

Perspective Digest

Volume 7 | Number 3

Article 9

7-1-2002

America the Bountiful

Elford Radke

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

Recommended Citation

Radke, Elford (2002) "America the Bountiful," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 7 : No. 3 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol7/iss3/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

AMERICA THE BOUNTIFUL

Did peanuts really grow from peanut trees in Portland, Oregon, where we were going to live?

America! A wondrous land flowing with milk and honey, they said on the bleak prairies of Alberta back in 1937. And my folks were going to move there. They *had* to move there! The granary where my father worked in the little town of Granum, population 90, had burned down. The only things prospering on the prairie were prairie dogs. Millions of them! Little did I care that I was lame and poor, or that because of the Great Depression, my folks were to enter the U.S. illegally. We were going to America! America the bountiful.

In preparation for the awesome journey, I stuffed my pants pockets with all the trinkets a little wide-eyed boy of 7 could store in them: odd nails, colorful rocks, pretty

pieces of glass, and a semi-petrified angle worm. Some people might go to America for the milk and honey; my focus was on peanuts. Could it be true that peanuts hung from the branches of peanut trees in Portland, Oregon, where we were to live?

Alas, no. And with so much treasure in them, the pockets of my only pants soon developed holes from which my treasures trickled. Mother dutifully mended, but soon there were more holes, more lost treasures, and more mending, until no mending would suffice. By then Dad had a job in a gas station, but with four hungry children to be fed and clothed, pock-

**Elford Radke lives in Meadowglade, Washington.*

ets without holes were a luxury.

However, from somewhere Mother saved the pennies necessary to buy a set of new pockets. Glory be! They were grown-up size and hung clear to my knees! Only in America! Now my pockets could hold all my treasures. And someday, I hoped, among them would be peanuts.

One summer day, the circus came to Portland. And the big striped tent was set up just up the street from our house. What thrills there would be! I had never seen an animal that was not at home on an Alberta farm. And here there were to be, it was said, lions and tigers and elephants and monkeys and clowns and—peanuts! Everybody knew that's what circus animals lived on.

Now I had big pockets, but nothing in them that would buy a ticket. But this was America, and surely initiative would be rewarded. A friend and I consulted, and, as circus personnel scurried about setting up exhibits, we crawled under the colorful canvas of the Big Tent. We emerged within inches of a snarl that could not have come from a real American. No real American would have grabbed us by the ear and ushered us toward the street while issuing dire warnings of life in what he called a "Reform School."

Just at that propitious moment, the circus master arrived, sized up the situation and nodded us free. With mingled excitement and

humility, we offered to work our way in. And glory be, he was a real American! Our offer was accepted.

We were ushered into a room with a tub filled with—No! It couldn't be!—*peanuts!* A whole circus-sized tub of unshelled peanuts. If we would sack them, the circus master said, we would earn free passes to everything.

And so we sacked. And sacked. For what seemed forever. Finally the 100 percent American circus master returned. "That's enough, boys," he said as he handed us our passes. "Before you go, you can fill your front pockets with peanuts."

Only in America would it be said! And only in America would a 7-year-old peanut lover have pockets that extended to his knees! When my friend and I triumphantly arrived at ringside, I had peanuts for the elephants, peanuts for the monkeys, and peanuts for me!

What a day! Depression or no Depression, what a great country! I went home that night eating peanuts and singing "God bless America"—for treasures secured, for circuses, and for pockets filled with peanuts. Deep pockets! Only in America! □

Editor's Note

There are more than the peanuts in this story to be thankful for. In 1939, an evangelist came to Portland and set up his sawdust-floored tent on a vacant lot only a mile from the

Radke residence. His name: F. F. Schwindt. A good German name. Like Radke. Elford's dad and mom decided to go hear him. Elford, his brother, Russell; and sisters Stella and Dorothy were also there every night. Right on the front row. One night, given permission to go to the restroom, they tarried. Dad found them, took them all home, spanked each, put them back in the car, and returned them to their front-row seats.

When Schwindt left Portland, parents Gus and Mini Radke had been baptized while the church sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Adventism, took, even though Gus lost his job because of the Sabbath. Russell became a dentist who often preached in small churches near his practice in Clarkston, Washington. Stella, baptized as an 8th-grader by H. M. S. Richards, married a minister, Roland Hegstad; Dorothy married Pat Larson, a long-time teacher and principal in the Adventist school system. Miriam, born in 1941, married Willis Adams, still a pastor in Ohio. And Elford, the peanut lover, also became a minister, for the past 28 years serving as auditor of the Oregon Conference. And yes, says his wife, Norabel, he still loves peanuts.



Illustration by Ray Driver