

CHAPTER III

The shop seemed so large and roomy to Bob as he took six bricks from the stack against the wall. He felt proud but also very humbled by his new property. There was something scary about having your own establishment. It was demanding, something you had to live up to.

Nearly one month ago, on the first of June, he had loaded up his jigs, welding equipment, brick, paint, pipe caps and tools and moved in. The shop was about twenty by eighty feet of space in the back which he divided into work areas for welding, bricking, painting and storage. He built shelves and work benches; the outside was completely whitewashed, and FISHER STOVE WORKS in large black letters was printed across the top of the outside front wall.

Carol and the girls had scrubbed the grease and grime off the floors, walls and windows of the office. At the moment Carol was using an old dresser that Ed's wife gave to her for a desk. The large mirror was off; it had three drawers down each side and one long center drawer along the top. She sat on the low stool that fit under it to do her paperwork and answer the phone. Carol had suggested that a proper desk might look better, but Bob refused. A fancy looking desk wasn't important. They weren't in the furniture business, were they? It was hard for her keeping books with no calculator, but at least he bought her a small portable typewriter.

The office was small, only nine by ten feet, and there was room for just one other straight back wooden chair in the corner across the room. But somehow Carol had made it look homey with a



planter hanging in the front window, a picture of an Oregon countryside on the wall, a calendar and a coffeepot perking on a small table in the other far corner.

Bob finished cutting a firebrick and showed his son Jesse how to install it. Jesse learned quickly and was especially eager to please his dad. Bob felt good about having the kids close by during the summer school vacation.

He heard voices out in the office. He immediately put down his saw and hurried out to the front. Hopefully it was a customer. Things were slow and not many people came in. Most of them were Bob's old friends stopping to chew the fat. A few were salesmen trying to sell office supplies or advertising space. They were running ads now in the *Valley News* as well as the *Register Guard*.

It was a man and his wife. Carol had greeted them. They both ran to meet any customer. It was a joke between them as to how many sales they made. They counted each customer who said he would think it over and who they were certain would come back; they counted the invoices, even the number of deliveries and installations. Of course, it totalled up three times as many as the actual sales were, but it kept them charged up.

Carol turned them over to Bob as soon as he came into the office. She was a little shy, and apart from staying around to talk to the ladies about cooking on the stove, she usually let Bob do the talking.

“How’s it goin’?” Bob asked.

The man appeared to be a farmer. He wore old faded levis mended in several places and manure was caught under the heels of his boots. His nose and the part of his forehead exposed under a straw hat were peeling and sunburned from working outside.

Bob always analyzed his customers so he could fit his talk according to what they were. He could gear his spiel toward ecology for an environmental advocate, wood to a logger, rising costs to a businessman, or hunting and fishing to a sportsman. He could even talk about the Lord to a religious person. Of course, he had to keep Carol on hand for help on that one.

No matter what kind of guy a customer was, Bob always agreed with him. Win them over. You can catch more bees with honey than vinegar.

“We come in to have a look at those stoves of yours,” the man said. He spoke slowly and was in no rush.

“You want it for your house? Where do you live?” Bob asked. Feel them out, get to know them. He felt he had to take his time with this old codger.

“We own a farm up by Marcola. Raise a few cattle,” the man said. He took off his hat and was beginning to relax. “We’re thinking about putting a wood stove in it.”

“Come on back, You can have a look at it,” Bob said. He showed them the stove he had installed for display on the wall just on the other side of the office. It was a windy but warm day, and he had the heat turned down. Carol had a pot roast braising in a metal skillet on the top level. She usually cooked their dinners — spaghetti, stew or chicken and noodles — here at the shop, and it was ready to eat when they returned home in the evening.

“This stove doesn’t emit smoke even when the door is open,” Bob began. “It’ll burn wood all night — you can start the fire in November and it keeps going until June. It requires wood only

twice a day. Ten dollars of wood a month will heat a two thousand square foot home."

Bob didn't try to sell himself. Stick to the features of the stove. And be honest. People can tell when someone is giving them a line of bullshit. And he didn't like the idea of being a greedy money hungry SOB, either.

The wife lifted up the lid of the pot and looked in at Carol's roast. Her hands were coarse, strong.

"Do you really cook on it?" she asked. "I can remember years ago having a woodstove. How warm and happy our kitchen used to be." Her eyes became a little misty.

"How good does the thing work?" the man asked.

"Nearly 100% efficient."

The man walked around the stove, opened it up, felt the door, the latch.

"How long before the damn thing'll wear out?" he asked.

"Shit, this thing will last longer than you do," Bob answered.

The man chuckled. Use a little humor. If the customer swore first, then Bob could, too.

"How much is it?" the man asked.

Bob hadn't brought up the money; he usually left that until the last. "Two hundred and twenty-five. This stove will pay for itself in six months. I'll give you fifty bucks more than what you paid for it if it doesn't do what I say."

The man fidgeted with his hat. "You take trades?" he asked, looking down at the floor.

"Hell, yeah. What you got?" So far he had worked out a deal for a CB radio and a three hundred H&H Magnum rifle. The idea was to get a stove out there. Hell, it would sell ten more.

"Can you use half a beef? A Charlois. Maybe as a hundred dollars down payment, anyway."

"Sounds good to me," Bob said.

They walked back into the office. Carol took out the big red ledger book and wrote down their name, address and the date. The couple said they would pay off the balance at ten dollars a month. As usual, Bob set no finance charges. He was in the stove business,

not making money off poor people.

They talked about the delivery date and the installation a while. When they left, it gave Bob a sense of fulfillment to see people satisfied by something he had made.

Carol was typing up a statement.

“That finishes up our materials,” he said to her.

“We’ll have to buy another lot,” Carol said. “We’ll do what you said — plough back what we earn into the business.”

“I’d like to buy for twenty stoves this time, but I don’t know if we should. It’s the end of the month, the rent on the shop will be due. We have our household bills — ”

“Things are going to pick up, Bobby,” she said. “We have to think positively, go ahead with things. If we pray, God will see us through.”

“God is going to help the son of a bitch who helps himself,” he bantered back.

Bob often razzed Carol about her religion. But down deep, he admired her strong faith. What he showed on the outside wasn’t really how he felt on the inside. There had been too many miracles in his lifetime for him to ignore God. Such as the time when he was alone in Mom’s old ’37 Plymouth and it started to roll down the hill while she went into the store a moment. He was only three years old but he could still remember vividly the car ramming a woodpile that just happened to be on the bank before it would have gone straight into the McKenzie River. Or the time he had disobeyed his mother and taken his tricycle down the street during the 1945 floods and his Uncle Jim just happened to be coming by and fished him out, half drowned and clinging to the limb of a bush. Or the time he had made a slide out of the water trough in the chicken house and caught his throat on the wire going down and nearly choked to death. He wouldn’t be alive today if something hadn’t just happened to make his mother come outside to hang up her washing.

He didn’t get to church much as a kid. Once his mother sent him to a Catholic Bible school, but he didn’t like the strict nuns. He left, came home and began picking filberts with his brother. His mother

said nothing more about it.

And he didn't act too religious. In fact, he sometimes covered up his beliefs by acting like a horse's ass. But inside it was a serious matter. What it all boiled down to was conscience. It will get you if you do something wrong and make you pay. He thought of his past — chasing around, raising hell. It sure had worked on him, anyway.

Five days later, rent for the shop was due. Bob had gone ahead and bought the necessary materials for twenty more stoves, and they didn't have any more money. He paced the floor, watching the cars go by out the front window. The sun was shining, hardly the kind of weather to sell stoves. No one had come in for two days, and it was only one hour until they closed.

“What the hell are we going to tell the owner?” he growled at Carol. She was sitting with her head bowed, her hands clasped together in her lap.

“The Lord will give us an answer,” she said, without lifting her head.

Carol had turned to the Lord after her previous husband was hit and killed by a car. She came out to Upper Camp Creek to find peace and serenity, taking in foster children for income. She waited patiently for the Lord to put a man at her doorstep. The only one showing up was Bob, and most of the time it was to have her launder his shirt or watch his two kids awhile. After they became chummy, he tried to put the make on her. But nothing doing — it had to be the real thing with her.

Just then Bob heard the sound of a car motor drawing closer. A car pulled up outside. A man dressed in a three piece suit and tie walked in and said, “I want to buy one of your Fisher Stoves. My neighbor has one and it works great. I'd like to get it in during this good weather.” He paid cash right then and there.

Bob took the money that same evening over to the landlord and paid the next month's rent. He guessed he had better chalk up his fourth miracle.

Everyone seemed to have that same idea of buying and putting in

their stove during the summer. Things started rolling. By the end of July, Bob was selling four stoves a day, and it kept him moving.

He came in one hot day after installing a stove out in Walterville. He was sweating, and the six pack of beer he had picked up on the way back tasted good. It seemed to pick him up, keep him on the go.

He walked quickly back to the shop. He had one more stove to load and deliver this afternoon.

He was provoked when he saw Tyler idly looking out the window. Tyler was using the striker to light his cigarette. He was a young kid, big and strong, but it drove Bob crazy that he was so slow, especially when Bob was paying him by the hour.

Bob had hired Tyler only last week. He needed someone to help weld. There was just so much Bob had to do — figuring, pricing steel (which was still going up), buying parts, testing paints, loading, delivering, installing as well as waiting on customers.

He and Carol traded off serving out front now. She had enough to do, too. She worked alongside him in the back, standing there handing him his gloves, torch, helmet or welding rod. Or she bricked with Jesse, painted, or cleaned up with the girls. It wasn't easy for her to keep the books straight either, because of Bob's habit of jotting down prices, names and addresses, or dates on the nearest wall.

Then only a few days ago, another problem had come up. A customer had returned to complain that his cast iron door had cracked. It cost Bob \$100, but he replaced it. He was going to stand behind each one of his stoves and his word. Then it worried him afterwards that there might be others. He couldn't stand to think of his stove as being flimsy or faulty in any way, so he became occupied making new patterns for doors. The crack had occurred between the draft caps, so he decided to put trees across the middle of the door to give it extra thickness and strength. Fortunately, the new design even looked more decorative.

He had added a new model to his line, too. The Mama Bear. The Papa Bear put out too much heat for some of the smaller homes, so he made the Mama five inches shorter and two inches narrower.

Another matter which he had taken care of was the patents. At

last he could afford to pay for the finalization of the patent papers. Now he felt proud that the stove was really his, his own creation, offspring and contribution to society. There were others who did nothing but talk about saving energy and burning up our un-replenishable resources, but he had done something about it.

Bob crunched in the empty beer can and threw it in the garbage pail then went over to the work shelf.

“Come on, Tyler. We have to get this stove done. I’ve got to take it out to Goshen and put it in tonight. Bring over the door and I’ll help you put it on.”

Bob began to examine the firebox Tyler had welded that morning. It was not as good as Bob would have done it. He was very picky, a perfectionist at welding, and it made him mad to see Tyler’s sloppy workmanship. He wished he could point out to Tyler in a calm constructive way all of his mistakes, but he felt himself getting riled up. He might fly off the handle, start to stutter and make a fool of himself.

He heard a loud crash over by Tyler. He looked around. Tyler had dropped the door and broken off the hinge.

Bob came unstrung. He could feel the veins in his neck tighten, his blood heating up his face, neck and the top of his head.

“What the hell is the matter with you?” he yelled. “We only have one door left and you drop the son of a bitch.”

Needless to say, Tyler didn’t last the month. Carol, however was the one to let him go.

“I can’t do it,” Bob said. “If I get started, I might punch him out.”

By next month, Bob had gone through three more welders. He wasn’t too sure he was going to keep the two hippies he had now, either. The problem was taking too much of his time. Right now he needed to concentrate on improving the draft caps. Two people had complained that the pipe caps on the stove got too hot and burned their hand. After much brain racking, he came up with the idea of adding a bar made of thin metal, extending about one inch horizon-

tally out from the cap. It would be air cooled, insulated and wouldn't be hot to touch.

As he sketched out the design, he couldn't get his mind off his troubles as an employer. He had hired Mac, a guy with whom he worked at Weyerhaeuser. Mac was on the bottle and couldn't keep a job. But Bob felt sorry for him and took him on. He couldn't turn away a down and outer, a loser. It made him feel good to give somebody a new chance, a break. But Mac didn't show up once too often and Bob had too many customers waiting for stoves. So he and Carol had made up the story of business being slow and gave him notice.

Then came Billy. This time Bob decided to hire on a piecemeal basis. He paid Billy so much a fire box, a top and the leg. To begin with, there was the clash over that damn rock n' roll music. Bob had bought a small radio and put it on the window sill so he could listen to the Fisher Stove commercials that were now playing. Also, he liked to listen to Johnny Cash and Charlie Pride. But everytime he turned his back, Billy would change the station. Finally Bob exploded, "If you touch that goddamn radio again, I'm going to bust your skull wide open."

Even a few days after that, when Bob came back after bringing in a load of new supplies, there was the radio again blasting out that rock n' roll. But it was when Bob caught Billy turning in an overcounting of his work that he wanted him out. Bob was so inflamed, that again Carol had to do the firing.

"I'll kill him," he said. Bob hated anyone to cheat him. He could bawl like a baby over a wounded dog, but he would slam a two by four over the head of anyone who cheated him out of three cents.

He didn't know why he couldn't seem to handle employees. He had been a foreman over as many as twenty or thirty men, he hadn't thought twice about chewing a man out for stuffing. He was working alongside them and he expected everyone to pull his weight. But now it seemed different. They were working for *him*. Somehow he didn't feel right about demanding a lot. And they seemed to sense his softness and took advantage of him.

These two hippies were no fireballs, either. But this month was so busy, he decided to put up with what he could get.

Even Mom started coming down to help with the painting. And Dad was running the hacksaw — cutting the channel iron for the door seals, the legs and the two inch hinges out of twenty foot flat bar. He spent a lot of time tinkering, however. He was forever working on some improvement to the stove, either water coils or various styles of legs. And, of course, the oven he was always talking about.

His woman had left him. Although Baxter said she had run off with money from his bank account, Bob suspected Baxter had paid her off to leave him in peace. Now Baxter was being nicer to Mom — helping her with her garden and laying new linoleum in her bathroom. She was warming up, but she said she refused to move back in with him at Upper Camp Creek.

Baxter was looking over Bob's shoulder now, watching him draw out the new handle on the pipe cap.

“Think that'll block the heat, Bobby? Kind of ugly. Sticks out — might catch on someone's leg. That's what you made up your mind to go to?”

“Yep, going to apply for the patent tomorrow. Probably cost me a good \$750 bucks.”

No matter if they were selling stoves, seemed like they were always short of money. It all went back in, and they never seemed to get ahead.

Just then the Murrays came in through the door. They were going to pick up their stove five days ago and hadn't shown up. He signalled to Carol, busy on the other side of the shop chipping off slag, that he would take care of them.

He told the Murrays he had stored the stove in the back, to wait and that he would wheel it out for them. But he searched the entire storage area and couldn't find the stove. He grew impatient. Where the hell could it be? He had so much to do, and it pissed him off to waste time looking for something. He called for everybody to help. Everyone began searching except Baxter. He had slipped out the side door and driven off.

Bob had an intuitive feeling. He looked in the far back area where Baxter had been tinkering around that day. Sure enough, there was the Murray's stove, only it was about five feet tall and had a glass door oven. Baxter had completely modified the whole thing.

For the first time in his life, Bob was furious at his dad. He could overlook his tinkering, his meddling, his criticisms, but this was going to take hours to redo, time he didn't have.

He had to make apologies to the Murrays. He promised to have them another stove ready that evening.

It was already four o'clock and that meant he wouldn't be home till 8:00 p.m. Son of a bitch. He wouldn't be able to eat with the kids again. He missed talking to them, teasing and telling them jokes.

He walked over to where Carol was working. She was on her hands and knees. There were black smudges on the front of her smock, her arms and around one eyelid. The hair along the base of her neck and around her temples was dripping wet from perspiration.

"We'll have to get this stove ready to give to the Murrays," Bob said.

Immediately she stood up and moved over to make room for him. He looked the stove over. There were still berries in places she had missed.

"That looks like shit," he said.

Carol's eyes widened into a glare. The black around her eyes emphasized their ferociousness. She threw down the scraper onto the floor.

"If it's not good enough for you, then I don't want to do this job anymore," she said. She had been working hard and wasn't going to put up with Bob's temper.

But Bob was fit to be tied. "If you're not going to do it, then I'll do it myself," he said.

He grabbed her wrist and pulled her over to the entrance to the office. Then he took a piece of soapstone out of his pocket and drew a line across the threshold.

“You keep your ass over that side of the line from now on,” he said.

He stomped back to the stove, took hold of the scraper and knelt down to begin chipping. Just as he started, he saw a brick fly across the room, hit the wall and splatter all over the floor. He looked up and saw Carol still standing at the doorway, tears in her eyes, her arm still suspended from throwing the brick. Then he looked at the scattered pieces of brick.

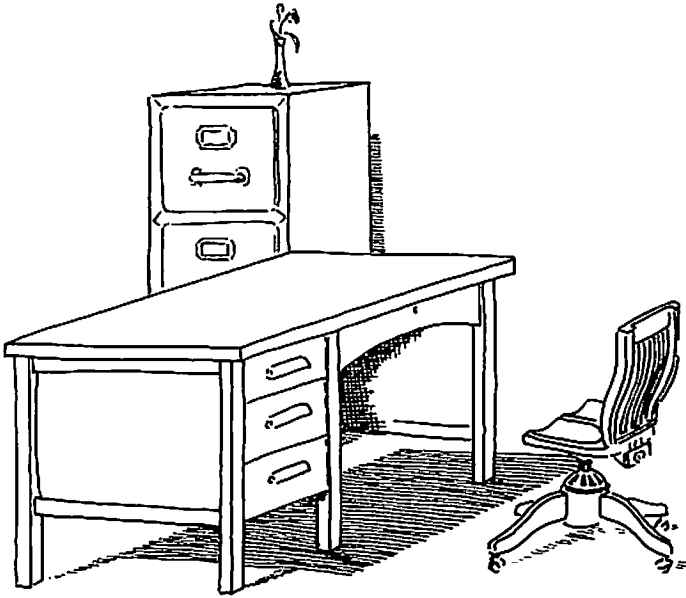
“There goes another thirty five cents down the drain,” he said in a sarcastic tone and turned coldly back to the stove.

It took him only one and a half hours to clean, paint and brick the stove. By that time he had cooled off and felt sorry for the way he had spoken to Carol. He looked into the office and saw Carol sitting at the dresser desk, still crying. No use in trying to say anything. He knew it would take her a long time to get over it. She didn't forget about things like him and stayed mad longer. One of the faults Bob had tried to overcome all of his life was his hotheadedness. Blow up, let off steam, say things without thinking. He would like himself to be one of those people who were always cool, collected, in control of every situation. But try as he did, he never seemed to get there. He felt particularly bad about taking his frustrations out on Carol. She just seemed to be an easy target and yet she was the one who meant more to him than anyone in the world.

He decided to make it up to her. The next morning he went shopping and bought her a new calculator and a large desk. It was second hand but it was solid oak and had lots of drawers. He even splurged for another fifty dollars and bought a file cabinet.

The next day Carol was calmed down and as loving as ever, but Bob's problem was still there. He just wasn't getting enough production. His Mom, bless her, was hard at it, Carol was re-arranging her office, the hippies turned up late, and his dad spent the morning trying to convince Bob of all the advantages of his remodelled stove. There was no use in trying to change him.

Frustration and irritability were coming back on Bob. Then Ron



Correll walked in. He and Ron had worked together at Steelcraft, but Bob hadn't heard from Ron since he went to visit him in the hospital after the shooting accident. Ron was hunting deer last fall with his bow and arrow in the archery area when a double-ought buckshot hit him dead center in the chest. Even though Ron had thoracotomy surgery, the injury was so severe he didn't return to work. Bob took up a collection from among the workers and took it to him while he was recovering in the hospital.

"I hear you are making stoves now," Ron said. "Susie and I been looking for one for our place out in Veneta." Ron looked thin, and there was a drawn, tight look to his face.

"Give you a special deal, Ron," said Bob. They shook hands. "Good to see you. What've you been doin'?"

"Things haven't been so good," Ron said. He took out a Camel

and lit it. "I lost my case. The court made me look like some kind of nut and the guy who shot me got off scot-free. I went back to welding in February, but it was too heavy for me. I didn't feel like I was doing my part, so I quit. Call it self pride, I guess. Then I went to Lane Community College, decided to learn a new trade — drafting. But goin' back to school wasn't for me. So I got a job in a factory sitting on a metal stool screwing together pipe fittings. That nearly blew my mind. I couldn't take it. Since then we've been barely makin' it."

Ron had already smoked his Camel down to a small butt. As he turned to toss it out the window, Bob saw a gun and holster attached to the back of his belt.

"What the hell is that thing for?" Bob asked.

Ron gave the gun a firm pat. "I've decided a man needs to carry arms in this country to protect himself. I got four kids to think of," he said. "A couple of weirdos high on something flagged Susie and I down in our Volkswagen one day. They waved a 22 automatic rifle at Susie and threatened to shoot both our heads off. I managed to speed out of there and called the Sheriff to report the incident, but you know nothing was ever done to those kids."

"Looks like you've had some bad luck," Bob said. "Want to work here?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Same thing I do."

"Only if I can be an asset to you," Ron said. "I have to feel I'm earning my pay. I don't want to be overhead."

"Okay, we'll just see how she goes."

"Just one thing, Bob. My contract has to be based on the scriptures — a slave-master relationship. You're the boss. Only by being subservient to you do I serve God fully. And that comes first in my book."

"Sounds good to me," Bob said.

"I'll be there in the morning with my tools, coveralls and hood."

Bob broke him in on the first day. Before long, Ron could weld together a firebox, burn out the exhaust hole, put the exhaust vent

in, construct an ash fender, install the door and put in the draft caps at the rate of five to six stoves a day. Within two weeks Bob put Ron in charge of the entire manufacturing.

Ron took his responsibility seriously. "I figure my job is to keep you out of the shop," Ron told him. "Leave you free to coordinate your sales, installations and advertising."

The first thing Ron did was fire the two hippies. "Hell, you or I could accomplish more with a stick rod than they do with a wire welder," he said. "I want somebody working not picking his nose."

Ron showed Bob a box of burnt out drill bits and taps. "They weren't careful or shop wise, either," he said.

Bob went into the office and brought back a few scraps of paper. "Here, start pulling a few names from these. I scribbled down a few men who came in and applied for work."

Ron began interviewing and hired an eighteen-year-old kid for making small parts. But the most reliable worker he could find was his own wife, Susie. She quit her job at Williams Bakery and worked a full eight-hour shift welding, painting and bricking as diligently as any man Bob had ever seen.

The only allowance Bob made for her was to watch his swearing. He was afraid it might offend her religious beliefs. Carol and Susie, however, spoke the same language and developed a deep friendship. And Carol was now able to spend more time out front in the office and serving customers.

CHAPTER IV

The territory was getting too damn big, Bob thought, as he looked over the names and addresses of his long order list. People were buying stoves from all over — Portland, Corvallis, Klamath Falls, Salem. Even out of state — Seattle, Washington; Boise, Idaho; and cities in North California he hadn't even heard of before. Of course, for those long distances, either the customers came over for their stoves or Bob shipped them by truck or rail. But still, his deliveries were getting pretty far out — Florence, Newport, Coos Bay, Bend and Medford. He had to hire one more man to help out — his nephew, Jerry Hodgin — which meant he now had four guys plus Ron and Susie.

And to think he was just touching the surface of each one of those towns. Hell, if he really promoted those places he could sell thousands more stoves. But even with bustin' his ass more than he was now, he knew he couldn't supply enough stoves. He had a hard enough time just supplying Springfield and Eugene.

The only way would be to start up shops in those other locations. But that meant he would have to go there himself, find a building, hire people, do the promotion work. He didn't have time to be away. Besides, he was a home town boy. Even going as far as Portland made him nervous, and his thoughts were only occupied with getting back to Upper Camp Creek.

The perfect setup would be if someone else opened and ran the shop. Just pay Bob, say \$15 a stove. The idea was appealing. He began to envision . . . If there were 200 shops situated all over the United States, and if each one sold just one stove a day, then he

could sit back and collect \$2500 a day. He smiled at the thought. Bob Fisher a rich man. He could do anything he wanted or felt like doing. Take it easy, have a few beers, go fishing, diddle a lot, visit the relatives, buy some of that land he always wanted — a new tractor, maybe a new combine. He would be in seventh heaven instead of struggling every day to survive like he was now.

His daydreaming had to come to an end when two customers came in through the door. Carol had gone out for some doughnuts, so Bob had to take care of them.

“Howdy, I’m Bob Fisher. Anything I can do for you?”

They were two young men dressed in cotton tee shirts, cutoffs and sandals. “My name is Paul Zyri and this is Claudio Querin. We saw these stoves advertised in the newspapers and grew curious to see them,” said the one with dark hair. The other was heavysset and had long hair. Both of them looked like hippies but were clean and didn’t look like dopers.

“Sure thing,” said Bob. “Greatest stove there is.” He took them to the back and showed them the stove. It wasn’t burning — August was too hot. Sometimes, however, if the customer requested, he would light it up temporarily.

“You from around here?” Bob asked.

“No, we are from British Columbia,” Paul said.

Now Canada. What a market that would be! Cold winters, even higher energy costs, and lots of timber.

Paul and Claudio began looking the stove over. Bob ran through its high efficiency, adaptability, longevity, and explained the natural circulating system. They seemed to be interested in how it was constructed. Bob guessed them to be mechanics. He had an idea.

“Hey, how about you guys makin’ these stoves?”

They didn’t answer. They smirked a little as though they thought he was joking.

“I’m serious,” Bob said. “The stove business will grow. People like to burn wood, that is why every house has a fireplace. But they are only five to eight percent efficient. Wood is replenishable, and there is enough slashwood to heat every house in the country without depleting the forests. It wouldn’t take much money

to start up. This is an opportunity for young men like you.”

At that moment a car pulled up outside the shop, then another followed behind it. “You can see for yourself how good the stoves sell.” Bob said. “It’ll be busy like this for you once people get to know about Fisher Stoves. Word gets around.”

The two young men looked at one another. They seemed impressed. “It’s worth a try,” Paul said. “What kind of a deal would we get?”

“I’ll sell you a franchise. All I ask is \$1000 for the area and about eight percent of the gross.

Bob had no idea what a franchise was worth. He had very little background in business administration or finance. But he had a strong sense of fairness. Eight percent of the gross worked out about eighteen dollars a stove.

The people outside were out of their cars and coming in the shop now, and he would have to serve them.

“Tell you what. Go back and have Ron Correll show you how to make these stoves,” he said to them. “Then come on out to my place at Upper Camp Creek for supper. We’ll talk about it some more.”

He called to Ron and turned them over to him. Then he tended to the customers. He gave his best sales pitch because he knew Paul and Claudio were watching to see if he had made a sale. Fortunately, both parties bought a stove.

Carol came back with the doughnuts for the 10:30 a.m. break. Bob noticed the bulging bag. She was always thoughtful and bought for everyone.

He was busting to tell her. “I think I just sold a franchise to build Fisher Stoves up in Canada,” he said.

“That’s great, Bobby,” she said calmly and went on putting the doughnuts on a large tray at the small table in the corner. She never disagreed. If he was going to go to China to sell stoves, she would back him up just as long as she was assured of his love. The only time she got edgy was when he gave her a bad time. She took it wrong, as if it was her own doing, when it was really only his own bad mood that made him spout off at her. Right now he felt very

loving. He took the tray out of her hand, laid it on the desk and gave her a long, strong caress.

That evening while Carol and the girls were preparing supper, Bob and the two young men discussed the terms of the short homemade contract he had drawn up. Bob had called the patent agent that afternoon to apply for a patent in Canada. The agent advised Bob to sell licenses to manufacture the stove plus a royalty. A franchise, he said, carried too many restrictions.

“All it says here,” Bob said, “is that you have to sell in your own territory, build the stove according to specification, pay a \$1000 license fee and minimum royalty of six percent — that’s about \$15 a stove.”

He had lowered the percentage after thinking it over later in the day. He felt guilty over making too much money off beginners. Anyway, he figured the less money they sent him, the more they would put into the business and that eventually would make Bob more money in the long run.

“I’ll supply you the doors from here. No sense in you going to the expense of having patterns made. I’ll keep tabs of your sales by the number doors I send out.”

Paul had a few questions. They sat up talking over a few beers until 1:00 a.m. in the morning. Carol made up a bed on the couch, and they spent the night there. The next morning they all signed the contract, and Carol took it into town to have it notarized.

From then on, at every chance that came his way, Bob tried to solicit customers, relatives, old friends, and even salesmen, as Fisher Stove licensees.

Frank Jorgenson and his wife Barbara, who was also Bob’s cousin, were down from Seattle to visit her folks, Uncle George and Aunt Hestor. On the night of the family get-together, Bob spent the evening discussing the stove business and showing them the one-page licensee contract. Frank at the time was an armored car driver, but he was having trouble with his knees. Bob convinced him this was a way out of his predicament. They bought a license

for the Seattle area, brought a man down for Bob to teach to make stoves, went back to Seattle and began to manufacture.

Then there was Ted Howe, a short, husky man who came looking for a sawdust furnace. He was in the heating and sheet metal business.

“What the hell do you want with one of those outdated things when you can have a Fisher?” Bob asked him.

Ted looked the stove over and was thoroughly convinced it was the best heater he had ever seen.

“Why don’t you build these things yourself?” Bob asked. In two days Ted was a licensee in Newport.

Mat Cullen had already seen a Fisher Stove. He knew its advantages and the favorable response it brought from people. Bob didn’t have much trouble talking him into buying a license for Canby.

Jake Jackson only wanted someone to build him a barbecue. Bob and he hardly became acquainted before he was off to Redmond making Fisher Stoves. There was one initial holdup, however. Jake was short of money and needed \$1000 to buy steel before the price went up again. Bob saw Jake as a sincere, hard-working type. Tall, thin and fair, he wore a cowboy hat and a wide belt buckle. Bob did not hesitate to loan him the money.

Everywhere Bob promoted or displayed his stove, he was on the lookout for potential licensees: The rodeo, the garden show and the Springfield parade, where he won first prize for the most original float.

At the Eugene fair in September, he had floor space in the Commercial Building. He was feeling rather cocky, because he had sold over one hundred stoves. A handsome man with silver grey hair and wearing a striped suit stopped to look at Bob’s display. Bob gave him a brochure, let him have a moment to look it over and was about to begin his sales speech when the man asked, “Are you satisfied with your present building as a manufacturing facility? I am a representative for the Hi-C Construction Company. We sell pole buildings. They serve very well for small factories, warehouses and such.”

He whipped out a card from a pocket inside his coat. Bob looked

at the card. Dunagan. Arnold Dunagan. Here was a switch. He was trying to sell Bob. The guy was a smooth talker, cool, polite. Bob liked his style.

“Hey, I’ve heard of those, I’ll keep it in mind,” Bob said. He tried to pretend he was interested. Can’t turn the guy off, he might buy a stove. “What do you think of my stove?” he asked. Better get back on the track.

“Very impressive,” Dunagan said. “I might be interested.”

Bob smiled. Dunagan was using the same tactic. He knows how to peddle, all right.

“What would you think about making these stoves and selling them?” he said.

It was Dunagan’s turn to smile. “Right now I’m pretty tied up in these pole buildings. But I’ve been around enough never to turn my back on something good. I’ll keep it in mind.” He held out his hand, and Bob shook it.

“Nice talking to you, Mr. Fisher.”

“Call me Bob. Hope to see you again.” Bob had a hunch he would, too.

As the Fisher Stove was getting more and more known, the licenses became more attractive and sought after. The television commercial helped. Bob had decided the script the producer wrote out did not have enough pizzaz. He was paying \$1000 for it, and by god, he wanted some punch to it. He figured he could do better.

He told Jerry his idea one afternoon over a beer on their way back from an installation. Jerry laughed and said, “You wouldn’t have the guts to say that in front of all those people.”

That cinched it. Now he had to show him he could. He rehearsed aloud in his pickup all the way to the television recording room. The station manager listened to it first to give his approval.

“Go ahead if you want to, but I think it will offend people,” he said.

Bob wore his new leather jacket with fringe down the sleeves

and around the bottom. His recently grown moustache was neatly shaped. He was in good physical shape from long hours of heavy labor, and he knew he looked good.

But when the cameras started to roll, his heart thumped hard inside his chest and he began to rock to and fro on his heels.

The shot showed Bob standing beside his stoves. "Howdy, I'm Bob Fisher," he said. "If you're tired of high energy costs, then you need a Fisher Stove." He had thirty seconds to mention the triple seal door, the two cooking levels and the superior craftsmanship, and to point out that the stove didn't smoke and held a fire overnight. Then came the punchline.

"Remember," he said, "these bears are super heavy. So if you've been drinking prune juice, don't try to lift one."

Immediately people came into the shop laughing to beat hell. There were phone calls from all over the county and state complimenting him on his performance. One little boy saw him walking across 42nd Street and shouted from a car window, "Hey, Mr. Fisher, been drinking any prune juice lately?" He then stuck out his tongue and went 'pfffft.' Bob heard everyone in the car squeal with laughter.

Bob was getting lots of attention in the newspapers, also. There were feature stories in the Portland *Oregonian* and *Oregon People*. One article in the *Register Guard* printed Bob's whimsical tale of how the Baby Bear was born: "We left a Papa Bear next to a Mama Bear stove one night and the next morning, there it was — the Baby Bear."

Art Beevor from Beaverton had followed the Fisher Stove progress in those feature stories. He told Bob he was looking for something to do when he retired. Maybe bring his son in on it. He came down with his wife to buy a license and soon was making a fine product. A craftsman and perfectionist like Bob, there was some debate as to who made the superior stove.

Mark Williams called from Silverton. He wanted out of the real estate business. The Red Carpet Company had grown too big for him. He liked the idea of a small home town business and bought a license for a thirty mile radius just outside of Salem.

At the end of the year, there were eight licensees in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. But in the early part of 1975, people began coming in from all over. Bob had put an ad in the January edition of a magazine called *My Little Salesman*. It was directed toward loggers, truckers and heavy equipment dealers. He tacked on two words at the bottom of the ad — “manufacturers wanted.”

Eugene Robinson, a small, soft-spoken man from Colorado, read the ad. He had been in logging and earth moving but was now sixty-two and wanted something less strenuous. He and Bob spent until late at night talking over his contract in front of the Fisher Stove in the A-frame. He came back again and brought his foreman for Bob to teach how to make stoves.

Floyd Gullickson spent his vacation learning to make stoves for his Wisconsin territory. He caught on quickly, having spent his life at manual labor and as a millwright. He found such a good market back in Wisconsin, he had to call in his son to help.

Roy Smith and Loren Trachsel were not welders or mechanics and had some doubts about their license for Minneapolis. But Bob urged them on.

“Here’s how you should do it,” he told them. “Find a shop with an experienced factory superintendent. Give him these blueprints, and he’ll know what to do. All you have to do is worry about the selling.”

It seemed to Bob like he spent most of his time training people to make stoves, drawing up blueprints and writing out measurements. He gave them doors, patterns, small parts and sometimes financed them to get started. Each time he watched the licensees take off for their territories, he wondered how they would fare. Which ones would make it? He later learned that some of his early predictions were not always accurate.

And there always seemed to be somebody staying at the A-frame. Carol was constantly cooking, trying to be a gracious hostess, watching the kids and still put in her hours at the shop.

Once they had a guy who was a real know-it-all. Bernard Mulligan.

Marketing, advertising, production — you name it. He tried to tell Bob how to do it. And Bob could tell Mulligan irritated Carol the way he was always bragging up Canada. “Canada is so much more scenic” or “The people in Canada aren’t spoiled and soft.” Bob wished to hell he would get back up there, make his stoves and get out of his hair. He was driving them all nuts with his morning exercises — screwing up his face and neck, flopping and jumping all over the floor. And Bob didn’t see why he had to add wheat germ and sunflower seeds to Carol’s perfectly good chicken casserole.

The time came when Bob began to have doubts about the short one-page contract. In March, a bald, tall and thin man in his middle thirties came in the shop to sell Bob a booth in the Eugene Home Show.

“My name is Cal, Cal Cotton. Praise the Lord. I’m here to give you a fantastic break. This might be the best deal you’ve had all year,” he said. He flipped out his papers and showed Bob a drawing of the available spaces left on the homeshow floor plan. He looked over at Carol, who was quietly listening at her desk, smiled and said, “Jesus loves you.”

Who does this guy think he is, the Messiah? thought Bob. He had a stubby reddish blonde beard and thick lips.

“How much?” Bob asked.

“Special price — just for you. Three days for only \$250. This is a great opportunity to show your product. We have large crowds, and many people will pass your way.” He spoke like he was calling you into the fold.

Bob wasn’t interested. It was too much money. And he was tired of all these salesmen coming through here. He was constantly bombarded by people promoting the bowling alley, magazines, the ball games. Once he had given away a stove to the Lion’s Club for the Blind Children’s Society. Bob knew of a partially blind child up around Camp Creek, gave them his name and told them to contact

him. He saw the boy a couple of months after that and he still didn't have any glasses. Bob called them and told them what he thought. The boy had glasses within a week.

Cal wasn't easily put off. "I can see you have a fine product," he said, looking through the door back into the shop. "You ought to show it off."

This was Bob's chance to get the guy off the subject. "You want to buy a stove?" he asked.

"Look like fine stoves. Mighty fine." Cal said.

Bob talked ten minutes about the stoves, then about the licensees.

"You owe it to people to tell them about this stove," Cal said. "Praise the Lord. This is a contribution to our degenerating society. Put it in the homeshow, let the people see it." Cal kept at it until Bob was talked into it.

After Bob signed the contract, he said, "Anybody who can sell a crock of shit like you, ought to be able to sell a million stoves. Do you weld?"

"No, but I could learn. What areas are still open?"

"Idaho."

"Let me think it over," Cal said.

He was back in two days to learn to make stoves. Bob gave him the blueprints, patterns and doors. Cal loaded them up in his Volkswagen van with his wife and five children. A Bible lay on the dashboard.

They didn't hear from him for nearly three months. Cal didn't send money for royalties nor did he pay for the doors.

"Better call him up," Carol finally said. "And stop sending him more doors."

"Why? He's doing real good up there. I'm impressed with how many stoves he's selling."

"I don't like to see anyone take advantage of your generosity and good heartedness, Bobby," she said.

"He's an honest man. He'll pay up," Bob said.

"He is a sharp. Can't you see through him?"

"Okay, you call him. I don't want to get in bad with him." He stood there while Carol called.

She held the telephone a distance from her ear so he could hear Cal.

“We need the money,” Carol said. “We are a little short this month.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll get it to you,” Cal said in his boisterous voice. “Did you think of Jesus today?”

Cal had set Carol to thinking. That night after they had gone to bed, she said, “Most of the licensees seem to be good men, but there’s bound to be a couple of rotten apples in the barrel. Do you think we ought to hire a lawyer to look over our one page contract?”

“Okay. But look for one in a crummy office,” Bob said as he yawned. “He’ll be cheaper.”

“Then he will be a crummy lawyer,” Carol laughed. “Let’s look one up in the yellow pages.”

She crept softly down the stairs in her frilly eyelet nightgown and brought back the telephone book. She began reading down the list of names. When she came to Watkinson, Bob said, “Get him. It sounds like that nice ‘Watkins’ man that used to come round selling stuff.”

The next day, in late afternoon, they both went to keep the appointment Carol had made with Mr. John Watkinson. He was young, slender and wore thick rimmed glasses.

“Don’t I know you from somewhere?” Bob asked.

“Yes, Mr. Fisher. Over a year ago, you gave a brochure to my wife and me at the Saturday flea market.”

Bob remembered. It was that young couple who wanted a stove but didn’t have their home built yet.

“You ever get a stove?” Bob asked.

“We are still working on it,” he said. “I’m just getting started in business, too. Now, how can I help you?”

“We’ve been using this short contract for our licensees. But we’re getting so many, we better have you draw up something proper and legal like,” Bob said. They gave him the names of Brian Higby and Trent Johansen who had just bought Utah. Trent had a good job as bailiff at Lane County and Brian was in real estate. But they were Mormons and liked the idea of starting a new

life in Salt Lake City.

Mr. Watkinson looked the short contract over. He had the habit of taking off his glasses and putting the part that rests over the ear into his mouth. He used a lot of "ums" and "ahs." He asked endless questions about the business, the debts, the sales, about the royalties, the patent, the trademark. On and on.

Carol answered most of the questions. Bob couldn't sit still. Every five minutes he stood up to shake out his levis or get a drink of water. He hated these legal details. A lot of mumbo jumbo with big words. He didn't see it getting anything done; nothing solid that he could see and touch came out of it.

Now Watkinson was telling him he had to refer to a patent and trademark expert. They make everything so damn complicated. If this was what it was going to involve, he was glad he was turning the shitterrie over to somebody else. He had to have a lawyer — they were a necessary evil. And this one seemed like a nice enough one. But he hoped he would have as little to do with this kind of thing as possible. At the time, he had no idea of the extent of the legal matters that were to come.

Before Bob knew it, the summer had flown by. It was already September. Never seemed to be time to get everything done. Continually running back and forth, he always seemed out of breath.

Right now he needed to go out and buy new equipment. He walked through the shop checking over the condition of the machinery. He noted he needed a hoist, disc grinder, drill press, and a hacksaw. It was smoky and hotter than hell inside even though it was still morning. And noisy — loud banging of stoves being flipped over, the buzzing of the drills and whirring of saws.

They were really putting the stoves out now. About fifteen a day. Ron had sometimes up to twelve men on a mass production system: One parts man to cut the hinges, drill holes in the doors, run the band saw, and cut the door channel, handles and clips to hold the brick in; two men in the bricking department, usually one in the painting, one in the cleaning, knocking off slag and berries and Jerry and another guy to help Bob load, make deliveries and install stoves.

Right now he was short a guy. In a way, he missed spouting off at Stan. He was an irritating little bastard but a good scapegoat for blowing off steam when anything went wrong. One Saturday a few months ago, Stan Chaney came in to the shop to buy a stove. He was about twenty-two, small and skinny. He had tucked his pair of green army combat pants inside a pair of tall boots.

"It's for my wife's birthday," he said. His voice was high and whiney. His dark eyes seemed only an inch apart and had a scared look.

"You came at the right time," Bob said. "I happen to have about four extra stoves in stock."

"I don't have any money," Stan said. His soulders stooped slightly as though his chest was caved in. He looked helpless; another no-hoper, Bob thought.

"We can make some arrangement where you only have to pay \$25 a month," Bob suggested.

Stan was happy with that so they loaded the stove, a Mama Bear, into the back of Stan's 62 Chevy pickup. But only a few days after Stan had carted it off, he was back again.

"I lost my job," he said. "I won't be able to pay for the stove." He looked pathetic, nervous, and his eyeballs shifted from side to side. Bob's heart softened, and he felt sorry for him.

"Why don't you work here?" he said.

Stanley smiled a sheepish smile and signed on. But little did Bob know what he was getting into. The kid was always messing things up. He put the bricks in wrong or he forgot a brick entirely. One time when unloading at a delivery, he let go of the four wheel cart with a Papa Bear on it. It rolled down off the ramp, down a busy

street and into a concrete storage building. Thank God no one was hurt. And only one leg of the stove was slightly bent.

He was the joke of the shop. "Wonder what Stan will do today?" someone would say. They called him "Stanley" whenever they were teed off at him.

But if someone got after him, he broke into tears. He was temperamental, erratic. Sometimes he threw tantrums over a mistake when cutting small parts. Then Carol would calm him down and encourage him.

After about three or four months, Stanley came to Bob. "I want to go out and build stoves in my own territory," he said.

Bob refused. "You don't even know how to wipe your own ass," he said.

"I'll apply myself, try to learn more." He put on his pitiful, wretched face.

"No."

"I think I could do it."

"No."

"It would give me responsibility, new direction."

"No."

Everyday he was after them. He worked on Carol with tears in his eyes.

Bob found himself spending a lot of time dodging him, ducking around corners. Finally he said, "That skinny ass kid is driving me ape shit. Send him to Arizona. Anywhere. Just get rid of him!"

The next day Stan drove up to the shop with his pickup loaded up past the sideboards and covered with an old dirty tarp. Bob thought he was taking a load to the dump.

"Where the hell you goin'?" Bob asked.

"I'm headed for Flagstaff, Arizona," Stan said, his ridiculous grin on his face.

Bob wondered how Stanley was faring out in the wide world. But right now he was too busy and had too many things to do to think about him very long.

He walked quickly through the shop. Better order some more steel and small parts supply, too. They really go through the

materials, he thought. Ron had said Dad was taking some home with him. Wonder what he is fooling around with now. Bob knew Baxter was sometimes a nuisance to Ron, and he felt a gratitude to Ron for his patience and good humor with the old man.

Bob went into the office to call the steel company. Carol was serving a customer even though it was only 8:30. They had a bookkeeper now, but she was still doing the invoicing, payroll and selling.

There were three men waiting in there for him. Short, square heads, brown hair — anyone could see they were brothers.

“Be with you in a minute,” Bob said. They nodded and leaned back against the wall to wait.

First Bob called American Steel. They had better stuff — not rusty; nice and flat — and they had better service. If they said they’d have it by Thursday afternoon, then they had it. But they were one cent more than the others.

Far West Steel was cheaper, but sometimes their steel was a little warped. If the metal was off 1/4”, the welders were screwed up about one hour because they had to re-cut it with the torch.

He dialed American. “Yeah. This is Bob Fisher. I need material for about five hundred stoves this time. Figure it out and give me a quote.”

The answer was a flat 23.75¢ per one hundred pounds.

“I should get a better price if I’m buying this much. Come on, give me your best shot.”

The answer came back 23¢.

Bob did a little figuring. He knew they were making about ten percent. And they were hungry for business now that high prices had put a lot of companies out of business. And they could see Bob’s business was growing fast.

“I just got a bid from Far West for 21¢,” he said. This little lie could save him three to five hundred bucks. “I’d pay a little more because your stuff is better but —”

This time the answer was down to 22.5¢.

“Okay, deliver it on Friday morning,” he said and hung up the phone.

He beckoned Carol over a moment. "I just ordered \$5000 worth of steel. How much money we got?"

"Only \$2000. But if you give them a check on Friday, they won't send it in 'til Monday. Maybe we'll have a good weekend and can rush over Monday to cover the check," she said. Would they ever be able to stop worrying about money?

More people were coming in, Bob turned hurriedly to the three brothers.

"What can I do for you?"

"We're interested in getting a license to make Fisher Stoves. We are the Dunn brothers. This here is Roy and George. I'm Walt."

The heavysset one did the talking. He had a soft toned voice. Roy, the thin one, seemed quiet, reticent. George, the youngest, looked a little skeptical but said nothing.

"How about you guys having a look around while I take care of these customers?" Bob asked.

"Sure," Walt said, shrugging his shoulders. "Whatever you say . . ."

There were two customers. Bob had seen the lady pull up in a white Cadillac. She looked like she expected immediate attention. Bob chose to serve the young couple first. On his way back to show them the display model, he felt the sole of his boot begin to flap as he walked. Damn boot! He had just tacked the sole back on yesterday with a couple of small nails. He didn't seem to have time to buy a new pair. And his hair was getting so long, he could feel it on the back of his neck. He couldn't even get to a damn barber.

He did not come back front for over an hour. While he was in the back, he had finished off a stove and loaded up three more for buyers who had come to pick up the stoves they had ordered weeks before.

There were more people waiting by now.

I believe I'm next," said the lady with the white Cadillac. "I would like to see Mr. Fisher."

"You're lookin' at him," Bob said.

"You're Bob Fisher?" the woman asked, aghast.

"Excuse me, I have to go take a piss," Bob said. He went

outside and ducked underneath the old army blanket stretched across the doorway to the toilet. Still didn't have a proper door yet.

When he came back, the woman looked a bit indignant but she was determined to be served.

"I want to see a Fisher Stove," she said.

He took her to the back.

"Is this the only model you have? It's ugly."

"I'm ugly, too. But I work good," Bob said. Then he added, "This stove will fit into any decor — antique or modern. And I wouldn't change a line of it."

"But I like to see the fire," she said.

"This thing is meant to be efficient," Bob said. He was getting impatient. "You can get stoves with tempered glass but it breaks too easy and soots up so you have to keep cleaning it. I get those ornamental stoves as trade-ins every day."

The lady noticed Bob glancing over at the people lined up out front. She sensed his rush. "I'll take one."

"What kind?"

"A Papa Bear. My house is about fifteen hundred square feet."

"You don't need that big a one."

"I think I do."

"I don't and besides I can't sell you one today. It'll be five weeks before I can give you a Mama."

The woman whipped out her check book. "How much will it be?"

"\$300."

"Here's the check. My son and son-in-law told me about these stoves and in five weeks I'm coming back and getting mine."

Bob took the check into the office and handed it over to Carol. Then he took care of more customers. At about 11:00, Carol gave him a bag containing two MacDonal'd's cheeseburgers. It was his breakfast and lunch. She nodded her head in the direction of the corner of the room where the Dunn brothers were still waiting. Bob noticed the ashtray was full of cigarettes.

Bob chomped into his cheeseburger. "What territory do you want?"

“Someplace on the West Coast,” Walt said.

“Nothing left on the West Coast. Only the East Coast left.”

The brothers looked at one another. They talked quietly among themselves. Walt was for it. George argued against it. Roy seemed to mediate between them.

“Which states?” George asked.

Bob looked at his map he had tacked to the wall above the desk. There were pins with red heads stuck in most of the states. Not much left.

Only two weeks ago he had sold New Hampshire to Arnold Dunagan, the man who tried to sell a pole building to Bob at the County Fair. Bob had guessed right on that one — he somehow had sensed Dunagan would come around again.

Then Woody Taylor, a dark, overweight man in his sixties, drove up in a Lincoln Continental one day last week, looked over the operation and bought four states at once — Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Some kind of a business tycoon. Always talking about his condominiums, shopping centers and apartment houses. He was the kind that snapped his fingers and people jumped.

And of course, he was used to luxuries. Bob laughed to himself as he remembered when Woody and his wife stayed at the A-frame. The fresh water spring was drying up with a long summer drought. Sometimes they would only get brown water coming out the taps.

“Why don’t you fix things up around here?” Woody ranted. “You deserve a better life. Get yourself a Mercedes.”

His wife, Ginny, was different — down to earth, a little embarrassed by the rocks Woody bought for her fingers. And she was so good to Carol. While she was outside pulling weeds with her, Ginny told her, “You forget about this garden. You can only do so much. Don’t push yourself or you will get sick.”

Woody had big ideas about the business, too. He talked about shortcuts to manufacturing — like using a one piece pre-bent top instead of the three pieces welded together. And better advertising. “Get yourself a first class brochure,” he said, “Not some backyard amateur stuff.”

Bob wondered why a big tycoon like Woody bothered with him. Until, on the last day before leaving, he turned to Bob and said, "You know, Fisher. There is something about you that makes people care."

Bob swished down the last two bites of his cheeseburger with the coke. He wished it was a cold beer instead, but no chance of Carol buying that. He had given up coffee last spring. He was too uptight and was having trouble going to sleep at night.

"Take your choice of what's left and stick a pin in it," he said to the Dunns, pointing to the map. He made a beeline for the door. "I'll be back in a couple of hours. I've got to go out and buy some equipment."

The parking lot was so jammed that afternoon when he came back, he couldn't get through to unload his pickup. Son of a bitch! It was after 2:00. He had to sell all these people, unload this damn crap, make four or five deliveries and one installation tonight. He felt his legs begin to tense up under him. He shifted gears, rammed on the gas pedal and sped over the stubble grass in the vacant lot at the side of the shop. He positioned the pickup and called out for someone to help him unload.

Ron brought over a young red headed kid about twenty years old. "This here's Dick Higgins," Ron said. "He's lookin' for a job."

Bob looked at him. Looked like another hippie trying to find himself. Just hope he's not another Stanley. "Okay, Higgins. Let's see what you can do. Soon as we're done here, I've got a delivery for you to make."

The kid was soft and began to sweat as they carried in the equipment, but he kept up pace and didn't complain. They put a stove on the back of the pickup, and Bob gave him an address.

"Make it snappy. I've got more after this one," he said.

As soon as Bob entered the office, he was hit by a customer. "Have you got a used Mama?"

"Hell, ya, my Mama is used," he said, chuckling and pointing his thumb over toward Carol, who was making out a sales slip for a stove she had just sold. "Na," he said seriously, "I don't get any Fisher Stoves back — unless it is for a different size. I got one

Franklin that came back four times, a Wards Circulator and a Montague.”

As he talked he saw the Dunns over in the corner again. Get to you in a minute,” Bob said, apologetically.

The telephone rang. Someone wanted to talk to him about wood species. After that he sold two more stoves, and it was almost 4:30 before he got around to the Dunns.

“You decide what territory you want?”

“We’ll take West Virginia and Virginia. We took a short trip to the library while you were gone and checked out an atlas. Those states have got good population, timber and climate. They are right directly across the U.S. from Oregon, and from what we read, the Roanoke Valley is very much like the Willamette Valley,” said Roy. George looked a little more agreeable and Walt seemed anxious to close the deal.

“Sounds good to me,” Bob said. “Better spend a couple days with Ron making the stoves. You got someplace to stay?”

“We’re staying at George’s place. But we’ll be here tomorrow at 1:00 sharp,” said George.

Bob shook his head as they left. They’ll never make it, he thought. Nice guys but too quiet and not aggressive enough. This was one of the times he was way off in his predictions.

The Dunns no sooner were out the door when Dick Higgins came in. “What’s next Mr. Fisher?”

I’ll be damned. Only took the kid thirty minutes. He just might go places in this Fisher outfit. This time he was right.

Bob coordinated more deliveries for that afternoon, checked over the orders, talked over the phone to licensees and took care of more customers the rest of the day.

Just as he and Carol closed the shop at 6:30, Ron and Susie Correll came up front. They looked serious and slightly apologetic, like they had a confession to make.

“You got somethin’ on your mind?” Bob asked.

“Bob, I’ve been working here for a year now. And I’m deeply grateful for the job. I’ve enjoyed working with you and grown to love you like you was my brother. I’ve tried to keep my contract to

you and to God. I've spent a lot of time training people to make stoves and watch them go off and make money. Call it lust if you like, but I can't help wanting the same for myself."

Bob felt a little saddened. What would he do without Ron? Shit, he was already swamped up to his neck now. But he looked at the two of them — tired and dirty, honesty and sincerity in their eyes. He hated to lose them, but it would be selfish of him to hold them back. He had to think of what was best for them, and they deserved something good after all their tough breaks.

"You got any money to get started?"

"About \$700 saved. But we have our sons to help us work."

Bob walked back to the shop. He collected a welder, torch kit, his new grinder and hacksaw and put them in a pile.

"Take these and enough material to build 10 stoves," he said. "I'll give you Medford out of my own territory. Get down there and get your business going. And remember, call for help if you need it. I won't let you sink."

Bob took off with Jerry at 7:00 to make an installation. He didn't get home until almost midnight and he was fairly juiced up. He tried to sneak upstairs quietly without knocking anything over, but Carol was still waiting up for him.

"Where have you been? I've been worried," she said.

"Guess what?" he said, trying to act gay and excited. "Jerry and I stopped off for a beer on our way home. We got to talking to some contractor building homes out near Coburg. He bought fifty stoves. What do you think of that?"

She didn't seem too thrilled. "Have you had anything to eat?" she asked.

"Na, I'm not hungry," he said.

The beer, the heat, the constant rush of the day suddenly began to churn his stomach. He felt nauseated. He took off his socks and boots, stripped down to his shirt and shorts, then lay down on the bed. His head was swirling not only from the beer but with all of the figures, names, things he had to remember to do tomorrow. He had

to hold everything in his head because there wasn't time to write anything down.

He looked over at Carol picking up his shirt and dirty levis and putting them in the clothes hamper. There was only a small lamp on over by the dresser. He could see her soft, round curves through the nightgown. She had a fresh glow to her skin and she smelled of lotion and shampoo.

He thought back to the carefree times they had together before the stove business — the way she laughed and scolded when he teased her, the time he took her down the McKenzie River in his fishing boat and how she sat calmly smiling in complete trust even when they were caught in a swift current and Bob had to row like hell to keep the boat from crashing into the rocks. Then downstream a ways after the danger had passed, he had taken her over to the bank . . .

Yet they hardly had time for one another anymore. Always talking business until late at night — where to advertise, when to buy steel, how many stoves they were selling.

“The kids missed you,” she said, crawling into bed.

The kids. Damn, how he felt guilty that he never saw them now that school started again. Never sat down to supper together, never went anyplace together. It was like running them by remote control — over the telephone or by notes on the refrigerator. Even when they were around and he and Carol were talking about stoves, the kids seldom interrupted. Once, Carol had set the rule that they never discuss business at home. But it didn't last long.

“Just this one thing . . .” he would say, and off they'd be talking stoves again.

Even tonight, there was something he had to bring up.

“I didn't get a chance to tell you. Smith and Trachsel called. They have a problem. Do you remember they didn't want to be welders? I told them to get a fabricator? Well, they found a company called Self Sufficiency who got the idea they would make the stove without paying for the royalties or for the doors. Can you beat that? I told them you'd talk to John Watkinson about it.”

He looked over at Carol. She was fast asleep. He leaned over

her, stroked her back and kissed her on the shoulder. Then he settled down under the covers but he couldn't relax. His heart was racing too fast. Thinking about someone stealing his stove made him fume. It was like finding someone with your wife — you get hairy all over, he thought. He didn't sleep all night.

Bob hurried to finish his bath. He still hated them. Stripping down, exposing his body to soap and water seemed an intrusion, an invasion of his privacy.

It was a cold day in January, 1976. He had left the door open to let the heat from his Fisher Stove radiate into the bathroom. At least it wasn't as cold in Oregon as it was in some places back East. A cold snap had just hit there. He had heard stories over the news of people without energy, wearing three or four layers of clothing, huddled together in school rooms or depots. Bob felt sympathy for them and wished he could send some of the desperate cases a free Fisher Stove.

It was 8:00 p.m. Already late by one hour. He was going to a birthday party at his sister Delores's house down on Hayden Bridge Road near Mom's. Delores was giving a party for Teresa, her daughter. Bob hadn't seen much of his relatives lately and was looking forward to seeing them. He had missed the Christmas and New Year get-together because he was too busy. He and Carol just barely had time to get something bought for the kids.

Bob wondered if his relatives thought he was turning into a snob now that his business was going good. Not Mom or Dad — because they knew anything he had was theirs to share. But his brother and sister admired the status of money and success. Bob felt sorry for Donny. He had worked at Weyerhaeuser for seventeen years now, raised cattle, farmed his land, built his own home. Steady, reliable,

a quiet plugger. His sister Delores was a hard worker, too. Like Mom. Sewing, yardwork, raising beans, working in a nursery. Bob felt a little guilty that he had more than they had.

He came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel and passed by the kitchen on his way upstairs to get dressed. Carol was busily fixing a cheese platter to take to the party. She had come home a little earlier and had already changed clothes.

“Don’t forget to take that beer that’s in the refrigerator,” he reminded her as he passed by. Boy, he would really like to hang one on tonight. Get blotto. He needed a break, forget all his recent worries.

This guy Schrader was bugging him. He had come in sometime last September with a picture of a stove he had built.

“What do you think of this?” he asked. He was a husky man with dark curly hair.

Bob looked at the picture. It was an exact replica of a Fisher Stove only it had an oven built into the top level of the two step design. It had Schrader Home Baker written on the door.

“It will probably work since it’s just like a Fisher,” Bob answered sarcastically.

“Well, I got a few orders for them but I wanted to see if you’d mind before I went ahead and built them.” He smiled, trying to be a nice guy.

“Well, I would mind,” Bob said. “You know you’re doing wrong or you wouldn’t be in here.” His respiration rate had speeded up.

Schrader knew exactly how he stood with Bob when he left there. But he went ahead with making his stoves. Since then, Schrader Stove ads had been appearing in the same papers that carried Fisher’s ads, Schrader made television commercials similar to Bob’s, and he opened a showroom.

Bob checked it out with Jim Givnan, his patent agent. He found out that Schrader had taken his drawings there, but the agent told Schrader his stove might be an imitation. So Schrader then filed for his patent with a Portland agent. Bob believed it would be only about three months before Schrader’s patent application would be

denied. But in the meantime, Schrader was selling stoves. True, Schrader had by now changed the stove a little. He was using aluminum doors instead of the steel or cast iron door, and he was also using a different door handle and a squared off ash fender. Even so it still looked like a Fisher.

It burned Bob up every time he thought of it. How the hell was he supposed to enforce his patent? Wrap it around the barrel of a '44, maybe that'd do it. Or else throw the goddam thing in the fire. It obsessed him so much he couldn't think straight. He had to work at keeping cool, controlling his thoughts.

Then the thing came up with one of his licensees, Jake Jackson. Jake brought into the shop a modified model of the Fisher Stove which was wider and had two doors.

"People can open the doors and put a screen over it. We can call it the fireplace model," Jake said. Bob noticed he was wearing a fancier, more expensive belt buckle.

Bob hesitated. He didn't want to rush into a decision. He had the other licensees and their reactions to think about. That meant they would all have to alter their manufacturing processes.

But later, Bob heard rumors Jake was making his fireplace model on his own. Bob went to Redmond and walked into Jake's showroom. There it was — a Fisher Stove adaptation with double doors. Jake became rattled and tried to explain that he felt strong on his double door stove.

When Carol heard Bob's story after he returned home, she wanted to take on the double door line. "We could make two sizes — call them the Grandma and Grandpa," she said.

But negotiations over the royalties during the next few weeks were charged with too much pride and hurt feelings. Jake broke away and began his own stove — the Frontier.

Once someone turned on Bob, he never felt the same again. He knew it was wrong — better to forgive and forget. He worked at it, but it still gnawed at him.

At least Jake had settled up fairly. Not like Ray Bruce, a licensee from California, who wanted Bob to take on another adaptation of the Fisher Stove with a double door oven on top which he now

called the Buffalo Stove. When he went off on his own, he owed \$27,000 for doors and royalties but still hadn't paid up.

Bob slipped a clean white tee-shirt over his head then began to comb his hair. As he stood before the mirror of the bedroom dresser, he saw that his neck was turning red and the flush was spreading up over his jowls. His skin over that area was hot, burning. It was a symptom that he was smoldering, boiling inside.

It was always something. One thing after another. And today Dick Higgins left. Not that Bob wasn't glad to see Dick get his own territory. The red headed kid had been a good worker. Never idle, didn't walk but ran. He would sweep, clean, deliver stoves, anything Bob asked. And when Bob trained him to weld, he caught right on. It was like he suddenly had found what he wanted to do. No use in holding a kid like that back — better to make use of him somewhere. So Bob suggested he go build stoves. Today Dick took off for Post Falls, Idaho, with two other friends — Jerry Hilperts and Nicky Parrish, who had previously worked with him at the Eugene Feed Mill. They, too, chose to give up a hippie way of life and go after something.

Bob knew it was better for both Dick and himself that Dick left. But it was just that there was the constant change, turmoil, coming and going of people.

Only a few days ago he had two new licensees from Canada to break in at the shop and stay at the A-frame. Chuck Dynes and Gary Wismer. But it had paid off. It pleased Bob that Canada was going so good. That health nut Mulligan was out of the picture now ever since Jim Craig and Bob Warman, two earnest, industrious young men bought him out.

As Bob snapped up the buttons on his new western shirt that Carol bought him for Christmas, the telephone rang. They had put another extension into the bedroom because there were getting to be so many phone calls lately. Sometimes the licensees back east often forgot the three hour time difference and woke them up in the early hours of the morning.

He picked up the phone. "Hello."

"Bob, this is Doyle Hawks calling from North Carolina."

Bob remembered a blonde, slim man in his thirties who had bought a license back in November. He had been a parts manager for Buick for twelve years but wanted to do something on his own. His brother Theo had the states of Tennessee and Mississippi, and Doyle was also related to Linda, wife of George Dunn of the Dunn brothers. While the Dunns were back in Eugene to attend a funeral, they convinced Doyle to try the Fisher Stove business.

“How’re you doin?” Bob asked.

“No good, Bob. We don’t think we can meet the minimum royalty or the 600 stoves.”

“What seems to be the trouble?”

“It’s these Southerners. They look, they seem impressed but they don’t buy. They seem to take a long time to convince.”

“Don’t get discouraged. After you get a few stoves out there, word of mouth will spread.”

“Bev and I are down to nothing. I got my inventory built up but our money is almost exhausted. I don’t think I’ll be able to send the money that is required in our contract.” His voice was desperate. Bob recalled him to be a serious conscientious type.

“You’re tryin’ your best, aren’t you?” Bob asked.

“I’ve tried everything I could think of.”

“Then don’t worry about the money you owe me. That minimum royalty clause in the contract is for those people that take a territory and don’t work on it. Use your money to keep the business going. That’s good for both of us. Keep your chin up. This cold snap ought to pick up business.”

“Maybe so,” Doyle said. He sounded reassured.

“By the way, how’s the Dunns doin’?” Bob was surprised at the large royalties the Dunns were sending in.

“We keep in touch back here. They’re selling stoves like hot-cakes. They work well as a team. George handles production, Roy the distribution, Walt does the purchasing and Linda works in the office.”

Just goes to show you can’t tell people by the first impression, Bob thought, as he hung up the phone.

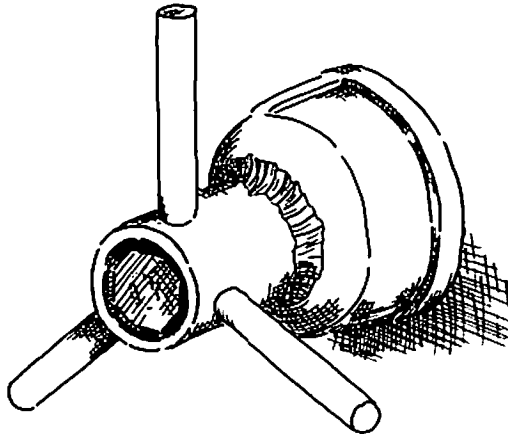
Bob, Carol and the kids let themselves into the back door of Delores' house. No formalities were necessary; relatives were always welcome. They heard the voices and laughter of everyone in the living room: Mom and Dad; Don and Tony with their children; Delores, Jim and their three kids — Jimmy, Mitch and of course Teresa, the birthday girl.

Before Carol could set the cheese tray on the kitchen counter, Tammy and Kelly had to make space for it amongst all the dishes of food — sausages and sauerkraut, fried chicken, beans and pork hocks, pickles and pepper relishes. Bob opened one of the beers he brought and put the rest in the refrigerator. It was spotless. Delores was an immaculate housekeeper like Mom.

When they went in to join the crowd, Dad was passing something around to those sitting on the couch, the hearth and the floors.

“What's this?” Bob asked as he drew closer.

“My cap to my stove,” Baxter said.



Bob saw a small scale model of a draft cap made out of bolts, pipe and a cut up pipe cap.

“Your stove?”

“Yep. I built one. The Baxter Stove. Already applied for the patent.”

Baxter began to describe the stove and show him the cap. Bob hardly listened or looked at the cap. He was too upended. He felt both pain and anger that his dad would do this behind his back.

“So this is where all my parts, paint and brick have been going to? Why the hell did you keep it so secretive?”

“I wanted to surprise you,” Baxter said. His familiar smirk came over his face.

“Is that why you peeked over my shoulder while I was designing my new cap? Watching my drawings?” Bob accused. Bob wanted to call him sneaky, underhanded but held it back.

“But I didn’t copy, Bobby. I’m not one of them ‘imitators’,” Baxter said.

“How could you do that?” Mom said to Baxter. “You can’t go against Bobby . . . compete with your own son.”

“I did it for you, Bobby. Hep your business. Give your customers a choice. Some of them like an oven.”

Baxter’s eyes twinkled with mischief. Cagey. You could never pin him down. Bob couldn’t feel any hatred. Dad was his best friend. Always happy, never complained. Bob couldn’t let anything destroy that relationship. Better to swallow, forget about it.

“Do you think you could put Dad’s stove in your shop and try to sell them?” Don asked. Bob could tell Donny was on his second or third beer. He was more confident, talkative.

“Hell, no. From Dad’s description it must have at least thirty-five parts to it. Mine has eight.”

“Do it for Dad. You have guts and ability. And with all your money . . .” Don always spoke highly of others — like he was inferior. Don was good at real estate, and one time he wanted to build horse stables on his land. But he had no confidence in himself. Sure, Bob had a lot of self doubts, too. But with Carol’s help, he hadn’t let them get him down.

“That would be like admitting my stove wasn’t the best there is,” Bob answered. “Besides, do you know what it takes to get a stove started?”

“Maybe if we all helped promote it,” Delores said. “Get brochures, run ads, get in home shows.”

Bob saw Delores’ eyes light up. Leave it to Delores, the organizer. She had gone to college and had a way of getting things done. Even more so now that her three children were grown.

“If we all pooled some money . . .” she was saying. Bob stood back and listened to them discuss plans for Baxter’s stove. He saw their enthusiasim. Maybe they didn’t know how hard it had been. Maybe they thought they could get rich.

He had two, three more beers. But he found he couldn’t subdue his hurt, resentment. He felt like an outsider, like they were ganging up against him. His neck felt hot and flushed again. He felt a little sick to his stomach and remembered he hadn’t eaten lunch that day. The snuff turned his stomach.

Carol came up beside him. “You look a little green. You feel all right?” She looked a little perturbed herself.

“Let’s go home,” he said.