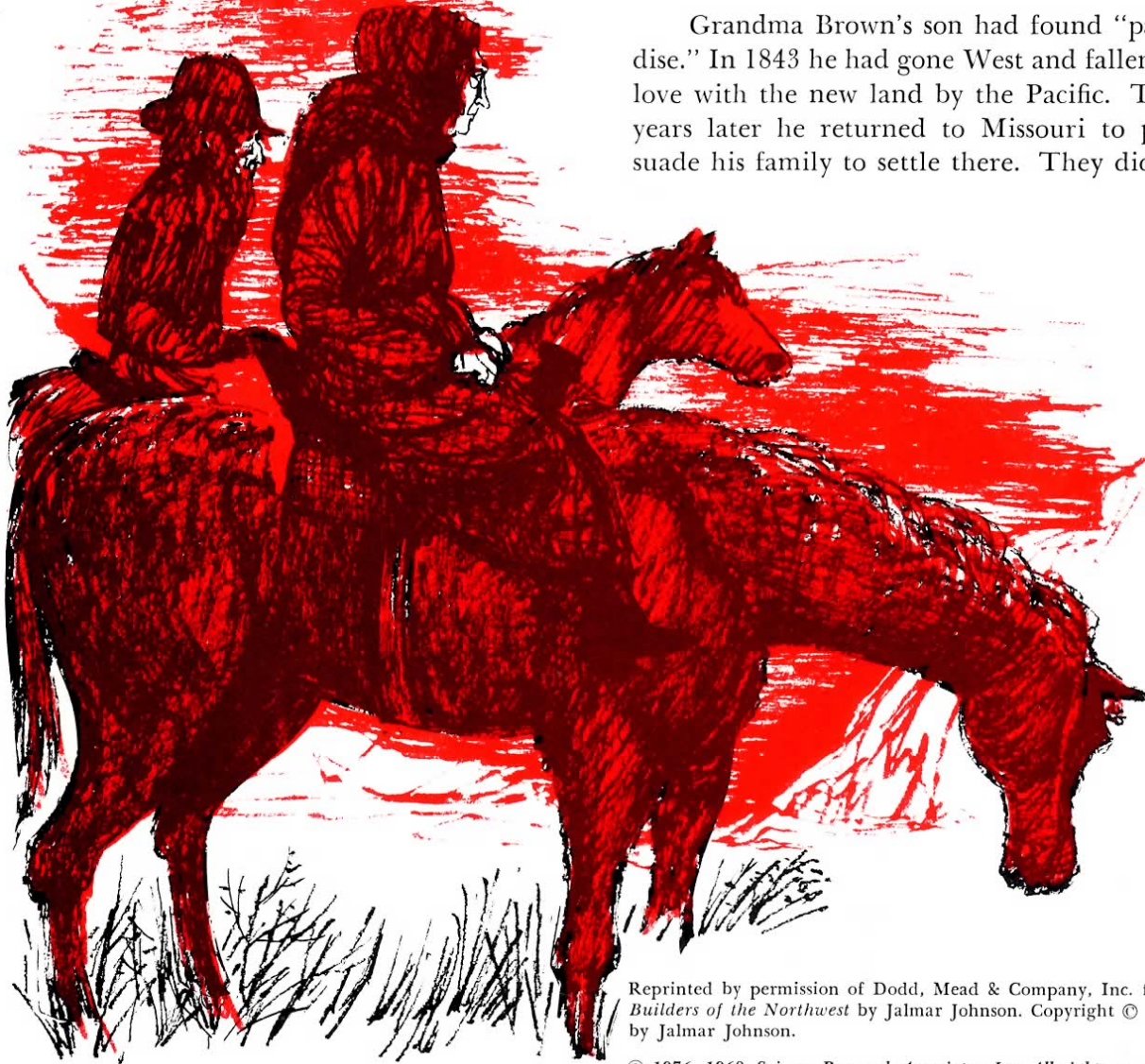


Grandma Brown Goes West

by Jalmar Johnson

Grandma Brown's son had found "paradise." In 1843 he had gone West and fallen in love with the new land by the Pacific. Two years later he returned to Missouri to persuade his family to settle there. They didn't



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need much urging. On April 15, 1846, they joined a wagon train bound for Oregon.

Tabitha Brown was sixty-six. She was five feet tall, never weighed more than 108 pounds, and had to use a cane because of a lame leg. But although this little old lady looked nothing like an adventurer, she filled the role as well as the toughest man.

The first 1400 miles, across the Great Plains and the Rockies, was a pleasant trip. But in Idaho, with only 600 miles to go, Tabitha and her family made a serious mistake. They decided to take a newly discovered southern route instead of the usual trail to the north. The supposed shortcut included rough mountains, hostile Indians, and sixty miles of desert, but by the time they learned this, it was too late to turn back.

This last leg of the journey began in August. By October the travelers were still far from their destination, and cold weather was setting in.

Probably the worst part of the trip was the passage through a steep canyon of the Umpqua River. The canyon was only twelve miles long, but some of the immigrants spent two or three weeks traveling through it—and many of them died there.

The trail was a nightmare of mud and rocks, with water up to the horses' bellies in some places. All the wagons but one broke down, and soon the canyon was strewn with dead cattle, furniture, and clothing. Grandma Brown lost her wagon and all her belongings except her horse, which she now had to ride.

Finally they reached the Umpqua Valley, but ahead was a towering mountain range. The provisions were almost gone; a little ba-

con and tea remained, but no bread. The family held a meeting to decide what to do.

The main problem was Tabitha's elderly brother-in-law, John, who was very weak and would not survive long without food. It was decided that he and Tabitha should go ahead alone, to try to catch up with some wagons that had left earlier. The rest of the family would stay behind for a few days to let their cattle regain strength.

The aged couple set out on horseback, with their scant portion of the provisions. (Tabitha's share was three slices of bacon and a cup of tea.) That night they camped in an oak grove without any supper. By the afternoon of the next day, they were suffering greatly from hunger and fatigue, but Grandma insisted that they press on. Somehow they struggled over mountain after mountain, and came at last into a large valley.

Tabitha scanned the wide, lonely expanse hopefully, but there wasn't a wagon in sight. There were tracks, however, and she followed them across the plain until nightfall.

The old people spent that night shivering, for they had no fire—fortunately, as it turned out. For the next morning Tabitha found the fresh tracks of two Indians not far away.

That same morning they met one of the people they were trying to catch up with. The man had been hunting deer, and had managed to shoot one. He led the two old people to his wagon, and in a little while their stomachs were filled with fresh meat.

Soon the rest of Tabitha's family caught up, and they continued the journey together. Finally, on Christmas Day, they reached the

town of Salem, where a missionary took them into his home—the first house Grandma Brown had set foot in for more than eight months.

Anyone else would have seized the chance for a good long rest, but the first thing Tabitha did was get a job. She agreed to act as housekeeper for the missionary, receiving in return room and board for both John and herself.

But Tabitha needed cash, too. She had only one small coin, a picayune (worth a little more than six cents). She had found it in the finger of an old glove.

Perhaps that gave her the idea, for it was with gloves that she increased her fortune.

She bought three large needles and some buckskin, and began to make gloves to sell to the other settlers. Then, with the profits from her glove sales, this tireless old lady started a small boarding school. She taught the classes, raised the food, and did all the housekeeping herself.

Not until 1855 did Grandma Brown finally feel entitled to retire and enjoy the rest she had earned. By that time the school she had founded with a six-cent coin had grown into Pacific University, a center of learning that still flourishes today. This spunky old lady had not only challenged the wilderness—she had changed it.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **Grandma Brown decided to go West at the age of**
 - A fifty-five
 - B sixty-six
 - C seventy-seven
2. **The first two-thirds of the journey was**
 - A an enjoyable adventure
 - B a confused search
 - C a terrible ordeal
3. **The choice of the southern shortcut can best be described as a**
 - A lucky accident
 - B foolish whim
 - C dangerous mistake
4. **After passing through the Umpqua River canyon, Grandma Brown continued**
 - A by wagon
 - B on foot
 - C on horseback
5. **John was Tabitha's**
 - A father-in-law
 - B brother-in-law
 - C son-in-law
6. **The aged couple's main problem as they traveled alone was**
 - A lack of food
 - B Indian attacks
 - C heavy storms
7. **They reached the town of Salem on**
 - A Thanksgiving Day
 - B Christmas Day
 - C New Year's Day
8. **The first job that Grandma Brown took in Salem was that of**
 - A housekeeper
 - B teacher
 - C nurse
9. **She began to earn extra money by making**
 - A coats
 - B hats
 - C gloves
10. **With the money that Tabitha had earned, she founded a**
 - A school
 - B hospital
 - C hotel