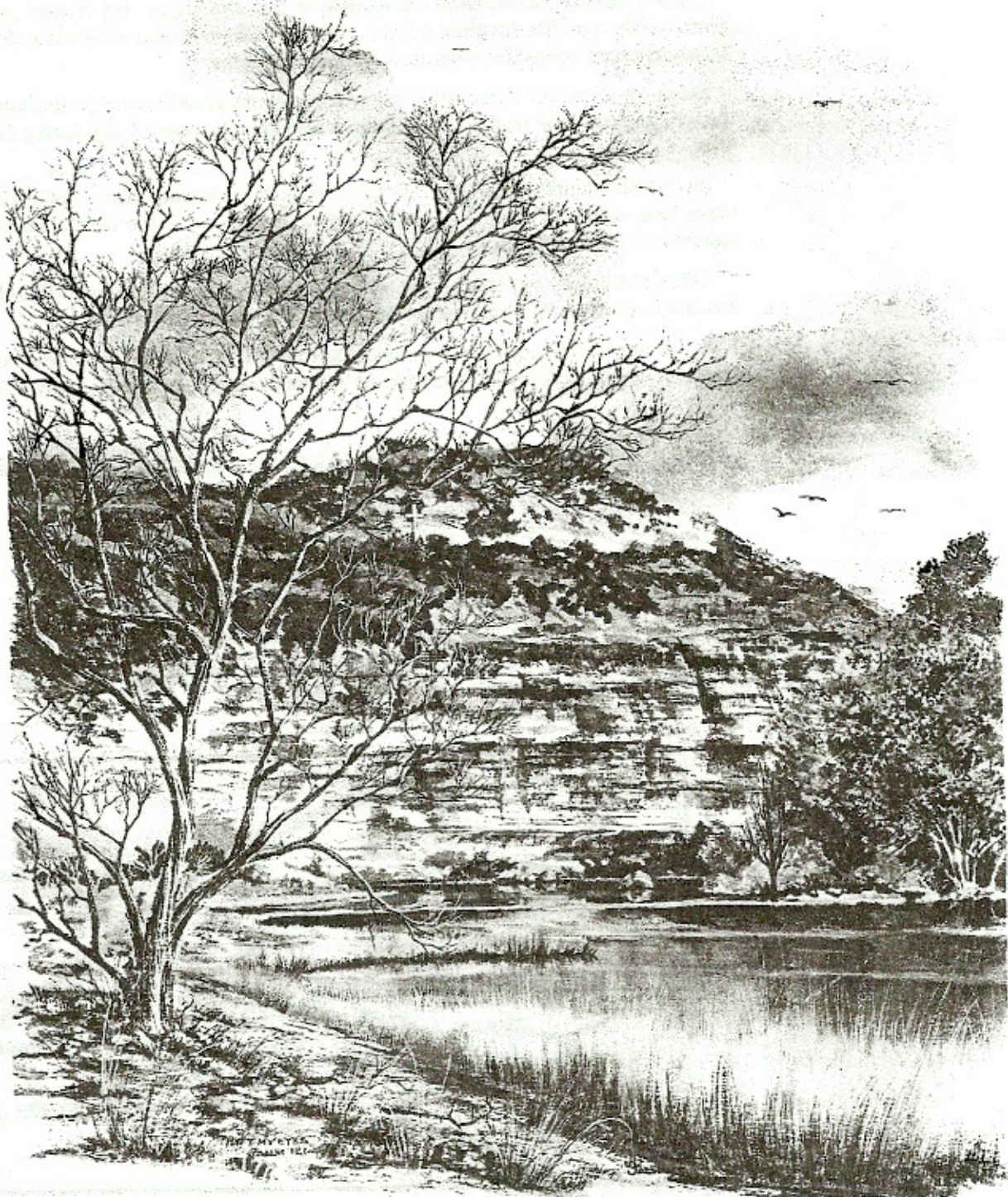


BY STREAMS OF WATER



ROBERT LIVELY

# MO-RANCH

**Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly** is the conference and retreat center for the Synod of the Sun, Presbyterian Church, USA. In 1986 it hosted more than 21,000 persons for conferences, seminars, retreats and family vacations.

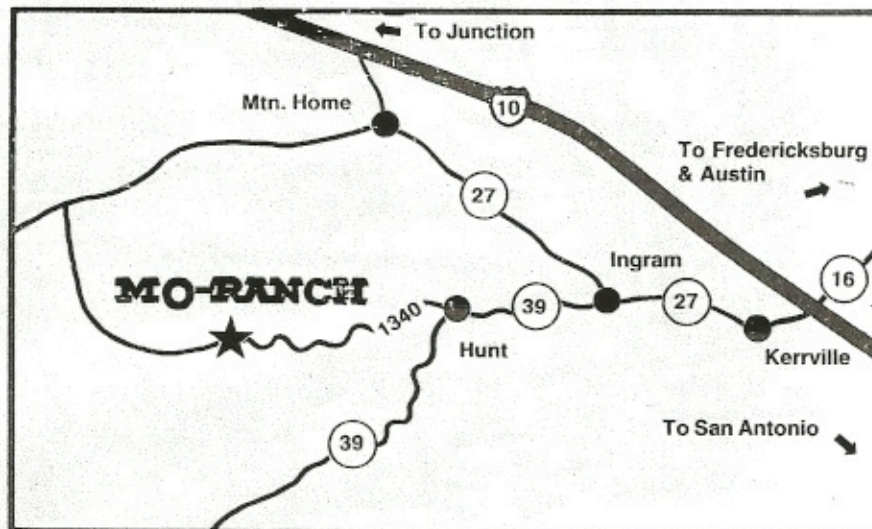
Set in the beautiful Texas Hill Country 23 miles west of Kerrville, Mo-Ranch was once the working ranch of the late Dan Moran, president of Conoco Oil Co. during the 1930s and 40s.

In 1949 the church purchased the ranch from Mr. Moran's estate. Since then, facilities have been added for food service and lodging, but much of the ranch retains its unique appearance and character.

Although church conferences and seminars are the primary purpose of Mo-Ranch, families and businesses are welcome to use the facilities when available.

If you or your organization is interested in Mo-Ranch, write to Mo-Ranch, Hunt, TX 78024 or call (512) 238-4455 (for general information and publicity) or (512) 238-4000 (for reservations).

*The Mission of Mo-Ranch  
is to provide a special place  
and an enriching program in a living,  
learning Christian environment  
to enable people to grow  
in God through Jesus Christ.*



The stories of this book are caught up with love, and mission, and mischief as the author weaves them together in the history of Mo-Ranch. They come alive because most of it is firsthand history or history derived from the lips of those who experienced it as told to the author. Bob Lively's style of writing is compelling and draws the reader into the tunnel of the message, as a magnet.

Visitors at this special place called Mo-Ranch will quickly identify with many parts of these stories, while those who have never spent time on the Guadalupe River about which the author speaks in "By The Streams of Water" will be intrigued by the devotion of those many men and women whose lives have been a part of the Mo-Ranch mystique.

The reader can expect to find many personal experiences of the author beginning with his courtship of his bride-to-be through the days he sat in "The Roost" on Nicklos Hill writing this volume. The personal accounts span over a quarter of a century from his position as a mischievous young summer cafeteria boy to his present role as ordained minister counselling another young boy to go to Mo-Ranch. He has been involved with these "streams of water" for more than half of the jubilee story years.

The reader will also find another view of "who was Dan Moran," and why Presbyterians call their conference center Mo-Ranch.

There are passages that bring lumps to your throat and tears to your eyes, as the author describes in such genuine ways, humanity confronting the work of the Spirit of God. No one has ever described with such bouyancy the illness of a child at the time of the Synod vote to purchase the estate or the sheer joy of a Mexican family being given a home instead of a wetback shack. The author believes that the hand of God has worked with such clarity in using Mo-Ranch as a part of His purpose that the reader can only conclude the journey through this book with an acknowledgement of thanksgiving to God Almighty.

Author:

### **Robert Donald Lively**

Bob Lively is a native Texan and an ordained Presbyterian minister. He is a founder of the Stewpot and Community Ministries of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas where he served as pastor for a decade.

In the summers of 1963 and 1964, he served on the Mo-Ranch "junior staff." Dr. Lively holds degrees from Austin College and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He is the author of numerous articles, and is the recipient of two national writing awards for his fiction. He has been named a distinguished alumnus of Austin College.

Artist:

### **J. U. Salvant**

Mo-Ranch's Artist-in-Residence for the past nine years J. U. Salvant, watercolorist, paints this beautiful part of the Texas Hill Country as one who knows the serenity and quiet joy that awaits all who come to this very special place.

She is well known in the southwest through her originals and prints. And her work is found in galleries, and private collections throughout the United States, Europe, Middle East, Asia, and Australia. In addition, in 1982, she was invited to exhibit in Tel Aviv, Israel representing Texas.

Joan is a Presbyterian elder who lives in Austin, and is the wife of Dr. Edwin T. Salvant, Jr., pastor of Wilshire Presbyterian Church.

Photographer:


### **Diane Hopkins Hughs**

Diane Hopkins Hughs is a photographer and teacher who has been coming to Mo-Ranch since high school days in Dallas. She holds degrees in art from the University of Texas and Indiana University. She teaches classes and workshops in Museums and art centers and has been on the faculty of Southern Methodist University and Schreiner College. Her work has been widely exhibited and published in numerous books and periodicals.

She currently lives in Gainesville, Georgia with her husband and son.

## CHAPTER 5 OVID O. WEST

"What in the world is going on?"  
O. O. West



One of the first orders of business facing the Mo-Ranch Board of Trustees in the spring of 1949 concerned the recruitment and hiring of someone to serve as manager of Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly.

The minutes of the Sub-Committee on Operations of Mo-Ranch offers the following position description:

**"Specific Duties:**

The Ranch Manager, under regulations established by the Board of Trustees, is responsible for specific duties as follows—

- Promotion—makes, improves, and reviews contracts with individuals and congregations to foster and promote patronage of the Ranch, consults trade journals, newspapers, etc. to determine functions which may occur; endeavors to induce persons to hold functions at Mo-Ranch by quoting rates, making suggestions, and arranging details.
- Purchasing—purchases, at the most favorable prices consistent with quality and other factors, materials and supplies necessary for the operation and maintenance of the Ranch. Purchases new or replacement machinery and equipment upon the authorization of the Board of Trustees only.
- Commissary—favorable policy for profitable sale of all services and merchandise purchased for resale, determining mark up, percentage, average stock, proper rate of turnover, etc.

- Dining—supervises, instructs, and assigns duties of employees including the planning of menus; estimating food stuffs, and staples needed and the purchase of these.
- Rooms—supervises, instructs and assigns duties of employees, including the assigning of rooms, checking guests in and out, collecting fees, cleaning rooms, performing mixed services and minor repairs.
- Safety and Health—proves and supervises adequate facilities and staff as required for the safety and health of guests, including the formulation, posting, and observances of safety regulations, operations of infirmary, and maintaining water front (life) guards.
- Maintenance—supervises normal repairing and maintenance; plans renovation, decorating revisions, and extensions of facilities for approval of the Board of Trustees.
- Conferences—cooperates with and assists conference committees, directors, or other church agencies to assure effective use of desired facilities for conference purposes; including quoting approved rates for various accommodations; assigning rooms to guests as directed, providing meals as requested, assisting with arranging class and assembly schedules.<sup>71</sup>

To be the manager of Mo-Ranch meant that whoever accepted this job would be loaded, maybe even burdened with responsibility from the first day. It was a big ranch, and the job of managing it was obviously to be a prodigious responsibility. The Sub-Committee appointed Dr. David L. Stitt and E. A. Dean to find and then to hire a man to serve as the first Mo-Ranch manager. And what was to be the salary for such a position? The maximum salary was to be \$4,000 plus room and board or \$5,000 plus living accommodations including lights, water, and fuel.<sup>2</sup>

Stitt and Dean traveled to the Rio Grande Valley and secured the services of Ovid O. West to serve as the first manager of Presbyterian Mo-Ranch. Prior to his employment by the Synod, West supervised the operation of a vegetable canning factory in a small South Texas town close to McAllen.<sup>3</sup>

The implicit bedrock of every word of the 1949 position description pointed to these mandates—(1) operate the ranch efficiently, (2) please a multitude of constituents; (3) offend no one; (4) run the place on a shoestring budget; and (5) keep the peace with the Synod Christian Education staff, if possible.

Ovid and Ruth West remember well their introduction to the Mo-Ranch possibility. They first received a phone call from board member L. Roy Klein inquiring as to the feasibility of visiting with the Wests regarding their serving as the managers of the Synod's new acquisition on the banks of the Guadalupe River. In that they had neither applied for nor had sought the position, Ovid and Ruth West were quite surprised by the inquiry. But the surprise didn't serve to stand in the way of their interest.<sup>4</sup>

They drove to Mo-Ranch on a Saturday, and there they visited with L. Roy Klein, David Stitt, and E. A. Dean. It was an enjoyable enough afternoon for all concerned, and by Monday, the position was offered to the Wests pending the necessary approval by the Mo-Ranch Board of Trustees. On Tuesday, Dr. Thomas Gallaher called the Wests for the purpose of offering officially the position on behalf of the Board. Gallaher ended the conversation with the request that Ovid and Ruth West, and their young son, Wayne, be on the Mo-Ranch property within the span of two short weeks.<sup>5</sup>

Needless to say, those two weeks represented a frenetic time in the life of the O. O. West Family. They packed, hugged firm good-byes to friends, and pointed the front end of their Chevrolet in the direction of the Texas hill country. Within hours, and right on schedule with the board's request, Ovid, Ruth, and Wayne West crossed Dan Moran's low water bridge, and drove beneath the ornate wrought-iron gate which had been donated by E. J. Nicklos and which offered this proud new announcement.

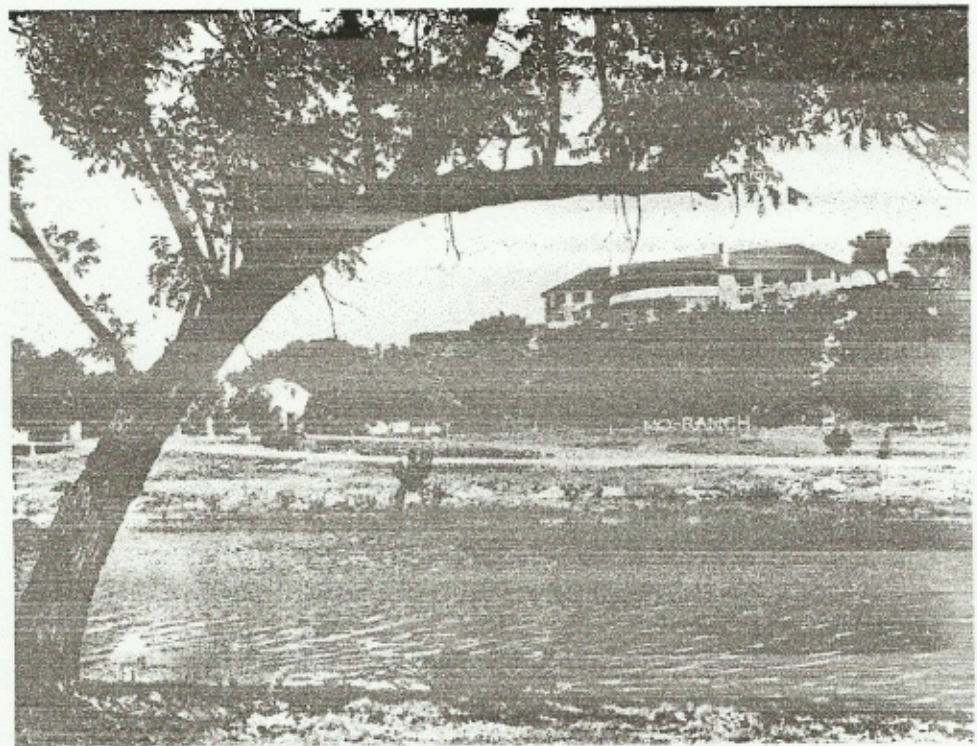
"The Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly."<sup>6</sup>

The Wests were beginning a new life which would coincide in both time and events with the birth of something big, expansive, and brimming with about equal parts of risk and hope.

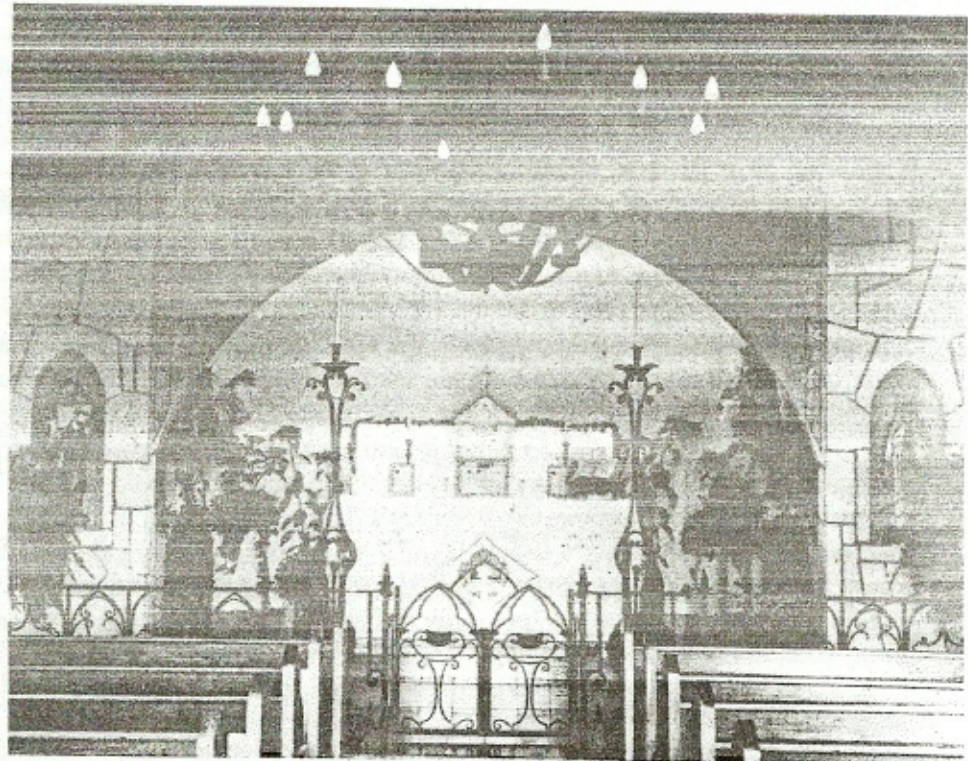
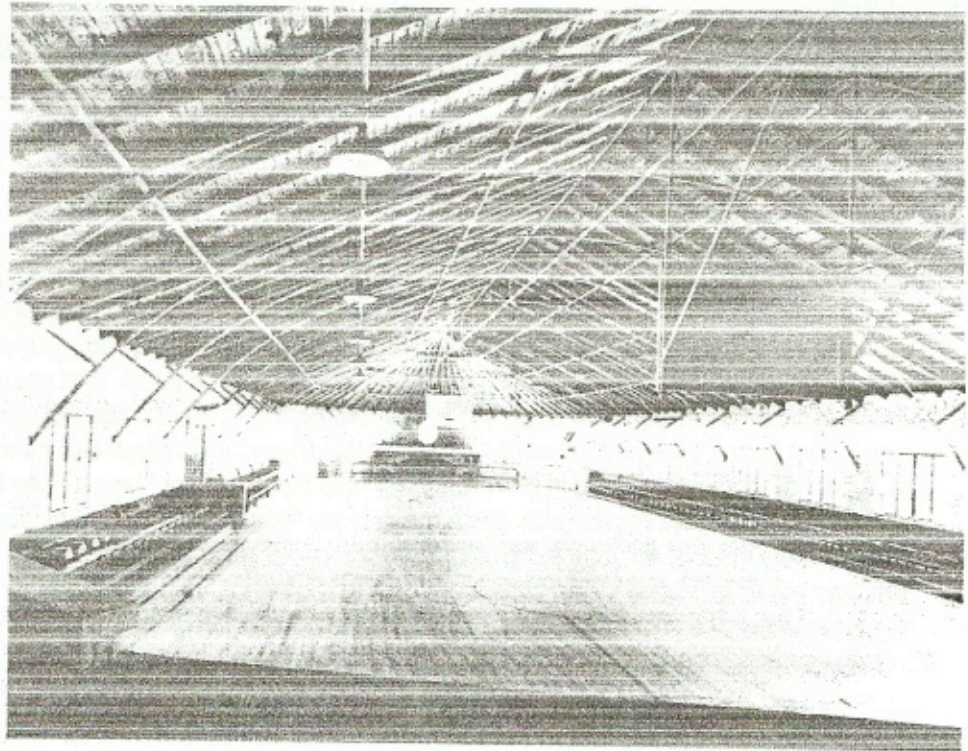
Their duties were there waiting for them. The very first day, a small meeting of one of Synod's committees adjourned on the campus of Schreiner Institute and voted to reconvene at Mo-Ranch. Upon the committee's arrival, the membership inquired of their hosts, Ovid and Ruth West, if they could possibly secure lodging for the evening, including a full supper, and of course, a morning breakfast. The new manager and his wife hardly knew where the kitchen was located, but, of course, they had no choice but to nod yes, and with that nod came the beginning of an era which would last for eighteen years. Ruth scraped together enough food to prepare the meals, and Ovid readied the necessary rooms in the Main House.<sup>7</sup>

Each new week brought more visitors to Mo-Ranch. Jack Lancaster called from what was then First Southern Church in Austin requesting lodging for a youth group on the following weekend. It was immediately apparent to the Wests that they needed help, and further, that they needed it in a hurry. Ovid West drove to Hunt, and "recruited" a couple of cowboys who had never before grabbed hold of the business end of a broom or mop. He hauled them to the ranch and offered to them a crash course in housekeeping, and with that, the Mo-Ranch staff was launched. Of course, the news of employment opportunities spread. For weeks, every Saturday brought carloads of families to the ranch in search of jobs. Most were turned away with kindness, but a few were hired, and some of those even stayed on for years.<sup>8</sup>

Second only to the immediate accommodation of the numerous guests who frequented Mo-Ranch was the quite unexpected problems of weeds. Mo-Ranch owned no real lawn mowers at the time, and of course, two former cowhands who were spending their days doing housekeeping chores in Loma Linda Lodge, as well as in the Guest Lodge and the Manor House, were no match for the weeds born of summer showers and the blessing of hill country sunshine. In fact, during the West's first week on the Mo-Ranch property, the weeds in the field which separated the Guest Lodge from the River Dorm were waist high to a tall man. The problem was approached with ingenuity. Elmo Wilson, a neighboring sheep rancher, was called, and within two hours a herd of more than one hundred hungry ewes and rams was let loose on the problem. Within days, the satisfied sheep were herded back to the Wilson ranch taking with them a whole season's worth of ticks embedded in their wirey wool. In their wake, the sheep left a thoroughly "mowed" river valley meadow. Ovid West had just demonstrated what was, perhaps, his most distinctive characteristic—the ability to



Ovid and Ruth West; Loma Linda Across the Guadalupe.



The Gymnasium/Skating Rink; Moran's Chapel



solve problems without spending hard-to-come-by Mo-Ranch dollars. Elmo Wilson nodded his gratitude, and Ovid West nodded back.<sup>9</sup>

All in all, the relationship between Mo-Ranch and Ovid and Ruth West was a good one when measured against the yardstick of the "bottom line." The Wests operated the ranch with the mandate for economy etched clearly into their reasoning, and yet, it was this very norm which often proved to be the proverbial thorn in the flesh of those who visited and came to love Mo-Ranch.<sup>10</sup>

The first obvious arena where the mandate would prove difficult was, of course, in the area of providing an adequate staff for Mo-Ranch. Mo-Ranch was isolated. There was no way to avoid the fact. In addition, Mo-Ranch was no longer a millionaire's business. It was a church, spelled, STAY WITHIN THE BUDGET, conference center. Wages in those days were low, even by 1949 standards. About the best a person could hope to earn in the employ of the Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly was five dollars per day *plus* room and board. Consequently, the mandate produced what might best be characterized as a certain unintentional irony.

Here was a center where leaders were trained in the Way while they, themselves were served by others who subsisted on, not the wages of sin, but rather upon "sinful wages."<sup>11</sup> But West was in a bind. He was compelled by the harsh line of the board to make ends meet and to operate a full staff consisting eventually of up to twenty permanent staff positions. There was even more to this irony. While the Gospel of Jesus was being taught, and while sheltered Presbyterian Youth from the shake-shingled suburbs of Texas cities and towns were being actively recruited to labor for the Synod, the permanent staff consisted of whoever might be found to do the work at embarrassing wages in such a beautiful, but isolated, spot.<sup>12</sup>

There were a few in the Synod who approached the obvious with enough twinge of conscience to comment occasionally that Mo-Ranch was paying what they called "slave wages," but the truth is that most folks looked the other way. Ovid West was thereby saddled with an untenable, unwinnable circumstance. For him personally, the situation devoured employees.

Turnover was a weekly phenomenon. And when the harshness of the circumstances depleted the staff, Ovid West would climb into the front seat of his Chevrolet and would drive to the small towns in East Texas. He'd travel from courthouse jail to courthouse jail inquiring of the local police chief as to who was out of jail in search of work. The chiefs came to know him, and every time they'd point him in the direction of a hapless family or some down-on-his-luck old timer who was both in dire need of a job and in sore need of "getting out of town." Right there on the spot, Ovid West would sign up the folks, haul them back to Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly, and offer to them a three-minute orientation which usually consisted of placing a mop or a broom handle into their hand.<sup>13</sup> The Synod looked the other way, the board grinned every time the year ended up in the black, and essentially, O. O. West accomplished exactly what he'd been hired to accomplish. The "bottom line" remained a strong priority with the Mo-Ranch board.

During that very first summer, an institution was born. It was simply called "The Junior Staff." To literally hundreds of high school age youth, who were fortunate enough to be counted among its membership, the Junior Staff was as one former par-

participant put it. "The Peace Corps experience of my life."<sup>14</sup>

Junior Staff members were in their own perception, as well as in the view of their sometimes envious peers, lucky to be a part of the unique experience. For many, if not all, it was to be a first-time-away-from-home kind of summer. Romances always blossomed, and kids grew up under the hawkish eye and the protective wing of Ovid and Ruth West. On one Junior Staffer's first morning as the cafeteria boy of 1963, a Frosty Acres truck rolled up to the back door of the kitchen. Obvious to everyone but the new employee, the truck needed unloading. Instead of pointing in the direction of the truck and requesting compliance with the expected, O. O. West approached the obsequious sixteen-year-old from Dallas with these words:

"If you don't get out there and unload that Frosty Acres truck, I'll kick your rear end up where you keep your head."<sup>15</sup>

With those words, two truths were imparted. First, O. O. West was more bark than bite, though the stories of his bite were legion as well as legend with generation after generation of summer staffers. Secondly, West was all business. Rules and expectations were to be met with a toothy smile which communicated devotion to duty, love of everything decent, and adoration of an absolute compliance with a rather rigid code of conduct, which included standing in rapt attention everytime Ruth West walked upon the Mo-Ranch dining hall porch.

Consequently, the fact remained obvious to anyone except the foolish or the intentionally self-destructive—O. O. West meant to rule and did rule with an iron fist. And for that matter, so did Ruth. And as a consequence, the sane, rather well-adjusted Junior Staff boy or girl would rather have hurled his or her body off the catwalk than to break a Mo-Ranch rule. There were, of course, those who tried, but they were only successful because neither Ovid nor Ruth West ever detected the crime.<sup>16</sup>

For the whole of the West administration, the Junior Staff boys lived in the long barn on the hill located about half way between what is today the Crawford House and the 1952 Dining Hall. Usually from six to as many as ten high-school-age boys lived in the barn apartments, and a full herd of O. O. West's prized angus cattle inhabited the rear portion of the same barn. There were interesting confrontations between the cattle and the Junior Staffers. One former Junior Staffer recalls a bull who seemed to hate the barn's summer inhabitants enough to wake everyone with his loud, resonant bawls early each morning about 2:30. After two weeks of this intrusion into their valued sleep, this crop of ingenious young men set a trap for the bull. As he ambled into the barn for his nightly disturbance, the boys waited in the beams of the loft. And just at that moment of truth when silence was on the threshold of being robbed by this creature's obnoxious impatience, fifty gallons of water were spilled upon the bull's head.<sup>17</sup>

Every boy on the summer staff of 1963 gave immediate thanks to the Almighty that bulls can't talk. Had God created those animals with the capacity for vocabularies, there would have been no small amount of indicting testimony rendered by the enraged animal. But nature required of the bull silence, and from that night on, he ceased his intrusion upon the otherwise peaceful ambience of Dan Moran's dairy

barn.<sup>16</sup>

Essentially, the Junior Staff boys were assigned separate jobs. Two worked as life-guards, one worked in the cafeteria, and the others worked as what were appropriately enough described as "funkies" for Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.<sup>19</sup>

The Junior Staff girls worked, lived, and had their very being under the incessant vigil of Ruth West. They lived comfortably in what Dan Moran had called The Pilot House which, of course, is located to the rear of the Main House. Their summer assignments consisted of working with the cafeteria boy on the food service line, and helping with the cleaning of the dining hall following each meal.<sup>20</sup>

Ovid O. West owned a yellowed, simulated newspaper headline which he framed and then hung on the wall of his office. It read:

"Double O Rides Again -  
The Straightest Shooter in the West!"<sup>21</sup>

And that's close to how O. O. West viewed himself—as a "Straight Shooter." And any employee, Junior Staff or permanent, who viewed him any differently missed the whole essence of the man's character. He did shoot straight. In many ways, he was enigmatic in his own simplicity. He was not simplistic, but to him, right was right, wrong was wrong, black was black, and grey was not a word which could be dredged out of any reasonable vocabulary. Rules were to be kept. Alcohol was the devil. And any breach of the rigid decorum on the part of a Junior Staffer usually meant one thing—an automatic long distance call to some pastor informing him (there were not many women in the ministry in those days) that some youth had broken the rules, had been, therefore, fired, and needed to be picked up before the next day's supper.

Consequently, the rules were obeyed, with a shrug, and with no small amount of resentment on occasion. But O. O. West more than likely slept securely knowing that the strong arm of his close-to-absolute intimidation ruled even in his sleep. Serious problems were as rare as a July thunderstorm on the North Fork of the Guadalupe. In fact, if Ovid West had any sin in the area of pride, it was tied to the fact of what he liked to call his straight shooting. Once a week, all Junior Staff boys were rounded up like they were some of Elmo Wilson's sheep. They fought to sit in the back seat because to a kid, they were terrified to be in the front seat of O. O. West's Chevrolet. The shyest, one usually thought to be somewhat of a sissy in the harsh judgment of the others, was compelled by the circumstances of his weakness to sit next to Mr. West. No one wanted that position, but someone had to sit next to the "Straight Shooter." And with as much smile as was possible on his leathery face, he'd haul this carload of boys into some Kerrville barber shop, which was located in a hotel, where they'd be sheared to the point of resembling Elmo Wilson's grass-eating, tick-attracting sheep. Long hair had no place at Mo-Ranch unless it was attached to the scalp of some female, and even then, it was wrapped in a tightly-woven hair net during the food service hours. O. O. West would rather have watched a full can of Pearl Beer being consumed on the benches in the catwalk than to have seen even one lock of hair touch the very top of some boy's car.<sup>22</sup>

The Mo-Ranch rules were clear, rigid, close to sacred, and of the same weight as

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those tablets given by God to a man named Moses on Mt. Sinai. Bob Schmerbeck, III, who is today a Kerrville businessman and ruling elder in the First Presbyterian Church of that city, recalls oversleeping on a morning when it was his duty to be in the Mo-Ranch kitchen by *no later* than 6:30 A. M. Schmerbeck remembers running, and then sprinting down the barn road in his luckless race with the ticking of the uncaring clock. He realized full well, all too well in fact, his sin. He was busy hating himself at the moment and at the same time worrying about a confrontation with the ubiquitous Mr. O. O. West. Sometimes, and Schmerbeck knew this well, luck would intervene and such indiscretions were missed, but on this morning, luck could not have been purchased. There before him in the road with the engine idling on mad, sat O. O. West staring straight in the direction of a late Junior Staff boy. He didn't exhibit an ounce worth of emotion. Opaque sun shades hid his eyes. Schmerbeck tried in vain to read his disposition which, more than likely, fell in that distance between angry and livid. Schmerbeck did his best to wrest a grin out of abject anguish. Very slowly, the car window rolled down. The expression of the "Straight Shooter's" face never changed. In a voice three octaves above confidence, the boy offered his brightest "Good Mawnin'" to the icy glare of those sun shades.

A voice deeper than God's cut the morning air:

"What's your name, boy?"  
"Uh, Mr. West, it's Bob Schmerbeck."  
"Naw, not this mawnin'. Naw... this mawnin' it's Mud!"

Schmerbeck knew he'd been bested. So, being the intelligent man that he's always been, he didn't attempt an argument with the obvious. And that was it. Mr. West had made his point. He never offered another word on the subject. The truth is, he didn't have to. Bob Schmerbeck, III *never* overslept again, not even when the bull deigned to awaken him at 2:30 in the morning.<sup>27</sup>

The Mo-Ranch Junior Staff contracts of those days reflect both a certain innocence and the iron-control of the West administration. These contracts read as follows (in part):

"Witnesseth:

Employer agrees to pay employee in wage of \$35 per month plus room and board and upon completion of contract, employees will receive a bonus of \$20. . .

. . . Employee agrees in accepting a position on the staff of the Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly to work from June 1 and including July 18 at a wage of \$35 per month plus room and board. Employee further agrees that if he/she find it necessary to break this contract before the expiration date, he/she will forfeit the bonus of \$20.

Employees and parents agree that if any accident should occur while employee is driving a Mo-Ranch vehicle, they will pay for any damage done that is not covered by insurance, to the Mo-Ranch vehicle or any other vehicle involved.

Employee promises to attend church services on Sunday and to take part in such other services and conference activities during the week as is possible without interfering with his/her work.

In the case of girls, employee agrees to be in her room by 10:00 each night with the exception of Saturday, at which time she agrees to be in her room by 12:00 midnight.

Employee further agrees to do his/her job faithfully, willingly, cheerfully, and to the best of his/her ability."<sup>24</sup>

Such contracts would be treated with polite derision by today's youth, but in the fifties and sixties, they were issued with a knowing, pencil-thin smile, signed, and returned in droves. In the words of one summer staffer, "The Junior Staff experience provided the most enjoyable two summers of my life."

Bob Schmerbeck recalls that O. O. West was a man completely without pretense. "I can still visualize him standing on the porch of the Mo-Ranch dining room wearing a November-crisp, starched long-sleeve (always long sleeve) shirt. He'd light up a filterless Chesterfield cigarette, and with grey eyes the very color of faint smoke, he'd survey all that was contained in the valley's new morning. The man demanded, and in turn received, complete absolute respect from all of his employees. There were no petty thefts, no vandalism and no misconduct of any kind. We all knew that it would never be tolerated."<sup>25</sup>

Thomas W. Currie, III, who today is an ordained Presbyterian minister also served on the summer staff during those days when the sixties were still somewhat innocent and when the air was more filled with the "Good Vibrations" of the Beach Boys than the angry chants of war protestors who were to flood Austin's Congress Avenue a mere five years later. Currie remembers his summer as the official "flunkie" to Mr. O. O. West with these words:

"My earliest memories of O. O. West consist of seeing him talk with my father in front of the Mo-Ranch office, usually as we arrived and as we left Mo-Ranch. I don't know what his official title was but he always looked to me as if he fit the part of manager, or director, or simply 'head honcho.' To me he always bore faint resemblance to Hop-a-long-Cassidy, with his leathery face and squinting eyes and simple western dress."

Several years later, I came to know Mr. West somewhat intimately in that I was his "flunki" during the summer of 1962. That aptly-named job mainly required of me to do what Mr. West asked me to do, which might include anything from cleaning commodes in the Youth Building to pulling weeds around the horse barn. But mainly the job consisted of sitting in the Mo-Ranch (manager's) office, answering the phone, running errands, and the like.

It was not arduous labor. And Mr. West was not a difficult boss. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy, whose gravelly voice and austere demeanor intimidated us, one and all. But his bark was worse than his bite (though he could bite and legends abound concerning those unhappy occasions).

He chained-smoked Chesterfield cigarettes, and I can remember once when that habit gave us pause for thought. There were some Conoco pumps in front of his office from which Mr. West filled his car with gasoline. He asked me to check the air in his back tire while he pumped gas, which I was glad to do until I noticed that the hand pumping the gas also held a lit cigarette. I figured that the gasoline wouldn't dare

blow up in Mr. West's face, but I wasn't so sure about its intention toward me so I hastily told Mr. West that the tire was completely inflated and moved away.

I rather suspect that Mr. West was under a good deal of pressure to make Mo-Ranch break even, a suspicion which would account, I believe, for his frugality. The man watched pennies and figured that the dollars would take care of themselves. Still, he was no miser, and for all his austerity, he never spoke an ill word to me. He demanded a good deal of those who worked for him, and he did not suffer fools gladly. I can't help still associating him with Mo-Ranch, and every time I return (to Mo-Ranch), I expect to see his tan '62 Chevrolet Impala come sweeping up to the dining hall. We were both scared of Mr. West and also strangely admiring of him for he seemed to us to be in full control. Perhaps that feeling was due more to his powers of persuasion than otherwise, but whatever it was, it worked.

Within very strict limits, Mr. West possessed a moral code which was rigid in application. He was a teetotaler, who was not afraid to evict folks for breaking his rules. On the other hand, I do think that he understood that Mo-Ranch existed for rest and recreation, and he was not opposed to folks enjoying themselves.

And his name implies he was a man of the west. He looked the part, and as so many who grew up in the west when times were hard and distances were real, Mr. West was a man not given to many words or easy relationships with other people. His actions spoke for themselves, and he was not afraid, I believe, to let others do the interpreting. I did not always like Mr. West or agree with Mr. West or think that Mr. West was advancing the cause of Mo-Ranch, but I never questioned his commitment to his work, and I never questioned his ability to do that work.

In any case, he certainly put his stamp on the place, and for those who remember Mo-Ranch during his tenure, both the place and the man seem a part of each other.<sup>26</sup>

The arrangement of paying homage to the "bottom line" provided some interesting experiences for the Junior Staff. Like most Presbyterian young people who were working overtime in struggling with a sense of self during those turbulent, and contextually still somewhat tame, days of adolescence, the Mo-Ranch experience represented a clear passage from the carefree, taken-care-of days of youth into most of what it meant to be an adult. And in one sense, the environment at Mo-Ranch was somewhat "schizophrenic." Here was Ruth West folding her protective and thick-feathered wings over a cottage full of four innocent Presbyterian girls. In the barn, boys fresh out of San Antonio's Alamo Heights High School or Dallas' Sunset High School were more occupied with dumping water on some angry bull's head rather than involvement with any real mischief. Consequently, these youth arrived as somewhat sheltered chicks to be protected for a summer by the iron-clad rules of O. O. and Ruth West and then at the same time were placed elbow to elbow in the serving line with folks who had been "recruited" by "the Straight Shooter" himself to work until they either got fired or walked off because of the close-to-slave wages.

It made for a fascinating mix. And more than one Junior Staff letter contained news of seeing some pathetic man fired because the disease of alcoholism got the best of his struggle with temptation.

One former Junior Staff cafeteria boy remembers a sure enough fight complete with butcher knives in the Mo-Ranch kitchen just minutes before the women's confer-

ence was to be served breakfast. Mr. West wasted no time in firing both of the hapless, and the then-full-of-regret contestants in full view of the widely-stretched eyes of the full Junior Staff.

Bob Schmerbeck, III recalls watching an October broadcast of the television news following his summer on the Mo-Ranch Junior Staff. Much to his surprise, something close to mild shock, he witnessed the "Live-at-Five film footage of a man being hauled into the San Antonio jail with his hands cuffed. The charge was attempted murder. Just six weeks before, the same man had served with Schmerbeck on the Mo-Ranch food service line."<sup>27</sup>

Laura Shelton Mendenhall, who is today an ordained Presbyterian minister, recalls that O. O. West and Ruth served well as strong parental figures. "They kept a strong watch on the young girls who were in their employ for the summer."<sup>28</sup>

Like all Junior Staff students, Laura and her family drove to Mo-Ranch for the purpose of the required pre-summer interview. Laura further describes the experience as something close to traumatic. Ruth and "Double O" West, as he was called somewhat affectionately but never to his face by the Junior Staff, were imposing figures there in the dim glow of the March light which filtered through the Main House living room. She recalls the intensity of that afternoon's half hour:

"Very early in the interview, somewhere between the third and fourth word, the reality of their firmness and their absolute resolve became abundantly clear to any and all potential Junior Staffers who might (by foolish chance) harbor the conviction that those folks were composed of fluff, and therefore, all bluff."<sup>29</sup>

Like all, well at least most, Junior Staffers, Laura Shelton Mendenhall remembers bending over backwards, so to speak, to do a good job. No one ever wanted to give either Ruth or "Double O" the opportunity to offer even a word of criticism regarding either performance or demeanor.

In this pastor's interpretation of her own past, "The West's provided a disciplined, and somewhat demanding, but never unreasonable, transitional-experience for us. Most of us were within a year or so of leaving home for college or university experiences. And the structure they provided was most often, but not always, appreciated."

In the memory of another Junior Staff member, Mo-Ranch structurally was organized as something akin to a modern-day "feudal system." Essentially, the Junior Staff were long-term visitors who could take the experiences back home, absorb them, exaggerate them, and then proudly herald the truth that to be at Mo-Ranch for a summer was a life-affecting experience. But to the poor blacks and the poor hispanics (some who were in this country illegally), employment at Mo-Ranch meant hard work, virtually no praise, the all-out avoidance of conflict with the "master and his wife," thirty-five dollars a week, and twenty miles of highway separating an unair-conditioned, ventilated cinderblock cabin from the relatively bright lights of Kerrville, Texas.<sup>31</sup>

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was standing before a record congregation of believers in the shadow of the Washington Monument. His message was as simple as it was dramatic: "I have a dream . . .," he told the nation on the shimmering black and

white screens of television. This particular dream had not yet penetrated the shadows and the "feudal system" of the Synod Conference ground on the banks of the Guadalupe River. Black staff members ate their meals in an unventilated room which was adjacent to, but certainly separate from, the main dining room. The Junior Staff was lily white, and therefore, they shared their meals in the main dining room where the guests were to dine just thirty minutes later.<sup>32</sup>

The minutes of the Mo-Ranch Board in 1954 reflect the strong sentiment that Mo-Ranch would not tolerate racial segregation of any kind. But apparently, that rule applied mainly to the guests. And it was true enough that during the late fifties and early sixties, a few blacks and browns did attend Mo-Ranch conferences. They did dine in the main hall, and they did even cross over the threshold of air-conditioned Pheasant Run, but the "feudal system" remained in the minds of the Synod's Christians as just the way things were.<sup>33</sup>

One young man, who in the minds of those who succeeded him on the Junior Staff, attained in a mere twelve weeks the rank of veritable "legend." He hailed from the Oak Cliff section of Dallas, and today, he is a businessman in Enid, Oklahoma and a ruling elder in the First Presbyterian Church of that city.<sup>34</sup>

David Alan Chase became somewhat "famous" in that unlike the generations before and after, he displayed absolutely no fear of a man he called simply "Double O." Chase was never content to live simply within the bounds of the expected, the ordinary, and for him, the dull. No, he was one who always stirred mischief with the alacrity of a potter's hand in a lump of clay. In fact, David Chase was deserving of some university's "Master of Mischief Degree" even before his first day of undergraduate study. The man was a genius at staying one brisk step ahead of the absolute law of Double O. West.

His favorite trick was catching grasshoppers and then dropping their dead little bodies into the Mo-Ranch ice canisters. He'd rear with delight every time some elderly, not to mention refined, woman would discover some grasshopper's leg sticking out of her ice tea like it was some ornate swizzle stick. A flood of complaints rolled in, but he was never caught in the act, and the ice tea remained contaminated for the whole of a summer.<sup>35</sup>

Single-handedly, he rigged a string and pulley system above the food service line. The string was attached to a tiny bell in the dishwashing room where David Chase spent his summer. Its purpose was to alert him every time an attractive teen-aged female came through the food service line. The cafeteria boy would give the string a yank, and Chase would appear in the food service line for maybe three minutes of serious flirting prior to the girl's necessary departure from the line.<sup>36</sup>

On one typically dull August night, this genius decided that the boys living in the barn needed to be frightened--scared out of their wits was more like it. He recruited three other young men, who because of the overflow in the barn were lodged with him in Dan Moran's old Creamery Building. At mid-night, the four college-age youth crept in the darkness and ten minutes later found themselves hiding in the shadows in a corral full of thirty or so sleepy angus cows and one bull who already owned reason enough to hold a serious grudge.

In typical Chase style, the man produced from his tattered bluejean pocket the big-





Mo Ranch Chapel Door-Pull *Photograph by Diane Hopkins Hughes*

gest firecracker which could be purchased legally on the outskirts of Kerrville, Texas. It was fat, red, and on its side was stenciled this single word: "Baby Giant."

While his three colleagues watched breathlessly from the corral, Chase ascended to the concrete loft of Dan Moran's barn. In the four apartments, ten boys slept securely in the knowledge that all was well, that the morning would arrive in peace, and that a certain bull's rude habits had been more than quelled by a barrel full of water.

Moments turned to full hours. The crickets chirped, but there was no other noise, and there was no sign of the "Master of Mischief." Cows stood up where before they'd been asleep in the mud. The bull began to pace nervously, but the three partners adhered strongly in the youthful code of non-abandonment. Again, the minutes ticked with what seemed like a thud on the small Timex watch which was strapped to the wrist of one of the anxious boys. The barn remained asleep, and somewhere on the Nicklos Hill an owl registered his presence in the blackness of the night.

Suddenly, the barn seemed to rise on its foundation. The smoke belched out of the loft. Fire enjoyed a moment's worth of fury and then disappeared again. And then a strange silence, the kind which visits just before the storm when the elements wait and decide, covered the barn, the corral and the whole of Dan Moran's ranch.

The cattle were the first to decide, and they chose on the side of all-out panic. The code of non-abandonment was forgotten in the presence of full stampede, the kind which is spliced into every B-Grade western movie which was ever projected on the screen of Dallas' Texas Theatre.

The "Master of Mischief" dropped from the loft and landed safely on the ground in front of the barn. Three terrified boys stood in the middle of a stampede and stared at the closed gate. Finally they sprinted back to the safety afforded by the Creamery Building. In the panic, a crucial gate was left open.

David Chase survived his own bomb. He was singed, and choked on the smoke for about an hour before sleep robbed him of further enjoyment of his latest success.

The new morning offered the sun to the Guadalupe Valley. And at first, life was easy enough. The morning dove greeted the day as though nothing was different. The turkey buzzards lifted from their roost right on schedule and searched the morning air for a fresh ride on a strong summer thermal. Deer hurried with their last bite of breakfast and then scurried in the direction of cedar shadows. Life seemed ordinary enough. From the Mo-Ranch kitchen there wafted the ubiquitous morning aroma of freshly-fried bacon. And it all hung together as though God was the conductor and all the rest were musicians putting together one magnificent symphony called morning.

And it was all so common except for one fact. A black Angus cow grazed on the front lawn of Pheasant Run. Another one grazed by the River Dorm. Cows were on the road, in the garden, next to the pool, and just brushing up against the aviary.

Some woman opened the door to room 29 of Pheasant Run and screamed. From somewhere, another scream followed. Within minutes, a tan Impala Chevrolet sent the gravel flying. Even before the car door could slam, the inimitable voice of the "Straight Shooter" was screaming.

"David Chase... David Chase! Where's David Chase!"

The "Master of Mischief" ambled out of his usual station in the dishwashing room. He'd not seen the cows. As far as he was concerned, the "bomb" had not only been a success, but the stuff of which sure legends are constructed. He was more cocky than afraid because, after all, he'd always viewed his own vocation as that of legend-maker, and here at the tender age of eighteen, he was on the threshold.

O. O. West transported David Alan Chase and his three colleagues in the Impala to his small, stuffy office. He stood them against the wall, just beneath the framed headlines regarding straight shooting.

Every one of those boys just knew that they were to face a firing squad. In some ways, bullets at that moment would have been preferable to the glare of Double O West.

Maybe it was grace. More than likely, it was the hard fact that four boys would be hard to replace in August. Whatever the reason, the man didn't fire one of those boys. At least three boys learned a powerful lesson on that icy August morning. The "Master of Mischief," if he learned anything at all, must have realized that he'd simply dodged another bullet. He winked and raced to the Creamery building while his three buddies fringed on their usual waddy by apocryphal power in young ladies.

In his own way, O. O. West was a good man. He was fair, and vet at the same time, harsh. The circumstantial harshness of the "feudal system," was more a result of the inaccessibility of the latter than any manifestation emanating from the personality of the Mo-Ranch manager.

He was not even a humorless man. His brand of humor was, though, limited to the subtleties of a single joke. It went like this. When he walked through the dining hall food service line at breakfast, he'd wink (at least some thought they saw a wink), and he'd say "Good Mawwin!" There was nothing innately funny in that. But then at lunch, he'd walk through the line and again utter, "Good Mawwin!" And every intelligent, and not to mention intimidated, youth would laugh at this small hint of humor.

At the evening meal, it was always the same. Once again, he'd ease silently through the line. This time his words were, "Good Mawwin!"

"What in the world is going on?"

And again, the self-respecting fully-intimidated, which included everyone except maybe the "Master of Mischief," would declare:

"Well I don't know, Mr. West."

And that would be it, the entire exchange, the whole of the transaction. And those words were always the same, something as predictable as the turkey buzzards' glow arc in the morning sky.

And the irony in them was that not one of us, not even David Alan Chase, would have ever questioned that Double O West, the "Straight Shooter," didn't for a moment know precisely what was going on, both in the world, and especially at a place called the Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly.

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### NOTES

- 1 Minutes, Mo-Ranch Board, 1949.
- 2 Minutes, Mo-Ranch Board.
- 3 Interview with Jack McMichael, June 1985.
- 4 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West, June 1985.
- 5 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.
- 6 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.
- 7 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.
- 8 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.
- 9 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.
- 10 Letter received from Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West.
- 11 Author's recollection.
- 12 Author's recollection.
- 13 Telephone interview with Mr. and Mrs. O. O. West, June 1985.
- 14 Interview with Robert Schmerbeck, III, June 1985.
- 15 Author's recollection.
- 16 Author's recollection.
- 17 Author's recollection.
- 18 Author's recollection.
- 19 Author's recollection.
- 20 Author's recollection.
- 21 Author's recollection.
- 22 Author's recollection.
- 23 Interview with Robert Schmerbeck, III.
- 24 Mo-Ranch Archives.
- 25 Interview with Robert Schmerbeck, III.
- 26 Letter received from Thomas W. Currie, III, June 1985.
- 27 Interview with Robert Schmerbeck, III.
- 28 Laura Shelton Mendenhall, "Mo-Ranch Memories," (tape, June, 1985).
- 29 Laura Shelton Mendenhall, "Mo-Ranch Memories."
- 30 Laura Shelton Mendenhall, "Mo-Ranch Memories."
- 31 Interview with Robert Schmerbeck, III.
- 32 Author's recollection.
- 33 Author's recollection.
- 34 Author's recollection.
- 35 Author's recollection.
- 36 Author's recollection.
- 37 Author's recollection.
- 38 Author's recollection.