



BIOGRAPHY OF TOM DELMASTRO

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For many a night, a young farm boy not quite six years old, lay covered from head to toe under a pile of blankets in his Illinois bedroom. The comet was coming, as bright as the biggest fire you could build and it stretched for miles and miles. Comet Halley frightened young Tom Delmastro along with many others. It caused many people to commit suicide, as many predicted its arrival was the end of the world. The comet passed and its prediction proved false, as the world continued, but just as unpredictable was the young boys future and how it would influence and alter the lives of those around him.

Tom's father Victor came to America from Turin, Italy. Victor's first job in America was chopping wood. On his first day of work the axe slipped and Victor nearly lost his big toe. After his marriage to Angeline Berta, also an Italian-Immigrant, the Delmastros settled on a farm outside Braidwood, Illinois.

Tom was born March 14, 1903, the fourth child of ten. As a young boy, Tom read alot about the West and was anxious to visit relatives living in Rock Springs, Wyoming. At the age of 24, after purchasing a train ticket to California, Tom left Illinois. After traveling for two days and two nights, the train arrived at Rock Springs, Wyoming on the morning of February 9, 1927. Because the train had crossed Nebraska and most of Wyoming during the night, this would be his first glimpse of the West. Tom had decided to spend some time with his relatives in

Rock Springs before traveling on to California. Although the sun shown brightly, it was a cold morning. Looking around, Tom saw bare mountains, no trees, no vegetation... Why this must be the worst place in the world! After visiting his three Uncles and an Aunt, Tom left for California, his expectations of the West somewhat let down.

Tom arrived in California and found employment at a vineyard in the Imperial Valley. After three months the heat was unbearable and Tom decided to return to Illinois.

Money was getting low about the time the train arrived in Rock Springs. Until now most of his life was spent in agriculture but there was nothing like that to be found in Rock Springs, Wyoming. Tom soon found work with the Union Pacific working in their freighthouse. The average wage at the U.P. freighthouse was a little less than fifty cents an hour. An eight hour day paid three dollars ninety-eight cents. Every morning, along with four other men, Tom would unload six to eight refrigerator cars full of meat. These "meat cars" had to be unloaded by hand, as there were no fork-lifts as there are today.

Rock Springs population at that time was between 10,000 - 12,000. Its people were of some fifty-two different nationalities. Although Tom had relatives living in Rock Springs, it took some time to adjust to the town and its people. The people were very nice, but

different than those he had left back in Illinois.

Many of Rock Springs homes were built on the side of surrounding hills to protect them from the wind. Many of the men worked in the local coal mines which were with-in walking distances from their homes. The cities un-paved streets followed these miners routes, resulting in crooked, twisting patterns.

Most of the shopping was done at the Union Mercantile and the Miners Mercantile. There were several smaller stores where purchasing groceries was done quite differently than today. The shopper would give a clerk behind the stores counter a list of needed items. The clerk would then pick your items from shelves behind him. A lot of items came bulk, and were sold by weight. Produce wasn't as easily accessible as it is today, and Tom missed the vegetables he had taken-for-granted back on the family farm. There were two or three bakeries at that time and a loaf of bread sold for ten to fifteen cents. Payment was either in cash, or the store might "carry" you.

Tom made his home, on Fourth Street, in a room back of the Labor Temple Theatre. It was a small room with a window and two doors, one leading into the theatre and one outside. Although movies were shown most evernight, Tom wasn't for "pictures" so he didn't see that many.

In addition to the Labor Temple Theatre, there was the Rialo Theatre. Every winter Alexander Pantages would present livestage shows at the Rialto Theatre

on Sunday nights. Every Sunday the Rialtos five-hundred seats would be filled. Everyone loved to listen to the Pantages Bands and Orchestras, laugh at his funny comedians, or stare in awe at his animals. At one show there were six elephants on stage at one time. Tom got to meet many of the performers when he helped his Uncle work backstage of the Theatre. One Sunday evening three little midgets were to sing and dance for the Rialtos audience. The midgets it seems got in a little mix-up, possibly had a little too much to drink and had trouble entertaining that night.

The train also brought entertainment to Rock Springs. Barnum and Bailey Circus came to Rock Springs at least six times that Tom recalls. One show brought thirty to forty train cars full of bears, leopards, lions and side shows. Each circus began with a big circus parade through Rock Springs.

Rock Springs held parades of its own each Decoration and Labor Day. The local coal camps would organize bands to march in the parades. Tom recalled an incident that occurred during a Labor Day parade. A man from Salt Lake City came to Rock Springs to film the parade. The night before the parade the camera man spent too much time "other places" and someone replaced the film in his camera with toilet paper. The next morning the cameraman stood filming the parade only to return to Salt Lake with a roll of toilet paper.

A lot of the entertainment in Rock Springs was wholesome

family fun. The winter brought sleigh riding, with fall came hunting. During the summer, when time would allow, trips to Lava Hot Springs, Idaho where families would enjoy the relaxing hot mineral baths. Local coal camps would organize baseball teams and challenge each other in Sunday afternoon games. Many of the games were played at the roundhouse which was located at the end of Blair Street. Occasionally the cowboys from surrounding ranches would gather together for a rodeo. Tom described the cowboys no different than today's cowboys, except maybe they dressed a little more of the western style. The cowboys were no better riders than those today. The number of cowgirls were less than today.

A lot of the events held in Rock Springs were customs brought to the town by its citizens of different nationalities. Each fall International Night was held at the Rialto Theatre. On this night the Rock Springs people would dress in native costume and dance traditional dances. Polka seemed to be the main dance. It was a beautiful site to see. The people looked so different. Polish, Italians, Slavs, and Finns were a few of the nationalities represented.

Rock Springs introduced Tom to many different cultures and types of people. One such individual was Tamale John, a Hindu. Tamale John made and sold tamales on the streets and in saloons.

In 1928, Tom quit his job for the U.P. Freighthouse and went to work for the State Highway Department. Tom

was responsible for maintaining the road from Rock Springs to the emergency airport east of the Point of Rocks. Every other day Tom would pull a road-drag over the twenty-eight miles of dirt road. The road draw was pulled behind a tractor and its several blades would cut away the rough places in the road. Tom made twenty-five dollars more a month with this new job. His monthly pay had now increased to one hundred twenty five dollars.

Although it may be hard to emagine living on such a wage today, the price paid for supper at the Grand Cafe was only thirty-five cents. The meal included a large piece of meat, potatoes, onion if you wanted it, three or four slices of bread with butter, dessert and all the coffee you could drink. A room at the Valley House cost guests one dollar and fifty cents a night.

In 1929 Tom was hired by Ohio Oil Company. In later years Ohio Oil would become Mountain Fuel. A crew[?] by the name of Kiser Transportation Company had the job of distributing the pipe for Ohio Oil from Canda to Hiawatha Dome. During the early spring of 1929 Southwest Wyoming had a terrible snowstorm. During this snowstorm one of Kisers crews was caught by surprise leaving them marooned in the Red Desert. A party of five men, that included Tom, was formed to find and help these people. The rescue party loaded a truck with food and set out in search for the stranded group. The first day the party made it as far as the emergency aviation field where they spent the night in a small building there. The next morning

the men built a sled using scrap lumber and rope they found. In temperatures as cold as twenty-eight below zero, the party continued their search. After traveling an additional eight miles they found the lost group. Four of the Kiser men had brought their wives and children along. The women and children had taken shelter in an abandoned sheep wagon while the men slept in holes they had dug in the snow and lined with tarps. The Kiser group was over-joyed to see Tom and the rest of the rescue team with their sled loaded with food. During the three days they had been marooned, they had only eaten two meals, one a dinner of beans and the other a breakfast of a pancake apiece. Some of the snow drifts were twelve feet high and the temperature still was a frigid twenty-eight degrees below zero. Late that afternoon Boeing sent a plane from Salt Lake City. The plane dropped two parcels of food. The first was a case of pork and bean. The case of beans buried themselves in the fall in a snowdrift and had to be dug out. A bundle of bread, about the size of a bale of hay was dropped, bouncing eight feet in the air as it hit the snow. Things started to look up for the isolated group when the Highway Department was finally able to get through with their equipment. After having spent two nights in the cold, Tom was anxious to soak in a hot bath upon arriving in Rock Springs. Tom's ears and feet began to burn and after consulting the local Doctor, he found out he had frost-bitten them. It wasn't until the following July did they completely heal.

On September 21, 1931, Tom was laid-off by Ohio Oil.

The depression had hit Rock Springs. No one was working. The mines were only working one to two days a week. For quite awhile Tom earned money selling the local paper, "The Miner", making a dollar a day. Chuckling, he told me his diet consisted of "a lot of sweet rolls and doughnuts"... "I didn't live very well but...I lived!"

Tom started working again when he was hired by the City of Rock Springs. Tom became Street Commissioner in 1934 under Rock Springs Mayor Walter Muir. Tom worked hard to find work for the cities unemployed so they could get on the relief payroll. Tom eventually had three hundred men on the relief payroll building rock retaining walls, paving the cities roads and working on the city sewer system.

The rock retaining walls built in the area soon proved worthy. In July, flash thunderstorms brought water gushing in on three sides of Rock Springs pouring into Bitter Creek. Water rushed on to the West Flat of Rock Springs flooding the basements of the homes there. West Flat would be the end of Center Street today. Fortunately there were no casualties, but the property damage was extensive. It took nearly three days and nights to pump the water from the flooded homes.

The people of Rock Springs managed to survive through the depression one way or another. Shortly after the depression, a project building a new airport began. It was to be built Northeast of Rock Springs where there was nothing but a large sand pile covered with greasewood

and sagebrush. Tom oversaw the building of three runways, a drainage system and necessary lighting for the airport. The Boeing planes that used the airport were slow. They seemed streamlined for the time but look clumsy compared to the jets of today.

In 1941, the day following the completion of the airport project, Tom enlisted in the U. S. Navy construction battalion. After training Tom spent eighteen months in the Pacific during World War II. It was yet another new experience for Tom, although he didn't feel bad when he had the chance to come home.

After returning to Wyoming, Tom purchased a ranch outside of Eden, Wyoming in 1945. Once again, Tom had the opportunity to work the land as he had as a young man back in Illinois. Tom's days were kept busy raising sheep and cattle. His fields were planted full of alfalfa, oats and barley. His thoughts were not preoccupied with just ranching however. On May 4, 1958, Tom introduced the Valley to his new bride Marian. Tom nicknamed Eden "the coldest spot in the United States." On one occasion the thermometer read a cold 62 degrees below zero. That night was long and cold for Tom and Marian as well as the livestock, as the bottled gas used to heat their home coagulated, due to the extreme cold.

Tom and Marion moved to Rock Springs in 1965 after retiring from the ranching business. Comet Halley is once again orbiting our heavens and Tom Delmastro has seen many years filled with mans progress since the comets last visit.

Tom always knew Rock Springs would have many opportunities for expansion although he never thought it would get this big. "The last ten years have been very prosperous for Sweetwater County and its people," shared Tom, "and its future is very bright." Since the comets first passing, Tom recalls the introduction of the automobile to modern space travel. Although he would love to travel to the Moon, Tom feels it might be a little to high for him. Unless they have stopping points between here and there he feels he would just as soon sit down here.

Once again the comet will trail our skies, bring with it predictions of the future while the doors open revealing times yet unknown to mankind.