a beauty, isn't it?" Mr. Parsons beamed as he retrieved it from the window.

"How much?" There was anxiety in my voice.

"Fifty cents."

"Charge it," I blurted. "Can I charge it?" The silence was heavy. Obviously Mr. Parsons had little experience in opening charge accounts for boys barely out of the stroller.

"Does your dad know about this?"

"No. But it will be alright with him."

I marched proudly out of the hardware store with the knife in my pocket. To this day, I'm grateful to my dad and Mr. Parsons for understanding that such moments should be magic and not humiliating. After all, our market economy does allow a little "wiggle room"... even for small boys.

by Max Bass

