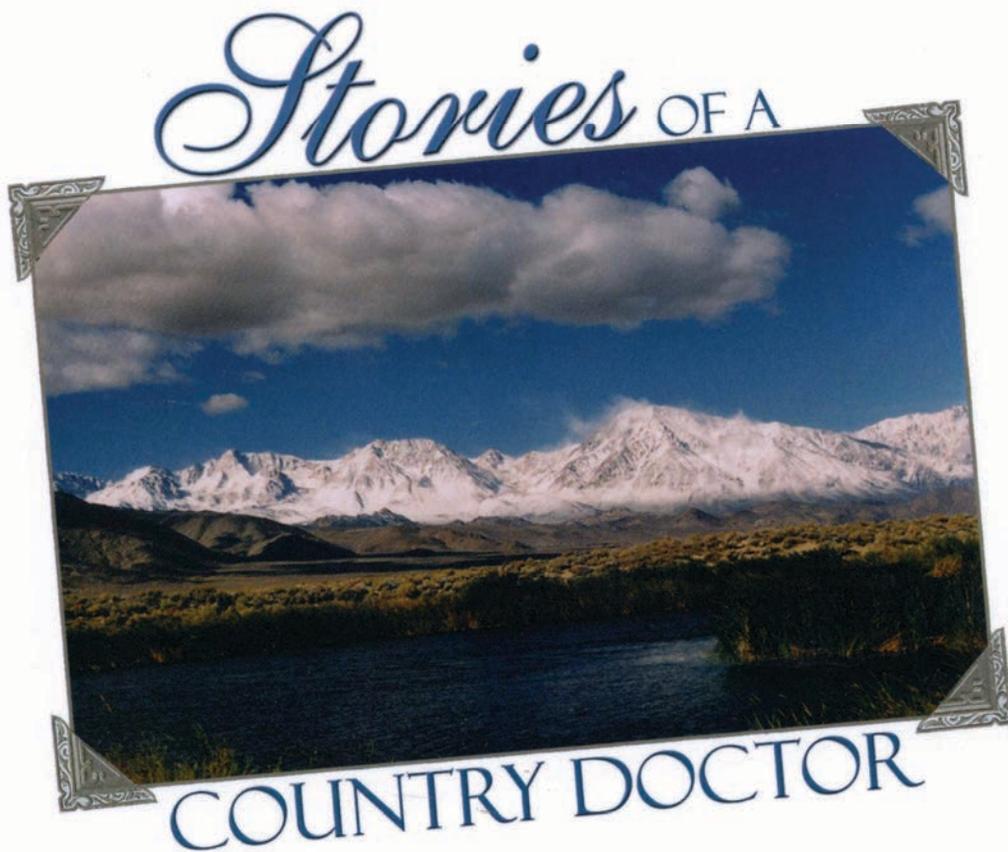


Stories of a Country Doctor

By Robert W. Denton M.D., PH.D.



ROBERT W. DENTON M.D., PH.D.



ROBERT DENTON grew up in small mining towns of the Mojave desert, himself the son of a small town doctor. Following his father's footsteps, he attended medical school at Northwestern in Chicago, where he met and married Betty Spaeth. He and Betty then moved to Bishop, California, a small town in a wild setting between the fourteen thousand foot mountains of the Sierra and White mountain ranges, where Bob established himself as a country doctor for fifty-seven years.

Dr. Denton is an accomplished story teller, and in this anecdotal autobiography he recounts fascinating tales stretching from his father's experiences growing up on a farm at the turn of the twentieth century to his own many adventures as a country doctor in the Eastern Sierra. Apart from their entertainment value, many of these stories are of considerable historical interest as well. From gun fights, plane crashes and backcountry rescues to tales of political intrigue, missionary work in exotic locales and accounts of the author's unique experiences as a traditional, "do everything" country doctor, this book captivates from start to finish.



Inspiration/Motivational/
Autobiography

ISBN 978-1-58930-239-6 \$18.99 US
5 1 8 9 9



BILL BRAMLETTE AND LITTLE LAKE

Bill Bramlette was one of my heroes. He was like a second Dad to me. He treated me as if I were his grandson. My dad and he were real close friends. They were both conservative thinkers on most topics. Mr. Bramlette taught me how to hunt deer, ducks, and quail; how to fish; and how to think. He probably did not get past the fourth grade in school, but he was wise and knowledgeable in so many situations that I consider him to have been very well educated. He was also courageous and fearless.

He could spin yarns and stories by the hour. I guess I must have learned something of how to tell a story from him as well as from my dad. Indeed, I had many mentors and teachers in my life who were also friends and colleagues of my dad. Mr. Bill Bramlette was one of these important people.

He made his fortune racing automobiles in the 1920's along with Barney Oldfield and others. These men raced cars from Los Angeles to maybe Reno or Phoenix, and then raced about the dirt tracks at county fairs at those cities. Bill said that Barney Oldfield won most of the races at the fairs because he had a particular skill of getting the most traction out of the racing car without spinning out the wheels and then having to slow down in order to regain control of the race vehicle, which was what the other race drivers were forced to do. The dust was so thick at these races that the only driver who could see anything at all was the one in the leading car, and no one could be at all sure that he could see the race track. The rest of the race drivers could only see the turning wheels spinning in the dirt and dust. Bill said that he admired the men racing at the modern speedways like the Indianapolis 500, but he thought that his days of racing were really just as dangerous.

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During those early days of automobile racing the race drivers would draw lots as to how the cars would line up at the starting line of the race. The rules also stipulated that if one car was to pass another car, the passing car would have to gain two or more car lengths ahead before cutting in front. Therefore, the inside car had a great advantage over the outside cars on the racing track, especially at the starting gate.

In one race, Bill drew the outside starting place, and therefore he attempted on the starting signal to race as fast as his racing machine could go in order to be far enough ahead to cut in front of everybody else. But at the first turn in the race track he found that he could not succeed to make the necessary two car lengths ahead. He had fallen just behind the lead car, and he was boxed in just outside of his car by another guy, and all of the other racing cars fell behind him to complete his enclosure. The announcer on the loudspeaker raved about what a close race it was, but it was really just a slow grind to the end, for the boxed in Bill was unable to break free. At the end of the race, he finished in third place. He used this story to illustrate to Dad and me how luck could play a large part of any race, and also how unforgiving all of his associates were to him in that race.

On a long road race from Los Angeles to Phoenix, Bill was ahead until about a mile from the finish line, when surprisingly his car struck a large bump and broke its front axle. Bill and his companion made a makeshift repair of the axle by splinting a post stolen from a nearby fence, and the two men pushed the crippled car for the last mile to the finish line. They lost the race because they were overtaken by several other cars while they fixed the axle. My dad asked Bill why he would have thought that he could ever win the race with the broken axle. Bill answered that you could never know if the next racers might break their cars' axles on the same chuckhole bump too!

Bill Bramlette's last serious competition was a race designed for any and all competitors with any kind of car around the perimeter of the State of Nevada, beginning at Carson City and then to Reno, Winnemucca, Elko, Wells, Ely, Tonopah and then back to Carson City, all on almost a thousand miles of dirt roads. Evidently the prize for this bonanza of a race must have been significant, for it seemed that everybody with any kind of car, from Model-T's to trucks and racecars, wanted to enter the race. Bill and his filial brother, Pete, tested all the roads and wrote note cards describing their particular conditions all the way about the state. While testing the roads, Bill ran his racer really fast, cutting off the slower vehicles that were trying out the course, in order to scare them from entering the race and thereby cluttering up the field later on. Bill later described the ensuing race to my dad, "Doc, there were some stretches of road that looked straight and where one could go 60 or miles per hour, and other places that looked allright but had chuck holes hidden in the road; so the cards would advise going 15 m.p.h. until the next corner." As the Bramlettes passed the copper mill at McGill just north of Ely, the workers

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had found seats on the roof of the mill in order to watch the race go by. When Bill passed by, his Lincoln racer blew a tire from its right front wheel and the tire flew off the wheel and disappeared into the desert. Bill changed the tire without noticing his audience at the mill and went on his way. The miners found the ruined tire and sent it back to Bill by express later. Part of Bill's preparation for this race was to have tires stored at the towns along the "race track" in case he needed them. Bill told Dad and me that changing the tire took only a short while. It was getting back the rhythm of driving again that cost him time in the race.

Bill won that race in his Lincoln "Road Runner" so completely that he was the only driver to complete the whole race about the state within one day. After the race, Bill's competitors asked Bill how he had accomplished the remarkable feat. Bill took the note cards that he and his brother Pete had used on the trip and tossed them to the other drivers, saying, "On winning this race I do not have to race anymore, and I can retire; so perhaps these note cards will help you now."

Bill drove a Lincoln car. He called his car the Road Runner and he had a picture of the bird on his car. Bill told my dad that even though the racers were supposed to use stock cars, every mechanic tried to improve his racing vehicle. Bill said that he took the Lincoln apart and rebuilt it. He had about the same number of gears left over after he had reassembled the transmission as he had gears in the car, so less friction and more speed resulted.

The Nevada races were run by having each car take off from the starting line five minutes apart from each other. Then when a faster car would overtake a slower car, the slower car would delay and not move over for the faster car to pass. The faster car would then "ride" seriously close behind, thereby forcing the scared driver of the slower car to turn out. Most of the roads in the 1920's were narrow and one way, or a tight two way, and only a few were paved. When the faster cars would finally pass the others, the driver's mechanic would throw whatever wrenches or tools he had at the heads of the occupants of the other vehicles, to eliminate the crowd on the road; note the friendly competitive spirit, for throwing paving bricks was forbidden. When the racers would go back to the starting line after the finish of the race, the men would try to find and recover their tools from each other!

Bill Bramlette bought real estate at Little Lake and also at Benton, California, and at Bell and Downey in southern California. The Little Lake property extended some half mile or so south of the lake; so the property was about three miles long. Bill built a hotel and dining room as well as a post office, café, gas station, automobile garage, and several homes for his family. Little Lake was located about equal distance from Mojave to the south and Bishop to the north, so it was a natural stop for many travelers.

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Mrs. Bramlette prepared meals at the hotel for the hotel guests and for the travelers driving through the valley. Wonderful food, and surely lots of food, was presented on long tables by Mrs. Bramlette and her crew. On those tables would be a cornucopia of several types of meat, potatoes, vegetables, bread, butter, jams, water, tea, coffee, pies, cakes, salt and pepper, and so on! The white tablecloths, silverware, and crystal were all first rate. The chairs and other furniture were comfortable and showed good taste. Mrs. Bramlette had a large kitchen with a great big wood-burning stove with ovens within the stove. The hotel had a large lobby with all sorts of bric-a-brac and mounted animal and bird specimens (including deer heads and horns mounted on the walls). Comfortable chairs, tables, and reading lamps surrounded a large fireplace. There was a separate smoking room elsewhere. Mr. Bramlette and his wife had an apartment on the first floor. What a dreamland of a castle that place was for a little boy like me. The first time I remember eating there was at breakfast before Dad and I went duck hunting with Mr. Bramlette. Since there were so many ducks those days, it was really more like duck shooting than duck hunting on the lake. I was six years old, and I was bundled up with all the clothes I owned, but I was still cold. The hearty breakfast was buckwheat pancakes, each of which filled the whole plate. As soon as I had finished eating the first pancake, Mrs. Bramlette asked if I wanted another? She said, "Bobby, it is cold out there on the lake; are you sure that you don't want another pancake?" I got so filled up with buckwheat pancakes that I had no room for another, but I was not cold any more that day.

Little Lake was full of tule reeds all over the lake, and ducks of all breeds were there by the thousands. My dad would tow the flat duck boat into the tules, and he would shoot the ducks as they flew by, most of which were killed close enough to be easily found. I got to pick up the ducks out of the water and throw them into the little boat. Our boat, as well as the other boats, was filled with ducks up to the brim by the time we went back to the shore. That is how I became a hunter.

The next thing I knew I was given a 2 1/2 inch shell double barreled shot gun and my job was to shoot the heads off of the chickens in our chicken yard when my mom wanted them for dinner, because she could never bring herself to chop the birds' heads off with a hatchet. I was a good shot for a 6 year old.

I had the great opportunity in my life to have hunted ducks and other game before the human population pushed out the wildlife population. My dad and Bill would remark that they thought there were less ducks each year at Little Lake when I was a youngster, and they were right. Today, there are hardly any ducks left in this flyway.

The diminution of the bird wildlife that used to inhabit the great flyways of North America was probably the result of breeding areas of shallow lakes and wetlands in Western Canada being turned into either producing farmlands or deep lakes or reservoirs where protective cover was lost. I do not agree with some wise guys' attributing the loss of the wild ducks to over hunting.

When I became a few years older, Dad gave me a three-inch cartridge Winchester pump shot gun. Mr. Bramlette thought I was a pretty good marksman to shoot ducks with that small gun. Later, I had other guns, too.

Bill Bramlette wanted to get rid of some of the tule plants on the lake in order to develop open water. Dad told Bill that muskrats could eat up the tules. Dad knew about muskrats because he had trapped them when he was growing up in northeastern South Dakota. So Bill ordered eight muskrats (4 male and 4 female) from some Midwest supply house; but by the time the cage of muskrats arrived at Little Lake, all of them were dead except for one which was almost gone, because of their fighting one another. Bill reordered eight more animals, with each one in its own cage, and they all arrived alive. The muskrats adapted quickly and multiplied, and they ate all of the tules within a few years' time. They made "houses" in the water of piled up tule reeds "woven" together into a hemisphere about three yards or more in diameter with the entrances to the floating houses underneath the tule masses, like beavers. After the large colony of muskrats would eat all the tules, they would find other grass foods, and make their new "houses" within the banks of the lake. Then Bill planted large mouth bass into the lake for great fishing and wild rice for great food for migratory ducks.

It may be worth noting that muskrats started appearing in the upper Owens River banks during the last couple of decades. Apparently no one in Bishop knows how the muskrats got to the Bishop waters, but I suspect these adventurous rodents migrated during wet seasons from Little Lake to Haiwee Reservoir and then along the Los Angeles canal to the Owens River. No one seems upset with their appearing here. I have seen them swimming in this part of the river with a triangular bow wave forming outwardly from their nose.

I remember one time Dad, Eddie, and I were fishing on Little Lake when the wind was blowing. On this occasion, we used large black gnats on our fly rods, and the large mouth bass fought each other in order to strike our flies! We had never had such fly-fishing anywhere before. We used two flies, one at the end of the leader, and another as a drop fly. The wind was so strong it was difficult to lay our hooks into the water, so the large mouth bass had to jump out of the waves to get caught. Dad let us do the fishing; he skinned and cut fillets about as fast as my brother and I could haul in the bass.

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On another occasion, Dad and I were rowing into the dock at Little Lake after catching some bass toward evening and I noticed a green pickup parked on the causeway. I told Dad I thought it was a game warden looking at us with his binoculars. After we had docked the boat and were cleaning the fish, the game warden suddenly appeared, for he had had to wade across the outlet of the lake and work his way back to the pier where we were. He announced he was a state game warden from Lodi County and was passing through on his way south. He had seen that we were catching fish in California and so he would be the hero and arrest us, for bass season had not opened yet in California. I was apprehensive for I figured that the stranger cop had caught us, but Dad hardly looked up at the fellow and continued to clean the fish. Finally he said, "This is a private lake, and you are trespassing, and you might as well leave right now." He left.

One time the Fish and Game people told Mr. Bramlette that since they had stocked the lake no one could fish out of season even though it was a private lake. Bill retorted that he had stocked the bass into the lake, and if the State had put their fish in the lake, too, that he would have to insist that they get their fish out of his lake because he did not want to feed their fish! After that, the Fish and Game left Bill and his guests alone.

Bill Bramlette was a courageous and fearless man. When he grew up in the southland of California, wild game was plentiful, especially in the Downey-Bell-Whittier area; and he hunted upland game birds for the Los Angeles restaurants. He loaded his own shot gun shells, and he used different amounts of powder and shot for different game, heavier loads for heavy birds like canvasback ducks and lighter loads for smaller birds like doves and quail. He did have one serious accident when one of his brass cartridges exploded and blinded his right eye with black powder, so he had to learn to shoot left handed, which he did well enough. By the time he had regained the vision in his right eye, he had become quite ambidextrous, especially in his ability to shoot guns with either hand and in either direction.

He mentioned that one time he got ahead furnishing the restaurants with game birds and the proprietors told him to slow down his shipments. In order to keep Bill as their provider, they suggested that he shoot snipe for them instead. They figured it would take a week or two, at least, for Bill to find snipe so that they would have time to use up their supplies of game. However, Bill just happened to know where the snipe was, in a field of a certain farm along the road. When Bill walked along the road with lots of fine light shot, and less powder, and the snipe flitted over him he just shot over his head into their midst, and he sent a delivery box of a hundred snipe to the restaurants the next day. An immediate return telegram came from the city canceling the order; no more snipe! Bill never found out how they cooked the little birds, if they did.

When Bill and his wife were married, they lived in the Downey-Bell area, and Bill was a water-well driller before he became a race car driver. Bill was a natural-born mechanic, which started him on his racing car adventures. During these active days, Bill met many acquaintances, and from these he accumulated a stalwart small group of close friends. Dad and I were relative late comers as we only knew Bill for about the last fifteen years or so of his life. We met only a few of his old friends, mostly when they went duck hunting at Little Lake when we were also there.

Mr. Bramlette was an honest man, and therefore he surrounded himself with honest people. He protected his friends, and he did not hesitate to say "no" to his non-friends. For instance, one Sunday morning we were assembled near the service station at Little Lake getting ready to hunt ducks and I was inflating a rubber boat with the air hose used to inflate tires. A well-dressed man approached me and asked if we were going to hunt on the lake, saying that he would like to go with us. I answered that he would have to ask Mr. Bramlette, and I pointed to the man wearing overalls and a slouched hat. The visitor asked Mr. Bramlette, "I wonder if you could include me?" Bill answered, "No." The visitor said, "Perhaps you don't know who I am; I am the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Chief of this area." Bill said, "Yes, I know and the answer is no."

I do not know why, but Bill did seem to have trouble getting along with some of the Lone Pine citizens. So, when Charlie Brown, from Shoshone in the Death Valley area, was running for election to the Senate of California for the first time, he asked Bill to support him. Bill agreed, for after all, their homes were only 100 miles apart across the desert and they were neighbors. Bill then told Charlie, "I am for you, but don't get upset about whatever you hear about me around Lone Pine during your campaign." Bill then told the citizens of Lone Pine, "Whatever you do, don't vote for Charlie Brown." The people detested Bill so much that they overwhelmingly voted for Charlie in Lone Pine. Charlie won by "reverse psychology." Charlie Brown was a wonderful senator for us. He remained in office for such a long time that he controlled most of the powerful committees.

When Charlie got old enough to retire, he ran for re-election anyway, but he lost to Bill Symons. Charlie and his daughter visited Betty and me during that last campaign, and as I told Charlie that I had already committed myself to Bill Symons, Charlie reminded me that he and Bill Bramlette were old time friends. I still feel bad to have let the old man down.

I knew Bill Bramlette and his family for only about one decade (1931 to 1941) before he died. I came along about when his grandchildren were supposed to have arrived. So, he treated me as one of his family. These were important years for my development in growing up, and I thought of him as a second dad. I thought of these men as my heroes, and I still do.

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Bill noticed that his three children had grown up and were happily married, but there were no grandchildren. So Bill announced he would give to the first grandchild a thousand dollars on arrival. At last, all of a sudden within the next year, Bill and his wife were presented with three grandchildren; from Lucille and Art Calloway a boy, from Buster and Maybelle another boy, and from Tom and Hazel a girl. Since each was nearly tied to be the first grandchild, Bill awarded each one a thousand dollars, thereby tripling his original proposal. My mother always laughed a lot whenever she related what happened to grandfather Bill, the lucky man!

Since I am writing about our friendships with the Bramlettes, I want to interpose another story from when I was still doing postgraduate research in Chicago. I was driving to Rockford, Illinois from Chicago in order to obtain horse viscera specimens from the Quaker Oats dog food plant (Kennel Ration dog food using horse meat as well as grains). On the trip I just happened to turn the radio on to Arthur Godfrey's morning talk program. He discussed a remarkable definition of friendship. He suggested that only a very few people ever have a friend, using his strict definition as I remember it. A person would be such a friend if he were of the same gender (but not including filial or family members), and if he knew the other person well enough to trust him with all of his secrets, ambitions, victories, defeats, accomplishments, worries, failures, charities, sins, and beliefs, etc.; and if the other person would have the same reciprocal deep relationship. As I remember Godfrey's numbers, some 75% of the people interviewed never had such a friend, 20% thought they had such a friend once in their lifetimes, and 5% thought they had two or more such friendships. As an example, Godfrey told of one American politician, Jim Farley (who was actively engaged in President Roosevelt's election campaigns), who was said to have had 50,000 acquaintances with whom he could spontaneously initiate a dialogue, knowing their first and last names, and knowing enough about them to ask how the family or a particular business was doing. Nevertheless, this unusual gentleman said that maybe he had two such close friends, and as he grew older, maybe only one.

Bill Bramlette must have had more like a dozen of these super friends. At least I thought so highly of him that I would have defended him with my life just as I would have with my own family.

So, with this definition aside, I shall continue with more notes of Bill Bramlette. He was approached by one of his longtime friends by telephone sometime in the 1920's asking him for help regarding a run being made on the friend's bank in Downey, CA. The friend asked Bill, "Do you think you can help me?" Bill answered, "Yes, what is the problem?" The banker friend had lots of loans out with solid securities, but all of a sudden many of his depositors started making a run

on the bank by withdrawing their money, and the bank was running out of liquid assets, and cash. The plot was engineered by a rival bank, which was ready to take over the friend's bank.

Bill asked, "How much money do you need?" Bill told my Dad that when he heard the number, he whistled into the phone. The friend then asked Bill, "Can you still help me?" Bill said, "I already said I would, and I will."

Bill telephoned various old friends and business people in Los Angeles for their support, especially those from his racing days. Incredibly, most all of these old timers lent the money that was needed to save the friend's bank. When all of the solid loans came due and were paid back, Bill was able to return their money. The bank was saved, and somehow or other the banker friend turned over ownership of the bank to Bill. The Bank of America eventually bought the Downey bank at a proper value, to Bill's advantage. Before Bill sold the bank, the bank was robbed twice. The second time, a robbery threat was made by two shifty-eyed men, who came in to pay half down for a safe deposit box. The bank employees told Bill that these two looked like the same sort of characters that had robbed the bank before, and that they seemed to have come to "case" the place.

On the day that these two thugs returned supposedly to pay for the safe deposit box, Bill and a Los Angeles sheriff deputy were waiting in Bill's car parked across the street on Atlantic Blvd. The bank was on the northeast corner of the boulevard at an intersection with an east-west cross street. The bank front door was facing west on the boulevard, and its left wall ran alongside the cross street with its rear door on an alley on the east side of the bank building. The bandits arrived in their black sedan, and they parked just behind Bill and the deputy's car; both were facing south on the boulevard.

The bandits walked past Bill's car, then eastward from the corner across Atlantic Blvd. and into the front door of the bank, with Bill and the L.A. deputy following behind. Bill told the deputy, "You take the front door, and I'll take the back door in case they come out that way." So, the deputy drew his gun and walked right into the front door, and of course, the bandits shot the deputy in the stomach, and he collapsed onto the floor. Bill raced back to the corner of the bank building just as the first bandit came out of the front door, and as the bandit faced Bill toward the south, he fired point blank and then ran across Atlantic Blvd. to start firing from behind the spare tire of the bandits' car. Bill could not return fire at the first bandit because people had come out onto the sidewalk behind the bandit. Later it was determined that the bandit's aim had been pretty accurate, but the bullet had passed between Bill's legs and hit the gas station pump on the southeast corner of the intersection instead of Bill's abdomen.

A duel was fought between the first gunman, who was behind the spare tire of the get away car, and Bill, who was in front of the bank, standing without any cover. Bill hit the bandit with two bullets from his Luger automatic, one on each side of

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the chest, and the bandit fired all of his shells just above Bill's head into the large window with his 45 automatic. The second bandit inside the bank had to cover the bank employees, and yet he tried to shoot Bill from the front door but missed. Bill and the first bandit emptied their guns about the same time; the second bandit then ran out the door and across Atlantic into the get away car driver's seat, and away they went. Bill ran across the wide boulevard behind the two gunmen, he jumped into his car, and the mad chase began, going south on Atlantic Blvd.

Bill did not have a chance to reload his Luger, but he was able to close the bolt so the gun did not look empty. Bill ran down the bandits' car and forced it off the street into a telephone pole, and he held up the two criminals with his empty Luger and handcuffed them. Obviously, Bill's experience as a racecar driver contributed to this amazing capture. Then, Bill reloaded his pistol right in front of his prisoners!

No one died from the gunshot wounds. The deputy must have had a good surgeon in order to survive the .45 slug in his abdomen. The deputy received the news media credit for the capture of the armed bank robbers, and Bill was not mentioned. Nor was any mention made of the bandit with the two bullet holes in his chest. No bystanders were shot or injured, although one lady was looking out of her upstairs window and a ricochet bullet broke the window in her face.

The bank robbers were tried and the whole gang was apprehended and sent to prison, but who knew for how long, since the corrupt state prison system might set them free. During the trial, Bill was approached by a couple of gangsters on the courthouse steps and asked, "Is your name Bramlette?" Bill answered, "Yes." They said, "You're on the spot." Bill said, "Come around if you think you're lucky." Bill had to carry a .38 revolver in a shoulder holster and watch out for ambushes from then on.

Over and again I have been impressed with how much Bill's old friends and acquaintances admired him. For example, when a well known wealthy Los Angeles car dealer died without leaving a will, his entire estate was tied up in probate. His widow was stranded without any source of income for many months, and she was denied any loans from anyone. In desperation, she finally telephone Bill and explained her plight, and she remarked that her late husband had told her many stories about Bill, and had said if she ever was in serious money trouble to call Bill Bramlette for help. Bill sent her the money she needed. He never did meet her personally.

Bill Bramlette died at his home in Benton, California, in about December, 1940. He was only 60 to 65 years old. He had out hiked and out climbed all the rest of us only a week or so before he died when we had been hunting mountain quail. All of the wonderful adventures we had had with him suddenly became memories, such as the time we were duck hunting at Little Lake and Bill shot ten flying ducks with

ten shells. The rule at Little Lake had been that nobody fired a shot until after Bill did, so that all the hunters could get settled into their blinds. As soon as the guns would sound off, the ducks would take to the air and the air would be filled with several thousand flying birds, so thick we could hardly see the hills through them. What a sight and what a noise from their flying. After a couple of hours, the boats would pick up the hunters from along the shore and pick up the dead ducks in the lake and we would get into the pickup trucks and retire to the back of the hotel where the ducks would be tossed into a big pile. The men would tell stories to each other, and the ducks would be sorted out and distributed to everyone. Many varied species of ducks were identified in those days, especially Mallards, Redheads, Canvas Backs, Wigeons, Pintails, Sprigs, Bluebills, Teals, Ruddy and other small diving ducks, Coots, and occasionally Canadian geese when I was a young fellow. Each year there would be less and less, until nowadays when they are almost gone. I have not hunted ducks for many years. A family of white swan used to come by yearly; then they were gone, too. Now all of the buildings at Little Lake are gone too, and most of the people that were there have died.

One day when I was at the mortuary in Bishop performing an autopsy, I asked Eddy Blake if he had been at the mortuary when Bill Bramlette died in 1940? Eddy remembered that he was there on the job as Mr. Albright's assistant. I said that my dad had telephoned the Bishop Mortuary as soon as he had heard the news of Bill's death, and Dad had asked for an autopsy, but no post had been done because Mr. Albright had given Eddy strict orders to embalm the body as quickly as possible. The body in the casket had been rushed to Downey-Bell (Los Angeles) to the funeral there by Mr. Albright. Our family had started to drive from Trona to go to the funeral but we had had a car accident and did not get past Randsburg. Mr. Albright had started home from the funeral in his empty hearse when he had apparently been alarmed by somebody chasing him in a car, so that he had tried to outrace his assailant by driving full speed on the main boulevard through San Fernando Valley. He finally had run a red light and been killed in a collision. Why was he in such a rush to get home? Eddy Blake did not know either. Eddy eventually bought the Bishop Mortuary from Mrs. Albright.

When Bill died, Tom and Hazel inherited the Little Lake property. Tom ran a fishing business at the lake, mainly for crappy and bass, and also a trout pond away from the lake itself. In the fall and early winter he would contract with a Los Angeles duck-hunting club of mostly physicians of my father's generation to shoot ducks. However, Tom honored me by keeping the opening day of duck season open just for us.

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Tom started having stress with stomach ulcer symptoms, and as his physician as well as his hunting partner I suggested he sell the Little Lake property. Probably if his dad had been alive he would have either run off the bureaucrats and trouble-makers or sold the place already. Tom remarked that really the only reason he kept the place was so that I would have a place to shoot ducks. What a friend! But there were not that many ducks around anymore. Tom and Hazel sold Little Lake and moved to Idaho.

Before I leave Bramlette stories, I should add something about Buster's inheritance of the abandoned mining town and valley 40 miles north of Bishop known as Benton.

Of course, the Paiute Indian tribes had lived there and in the surrounding country for centuries before the white man discovered silver mines in the adjacent Blind Springs hills across the great meadow east of the big hot spring around 1860 or so. The busy populated town grew and then faded like most mining towns as the ore became exhausted. It was said that enough silver was mined and recovered to pay for much of the Civil War. (That statement was a "tall" story, best told by gold mine promoters.) There were two mills operating during the mines' heyday.

When Bill Bramlette took Dad and me to visit his Benton ranch properties and the old stagecoach buildings in 1933 or 1934, the whole region was quite rural and rustic with mostly dirt roads and rundown homes and barns. There was a paucity of people and not much activity. I guess Bill had made enough money race car driving and investing to be able to buy up most of the real estate in the place during those depression years. However, besides the rustic ruins there were two delightful small lakes nearby which were dug out in order to have a place to cool the hot spring water used for the mills and for the fields. The first lake was nice and warm and it had tules and lilies with large gold fish and crappies, and it was a great place in which to swim. The second lake drained from the first, and it was always too cold for me to swim in but the ducks liked it better.

The domestic water supply was taken directly from the hot spring by an underground main to a cooling tank, from thence to be distributed by regular plumbing to the buildings. Since the water was still quite warm, it was cooled by letting the hot water stand in open containers, for refrigeration had not yet arrived in Benton. The dry desert weather helped cool the water. For instance, the bathtubs were filled to about 1/2 full and let to cool for the next person to add hot water as he wanted. Then when that person finished bathing, he was supposed to drain and clean the bathtub, and refill it about 1/2 way. (I forgot to refill it once. Too bad!) My wife was happily surprised to find steam heated warm toilet facilities there.

The Indians lived in wooden unpainted houses built on the west hillside of the town. They lived freely there as they always did before Bill obtained the land. The Indian women washed and beat their laundry on the wet rocks bordering the hot

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water creek. (Betty and I saw the same technique of pounding clothes on wet rocks with wood sticks when we were in Kasganj, India, in 1975.) The old hotel, general store and stage stop were named Wye Wera Hot Springs, with a big sign painted on the top front of the building. This was not an Indian name recognized by any American tribes, but rather a Maori, New Zealand name.