

Lewiston sits in a deep canyon at the confluence of the Clearwater and Snake rivers in north central Idaho. When Ken and I and the boys arrived in 1969, the rivers ran free, but not for long. Lower Granite Dam, the last of four dams on the Snake before it meets the Columbia, was completed a few years later, after we had left, and brought slack water—essentially a reservoir—to Lewiston and Clarkston, its twin city across the river in Washington State.

All of that—the flowing rivers, the controversy over the soon-to-be reservoir—was lost on me as I faced the transition from a stable income and military housing to an unknown future. My first impression of Lewiston was that the rivers were nice, but the town stank—literally. A huge paper mill on the east end of town spewed out smoke and fumes that smelled like rotten eggs. It wasn't too bad downtown, and seldom was detectable around the river bend in the neighborhoods up the hill south of town where we found an apartment to rent. Financial realities hit almost immediately. Ken quickly discovered that the optometry practice he was taking over from a retiree was not a thriving business. Ken was serious about optometry and intent on running the practice his way. I didn't understand the nuances of "his way" versus other ways, but it seemed to me he wasn't listening to his clients or reaching out to other optometrists for advice. Early on I tried to talk to him about it, but he was dismissive. "You just don't understand," he would say. He was right, of course. I didn't understand, but at the time I experienced it as a stubborn contrariness in Ken that I hadn't noticed before. I chalked it up to stress.

And I was dealing with my own stress. Soon, it became obvious we couldn't afford the first apartment, and we began looking for something cheaper. A rundown furnished house set back from the sidewalk on a big lot in the same neighborhood seemed

acceptable. There was room for the kids to play outside and trees to shade us from the hot summer sun. At less than eight hundred feet of elevation, Lewiston is the lowest spot in the state and often the hottest. The house itself left a lot to be desired. It had several do-it-yourself add-ons, a low ceiling, bad lighting, and inadequate insulation. We suffered in the summer heat and used space heaters to keep warm in cooler weather. Once, I smelled something burning and found one of Tim's many stuffed animals against the heater—singed but not yet ruined. It was nap time, and he had probably tossed it before falling asleep.

“We've got to get out of this dump,” I told Ken that night. “I'm going to the newspaper to see about a job so we can afford something decent.”

“What about the kids?” he said.

“Maybe I can work evenings while you're home.” I had no idea if that was possible; I was just determined to try to change our circumstances.