

THE BEAUTIFUL ORCHARD – MANZANAR

by Martha L. Mills



It would always happen in May, just before school was out, in the little town of Manzanar. Word got around to overall-clad, barefoot boys and girls, and, oh so many birds, that the mulberries were ripe. There was no fight among us, as there were so many berries in these towering trees in this orchard.

This old orchard was set in among other orchards. Since no one lived in the old house, centered in a little clearing among the trees, it seemed to belong to us - the kids from all around.

Our ranch was the closest to the orchard. It was a quick run through our father's large corral. We jumped through feed troughs, over a fence, down a winding path, and were there.

As we entered from our side, which was on the north, we would always pause to look at a row of giant cottonwoods too high for even us to climb, who were experts at this. Two catalpa trees guarded the corner, and were a source of awe and curiosity with their cluster of white flowers, and, later, long seed pods.

The western side was full of apple trees of every kind known, and the earliest ones were near the house, in beautiful old trees with big long limbs. We could go to the topmost branches where the ripest always were. There were Strawberry apples - which were our mother's favorite, little sweet Lady apples, Delicious, Crabapple, Roman Beauty, big Arkansas Blacks, besides the usual Winesaps.

On the southern side was a row of black walnuts, and, nearest the house, cherries and apricots. One morning, as we gathered here with pails, picking the delicious fruit, the kids said, "Your mother should be here." Her ability to do just about anything was known to all of them. "Oh, she is", we said, "Way up there", picking and loving every minute of it.

The mulberries were on the east side. There were many kinds - the big purple ones, red and even sweet white ones to delight our tastes. And eat we would, all perched upon favorite limbs till our hands and faces were stained and our tummies full.



Many were the times we travelled through this orchard during our happy childhood. This was the route we took going to swim every long summer's day in John's Dam. We went through here to visit friends and neighbors, until they, and we too, moved away.

Sometimes the Indians from Fort Independence and Lone Pine would spend the summers here using the fruit and playing their fascinating stick games. Here too, Jim's wife died. We only knew her by this

name. Jim, an old Indian, worked in the orchards. For days and nights we could hear the Medicine Man's chant to drive the evil spirits away and make her well.

In my college days, years later, I would walk here alone and love it as always, though silent now of the eager kids. I often thought how nice it would be to be able to see the man here, as he planted these trees. I'm sure he did it with all the love in his heart, and knew it would be – A Beautiful Orchard.

