

# Mule Days

**Hidden Forest Publishers**  
*Guin, Alabama*

Cover art by Betty Treese

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First Edition

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Hidden Forest Publishers, Guin, Alabama.

Printed by InstantPublisher.com.

ISBN 0-9755117-0-X

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004106397

# Mule Days



Stories About Survivors of the Great  
Depression



*To my wife, Jacqui, who  
Forced me to get rid of and  
To ultimately condense all those  
Piles, pieces and scraps of notes.*

*For Dad (Pappy) and Mom  
Who Survived*

*And to all who encouraged me to  
Embark upon the writing of this book -  
You know who you are!*



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The way in which this book came about is rather unique. It had its beginnings because of the frailties of my mind to retain and remember the stories that my father told of his younger days. Out of desperation to recall them all, I wrote them down on odd scraps of paper, the backs of grocery receipts, index cards and the insides of cardboard shoeboxes - whatever was handy. In later years, I repeated what I had been told into a tape recorder and even made actual in-person recordings during my father's remembrances.

Family members (both outlaws and in-laws) encouraged me to take up the writing of this book because of some of the small projects that I had accomplished in the past. These included such things as narratives of vacation trips; holiday letters which reviewed personal events that occurred during the previous year; descriptive accounts of the work done on the small farm where we now live; and of my notes on the pitfalls and highlights of chicken farming sent via e-mail. In addition, my lovely wife Jacqui

thought that I should collate (I think this means clean up the mess!) the piles of notes that I had gathered over the last few decades.

I don't know where my talent originated or even if I have any talent at relating events into a venue that others would like to read. I like books and read extensively. I like old books and new books; fiction of most kinds - at least if they are believable; and books which deal with man's ingenuity and his ability to cope with life such as those by Eric Sloane. I also like books and magazines that depict the human ability to handcraft and hand fashion tools and objects of wood and metal. Old science books that depict the planets, the solar system and what was thought about them before modern tools such as radar and the Hubbell telescope came into being serve as my gems and jewels. I elicit great pleasure when the writings of authors such as Immanuel Velikovsky are proven correct by modern scientific methods. I am sure that these writers had some influence on my vocabulary at least.

Let me just state that in today's fast paced world of high speed internet connections there exists the capability to be just a click away using e-mail from someone in Russia or the deepest, darkest reaches of Africa. Events such as hijackings, 9-11, Weapons of Mass Destruction which have never been found, political posturing and the daily rat race or grind can and do cause such deep tensions. We need the opportunity - and the outlet - to sit back and relax. To reflect upon "the good old days" when life

was simpler and less stressful. This work will attempt to provide the outlet. Hopefully, you can and will provide the opportunity for relaxation and life enrichment.

*Lonnie E. Treese*

Hidden Forest Farm

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*Postscript:* The names and dates and places in the stories depicted in this book, to the best of my ability, have been given accurately. The events occurred shortly before, during and after the Great Depression covering a span of years from about 1925 to 1965. The locale is in northwestern Missouri, with most events occurring in Nodaway County. The main characters are members of one family (my ancestors and relatives) and their interactions with neighbors and friends. The stories are representatives of the trials and tribulations, anecdotes, sorrows and joys of all the survivors who lived and endured those times of economic depression. While historical in content, they have been blended with my imaginations and comments to present you with a poetical reality.





# Chapter 1

## The Great Depression

Where and how to begin - I guess the best way would be to give some background upon the economic conditions which will have a large influence on the events to follow and then to introduce the main characters.

The economic boom following World War I had little effect on the daily lives of a farmer and his family. Oh sure, he might be able to get a few more pennies from the sale of his grain or livestock, but all in all, it was still not a life of ease. As the boom started trickling off during the first part of the 1920's, it was hardly felt by the common man. Starting about 1925, the effects were beginning to be felt everywhere. And by 1929 it was a panic induced devastation.

The Great Depression came about because of excessive speculation in the stock market. Everyone who could afford to do so - and it was open to everyone, not just the rich - delved into the world of high finance. Everyone even included foreign countries. It was a fairly easy way to get rich.

Speculation - we all do it. We use our minds, intuition, prejudices and luck in trying to decide and plan our future actions

so that we can give ourselves all the advancement and riches that we can hope to obtain. We use speculation in deciding what careers to follow by balancing what we like to do with what jobs will help us reach our goals the quickest. We speculate when we are at the gambling table and have to make a decision about which cards to keep, how our luck is running for the next throw of the dice or whether it will be red or black on the next spin of the roulette wheel.

Speculating in the stock market is very similar - we weigh what has gone before with what we can imagine for the future then throw in a little of what we call intuition to make a decision to purchase a particular stock that will make us rich. Within the stock market and as a precursor for the events to follow, there came about a way to let everyone get into the act. It was called "buying on margin". For example, lets say you have been watching the value of stocks of the 'Ye Olde Wooden Buckets' Company and have seen them rise \$10 every quarter of the year for the last 2 years until they now cost \$100 per share. "Buying on margin" allowed you to purchase these stocks for \$10 cash (the usual percentage was 10% of the going price) per share then you could make up the remaining \$90 out of the profits the stock was going to make. So if your stocks were selling for \$110 next quarter, you would have that increase of \$10 to pay on the original cost of the stocks. If you sold your stock at the end of the quarter, you could realize that \$10 as profit. But you could make even more money if

you just let it increase in value during subsequent periods, so the majority of speculators just let their stocks "ride" hoping to make even greater profits.

Because a lot of people were buying the same stocks you were buying, the prices went up faster than they would have under ordinary conditions and now each share costs \$150 at the end of that next quarter instead of the \$110 that you expected. But, this is good isn't it? The answer is "It could be, but probably isn't." The reason - the 'actual' value of 'Ye Olde Wooden Buckets' products upon which the stocks were based probably has not risen with the stock market's 'inflated' speculative price. In fact, the number of wooden buckets sold has not increased and the sales price for each bucket has started dropping off as metal buckets become more in use. The stock's market price reflects this change, levels out and starts sliding back toward the 'actual' price so that now you are losing money. To break even, you would have to start dumping other stocks that you own to make up the difference. This causes all the other stocks to start sliding as well. So when these speculative stock buyers started dumping the stocks that they actually owned to make the payments for the stocks that they had promised to purchase, prices plummeted - the bottom fell out and kept falling in the resulting panic and stock market crash of 1929. No one could cover their promises because they could not get enough money from selling what stocks they had. This had the adverse effect of affecting not just the stock market and high finan-

ces, not just this country, but also the whole world.



Depression era mealtime

By the latter part of 1929 and during the early years of recovery, the following conditions existed: There was work to be had, but no one had any money with which to pay - you might have to settle for a chicken or a pig. Hogs were going for 2 1/2 to 3 cents per pound. Cows were selling for \$6 or \$7 each if you could find someone with any money to buy them. Eggs were priced at 8 cents to 10 cents per dozen. And corn was going for 10 cents a bushel if anyone had the funds. The farmer and his family had to survive and endure on what they could raise.

If any money could be raised, it was used for the absolute necessities that could not be bartered for, such as coal oil or



kerosene for lamps and rent.

Having set the economic stage let me now introduce the main characters. Isaac (to be alternatively known as "Ike" and "Grandpa" and of course Pappy calls him "Dad") and his sister Elsie married Ira (pronounced like "are-ee") and his sister Ethel (to be known mainly as Grandma) in a double wedding ceremony on Christmas Eve in 1906. Most of the stories will be following the Isaac and Ethel union and their issue, but there are others who make appearances here and there as well.

By 1925, nine children had been born. Only 6 would live to adulthood. The survivors consisted of daughter Verna who was born in 1909, son Irvin in 1910, son Bernard in 1917, daughter Reva in 1920, daughter Iva in 1922 and son Gene (he is "Pappy") in 1924. And then by the end of 1929, two more were born - Irene in 1927 and Donald, the youngest, only a few days after the stock market crashed in March of 1929.

As Pappy tells it:

"We had a Model "T" Ford, but it just sat in the garage. The license cost \$6.00 a year, which dropped to \$3.00 if you waited until June, but there wasn't any more money in June than there had been in January. Trips to town or anywhere else for that matter were by horse and wagon or you could ride 'shanks-mare' (Pappy's term for on foot)."

"We wore hand-me-down clothes which

were patched until there wasn't anything left except the threadbare patches. I had a pair of hand-me-down shoes, but I couldn't wear them because there wasn't any money to buy replacements so I had to (or got to - it all depends on how you look at it!) go barefooted for the most part from early spring until late fall."

"Rent was \$100 cash per year and like the money for the car's license - very hard to get, except we *had* to pay this. It took all year of scraping, doing without, making do and with everyone helping to put what few pennies could be earned into the gallon sized jug marked 'rent'. Mom and Dad had a 28 year rental agreement or we would never have gotten it that cheap!"

Such were the conditions and settings of this age long before television and daycare centers. Parents, siblings and other relatives shared the responsibilities of 'baby sitting' and bringing about a kid's raising. There were many instances of children being farmed out to others (and not necessarily relatives) for rearing, as their parents could not afford to feed and clothe them. Everyone helped as best they could.



