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CHAPTER TWO -- A MODERN YOUNG MAN AND AN IRON MAN

"You know somethin', Rusty?" he would habitually say as he grabbed me by the sleeve on my way down the shop stairs to begin an afternoon's work on the gill netters we were building. Usually, he heard me approaching from the top of the stairs, would hide his drink, and emerge from his office to greet me. "In my day we had to work like hell in order to have somethin' to eat and a place to live. You kids today, don't know the meanin' of the word 'work'. I worked like a dirty skunk all my life! You wouldn't believe it, would you?"

"I believe you, Gramps. What did you do, that you had to work so hard?" I asked, trying to appear serious.

"Buildin' ships! Christ, we'd be puttin' in ceiling, using big, heavy clamps that weighed over 125 pounds apiece. I'd pick up two of 'em at a time and go runnin' on the staggin'; up the brow of a ship. I was the stoutest son of a gun you ever heard of on my day. We used to drive spikes with a twenty pound mallet. Right handed, left handed, overhead, anything!"

"What kind of ships were you working on in those days?" I decided to ask and ^uperuse the conversation further. It did not appear that I would be getting much work done that afternoon, since Gramps seemed quite wound up and appeared to want to talk to someone. Anyway, it was always interesting to listen to his salty, old stories and to learn about his

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exciting past.

"Four masted schooners. Barkintines. Steam schooners. Tugs. Barges. Brigs. Ships. Christ, you name it and I've worked on 'em. I have over sixty years in shipbuildin'! How 'll that be?"

"How old were you when you began your shipbuilding career?" I asked in order to establish a frame of reference and to compare our beginning ages as apprentices.

"About your age. I was fourteen years old when I went to work for a master shipbuilder, Charlie White. That was up in Everett.

"White was a famous shipbuilder from San Francisco. He had quite a reputation in them days. Everybody knew the names of the ships he built: the sailing schooner Alcatraz, the steam schooner Emily, the Whitesboro. Those were just a few of the ships he lofted and built in California. They were all around 200 tons."

"How did you ever happen to meet him?" I assumed Gramps must have had to meet him personally because of the way he talked about him.

"He had moved to Everett to build steam schooners during the Alaska Gold Rush. I was workin' there in a nail factory for nearly a year when the old place closed down permanently. After it was closed down, the superintendent asked me to help him take inventory of the stock that remained in their large warehouse.

Charlie White was usin' the vacant warehouse to loft his first ship, the John S. Kimball, while his shipyard was bein' ouilt on the waterfront. Old man White used to send his son, Charlie White, to the nail works to do the loftin'. I saw the old master one day, when he was up checkin' on his son, and I asked him for a job."

"What did you say to him?" I asked with a keen interest in how Gramps actually came by his first shipbuilding job and how he got his intial start.

"I said, 'Mr. White! I'd like to learn to build ships and be an apprentice for you.'"

"White replied, 'What would a little guy like you do on a big ship?'"

"I answered, 'Well, how did you ever learn to build a big ship?'"

"Well, how did you ever learn to build a ship?'"

"White laughed and said, 'Yah, you're alright. When we get ready, you come to work for me!'"

"So, I went to work in the fall of 1898: turnin' bevels on the steam bandsaw with young Charlie White, firin' the boiler, makin' trunnels, pluggin' deck and God knows what. We worked ten hours a day, seven days a week for \$10.00 a month when I started out. Today, you make more in one hour than I'd make in a whole week!"

Trying to be humorous, I asked with a grin, "Was old

Charlie White as tough a guy to work for as you are?"

Gramps looked at me with a surprised expression and said, "What do you mean? Do you think I'm such a tough, old guy to work for?"

"I do not mean tough, Gramps. I mean was Charlie White a stern taskmaster? Was he as demanding as you are?"

"Hell, yes! Charlie White was drunker than a fool all the time, but, just the same, he was a good guy. He was an old shipbuilder from the old school, like I told yah. He was a tough old bugger. He always wore an overcoat and a derby hat.

"I remember one time when we was puttin' ceillin' in one of these vessels, I guess it was the John S. Kimball. I was helpin' on the thing at the time, pluggin' her, I guess. Everybody bored holes by hand and drove bolts by hand. Never had anything else but hand work. One day, when we was puttin' in the fore hood, that's the one with the most bend in it, and they was drivin' the bolts and one thing and another; Charlie White yelled to this fellow over on the other side, 'Hit that son of a bitch! What the hell you think you are? A God damned piano player?' That's the kind of guy he was. He would take his hat off and wave it around and yell at the guys. But, they loved him anyhow."

I learned from Gramps, during our conversations about his early shipbuilding career in Everett, that the John S. Kimball, which was the first ship he worked on, was originally designed

as a four masted, lumber schooner, but the Alaska Gold Rush created a demand for any type of vessel that could carry freight and passengers north. It was sold while still being constructed at White's yard and was changed from a steam schooner to a freight and passenger vessel for the Alaskan traffic.

After working with the one hundred man crew for nearly a year, Gramps decided to take a Sunday off and go sailing with his friends. While he was out sailing, a couple of Swedes, who were fastening planking at the shipyard, borrowed his top mall and somehow damaged the handle as they were driving spikes. On Monday morning, when Gramps returned to work and discovered that his handle had been ruined, he went to the blacksmith's shop to install a new one. It was in the blacksmith's shop that he ran into the "old man".

White saw him, noticed what he was doing, and asked, "Don't you know how to drive spikes by now without chewin' up your god damned top mall handle?"

As Gramps stood motionless, watching the master approach him in order to inspect the handle at a closer distance, he responded defensively, "Some of your damned Swedes, that don't know nothin', done it yesterday. They got a hold of my top mall and ruined the handle!"

"Where were you yesterday?" White demanded an answer and appeared to be getting madder, the more Gramps tried to explain.

himself.

"I wasn't feelin' good. I was home," Gramps lied.

"You're a damn liar because I saw you out sailin' yes-terday. Get the hell out of here! I don't want nothin' to do with you!"

Gramps explained the rest of his story to me and seemed to be trying to teach me a lesson from his experience, "I lied to him and that made him mad. If I'd a told him I went sailin' he might of forgive me. But, when I lied, it made him mad."

"Then what did you do, Gramps?" it logically appeared that something else had to occur in order for him to continue with his trade.

"I went and found another job!" he answered briskly, and then continued with his relaxed narration. "I walked down the waterfront and went to another shipyard that was owned by another master builder: Ed Heath. I told the truth this time: that White had fired me because I'd lied to him about being sick. But, I also told Heath that I could use a top mall either handed, over my head, and in any direction without chewin' up the handles. When I told him I was lookin' for a job, he said, 'Sure, I can give you a job. I'm lookin' for somebody that can do what you say you can do!'"

Gramps was fortunate enough to be able to begin working with Heath moulding frames in the loft. He helped the skilled builder determine the thickness of frames, the taper, the bev-

els, and the overlap for each section of the ship that Heath had recently laid the keel for.

"Moulding' frames is somethin' I learned from Ed Heath. I don't think anybody around there knew how to mould frames then, except the master shipbuilders like Heath and White. One man in the whole organization! They was built up like I am today," Gramps was continuing when I interrupted him and said that grandma was calling him for dinner. He fussed around the office, had another drink or two, then climbed the shop stairs for home.

The next afternoon I decided not to work on the gill netters again, in fact I decided to spend the entire week listening to his past history because it was intriguing. His six decades of experience in shipbuilding not only represented the accumulated knowledge of a master craftsman, but it also represented a living, eyewitness account of our country's history. Instead of working, I quietly walked into the office and found Gramps sitting in his easy chair by a warm fire which he had burning in his rusty, old, potbellied stove. His eight hour, working day was over and it was obvious he was cherishing the time spent in his office reclusion before being summoned for dinner.

"Hey, Gramps! Do you have time to continue your story about your early apprenticeship in Everett? Was it anything like what I'm doing for you down here on the fishing boats?"

"Hell, yes! I was just like you're doin'. In did the same things you're doin': turning bevels, firin' the boiler, takin' spilings, and so on."

"But, you worked on big ships and with a lot of men. I'm just working on peanuts compared to what you worked on when you were young."

"Principles are the same on any ship you build. Don't matter what size they are, big or small. The only difference between my apprenticeship and yours is that I take time to explain somethin' to you, when you don't understand it. In my day, nobody told you a damn thing, you had to discover things for yourself. But, once you learned it, you never forgot it! How 'll that be?"

"Another thing is that today you have an opportunity to use some pretty fine tools. We had nothin' but crude hand tools to work with. Never had none of these fancy power tools."

After Gramps had answered my question we moved on with the narration.

"Let us see," I thought out loud. "Yesterday, we were talking about the ships you worked on for Heath. You must have been around fifteen then?"

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"Fourteen or fifteen. I can't remember, it's been so long."

Gramps might not have been able to remember the dates, or his exact age when he worked on certain ships, but he still had an alert mind and could remember minute details of any of the vessels he ever worked on.

"Do you remember any of the ships you worked on at Heath's yard?"

"We built the Albion River. She was a 225 or 250 foot, steam schooner that weighed about 382 tons. Now that's a big ship compared to these 15 ton gill netters we're buildin'. Then we built the steam vessel Majestic for the Thompson Steamboat Company and launched her in about 1901. After that I worked on the barkentine Aurora. She was a four masted, sailing ship that we built inside of three months. She was about 250 feet long too."

"What do you remember about the barkentine Aurora?" I asked impatiently. The thought of helping build a barkentine stimulated my imagination. 'Gramps was fortunate when he was young: he had beautiful ships to work on,' I thought.

"When we put her out in front of the Bell-Nelson dock, a big, heavy nor'wester come up and a sea run in there about nine feet high. The ship was pitchin' back and forth. All the riggers got seasick and I was the only one that stayed with the skipper on the ship. He was afraid the masts were going to

snap. They had all the riggin' up, but they hadn't hooked up the turnbuckles. So I helped him hook the turnbuckles to the top of the bulwarks and he said to me afterwards, "I wish you would go to sea with me because you could be a captain like I am, someday." He liked me because I wasn't afraid. What do you think of that?"

"That is pretty good. But, why didn't you go to sea with him?"

"Because I was more interested in learnin' how to build ships than goin' to sea. Besides, I don't have to go to sea to have a good sail. There is enough water here in Puget Sound to suit me!"

"You used to live in Tacoma, didn't you?"

"That's right!" Gramps answered kindly as he sipped from his dark stained drinking glass.

"How did you happen to move from Everett to Tacoma?"

"Hell, wherever they was buildin' ships, that's where I wanted to be. Heath had been biddin' too low and he went in the hole. Had to close his yard. Charlie Morten, a friend of mine, and I had heard that there was a lot of buildin' goin' on in Tacoma. So, we sailed his 48 foot schooner, called the Fly Away, down there and lived on her for a year while we worked in a shipyard building barkentines.

"Another reason we left Everett was that in 1901, ship-building had died out. The turn of the century marked a time

when the old sailing ships had become a dead duck. These old sailing schooners were all being converted to steam schooners. But, I still wanted to learn how to build the sailing vessels before it was too late!"

"Why were they still building barkentines in Tacoma, if everyone was building steam schooners?"

"Hell, I don't know. All I know is that they was buildin' 'em to haul lumber to Australia. All sail, no power. I wanted to learn how, so I went to work for Sloan's shipyard as a helper."

"While I was workin' on the barkentines and buildin' a steam schooner called the Georgia, I was made plankin' boss."

"You mean you were in charge of the planking at the age of seventeen?" I asked with amazement.

"Hell, yes. I had worked under guys in Everett and they kicked the hell out of me when I grew up and learned how to plank with 'em. When I became boss, boy did we go! When I was runnin' the plankin' gang, the guys all quit because I was pusin' 'em too hard. I went to the boss and said, 'God damned it, I can't put these planks on because all these guys quit.!' Do you know what he told me?"

"No. What did he tell you, Gramps?"

"He said, 'You're too god damned tough. They can't take what you do! Take it easy and don't be in such a god damned hurry. You tell 'em a little story once in a while and give

'em a little cheer!'"

"I became a good plankin' boss then. We would kid each other and take our breath once in a while. That's what they do now. They have coffee breaks. Don't they? They sit down and chew the rag. Hell, we never thought of that one day. Today, they don't produce like they used to either and they got ten times better tools than we ever had. How 'll that be? They don't think about how much they produce, you see. They think about how much money they make and how much time they put in. Whether they produce or not, don't matter!"

"How did you first get interested in ships, Gramps? Was it up in Everett, when you were a kid?" I interjected because it was obvious that Gramps was getting side tracked again.

Before retiring for the evening, we spent the rest of the day talking about his early childhood in Banden, Oregon, where he first learned to love ships.

During his early childhood, Gramps became obsessed with the activities of the local Life Saving Crew who were skippered by an old time, sea captain called Captain Scott. They had built a life saving station for the crew who worked full time at this profession and who had the responsibility of rescuing crews of vessels in distress off the Coquille River Bar.

When Gramps was eleven years old he met Captain Scott at

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his home one day and shortly thereafter was accepted by the Life Saving Crew as their official mascot. Whenever they practiced shooting a tail line at their practice tower, which simulated a tall mast of a ship, Gramps would climb up and pull in the main line and secure it to the top of the tower. Then, he would ride the breeches buoy down to ground level where the rest of the crew was hauling in the line it was attached to.

Whenever he was not in school, he was either at the life saving station sweeping up shavings from their shop floor where they used to hand carve wooden models of sloops, cutters, or schooners in their spare time. Or he was out with the crew as they practiced rowing over the Bar. He loved everything about this hazardous work, especially the rescue missions.

From his seat in the local, one room, schoolhouse, he could look out over the Bar and see empty lumber schooners beating across on their way into Banden for a load of lumber. Upon reaching the safety of the north or south jetty, these famous old schooners would be towed by the tug Triumph to a vacant pier where they would be loaded with Port Orford cedar for their return trip to San Francisco.

From the confines of his classroom, Gramps could also see a towering flag pole that was located near the life saving station. Whenever a vessel was in distress, ran aground, or broached while coming in over the Bar, a signal flag was raised and a warning whistle would be blown.

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"I could see the signal from where I'd sit in school. See the vessels comin' in over the Bar with a southeasterly blowin' to beat hell. They'd come in and the wind would die down because there was a high bluff nealry one hundred feet high. They'd loose the wind in the middle of the bar and then they'd broach," Gramps related.

When the warning whistle blew, Gramps would dash out of the classroom and race down a flight of stairs to the awaiting surf boat. Their rescue boat was loaded down with life saving equipment, including breeches buoy, and was perched on a steep set of ways. When the releasing trigger was engaged, the boat and crew shot into the pounding surf and would begin rowing for the stricken vessel to attempt a rescue of the unnerved crew.

"I'd be the last one in the boat and the first one ashore. My job was to take the painter and watch the surf boat while the rest of the crew, all stout men, went out to rescue the crews of the schooners. They'd be clingin' to the riggin': hangin' on to anything they could get a hold of.

"Rainin' like hell. Soakin' wet. It didn't matter. I stayed there and took care of that surf boat. I loved to do it. I hung on to that damn boat and watched it like a hawk!"

Gramps always mentioned how rough the Oregon Coast is near Banden and Coos Bay. Everytime he told me about his experiences and missions with the Life Saving Crew, he would also mention famous shipwrecks and groundings he remembered from

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his youth. He remembered such famous shipwrecks as the wrecked at Coos Bay in 1893, the Bawnmore, also wrecked south of the Coquille River two years later in 1895, the Arago which ran on the rocks on October 20, 1896 near Coos Bay.

During his last year in Bandon, he recalls at least seven sailing schooners that went aground but were later salvaged. He went out on every mission that year and participated in the rescue of the crews from such ships as the Lila & Mattie, the Berwick, and the Lizzy Prene.

The romance, excitement, and adventure of belonging to such an heroic group as the Life Saving Crew had a profound effect on Gramps. He not only learned to love the sea, but he also learned to build hand crafted, wooden models like the crews would fashion in their leisure.

These wooden models were from three to four feet long and the Life Saving Crew always made a spectacular event out of sailing them in the lagoon of the Coquille River in the spring. The entire town would turn out and gather around the lagoon to watch them race. The losers of this annual contest would give their sailing models to their girl friends or to kids who had a good looking sister. The winner would keep his model until the ensuing spring and race it in competition with the loser's newly built models.

Gramps did not have a sister, but he was always watching the crews build their models in the winter months and was

always sweeping up their shavings from the shop floor and he thought he might be given one as a gift. But, that never happened.

After patiently waiting several months to receive a model, he finally decided to build his own. One weekend, he ventured down to the nearby docks where local, Port Orford cedar was piled in huge stacks, awaiting shipment to California to be used as building material for mansions and for the matchwood industry. He cunningly stole a small piece of white cedar from the Banderilla's shipment and carved his own model.

"It was kind of a crude thing because I didn't have the right kind of tools or nothin' to fashion a good one. When I finished, I was ashamed of it and didn't want those life saving crew members to see mine because their boats were so beautiful!"

His mother had sewn flour sacks together to form the sails and one day he went down to the unoccupied lagoon alone to see how it would sail. As he was about to test it in the water, he heard the approaching footsteps of one of the members of the life saving crew, apparently on his way home from his watch at the station. Gramps hid behind a bush in order not to be detected and camouflaged his model. The crew member spotted him and skirted behind the bush to see what he was up to.

"What are you doin', Charlie?" he asked. Surprised at my grandfather's actions.

"Nothin'" Gramps answered as he tried to ignore his

model which was partially visible in the underbrush.

"What have you got there?" the intruder inquired as he reached under the foliage to ascertain what Gramps was trying to conceal. "Did you carve this model?"

Gramps acted embarrassed, but then admitted he had made it.

"Don't be ashamed of that," the crew member said while inspecting the model. "You know, you're doing pretty good. If you keep building these boats you'll do a better job than any of us someday. If I ever build another one, I'm going to give it to you!"

Gramps concluded his model building story by saying to me, "I moved to Everett before they began buildin' thier models again, but, if I had one, I'd keep it to this day! They were artists: them guys."

From my observation of Gramps, it appeared that this early, adolescent experience had an effect on his subsequent behavior. He not only learned to do things for himself, without relying on anyone else for help, but he also discovered a talent that has been developing to this day: shipbuilding.

Shortly after this model building episode, Gramps and his family moved to Washington. Apparently, his real father had abandoned the family of three when Gramps was very young. His mother remarried and several years later his stepfather ventured to Everett to find work in a sawmill. After finding work, his stepfather sent for Gramps, his younger brother, and his mother.

in the fall of 1898. On their trip to Everett, they travelled on many legendary vessels. When they left Banden, they took the Alice Blanchard, a steam vessel with sails, from Marshfield to Astoria, Oregon. From Astoria, the family travelled across the Columbia River to Klamath, Washington on the famous sternwheeler, the Bailey Gatzert. She had been launched in Seattle in 1890 and won a famous race of the same year by beating another celebrated sternwheeler, the Greyhound. After arriving in Seattle by train, they took a horse drawn hack to the Steven's Hotel and after spending the night took the same vessel that had lost the supremacy of the sound, the Greyhound, directly to Everett where they disembarked.

In 1896, Everett was a town surrounded by a forest of tree trunks, which reflected the main industry of the region: logging. At this time, Everett boasted a saw mill, a nailworks, a box factory, and a link to Seattle via the Great Northern Railroad. However, Everett remained a poor town with no lucrative commerce or thriving business community.

Apparently conditions were rough for the family in Everett as they had previously been in Banden. Gramps's stepfather ran out on the family, which had grown to four. Gramps would dive for crabs, dig clams, pick oysters, and catch fish in order to provide the family with food. He sold wooden models of ships he had carved from beachwood to the sons of the more wealthy families for twenty-five cents apiece. His mother washed clothes, nursed the sick, and sewed for a meager income.

like Bremerton.

"All right! It was just after the Spanish-American War and there was a hell of a lot of work at that yard. We had to repair the bomb damaged decks of the battleship Oregon because they had been blown to pieces in the Phillipines. We also had to do work on two cruisers called the New York and the Brocklyn. We had the naval vessels repaired within eight months and then, the last ship I worked on at the Navy Yard was the four masted schooner called the Ernest."

"Do you recall anything else that happened at the Bremerton Navy Yard while you were there?" Even at his age Gramps had a keen, alert mind and could remember details vividly if you asked the right questions.

"Well, after I quit at the Navy Yard, I returned to Tacoma because Heath, who had moved down from Everett, had the Clallam and the Jefferson to build and I wanted to learn more from him. Then, after we finished building those two ships I returned to the Navy Yard to find employment again. You see, I had an excellent/excellent rating on my record from that yard and I figured it would help gettin' rehired.

"In the meantime, Teddy Roosevelt had passed a child labor law which prohibited anyone from working that was under twenty-one years of age.

"I goes over there, after spending almost a year and a half working in Tacoma, to find work. And do you know what? There

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was a Swede in line in front of me, he couldn't hardly speak our language. He said he was twenty-one by about a month. And he could o' lied, nobody o' knowed. After they took his name, I put in my record to the guy in the office to hire people. Do you know what he said?" Gramps asked me as he leaned forward in his easy chair and appeared to be getting more irritated the more he became involved in his story.

"No! What did he say to you, Gramps?" I asked, thinking maybe the story might be humorous, but knowing by Gramps's actions that it would not be.

"He said, 'You have to be twenty-one before you can go to work!' I could o' lied, but my record with excellent/excellent rating showed my age and everything.

"Do you know what I said? I said, 'Hell, I worked here for damn near a year before.

"They said, 'It don't matter! It's the law now!'

"Finally I told them, 'When a god damned Swede can come over here and be a foreigner and can get a job. And I was born in this god damned country and can't get a job, then you can stick your god damned Navy Yard up your god damned ass!'

"After I said that, I walked away and I never been back since and that's a fact. I never went back to that son of a bitchin' Navy Yard ever. I wouldn't go back there to save the earth!

"But you know somethin'? All the Japanese, the little