Excerpt from Charles Frederick True, Sally Ralston True ed.*The Overland Memoir of Charles Frederick True: A Teenager on the California Trail, 1859* (Independence, Missouri: Oregon-California Trails Association, 1993), 38-44.

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Some days later brought us to a point nearly north of Fort Kearney on the southern bank of the Platte, and it was here that we had a very distressing accident.

We were traveling over an almost level country with a heavy growth of sagebrush extending to the river miles away and to the ever-present river hills of the prairie lying to the north a few miles distant. It was about eleven o’clock. We had been uncomfortably warm as we all **tramped** along in the heat of that hot June day, and our animals were lagging, **lolling**, tired, and thirsty.

I was taking a turn at driving our team and frequently looked miles across the country at Fort Kearney on the southern bank of the Platte, at these times a well-known government outpost.

[...]

Suddenly, I turned to my mother’s terrified call from her seat in the front end of our wagon to see the near forward wheel passing over the leg of my four year old sister, Carro, who had fallen out of the wagon. By acting promptly, I dragged her from the pathway of the **hind** wheel, which would have passed over her head, killing her or leaving her in a condition far worse than death.

[...]

Brave, and ever-kind father, though visibly affected, at once recovered his **poise** and held Carro tenderly until mother prepared with blankets on the ground a temporary bed for her. Upon examination, they at once found the leg below the knee broken. Here was a case for technical skill. In its absence though, there was present no one who had even practical observation or experience. Father found he would have to take the lead with the assistance of volunteers.

No little difficulty arose from the search that at once followed to find suitable wood for **splints**. There were no trees -- nothing but sage bushes as far as one could see -- up and down the valley. It was suggested that pieces of driftwood on the river bank might be procured. Immediately several started to **ascertain** just what was available. The distance there was several miles. In the meantime, bandages were prepared and every possible **expediency** utilized to **console** the afflicted little sister, who was in a state of shock.

Among the various **specimens** presented for father’s inspection were some dry pieces of willow for splints, which he regarded as best adapted to the purpose for which they were to be used. With knives, these pieces were carefully **divested** of all bark and then split in halves and smoothed down with knives to uniform sizes.

[...]

Everything had been done that could be done; as to the rest, my parents felt as they always did, that God’s love and power are abundantly sufficient to meet every **condition**. This was soon to be put to a supreme test, for it was the almost unanimous opinion that this accident would result in our being **obliged** to remain where we were for some weeks, or until the bones had knit, or until the movement of the wagon over the rough road would not prevent nature’s continuous new growth or healing without which we knew she would be a **cripple**.

How was this problem to be successfully met? How would it be possible to transport this very dear little sister on an emigrant wagon with no springs or **buffers** to ease the constant **joltings** which we felt would prevent the broken bones from growing together?

These were hours, indeed, of great anxiety, for to be detained a month or even less at this stage of our journey would mean our inability to reach our destination before the winter snows set in. Then, again, we were not **provisioned** for such an **extension** of time.

It was here that our dear **resourceful** mother, at this critical moment, suggested that if two men of our train, one of whom was Harry Cavill, I well remember, who had a small wagon drawn by a **span** of mules, would be willing to give up their light spring seat upon which they were riding so comfortably over the rough roads, our problem would be greatly simplified. She explained that by **depriving** ourselves of two pillows, they could be placed upon the seat as a substitute mattress, and my sister placed upon them on her back, in which position we knew she would have to lie for a few weeks, at least.

My parents made known this plan to Harry and his companion, and they without hesitation cheerfully gave up the **coveted** article, and for the next few weeks they used the hard side of a board as a substitute over the very rough roads.

[...]

Mother’s plan proved a success from the start, with her **unremitting** loving care and cheer. During those weeks of hot dusty rides over natural roads, she kept the bandages about the broken limb, always wet, night and day, and in every way tenderly nursed and comforted her. Nothing else was used but water, for we had nothing else. Many nights our camp was **pitched** near the Platte River where water could be obtained. This water had, however, a bad **distinctive** feature. It could not be used until the mud and sand had settled to the bottom of the bucket. The river is wide, very shallow, and is from bank to bank, for hundreds of miles, a vast mass of floating **quicksand**, a very treacherous stream for animals which were liable to sink out of sight in its changing sands.

Dear, ever-willing, ever-busy mother greatly disliked to use this muddy water, which after settling overnight would still be cloudy with mud and unfit for drinking or even washing. Many a time those long June days, we went thirsty rather than drink it. Moreover, it discolored the bandages at once, which of course could not be removed. This **unsanitary** condition was difficult for mother, with her life-long habits of **scrupulous** cleanliness and neatness to **reconcile**.

Our animals, as well, had no use for the Platte River water. Often it became necessary to drive them a mile or more to this river for water, to find they would not drink -- too much quicksand and mud in the **solution**.

It was, indeed, a great punishment to our little sister, Carro, to remain on that spring seat on her back, strapped to it so she could not possibly turn over or fall off for several weeks, and this too, over a rough natural road, badly cut up by animals and wagons of the great **throng** extending in big wagon trains hundreds of miles ahead.

Her only comfort was a little doll which she fondly clung to all hours of those **tiresome** days. There remained for her upturned eyes, as she lay on her back, but one other **diversion**, a view of the bluish-gray wagon cover above her with pockets for various articles. Had she been able to peer ahead, she would have seen the clouds of dust, the wagons drawn by horses, mules and cattle winding up and down to the left and right, according to the easiest natural roadway before us, and the ever-present **aromatic** sage covering the entire valley. Had she been able to extend her vision back to the hills on the north of the valley, she would have seen many buffalo feeding at any hour daily.

In a few weeks, she was permitted to sit up when the wagon was not under **headway**. The bandages were later removed, and eventually she was able to walk about at camping time, the favorite of all the train. We lost no time all these weeks and entered and left camp with the rest daily. Father and mother greatly rejoiced when it was found the bones had grown together perfectly and her leg was straight.

When we started on our long journey with oxen across the Plains to California, we could not think of leaving our dog. Quite a few suggested that, owing to his unusually short bow legs and stocky body, he would be unable to travel such a distance. We could not think of parting with our pet, so along he came, day after day, week after week, and month after month. He had a great dislike for water. Many rivers and creeks had to be forded. It was then that Prince would run up and down to see if he could not possibly find a log or some stones or shallower water, always crying and barking as he were being left behind, finally ending, if he could find no possible way to keep from wetting himself, by his running and jumping in as far as he could and then swimming across. Once out on the opposite side, he rubbed himself in the grass and dirt till he became but a faint **semblance** of himself. Upon coming out of the water he had the habit peculiar to all dogs of running about and shaking himself and throwing the water **liberally** on anyone within range of his **improvised** sprinkling outfit.

When we started west he was nearly a year old. His second year was in the midst of experiences most unique, covering the wilds of the prairies, plains, mountains, **summits**, deep dark canyons and deserts from southern Minnesota to the mines of California.

I recall an incident which occurred up the Platte Valley some four hundred miles west of Omaha. The weather was **exceedingly** hot during the day. Prince had been showing signs of being quite lame. He kept out of the road and preferred walking on the grass, if any. I examined his feet which I had noticed him licking and found the soles were badly cracked and worn through to **the quick** and bleeding. He was very sensitive about my even touching them. I tried tying one foot up in a piece of cloth, but this he objected to and was not long in pulling off. I found it was impossible to keep his feet tied up with anything we could **devise**. A day or so later we were travelling over low sandy **hillocks** devoid of all vegetation. It was about eleven o’clock and very hot. All the cattle were panting and lolling, as there had been no opportunity for them to **quench** their thirst since leaving camp in the morning. We were all busy attending to our teams when we heard someone calling from our rear and looking back saw several pointing to Prince. He was sitting up on his **haunches** and crying almost like a child.

I ran quickly to his aid while the wagons of our train following us came to a halt. When I reached him, he kept his unusual position while he as much as **implored** me to look at his feet. This I did and found they were bleeding from several places and worn to the quick. The sand was as though it had been cooked in an oven. I gathered him up in my arms and carried him to our wagon and put him in the wagon bed. He had never ridden till this time. Previously, whenever we had put him in the wagon, he had jumped out.

On this occasion, however, he for once as much as said, “This is just what I wanted as my feet burned as I walked in the fiery sands till I suffered so from their bleeding that I could do nothing else but sit upon my hind legs and cry till you came to my rescue.” He showed his appreciation by lying down under the spring seat upon which Carro was lying. I half suspect that this was why he was willing to remain, as he was deeply attached to her and for two weeks or more since she had been lying there, he had missed her; and now that he was again by her side, he was with all his suffering quite beside himself with happiness. He could not be made to lie down until he had shown her his love by putting up his two feet on the edge of the pillow upon which she was lying. When we insisted that he take them down, there were stains of blood from his bleeding feet -- “Poor little Prinnie,” as we fondly called him.

***Vocabulary***

Tramped - verb - Walked through or over a place wearily or reluctantly and for a long distance

Lolling - adjective - Sticking out the tongue so it is hanging out of the mouth

Hind - adjective - Situated at the back; rear

Poise - adjective - Balance or self-control

Splints - noun - A thin piece of wood or other stiff material used to hold a broken bone in place

Ascertain - verb - To find out or determine

Expendiency - noun - Something that is a means to an end

Console - verb - Comfort

Specimens - noun - Examples or samples

Divested - verb - Stripped or removed of something

Condition - noun - Situation considering the circumstances

Obliged - adjective - Forced by the situation

Cripple - noun - A person who can't use one or more arms or legs (now considered offensive)

Buffers - noun - Something used to cushion shocks on a machine

Joltings - noun - Sudden and sharp movements

Provisioned - adjective - Supplied with food and necessities

Extension - noun - An additional amount of time to do something

Resourceful - adjective - Able to deal with a new situation or challenge

Span - noun - A team of animals, especially oxen or mules, hitched to a wagon or plow

Depriving - verb - Remove something from someone's ownership

Coveted - adjective - Wished for or desired

Unremitting - adjective - Not reducing' constant to the point of annoyance

Pitched - verb - To set something up, especially a camp

Distinctive - adjective - Having a quality that marked it as different from other things

Quicksand - noun - A bed of very soft sand so full of water that something walking on it may get stuck or sink into it.

Unsanitary - adjective - Not healthy or clean to the point that it would spread disease

Scrupulous - adjective - Careful and exact

Reconcile - verb - Make differing people or ideas agree with one another

Solution - noun - A mixture of two or more substances, especially where one thing has dissolved into another

Throng - noun - Many people crowded together or a crowd

Tiresome - adjective - Annoying or exhausting

Diversion - noun - A distraction or pastime or game

Aromatic - adjective - Having a smell, especially a pleasant or strong one

Headway - noun - Forward movement or progress

Semblance - noun - Appearance or image of something

Liberally - adverb - In large amounts, generously

Improvised - adjective - Made without previous work or preparation

Summits - noun - The highest point of something like a hill or mountain

Exceedingly - adverb - Very or to an unusual degree

Quick - noun - Tender flesh, especially under nails or claws

Devise - verb - Make or form

Hillocks - noun - Small hills or mounds

Quench - verb - Satisfy something.

Haunches - noun - The hips or rear legs, especially of an animal

Implored - verb - Beg for help, especially if pitiful