



Dewey Chambers

People

1-1-1982

Tales of the Delta Folk, edited by Dewey Chambers

Dewey W. Chambers

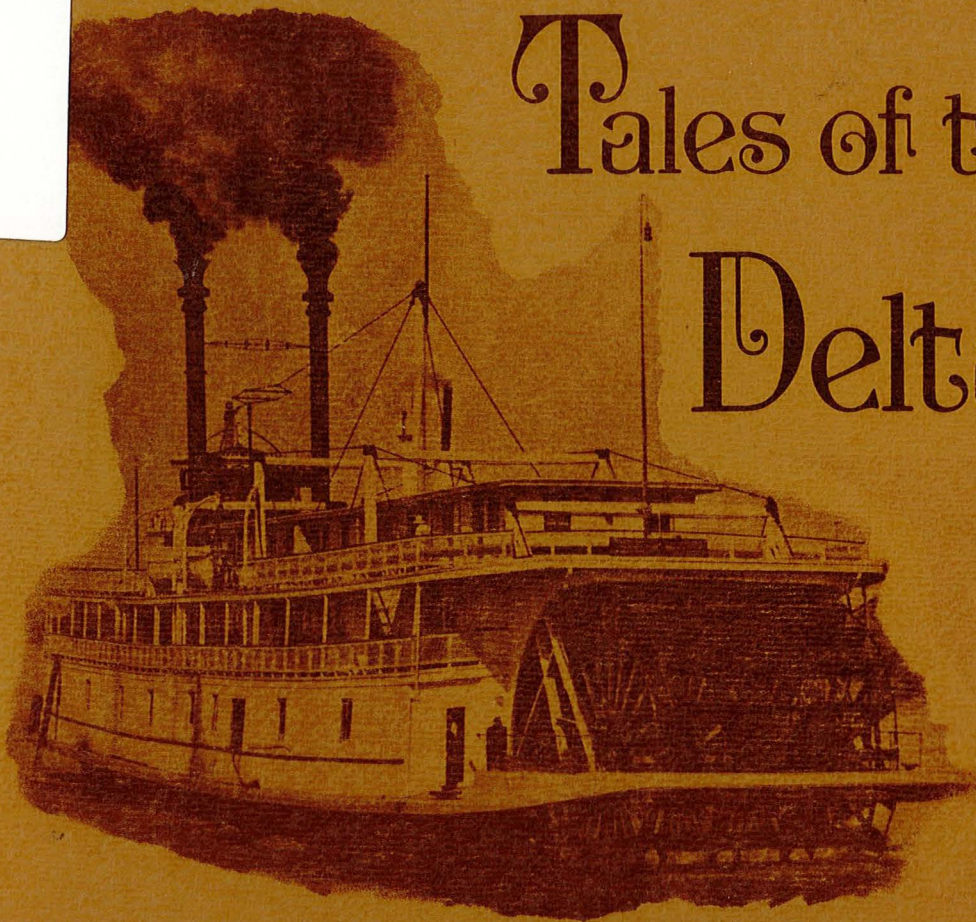
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/dewey-chambers>

Recommended Citation

Chambers, Dewey W., "Tales of the Delta Folk, edited by Dewey Chambers" (1982). *Dewey Chambers*. 14.
<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/dewey-chambers/14>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the People at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dewey Chambers by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

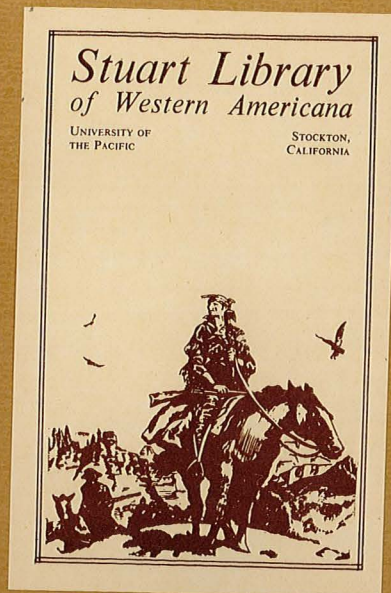
WA
F
868
.5131
T14
1982



Tales of the Delta Folk

Edited by
Dewey W. Chambers

First Edition
Number 313



Cover: *The River Queen* taken on the Sacramento - San Joaquin Delta.

Photos courtesy of Holt-Atherton Center for Western Studies, University of the Pacific.

INTRODUCTION

We started collecting these folk tales in early January, 1982. I don't think we will ever finish. The mystery, the magic, the lore of that vast land called the Sacramento - San Joaquin Delta captured all of our imaginations. This unique tract of land in northern California, riddled with waterways, rivers, sloughs, islands, tules, and history became a part of our lives. We didn't know it as first, but as the month grew old, our fascination ripened. The following stories written for children are a result.

It all started with "Winter Term", a one month's special January study term at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, at the head of "The Delta." The Department of Drama, under the direction of Dr. William Wolak, approved the course "Tales of the Delta Folk" as an offering from his department. The rest was a sheer delight!

When the news spread that a class would embark on collecting stories about how it was on the Delta years ago, the people responded. We got letters, invitations, old timers came to class and talked, we went into the Delta and looked, and questioned and listened, and listened, and listened. We gathered enough information

for a hundred more stories. The following are just a sample. Combine this with the University's Holt-Atherton Center for Western Studies and their interest and cooperation in the project, and the sheer delight turned into an absolute thrill.

The students and their professor wrote the children's tales that follow, based upon those days and weeks in the Delta. Every incident, every plot line, every action by the characters is true, based on the stories we collected in the Delta. Only the characters live in fiction. What they do, however, is true.

This book owes much to Dr. William Wolak, Chairperson of the Department of Drama at the University of the Pacific. Without his constant encouragement, his deep interest in the project and his willingness to spend hours of his personal time in the final editing process, this volume would not exist.

Read and enjoy. It is a history you will not find in the history books. It is folk history — the history of a remarkable people who built a remarkable land: The Sacramento - San Joaquin Delta.

Dr. Dewey Chambers
Professor

FEB 11 1983
403427
UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC
Western Americana
PZ
801
7143
1982

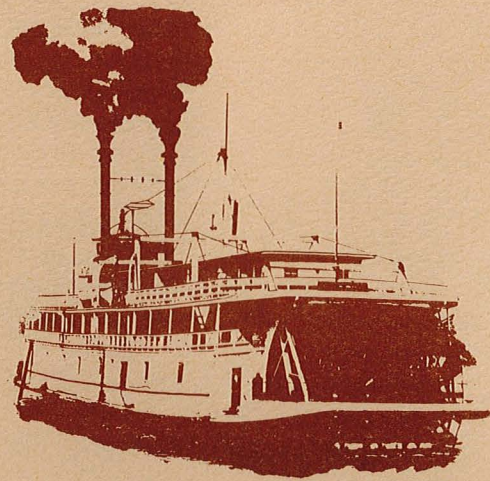
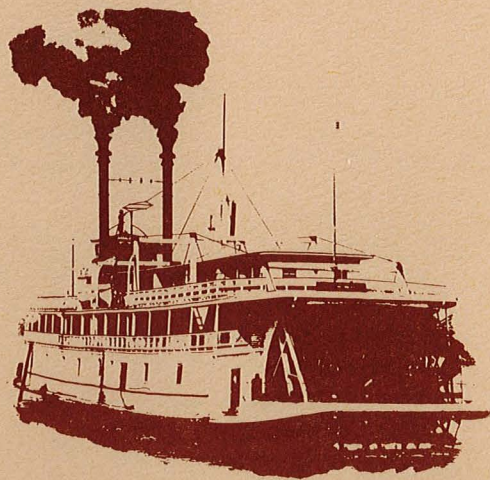


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Charlie's Clean Fight	1	"On Time" Angelo	37
By Deborah J. Gears		By Brenda Miles	
Matthew's Delta Home.....	9	Beautiful Mayling, Of The Tiny Feet	43
By Sharon Khazoyan		By Sandra Jue	
Fog Cat and The Storeboat	15	A Hard Lesson Learned	49
By Paige A. Saarinen		By Paige A. Saarinen	
At School In Stockton	23	Toy Ben's Dream.....	57
By Celia Bernhardt		By Carol Lowe	
Polenta Birds	29		
By Deborah J. Gears			



CHARLIE'S CLEAN FIGHT

By Deborah J. Gears

"Go Charlie!"

"Get'em Ben!"

"Fight. Fight. Fight." Chanted the children in the muddy school yard.

Panting for breath, Charlie McNeil, son of the owner of Jones Tract, took another swing at his best friend Ben de Luca.

"Boys, stop that fighting this minute!" said Miss Claire, the young teacher, in a stern voice. "Charlie, why must you fight over everything?"

She pulled the two boys apart ordering them to get cleaned up at the pump.

Ten-year-old Charlie felt blood trickle out of his nose.

"That was a hell of a fight we had there, Ben," said Charlie as a grin broke out across his wide face. His red hair seemed to fit the fiery temper that prompted the fight moments ago.

Fighting was a part of life for these boys who grew up in the San Joaquin Sacramento Delta in the early 1900's. Any disagreement was quickly solved with fists and then forgotten about.

The children trooped back across the muddy, dank yard into the classroom. All six grades learned together in the one whitewashed room. A pot-bellied stove sat in the corner. It was the only source of heat in the chilly room.

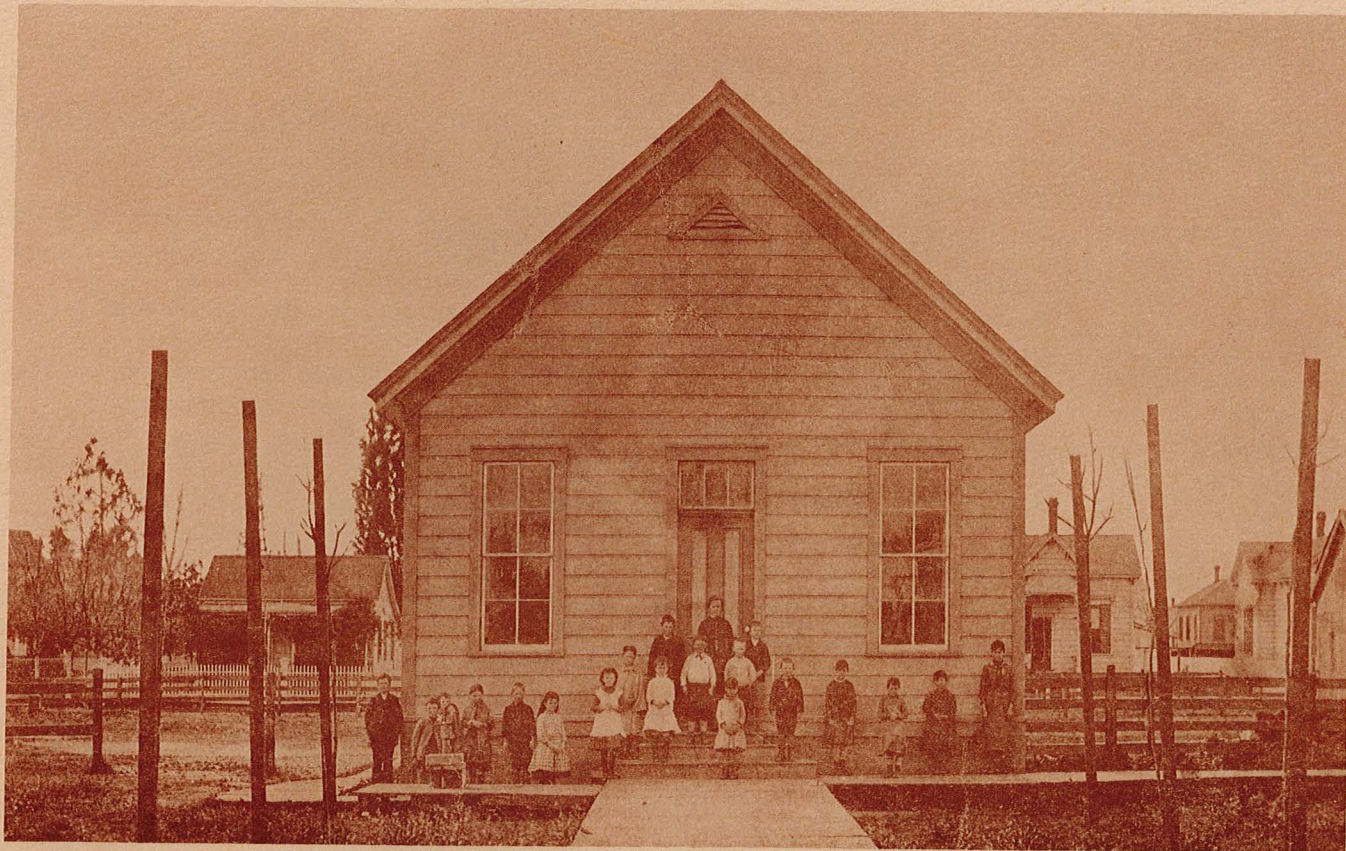
"Three times four is twelve."

"Four times four is sixteen," chanted the fifth graders.

Ben and Charlie slipped into their seats and joined their class in reciting the multiplication tables.

Finally the children were dismissed for the day. Shouts of glee drifted back to Miss Clair as the children ran outside into the late winter afternoon. Normally, she would return to the McNeil's house where she stayed during the week. But today was Friday. She was going home to Stockton for the weekend. It was a break she needed badly. The children here in the Delta struck her as uncivilized — fighting constantly and running around barefoot year round.

"Come on, Ben," shouted Charlie as he started off down the levee. The boys were quiet as they hurried home to their chores.



A Delta school in the 1870's.

Occasionally one of them would toss a pebble or kick a stick into the murky water alongside them. Watching ducks and geese playing in the water and the willows made both boys wish there was time to catch a couple for dinner.

"See you Monday, Ben," shouted Charlie as they parted. Except for school, Charlie rarely saw his small dark-haired friend. Ben came from a poor Italian family who leased land from Charlie's father. Besides, in 1908, the children had no time for playing on the Delta. Everyone had to work if they were to survive.

"My flour is gettin' low, Henry." Charlie's mother told her husband at dinner.

"Time for a trip to Stockton. I have some business to do also. We'll leave first thing tomorrow morning," replied Charlie's father.

"Dad, can I go too, please Dad," pleaded Charlie. A trip to town was a rare pleasure.

"I don't know, Charlie. Can we trust you?" questioned his father. "The last time we went, you were in three fights. And that's not the first time that has happened."

Charlie's temper got him in more trouble than any other boy in school. Even though he meant well, he always seemed to get in trouble.

"I promise I won't get in any trouble, Dad," replied the boy. "I won't get in a fight no matter what anyone says to me."

"If you do, it'll be the last time you'll go with us. I won't have you embarrassing me and your ma anymore."

"Yes, sir."

Charlie didn't know how he was going to stay out of trouble. A whole day? That was a long time! But he would try his darndest.

Seven o'clock the next morning found Charlie sitting on the back of the buckboard riding toward town. The family had already been up for a couple of hours. Trip or no trip the cows had to be milked. The chickens and pigs fed. The eggs gathered, the wood split and stacked. The fire in the smokehouse checked, and breakfast cooked, eaten and cleared, beds made and the floor swept. All three of the McNeils had been very busy hurrying to get done in order to have as much time in town as possible.

The eighteen mile trip would take some four hours. The going was slow. The early morning fog still hugged the ground. Mud clung to the wheels. Charlie snuggled deeper into the blankets. The only sounds to be heard were the squeaking of the wagon and the sucking sound

of mud as the horse continued to pull one foot after another out of the muck.

His parents were quiet as his father concentrated on the driving. His father's broad back stretched under his layers of clothing. His hair had the same carrot coloring as his son's. His deep blue eyes were set in a face lined before its time by the cares and worries of farming in the Delta. In contrast to the huge bulk of his father, Charlie's mother was a petite woman with black hair and green eyes. She was a strong woman though. Her spirit could more than match her husband's or her son's if she sensed an injustice.

As they neared the town of Stockton, the sun finally succeeded in penetrating the fog, lifting the spirits of the riders of the cold buckboard immensely.

Mr. McNeil guided the horse to the stable. Here the horse would be fed, brushed and rested.

"I'll be at the saloon, Lizzie, if you need me," Mr. McNeil informed his wife. All the men would be there. Not only did a lot of visiting and drinking take place in a saloon but most business transactions as well.

Mrs. McNeil, trying to avoid the muddy streets, carefully stepped upon the wooden sidewalks. Charlie followed his mother into Gianelli's General Store. The cluttered shelves had everything from yard goods and

pickles to necessary staples and toys. Charlie eyed the sour balls longingly.

"Good-morning Mrs. McNeil," greeted the clerk. "What can I get for you?"

"Good-morning, Mr. Davis. I need flour, sugar, molasses, coffee, and some kerosene. I'll stop by around 2:30 this afternoon. Please have it all ready by then."

"Ma, can I go look around for awhile?" asked Charlie as his mother left the store.

"I suppose, just be back here at 2:30," replied his mother. "Here's a nickel for lunch and don't forget your promise."

"I won't," said the boy. Excitedly he scampered off to see if anyone he knew was in the vicinity of Gianelli's Store.

He started off down Main Street peering into the shops and watching the people hurrying in and out of stores. As he passed the barbershop, Charlie noticed a group of boys playing marbles on a hard packed surface of soil. He drew close to watch. The boys were older than he, and he thought they looked tough. It was obvious that they were "townies."

"Hey, country boy," snickered one. "Whatcha gawkin' at?"

"Look what we have here," taunted another. "A first class hick."

Charlie's face burned red with anger. He was a first rate fighter and knew he could lick any of the boys — alone or together. But he remembered his promise to his parents.

Without a word, he turned and walked away.

The town boys were astonished. They at least expected some cussing and sharp words. Glancing at each other they got up off their knees and followed Charlie down the street.

"Not only is he a hick, he's a sissy."

"Sissy. Sissy. Sissy. . ." They taunted pulling at his hat.

Charlie, trying hard to ignore the taunts and insults, crossed the muddy street. As they followed him, Charlie's temper rose higher and higher. He knew he couldn't fight them, but oh, how he wished he could! Because of his promise not to fight, he decided to run and lose them in the maze of buildings in downtown Stockton. Darting behind a house, Charlie attempted an escape.

"Look at him, what a rabbit."

"He won't even stay and put up a fight."

"Chicken."

"Let's follow him and teach him what we do to chickens."

"Yeah, let's go!"

The boys took off after Charlie. Hearing them behind him, he led them down an alley, then back to the main street, past the court house, around buildings and through bushes. Charlie, used to hard work and exercise, felt fine; but the town boys, not used to as strenuous work, fell behind.

Charlie glanced around noting the Chinese Joss house and restaurant marking the last of the shops.

Thinking quickly, he made his way down to the harbor. Ducking quickly behind an overturned row boat he hid from sight.

The boys ran up, panting for breath.

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know."

"Anyone see him?"

"Hell, I'm mad now, he drug us through everywhere. My ma is goin to yell at me good. My pants got a hole in them."

"Just who does he think he is leading us all through town?"

"Who's idea was it to follow him anyway?"

"Wasn't mine."

"It was your idea, I heard you."

Charlie, realized that the boys were now angry at themselves, as angry as he had been at their taunts. He now saw a way for them to do his fighting for him.

Picking up a stone he lifted his head until he could see the boys. Still intent on their argument, they didn't notice Charlie throwing a stone.

"Ouch, don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Don't play dumb with me."

Charlie threw another one.

"I said, cut it out!"

Soon one boy lunged for another. Suddenly all were punching and kicking each other. A genuine brawl was under way.

Hearing the noise, a workman poked his head out of the warehouse. All he could see were boys rolling over in the mud trying to hit, kick and bite each other.

"Hey, you boys cut it out," he said as he tried to pull the boys apart. "Now get out of here."

The boys scattered and ran.

Charlie stood up with a broad smile and sauntered back through town with the look of an angel in his eyes. He was proud of himself! He hadn't fought. He had kept his promise to his parents. Just because the town

boys were so stupid to think a well placed rock was intended to start a fight wasn't his fault. Just think, he had actually won a fight without so much as getting his clothes dirty. He thought to himself "I'm getting real smart."

Charlie made his way back down Main Street to Gianelli's. Climbing up on a stool, Charlie took his nickel out and laid it on the counter.

"Mr. Davis, could I please have a slice of bread, and some salami, please?" requested Charlie.

Mr. Davis brought the food and a glass of milk for the boy.

As Charlie sat enjoying his lunch, his mother walked in. It was later than he had realized! He quickly finished the rest of his lunch.

Charlie loaded the buckboard with the supplies as his mother paid Mr. Davis.

"Charlie, it looks like you're going to have to go get your father," said Mrs. McNeil.

As the boy made his way across the street to the saloon, he found himself hoping his father had not had too much to drink. Nothing made his mother madder than when her husband had too much whiskey. Charlie saw his father come out the door. With relief, he realized his father was fine. Lots of business was done — and

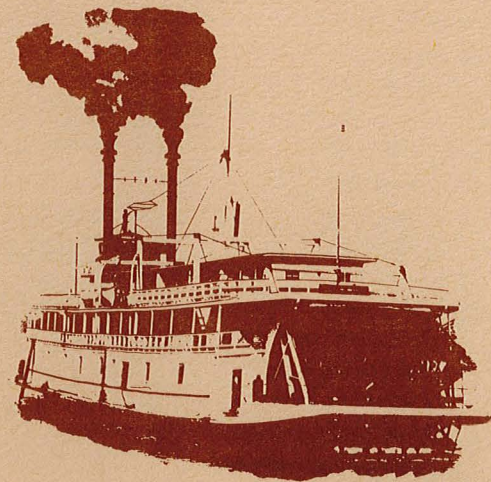
thankfully not too much drinking.

The three climbed into the buckboard and started the long ride home.

"Well, Charlie, how did your day go?" asked Mr. McNeil.

"Oh, just fine, dad," Charlie smiled. "I can't understand how these town boys can be so dumb! They fight all the time. And Pa, they ain't got no reason for it. Why I saw a half dozen boys go at it down at the dock. They all ended up muddy and bloody — and I'll be danged if I know why! I just sat back and watched 'em. You know, they wouldn't last ten minutes on the islands." Charlie smiled a broad smile and bounced a rock in his hand and caught it with ease. "Funniest thing I ever saw. Fightin' for no reason."

The buckboard bounced along the road to Jones tract, bound to make it home by sunset.



MATTHEW'S DELTA HOME

By Sharon Khazoyan

"Come on, Matthew," the boys shouted. "Are you afraid of the water?"

Matthew stood knee-deep in the muddy Delta water. He didn't want to confess that where he came from, nobody swam much. He didn't even know how to swim. He watched the other boys laughing and splashing each other. Then he sadly turned and went back up the bank of the levee.

"He is afraid of the water," Jimmy called to the others. They all laughed and tried to splash him.

Matthew turned around angrily. "I am not afraid of the water," he retorted. "I just don't want to swim with the likes of you!"

He made his way down the path towards home, alternately running and walking to escape from the mosquitoes that swarmed around him. "Even the bugs around here hate me," he thought.

"I'm going to show them, I'm just as good as they are," he told himself. He didn't know just how, but he began thinking up some plans for proving himself to the other boys on Roberts Island.

It was still early afternoon, so instead of going

home, he decided to go over to the main waterway along the north shore of the island. There were always steamboats to see, and ships coming and going with all sorts of interesting cargo, bound for San Francisco, and distant lands. He liked to imagine what it would be like to travel on one of these huge ships. In 1900, these huge ships were a wonder to behold!

He and his family had come to California by train from Pennsylvania. He knew the trip had been hard for his mother and his baby sister, but he had enjoyed running back and forth through the cars, and sleeping in their little room, with everything so small and compact. He had made friends with the conductor, and was even allowed to ride in the caboose once, where he got a bird's-eye view of the whole train. He was going to be a train engineer someday, he decided.

But right now, he had to learn to live in his new home. Since his father had died of tuberculosis a year ago, his mother had finally accepted her brother's, his uncle Louie's, invitation to move out West and live on their farm. To someone used to closed-in cities the wide open spaces of the Delta were foreign and strange. But

Matthew, like most 9 year old boys, loved the freedom of life on a farm. His uncle had two dogs that Matthew loved. They were his first new friends. His uncle had promised to teach him to shoot a gun on his tenth birthday, too, so he could learn to hunt ducks, geese, and whooping cranes. Supposedly, the cranes tasted even better than turkeys when roasted.

He stood on the shore and leaned against a weeping willow tree. A steamboat came around the bend. It looked like the one he and his family had come up the river on when they first arrived. It was! He waved and shouted. The crew members on deck waved back. They remembered me, he thought, smiling.

"All those steamboat folk sure are friendly, aren't they, son?"

Matthew turned, startled, to see an old man, with a fishing pole and a big string of fish in his hands.

He winked and chuckled at Matthew's expression of awe as he looked at the fish.

"Beauties, ain't they?" he said. "Hey, aren't you the new kid, old Louie Patterson's nephew?"

Matthew nodded, still looking at the fish. Most of them were at least three feet long, and where he came from, the only fish he ever caught were a foot long, or two feet at the most.

"Ain't you ever seen fish before, son?" the old man chuckled. Matthew could smell the liquor on his breath.

"Come along. You can help me clean 'em," he said.

As they cleaned the fish, the old man, named Jake, asked him questions about himself, his family, what it was like "back East". Although Matthew was still somewhat in awe of him, he decided Jake was a good friend to have. He told him about how the other boys made fun of him. Jake had lived in the Delta for many years, so he promised to teach Matthew the Delta ways so he would be accepted by the other boys.

"First, you have to learn to swim," Jake said. "Meet me here tomorrow after your chores are done."

At home that night, Matthew could hardly conceal his excitement. but he decided he shouldn't tell his mother or his aunt and uncle about his plans. They might tell him he couldn't go.

After he had finished his last chore, milking the cows, he hurried to the spot he and Jake had chosen for the swimming lessons. It was a sheltered spot where the water ran between two levees, and the water was not too deep in this particular spot.

The mud oozed through his toes, and the water felt refreshing and cool. "So this is how folks survive the hot weather around here," he thought, with relief.

Although summer was over, the weather had remained unusually hot.

At first he was afraid, but Jake was a patient teacher. Soon he was swimming around with no trouble at all after nearly drowning twice. As a reward for his quick success, the old man promised to take him out in the row boat the next day.

"You've got to know how to use a boat if you're going to live in the Delta," he said.

He arrived home a bit late that day, because he had practiced swimming all afternoon.

"Where have you been, Matthew Jameson?" his mother demanded. She wasn't very happy about his wet, muddy clothes.

"A friend of mine taught me how to swim," he said, proudly. "And tomorrow I'm going to learn how to row a boat!"

"Why would you want to swim in that muddy water? You'll probably drown. And where are your shoes?" she asked, in a voice that warned Matthew not to argue with her.

"If I don't learn how to live in the Delta, no one will play with me," he said, cautiously. "They make fun of me for not going barefoot, and not knowing how to swim."

His mother stifled a sentence, and listened quietly.

"Besides, Jake is really nice, and he has lived here for such a long time," Matthew added.

"If you're talking about old man Jake who goes around smelling like fish and whiskey all the time, you are most certainly not going boating tomorrow. You can go out and help Uncle Louis tomorrow instead."

"But. . ."

"No arguing. Now go get cleaned up and ready for supper."

The finality in her voice made him obey, but he was determined to find a way to keep his appointment with Jake.

That night, Matthew lay wide awake in bed. He decided he would sneak out of the house in the morning and see Jake, in spite of his mother's orders. He just had to show those other kids that he was just as good as they were. He would start making plans with Jake the next morning.

It was still dark when he eased out of his window. An eerie mist covered the ground and made the air cool and damp. He made his way across the quiet fields to the spot where they had arranged to meet, and settled down under a willow tree to wait for Jake.

While he waited, he noticed that there were many

geese flying about, unusually low to the ground. It was an overcast day, a strong wind was blowing, and Matthew wondered if it was going to rain. The weather here was so unpredictable. "I wish I had a gun," he thought. "I could shoot so many, even Jimmy would be impressed."

"Hello there, son!"

Matthew turned to see Jake approaching him in his little row boat. He brought it in close to the shore.

"Hop in. We're goin' huntin'," he said, with a little twinkle in his eye.

"But, I'm not allowed to shoot a gun until my tenth birthday," Matthew said, hesitantly.

"Don't you worry," Jake assured him. "Your family will be very proud of you after **this** huntin' trip."

While they talked, Jake took them out of the main channel and into one of the small waterways. The geese were flying so low, Matthew could see every feather on their undersides, and their feet tucked up underneath.

Soon Jake arrived at the spot he was looking for. Two willow trees stood on either side on the banks, their branches draping over the water so that the geese were forced to fly closer together right above them. The water was moving very slowly, so they had no trouble keeping the boat relatively still.

"Now, you do just as I tell you, and you'll have goose for dinner for a long, long time," Jake said with a chuckle. "Stand up there in the middle of the boat. Then, when you've got your balance, start swinging this oar in the air. It's kind of like playin' baseball, except the geese are the target, not the ball."

Matthew did as he was told, and Jake allowed the boat to drift slowly downstream as Matthew hit down one goose after another. With a squawk, each one plopped into the water.

"You can stop now son," the old man said after they had gone about 100 feet.

"Wow, look at those birds!" Matthew exclaimed. There seemed to be geese everywhere, but when he counted, there were only ten.

"Well, don't just stand there, boy. Get in there and bring 'em in," Jake said, impatiently, noting that some of the geese were not quite dead yet. He wanted to put them out of their pain as quickly as possible.

So, Matthew dove in and swam back and forth collecting the geese, which they put in the boat. When he had finished, there was almost no room left for him to sit in the little boat.

"Now, where do these so-called friends of yours usually play?" Jake asked.

"I'll show you," Matthew said, with a smile. At last, maybe he would have a chance to be accepted into this strange new place.

When they arrived at the local swimming hole, the boys were indeed impressed.

"Where did you get all those geese Mr. Jake?" Jimmy asked.

"Oh, I didn't do a thing," he said, with a wink at Matthew. "My friend, here, he just reached up out o' the boat with this oar and SWOOSH, he knocked 'em down dead in the water. Then he went around, swimmin' in the water and collected 'em all up."

Matthew sat a bit taller in the boat. The boys just looked at him in amazement. This couldn't be the same boy that had been afraid of the water a few days before. Finally, Jimmy spoke up again.

"Hey Matthew, I was just wonderin', would you like some help gettin' those birds home?"

Matthew hesitated a bit, with a look at Jake.

"Yeah sure," he said. "And I might need some help with pluckin' 'em too!"

The boys all started to laugh at that. They pulled Matthew out of the boat, and after they splashed him a bit, all in fun of course, they started unloading the geese.

Each boy took a goose, and they all said good bye to Jake. While they carried them down the path toward Matthew's home, they asked him again how he had "hunted" the geese. They were impressed because he had learned so fast. They knew that many of the men in the Delta hunted this way, to save bullets, but they didn't usually let kids try it.

Now Matthew had to deal with another problem. What would his mother say? He had disobeyed her, and he hadn't even done his chores that morning. And Mother had this irritating habit of worrying when she didn't know where he was.

He led his new friends into the yard behind the house, and went to get buckets of water so they could start cleaning the geese. His mother heard the noise, since boys are usually not very quiet, and came outside to see what was causing the fuss.

"Where have you been, Matthew? We've been so worried!" She suddenly stopped in her tracks. "And where did all these geese come from? And just look at you. What a mess!" she exclaimed.

One of the younger boys, Tommy, jumped up with his goose, before Matthew could muster an answer.

"Oh, Mrs. Jameson. Isn't it great! Look at all the geese Matthew caught. He just batted them down out of

the sky, like it was nothin'."

"Yeah, Mrs. Jameson," Jimmy chimed in. "My mom is always saying how great roast goose tastes. She's always wishin' my daddy would catch us some like these."

And all the boys began voicing their admiration at once, so that Matthew just had to stand there and hope his mother would agree with them. Finally, it seemed they had won.

"All right, all right," she said. "Finish cleaning them, and I'll fix one for supper. Matthew, come here and explain to me what you've been up to. You certainly found some faithful friends all of a sudden."

When he had finished telling her the story of how Jake had helped him gain the acceptance of the other children, his mother was thoughtful.

After a few moments, she asked, "Do you know where old Jake lives?"

"Sure, I do."

"Why don't you run along now and invite him to have supper with us."

Matthew looked at her in amazement.

"Wow, Mom, thanks!" And off he went.

Then Mrs. Jameson went to supervise the boys plucking the geese. When they were finished, she sent

each of them home with a goose for their family. After that, the Jamesons were a respected family in the Delta.

Matthew remembered that evening as one of the best of his life. The roast goose was so fragrant and moist, and he was so happy to have his mother meet his friend Jake.

He went to bed that night full, and happy, and warm inside. "I think the Delta is a pretty nice place after all," he decided.

FOG CAT AND THE STOREBOAT

By Paige A. Saarinen

It was very early in the morning. The dark, rich fields of peat stretched for miles and miles throughout the San Joaquin Delta. The thick grey fog that seemed to smother the land was common on a cold winter morning. In the fields, small, swirling patches of fog, known as tule fog, moved on tiny currents of wind.

To someone from a distance, her coat would have easily blended with these grey patches, but anyone who looked closer would see a small gray cat, creeping along a furrow, her fur laden with dew. She had a look of intense concentration on her face, and it wasn't long until she coiled her strong legs under her and pounced on a field mouse. Picking the mouse up in her mouth, she looked around and trotted up the bank, along the levee and up to a small farm house set on stilts above the high ground. This house was safe from any flood that might result from an overflowing levee, which was common in the Delta in those days.

The cat, named Fog Cat because of her color, dropped her precious mouse and mewed at the door. She smelled the wood smoke from a fire in the stove, and breakfast was cooking. A small girl opened the door,

grinned in delight, and scooped up Fog Cat, before she could leave her paw prints all over the clean kitchen floor.

"Fog Cat, you're all wet and covered with peat," said Sarah, the eight year old daughter of a farmer. She thought that she owned Fog Cat, but Fog Cat knew it was just the opposite. Sarah fed Fog Cat, petted her and took care of her, but no one could own Fog Cat. Cat's, especially Delta cats, were very independent.

"Come with me, Fog Cat," Sarah whispered as she rubbed the cat's neck and Fog Cat began to purr, "Let's go milk the cows."

Fog Cat allowed Sarah to hold her and pet her, and she certainly approved of their little morning ritual of milking the cows together, especially when Sarah squirted fresh, warm milk straight from the cow's udder and Fog Cat would try to catch it in her mouth. The barn was Fog Cat's favorite place: warm and cozy, smelling comfortably of cows. Best of all, there were endless dark corners to hide in, straw to curl up in to sleep away a foggy day, and hundreds of mice. Only on the coldest night would Fog Cat allow Sarah to bring her into the



A storeboat on the Delta in the late 1890's.

house to sleep. She took her job of mousing seriously.

Sarah was the only child on the farm. She had to do many chores that a boy would usually do. Since Fog Cat's early morning hunting was finished by chore time, she liked to follow Sarah around as she did chores. After milking, Sarah would scoop up a pan of grain and take it out to the closed-in chicken pen, and feed the chickens. Fog Cat really wasn't interested in those chickens. They were so stupid and slow that they would not even be a challenge for a great hunter like herself. Almost every morning, Sarah gave her a little scolding, just in case, "Fog Cat, don't even look at these chickens. You must never, ever, ever go near Mama's chickens! The eggs bring us extra money!!"

Sarah's next chore was to check the fire in the smoke house. Just going near that smoke house made Fog Cat's nose twitch. All that ham and bacon smoking was the most tempting thing she'd ever smelled. It probably tasted even better than freshly caught rabbit. However, it didn't look like she'd ever get a chance to find out, since, as soon as she had built up the fire with oak logs, Sarah firmly shut the door of the little stone house. This meat would be smoked for weeks to preserve it for a long time.

After the morning chores, Sarah didn't have much

time to eat breakfast before the school-boat came to take her to school. Since there was no school on Hog Back Island, where the farm was, Sarah rode with the neighbor children on a school-boat to the next island, where there was a one-room school house. After school there would be more chores: weeding the garden, helping with dinner, cleaning and trimming kerosene lamps and mending clothes, among many other jobs. Sarah would only go to school another year or two, then stay home to help with the house and farm. Delta girls did not need much of an education in 1912.

Fog Cat always walked down to the dock with Sarah to wait for the boat. Then, feeling she had seen her safely off to school, Fog Cat's day stretched ahead of her. Often she climbed up to the loft and found a cozy spot in the hay to curl up and have a long nap. Other times she went on long hunting expeditions through the fields where Sarah's father grew corn, barley, potatoes and beans. Usually there were plenty of birds there. One day Fog Cat had seen some children catching birds in a net along the levee, but she figured she was better off with her own quick leaps and sharp claws. The Italians cooked these birds into a dish called polenta, but Sarah's family left the small birds to Fog Cat.

This morning, as Fog Cat sat on the front porch with

her tail neatly curled around her, washing the milk off her face with her paw, she caught sight of a boat down at the dock. Usually Fog Cat stayed away from the water, but this morning, her feline curiosity got the better of her.

This boat was one she had seen often at the farm. It looked something like a large barge, and there was always a fat, jolly Italian man aboard. Someone from the farm usually met this boat, and it seemed that they gave things off the boat to the farmer and took his produce away in return. There was the Italian man talking to Sarah's father. Fog Cat got closer to the boat, but stayed under cover of some bushes along the water. She smelled a familiar smell! That smoked meat. There must be some of that on the boat.

There was a ramp leading to the boat, and Fog Cat ran swiftly up the ramp and onto the dark boat. She followed her nose, which led her around a corner. Sure enough, there was meat, but it was hanging out of reach, from the ceiling.

Suddenly there was a loud bang behind her that startled her. As she instinctively dove for cover, the boat gave a lurch that almost made Fog Cat lose her balance. She crouched behind some cartons. Then she realized the boat was leaving, and with her aboard!

After a while Fog Cat grew used to the sway of the boat and decided to explore a little. The inside of the boat looked like a room, and there was food and other things that people used, like tools and cloth all around. There was a sign saying:

WELCOME TO GIANELLI'S STOREBOAT

above a long counter. The storeboat was a barge which loaded up with food and other goods from the main store in Stockton and delivered things to the different islands throughout the Delta. It also picked up farmers' produce and took it in to be sold in the city.

This storeboat was a marvelous place for an inquisitive cat like Fog Cat. In one area, she found boxes of strange fresh vegetables which she had never seen before in the garden at home. She didn't know, but these were Chinese vegetables, which Mr. Gianelli would deliver to the Chinese camps. There were also bottles of rice whiskey, one with a dead rattlesnake soaking in it. The Chinese people used this for a healing linament. Strange smelling dried herbs hung on the wall. Fog Cat didn't like the smell of these strange things at all and decided to explore elsewhere.

In another section, she found more familiar items, which she had seen in Sarah's home. There were bolts of cloth: printed cloth, like the cloth Sarah's mother used

to sew Sarah's dresses, cloth she would use to make her father's work clothes, and cloth for sheeting and curtains. There were many tools that Fog Cat recognized from the barn, as well as pails, cooking utensils, turpentine and kerosene.

She saw large cloth sacks of flour, and others of sugar, coffee, and macaroni. Stacked along one wall was bottle after bottle of whiskey and also red wine for the Italians. As Fog Cat walked along here, she came to a door leading down into the bottom of the boat. Down she went. There were piles of freshly dug potatoes, and ears of corn that must have come from the various farms. There was also grain. Fog Cat's sensitive nose picked up another familiar scent too: mouse! And there he was, ready to chew his way into a sack of grain. Before he knew what happened, she pounced on him and caught him. She was looking for a place to settle down to her meal when she ran right into the store boat owner.

"Nice kitty," he said in his rough, thickly accented voice, "Where'd you come from? Got a mouse? Good kitty, catch lotsa mice and you can stay here."

After finishing the mouse, Fog Cat settled down for a comfortable nap. She didn't know it but this boat came to the farm every couple of days. She would get

home sooner or later.

Her secret stayed with her even on the store boat: she was going to have kittens. She had a feeling that while on the boat the time for their birth was getting nearer. When the boat docked at the end of the day in Stockton, Fog Cat remained on board. The owner, Mr. Gianelli, brought her some meat scraps, and she was grateful, since she didn't feel like hunting. His son, Luigi was with him.

"Luigi," he said to his son, "Now we have a cat. She live on the boat, keep the mice away. It is good for the boat."

"Papa, where is she from?" asked Luigi.

"I don't know, she found her way onto the boat somewhere, but we will keep her." With that, they locked up the boat and went ashore to their house above the main store on Market Street.

That night Fog Cat found a warm corner with a pile of rags. She slept comfortably there and decided to remember that. It would be a good place to have the kittens.

The next day, the storeboat left early and headed out to a different island. Fog Cat stayed in her corner most of the day, but from a distance, she saw the people come onto the boat and make their purchases. She had never

seen Chinese people before, or heard their language, which seemed strange to her. One little Chinese boy spied her and came over to pet her, and as he was very gentle, she allowed him to pet her. But, when he spoke in his high, sing-song language, she couldn't understand a word.

The day was interesting, but Fog Cat was glad to dock again, as now she knew her kittens were coming. Late that night, while the ship swayed gently in the water at the port of Stockton her kittens were born. There were four kittens. She licked them proudly and knew they would be happy on the farm that they would be returning to soon. They fell asleep. Gently rocking in the water.

In the morning, Luigi was the first aboard. It was Saturday and he would accompany his father on the storeboat. He was the first to discover the kittens, but when he made a move to touch them, Fog Cat hissed a warning. They were still too young! Luigi brought his father to see them. His father was pleased.

"More cats, more to kill mice," he laughed.

At the first stop that morning, Fog Cat left her kittens for a moment to search for familiar land. Her instinct led her to believe they were near home. A familiar smell came on the morning breeze. She knew that Mr.

Gianelli planned to keep her on the boat. That might be fun for a while — but not with kittens. Fog Cat was now a mother, and she wanted her babies at home on the farm. She sniffed the air. Home! She could smell it! The smoke house! That meat! There was no mistaking it, they were coming home.

After a short time, the boat pulled up at the dock. Sarah was also home from school, sitting down by the dock.

"Hi, Sarah!" cried Luigi.

"Hi, Luigi," she answered, but Luigi didn't think she looked very happy. He thought he knew how to make her happy.

"Come onto the boat. I will show you something. A surprise."

When Sarah saw that the surprise was Fog Cat, she was delighted. "You've found my Fog Cat. And she has her kittens."

Fog Cat stretched and proudly licked her babies and gazes at Sarah.

"No," said Mr. Gianelli from behind the children, "This is our cat. She kills mice on the boat."

Sarah reached slowly toward Fog Cat, trusting her, Fog Cat closed her eyes and began to purr.

"Papa," said Luigi, "She must belong to Sarah. She

hissed at me this morning. See how she knows Sarah!" He looked pleadingly up at his father. "We have to give her back."

"Please, Mr. Gianelli," pleaded Sarah, "She's my very own cat."

"I will make you a deal," said Mr. Gianelli. "When the kittens are old enough, you give me a kitten for the store boat, and I will give your cat back to you, as I can see now that she is yours."

"That's a bargain," agreed Sarah, "You can have a kitten, any one you want!"

Luigi slipped away and came back with an empty crate.

"You'd better put the kittens in," he said, "your Fog Cat will hiss at me."

Fog Cat let Sarah gently put each kitten into the box, where they began creeping around and mewling for her. She jumped in, and Sarah carried the box ashore and into the house. She set it in the warm spot behind the wood burning stove in the kitchen. She sat beside the box and spoke to Fog Cat.

"Fog Cat, I'm so glad you're back. I missed you terribly. And now you have four babies, and they're beautiful; two black, one gray and white, and one gray just like you."

Over the next couple of weeks, the kittens grew quickly. Fog Cat began taking them outside and teaching them about the farm. She taught them hunting, although the best they could do was pounce playfully on mosquitos, which appeared in swarms every evening. She showed them the barn, and the cows and where the dock was. Now, when she saw Sara off to school, all four kittens followed her down to the dock. There was one kitten, the gray kitten, who was always the last to turn away from the dock and leave. Whenever he heard a boat from anywhere on the farm, he ran down to the water to see what was happening.

Sarah loved playing with the kittens, and almost forgot about her promise to Mr. Gianelli. She tried to explain to Fog Cat, "Fog Cat, one kitten will have to go live on the store boat. I promised. I'm sorry." It made her sad to think of Fog Cat's baby leaving them. But Fog Cat only purred and smiled her cat-smile.

Finally the day arrived when Mr. Gianelli said, "Sarah, it's time for me to take my cat. Mice are all over the boat."

Sarah called Fog Cat down to the dock and the kittens tumbled after her. Which would it be? The black kitten was awfully timid and Sarah felt it needed special love. The gray and white one was so playful and scatter-

brained that it would probably fall overboard. When she saw the gray kitten put his tiny tail into the air and march straight for the boat and Mr. Gianelli, she knew which it should be. This was the kitten who loved the dock. Perhaps he remembered his first day aboard the boat.

"It looks like I don't have to choose," chuckled Mr. Gianelli, "This kitten has chosen me."

During the long winter that followed, Sarah often thought of what fun that kitten would have living on the store boat. She knew it would be a good life, and the kitten would grow fat and sleek on all those mice. She thought Fog Cat must be very proud of her kitten who grew up to be a storeboat cat.

AT SCHOOL IN STOCKTON

By Celia Bernhardt

"Wake up Ned, wake up! Today's the big day."

Ned opened his eyes to see his mother standing below. It was Monday, the day Ned was to go into Stockton for school for the first time. Slowly, he crawled out of bed and climbed down the ladder from the loft to join his parents and Miss Robinson, the school teacher, for breakfast.

"Good morning Ned," said Miss Robinson. "Are you ready for your first day at the big school?"

"I'm not going," Ned said adamantly.

"Now come on Ned," said his father sternly, "you knew that once you entered the fourth grade you'd have to go into town to school. Your new school will be much better for you. Island schools just don't do the job that the school in Stockton will."

"And besides that Ned," said Miss Robinson, "You can still come and visit us at the Bouldin School when you have time."

"Hmmp!" said Ned, knowing by the look on his father's face that he'd better not say anything more about that subject.

Ned's mother placed a tin bucket on the table next to

him and said, "Here's your lunch, Ned. Be sure not to lose the bucket and don't forget to do your chores before you leave."

"Yes, Ma, I know." And with that he jumped up, grabbed his lunch and hurried outside toward the barn, relieved to escape the reprimands of his parents and Miss Robinson.

"They just don't understand," he thought to himself. "After all, Pa was working on the farm at my age and the others, well, they're just women-folk and never had to go to town for school with a bunch of strangers."

He set down his pail and sat to milk the cow and said, "Ya know old girl, I guess I shouldn't be worried, they're probably all a bunch of city sissies anyway. Why, I'll bet not one of them could shoot a better duck, or catch a bigger fish, or beat me in a swim race across the levee over by Andrew's Farm!" His confidence was beginning to grow as he reached out and kicked over his lunch pail, sending the piece of salt pork and his mother's corn muffins sailing. "I just don't see why I have to take this old pail, the other kids will probably all



The LaFayette School in Stockton, 1890.

have their lunches in sacks!”

Just then his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of his mother’s voice calling from the house. “Ned, hurry up now, so you don’t miss the Colberg storeboat into Stockton. You are going to have to run the couple of miles to the dock as it is!”

“Okay, Ma!” answered Ned, as he quickly gathered up his things.

Ned started up the road away from his house. He was thinking that it was such a pretty day for walking, warm even at this time, perfect except for one thing — those darn mosquitoes! He ran ahead for a while to escape them, and then walked until they caught up again. This was a very common experience for Ned, having grown up in the Delta. It would be much worse in the hot afternoon, when the mosquitoes got caught in your nose, ears, and under your collar. He often counted his blessings that he had not gotten that very prevalent disease in the Delta, malaria. Why, he could still remember last year when that whole Italian family had died of it over on Ryker Island.

There was a thin curl of black smoke up ahead and Ned knew that it came from the gasoline outboard, and that the storeboat must be docked just over the next rise. He ran the distance and after giving the owner, Mr.

Colberg, his nickel, jumped on the boat and made himself comfortable for the long ride.

Ned always loved the storeboat and he was always fascinated by the deliveries Mr. Colberg made to the Delta folk as he worked his way through the waterways. It wasn’t the flat old barge itself that fascinated him, but its cargo. Looking around, he could see all kinds of things: sacks of flour and spices; big tins of coffee grown in some faraway land; big packages of macaroni and beans; over in a corner were bolts of cloth just like those Ma had made his shirt out of last Christmas; and near the rear of the boat there were some huge plow blades and behind them, just standing there, a mule!

With a puff of black smoke and a chug of the engines, the boat started pushing slowly upstream. For the next hour Ned sat on the boat going up the river while it stopped periodically to make its deliveries to the farms along the way. They stopped at one Chinese camp where the only delivery was three kegs of rice whiskey. His mother had always told him to stay away from the camps and the men who lived there, especially on the weekends; and now he knew why. That whiskey would be used on the weekend; a good place to avoid!

Soon Mr. Colberg was pulling the boat into the Port of Stockton; this was where Ned would leave. Looking

around, Ned thought that he would like to stay there all day and forget about school, the dock area was an explorer's paradise! But today was not the right day for exploring, and Ned knew it. He turned away and walked toward the school.

As he came near to the schoolyard, Ned could hear the calls and shouts of children playing outside. He could see them running, swinging, and throwing balls in the yard. How Ned hoped they would all like him and that his own voice would join theirs! But as Ned entered the yard gate, something he hadn't expected happened. The yard grew silent and, one by one, the others stopped what they were doing and stared at him.

Ned was just starting to feel beads of sweat popping out on his forehead when from the far corner of the yard he heard, "Ooh, look everyone, look at the new hick! What's your name, kid?"

Ned turned toward the voice and saw that it came from a rather tough looking boy standing in the middle of a group of four or five others. He looked older than Ned, a bit taller, and a whole lot meaner. When Ned answered, he wanted to sound very old and grown up but when he finally said, "My name's Ned," it sounded like a mere squeek to him.

The boy continued to poke fun at him.

"Look, he's even wearing overalls! Papa's Chinese gardener wears overalls just like those."

Ned looked around at the other children. Surrounding the taunting boy were others who were laughing and jeering. The rest of the children looked nice enough. Some of the older ones were even beginning to look like they felt sorry for him. Ned knew all about this kind of boy. His Pa had said that at every school there was a bully who would pick a fight with just anyone to prove he was the strongest. His Pa had also said never to fight anyone unless you've tried all possible ways to avoid it. Ned knew he did not want to fight this bully so he started walking toward the schoolhouse door. But the boy stuck out his foot and with a smack Ned tripped and hit the dusty ground.

"Hey, let me be!" shouted Ned.

"Yea? What if I don't?" the bully looked at the other children, "He won't even fight, he's a chicken!"

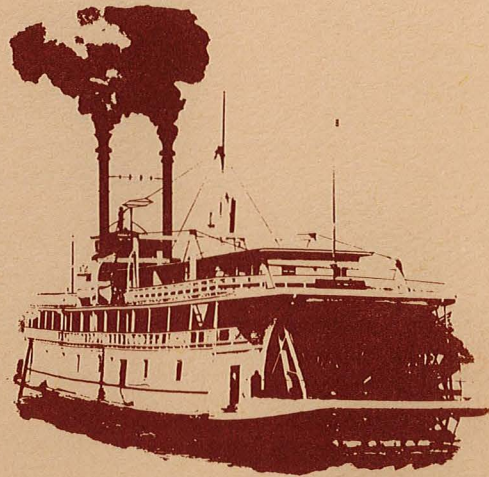
Ned wanted so badly to reach out and punch the bully, but his father's warning about fighting kept running through his head. So he just didn't say anything. He started to get up, but the boy reached out to push him back down. When Ned saw the bully move toward him, he decided that this surely would qualify as a case of self defense. He reached up and grabbed the other boy's

hand, pulling him down to his knees.

Ned did not remember very much afterward about the fight except that the other children's cries slowly changed from, "Fight, fight! C'mon Butch!" to "Go Ned, hit him!" and that he was on top of the other boy. It occurred to him that this must mean he was winning, and this made him stronger than ever. Sooner than he had ever expected, Butch was yelling "Uncle" and the school bell rang. The boys broke apart and, grabbing his lunch pail, ran with the other children up the stairs and into the classroom.

The rest of the day went as Ned had hoped it would. He was able to answer all of the questions which the teacher asked him, and he even was third place winner in the spelling bee. When it was time for school to dismiss, Butch, the bully, even offered to play catch with him. For all children know the first schoolyard rule — fights don't continue and nobody holds a grudge.

As he sat on the storeboat heading toward home, Ned turned back to look at Stockton and thought to himself that he couldn't wait for school tomorrow.



POLENTA BIRDS

By Deborah J. Gears

"Celia ---- Celia."

Celia was aroused, momentarily, by the sizzling sound and delicious smells of breakfast. She snuggled down deep in her warm blankets and sniffed the air hungrily.

"Celia! Get up right now!" Her mother's voice demanded.

Eight-year-old Celia rolled over and rubbed her sleepy brown eyes. With her thick dark hair all tousled, she peered out of the covers. It was a cold, foggy morning. She hated to leave her warm, fluffy bed. Her hard-working mother had managed to save enough wild goose down for mattresses. No straw mattresses for the Bava family. She snuggled deep into the feather bed.

Suddenly, Celia bolted upright. Today was no ordinary day! After months of pleading, she was going to help catch the birds for polenta, her favorite dish. It was a job usually left to her two older brothers. But today she was going to prove that she was as good as any boy, her brothers included.

She ran to the window, putting on her dress covering her warm underwear as she went. She peered out at the

thick fog. She pulled up her thick stockings and slipped into well worn shoes. She knew her brother Tony was already out milking the cows. She had better hurry or she wouldn't have her chores done in time for breakfast or for the bird hunt!

"Good-morning, mama," sang out Celia. "I'm going with Tony today for birds, birds for polenta."

"You're not going anywhere if you don't hurry up and finish getting the table ready for your papa's breakfast," her mother said. Celia smiled at her mother's combined language of Italian and English.

Celia quickly set the table. She danced around the room sniffing the frying bacon and trying to help crack the eggs and pour the milk.

"Celia, get out of my way. Go call your father and brothers to the table," scolded her mother.

The girl pranced out of the room. The familiar damp, bone-chilling fog hit her body as she closed the front door behind her. Unlike the hot, dry summer, the winter time always brought plenty of rain, fog and wind to the Delta. As the water rose with the rains, all her father and the other farmers talked and worried about



Hunting on the Delta was fun. Sometimes they even used guns.

was the possibility of the levees breaking, flooding their farms and homes.

"Papa, Angelo, Tony ---- Time to eat," shouted Celia into the thick fog.

Shortly thereafter the forms of her father and her older brothers emerged from the thick whiteness. All the Bava men resembled each other. Dark wavy hair, dark complected skin with a short stocky build, testified to their Italian heritage. Celia's father and oldest brother had dark brown eyes. But Tony and Celia both had their mother's green eyes.

"Big day for you today, eh Celia," said her father as he rumbled her hair.

"Today you're going to try to do boy's work. You're no boy. You won't be able to do it," Angelo said. "You belong in the house with mama."

"I'm as good as any boy, you'll see," retorted Celia.

They all filed into the kitchen and sat down. To Celia, the others seemed to be dawdling over their breakfast. She was in a hurry to finish her chores and go.

Finally breakfast was over and the dishes done. It seemed those two tasks took hours!

"Go feed the chickens and slop the pigs and then you can go," Mrs. Bava told the girl.

Humming parts of Italian songs, Celia snatched her old brown coat and hurried outside. She grabbed the pail to feed the chickens. In her eagerness, her hand knocked the pail over and all the grain spilled.

"Oh," Celia cried, "I'll never get to go." She bent down and scooped up all the seed before she could feed it to the chickens. Finally the chickens were fed and the pigs were slopped without further mishap. The chickens laying the eggs and the pigs providing the bulk of their meat, Celia knew they were important, but she hated the smell. Especially the smell which came from the pigs' pen. She finished gathering the eggs and hurried inside.

Slamming the door behind her, she ran smack into her mother and two eggs crashed to the floor.

"Oh Celia, when will you learn to be more careful," reproached her mother. Celia was always in a hurry and often clumsy.

"Go on out now, you'll be no help today." Mrs. Bava knew the broken eggs were an accident. She did wish, however, that her daughter would be more careful.

"Tony, Tony, I can go now. Are you ready?" Following the sound of an ax she found her brother replenishing her mother's supply of wood.

"Just a minute," replied Tony. Though only twelve,

he worked long, hard days as did all Delta children. His father was one of the few Italian farmers who stayed on the Island all year round. Most returned to Stockton for the winter months. Therefore, the Bava family worked hard even during the winter.

"I'm ready Celia," called Tony as he carefully put away his ax. "I don't know why you are so excited. Catching birds is not all that much fun and it'll be **hard** for a girl like you."

Celia squared her shoulders. She was determined not to tell her brother even if she did have troubles. She knew a boy who complained was a sissy. Celia was determined not to be a sissy!

"It has to be better than dishes, sweeping, and making beds," Celia snapped.

"Let's go then." Tony tucked the net and burlap bag they would need under his arm. They walked along the levee, down a path, across a footbridge to the far bank.

"How far do we have to go, Tony?" asked Celia struggling for breath.

"There's a good place down the levee a little ways," Tony laughed.

Although the day was cold, Tony was barefoot as usual. Soon his feet were stained black from the peat-

filled dirt. The Delta always had a peaceful feeling. On a clear day, one could look out over wide stretches of land filled with green, growing things. The children always looked at Mt. Diablo as a guide and a friend. But the fog closed everything in on a day like this one. As usual the white mist gave Celia an eerie feeling.

Coming to a stop, Tony unfolded the net. The net was hand made of twine, and was shoulder high for Celia. It was made with a fine mesh, which allowed no bird to escape. These nets had come to the Delta as part of the Italian ways the farmers brought with them.

"Celia you hold on to this end. You'll walk on this side of the levee, I'll walk along the other." Tony enjoyed being boss. Usually he was the one following orders from his older brother or father.

"Now hold the net up and let the rest fall straight to the ground," he commanded.

Celia held her end up as she was told. It was difficult! She liked being outside, however. She could hear the chirping and the twittering of the small birds. but she noticed that she did not see as many flying around as usual.

"Tony, where are all the birds, they're not flying around," questioned Celia.

"They can't see any better than we can in the Tule

fog, stupid. They stay on the ground which is why we can catch them with this net," responded Tony.

With the burlap bag swung over his shoulder, Tony began to walk slowly forward with Celia following his lead.

Celia could feel the cold damp ground under her feet and the wet thick grass around her ankles. If she had been out here with her mother she would be filling her basket with the mustard leaves that were scattered throughout the grass for tonight's dinner. But not now. This was not women's work. Celia smiled broadly.

A squeaking sound interrupted her thoughts.

"Tony, we got one," yelled Celia.

"Shut-up, do you want to scare off all the others? And pay more attention. I had to drop the net over this one all by myself. If there had been more than one bird we would have lost them." Scolded her brother as he shoved the bird into the burlap bag.

"I'm sorry," said Celia and she promised to do better.

"Come on, we have to get a lot more," Tony snapped, thinking of his mother's polenta. The meat from the birds would be added to a thick gravy which in turn would be served over a corn meal mush. Tony could smell the garlic, herbs and tomatoes simmering now. To

think of the cheese melting on the polenta was more than he could stand.

Tony and Celia continued walking slowly along the levee. They caught more birds. Celia learned how to trap the bird in the net once it was caught.

Celia's arms began to tire from the unfamiliar work. The fog began to lift a bit. She glanced across the murky waterway and could see a couple of other boys with bats trying to knock down geese. Geese flew low on foggy days. This trick of knocking down geese was an old trick that the Italian farmers often used. "Why waste bullets when you could knock them out of the air" was a joke that went all through Mandeville Island. Her brother waved and wished the boys luck.

Suddenly, Celia tripped over a rock and fell. As she fell the net dropped and two large starlings got away!

Celia sat up slowly. She bit her lip to keep from crying.

"I'm sorry, Tony, I'll try harder." Her aching shoulders told her that catching polenta birds wasn't near as much fun as she thought it would be.

"You're all covered with mud, what are you going to tell mama? Come on let's finish getting these birds." Tony bent over to pick up his sister. He brushed her off as best he could. But the dark peat dirt did not come off

very easily. The front of Celia's small body was covered with the dark powder.

They worked awhile longer collecting sparrows, starlings and even an occasional dove that wandered into their net.

Tony, remembering how hard it was to keep up with his older brother, decided that they could take a break before turning back.

"Let's rest here, Celia," he called.

Celia gratefully put the net down and went over to the edge of the levee and sat down on a willow tree that had bent over by the wind. The winter storms were always bad.

"Time to start back," said Tony as he picked up his end of the net.

"Tony, how many more birds do we need?" asked Celia.

"Not many," responded Tony. "We'll get a few more and then we'll just forget the net and walk the rest of the way."

Celia picked up her end and promised herself to pay closer attention and not let any more birds escape. The wind was beginning to stir the leaves and make the water ripple. She could feel it right down to the skin. The fog was beginning to get thicker.

"We'd better hurry. We don't want to get caught too far out in this fog," warned Tony.

Swish went the net over a big black starling. It was quickly popped into the bag followed by two sparrows and another starling.

"That should do it, Celia. Help me fold up the net," said Tony. "You can carry the net and I'll carry the birds."

"OK," sang a joyful Celia.

The two children quickly covered the distance home. The house looked warm and cozy on its stilts, and a fire was burning in the wood stove. The two dragged themselves inside.

"Celia, what happened to you? Oh, never mind. Go wash your hands. I've kept some lunch hot for you," mother smiled.

Celia quickly washed her hands and came to the table in the kitchen. They enjoyed the hot minestrone and warm bread covered with rich olive oil. They crowded up next to the hot stove to savor the lunch.

"Come on, Celia, you helped catch them now you have to help get 'em ready too."

Celia was not looking forward to this part at all. She hated cutting off the birds' heads. It was very messy! And the pretty little birds looked so pathetic with no

feathers. "The longer you take the longer we have to be out here," said Tony, prodding his squeamish sister. The job of plucking the feathers and cleaning the birds did not take long. It was a job both children had done many times.

They carried the birds inside. The small house already smelled of the polenta. The combined smell of garlic, onion, spices and tomatoes simmering on the stove, tantalized their nostrils.

At dinner that night, Celia sat up tall, proud to have helped put meat on the family table.

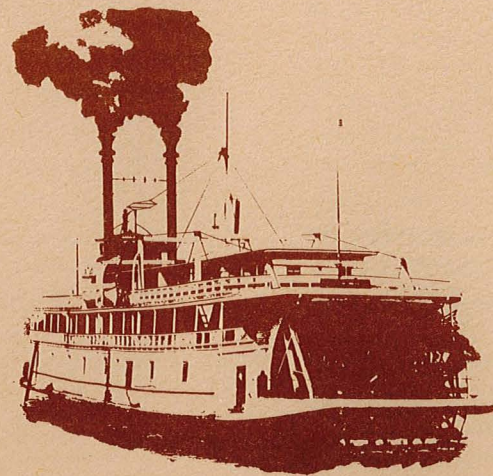
"Well, Tony, how did our girl do out there today?" asked Mr. Bava.

Tony looked at his sister and gave her the praise she deserved.

"She was as good as any boy, Papa." Celia's face beamed with pleasure.

When Mrs. Bava brought the large platter of polenta steaming from the over and placed it on the table, the whole family applauded. It looked beautiful! The rich smell of spices, garlic, tomatoes, mushrooms and cheese covering the birds caught that morning was a special treat. Their Italian heritage filled the kitchen with wonderful smells, and all mouths watered.

Celia didn't join the applause when the polenta was placed on the table. She secretly took a bow.



“ON TIME” ANGELO

By Brenda Miles

“Yes Mama, I will hurry and meet the storeboat!”

“Yes Mama I did slop the hogs and feed the chickens!”

“Alright Angelo, you’d better hurry along now and meet the storeboat before it leaves the dock. Don’t forget the herbs and spices. Mr. Hayes said that he’d be sure and have them for me. Oh, don’t forget the macaroni.”

“Yes Mama, I won’t forget the herbs or the macaroni. Good-by.”

As Angelo dashed out the door he wished that mother would not remind him of the same thing over and over a hundred times!” I do things that a man does! Why at the age of twelve, Papa said he was a man ’cause, he did things that the men did.”

“Hurry Angelo now and don’t forget the herbs and macaroni.”

“Yes Mama.”

“Damn! its a hot day today,” Angelo mumbled.

With a quick gesture, Angelo covered his mouth. He knew that if an elder heard him cuss like that he would be in trouble. Running along the path he saw a swarm of mosquitos form about him. Swarming mosquitos dur-

ing the summer months was not unusual, especially in this summer of 1904. The boy reached in his pocket and drew out a large handkerchief that he used to swat the mosquitos that plagued everyone on the Delta Island.

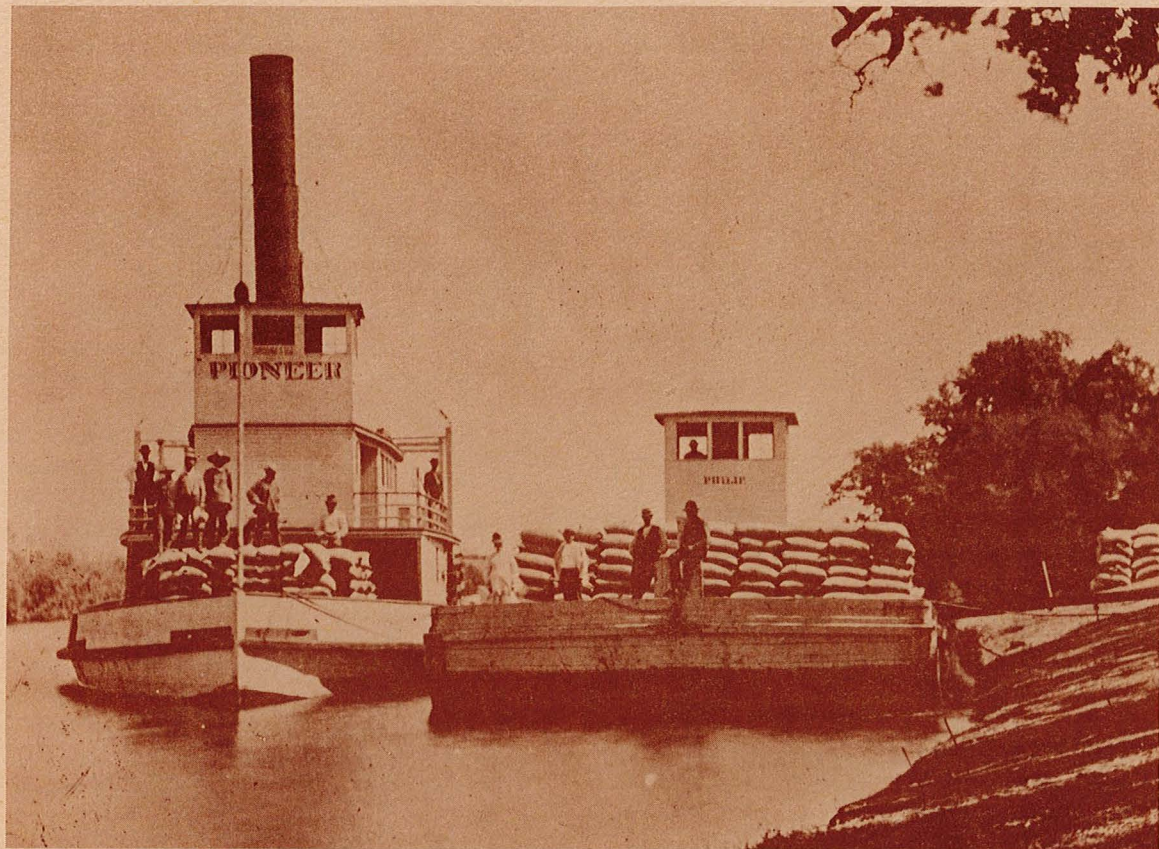
As he scurried down the path toward the dock he noticed an old friend, Mrs. Vanelli, whose family came from the same part of Italy as Angelo’s parents.

“Hello Angelo. How are you and your family?”

“Fine Mrs. Vanelli. I have to hurry now and meet the storeboat before I miss it!”

Angelo continued down the path swatting mosquitos as he went. In the distance he heard a whine, then a whimper that sounded like an injured dog. Angelo turned toward the big, old oak tree where he often enjoyed coming to whittle with his grandfather. He remembered his grandfather fondly. He missed him. Death from malaria came to many Delta families. The whimpering sounds seemed to come from a patch of tumbleweeds just off the path. As Angelo approached the weeds, he saw that Mr. Sawyer’s dog Benny, was caught by his right hind leg in a Chinese duck-trap.

“Mama mia, Benny you’ve gone and got your leg



Two storeboats docked at a Delta island.

caught in Mr. Ching's duck-trap."

Angelo tried hard to open the jaws of the trap with his hands. He didn't have the strength to pull the teeth of the trap open.

"Oh gosh! Poor Benny. I can't help you."

Angelo looked around to see if he could find something to pry open the trap. "Ah ha! there's just the thing that I need to open the trap." Angelo picked up a stout branch from under the old oak tree and began to pry the duck-trap open.

"Come on you dumb trap, open up."

All the while Angelo spoke calmly to the dog. "Now when I get this thing open Benny, you try and lift your leg out." Angelo pulled and tugged at the trap until finally the spring in the trap snapped loose.

"See Benny I told you that I would get you out of this thing." Angelo took a look at Benny's leg and removed his handkerchief and wrapped it around the wounded leg. "I'll have to pass Mr. Sawyer's house on the way to the dock Benny, so I'll drop you off there. I know that Mr. Sawyer will have some words for Mr. Ching about his damn traps, but that's the way it goes."

Angelo picked up Benny and held his wounded leg so that it wouldn't dangle when the boy walked. Soon Angelo got back on the path. Suddenly it dawned on

him that he had to meet that storeboat before it pulled anchor.

"Oh no," Angelo thought, "I've forgotten all about the storeboat. It's probably pulled anchor and on its way to Hog Back Island and that's way down by Bouldin Island. That's too far to walk from Jones Track. I'll never make it and I'll sure be in for a licking."

Angelo looked at a familiar figure coming toward him in a surrey. It was Harold Roberts, an old family friend — one of the few who was not Italian. As the surrey got closer Mr. Roberts spoke. "Hello Angelo," he said.

"Hello Mr. Roberts," Angelo managed.

"How's things going Angelo," Roberts asked in a troubled voice.

"Oh! Mr. Roberts I was on my way to meet the storeboat and Mr. Sawyer's dog Benny got one of his legs caught in one of Mr. Ching's duck-traps. I stopped to help Benny and lost track of time and I still have to take Benny to Mr. Sawyer's house. I just know that I've missed the storeboat," Angelo complained.

"Yes Angelo you have missed the storeboat, it's on its way to Hog Back Island now," Mr. Roberts answered.

"Oh no — what will I do now, I'm in for a whipping for sure," Angelo wailed.

"Now calm down Angelo, I'm on my way to Hog Back Island and I'll give you and Benny a lift," Roberts grinned.

"You will Mr. Roberts," said Angelo hopefully.

"Sure, Angelo. I will providing that you help me load my goods on the buggy when we get to the dock," Roberts bargained.

"Sure Mr. Roberts. I will, I will," Angelo agreed eagerly.

"Then hop on and let's be on our way," Mr. Roberts commanded.

Angelo hopped on the back of the buggy with Benny in his arms and away they went down the path. They came to Mr. Sawyer's house first. As they approached the house Mr. Sawyer was outside digging in his garden of tomatoes, onions, garlic and melons. He looked up and saw Mr. Roberts, a long time friend.

"Hello Harold," said Sawyer, "How's the day going?"

"Fine Jim, just fine," Mr. Roberts answered.

"Whose feet are those that I see dangling at the end of the buggy?" Sawyer asked.

By that time Angelo had jumped down from the

buggy with Benny in his arms and ran toward Sawyer. "Well what have we here Angelo?" Mr. Sawyer asked.

"Mr. Sawyer I was walking down the old Jones Track path and I heard a dog whining by the old oak tree there. I followed the sound until I found Benny caught in one of Mr. Ching's duck-traps. So I stopped and got him out."

Mr. Sawyer took Benny from Angelo and thanked him for stopping and freeing Benny from the duck-trap. He also thanked Mr. Roberts for bringing Angelo and Benny.

"Mr. Roberts I think that Mr. Sawyer was awful glad that I rescued Benny from that duck-trap."

"Yes Angelo, I would say that Mr. Sawyer was mighty glad." Mr. Roberts and Angelo got back on the path, the surry headed toward Hog Back Island.

"Well young master Angelo, would you like a piece of licorice?"

"Yes sir," answered Angelo.

Mr. Roberts and Angelo had a quiet ride all the way to the dock at Hog Back Island. When they reached the dock, there were only a few people waiting to receive their goods.

"We may have timed it just right Angelo, only a few people are here to pick up their goods."

"Mr. Roberts we'll be in and out of here in no time at all!" exclaimed Angelo.

"Hello Angelo," said Mr. Sparks the owner of the storeboat. "I missed you at my last stop. I have the goods that your mother ordered."

"Yes Mr. Sparks, that's what I'm here to pick up."

"Here you go Angelo," said Mr. Sparks handing over a large burlap sack full of ordered goods.

"Thanks Mr. Sparks," Angelo smiled accepting his burden.

"Hello Harold. I have your goods too. I'll have one of my boys help you load your buggy."

"Thanks Sam," said Mr. Roberts. "Angelo, why don't you put your mother's goods up front with us."

"Sure thing, Mr. Roberts," said Angelo.

After Mr. Sparks' son and Angelo loaded the buggy, Angelo saw a patch of wild mustard a couple of yards away and hurried to pick them while Mr. Roberts finished checking his goods. When Mr. Roberts finished, he beckoned Angelo to come. Mr. Roberts and Angelo boarded the buggy and headed for home. On their way they met Mrs. Vanelli coming down the path. Mr. Roberts tipped his hat to Mrs. Vanelli.

"Good day Mrs. Vanelli," said Mr. Roberts.

"And a good day to you too Mr. Roberts," replied

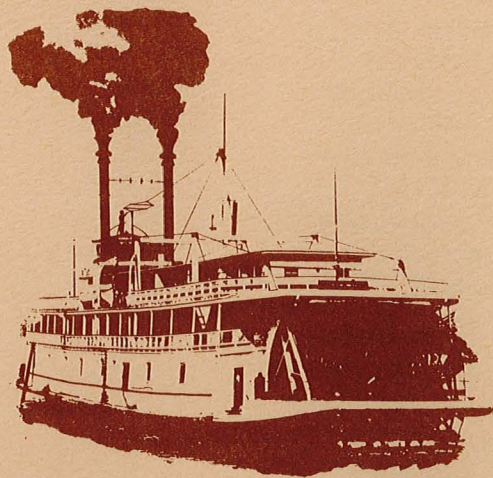
Mrs. Vanelli.

"Did you make it in time to meet the storeboat Angelo?" Mrs. Vanelli asked.

"Well," said Angelo, haltingly.

Mr. Roberts interrupted and smiled at Mrs. Vanelli and Angelo, as he said, "Yes, Angelo did meet a storeboat, and his mother's goods are right here."

Mr. Roberts and Angelo looked at each other and smiled.



BEAUTIFUL MAYLING, OF THE TINY FEET

By Sandra Jue

"Ming, Mayling! Come on now, it's time to go," their father shouted.

"Here I am father," Ming yelled with excitement as he quickly ran out of his room.

"Mayling! Hurry up!" her father said loudly.

Mayling slowly crawled out of her room. Her long, straight, shiny black hair was pulled back into a single braid and her small slanted brown eyes were filled with tears.

"But father, I don't want to stay with Aunt Sue. I want to go with you and Ming!" Mayling cried as the tears rolled down her face.

"Ha! You're only eight years old and I was not allowed to go with father until I was nine. Besides you're a girl," Ming replied smiling.

"Father, Ming is only ten and I'll be nine in a couple of months. Oh father, please let me go, please," Mayling begged.

"Well. . . alright, I suppose you can come, but a boat is no place for a little girl. No, a girl's place is in the home," responded her father firmly.

A few years ago, Ming and Mayling Lee's mother

died of malaria. Since then, Mayling spent every day at her Aunt Sue's house while her father and Ming went to work at the Chinese vegetable store on Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown. However, today was not just another ordinary day. Ming and his father were going to load Chinese vegetables, burlap sacks of rice, herbs, silk, tea and other goods onto a steamboat. They would leave San Francisco to take orders and deliver fresh vegetables and other goods to the Chinese people on various islands along the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. They would do this three times a year and the trip would take one whole week. Today would be the second trip of the year.

Mayling was filled with excitement as her father picked her up to carry her onto the steamboat.

"Oh how I wish I could walk well. I may have beautiful feet but walking is very difficult," said Mayling.

Mr. Lee looked at his daughter angrily.

"Mayling, you know that binding a girl's feet is an old tradition! When we left China your feet were bound. All girl's feet are bound. To have small feet



The Chinese were very early settlers on the Delta. This Chinese boy is dressed for a special occasion.

means beauty!" responded her father.

"I know, but I would rather walk than have beauty," Mayling sighed.

Mr. Lee sat Mayling down on a wooden crate where she would be out of the way and out of trouble.

Ming had straight and shiny black hair. He was skinny but strong and a very hard worker. Ming helped his father and Yen Chen load the wooden crates of boc choy, guy long, low boc, rice, herbs, and other goods onto the steamboat. Yen Chen was in partnership with Mr. Lee and an old friend of the family for many years.

Finally, it was time to leave San Francisco and head toward Stockton, deep in the Delta. The steamboat was old but sturdy and would make the trip in one day.

Ming went to the cargo room to get some vegetables, rice, and tea for dinner. He carried a kerosene lamp and stepped down the squeaky stairs. Ming got the vegetables and other things and headed back toward the stairs. For dinner, they had salted port, rice, and vegetables. Ming and Mayling drank hot tea but their father and Yen Chen drank rice whiskey.

The next day they arrived at Brannan Island. It was a very bright and hot August day. Mayling held onto the side of the boat's railing so she could see everything that was going on. Ming and her father unloaded the crates

of vegetables and other goods for the Chinese people who had ordered them. Yen Chen collected the money and took orders for the next trip that they would make in four months.

"Father, why are those boys putting weird shaped baskets into the water?" Mayling asked.

"Mayling, those baskets are shaped like a heart. Bait, such as bones or left over food, is put into those baskets to lure fish inside. But once in the basket, they can't get out. This is an old Chinese way of fishing brought to this new land," her father answered.

"But father," Mayling asked "when we passed Ryer Island, I saw two boys holding a net as they walked in the water. You told me that's how people caught their fish."

"Yes Mayling but they weren't Chinese. Each group of people has a different way of catching fish and other animals. You'll see as we move on to the other islands," answered her father smiling.

Later that night after dinner, Mayling complained of being bitten by mosquitos. Yen Chen brought out a jug of rice whiskey containing a rattle snake in it.

"Here, this will help ease the itching. Rub some on," Yen Chen told Mayling.

Mr. Lee brought Mayling some herb tea. The people

on the islands believed that drinking the water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta would lower a person's chance of catching malaria. But not Yen Chen, he did not drink water, only rice whiskey.

The next morning they left for Twitchell Island. Along the Delta were very strong wild willow trees which held against the tides. Also in the Delta were boats that took the children on the islands to school. Not like San Francisco where most of the children walked to school, Mayling thought. She also learned about another kind of boat, almost like the one she was on. This boat was called a storeboat and it carried potatoes, sugar, macaroni, and other goods. It would go from one island to another. The storeboat made grocery shopping easier for those who could not make it into town by the ferry boat that sailed on the Delta. The ferry boat would deliver the mail, meat, groceries, almost anything the island people needed. Most important of all, it would bring people to town and to other islands. Inside the cabin there were seats on both sides, and if it was a nice day, passengers could ride on the seats outside and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. Although Mayling was learning a lot about the people on the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, she began to wish she was at home with her Aunt Sue. Ming and her father worked most of the

day. Mayling had no one to talk to. If she were at home, she could talk to her Aunt Sue or other friends. Mayling was beginning to regret asking to come on the boat. She felt very lonely. She looked at her feet. Mayling thought to herself how wonderful it would be if she could walk like her brother. At least she would be able to move about the boat, instead of just sitting.

A few days later, they came to the last island. By now, Mayling hated being on the boat.

"Father, can I sit at the end of the loading dock? I promise to be good, please," Mayling asked.

"Well you've been on the boat the whole trip. I guess it'll be alright," her father responded.

Mayling sat on the edge of the dock with a silk woven fan to keep her cool in the hot sun and also to keep the flies away. Ming carried a burlap sack of rice as he walked by Mayling. Mayling broke into gales of laughter.

"Why are you laughing?" Ming demanded.

Mayling's laughter grew louder and louder, tears began to fill her almond shaped eyes and her stomach began to ache because she was laughing so hard. When she calmed down, Mayling answered "Look at that girl. She has big feet and waddles like a duck!" She began to laugh again.

Ming gazed at the girl and began to laugh too. Suddenly, Ming stopped laughing.

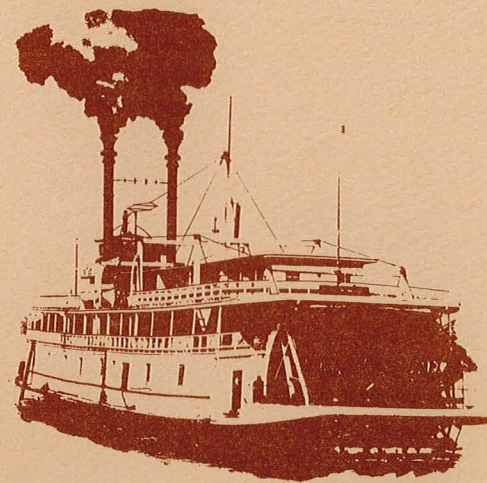
"Mayling! We shouldn't laugh at the girl. If you didn't have such beautiful small feet, you would have big feet and waddle like a duck too!" Ming said angrily.

"You're right," Mayling said as she gazed at her bound feet. "I'm proud to have such small and beautiful feet!"

The time had come to leave the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and travel back to San Francisco. Mayling was very happy when her father picked her up to carry her home.

"Oh father," Mayling said as she laid in her very own bed. "I learned a lot on the trip but I think I'll stay with Aunt Sue when you'll go again in December, if it's alright with you."

Mr. Lee smiled at Mayling as she fell fast asleep. He thought to himself how proud he was of his daughter. "She is growing up" he thought to himself. "All week on the delta boat, and not a complaint. And how beautiful she is! She looks so much like her mother, from her beautiful head to her tiny feet."



A HARD LESSON LEARNED

By Paige A. Saarinen

Rat-a-tat-tat, the pebbles bounced off the window. Humm. . . Tony opened his eyes for a moment, and then sank back into sleep.

“Meowww — Oww, Hisst — Meoww!” The sound came through the morning fog like a knife.

“Holy Cow,” Tony shouted as he bolted from his bed. “Today we’re going hunting!”

Grabbing his clothes he ran to the window and lifted it, whispering loudly to the “cat” below, “I’ll be right down.”

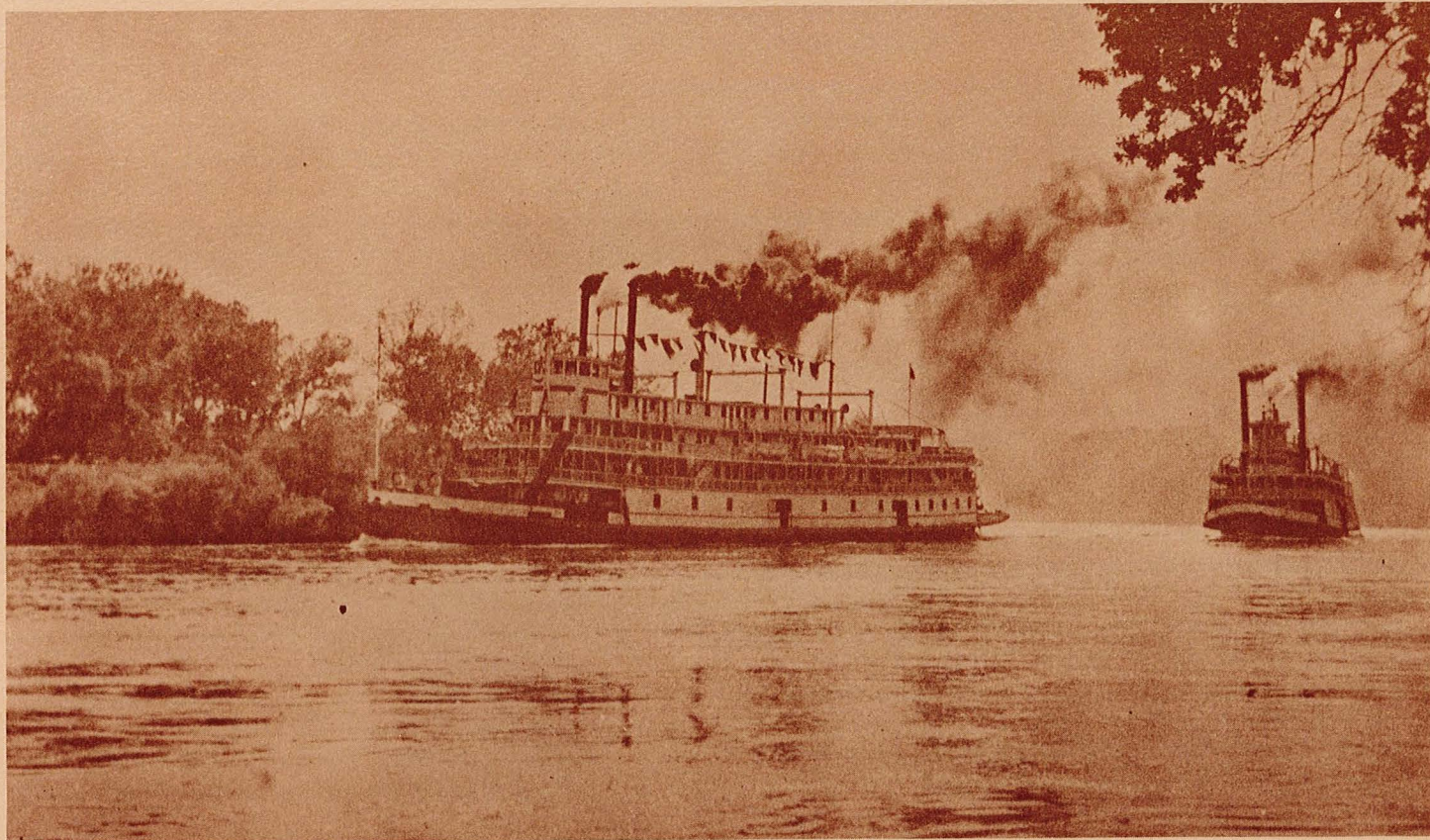
Yesterday his older brother, Ben, had told him he planned to take the boat out early this morning and go duck hunting. Ben had agreed that Tony could come along, as long as he kept it a secret. Ben planned to sneak away very early, catch several ducks and geese and surprise his parents by returning with a large catch. Their father’s friend, Mr. Campbell, would buy the ducks and geese from the boys for fifteen to twenty-five cents apiece, and then would ship the breasts, in lard, to San Francisco to be sold in Chinatown. Ben wasn’t going to tell their parents that they were going, so that he could surprise them with the extra money.

Tony and Ben lived on the San Joaquin Delta on Bouldin Island in the year 1904. Their father had come here from Italy when he was young and began farming by renting land for the season. Later, he brought over the boys’ mother, married her and started a small farm where he grew mostly beans, potatoes, and corn. Tony, seven, and Ben, eleven, loved living here. Although they spent a lot of time helping with the crops and doing chores, there was still plenty of time to fish and hunt and catch crawfish. They also amused themselves whittling and making and flying kites.

The boys made their way across the field to the dock where the rowboat was already tied. Tony’s feet were bare and as he walked, the spongy, dark earth felt good on his feet. This was peat, the richest soil on earth. The wispy gray tule fog swirled around their feet like small ghosts. It looked spooky, but was familiar to Tony. As they walked he began to think.

“Ben,” he asked, “Don’t you think we should maybe ask Papa if we can take the boat?”

“Listen,” said Ben, “I **told** you this was going to be a surprise. I’ve taken the boat out by myself before, and



Steam boats were a common sight on the Delta in the late 1800's. Here are two of them coming to Stockton from San Francisco.

we will be back in only a few hours. If you're going to be a baby about it, then you don't have to go."

Tony decided to keep quiet, because he really wanted to go along. He climbed into the boat and sat in the stern as Ben climbed in, untied the rope, and pushed off. Ben had a gun of his own, which Tony envied with all his might.

"Ben, can I use your gun sometimes today?" asked Tony.

"Yeah, when I get tired."

They got into the middle of the slough and Ben took the oars and began rowing. After about a half hour, Tony recognized the marsh where they usually hunted.

"Ben, aren't we stopping here?"

"No, I overheard some of the men talking and there is another place where the ducks fly overhead in one straight line, as thick as mosquitos. I'm going to look for that place. I think it's just a little farther."

After a while Tony could not recognize where they were, but he supposed that since Ben was so much older he knew what he was doing and where he was going. He began to watch the tules along the side of the river. These were tall, coarse reeds, often floating islands, where the ducks nested. There were also twisted bare willows that hung way out over the water. It was almost

light, when Ben stopped. There was a rustling in the tules and birds began to fly over head. At first only a few, but after a few minutes what seemed like thousands began to appear. Ben was shooting, hitting one every now and then, and the birds kept getting thicker and thicker, until it seemed they would hide the sun. Tony took the oars in his hands and reached out to use them to drag the ducks in the water closer to the boat and load them in.

All of a sudden, Tony looked up. A huge duck seemed to be heading straight for his head. At the last minute, with nothing else to do, Tony raised the oar in his hand to ward off the duck. There was a thump, as the duck hit the oar and fell right into the boat.

"Ben," cried Tony excitedly, "I got a duck."

"How?" asked Ben, lowering his gun and turning to look.

"He flew straight for my head and, whomp! I knocked him right out of the air with my oar!"

Ben smiled at Tony, "Hey Tony, that's a pretty smart way to get a duck, see if you can hit another." Tony could see the real admiration on Ben's face.

It took a while for another duck to come close enough, and when Tony swung the oar, it brushed the duck's foot. The duck only looked startled and flew

away quickly. In the meantime, Ben hit two more ducks and a goose. Then another duck flew close. Tony held the oar with both hands and swung with all his might. He nearly tipped the boat, but the duck fell into the water beside the boat. Ben wasn't even upset at Tony for rocking the boat.

The time passed quickly because the boys were so caught up in their hunting. The sun was well past high noon when Tony realized he was very hungry. They hadn't even eaten breakfast in their hurry to leave. But, he didn't want to make Ben think he was a baby, so he didn't mention his hunger.

"Ben," he ventured, "It looks pretty late. Maybe Mama will be worried when we don't show up for lunch."

Mama always worries," Ben answered, "Women always worry about men. We'll leave in a few more minutes. Oh yeah," he remembered, "I brought some bread and sausage," and he pulled a crumpled packet out of his overalls.

Tony took a piece of homemade bread and several thin slices of the pork sausage which his father had salted last fall. Tony hadn't tasted anything so delicious in a long time. Ben kept right on shooting at ducks, so Tony picked up his oar and looked for low flying birds.

The bottom of the boat was nearly covered with birds. Tony wasn't going to mention leaving again.

A while later, Ben finally lowered his gun. Tony thought they would finally leave now. However, when Ben asked if Tony would like to use the gun, Tony couldn't pass up the chance. He hadn't had too many chances to shoot at ducks and wanted to practice. At first Tony had trouble hitting anything, but the ducks were so thick that sooner or later he must get one. He looked up and saw a bird larger than the rest. A goose! With excitement, he raised the gun. He knew he could get it! He aimed and pulled the trigger and the goose fell from the sky. Their second goose! Geese brought twenty-five cents instead of fifteen cents for ducks. Tony was so proud. So this was what a man's life was like — hunting!

"Good Tony!" shouted Ben, "Ya got us another goose."

After this Tony began to get the hang of it and shot three more ducks. Ben didn't seem to be as good at battling the ducks with an oar as Tony was. The next thing Tony knew, he pulled the trigger, but no shot.

"Ben," he said impatiently, "I need more bullets."

"Tony, that's all. We're out. We'd better get home now anyway."

"It's pretty late, huh? Almost dark, Ben!"

Ben looked over the ducks and geese piled in the bottom of the boat. "Mama and Papa won't be upset when they see all the birds we got!" He picked up the oars and began to row.

Tony sat back and day dreamed. Twenty-four ducks and two geese would bring a lot of money. Maybe he'd save up and buy a gun of his own! Tony realized he was getting cold now. The warm sun was quickly sinking and he wore only overalls. He knew, that he wouldn't catch cold because Delta people were tough and worked hard. They didn't get sick.

No matter how healthy he might be, he was hungry also. At home, Mama would be building a fire in the stove to cook dinner. He felt a pang of guilt when he realized he should be bringing in the wood. Mama would probably slice thick slices of salt pork and fry it. He could just imagine it sizzling as it got crisp on the edges. Mama would use the left over fat to make a thick, tasty gravy to eat over potatoes. They also usually had cooked mustard greens, which grew wild on the Delta, or vegetables from the garden, but if Tony was not home, who would have gathered them? That also was his job! Tony was beginning to feel uncomfortable as Ben spoke.

"Tony, do you remember seeing this place before?"

Tony came out of his own thoughts and looked around. It all looked the same to him: marshes, brown water, tules and rich brown fields beyond with farm houses and other buildings up on stilts. The clouds of mosquitos that appeared in the evening were coming out.

"Are we lost, Ben?" He slapped a mosquito away.

"Don't be crazy. I remember. I turned the wrong direction back there."

Ben turned the boat and tried to retrace their route, but everything began to look the same. He knew there were miles and miles of waterways in the Delta. If they didn't get home soon, the thick, foggy darkness would keep them stranded all night. He felt responsible for Tony. He was so young and really had been brave today. He didn't want Tony to know they were lost. He would be scared. Though he didn't like to admit it, Ben himself was scared.

Tony broke into his thoughts, "It's getting dark. Soon we won't even be able to see."

"I know Tony. We're almost there though."

All of a sudden there was a loud booming noise not far behind the boys' boat, and out of the growing darkness loomed a huge, dark shape. It startled both of the

boys, and it wasn't until the second blowing of the horn that they realized that this was the steam boat which carried travelers from San Francisco through the Delta, and it was bearing down quickly on their little boat. Ben grabbed the oars and rowed the boat towards the shore as quickly as he could. The big steam ferry churned by, not four feet from them and the violent waves from the paddle wheel rocked the little rowboat and water sloshed over the sides.

Both boys sat in silence, realizing how close they had come to being plowed under. Then something dawned on Tony.

"Ben, that's the steam ferry."

"I know that, stupid," Ben said, feeling cross because he didn't know what to do.

"But Ben, it's Saturday. The ferry passes by our farm every Saturday night. If we follow the ferry, it will lead us right to the farm."

"That's right," Ben cried, then added, "I really wasn't lost, but this will be an easier way home!"

Ben had to row as quickly as possible to keep up with the ferry, which moved very rapidly. Tony took over for a short time, but soon grew tired.

"We're losing it," he said dejectedly, "What are we going to do?"

"It's O.K., now I recognize where we are. Just a little further and we will be home." This time Ben realized it was true.

As they pulled up at the dock and tied the boat, both boys began to realize that they'd been gone all day without permission and that they would probably be in serious trouble. Tony stepped aside to let Ben open the door and enter the kitchen first. As they walked in, Papa looked at them sternly and didn't say a word, but Mama jumped up, crying and hugging and scolding them all at once.

"Tony, Benny, where have you been? All day you've been missing, we thought you drowned! Tony! Where were you when it was chore time? Benny! Your poor Papa had to chop the wood!" In her excitement, she switched back and forth between English and her native Italian, and alternated between hugging the boys and cuffing them.

Their father did not waste so many words. "Come with me out to the wood shed. Then you go to bed with no supper."

Later Tony climbed the stairs painfully. The willow switch his father had cut would long remind him of taking the boat without permission. He felt ashamed that he had made his parents worry and get angry. As he was

almost asleep, his father came up to his room.

"So you went hunting?"

Tony could tell Papa was no longer so angry. "Yes, Papa. I'm sorry."

"When I first came here as a young man I loved to shoot ducks, but now I have no time."

"Papa, maybe we could go together, you and me and Ben. We would work really hard so you could get the farm work done."

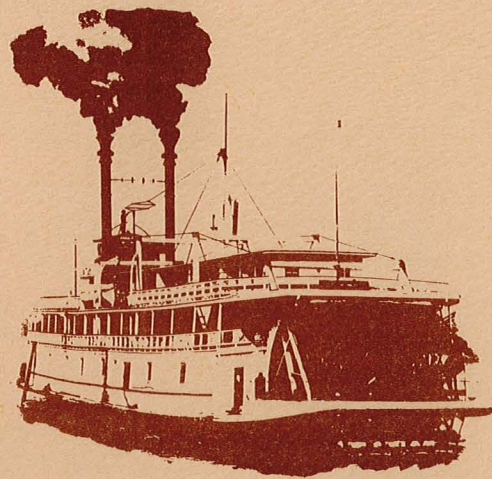
"Like you boys did your work today?"

"I'm sorry, Papa. We wanted to hunt like men, and show you how many ducks we could get."

"Tony, you must learn one lesson from this experience. It may be fun to hunt and fish, but a real man must learn to take responsibility. It was very childish to leave without asking, to take the boat and to neglect your chores. Your Mama was worried. I'm very disappointed, because I thought you were more of a man than that." With that, his father rose to leave. "Good night, son."

His father really was right. He had come to the Delta and because he had worked so hard, he was able to buy a farm of his own instead of living in a camp. One day the farm would be in the hands of Ben and Tony and if they were to be the men in charge, they also had to learn

the responsibility of work. Tony guessed that was what his father wanted them to learn now. As Tony drifted off to sleep, thinking of owning the farm himself someday, he vowed to himself that he would work doubly hard tomorrow. He would stack the biggest stack of kindling they had ever seen, he would pull every single weed from the garden. He would prove that he learned his lesson that day, and that he understood what it really meant to be a man.



TOY BEN'S DREAM

By Carol Lowe

"Toy Ben! Toy Ben! Where are you? Come quickly!"

Toy jumped out of his chair and ran to the kitchen where his mother was preparing dim sum for the big New Year's celebration. This was the year of the Rooster — early 1900's, a special year as Toy Ben had been born twelve years ago in a year of the Rooster.

"Hurry up or you'll not get there until long after the storeboat has gone," his mother pleaded.

Toy hurried out, slamming the door behind him. Toy Ben enjoyed the walk which led him through the rows of small, crooked houses of the Chinese work camp. He enjoyed watching all the different people going about their daily routines. Toy Ben often wondered if he would still be among these people in ten or twenty years.

"Ten years, that seems a long time away," he thought to himself. In ten years he'd be twenty two! An old man, he thought.

As he hurried down to the storeboat, he dreamed of perhaps owning his own farm someday and growing potatoes, corn or beans, and raising a family. This

would be a good life he thought, living off the "good earth" and surrounded by a loving family! Perhaps his son could carry on for him and take care of the farm someday. This was Chinese tradition. From father to son and on down the line. Toy Ben knew he could realize his dream if he worked hard. But working from sunrise to sunset for twenty-seven dollars a month, he realized it would take a long time to make that special dream come true.

As Toy Ben arrived at the storeboat he felt a small hand grab onto his shoulders.

"Toy Ben" a voice rang out "Are you ready for another New Year celebration?" It was Bo Kee, a cousin of Toy Ben's who traveled with the storeboat from San Francisco. They talked for a few minutes catching up on family gossip. Then Bo Kee excused himself to help a customer. Toy Ben loved to come to the storeboat. It was loaded with all kinds of things that were in a regular Chinese store; the kind of Chinese store that could be found in Stockton or Sacramento. Different storeboats carried different goods. It made shopping easier. The Delta people didn't need to leave their island to shop,

the store just floated to them in a storeboat. This one came all the way from San Francisco and carried many Chinese goods: tea, rice wine, silks and medical herbs among other oriental goods.

Toy Ben went to the Boat Master to pick up the order that his mother had placed two months ago. Many of the things they needed for the New Year celebration were brought from San Francisco, and were ordered months ahead of time. Such things as rice and sugar were ordered in large quantities and he dreaded having to hand carry the goods home. There were special Chinese herbs and linaments, salted pork and cured fish. "What a feast this would be!" he thought to himself.

Toy Ben gathered his load in a burlap sack and left the storeboat. As he was leaving the boat master handed him an envelope. It was a letter! A letter from Yen Lee! He must hurry home so he could read it.

Although he did not go to school, Toy Ben was intelligent and taught himself to read and write in his native Chinese, as well as a little English. "Oh Yen Lee!" he thought, "my pretty Yen Lee!" Toy Ben was engaged to marry Yen Lee by arrangements of their parents, when the families lived in China, when he was eight years old. But Yen Lee was still in China,

thousands of miles away! Toy Ben hoped to bring Yen Lee over to America, but he could not afford to do so yet; and, he was still too young to be a husband.

Later that evening at home when he finished reading the letter, Toy Ben sat down and drifted off into thought. How could he raise the money to bring Yen Lee to America? He only needed two-hundred dollars more, that was eight months pay if he saved every penny." There's got to be a way," he said to himself, and then fell fast asleep.

Two days later, the holiday celebrating the Year of the Rooster had arrived. The parties, the special dinners, and the festivities were over and life returned to normal. Toy Ben was lucky and had received a handsome sum of money over the New Year. An old Chinese custom was to give a red envelope to friends as a gift for the New Year. Many of these had contained at least 25c! Toy Ben was lucky this year. He had collected over five dollars! That was more money than he would earn for five days work. He was now another five dollars closer to Yen Lee, but still short of what he needed. He knew there had to be something more he would have to do to earn the extra money he needed.

At dinner that night, Toy Ben said "Father, how can I ever raise the money I need to bring Yen Lee to

America?"

Toy Gan paused for a moment and thought back to when he was young. "Toy Ben, when I came to America, I had nothing but I worked hard. I was the first farmer to plant corn on the Delta islands in the mid 1860's. I have always managed to keep the family fed and clothed no matter how hard times have been. It is only through hard work and careful planning that a man can achieve his goals."

He listened intently to his father, for Toy Ben knew he was a wise man. Toy Ben asked, "Father, I am willing to work hard to realize my goals, but what can I do?"

"Toy Ben," answered his father, "when I was a young man I needed money to pay for a small piece of farmland. After working in the fields all day, I would work through the night catching fish and selling them to local peddlers. The peddlers would pay me two cents for every dozen fish I would catch."

"Toy Ben, if you could do this and earn an extra one-hundred dollars by the end of the month, I will give you the rest of the money to bring Yen Lee over from China."

"Father," replied Toy Ben "I will work hard. I know I can do it!"

For the next three weeks Toy Ben worked all day in the potato fields digging potatoes for Mr. Shima. Mr. Shima owned much land in the Delta and had always been generous to Toy Ben. At night he would work the river, fishing with a bamboo basket his father had given him. The basket was woven like the ones that came from China; it was pear shaped. Bait was placed in the center, and lowered in the water by a pole. These baskets remained in the water all day. They were pulled up at night and emptied. This was the Chinese way of fishing. Toy Ben had five baskets. It was hard work. For every good fish Toy Ben would catch, there were forty or fifty small carp he could not sell.

At the end of the month Toy Ben was exhausted. As he walked home that night he thought, "I've been bitten by the cold frosty nights as well as the swarms of mosquitos. My feet are sore from walking to the river night after night, but what really bothers me is this cough." The cough was brought on by breathing in the peat dust caused by plowing the farmlands. But Toy Ben felt it was worth the trouble. To bring Yen Lee so she could become an American before she became his bride.

When he got home he sat down with his father to count his earnings. Toy Gan said, "Toy Ben you have worked long and hard but you have only earned twenty-

eight dollars.”

“No!” said Toy Ben “I have worked long and hard but I feel I am no closer to my goal. Father, I have failed.”

“My son,” replied Toy Gan “Those who work hard in life will eventually be rewarded. I am proud of you Toy Ben, do not give up.”

After several weeks of hard work in the fields, it was once again time for Toy Ben to go to the storeboat. As he walked off the storeboat with his goods Toy Ben thought to himself, “If I only had my own family and farm.” Just then he felt a delicate hand touch his shoulder. He turned and saw a small figure shivering in the cool Delta air. It was the figure of a girl, balancing on the tiniest feet, dressed in old tattered clothes. Binding the feet of females was an old tradition in China. This was a symbol of beauty and dignity. His father had been right, hard work and effort was worthwhile. It was Yen Lee!

“Yen Lee, how did you ever get to come to America?” cried Toy Ben.

Yen Lee said, “Didn’t you know that your father sent for me? He wants an American bride for his son. I have come early to learn.”

Toy Ben blushed deeply. “I promise I will teach you, I’m already an American.”



3 5132 00302 8974

University of the Pacific Library



University of the Pacific Press