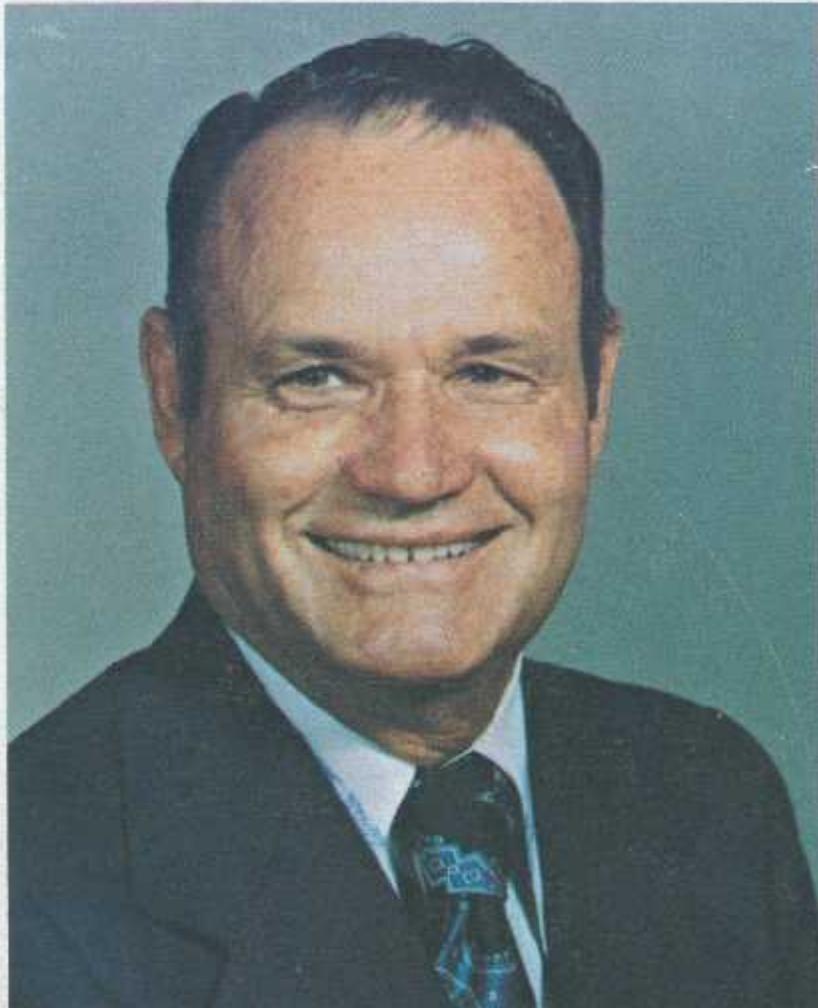


L. E. LEIPOLD, Ph.D.

ALTON S.
NEWELL

RECYCLING EXPERT



L.E. Leipold, Ph.D.

Alton S. Newell – Recycling Expert

Men of Achievement Series

ALTON S. NEWELL,

Recycling Expert

UP FROM POVERTY TO BECOME
A WORLDWIDE RECYCLING MERCHANT

By
L.E. LEIPOLD, Ph. D.

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To
WINNIE JANDREAU NEWELL,
wife, business associate and ever-present inspiration
to her husband,
this book is dedicated.

CONTENTS

Foreword.....	8
Chapter One	
A Letter Is Written.....	12
Chapter Two	
Oklahoma in Alton Newell’s Boyhood Years.....	16
Chapter Three	
A Proud Heritage.....	19
Chapter Four	
Boyhood Days in Kansas.....	22
Chapter Five	
The Newells Return to Oklahoma.....	28
Chapter Six	
Sharecropping in Oklahoma.....	32
Chapter Seven	
The Okies Go to California.....	47
Chapter Eight	
Fruit Tramps.....	62
Chapter Nine	
Growing Up.....	72

Chapter Ten	
The Restless Years.....	79
Chapter Eleven	
Getting a Start in Business.....	83
Chapter Twelve	
The Invention of the Newell Shredder.....	89
Chapter Thirteen	
The Newell Shredder in Action.....	95
Chapter Fourteen	
Automobile Graveyards.....	98
Chapter Fifteen	
The Newell Enterprises.....	103
Chapter Sixteen	
Alton S. Newell – The Man.....	106

FOREWORD

The United States of America is a wasteful nation. Though its inhabitants were once a frugal people, they were traditionally little concerned about the natural wealth of the nation itself, for once upon a time this country had few people and seemingly unlimited resources.

When this nation was founded, it extended from the Atlantic Ocean halfway across the continent to the Mississippi River. In all that vast expanse of territory there lived only three million people. Few factories were to be found anywhere in it, and those that did exist were small, totally unlike those of today. Coal was not yet used, some cities prohibiting its use because it polluted the air. Oil from the ground was unknown. Rivers and streams ran clear and fresh, unpoisoned by herbicides and pesticides.

Almost from the ocean shore, the land was tree-covered, sheltering wild animals of all kinds. To get meat for his table, the family head needed only to take his fowling piece and go into the nearby woods. Game of all kinds was plentiful.

As the nation expanded westward, forests were cut down to provide tillable soil, wildlife retreating as man advanced. The invention of the cotton gin made the need for more cultivatable land greater, while factories sprang up in the North that made it a great industrial region. Located along rivers from which they often secured their power, they emptied their waste materials into the streams' waters.

America was a rural nation in those days, with nine persons out of ten living on farms. As industries developed, cities grew, drawing people from the farms. The rural freeman became an urban slave, dependent upon others for the food and goods that he consumed.

The nation expanded westward inexorably, not content until the Pacific Ocean was reached in the middle of the nineteenth century. The vast herds of buffalo which had fed on Western prairie grasses for untold centuries were cut down unmercifully until they became extinct. The virgin forests were decimated, making a few men rich but the nation poorer year by year.

As the face of the nation changed, so did the character of the people. Small towns were laid out by the thousands and cities grew larger. The small-farm owners became fewer in number as the size of farms increased; small-town life took the place of the farm for many families. The trend grew and expanded into the twentieth century.

Life was still relatively simple and uncomplex at the beginning of the present century. Most people stayed at home or wandered but a few miles afield, no farther than a team or horses and a buggy could take them in a day and return them home in time to do the evening

chores. In the small towns many families kept a cow and a dozen or more chickens. They got their water from a pump in the back yard; cooking was done indoors and toilets were located outdoors, a situation that has since been considerably reversed. Telephones were crude, a long-distance call usually being made only at the death of a family member, telegrams being more frequently used.

The country store was as simple as the life of its patrons. Necessities were stocked, but few luxuries. There were no frozen foods, no cellophane-wrapped articles for sale, no plastics. Grocery bills, paid monthly, were only a few dollars for the average family. Family gardens were planted, tended and harvested by all but the improvident and perhaps the village banker. Saloons were saloons and women stayed out of them. Cigarette smokers were called cigarette fiends and the cigarettes themselves were aptly referred to as coffin mails. Few villages had electric lights, sewer systems or paved streets. Along the main streets, hitching posts were provided for the convenience of farmer shoppers, each post well chewed by the impatient horses which were hitched to them. Streets were muddy or dusty, depending on the weather. The main event of each day was the arrival of the passenger train, usually met by a good-sized delegation of villagers.

This was the typical picture until something occurred that revolutionized the pattern of American life. The internal combustion engine was invented, and men like Duryea, Olds and Ford began to experiment with it and a buggy, with the engine replacing the horse. Eventually they made it work, crudely at first, but each year it was better and better. Instead of three or four miles an hour, man could now travel twenty or twenty-five, so he could go farther away from home and yet get back the same day. He could, that is, provided the roads weren't too muddy or filled with ruts.

Demands began to be made that roads be built better, even be graveled. Paved roads were not considered seriously at first, but in time they, too, were demanded. Three-lane highways came in vogue here and there, the third lane being for passing convenience, but too many motorists going in opposite directions began using the third lane at the same time, with tragic results, so the number of lanes was increased to four, sometimes with a median separating them. From a narrow, muddy country road, ungraced by informational signs, to the modern freeway, took approximately a half-century of time. What comes next is anyone's guess, but with more and more travelers taking to the air, perhaps the freeways have now almost reached their peak of development. It will be interesting for someone to look back fifty years from now to see how wrong even such a simple prediction as this can be.

In towns and cities, old discarded automobiles gradually became a problem. What to do about the disposition of the old cars has brought forth innumerable proposals, but few of them have been of definite value. Many persons, concerned about the ugly appearance of the lots, suggested laws or ordinances requiring the erection of high board fences around them. This would satisfy those whose aesthetic sensitivities were offended, but would do nothing to help solve the real problem.

Alton Newell's invention is one of the few promising developments that have taken place in this area of concern. *The need is to get rid of the vehicles that have already been junked or abandoned and to prevent the accumulation of additional ones.*

This is the task to which Alton Newell has set his hand. From scrap yard owner to international metal processor has been a long struggle upward. Today he heads the Newell Manufacturing Company and a half-dozen or more other companies. His ventures take him to all parts of the world.

Alton Newell's life story has many facets. Every American can find in it justification for a strong faith in his native land. His biography as it appears in this book is divided into two parts. The first records the almost unbelievable story of his childhood, absorbingly fantastic. Part II relates his rise in the business world, from scrap dealer to inventor and international reprocessor of metals.

L.E.L.

PART I

A Letter Is Written

In the Wednesday, December 29, 1971, issue of the prestige newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, appeared a full-page letter addressed to “Dear Uncle Sam.” It began, “Since you have been the object of much criticism lately from both within and without your borders, I would like to write you a few words of praise to brighten your New Year.”

The writer continued:

“In the past two years I have traveled in almost all the countries of the world. In most of the places I visited I saw irrefutable evidence of your deep concern for the welfare of all the people of the globe. Your men in uniform are scattered throughout the world. Not a one is there to conquer any space or subdue a human being. They are at their assigned places to insure that free men will remain free. Many white crosses there give evidence of the sacrifice made by those who never returned to their homeland. Twice in my lifetime you have joined other free nations to put down those who would enslave their fellow man. You beat your enemies to the ground only to pick them up again and dust them off, bind up their wounds and tenderly nurse them back to health again. In many cases you provided them with more modern and sophisticated equipment than we have at home. Your scientists, engineers and technicians are busy all over the world today to help people obtain a more abundant life.”

“Your doctors, nurses and many helpers are fighting the effects of disease and poverty in underdeveloped and, in some case, overpopulated countries of the world. Most of the people of the free world appreciate this and praise you for it and pray that you will not become discouraged enough to cease your endeavor.”

“I pray for you and thank God for you, dear Uncle, because you have done so much for me.”

The words “...because you have done so much for me...” were read with some disbelief by many people. This man was praising America at a time when thousands of protesters were filling the streets, flaunting their banners of negativism and hate. Yet here was a man who dared to speak out in praise of the system that others were condemning.

Why did he do this? The startled readers read on, the next paragraph of the letter giving little reason for such praise.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

“I was born in a tent in Oklahoma and grew up in poverty. My parents were sharecroppers and moved from farm to farm. In the fall of 1922 they took their six children and headed west and became migrant workers. Seven or eight months later we reached California in time for the fruit harvest and became known, along with others, as ‘fruit tramps.’

“The next year my parents separated when I was ten years of age. All the children, ranging in age from two to fourteen, went with my father, and for several years went back and forth from Texas to California, working our way along. We went to school when we were in one place long enough for the truant officers to find us. Getting an education under these conditions was difficult, but with the help of many others, we all made it to high school. ...Our father’s health was not good, and he also developed a serious drinking problem.

“The two youngest children had to be sent to their grandparents for a while, but we soon got back together again. We finally settled down out West and began our slow climb out of poverty. Many people helped us along the way.

“Thank you, dear Uncle, for allowing God to bless us through you.”

Born in a tent in an Oklahoma field, living a childhood of poverty, making the best of a broken home and a drinking father, Newell was yet thankful for his blessings. The final paragraph of the letter told why.

“I sit today at the top of eight companies, one of which is doing business all over the world. I do not claim even a small amount of genius for myself, but would like to tell the world that our system of government gives a better chance to the individual to have a good life than any system known to man. I do not belittle those who have been unable to reach their goal, but offer my experience for their encouragement and also to encourage those who have it made to help those who don’t. I could never go back and find and thank all those whose lives touched and enriched mine, so to make up for it, I will try to help and encourage others. I count it a privilege to support my church and other worthwhile causes. I don’t mind paying income taxes, because they are in indication of material blessings. So, dear Uncle Sam, don’t let anyone tamper with your system of government unless they first show you a better one. Thanks for listening and Happy New Year.”

These were courageous words, spoken with conviction. While the streets and college campuses of the country were filled with noise and violence protesting the American way of life, the writer of this letter stepped out of the ranks to proclaim, “Here is a man who appreciates the qualities that have made our nation great. *Don’t let anyone tamper with this system unless he first comes forward with a better one!*”

Who was this man who “laid it on the line” in this bold manner? The letter was signed “Alton S. Newell, President, Newell Manufacturing Company, San Antonio, Texas.”

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

In the letter there are disclosed at least five reasons why Alton Newell should be a failure today instead of heading numerous corporations doing business in a dozen or more countries of the world. He was born in poverty, which alone was enough to doom him to a life of failure, but there were other reasons to add to this first heavy one. His parents were migrant workers, moving from place to place with the crops and the seasons. But those were still not enough odds to keep him from rising above their level. His parents separated when he was a boy, leaving the father to care for the six children as best he could. The kind of life that resulted meant that little formal education could be had by Alton and his brothers and sisters. Alton himself never succeeded in reaching the third year in high school, dropping out in the middle of the tenth grade.

Yet in 1971, he was willing and able to spend \$20,000 to express his gratefulness to Uncle Sam for 'being so good to him.'

America is filled with countless young people today who find it easier to give up than to make an honest effort to succeed. "I can't" and "I don't have a chance" are two excuses that are most often given for idleness and dependence upon others. Unless help is given by others, failure is accepted as a way of life. But not so with Alton Newell. With five strikes against him – three being the usual number that puts one out – he continued the struggle and came out on top. In his life story there are lessons well worth the reading.

Many *Wall Street Journal* readers found the message written by Alton Newell worthy of response. Letters and cards flooded his mailbox, over 1400 of them. Of this number, only six were negative in nature, several of these being rambling, almost incoherent communications. Scores of companies reproduced the letter, giving it to their employees. Churches printed it in their bulletins; lodges and other organizations distributed it to their members. The President of the United States sent a personal message of congratulations. It was a new experience for many, this letter of praise and credit, of gratefulness to a system that made it possible for a poor boy to rise above his past to a position of prominence.

I read the letter and pondered it long. I did not know Alton Newell; perhaps he was a man worth meeting. Would his life story be worthy of writing so that others could profit by his experiences, his philosophy becoming an antidote against the defeatism so prevalent among young people of the day? It might well be that this would be worth finding out. Several days later I was on my way to Texas.

San Antonio is an unusual city, with a beautifully landscaped river flowing through its center. The Alamo, famous Texan shrine, stands in the city square, dedicated to the memory of the brave men who had the courage to die there in the name of freedom and liberty. Go south on Alamo Avenue to Probandt Street and turn left for a few blocks until you come to a huge green building with the single word "Newell" painted on its side. Fifteen acres surround it, all part of the business complex. This is the home of the Newell Manufacturing Company, founded by Alton Newell.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

One wonders what business is carried on there, with huge piles of scrap metal piled about, and you inquire of a grounds attendant. He seems surprised that you do not know.

“Why, this is a recycling plant,” he informs you. “Tons and tons of scrap metal of all kinds are ‘chewed up’ each day by the big machine that Mr. Newell invented. An old automobile goes in, bits and pieces come out, to be reprocessed into new and usable metal. It’s quite a machine!”

Indeed it is quite a machine. Go to the very top of it, into the control tower, and watch it in operation. A powerful grapple picks up the metal and drops it onto the conveyer. As it disappears into the maw, one thinks in disbelief, “No machine can grind those big pieces to bits,” but moments later the bits come out onto the conveyer belt on the other side of the machine.

So it goes on, hour after endless hour, day after day. Great gaps are made in the scrap piles, to be filled in by other scrap brought in by railroad cars, by trucks and trailers. It is never ending, this process of recycling and reclamation.

In a building on the south end of the site is Alton Newell’s office, one-time “Okie” migrant worker and California “fruit tramp,” the man who fought the odds and won.

Oklahoma in Alton Newell's Boyhood Years

Oklahoma in Alton Newell's boyhood years was a fascinating place in which to live. Its wide, sprawling prairie lands had long been the home of Indian tribes. The "Five Nations," the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks and Seminoles, were respected by both the white man and their fellow Indians. When the rest of the Old West was growing up, wild and lawless, Oklahoma was forbidden territory to whites, who were warned to stay out of it. Not until 1889 was a portion of it opened to settlement, and the first mad rush occurred at high noon on April 22 when a portion of "Old Oklahoma" was opened to settlement by the white man.

Lying deep in the heart of America, the region that became known as Oklahoma was penetrated by white men within a half century after Christopher Columbus first raised the royal flag of Isabella and Ferdinand on the shores of Salvador. Having conquered the peaceful inhabitants of Old Mexico through trickery and force, the Spaniards were greedy for new sources of wealth. They heard stories of wonderful cities of gold built in the wide-spreading country that lay northward and determined to find them. Wandering Indians had probably seen the setting sun's rays reflecting off the walls of pueblo settlements such as Taos at the foot of the Sangre de Cristos and mistook the adobe for gold. There were seven of these cities of gold, the storytellers said, towering structures that dominated the countryside about them.

Gold that was so plentiful that cities could be built with it! What wealth would the discoverer of them possess! Greed and longing for fame drove the Spaniards to the north in search of them. Coronado, with a thousand men, ranged from the sunny vales of California to the hills of Oklahoma. They looked down into the depths of the Grand Canyon; they suffered through the heat of an Arizona summer; they marveled at the snow-covered peaks of the Sangre de Cristos and the scorching great dunes that lay at their base, but they found no cities of gold. Pressing onward, they came to the sprawling plains of Oklahoma where great herds of buffalo grazed restlessly, but still no signs of riches were seen. Discouraged, they returned to Mexico to report their failure.

The land first belonged to Spain, then France claimed it, and again it became Spanish territory. Then in 1803 it was added to the vast domain of the United States as a part of the Louisiana Purchase. Time went by and Oklahoma became divided, the eastern half known as the Indian Territory, the western section as Oklahoma, each with its own government. So it remained until the inevitable happened – settlers moved in and it eventually became a state. Nothing could prevent this from happening, not even solemn treaties. White men never could

bear to see good land occupied by the Indians; they should be assigned to land of little value and confined to reservations.

An ironic joke was played by fate on the white men in the case of Oklahoma. The almost worthless land that was set aside for the Indians proved to have a commodity of immense wealth lying deep beneath its surface, called *oil*. America was entering the machine age when Alton Newell was a boy and soon there would be millions of automobiles on its highways and great planes in the skies calling for ever greater supplies of gasoline, a product derived from crude oil. The poor Indians, long condemned to a life of dependence upon a dole from the white man's government, suddenly found themselves rich in money and worldly possessions. It was almost too much for the white guardians of Indian welfare to endure. Ways and means were found to share in their red brothers' good fortune, but the feeling of envy was hard to disguise.

So the Oklahoma Territory and the Indian Territory were united to become Oklahoma state. Congress affected the union in 1906 and statehood occurred the next year. What had from time immemorial been a lonesome, wind-swept and primitive land became the forty-sixth state to enter the Union. Only four more were to be added later.

The state was very young when Alton Newell was born in the little tent that served as a home for his parents and their growing brood. Times were good in America during those years, the father was told, but he failed to share in the country's bounty. World War I came and went, but Alton was too young to remember its stirring years. Probably that was because there was little that stirred in their lives, so far removed from the scenes of action.

Of course, the family was poor or it would not be living as it did, wandering from place to place wherever there was a promise of work. Sharecroppers never became well to do; the cards were stacked too well against them. A poor living was the best that they could expect and that was what they got. They moved from farm to farm, doing the only thing that they were qualified to do, satisfied with the meager returns received, yet *never* satisfied. America was *their* country, too, yet for them it was an alien land. Alton grew in stature and in years and wondered about such things.

Why should he and his family wander about the country, to California to pick fruit from the trees, back to Oklahoma to go from farm to farm, living in a tent in a dusty field or in a poor farmhouse? Why shouldn't they live in a real house like other folks did? What big houses there were along the streets of the towns through which they passed! The lawns were green, flowers bloomed in the patches, big trees shaded the houses from the hot afternoon sun. The people who sat on the porches sipping ice-cold drinks seemed so happy and contented, their clothes clean and brightly colored. Alton's clothing was faded from many washings and sometimes it was not very clean either. He felt uncomfortable as the old car, loaded with all their worldly possessions, drove by, with the curious and often contemptuous eyes of the villagers following them as they went slowly down the street.

What would it be like to live in a big house on a shady street, to eat his meals at a table with the whole family sitting around it, to have his own room upstairs and to go to school in the morning? How wonderful, he thought, yet he liked his own way of life, too. Other boys envied *him*, he found out on those rare occasions when opportunities came to compare their lots. To go from one town to another, to see California and the big orange groves yellow with fruit, to sleep in a tent at night, to eat one's daily meals outdoors – how wonderful that seemed, in the eyes of the tied-down boys of the towns through which they passed. Yes, Alton admitted, there *was* something to say in favor of their way of living. There was a freedom about it that he loved – but – would he always have to live like this? What about when he grew up and had a family of his own? Would they live as he was now, wanderers, never settling down? Would he ever have a house in which to live? But how could he earn enough money to buy one? He never could, he felt sure, and *he never would*. Sharecropping and picking fruit, that was all that he knew how to do.

Wondering, wondering, wondering – so many things to think about. He didn't like it when his parents quarreled, which they sometimes did. His father worked hard, when he worked at all, and there wasn't enough money to take care of his large family's needs. He couldn't blame his mother, either, for what kind of life was this for a woman? She wanted a house like other women had and a good bed to sleep in. Alton knew that she felt ashamed when in a store, stretching her few pennies to make them go as far as possible, her faded, cheap dress contrasting sharply with the neat clothing of the village women who never seemed to ponder the price of an article, buying what they needed or what they wanted and she always needing more than she had money to pay for.

A Proud Heritage

Alton Newell is not ashamed of his humble birth. Like Abraham Lincoln, his early life was not of his own choosing. Lincoln looked back upon his youth of unbelievable poverty yet could say in sincerity, "All that I am or hope to be I owe to my angel mother." He never spoke a word of recrimination nor pointed a finger in blame. Admittedly, Abe's father, Tom, was shiftless; that fact the son could not deny. What was important to Abe was that *he himself was not*. He was not responsible for his father's ways, but he was for his own. The world would not judge him by his father's life, but according to what he did with his own.

As Alton grew from youth to maturity, he became convinced that he had his own life to live and that it need not be patterned after that of his father. Many times he had been told of forebears who were respected members of society who lived in affluence. His great-grandfather, Edward Drumgould Newell, had been one of the largest plantation owners in Louisiana and now lay buried beneath a huge memorial arch in the Newell's Ridge cemetery in Tensas Parish, Louisiana. Ill times may have fallen on his father, but not all of the Newells were migrant workers, wandering homeless and without hope. There was Dr. Edward Dunbar Newell of Chattanooga, for example, and others. His father was proud of the Newell name, as well he might be.

America was very young when Edward Drumgould Newell was born on Washington's birthday in North Carolina in the year 1810. He was the son of Edward and Sallie Stokes Moody Newell, who had witnessed the stirring Revolutionary War years. Edward was eleven years old when Lord Cornwallis and the memory of the occasion was passed on to his own children. His father, John Newell, had come from Virginia to North Carolina long before Daniel Boone had first crossed the mountains to discover the rich lands that lay beyond. He and his wife, Lucy, had left Virginia to make their way to lovely Carolina, and it was there that the family made its home.

The good lands west of the Appalachian Mountains attracted thousands of men and women dissatisfied with the worn-out soil along the coast. Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee were settled first, and it was to Clarksville in Montgomery County, Tennessee, that Edward Drumgould Newell migrated in 1830. Young and restless, he looked longingly toward the west where there was land in abundance in the valley and at a cost so low that it was virtually free for the taking.

Others had also yielded to the call of the West – intrepid men like Andrew Jackson, who became President, and Davy Crockett, boisterous and brave, who boasted that he killed wildcats with his bare hands but whose luck ran out at the Alamo in Texas. Jackson, Crockett and thousands of others, among them Edward Newell.

Clarksville was good, Edward Newell conceded, better than North Carolina, but yet he was not satisfied. It was too settled. Daniel Boone had moved farther west, too, beyond the Mississippi for the same reason, complaining that he needed “more elbow room.” Edwards’ brother, “Dr. Tom,” felt the same way and the two men talked about it on a summer evening as they watched the sun sink behind the hills. The town was small, but it was growing. Someday it would become quite a sizable little city of more than twenty thousand inhabitants, but this neither Edward nor Tom knew.

South of them, across the state line, lay Mississippi and Alabama, much of their land still a virgin wilderness. Fertile and untouched, it offered enticing inducements to the two brothers. However, there was rough country to go through before they would reach Mississippi, which they decided should be their destination. The big Tennessee River was an imposing barrier, but there were other streams, too, many of them. Why not do as others were doing, letting the rivers take them southward? Clarksville lay on the banks of the Cumberland which flowed northward toward Illinois before emptying into the Ohio. That wide river, which had its beginning far to the eastward in Pennsylvania, in turn joined the majestic Mississippi, greatest waterway of them all.

The thought was father to the deed. The two men built a stout raft and the Cumberland was soon carrying them toward the Ohio. As they left the Tennessee hills behind them, regrets were many, but the lure of the unknown which lay ahead was too strong to resist. Resolutely they turned their eyes to the new lands and left Tennessee behind. The little raft entered the Ohio and then soon came the day when they arrived at its junction with the Mississippi. Now, here was a river that *really* was a river. Wide beyond their expectations, they were thrilled yet filled with fear. They knew it had no falls, no dangerous rapids, but it was so *big* and it wound this way and that; always it seemed as if they were rounding a bend.

They stopped at Memphis to get the feel of land under their feet and to replenish their supplies before going on. Now Arkansas lay on their right and Mississippi on their left. They had no idea where they should land. A conference was held and it was decided that it should be farther on downriver toward New Orleans. Curves, curves, curves, always the river wound on, meandering slowly toward its union with the gulf. Once they entered what proved to be a blind course, soon to become an oxbow lake. They had to pole their way out to where the current again caught their raft, then they were once again on their way.

When they got below Vicksburg they felt that they were nearing their journey’s end. When they reached Grand Gulf they docked their little craft and went ashore. This would be their new home, they agreed.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Look carefully at one of today's highway maps and you may find Grand Gulf on it, but it is too small to be generally included in a list of Mississippi towns and villages. It was small when Edward and Thomas Newell landed there one warm day in 1832, but they had faith in their judgment. There they began a general mercantile business, the goods arriving by river boat. It was the heyday of river traffic for years, and the brothers enjoyed the experiences they were having.

Meanwhile, Edward had no intention of remaining a small-town merchant. He explored the country across the river in Louisiana and soon was in possession of a huge estate of 10,000 acres of what had been government land. There he built a beautiful home, calling his land Cypress Plantation. To it he brought his bride two years later, Celia Ann Dorsey, daughter of Samuel Dorsey of nearby Port Gibson. Here Edward Newell made his home and prospered, becoming one of the leading citizens of the state. He was elected to the state legislature, and when the Civil War became a reality, he was a member of the secession legislature of Louisiana.

Celia Ann died after twenty years of married life, leaving no children. Edward then married Elizabeth Nugent Moody, a widow, and to them a daughter was born, but she did not live beyond childhood. Elizabeth, too, died, and again Edward married, his third wife being Jennie Yates of Schenectady, New York. Four children blessed this union, two sons and two daughters. One of the sons became the grandfather of Alton Newell.

In 1874, Edward Drumgould Newell and his two sons founded the town of Newellton. It was an ambitious project with a good outlook, but the passing years have not been kind to it. Like so many towns of long ago, it is no longer to be found on some of the maps of the state.

Edward Newell lived a long and active life. On June 10, 1888, he died at his plantation home. Long a cotton planter, he had invented a very useful device used in baling cotton, the Newell screw cotton bale press. He had served his state in many ways and the family members who survived him were proud of his record. His namesake and grandson, Dr. Edward Dunbar Newell of Chattanooga, Tennessee, erected a beautiful monument to his memory at the site of his grave.

Small wonder that today Alton Newell views his ancestry with pride.

Boyhood Days in Kansas

Whatever else may be said about Alton Newell's boyhood, it was an interesting time of life for him.

He was born in a tent on the edge of a cotton patch near the town of Maysville, Oklahoma, on August 19, 1913. His older brother and sister were born under equally humble circumstances in the same area. The parents were sharecroppers and seldom lived in a neighborhood for more than a year or two.

Sharecroppers, more numerous then than now, were tenant farmers who worked the farms on which they lived, sharing the crops that were raised with the owners. Sometimes an owner would provide a milk cow or two and perhaps a few pigs and chickens also to make the place more attractive to the tenant. Often these farms were neither fertile nor productive and very little equipment was furnished. In such cases the sharecropper found it difficult to eke out more than a bare living, though the work was hard and the hours long. They were generally restless, moving from farm to farm, always in search of a better place.

Very little irrigating was done in those days, the farmers being entirely dependent upon rainfall to water their crops. In the 1930s, along drought made a "dust bowl" out of the area, and crop failures resulted year after discouraging year. The drought area affected much of the West, from the Dakotas to Texas, and thousands of farms were abandoned.

There never was quite enough money to stretch from one crop to another in the Newell family. In desperation, the day came when the father strapped a bedroll on his back and hitchhiked his way northward in search of work. *Somewhere*, he felt, there must be jobs available for those men who were willing to work.

"All that I want is a *chance*," he told his family as he bade them good-bye. Where he was going or when he would be back, he did not know. He would write, he promised, and with these words he strode from the house and soon was out of sight down the road.

Sometimes in the summer word would come to the Newells that work could be had in the wheat fields of Kansas and then the father would hasten there to earn enough money to tide them over until their own crops were ready to harvest. At other times the owner of the farm on which they lived would advance them a few dollars, to be paid back when the crops were sold. Storekeepers were loathe to extend sizable credit to sharecroppers, for if the rains

did not come and harvest was poor, there would be but small chance that they would ever be paid.

When Alton was two years old the family decided to leave Oklahoma and go to Kansas. World War I was in progress in Europe and American grains and other products were in demand. The state to the north offered more opportunities for work, the father said. Besides, Alton's mother's father lived near Garden City and they were all anxious to see him. The grandparents had separated when the mother was a small child and she had seen her father on few occasions since.

Opportunities for successful farming were greater in western Kansas, they figured, for considerable irrigating was done in that area with less chance of crop failures. Depending entirely upon natural rainfall was taking too great a chance, they agreed. Sugar beets, watermelons and sweet potatoes were among the principal crops of the region.

Near Garden City the Newells made their new home on a farm owned by a cattle raiser who depended upon the crops raised on his own farm to feed the cattle which were fed for market.

Alton's memories of those days are long, both pleasant and unpleasant. One of the earliest is of riding in his father's wagon as the rounds of the feeding lot were made, refilling the troughs with silage, emptied so quickly by the ever-feeding cattle. "Silage" was made by cutting grain, cane or other feed crops while they were green and chopping them up and storing them in huge silos. There they fermented, the peculiar sweet-rotten smell pervading the atmosphere. Alton found the odor nauseating, but the cattle found the silage much to their liking and thrived on it.

The winters in western Kansas were colder than they were in Oklahoma, for the altitude was higher and the winds that swept down from the Rockies were often bitter. Snow sometimes accumulated to a depth of two or more feet, making travel difficult. Then the father would take the wheels off the wagon and replace them with long runners which glided over the snow with ease.

A sport that the boys indulged in during the snowy winter months was hitching rides on bobsleds. Attaching their little hand sleds to the horse drawn bobs, they would get exciting rides over the snowdrifts. Sometimes the farmer driving the team resented the boys doing this and used his whip on them or whipped the horses into a gallop, eventually spilling the hitchhikers into the snow. The boys decided that it was far wiser not to attach the ropes to the big sled, but rather to be able to release it by simply letting go. Chasing a bobsled driven by a farmer with a whip in order to retrieve their own sleds was discouraging.

As Alton grew up on the farm, he learned many things that boys to today are unfamiliar with. In the wintertime, he learned, horses must be shod with iron shoes with iron spikes on

the bottom. Otherwise, they might slip and fall on the icy roads. If this happened, the animal sometimes had to be disposed of by shooting.

One day one of the farm horses shod in this manner kicked the little horse that the Newells used to pull their buggy, breaking a front leg of the animal. There was nothing to do but kill it. Alton was heartbroken, for it was his favorite horse.

The father secured a lively pony to be their “buggy horse,” but it was a long time before Alton accepted it as a replacement for the one that he loved so well. It had never been a “single” before and it had to be trained to pull alone. The boys learned that horses are generally quite temperamental, objecting to changing their usual driving pattern. If a horse customarily was the right half of a team, it objected to being hitched in a left-side position.

“I’ll never forget the time I hitched our team up in the wrong position,” reminisced Newell. “I couldn’t figure out what was wrong. The horses pushed and leaned on each other, trying to get on the side to which they were accustomed. Finally my father saw what was going on and we changed them from the one side to the other. Then they were satisfied.”

Schooling was sporadic at best for Alton. He began attending when he was five years old, walking a mile and a half with his brother and sister to the two-room school that served the farming community. They walked in good weather and bad, but sometimes in particularly inclement weather one of the parents would hitch up the “buggy horse” and drive to the school. The Newell home was two miles from Garden City, just outside the town’s school district. Hot lunch programs were still in the future, so each pupil carried his own lunch. The lunches of the Newell children were frugal, usually consisting of a sandwich. That was all. All three sandwiches were carried in a paper bag which when emptied was carefully folded, to be taken home and used again the next day.

The school which Alton attended had two rooms, pupils of the first four grades meeting in the “primary” room and those in grades five through eight holding their classes in the “advanced” room. Folding doors separated the two rooms which for opening exercises and special occasions were opened making one large room.

Singing was a favorite type of activity at the beginning of each school day and also on special days. The birthdates of famous Americans were observed each year, and to bypass any such event without some kind of observance was unthinkable. The birthdays of Washington and Lincoln were among the most special of “special” days. On the birthdays of these famous Americans the pupils would prepare programs consisting of poems to be read, pictures drawn and colored, and sometimes the reading of original selections.

Patriotism was a virtue that was promoted on every appropriate occasion. When one sees the flag torn down and trampled upon by mobs today, it is not hard to conceive of what might well have been the outcome of such acts of vandalism when Alton Newell was a boy.

Other days observed were Labor Day, Columbus Day, Armistice Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, Arbor Day, Memorial Day, Good Friday and Easter, and others. There was no objection to brief prayers being said in school on occasion. Many programs either were religious in nature or had religious overtones. A Christmas program for the parents was a “must,” the pupils beginning preparations for it weeks in advance. The school board allowed a few dollars for candy and each pupil received a small bag of sweets on the day of the program. Today such a gift would hardly receive a second thought in our affluent society, but then it was a greatly appreciated gift, long anticipated and equally long remembered.

Alton Newell does not recall that he ever received any kind of corporal punishment from any of his grade school teachers, but there were many boys who did.

“Seeing them punished served as a deterrent to the rest of us,” he observed. “Some of the older boys didn’t seem to mind getting a few well-deserved whacks applied to the ‘seat of learning,’ but I dreaded the thought of it. Besides, I had been often told that if I were ever punished at school for misbehavior, I would get another whacking at home.”

The pupils expected punishment for breaking the rules and Alton never saw anyone resist it. sometimes the boy being punished – it was *always* a boy, never a *girl* – would put his hands behind him to protect his seat from the switch, but he soon learned that it was better to receive the switch on that part of his anatomy that was protected by his trousers than it was to have it applied on his bare hands.

“My mother was the one who administered the punishment at home, and with practice she got pretty good at it,” admitted Newell. “One day I was driving a make-believe team, using real reins and also genuine, grown-up ‘cuss words.’ Unfortunately for me, my mother heard me, shocked that I even knew such words, let alone used them. She used the reins on my bare legs and I was more careful after that. I can’t say that the punishment caused me to quit swearing, but it did make me more cautious about it.”

That day the rough leather reins broke the skin on one of Alton’s legs, causing it to bleed. His mother was immediately sorry for the unintentional injury and treated it carefully for several days until it had healed.

“I felt more sorry for my mother than I did for myself,” he admitted.

Today Alton Newell is not an advocate of severe discipline, though he believes that the harm that results from excessive permissiveness far outweighs that of strong disciplinary measures. There is plenty of room between the two extremes to find a reasonable answer, he believes.

The winters of western Kansas are remembered most strikingly by Newell. That flat land had little to retard the frigid winds that blew across the plains. He remembers his father

coming in from doing the chores, a small icicle on his nose. On washday, when they were hung over chairs or over the iron bedstead until they dried.

“Washday was a day of labor then, far different from that of today when pushing a button does the work,” he commented. “How often I would have to go outside to fill the copper boiler with snow, then bring it in and set it on the kitchen range. After the snow melted, the boiler would be only partially full, so again it would have to be filled with snow. The clothes for some reason had to be boiled in those days. For awhile we had a secondhand washing machine that had to be run by hand. A stick lever pulled back and forth swished the clothes around inside the corrugated machine. Some machine loads, such as our dirty clothes, had to be run ten minutes, while for others less dirty, seven or eight minutes sufficed. How my poor mother would have rejoiced over a present-day automatic washer!”

Central heating systems were unknown in rural America when Newell was a boy. During winter months, bedrooms were frequently almost as cold as the outdoors. The boys would undress down to their underwear in the warm room of the house and dash into the ice-cold bedroom. On the coldest nights the mother would heat several flatirons, wrapping them in paper before putting them in the bed to warm it before the boys jumped in, teeth chattering.

It was not unusual in the Newell house for two or three of the children to sleep at the foot of their parents’ bed in the coldest weather. Sometimes some of the brothers and sisters would come into their bed to keep warm, two or three at the head of the bed, as many at the foot. Expedients were the rule and necessity governed the situations that arose.

“These conditions were really not bad during the cold months,” Newell recalls. “It was better to be a bit crowded than it was to be cold. However, when we had to sleep five in a bed in the summer, that was a different matter. The heat of a Kansas summer is fully as uncomfortable as the cold of its winter. I could always manage one way or another to keep warm during the cold season, but in those pre-air conditioning years, there was really no way of beating the heat. Sometimes I wonder how we survived.”

When the Newells had a stove in the kitchen on which to cook, it was an old-fashioned kitchen range, which was fine in the cold months but made the house intolerably hot in the summer. Wood for the stove was as scarce on the prairie as it was in the Sahara Desert, so coal had to be used. When toward the end of World War I the mines were shut down because of a strike, the family found itself in a real predicament. It was possible to get along with less fuel, but not to have any fire at all for cooking purposes was quite out of the question.

“What does one do when faced with such a situation?” Newell asked. “Why, improvise, of course. Alternatives were not too plentiful, but we found two that helped. There were a number of old sheds on the place where we lived, not at all useful as I remember it. We ripped up the flooring in these sheds and broke it up into usable lengths. It had to be used sparingly, however, for the supply was limited.

“There was another source of fuel that I didn’t care too much for and don’t like to think about to this day,” he continued. “Cow ‘chips’ have been used for fuel as far back as history records go. When dried, they make a reasonably good fire. Our forebears used them when they crossed the great plains on their way west in their covered wagons. People of other lands have resorted to using them for untold centuries; so we did too. That was all well and good as long as my brother and I collected in our sack only good, dry ones. We got a bit careless and put in some that were still somewhat ‘ripe.’ That day we would all have had trouble eating our dinner if we hadn’t been so hungry. You can well imagine the odor that filled the house.”

Newell does not recall using an expedient that some of the settlers used who lived near the railroad tracks. Hobos were to be found on most freight trains, hitching rides. The doors of most boxcars were locked, so the hobos often sat on the coal in gondolas. The enterprising farmers would gather a few rocks and wait for a train to come by, pitching the rocks at the hobos who would return the greetings by heaving chunks of coal at the farmers.

During the winter months, especially when his bedroom was cold, Alton suffered from a problem that was in part emotional, in part physical. In his sleep he would sometimes wet the bed. Repeated whippings failed to cure him of what his mother regarded as a grievous fault. His mother believed that the boy was too lazy to get out of bed to use the “chamber” under it, but the son knew better.

“I was literally half frightened to death when I woke up in the middle of the night and realized that it had happened again. I would lie awake for hours, dreading the coming of morning when my sin would be found out. I remember sitting at the breakfast table, afraid to eat, expecting every moment the coming of the reckoning. I was whipped. I was forbidden to drink either water or milk in the evening. I was scolded when bedtime came and warned of what would happen if the offense was repeated, but it was all to no avail. It continued as a curse upon me until I was nine or ten years old. I am glad that today there is greater understanding concerning this problem.”

When the Newells were living in Kansas, two more children arrived. Now the size of the family increased to seven. World War I arrived, but Alton’s father was not acceptable in the armed forces. He had a large family, was a farmer and had a crippled hand. Food in enormous amounts was required both at home and abroad and few farmers were drafted.

When the Asiatic flu spread throughout America during the war, it was prevalent in Kansas as it was everywhere. Thousands of people died. The Newells did not escape it, every member of the family becoming ill. An aunt who lived in town came out to care for them until they recovered. Smallpox threatened the community, and Alton Newell walked the two miles into town to be vaccinated.

The Kansas years had not been kind to the family, though every member had done its share toward providing for the family’s needs. Discouraged and lonesome for their old surroundings in Oklahoma, the parents decided to return to the Sooner state.

The Newells Return to Oklahoma

What possessions the Newells had were sold, the proceeds going toward the purchase of a Model T Ford car. Seven people would ordinarily be load enough for such a small car, but in addition to the parents and five children, supplies and equipment for living along the way were loaded in the small trunk or hung on the outside of the car.

“My parents and the latest addition to the family sat in the front seat, the four of us in the back,” recalled Newell. “We were crowded, of course, and the things hung on the outside of the car rattled and banged as we drove along the rough road. There was no such thing as pavement outside of the cities, and rain made the driving anything but a pleasure.”

The long journey home began with unexpected complications. Alton’s father had never driven a car before and had received only cursory instructions when he purchased the vehicle. Today’s cars with their automatic transmissions are simple to operate, but the Model T was a different matter.

On the left side of the driver, next to a fake door that could not open, was a lever that served two purposes. There were also three pedals on the floor. Both the lever and the three pedals played roles in operating the vehicle. The left pedal on the floor controlled the low gear and it started the car moving when pushed clear to the floor. Then when the car was moving along, the pedal was released and the lever was pushed forward to put the car in high gear. However, when it was pulled all the way back, it served as an emergency brake. One of the other two foot pedals served as the foot brake and the other was the reverse pedal. In an emergency, the reverse pedal could also serve as a brake.

The inexperienced father thought that to put the car in gear, the lever should be pulled all the way back. When he did this, he was unknowingly putting on the emergency brake. The car moved along discouragingly slow and with not enough power to climb a hill, no matter how small. Halfway up each incline the boys had to jump quickly out of the back seat and push the car to assist it to the top of the hill. By midafternoon they had covered only a few miles. At that rate, they agreed, it was going to be a long time before they would see the hills of Oklahoma, and the very thought of hills brought pangs of discouragement to them all.

Outside Dodge City they stopped for gasoline, for not only were they making little progress toward their destination, but the mileage per gallon was very low. Model T’s were never noted for their good mileage, but this one was ridiculous.

As the gas tank was being filled, the elder Newell related his problems to the attendant. A few questions and some general conversation later, the trouble was diagnosed and they proceeded onward, the red-faced driver strangely quiet and the car filled with pleasing vigor.

At the end of the first day the tired family stopped at what was known as a wagon yard, the forerunner of our present-day motels. At these early stopping places there were food and accommodations for the animals as well as for people. There were only two big rooms provided, one for the men and one for the women, all customers using the same two rooms. Each person put his bedroll on the floor and crawled into it at bedtime. Such were the facilities provided for travelers a half century ago, so different from modern luxury motels.

“The whole five-day trip probably didn’t cost us any more than on room does now for a night’s lodging,” said Newell. “But we were thankful then to be inside and safely put up for the night.

“From Garden City, Kansas, to our destination, Duncan, Oklahoma, was approximately five hundred miles. Our car’s speed was probably no more than twenty miles an hour. Stops were frequent. The tires on the Model T were the high-pressure type carrying about sixty-five pounds air pressure and the roads were rough and ‘washboardy.’ Rattling, banging and bouncing about were constant. When it rained, travelers stopped and put on side curtains which were torn and cracked, keeping out only a small part of the rain that lashed the car. There was no windshield wiper except a small hand-operated affair which was little better than none at all. When gasoline was added, the occupants of the front seat had to get out of the car, for the tank was under the front seat. When the driver suspected that the gasoline supply was getting low, a stick was used to measure the depth of fuel in the tank, a procedure that each time necessitated vacating the front seat.”

On the second day, two rivers had to be crossed, but no bridges spanned them. Small ferry boats, each capable of holding one car, carried them across the streams. Poles were used to push the crafts, the passengers assisting with the poling. If the water wasn’t too deep, the men wore hip boots and pushed the ferry across. That night the weary Newells ended their day’s drive in a farmer’s yard, for a heavy rainstorm had come up that made driving hazardous. The kindly farmer’s wife prepared a hot meal for her unexpected guests and put them up for the night in her home. In the morning a plentiful breakfast was served before they continued their journey. The grateful Newells insisted upon compensating their hosts, but they would accept nothing but their thanks.

Not only were the roads little more than wagon trails across the prairie, but there were few signs to direct the travelers along the way. Crossroads were frequent and at each one the same problem arose: Which road should be taken? Often all they could do was guess, always going east and south, east and south. How far it was to the next town was a matter of conjecture. Several times signs had been installed at crossroads, but they had been changed by someone and misdirected the travelers. Today’s motorists, traveling at sixty or seventy miles

an hour over wide-paved roads with conspicuous signs to direct them, have little idea of the problems that travelers met fifty years ago.

Not knowing how far it was to the next gasoline station made it almost inevitable that sooner or later the Newells would run out of gas. When it did happen, they were out in the open country with little idea of how far they were from the nearest town. Seeing a farmhouse about a mile down the road, Alton and his father walked to it, leaving the others to wait in the car. To their dismay, no one was about the yard or responded to their knocking on the door. Noticing a fifty-gallon drum setting beside a shed in the yard, they went to it and smelled of its contents. It certainly smelled like gasoline, they agreed.

They had no container in which to carry the fuel, but upon looking around the yard, they found an old lard pail which would serve their purpose. Filling the tin pail, they hurried back to the stalled car and poured the contents into the tank. In spite of much cranking – there was no self-starter on the car – the engine refused to respond. They tried pushing the car down the road, with no better success. For a mile they pushed and sweated, eventually reaching the farmhouse from which they had gotten the fuel. The farmer had returned home and they told him their hard-luck story. When they had finished, he disclosed the reason for the car's refusal to start. It was kerosene and not gasoline which they had poured into the car's fuel tank.

"We were a woebegone looking group by that time," said Newell when relating the misadventure. "The farmer felt sorry for us and hitched up a team of horses and pulled us into town, several miles away. It was quite a procession with us seven in the car and the farmer walking alongside his team, coming into town. Some of the people stopped to watch us as we went by, just about as embarrassed as anyone could be. Several called out remarks to us, such as, 'Why don't you trade?' and 'So you did get a horse!' It was all good-natured bantering, and all that we could do was to grin back at them. I guess my dad was the most embarrassed one of all."

Bit by bit, Alton's father was learning useful information about his automobile. This day he learned the difference between kerosene and gasoline.

The parents planned to stop near Duncan to visit Mrs. Newell's mother and stepfather. It had been several years since they had seen each other and the children were eager to see "Pa" and "Ma," as they called their grandparents. A farmer was plowing in the far end of a field as they passed and Alton's father stopped the car to wait until he came closer to them to ask directions. As the team approached, Alton's mother said excitedly, "Why, that's Pa's team! See the white mark on the horse's face!" With growing excitement, they watched the team approach. Sure enough, it was not only Pa's team, but it was he himself driving it!

"What a reunion we had that day!" Newell recalled. "It had been several years since we left Oklahoma for Kansas and we had not seen each other since. My grandparents were happy to see the two new members of the family and, of course, they just couldn't get over how the rest of us had grown. Grandma killed the big red rooster and we all had chicken and dumplings

that evening for supper. And what appetites we had! If that red rooster had been one mite smaller there wouldn't have been enough to go around that day. Both Pa and Ma kept loading our plates with what we were sure was the best meal that we ever ate, as fast as we emptied them. It was wonderful!

“When my mother asked us, ‘How would you like to live near Pa and ma this year?’ we responded with happy shouts. Our grandparents were not well to do by any means, but they lived well by any standards, with plenty of food on the table and a good, warm house that was tight and comfortable in the wintertime. We kids were thrilled.”

Sharecropping in Oklahoma

So it was decided. The Newells agreed to live with the grandparents, helping them with the farm work while looking for a place of their own. The land was good, rich, red soil that grew ample crops and there was enough rainfall to assure a bountiful harvest.

However, even with sufficient rainfall, there were crop hazards that had to be met. There were far too many jackrabbits to suit the farmers, and farm boys were always glad to be of help reducing the surplus number. The jacks were big and made delicious food, fried or stewed.

“Those rabbits really grew big,” said Newell. “One day I saw two of them bobbing along in the field and I would have sworn that they were a couple of antelopes.”

Crows were not only pests, but were destructive as well. And they were smart, as Alton soon learned.

“If I went through a field carrying a stick and there were a couple of crows in it, they would pay no attention to me. But if I carried a .22 rifle instead of a stick, they would fly away before I could get within shooting distance,” he said with as straight a face as if he were reciting the Gospel truth.

With their dogs scampering about them, they often hunted in the fields, quite effectively keeping the rabbit population down. The crows were more difficult to manage, though scarecrows were set up in the fields. It was discouraging, however, to see a big black crow perched on one of the scarecrows, looking over the field to see where I should feed next.

Grasshoppers were equally hard to deal with. Some years they were so numerous that crops were almost entirely destroyed. Every year saw them come as a plague, eating their way across the fields. Poison was sometimes used, but was hazardous to other animals, such as farmyard chickens. A means commonly employed by the Newells was to arm every member of the family that was available with gunny sacks or rags and drive the grasshoppers from the field to the farmyard, where the chickens enjoyed a field day eating their fill of them.

Alton was seldom permitted the luxury of idleness on the farm. There was much work to be done, and most of it by hand. The grandparents had an adopted son about the same age

as Alton's older brother, and all three of them had their regular chores to do in addition to such other work that needed doing.

Hoeing corn was a job that had to be done but which Alton disliked doing. On the farms, horse drawn cultivators were used to mulch up the soil to keep the moisture from evaporating too rapidly, but in order to eliminate the weeds along the rows, hand hoes had to be used. Up one row and down another the boys went in what seemed an endless task. The sun beat down upon them and their shirts were wet with perspiration as they worked their way along the long rows.

Alton was paid extra for hoeing the corn, as were the other two boys, receiving fifteen cents a day for the labor.

"That sum seems like a very small amount even for those days, but when I look back upon it, I believe that it was good pay for what we did," Newell observed. "My grandfather tried to keep an eye on us as he worked in an adjoining field, but we were also keeping close watch on him. Whenever he was out of sight, we didn't hoe corn. It seemed as if the weather was always hot and we were ever on the alert for a cool plunge into whatever water was handiest – the horse-watering tank by the barn, the slough just over the hill, even on occasion the roadside ditch. Off would go our clothes – a pair of bib overalls – and in we would go. The corn next to the house was always the best hoed, for there we were under constant surveillance."

Corn hoeing and mustard pulling were sporadic tasks, but there were others that had to be done day in and day out. Twice a day the cows had to be fed and milked, the horses, pigs and chickens fed, watered and otherwise cared for. After the milking was done, the handle of the cream separator had to be turned, and when there was enough cream to make butter, the barrel churn had to be turned.

"It was always a relief when I heard a heavy 'Thump! Thump!' within the churn," said the former farm boy. "That meant that the cream had turned to butter and formed a big ball. Then came the best part of all – drinking big glasses of cool buttermilk! The pigs got what we didn't drink, but I am sure that we boys got the lion's share of it."

Then there was wood to cut for the kitchen stove and water to draw from the well, for each night the water bucket that sat in the kitchen beside the stove had to be filled.

A regular ritual that took place in the evening after the work was done and the boys were ready for bed was the washing of their feet, heavy with the day's accumulation of dust and dirt. It didn't take more than one skipping of the foot-washing requirement to convince Alton that it just didn't pay to do it. One night he went to bed, too tired to take the time to wash before retiring. No sooner was he in bed that he was asleep, only to be awakened by his grandmother an hour later. He had covered his unwashed feet with the blanket, but his grandmother, not to be fooled, had looked beneath it and saw the dirty feet. To be awakened

and made to get out of bed and wash the offending feet was far worse than taking the time to do it before going to bed, he decided.

Everyone used the same washbasin, taking turns. When through washing, the water was thrown out the kitchen door. The next user filled the basin from the pail, the long-handled dipper being always submerged in the pail of water.

Nothing was wasted. Even the dishwater was carried out to the pigpen and fed to the pigs, as were the potato peelings.

“My grandmother frequently quoted the writer of a little book that was popular reading years ago,” said Newell. “The title of the book was *Pigs Is Pigs*. My grandmother would watch the greedy animals push and crowd in to the trough to get at the dishwater and she would say, ‘Pigs is pigs, and rightly named.’ As I watched them eating, I agreed wholeheartedly with her.”

Almost all the food used on the farm was grown or prepared on it. The meals were simple, but there was always enough for everyone. Hogs were butchered and the meat was salted down or cured with suet. There was no refrigeration on the farm. Soap was made in a big iron kettle in the yard, using grease and lye. Corn raised in the field that Alton hoed during the growing season was shelled and taken to the mill to be ground into meal. Even today, a half century after his corn-raising experiences in Oklahoma, Newell is nostalgically fond of hot corn muffins, reminding him of childhood days when the smell of corn bread baking in the kitchen oven greeted him upon coming home after a day’s work in the fields. There was always plenty of corn bread, buttermilk, eggs, biscuits, and flour gravy on the table, and Alton felt that he was a fortunate boy while living with his grandparents.

Neither his grandmother nor grandfather had ever ridden in an automobile, and Alton’s father proudly took them on several trips to surrounding areas. They went to Lawton on one occasion, then to historic Fort Sill. A picnic lunch was packed and enjoyed along the route on any desirable spot. How exciting it was for Alton as they whizzed past slower, horse-drawn vehicles, or Indians walking along the road wearing long braided hair and shiny strings of beads.

A trip of about a hundred miles to Tishomingo to visit his Aunt Mary was one that he long remembered. Today he can talk about it only with emotion, recalling, as it does, boyhood pleasures long since gone. His aunt was poor, as were so many of the people there, living in a two-room house, one room of which had a dirt floor. There were two small children in the family. Farmhouses of this kind were numerous then, though few of them survive today.

“We had a grand time at Aunt Mary’s house in Tishomingo,” Newell recalls. “At least I did, and because I did, I assumed that everyone else did, too. We climbed trees and spent endless hours swimming in the creek that ran close to the house. We chewed the sweetness out of innumerable sticks of sugarcane as we watched the slow-moving mule pacing around and around in a circle, turning the machine that squeezed the sweet juice out of the cane. It ran into a big pot where it was boiled until it became sorghum molasses.



Alton and his brother Walter in 1924 when they lived at 109 Flower Street in Santa Ana.

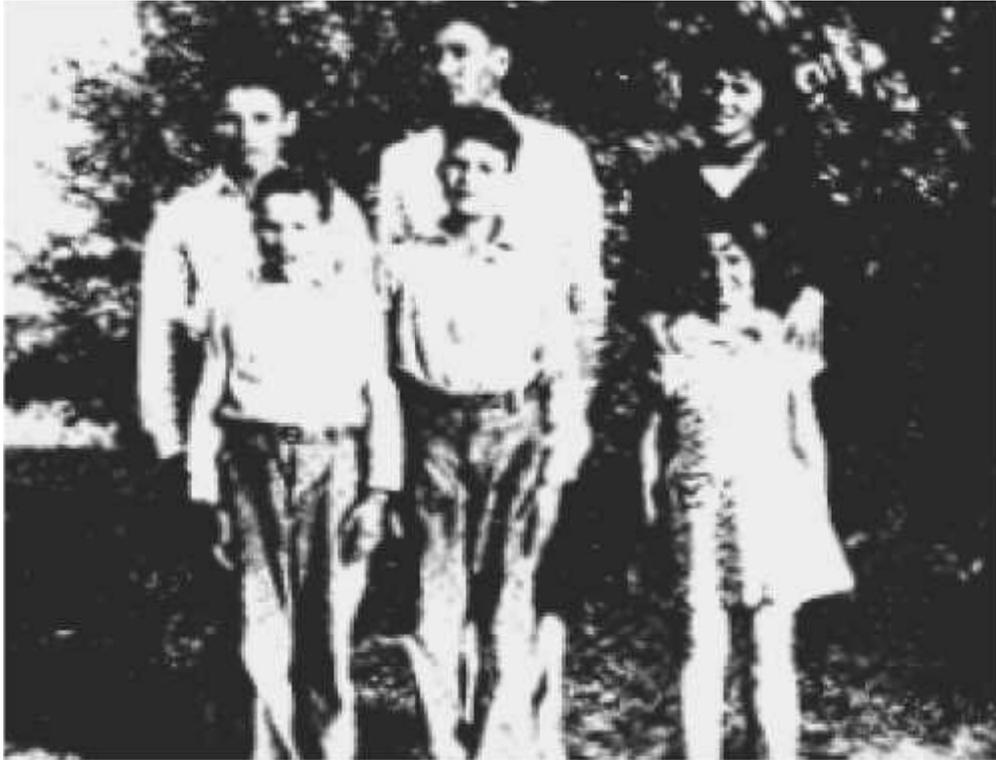
When the Newells picked prunes for the Saich brothers in Cupertino, California, in 1924, they lived in this house. Alton returned twenty-two years later and had his picture taken alongside one of his many boyhood homes.





Another boyhood home, at Glenbar, Arizona. The newels lived here in 1927-1928. This picture was taken forty-two years later, in 1970, when Alton returned to visit this scene of his boyhood.

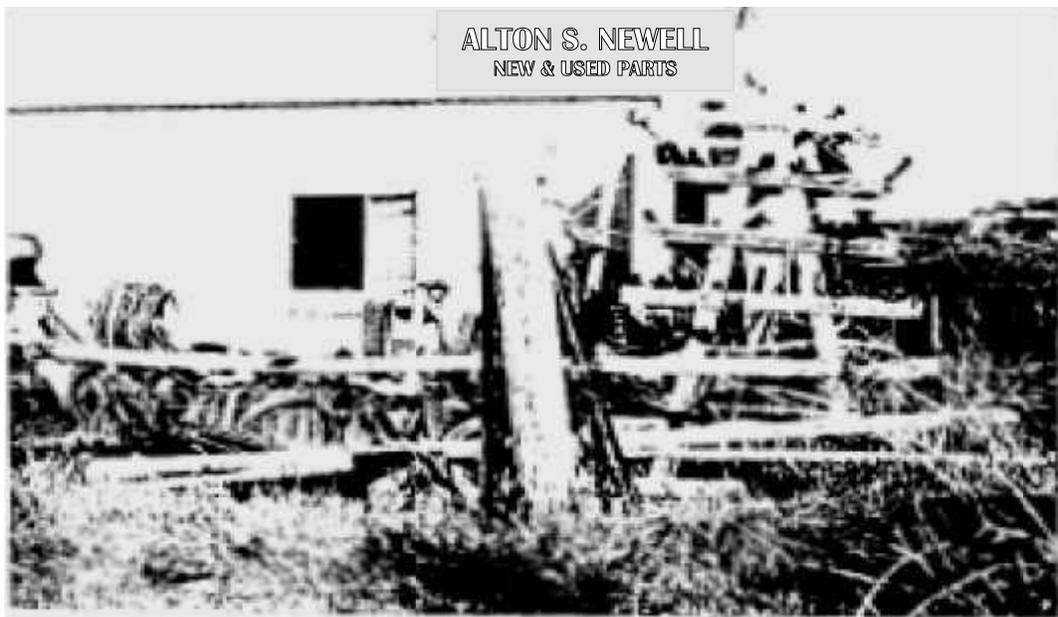
The six Newell children, in Blythe, California, in 1929. In the back row, left to right, are Alton, Walter and Edna. In the front row are Glenn, Pete and Opal.

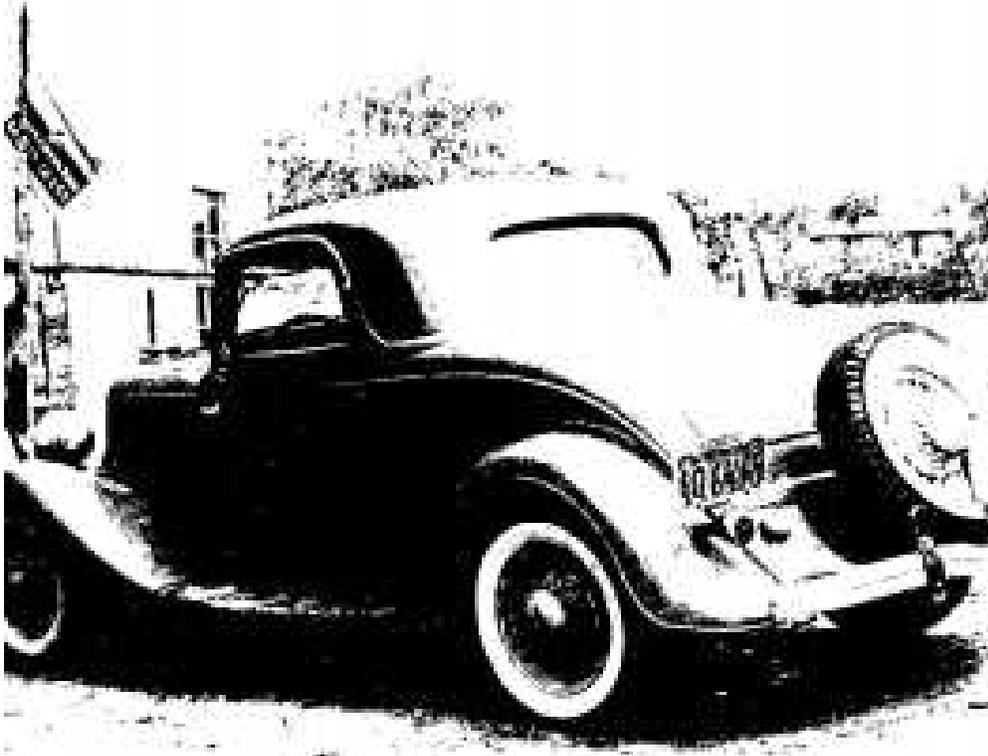




Alton and Walter Newell when they were both employed in a California auto-parts yard, 1932. Alton is third from the left; Walter is third from the right. The man at the extreme right is their employer, W. M. Rice, who had great faith in Alton.

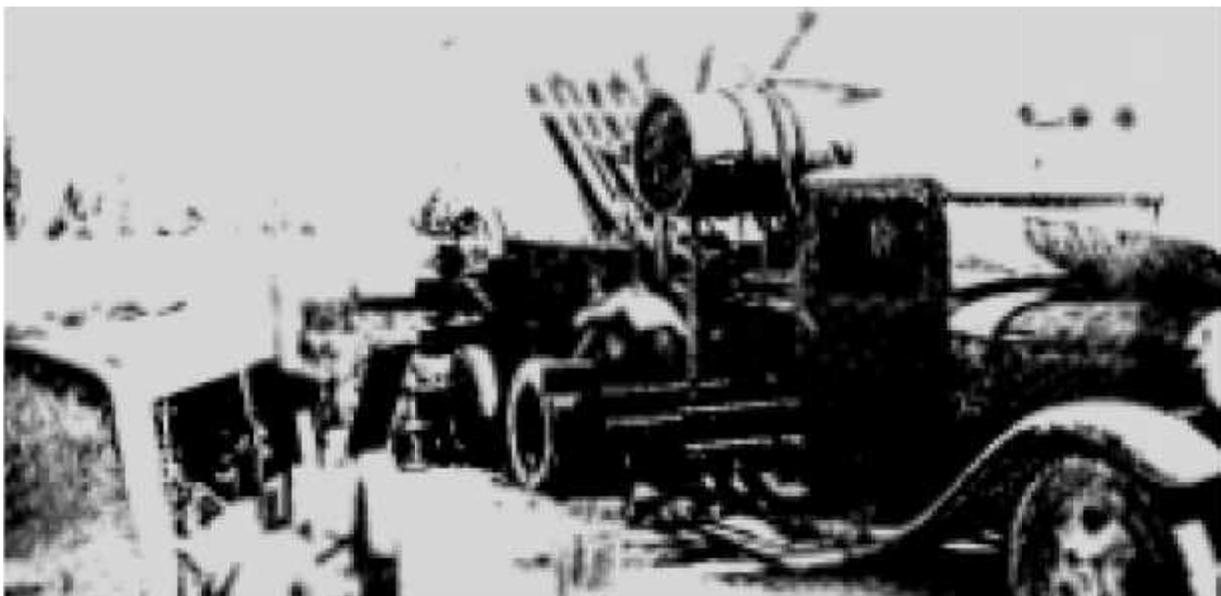
The auto-parts yard in Kenedy, Texas, bought by the Newells after their marriage, in 1938.





This 1934 Ford was the first car owned by the Newells, bought by them in 1938 after their marriage.

Alton Newell made a metals baler which he could drive from place to place to bale scrap. It was during World War II when metals of all kind were in demand. The baler is shown here in McCamey, Texas, in 1944.



ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

“Those were days of wonderment,” Newell reminisced. “We saw so many things that we had never seen before.”

Returning to the grandparent’s farm home, they soon were off again on another trip, this time to their old home town of Maysville. As usual, what road signs there were were often pointing in the wrong direction, reflecting someone’s perverted sense of humor, and they got lost, sometimes going miles out of their way. They had heard of the “health water” about which the town of Sulphur boasted, and a stop was made there to taste the product.

“One taste was enough for us. It was just plain rotten egg water as far as we could see and we had plenty of contact with that kind of egg on the farm. That was our opinion,” Newell reflected.

Meanwhile, Alton’s father had been “keeping his eye peeled,” as he expressed it, for a suitable farm on which to live as a sharecropper. He found one that was satisfactory and the family prepared to leave the grandparents’ place and move into their new home. Much to the boys’ disappointment, it was decided that the Model T car would no longer be needed and preparations were made to sell it. One day a man came to look at it, hearing it was for sale.

“My dad went into a fine sales pitch,” said Newell. “Why, this car has taken me and my family all over Oklahoma and Kansas with nary a hitch,” he boasted. “Starts right off, too. Lots of cars don’t, you know, but this one is a real corker.”

With these brave words, he pushed the spark lever up, pulled the gas lever down, turned the key to magneto and stepped in front of the car to crank it. Nothing happened. He pulled the choke, cranked again, with no results.

“For half an hour my poor father cranked that pesky vehicle which, for the first time since he bought it, stubbornly refused to start, except for the time he put kerosene in the gas tank instead of gasoline. He had learned a few things about the car since he bought it and he began to check them out, item by item. When he opened the coil box, it was empty. Then he remembered: The coils had been taken out as a deterrent to possible car thieves. No wonder the car wouldn’t start!”

He put the coils in the box and again pulled the crank. The engine started on the first try and the man was so impressed that he bought the car at once.

“We all looked longingly after it as it was driven out of the yard and down the road. We had enjoyed many miles of travel in that old car and it was almost like one of the family. How we regretted to see it go! There would be no more trips from now on, we figured,” Newell continued.

The family was soon comfortably settled in their new home and life resumed a more normal and more permanent tone. The little school which they attended was three miles away,

providing Alton and the other children in the family with a six-mile hike each day, but they took it in stride. If they had a long walk, so did others, and they really didn't mind it. School dismissed at four each day, so they were home in an hour, leaving plenty of time to do the evening chores. Often ten or fifteen children would walk home together down the road, sometimes cutting across pastures when taking shortcuts, wearing deep ruts through the turf.

Chores completed, the family gathered about the table for supper, after which the children alternated in helping with the dishes. An hour or two of study or play completed the day's activities. There was no radio to listen to or television to watch and bedtime came early. Six-mile walks and chores aplenty to do made falling into bed a welcome experience.

At school, a recess period of fifteen minutes was held in the morning and another in the afternoon. On the playground was a teeter-totter and also a small hand-propelled merry-go-round, the children's favorite piece of play equipment. There were several swings and a baseball diamond on which softball was played. Sometimes one of the teachers came out with the children, which the pupils always liked.

At afternoon recess one day, Alton was playing near the baseball diamond where some older boys were having a baseball game. One of the batters knocked a high fly in the air in Alton's direction. The boys shouted a warning to him and he turned to see what was happening. Just as he turned toward them, the hard baseball hit him full in the face, knocking him unconscious. Blood gushed from his nose and covered his face. The frightened older boys carried him to the schoolhouse and laid him on the steps. The teachers did what they could, bathing his face with cold water and washing the blood off.

Alton revived and was much embarrassed to be the center of so much attention. For the remainder of the afternoon he stopped his nose from bleeding the best he could with a handkerchief that his teacher supplied and had urged him to use. He was able to walk home when school was dismissed, but for days he worried about the handkerchief that was apparently completely ruined that recess period. Even his mother's reassurance did not completely dispel the doubts that filled his mind.

"Though neither of my parents had much of an education, they encouraged us to study hard and learn. Father went only through the second or third grade, but it was enough to teach him to read and write and to keep on learning what he could as he grew older. By example, they taught us to give a good day's work for a day's pay and to do a thorough job when on piece work," Newell commented.

On their farm they grew cotton, watermelons and peanuts. The peanut crop was an experiment for them and it didn't turn out too well. Rabbits were the biggest problem with crop. Watermelons were a rather sensitive crop as the vines had to be turned up to permit cultivation, and when the melons were ripe, they had to be sent to market regardless of the price. Almost everyone planted some cotton because it was the most stable crop. When it was

picked there always seemed to be a buyer who paid close to the right price because he could hold it to sell later if the price was extra low at the time of purchase.

The family lived for a year on this farm, then moved to another. Alton's great-aunt Luella's husband had passed away several years before, and though she had a number of sons, she felt that she needed some help. Next to her farm there was some other land available and it was there that the Newells moved. Some of the land they farmed independently and some was in cooperation with the aunt. Unfortunately, there was no house on the land, so the father bought a large surplus army tent, approximately 20 feet by 20 feet in size with a large pole in the center to hold it up. A wooden floor was installed to set it on, with rails around the edge to tie it to. Everything considered, it was not a bad place in which to live. It was crowded and unhandy for the parents and their five children, but they "made do." Two large beds were acquired, one for the parents and the youngest child and one for the three boys. Edna usually slept on a pallet or on an improvised cot. In the cold winter season, the wood stove served both for cooking and as a source of heat. A tent, they found, is really warmer in cold weather than most people would think it to be. In the summer some of the flaps at the edge were raised to allow a breeze to blow through, though usually it brought along with it a horde of mosquitoes and other insects.

"Along with all our household belongings, we found room in the tent during the winter months to store a few sacks of cattle and chicken feed. The younger children managed their weekly or semi-monthly bath in the washtub in the middle of the tent, and as for the rest of us, we either bathed when everyone else was outside or hung a blanket across a corner of the room to make a private bathroom. Needless to say, bathing was not practiced very religiously in our tent.

"We dug a well by hand in the bottom of a usually dry creek about a quarter of a mile from the tent. It was from here that we secured all our water. When on rare occasions it rained hard, it would ruin our well, but for a few days we didn't need it anyway, as the rainwater took care of our needs. When the creek bed was again dry, we would dig the well again, an easy matter, as it was only about ten feet deep."

On this farm, which was adjacent to Alton's aunt's home, the family was only a mile from the grandparents. This proximity was convenient for everyone, for they could all help each other on such projects as butchering hogs, canning vegetables or even washing clothes. The grandparents had a huge black kettle that was used outside to heat the water for scalding hogs, cooking large amounts of vegetables, boiling clothes or making soap. Washday was hectic for the womenfolk because already they had chopped cotton or perhaps plowed in the fields all week in addition to cooking and washing dishes and scrubbing floors and doing the other housework.

Most of the men wore bib overalls and blue shirts and also the ubiquitous long underwear in the wintertime. The women who worked in the fields usually wore the same type clothing but with the added benefit of a home-made bonnet. The boys generally wore

unionalls or coveralls as they are called today. The girls were attired in the same type of clothing when working as they wore at play, but for school and at most other times they wore cotton or calico dresses with undergarments made from flour sacks. Most of them also wore long, black, cotton stockings held up with a rubber band cut from an innertube instead of "store bought garters. Alton, too, wore long stockings with his knee-length pants, held up the same way. While such garters were cheap, they were generally cut from three-inch tubes, and the bands were extremely tight.

"When I took them off at night, the place just above the knee where the band had been worn all day itched miserably and the area had to be rubbed at length to get the circulation going again," Newell said, "To dress up, little boys normally had a suit with two pair of trousers, one pair buttoned below the knee and the other buttoned above. They were held up with a drawer waist. Almost all the women were good seamstresses, making most of their own clothes and also their children's. They were also good at repairing and patching the clothes for the men and boys. It was a special occasion when a boy wore clothes with no patches, for clothing then was worn until it no longer could be made to hold together. Patches sewed onto patches were a common thing in our house."

Barbershop haircuts were luxuries unknown to the Newell family. Alton's father did the haircutting for all of them. For the girls, all that was required was for him to cut straight across the back just above the shoulders, and across the forehead in front, creating "bangs." For the boys, he had at some time in the past acquired a pair of handclippers, but the results were generally somewhat dubious. When a haircut was completed, the subject often had numerous uneven spots here and there, but after a week or so it didn't matter because the hair grew out again and the bare spots no longer showed. At least six weeks or more elapsed between haircuts, but even then the boys' appearance was far neater than are the heads of hair worn today. How pleased Alton's father would have been if today's styles had been in vogue then.

The farm had its equipment to keep the horses well groomed, such as shears, brushes and, of course, a curry comb. This was necessary in order to keep their manes, fetlocks and tails trimmed so they would not accumulate too many burrs. Sometimes the horses would roll on the ground like the buffalo used to do to get mud caked on them. The animals needed good care, for they were depended upon to do much work in addition to providing the family's transportation needs.

About once a month someone would go to Lawton or Duncan to get groceries and other supplies, buying them for all three families. Variety was lacking in the buying and what was bought was purchased in large quantities. A hundred-pound sack of flour, the same amount of sugar, a five-gallon can of lard, if they had none of their own made, a five-gallon can of coal oil with the usual potato stuck on the sharp spout to keep the oil from splashing out, baking powder, salt, etc., were the only supplies that were bought.

"Only one of us children was permitted to go along on these trips into town, but whoever did go had an exciting time," Newell recalled.

“Once during a slack season our three families got together two covered wagons and an open one and we all drove to Tishomingo to see our other relatives. It was a three-day journey each way and we stayed in wagon yards each night. We children had never yet seen a western movie, so we didn’t know what we looked like as we drove down the dusty roads. We had a lot of fun, but I don’t think that it was half as glamorous as it is made to appear on television today,” is Newell’s opinion a half century later.

Soon after this covered wagon trip Alton had an experience that he has never forgotten. He had gone with his father to the grandparents’ house to get one of the covered wagons. He was sitting on the spring seat while his father hitched the horses to the wagon. The team had never pulled a covered wagon before and the big canvas-covered bulk that loomed behind it was frightening. Alton’s father had laid the reins on the ground as he hooked the last trace chain to the singletree. At that moment a half-dozen pigs came squealing out of the weeds, and the already skittish horses bolted. The father did his best to catch the wagon, but the frightened horses were too fast for him. Alton sat bouncing in the spring seat and wondered what to do next. But for the moment, he was fully occupied by hanging on to keep from falling out. He had never ridden so fast before!

“I believe I would have sat frozen to the seat, hanging on with both hands forever if the inevitable hadn’t happened,” he commented. “We hit a deep ditch in the field about a half mile from the house and the force of the jolt broke my hold on the seat. Backwards I went into the wagon box. I wasn’t interested in staying there any longer than necessary and crawled to the back of the wagon and stuck my head out the hole in the cover. But I didn’t stop crawling even then. I just kept on going until I hit the ground. There I lay breathless, for I had lit on my stomach and the wind was knocked out of me. By the time I came to my senses, my father was there checking me over.”

Unaware that they had lost the lone and frightened passenger, the horses continued on to the end of the field where they ran into a clump of small trees and underbrush, but even that failed to bring them to a stop.

When father and son reached their tent home, they found that the horses had really made a day of it, continuing on to the aunt’s house, crossing ditches, creeks, fences and anything else that was in their line of travel. There they had run into a barbed wire fence and stopped by the horse shed, too tired to go on. When Alton and his father arrived there, they were covered with lather and still out of breath. The wagon was still right side up, but the cover and all that held it on were gone, stripped down to its short sideboards and floor. Alton was only eight years old at the time of this wild ride, too young to know the miracle was that he had come through still intact.

Destructive tornadoes are frequent in Oklahoma, their fierce winds destroying everything in their path. After the tent was set up and anchored, the father set about to dig a cellar to shelter the family in case of a threatening storm. A short distance in front of the tent home a hole about ten feet square and six feet deep was dug. That is, it was supposed to be six

feet deep, but the diggers came upon hard red clay on one side and it was decided to leave that side as a shelf so they would not have to dig into the hard clay. The shelf was about four feet wide and three feet high, providing a natural place on which to put a pallet to sleep on and, besides, it saved them much labor.

After the hole was dug, logs were laid across it, and over the logs boards were laid. A deep cover of dirt over the boards provided a cellar that even a tornado could not destroy. A three-foot-wide entrance passage with steps carved out of the hard clay was then made, with a door covering it, almost parallel with the ground but with enough slant for the water to run off well. To the dismay of the users, the cellar provided a natural home for an infinite variety of bugs, insects and even an occasional toad or two.

There were no radio alerts or other warnings available in those days, so every time a severe lightning storm with threatening clouds occurred at night the father insisted upon everyone getting out of bed and huddling together in the cellar. The children disliked it, because with seven people crowded into this small space there was neither sleep nor rest for anyone.

One night while they were all huddled in the hole, the tent blew down and Alton was convinced that his father was less disturbed by this than the rest of them, for the mother and children were always put out at him for taking them to the cellar every time a rainstorm came up. Now he felt that his precautions were justified and that his policy of taking precautionary measures was vindicated.

The tent was set on a hill about a quarter of a mile from the aunt's house. One cold night in January, about four o'clock in the morning – this was in 1921 – Alton and the other children were awakened by their father and told to get up and dress and go to Aunt Luella's house. One of her older boys was sent to get a doctor. Each of the shivering youngsters wrapped a blanket or quilt around himself to ward off the cold and the sleet that was falling and, carrying a lantern, made his way to the aunt's house.

Since there were no beds for them, as the aunt had seven children of her own, they slept the remainder of the night in a back room used for storing cotton. They simply dug themselves into the fluffy pile and went back to sleep. There they slept till their father came shortly after daylight to tell them that there was a new little sister at the tent.

The doctor had come with his horse and buggy and brought her to them, he said. They didn't know it at the time, but learned later that that wasn't exactly the way it happened, for the little sister had actually gotten there before the doctor arrived. So, with their blankets wrapped around the cotton-matted clothing in which they had slept, they trooped back up the hill to see their new little sister.

They were to find out during the nights for the next several weeks just what having a new sister meant to the tent-home family.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

On this farm, corn, maize, watermelons and garden vegetables were raised that season. They also had several cows, a few hogs and innumerable chickens handy for a quick and tasty meal, as well as for the eggs they laid. Most of the corn and maize were grown to feed the animals that they raised. Some broom corn, which was a new crop for them, was also planted that season. They were always searching for a crop that had more future than cotton seemingly had. Today less cotton is raised than there was fifty years ago, other more desirable crops taking its place.

The year 1922 was their last year on the farm in Oklahoma. The crops were better, and financially the family was better off that year than it had been previously. An oil boom in the area where Alton lived helped to bring prosperity to many people, and his mother and aunt raised and sold many vegetables. The Newells also sold milk, eggs, butter and some hogs and chickens to the people moving in. By careful management they were even able to pay off some debts that had accumulated.

It was in the fall of that year that a letter arrived which changed the direction of the Newells' lives. Alton's mother received a letter from a sister in California who had once lived in Kansas but was now married and living in the state which boasted of perpetual summer. This sounded fantastic to the family that had suffered through many cold winters, and the children, especially, were excited by the prospect of living there. There was little to hold them in Oklahoma and at once plans began to be made for the exciting migration. There was still cotton to pick and some grain to harvest, but as soon as these tasks were completed they began to sell everything that wasn't needed, reducing the amount to be taken with them to a minimum.

A four-cylinder Buick touring car was purchased, in which it was hoped that the family of eight could be transported safely to California, in addition to a hundred and one other items necessary to them on the trip. Almost everything had been sold except two horses which had been left with some relatives. They were "insurance," kept in case the family wouldn't like California and would someday return to farm again in the Sooner state.

The children were the center of interest on their last day in school, saying good-bye to their friends and promising to write to them all. With their report cards carefully tucked away in the luggage, they loaded the vehicle with all the things they considered necessary for the long trip.

Wooden planks were bolted onto the fenders and along the running board on the right-hand side of the car. This space was filled with a bewildering variety of items, while the space between the seats served as a storage place for boxes of pots, pans, tin-cups, plates – you name it, it was there. On top of this, quilts and blankets were laid to make a good flat place on which to ride. Clothes and other soft items were crowded into a cotton sack that was tied across the back of the car. Also tied there was a washtub and a dishpan, two very necessary items for migrants on a long journey with six children. Other items were placed between the front fenders and the hood behind the headlights, tied down with cotton ropes.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

The big test came when it was time for the safari to begin. Would everyone be able to get in? That was a question now to be answered. The parents and youngest child, now nearly two years old, were in the front and the five children wedged tightly in the back seat area. Somehow they managed it, uncomfortable as it was, and wheezing and sputtering, the old vehicle headed westward to the land of eternal summer.

“This is better than being in school!” exulted Alton as the scenery whizzed by.

A stop was made at Altus, for several Newells lived there. They remained with Uncle Henry and Aunt Maud for several days, for his father said that it might be a long time before they would see them again. As events turned out, Alton’s father never saw his brother again, and it was to be forty years before Alton himself returned. Many of the people whom they had visited so long ago were then dead and Alton was no longer a sharecropper’s son, but a prominent Texas business executive.

The Okies Go to California

There was still some cotton to be picked, and the family decided to make sure that there was enough money to take them to California, so they all went to work, picking cotton around Altus and Frederick for several weeks. With the extra money in their pockets, they felt more secure when the time came to begin their long journey westward. It was now November and the weather was getting cold. To avoid it, they turned south to Abilene, going west from there, providing a warmer route to travel.

On the second day out, as they neared Midland, Texas, car trouble developed. The vacuum tank leaked air and would not suck the gasoline from the large rear tank to the motor. In order to make it into town it was necessary to stop every four or five miles to drain fuel out of the rear tank and pour it into the vacuum tank, since the small tank held only about a quart. Eventually, after many stops, they limped into town and left the car at a garage to be repaired. It was noon the next day before they were able to leave Midland and resume their journey.

“Having started after noon and stopping before dark, we only made a few miles that day,” recalled Newell. “And we had several flats. Tires then were of the high-pressure type that carried about 65 pounds of air instead of the 24 to 28 pounds carried in the tires of large cars today. The roads were rough, so it was difficult to tell when one went flat. Our tire size on that old Buick was 31 by 4. They were mounted on a steel rim which was fastened onto a wooden-spoke wheel. If you ran on a flat tire a few hundred yards, you had three or four holes in the tube to patch instead of one. We carried, as did most other cars, a tire-patching kit and a hand pump to fill the tire with air again after going flat. We let the jack down as we started to pump so we would know when the tire stood up like the others that we could quit pumping and start driving again. It was a rare day when we were without at least one flat tire.”

Arriving in the town of Pyote, a good camping spot on a sandy vacant lot was quickly located and they pulled in and parked.

Each day's journey ended well before dark so time was available while it was still light to peel and fry a few potatoes and open a can of pork and beans to eat before dark. In Pyote, the campsite was conveniently close to a store where several needed supplies were bought. A can of evaporated milk was opened and mixed with water for the children to drink. Alton's father's

usual diet was bread and milk on account of a stomach ailment that plagued him for many years.

The sandy soil on the lot at Pyote made an ideal place to “bed down.” A blanket or quilt spread on the sand made a soft bed. Sometimes the children simply took a blanket and rolled up in it. The younger children slept in the car. Alton never became accustomed to this manner of living. The war was usually parked as far from the road as possible and parallel to it so their beds could be placed on the opposite side and not be too conspicuous to those passing by.

“Though we lived like this a lot, I never quite got used to it,” said Alton Newell. “I always felt embarrassed to be seen living under those conditions. I believe my parents did, too, for we were almost always up and away soon after daybreak.”

In the morning, when the sun was still low in the eastern sky and before the world had completely awakened, the car was loaded with utensils, and with some of the children on the inside of the vehicle and one or two on the side, the day’s journey was about to begin. On this morning, however, it was soon apparent that they were not going to move very far without help, for the car was hopelessly stuck in the sand. The rear wheels spun, but only to go deeper into the sand with each turn. With everyone who was big enough to push assisting, they eventually managed to get the car to the hard ground of the road. However, in trying to get out of the sand, the transmission was ruined and a tow truck had to be called.

“He pulled us to the railroad station and stopped there. This was going to be our home for the next several days!” recalled Newell. Blankets and a few needed utensils were unloaded and taken inside. The mechanic told them that the passenger depot was seldom used and that they would not be bothered there. It was almost an empty room, with a few benches around the wall and a pot-bellied stove in the center. The blankets were thrown into the corner and the already weary group settled down for the day. They found out later that the parts needed for the car had to come from El Paso and that it would take a day or two to get them by motor stagecoach.

The hours dragged by, with little for the children to do. They had just begun to eat their noon meal of pork and beans and bread and milk when a man came in and sat in their dining room to wait for a train. He said nothing, but the uncomfortable family ate in embarrassed silence. Moments like these were never forgotten by Alton. All that day and the next they waited, the hours dragging by. On the second night they heard a train coming. Quickly their lantern was blown out so that the train crew would not think someone was in the depot waiting for the train. After it had passed, the lantern was lighted again. At least they were warm, for there was plenty of coal available in a bin in the corner of the room.

The mechanic returned on the third day to inform them that their car was ready to go. After paying the frightening bill and loading up their belongings, they were on their way again, hoping that their troubles were over. But they had gone only a short distance when the transmission went out again. They were still closer to Pyote than to the next town of Pecos, but

the father decided to hitch a ride into Pecos rather than go back to the same garage in Pyote. He returned in several hours riding in an Essex Super Six that was used for a service car. They hitched onto the Newell car and went slowly down the road toward Pecos. The discouraged family knew that after the repair bill was paid there would not be enough money left to take them to California. Everyone felt downhearted and wondered if they would ever reach their destination.

They told their plight to the garage man, who knew of a planter in need of cotton pickers. After the car had been put in the garage, the man took them, with their needed belongings, in the service car to the farm where help was needed. There was an old vacant shack on the property and it was there that the family was placed.

Once again parts had to be ordered from El Paso, three days passing before they arrived and the car was repaired. Because it took nearly all the money to pay the last bill, it was decided that they would remain in Pecos several weeks to replenish their funds. It was a happy bunch of kids that climbed into that car and headed for El Paso when the time came to leave.

Now they tried to make up for lost time, and in one day they made it to the outskirts of El Paso, a long journey in those days, though hardly a challenge today. A good campsite was located a few miles from town under some cottonwood trees and there they unloaded and made camp. The road was paved into town for fifteen or twenty miles because of the sand, so the prospects for the next day were bright. There were not many cars that passed in the night, but those that did made weird noises as they went by on the pavement.

“Those old red-top Fisk tires were made for mud and not for cement,” is Newell’s opinion today.

An early start was made out of El Paso from where they went north to Las Cruces, then west to Deming, Lordsburg and on down to Douglas, Arizona. They were making good time now, and in their eagerness to reach California the children imagined that they could even smell the orange blossoms.

Their enthusiasm mounted as they went on westward, through a type of country that they had never seen before. They were now near the Mexican border. A night was spent in Douglas, then on they went through Bisbee, every mile a thrill to the wide-eyed children. The wonder of the parents was no less keen. West of Bisbee they started up about the steepest mountain road that they had ever been on. It was narrow and winding, covered with gravel and coarse rocks. The father started up the hill in high gear, but quickly had to go to second and then almost immediately to low. They were all frightened, for the arroyo below them was steep and very deep.

“Dad tried to go into low, but he jerked the heavily loaded car so violently that the rear axle snapped,” Newell recalled. “Once again we were out of business. We scrambled out of the car to find some rocks to put behind the wheels so the car wouldn’t roll back and fall off

into the canyon. Then Dad did some thinking and decided to do a little careful maneuvering of the car. With all of us out of the car but Dad, he was able to get it turned around and headed back down the hill. We all quickly got back in and let the car roll on down the hill to the edge of the city. At the foot of the hill there was a garage and we rolled right up to its door.”

It certainly was not planned this way, but the location proved to be a good one for such an accident to happen. Close by there was a campground of the usual kind consisting primarily of a few places for cars to park with enough room to put the bedrolls down, a community water faucet and outside toilets. The camping fee per night was 25 cents. Also, to their delight, there was a grocery store nearby. The father made arrangements with the garage to get an axle sent out from Phoenix, and the family once more settled down to wait. It was still early in the afternoon and the weather was pleasant, so the children played on a nearby hill and in the campground. Several more cars pulled into the camp and soon there were children everywhere for them to play with.

The usual caution prevailed, the strangers watching each other from a distance at first, then getting closer together, and finally talking and playing together. There was one family of Mexicans and one of Negroes, each of which had several children. This was a new experience for the Oklahoma Newells, but everyone was soon on the best of terms. One of the little colored boys was a regular clown who kept the others laughing with his antics. Some of the families stopped only briefly, while others were still there when the Newells left after three days. It was with reluctance that the children departed from their newly found friends.

Once again they had to go up the steep hill on which the axle had broken, but this time caution prevailed. Everyone but the two youngest children and the driver got out of the car and walked up the hill. With the load lightened, the car was eased up the steep incline without any trouble.

Early evening found the wanderers at the edge of historic Tombstone, where a convenient roadside spot was located and camp for the night was made. “Tombstone didn’t impress us then as much as it does its visitors now,” said Newell. “Isn’t it strange what a little television publicity can do for a town?”

The usual early start was made the next morning. With good luck they hoped that they would make it to Phoenix that day. The road was a good one, well graveled and less rough than what they had gone over. About noon they went through sleepy Tucson where they caught up with another car as loaded down as their own and with as many things hanging on the outside. The driver flagged the Newell’s car down. They had a flat tire and had broken their tire pump. The Newells, anxious to make as many miles as possible, disliked losing the time, but nevertheless were glad to help out some fellow travelers. The others were also from Oklahoma and, like the Newells, were getting low on money. In fact, it was becoming obvious that a stop would have to be made in Phoenix to replenish their finances.

From Tucson to Phoenix the two cars traveled together, stopping at a pretty camp under some high date palms. As they climbed out of their cars, the other man pulled a silver dollar out of his pocket and, flipping it into the air, said to Newell, "Well, we made it to here with just one dollar left in my pocket." Smiling, Newell took from his pocket a half dollar and said dryly, "That's 50 cents more than I have."

Obviously, it was necessary for work to be found. Inquiring around, he found that even though it was early March, there was still some cotton to pick. It was of the "long staple" variety, the stalks growing as tall as a man's head and containing bolls with three locks instead of the customary five found in regular cotton. A worker could pick only half as much as he could of regular cotton, so the pay was higher, \$3.50 per hundred pounds.

Employment was found at a place several miles north and east of Mesa. Several dollars were advanced to the needy family to buy some groceries and a small white tent to live in was loaned to them. It was set up in an alfalfa patch a few hundred yards from the owner's house. Water was carried from his well. The tent was only large enough to cover a couple of beds and a small pallet, the beds being made by pulling some dry straw from a nearby stack and spreading it on the ground and laying blankets on it.

Cooking was done on an open fire outside, with the result that everyone afterward smelled of wood smoke. Eating was done while sitting on the running board of the car or on a stray box, each one holding his tin plate in his lap. Sometimes they sat on the ground and set their plate on the running board or box, letting them serve as tables. Only nonbreakable tin plates and cups were used, and though in time they became battered and dented, none was ever broken. Each meal consisted of one item only; that is, they ate beans and potatoes or bread and milk. That was all. Everyone helped himself, except the two little ones, of course, by carrying his plate over to the pot and dipping whatever was wanted. Most of the time the milk that was drunk was canned milk diluted with water.

"I am afraid that I couldn't drink it today, but I really liked it then," said Newell, thinking back upon the many times that it served as the main course of a meal. "Most of the time my mother made our own bread. It consisted of only flour, water, lard and salt and was baked in a skillet over an open fire. It tasted mighty good to us, for it seemed that our hunger was never quite satisfied. Corn bread was cooked in a pan in the same way."

One night the landlord forgot to tell them that he was going to irrigate and they awakened in the middle of the night with several inches of water in the tent. There was nothing that could be done about it except to get up and spend the rest of the night sitting in the car.

Everyone in the family except the two youngest, two and four years of age, worked in the cotton fields. For the other children, their work experience ended one day when a visitor called on them as they picked cotton in a field. He identified himself as a truant officer and wanted to know why they were not in school. Since a good answer wasn't readily available, the

result of his visit was that the next Monday morning the four of them, Alton included, were waiting by the roadside for the school bus, and soon they were on their way to school. Pete, the youngest of the four, had just turned six and this was his first day in school. It was the job of Walter, the oldest, to look after him.

Consternation reigned when the bus pulled up in front of the Franklin School in Mesa and the children learned that Pete must go to a different school. They were all assured, however, that he would be right there on the bus in the afternoon when it stopped to pick the older ones up. That satisfied their concern to a degree, but at once a new problem popped up. The peanut-butter sandwiches for all four of them were in a sack Walter was carrying and poor little Pete had nothing for his lunch that noon. After the bus left, Alton felt sure that he would never see his little brother again.

He worried through the long day and waited anxiously for the bus to arrive after school was out. When it pulled up to the school and they saw their little brother looking out the window, grinning broadly, it was a relief for them all. He was soon chattering about the days' adventures and telling of how his teacher had shared her fried chicken with him at noon.

Today Alton Newell reminisces often about his school days. "We settled down to going to school, but were often uncomfortable about it. We did not look nor did we act like the other kids, for our clothing was unkempt and it soon became common knowledge that we were Okies. Walter, my older brother, had several fights because he resented someone's snide remarks about our appearances. We wore knee pants and black stockings, and for some reason mine were always coming down over my show tops. When someone would poke fun at me about this, I just got out of the way, as I was generally smaller and couldn't fight him.

"Sometimes some of Walter's fights were about me. One of my most embarrassing moments came when I got my first report card. My grades were good, but in deportment I was given a 'U' or 'Unsatisfactory.' Alongside of it was the notation, 'Please bathe more often.' I felt terribly hurt. Why couldn't the teacher have talked to me in a kindly way about this? The remembrance of it stayed with me for a long time. What had bathing to do with deportment? And besides, how could I bathe often when I lived in a tent in the middle of a field in the wintertime with seven others in the family? My mother tried harder after this to keep her nine-year-old a little cleaner, I know, for she felt the humiliation as much as I did."

The school bus driver was only about eighteen or twenty years old and was often disagreeable to the Newell children for no apparent reason. And he drove the bus much too fast. One day when Alton was sitting just behind him, he saw the speedometer go up to 55 miles an hour. One Sunday as Walter and Alton were walking down the road, he approached them. They avoided him as much as possible by going over on the other side as far as they could. When they passed each other, he recognized them and called out, "Hello, bums."

"It was an unkind thing to say and we somehow felt degraded. Could we help it that we had no settled place to live? No one would have been happier than we if we didn't have to live

as we did, but for a grown-up man to taunt us in this way left bitter memories. Today I wonder just which one of us was the bum.”

Sometimes Alton’s mother gave him a list of groceries to bring from town, but the bus driver would not permit him to take the groceries on the bus. Often the boys had to walk the mile home from the store carrying the heavy bags of food. Alton recalls carrying home such tempting things as a can of peanut butter and a loaf of bread. No matter how good they smelled, the hungry boys had to resist the temptation to eat even a bit, for these items were for sandwiches for school.

Sometimes a passing motorist would give them a ride, and when this happened the boys would ask to be let off directly in front of the Gibson house, never giving the benefactor any hint that their home was the little tent pitched out there in the alfalfa field.

When there was no more cotton to be picked, Alton’s father found another job and worked a while longer so he would be sure to have enough money to get to California. The new employer had a small vacant house in the back of the lot and he let the Newells live in it. They still didn’t have a stove, so the meals were cooked outside on an open fire as before, but they were all happy to have a better place to put down their humble beds.

It was while they were living here that they all had the mumps. However, they recovered well, but it was a heavy burden for the mother to keep her brood properly cared for in the little house. School tended less than half the term, they were given their report cards and were happy to learn that all of them had passed to the next higher grade.

Just before the school term ended, near tragedy left the children shaken. While walking the mile from home to the bus stop along a path that ran alongside one of the big irrigation ditches, little Pete fell into the swiftly flowing water. His screams and wild thrashing in the water froze the others in their tracks. Then Walter rushed to the spot and dived in, fully clothed. Pete had already disappeared from view, but his big brother quickly brought him to the surface. Frightened, Edna took to her heels to get her mother, while Alton was too frightened to move.

Although Walter had hold of Pete, he could not get out of the canal because of its high banks. They drifted along, with Alton helplessly keeping up with them on the stream’s bank until they reached a suspended foot bridge and, with Alton’s aid, were able to climb onto it. At that moment the mother arrived, having run all the way from home. It all ended well, except for poor little Pete. He not only had a very frightening experience and was half drowned, but he received a spanking besides. This came after he admitted that the reason he had fallen into the canal was that he had pulled his cap down over his eyes to see how long he could walk blindfolded and yet stay in the path.

Summer was coming on and the fruit would soon be getting ripe in California, so everyone was getting anxious to move on. Early one morning the car was once more loaded,

and with no regrets or farewells the family again headed westward. Many times they had discussed the route to be taken. If they went through Yuma, they would have a bridge over which to cross the Colorado River, but here was also a terrible stretch of sand which was crossed on a plank road. They had heard many stories of how the shifting sand would creep across the road until it was blocked. Motorists then had to wait until the highway employees would come with their mules and scrapers and remove the sand from the road. The board road was wide enough for only one car, but a turn-out was provided every half mile to allow cars to meet and pass each other. The family considered the route carefully and finally decided to go to Wickenburg, then southwest to cross the river on the ferryboat at Blythe.

The decision made, they began the last leg of the long journey. In between Wickenburg and Salome, heavy rains had caused a flash flood during the night and at one point the water was still rushing over the road. The Newells were greatly concerned, for they did not know that sudden heavy rains sometimes fell in the desert. Eight or ten cars were backed up on each side of the water. A tow truck with dual wheels and tire chains was pulling the cars across the water, first one across one way and another one back the other way. In other words, as the father remarked, "That man is making money coming and going." The fee was \$2.50 per car, a pretty steep price for those days. The family's money was too hard earned to think of parting with so much of it in this way. Everyone got out of the car to watch as the cars were pulled across.

"My father listened to the instructions given by the tow-truck driver to the other motorists," Newell said. "They were to keep their engines running and to give as much help as possible by keeping their cars in gear with full power. By watching from the side, Dad noticed that much of the time during the one hundred feet or so through the water the towrope between the vehicles was not even tight. This meant to him that perhaps we didn't need any help to get through the water. 'Back in the car!' he ordered. 'We're going through!' And go through we did, to the disbelief and amazement of the other motorists."

"Those Okies!" exclaimed one driver as the Newell car went by them in a foot and a half of water.



Newell's office on Mission Road, in San Antonio, Texas, in 1948.

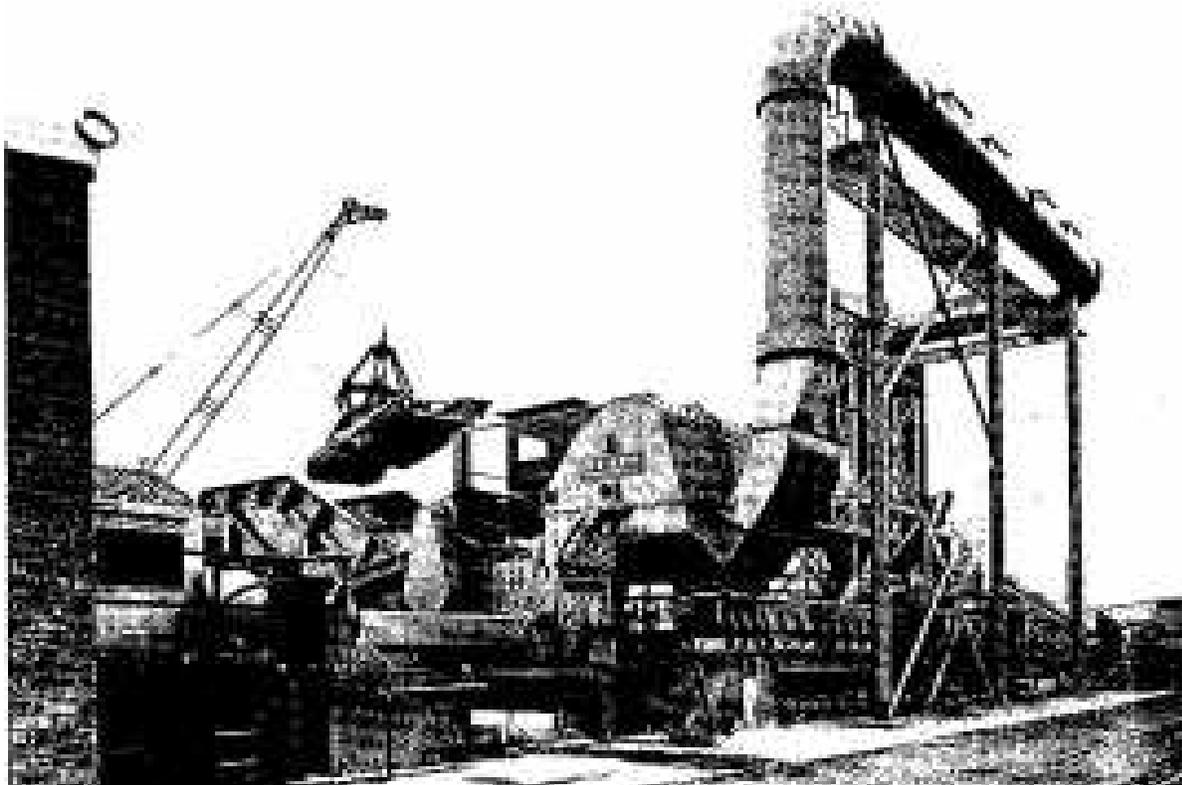
The Newell baler was an ingenious machine created and constantly improved by Alton. This picture, taken in 1953, shows its rugged construction.

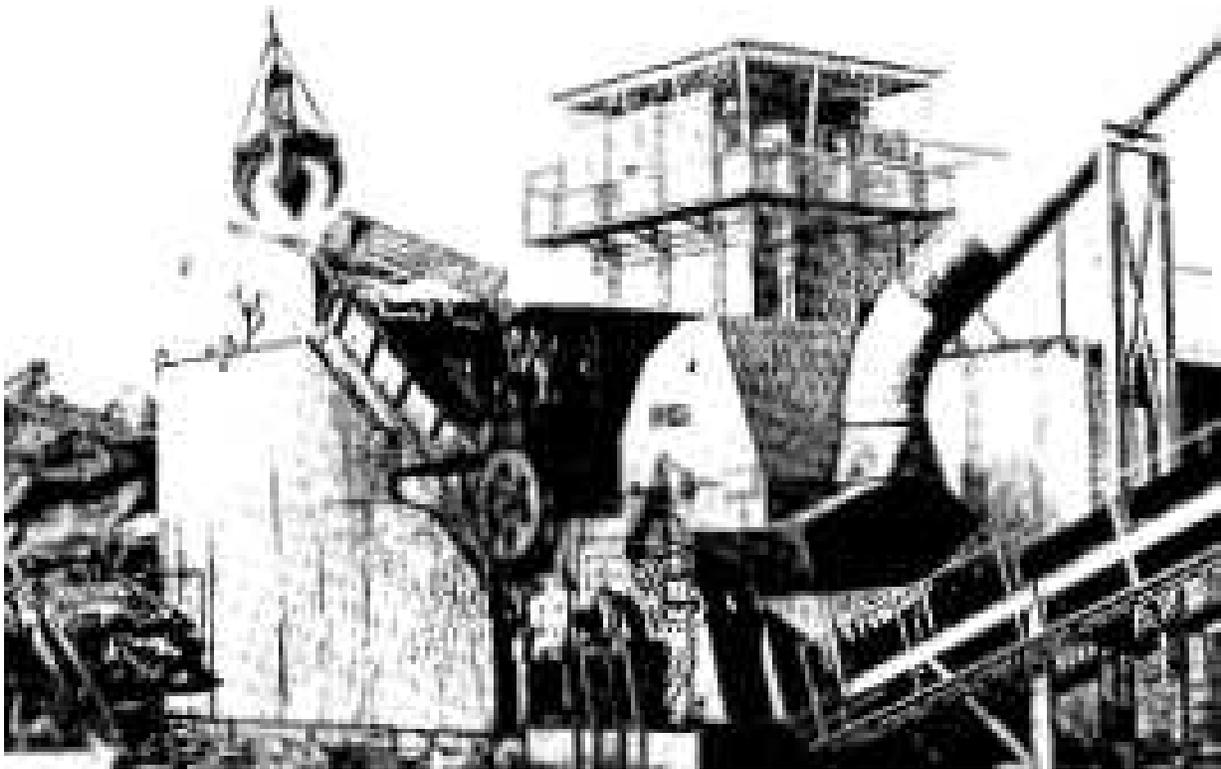




Alton Newell has taught a Sunday school class for many years. This picture was taken in 1971. Newell is at the extreme right.

This Lindermann shredder was built under the Newell patent. It is now in use at Edingburgh, Scotland.

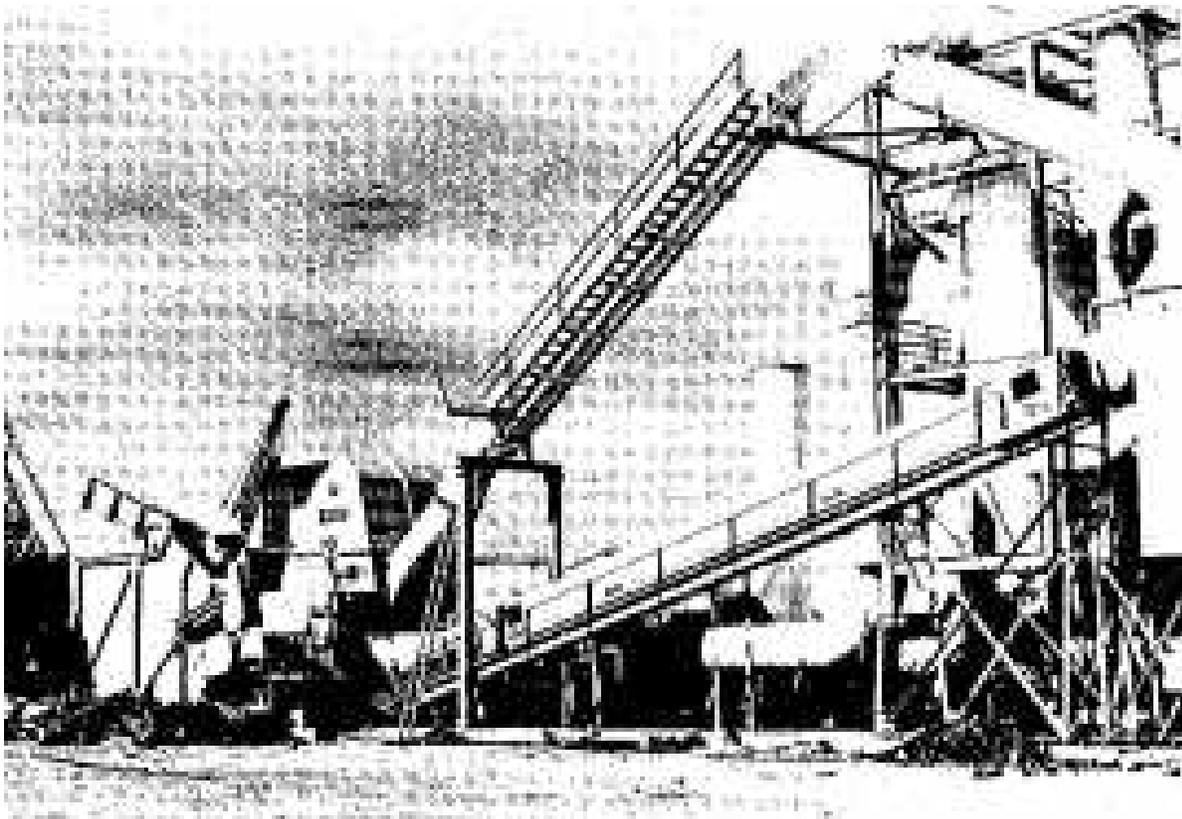




A Newell shredder – capacity up to 400 cars a day.

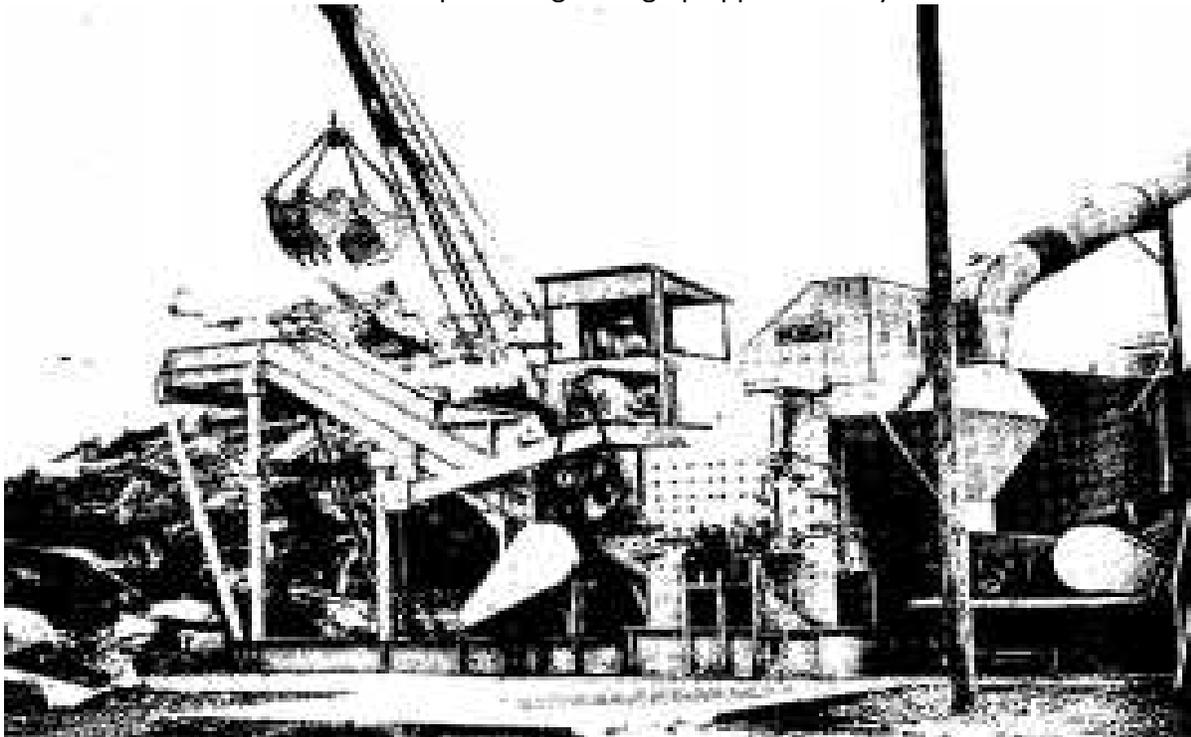
The stacking conveyer in the Dallas yard is controlled by the shredder operator. The scrap can be loaded directly into railroad cars, located on the left.





This shredder is in operation in faraway Sydney, Australia.

The early San Antonio plant, built in 1964. Many improvements have been made on the machine since. This machine is capable of grinding up approximately 35 cars an hour.



The heavy load of the car was actually an asset because the road bottom was solid sand and gravel. One after another of the drivers followed the Newell car, realizing that no tow truck was needed to get them through. When they reached the other side, Newell looked back with great satisfaction, remarking casually to a hesitant motorist, "It's really no pull at all; you can make it."

The only unhappy person present was the tow truck driver whose game had been exposed.

"My father was proud of himself for the rest of the day," laughed Newell.

Without further incident they reached the Colorado River in the late afternoon. Across it lay California. Blythe, the first town in the state, was five miles ahead. Their eagerness to reach California was dampened when they saw the raging, muddy turbulent Colorado. Never had they seen such a fearful sight. And they would have to cross it to get into the promised land! The warm spring rains had been melting the snow in the mountains on both sides of the Grand Canyon, overloading the river for a hundred miles or more. It was a flood such as this, they learned later, that caused the river to overflow its banks soon after the turn of the century, forming the Salton Sea.

They determined to watch the loading and unloading of the people and their cars on and off the ferryboat before risking their lives on the roaring river. Two cars at a time were carried on the ferry and it took about twenty minutes to cross. An ingenious method of moving the motorless boat across the river was used. Large cables were suspended from one side of the river to the other, and each end of the boat was fastened to pulleys that ran on the cables. By shortening the cable from the forward end of the boat to the pulley and lengthening the one on the rear, it headed the boat slightly upstream instead of parallel with the main cable. The water rushing against the boat then actually pushed it to the other side and, by reversing the procedure, it was pushed back across again.

"There were some wide-eyed and scared kids in the old Buick as Dad, under the guidance of the ferryboat operators, drove over those planks leading to the boat. Fortunately for us, ours was the second car on, so we had the added protection of the car ahead to keep ours from running off on the other end. The cars were tightly chained down, and with our hearts beating wildly, we started moving out into the river. I had the horrible thought that maybe the cable would break and we would be sent careening down the river and out into the ocean! Needless to say, we were a happy bunch when we felt the bump of the boat against the landing on the other side. For a while the thought of the sands and board roads down around Yuma sounded pretty good."

All's well that ends well, and soon the Newell car had been carefully edged down the planks from the boat to dry land, and shortly afterward they were in Blythe, an isolated little town of only a few inhabitants. It was not quite time for them to stop for the day, but they had had enough adventures for one day and they soon found a welcome campground. The children

were disappointed in not finding the countryside covered with orange trees, but they were told that they would have to wait for some time yet as they still had the worst part of the desert to cross, the famous Mohave.

The departure from Blythe was delayed the next day to make sure that they had all the things needed to travel the more than one hundred miles across the desert to Indio. Another water canteen was purchased and an extra supply of food was added. As they started out again, they felt a new confidence in themselves, for they were in California and a dream had come true for all of them.

Their enthusiasm waned, however, as they drove deeper into the desert over a road that was little more than a trail. It was ungraded, except in spots, and here and there it ran along the bottom of a wash. Several times when another car was met, Newell and the other driver debated which car should remain in the rut of the road and which should turn out into the sand. Everyone except the drivers would then get out of both cars and help push the lighter car around the one left in the ruts. Drivers were invariably helpful to each other in such situations, probably because they realized that it was a matter of survival to be that way.

As the sun got higher, it beat down upon the open car and its occupants. Several flat tires added to their burdens, and by midafternoon they had reached the halfway point in the sandy wasteland called Desert Center.

Having made it halfway through the desert, they decided to camp for the night. They were told the story of the founding of the little settlement, of how a traveler's car had broken down there and he decided to stay to help others get across the desert. He claimed to have the longest main street of any city in America, extending a hundred miles from Blythe to Indio. Though there were only a few buildings there, it was a fascinating place for the Newell children. All night long they heard the steady put-put of the single-cylinder engine that served the dual lights at night. Three business places served the needs of the isolated community, a garage, a general store, and a service station.

"It has been interesting for me to watch this community grow for the past fifty years," said Newell. "In the old days no traveler would have dared to cross the desert without stopping here. Many cars abandoned through the years attested to the fact that the task of crossing the desert was a hazardous one. Now hundreds of cars each day whiz by at seventy miles an hour with no thought of stopping, unaware of the changes that have taken place since the early motoring days. Four-lane freeways have replaced sandy desert trails and the drive across the Mohave from Blythe to Indio, once a long day's drive, and a hazardous one at that, is now made in an hour and a half in air-conditioned cars."

The next morning, remembering how hot it can get there even in the spring months, an early start was made, and by noon they had gone through Box Canyon and on to Mecca, which called itself "the edge of the desert." There they stopped to buy their lunch, consisting of a loaf of bread, a ring of bologna and two cans of condensed milk. Under a tree just outside of town

they stopped, and while the mother sliced the bread and meat (bread didn't come sliced in the '20s) and made sandwiches, the father opened the cans of milk and mixed it with water from the canteen.

Their hunger and thirst satisfied, they started out again, everyone anxious to go, for they were now getting close to the "real" California, Indio and Banning. Neither of these towns even remotely resembled what they are today. As the travelers went up out of the below-sea-level area to the higher altitude, they passed through canyons where the winds blew nearly all the time. This turned out to be a very exciting time for the children. Since most of the cars in those days were open touring cars, items of clothing were sometimes blown out of them by the winds. It became a game with Alton and the other children to see how many things they could find by the roadside. Before they reached Banning they had picked up a cap, a scarf, a shirt, a towel and a woman's dress. Now Alton had a new worry as they drove along: What if the owner of the cap that he had found should see him wearing it?

They decided their first stop should be in Santa Ana where one of Mrs. Newell's sisters lived. It was at noon the next day when they arrived at the edge of the city. Stopping at a green park on North Main Street, the parents walked from there into town, leaving the children with the car. All of them were glad to be able to run and play again, rolling and tumbling on the grass.

"I do not know why they did not drive to my aunt's house instead of walking, but I suppose they were afraid of the shock these 'city folks' would get with all its junk and six children drive up in front of their house," observed Newell. "This way provided an opportunity for my parents to explain everything to them before they saw us."

Several hours later they came back, riding in a car with the mother's sister and her husband. If they were surprised at what they saw, they gave no indication of it. The whole family went back with them to their home, where they stayed for several days while inquiries were made about the fruit harvest. To Alton, staying in the city home was a thrilling experience, for the first time in his life being in a home with electric lights, a kitchen sink and an inside toilet. Flushing the toilet was a real novelty to all of them, and the water was running down the drain quite regularly during those few days.

With a straight face, the father explained it to us.

"That gadget out there in the back yard is called a barbecue and that is where these city folks do their cooking. They go to the toilet in the house. Now, us country folks, we do our cooking inside the house and have our toilets out in the back yard."

Alton thought the matter over, pondering it well. He came to no definite conclusion concerning it, but he did admit that after all, flushing the inside toilet *was* fun.

Fruit Tramps

After a wonderful three-day visit, the Newells bade good-bye to their cordial hosts and drove to Elsinore, about sixty miles south and east of where they were, having been told that the apricot, lemon and potato harvest was about to begin. They passed orange groves, the trees loaded with golden fruit. This was the California of their dreams. The prospect of harvesting apricots was good news to them all because at last they would be working with something they could eat. They used to get ravenously hungry working in a cotton patch, except on those occasions when they worked for a farmer who had mixed a few watermelon seeds with his cotton seeds at planting time. What a welcome sight it was to come suddenly upon a big watermelon in the shade of the cotton stalks! The feast that followed was never equaled by any French king or Roman lord.

A grower that needed help in picking apricots was soon found, and the car was parked and a camp made under a wide-spreading tree on the edge of a lemon grove. Ample boxes were found to use for chairs and tables and the family “dug in” for a stay.

“We had lemonade for breakfast, lunch and supper,” Newell reminisced. “This was the best campsite we had ever been in. The beautiful weather was a joy to us all. California was surely everything that we had been told it would be. To top it all off, we were only about a couple miles from the lake. When work was finished in the evening, Dad would take us to the lake where we would all go swimming. We would come out nice and clean and. Besides, we would go in dressed in our dirty unionalls and they would come out niche and clean and, besides, we would get a bath at the same time. We didn’t wear any underwear, so by riding on the running board of the car or up between the hood and front fender we would be just about dry by the time we got back to camp. We wore the same clothes day and night and for days at a time. It was summertime and the living was easy.”

One difference between picking apricots and harvesting cotton was that it was necessary to climb a ladder to reach the fruit. Alton was only nine years old and the owner of the field said that he was too young to climb the ladder with a bucket for the fruit. Since there were three children in the family younger than he, only two of the five children could work with their parents. The four of them made about \$20 ad day picking by the box. It became Alton’s responsibility now to look after the younger children while the others worked.

From apricot groves the Newells went into the potato fields. After the digger had plowed up the potatoes, it was necessary to shake them off the vines. This was Alton’s job. In

time the damp soil had so cracked the bottom of his feet that one of them was bleeding as he worked. When the owner of the field saw the sore foot, he gave Alton a silver dollar and told him to go back to the camp and wash and "doctor" it. That ended his working in the potato fields that season.

Lemon harvesting began and the family switched from potatoes to lemons. Alton was not permitted on a ladder, so he spent his time solving a gopher problem. When the land was boxed off for irrigating, the water would, of course, go into gopher holes, often coming up where it was not supposed to. The owner of the land gave him a dozen or so traps and showed him how to set them. A bonus of ten cents was paid for every gopher tail that he brought him. During the harvest season of several weeks, he made almost five dollars in this way. To him it seemed like a lot of money but, as usual, he turned it over to his parents. This was true of all money that any of them earned.

The harvest season around Elsinore ended and once more the "fruit tramp" family moved on, this time to the San Jose area near San Francisco where the apricot season was beginning. They skirted Los Angeles, going north through the San Fernando Valley and up over the hazardous ridge route through Bakersfield. The San Joaquin Valley was at its best and they all agreed that at that moment it looked better than Kansas in the wintertime. Camp was made on the outskirts of Fresno where there were good facilities for camping and a zoo, which thrilled the children, for they had never seen many of the animals before. "We had a lot of fun there that afternoon," Newell recollected.

The next day, just beyond San Jose, a job was found at Saratoga with a man by the name of Hoge. The children thought the man's name was very funny when they saw it printed on his fruit boxes. They camped in his grove and worked there for several weeks before going on to Cupertino where a job was found with the Saich brothers. Here they had a little house to live in which, although it had no running water, was, nevertheless, a good place to "bed down." Cooking was still done on an outside fire, for there was no kitchen range.

Here the father worked in the orchards picking "cots" while the rest of the family worked in the pitting sheds. Anyone who was big enough to stand on a box and reach the trays was big enough to work. Their job was to cut open the apricots, take out the seed and lay the halves out on the trays. For each box emptied, they were paid 10 cents. When a box was emptied, the foreman would bring another and punch a hole in a card as a record. Alton and the other children worked on their mother's card and helped to empty her box. Since all except the youngest children worked, their earnings mounted rapidly. A fringe benefit of this job that the children appreciated was that when they got hungry, they could cut an apricot in two, put one half on the tray and the other in the mouth. Many a division of this kind was made during the course of an average day.

The trays that the fruit was put on were large, about three feet by six feet. When one was filled the worker called out, "Tray!" and two men would come and take away the full tray

and replace it with an empty one. Some of the women worked so fast at cutting fruit that Alton marveled at their agility. All that he could tell for sure was that the tray was filling up *fast*.

When the trays were full, they were put on little flatcars of a miniature railroad, each car being stacked up to a height of six or seven feet. It was then pushed into a sealed building which held fifteen or twenty cars. When the room was full, they closed the tight doors and burned sulphur inside the room for several hours for each batch. When the cars were taken out, they were rolled into a vacant area where the trays were laid out side by side in the sun. There they stayed until the fruit was thoroughly dried. Today this drying process is done in a heated building instead of relying on sunlight, and only a fraction of the time that it used to take is needed. It also eliminates the possibility of the fruit getting wet from a rare rainfall, or of becoming dusty on windy days.

“My fond memory of apricots, both fresh or dried, is that in spite of picking tons of them each season, they always made for us a good breakfast or a dessert at suppertime,” recalled Newell.

About the end of July, when the apricots were about gone, the prunes were getting ripe. The same people that they worked for picking apricots also raised prunes. Alton’s father and his family were good workers and were asked to stay on through the prune season. When that fruit gets ripe, it falls from the trees. The ground is carefully prepared to receive the fallen fruit by being made smooth and soft. Each prune has to be picked up from the ground, a back-breaking job. The trees are usually so full of fruit that the limbs have to be propped up to keep them from breaking.

The Newells started on this job about the first of August and were paid \$5 per ton for picking the ripened fruit from the ground and putting it in containers. Alton had just become ten years old and he could pick as well as an adult, about a ton a day. Since everyone except the two youngest children worked, the family made from \$25 to \$30 a day, which were good earnings for the ‘20s.

“My motivation was not quite as good as that of my parents, so more than likely I sometimes missed this ton-a-day goal. Actually, it was not as hard for me to crawl around on the ground all day as it was for my parents,” observed Newell. “Even then I remember how good it felt at the end of a day to hang from a limb and let my back stretch out.”

About this time the Newells decided that they needed a new car. The parents went into San Jose one Saturday and returned with a shiny black “Star” touring car. The Star was one of the many new makes of automobiles that came onto the market in the years following World War I. To the children, it was just about the prettiest thing that they had ever seen, and how good it smelled! They would get in it just to sit and sniff in appreciation.

“My father had promised us that if we would all work hard and meet our ton-a-day goal, he would take us to Santa Cruz to the amusement park on the beach or to the zoo in San

Francisco,” said Newell. “We had all promised, and the very next day after getting the new car, since it was Sunday and we had all been working hard, Dad took us to Santo Cruz. I think he chose Santa Cruz in order to try out his new car in the mountains. He was very pleased with its performance that day and spoke proudly of how easily it climbed the mountains even in high gear. We had a wonderful day at the park and returned by way of the Big Basin and the beautiful redwoods area.”

As September neared, the end of the prune season came into view. During the last round through the prune orchards, all the fruit that had not fallen were shaken from the trees. This was a neck-breaking job that was usually done by the father while the rest of the family picked it from the ground. A wooden pole approximately twenty feet long, with a hook on the end, was used to shake each limb to get the remaining prunes. To process the fruit after it was brought into the sheds, it was dipped in hot lye water before being spread out on a tray to dry. This crude method has now been eliminated and today the prunes are dried in a dehydration plant.

On the last Sunday before the family was to leave the prune harvest area, the father took them all to the zoo in San Francisco. This was an especially enjoyable day that ended with a picnic lunch in the park. Alton was fascinated by the steep streets of San Francisco, while his father was proud of the way his new car negotiated them. It was a “fun” day for everyone.

During the final evening before leaving, the children took their last rides on the little fruit cars that they pushed about by hand. They also had a grand time taking showers under a water hose in the dark among the fruit sheds. The next day was spent loading the car. Mr. Saich and one of his sons came by to give them their final pay, urging them to come back again next year to help with their harvest. Newell was pleased and promised to be back. Actually, they did come back for four more years to this same orchard, looking forward to each season as harvesttime approached.

The next day the family was once again on the road to nowhere, this time much less apprehensive of having flat tires or other car trouble. In the early evening when a stop was made in Kingsburg to get gas, they were told that the vineyards were ready and pickers were needed. They decided to stay all night here, making camp behind the station where they bought the gas. A large garage and storage warehouse was located there where space could be rented. An empty corner was assigned to them where the car could be parked and they could put their beds down. On a fire built out in back, the evening meal was prepared. Once again they were “in business.”

A job was found picking grapes on the outskirts of town, all the family working except the three youngest. Each worker made about five dollars a day. Here they stayed for several weeks.

The school term had started, and since California had a strictly enforced school attendance program, the parents knew that it would be only a matter of time until they would

be caught if the children worked instead of going to school. Alton's mother had never favored keeping the children out of school to work and insisted that they return to Santa Ana where they could attend a city school. They located a vacant house next door to the mother's half sister, Aunt Juanita, and her husband. Their address was 108 N. Flower Street. The house was later torn down and replaced in a few years by a service station. This was the first house that any of the children had ever lived in that had inside plumbing, and they thought it was all very wonderful. Just a half block away was the school that Pete and Alton were to attend. The school was so crowded, however, that half the children went in the morning and half in the afternoon.

All that the father could do in the line of work was manual labor because of his lack of education, and he had to be satisfied with whatever odd jobs he could get. The mother, too, worked at a number of jobs, usually at night, so someone had to be found to look after the children. For a time she worked as a hotel maid, later getting a job in a bakery. Sometimes Alton would go with her in the middle of the night so she would not have to walk to work alone.

"I usually ate a few goodies while I was there," he recalled. Fate decreed that more than thirty years later Alton bought an automobile wrecking yard that used this same bakery building for storing auto parts.

While living in Santa Ana, he and his older brother, Walter, sold papers on the downtown streets after school each day, earning 25 or 50 cents an evening and usually a dollar on Sundays.

As they did with all the money they earned, they turned these receipts over to their parents, who spent it for their clothes or school supplies. Once in awhile Alton was given money to attend a movie, his favorite stars being Tom Mix, William S. Hart or Hoot Gibson. One Saturday afternoon he was so fascinated by the Western film that he sat through four showings, not leaving the theater until after dark. Everyone had been looking for him for several hours and Alton never again failed to tell his parents when he was to be gone for any length of time.

A Novel source of income for Alton was found and used. He had a little red wagon that had been bought for delivering papers, and he now used it to go from door to door selling bread, pies, sweet rolls and other delectable items from the bakery where his mother worked. One Saturday he had so many requests for cherry pies that the next week he loaded his wagon with many of them and happily began his rounds. That day he sold not one of the, taking them home for the family to eat at the end of the day. They ate cherry pie for the next few days, but that put Alton out of the bakery business.

"I made what I considered to be good money selling papers on the street, but was too bashful to go into the restaurants and sell from table to table like some boys did," he recalled. "I also refused to go into the hospital to sell from room to room and was fired from one job because I wouldn't do it."

Alton's grandfather and grandmother had moved from Garden City, Kansas, to Santa Ana also, as most of their children had married and had moved there. They had two boys about Alton's age and they spent much time together. There were now many members of the family living in Santa Ana and they all agreed that they liked it there, better than back in Kansas. Alton's mother had written glowing letters to her mother about California and word now came that "Ma" and "Pa" Presley and son Jack and Aunt Luella and several other of her children were on their way from Oklahoma. They had come as far as Blythe where they were stopping to pick cotton. Alton and his father drove there at Christmastime to join them for several weeks before returning to Santa Ana with them. In this way another year passed.

The last of May arrived, and with it the end of the school year. Apricots were getting ripe at Elsinore and plans were made to go there to take part in the harvest. All the children were dismayed to learn that their mother was not going with them, but would remain in Santa Ana. Only Opal, the youngest child, was to stay with her, and they would wait for the others to come back to them after the summer harvest. Alton did not realize it then, but it was a separation that would later be made permanent.

We thought that it would be only for a few months, for none of us had any idea that there was trouble between Dad and Mother," said Newell. "They seldom quarreled, and they in their own way took good care of us. Sure, we were drifters, living here and there, in miserable places, but we accepted it as a way of life. All of us were unhappy when we learned that our mother would not go with us to Elsinore. Things – our meals and such – hadn't been of the best in the past, but what would they be now? With misgivings we left her and headed eastward into the mountains."

There were three carloads of the family now traveling together, the grandparents, the aunt and uncle, and several children. Together they could "clean up" an orchard in short order. They worked for the same people for whom they had worked last season, camping in the same place as they did the year before. Often the big group cooked the meals together and ate as one family. This pleased Alton's father because he then had someone to cook for him and his brood, consisting of the father; Walter, age 14; Edna, age 12; Alton, now 10; Pete, age 7; and Glenn, age 5. Opal, who stayed with her mother, was three.

The final separation of his parents was a blow to all the children. The father brooded about the family trouble but said nothing. Then on evening after work, he told the children to get into the car and go with him to Santa Ana to get Opal. Let Alton Newell tell the story as he remembers the happenings of that night.

"We went to Uncle Lloyd's house, thinking that we would stay there that night. Dad and the relatives stayed up talking; I couldn't sleep, wondering what was happening. It was late when a car drove up, and we heard a door slam. Uncle Lloyd told Dad it was Mother. He walked back into the kitchen as she was let in the front door. I was not asleep as yet, so when I

heard Mother's voice, I went into the living room just as my dad walked in from the kitchen. She was startled to see Dad, and she asked, 'What do you want?'

"'I came to get Opal. Where is she?' My father's voice was strained as if in anger. 'She is home,' replied my mother.

"'Go get her!' ordered my father. 'You have been leaving her alone while you are out of the house.'

"My mother didn't reply, but walked out of the house, returning with the sleepy little girl after about a half hour.

"All the children were now up. Pete ran over to where his mother was sitting and put his head down in her lap. She put her arms around him and, looking at my dad, she asked, 'Can I have this one?'

"'You can't have any of them,' said my father bitterly, and my mother began to cry. Dad said that we would leave for Elsinore at once, 'so we all got into the car. There were no good-byes until Mother came outside just as we were leaving. She kissed all of us, even my dad, when we left. This was the last time I saw my mother for six or seven years. The next day, back in Elsinore, my grandmother told me that she already knew that my mother and father were not going to live together anymore."

Life went on almost as usual in the motherless home. Every day was a repetition of the day before: work, eat, sleep. On some days they washed clothes or went swimming. Other than that, there was little diversion. At the end of June, the work at Elsinore was finished and the group went north to the San Jose area where they went back to the Saich brothers at Cupertino. They worked in the apricot orchards during July and then began prune harvesting. As it neared its end, the children wondered where they would go next and if they would go to school this year, and if so, where. There was no need to ask any of the adults, for none of them knew when they would leave or where they would go.

One day the father cried, "Let's get packing! We're moving!" and in no time at all the cars were loaded and on their way, the three vehicles making an interesting caravan as they drove through the countryside. They recrossed the Mohave and spent several weeks at Blythe picking cotton. The grandparents were anxious to get home to Oklahoma, but there was little to allure the Newells back to that state. Cabins at the tourist camp rented for a dollar a day, with a community bath and rest-room facilities provided.

Eventually Newell agreed to accompany the others back "home," for he needed help with the children.

One of the benefits that Alton enjoyed while traveling with relatives was switching cars and riding with his cousins. Bill and he were the same age and they often rode together. This

practice caused them a scare at Blythe that wasn't soon forgotten. After they had crossed the river on the ferryboat, the two boys were intently watching the boat being loaded for the trip back across the river when suddenly they became aware that all three of the family cars had departed, leaving them behind. Frantically the two raced after them, shouting and waving wildly. By chance someone in the end car saw them and stopped and waited for them. Each driver had thought that they were in one of the other cars. Needless to say, they didn't lag behind again.

"I remember that day so well, especially the evening," recalled Newell many years later. "We made good time, going through Phoenix and Mesa to Superior where we made camp in the mountains. It was a beautiful spot. I was very hungry and the smell of frying potatoes over the campfire made me ravenous. We also had fried bread and plenty of evaporated milk to drink. We boys explored the mountainside and found a big cave which we were afraid was filled with bears which would come out at night when we were asleep and attack us. After supper we all sat around the fire, more for light than for warmth, and listened to the grownups talk of their travels. Grandfather told us a lot of his experiences when he was a boy. When we finally rolled up in our blankets, we wondered if there were any bears which would come calling on us in the night."

The next morning a little after good daylight came and after a breakfast of oatmeal, the cars were loaded and the caravan started up the steep, winding roads leading up the canyon and on to Miami and Globe. The mountains were even worse to drive through than the ones they had encountered near Bisbee, and the going was slow.

Such was the life of Alton Newell as a boy. Before he was ten, he had wandered far, doing a man's work in the cotton fields and fruit orchards. He never had a home; the hard floor or the ground was his usual bed. His meals were frugal ones, of oatmeal or bread and watered-down condensed milk. Much of the year his clothing consisted of a pair of coveralls; that was all.

Again it was the end of the year and winter was near. Four months had gone by since school had begun but he had not been in school as yet. The weather was getting cold and, as usual, they were not prepared for it. The grandparents wanted to get on home before it got too cold, and they were preparing to leave. The grandmother asked to take Glenn and Opal, the two youngest, to live with them "so they won't freeze," and the father reluctantly decided to let them go. Alton was unhappy, not knowing when he would see them again. It was a sad parting for them all when they left. Alton's mind went back to breakfasttime the day before. Glenn had taken his tin plate back to the stove to get a second helping of fried potatoes. When he dipped his spoon in the pan, there was nothing there. He looked around at the rest of us and began to cry. Immediately we all offered him some of what we had left on our plates.

"I will never forget the look on his face if I live to be a hundred," said Newell.

Arriving in Texas, the family, now consisting of five instead of seven, resumed life as sharecroppers.

There was an old house in the field into which they moved their meager belongings. There was no furniture except a stove; boxes being gathered to serve as stools and a table. Some of the windows were broken out and boards nailed over them to keep out the cold. In January, the cold became intense, becoming one of the worst winters that they had ever experienced. A bitter north wind covered everything outside with ice, remaining that way for days. No work could be done, and the pathetic group used its time trying to keep warm. One night the father stayed up all night to keep a fire going in the stove. There were not enough blankets to keep warm and no money to buy more.

The father was a hard worker and an honest man, but he was a very poor businessman. He liked people and trusted them, but he never seemed to learn how to protect himself from those who took advantage of him. In his frustration, he sometimes resorted to drink, and when he was under the influence of liquor, he was like a wild man. Alton did not blame his father for his weakness; he only wondered how he could be of help. In later years the father overcame the problem and lived out his last years as a respected member of the community. The fault lay not with the man, but with the society that permitted him an unfulfilled life because of a lack of education and training.

During many cold winter nights as Alton lay shivering on the hard floor, he wondered what life was all about. One day a train passed the cotton patch in which he was working and he saw the people in it through the train windows. "Why aren't they picking cotton, too?" he wondered. He asked many other questions about life, but the answer that he generally got was that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. Young people are not responsible for their actions, he was told, until they reach the age of accountability, which is twelve years old. If he lived a perfect life after he turned twelve, he would go to heaven. That was always stressed. When Alton was eleven, he started practicing being good, not taking any chances. The day he reached his twelfth birthday all swearing ceased, for in his mind this was the worst sin that he committed. From the time that he was six years old, swearing – he called it "cussing" – had been a habit with him.

"On the day I was twelve, I stopped swearing," he said. "From that day to this, no swear word had been uttered by me, so complete was the change in me. I really quit!"

Alton missed the entire fifth year of school and also part of the sixth, up until the day a truant officer saw him working in a cotton field. Not that he wanted to stay out of school, for working in a field all day was far harder than doing schoolwork. He informed the school officials that he was in the sixth grade, not wanting to be embarrassed by being assigned to a class with boys and girls a year younger than himself.

In this grade, a persistent worry plagued him. He was a sensitive child with many feelings of inferiority, the result of untold number s flights both by fellow pupils and by

teachers. While his sixth grade teacher was a kindly and understanding person, she began a practice that day by day brought him closer to a dreaded moment. During the morning's opening exercises, the group was led in prayer by a different child each day. The teacher called on the day's leader in the order of seating, up one row and won another. The day was fast approaching when it would be Alton's turn and, except when said by the pupils of this school, he had never *heard* a prayer, had never *said* a prayer, had never been *inside* a church in his life. In terror and dread he waited for the awful day when he would be called upon. What would he do then? He did not know; he could only wait and hope that some miracle would happen that would deliver him from the terrible dilemma that faced him.

On the day before it was his turn, the teacher called on the boy who sat in front of him. The boy shook his head and the teacher called on Alton. His heart beating wildly, he could think of nothing other than to shake his head also. The teacher said nothing, calling on the pupil next in line, who responded. That ended the matter, but the suffering that Alton had gone through during the previous weeks was untold.

"That taught me a lesson," said Newell. "Who was it who once said that most of our troubles and worries never happen?"

Today Alton Newell is grateful that California had a strict school attendance law and the means of enforcing it. Scott Newell paid the penalty for his lack of schooling, but he did not have the foresight to see that he was condemning his children to a life similar to his own by keeping them out of school. His knowledge of the outside world was fragmentary and meager; his world was one of broken-down farms and cotton patches; the limit of his vision was the perimeter of the farm that he was at the moment working for another man.

Alton paid just tribute to Scott Newell when he said, "My father was a good man. He was a victim of the society in which he was raised and lived. It was through no fault of his own that he was neither educated for a profession nor trained for a vocation. If we children at times suffered privations and want, he endured them with us. When economic conditions bettered, he was every inch a man. I have never found it in my heart to point the finger of blame at him."

Ore years went by and the Newell family continued their wanderings. We cannot record here in detail all of them, for while each day and each year differed from all the others, there was, nevertheless, a monotonous repetitiousness about them. From the cotton fields to the orchards; from the orchards to the cotton fields; this was their way of life.

Growing Up

Alton Newell was growing up. When entering his teen years, he had already long done a man's work. Now he was becoming a man in stature and in strength. The time was soon to come when that strength was to be tested and it was not found wanting.

The motherless brood struggled each day against odds. Little Edna was becoming ever more capable as a cook and housekeeper, scrubbing, washing, cooking, doing all of the hundred and one household duties that the woman of a home was called upon to do. When her father and her brothers came in from the cotton fields in the late afternoon, their fingers cracked and bleeding, it was she who rubbed them with Vaseline to heal them.

In the little shack in the Gila Valley that was to be their home for the next twelve months, she assumed a woman's role, though often the fare was of the poorest kind. When the father no longer had a dollar or even a dime in his pocket, he sold the car and used the money for groceries. Soon they were gone, too, and the day arrived when the last bit of food was eaten with no money to buy more.

"How often of late my father would say, 'I just don't feel hungry. You kids go ahead and eat,'" recalled Newell. "We believed him then, but now I realize that he was not eating in order that we kids would have more."

The day after their food was all gone, the children went to school without breakfast. When lunchtime came they watched as the other children ate their sandwiches. All day long they went hungry. When they got home again, their father was gone. Anxiously they wondered, "Has he run away and left us?" What would they do now? What *was* there to do but starve? The little ones cried in their misery and the older ones could only comfort them and assure them that "Daddy will be home soon with something to eat," though in their hearts they had little hope.

Just then they saw him coming down the road with his team and wagon. They all ran out to meet him, calling loudly, "Daddy! You're home!" In the wagon were groceries, boxes and boxes of them, bread and milk and jelly and potatoes and a big red package of crackers and oatmeal, and even a sack of candy. The happy children shouted and yelled as he unloaded the boxes by the door and Edna excitedly began to make supper. As the children were gorging

themselves, their father told them how he had borrowed twenty-five dollars and spent it all for food.

“We didn’t have to thank him that day,” Newell said. “Our happy faces did that for us.”

Credit of a sort was established with Mr. Ferguson, owner of the little store at Glenbar, who many times saved them from going hungry by giving them food on “time.” They moved to a different farm nearby, living there for two years, the longest stay in one place in Alton’s memory. On it they raised cotton, wheat, alfalfa and sometimes vegetables, but in spite of hard work, they seldom could get a dollar ahead.

It was the beginning of a long siege of unbroken poverty and discouragement. Often they had to ask for credit from Mr. Ferguson, granted reluctantly because of the poor prospects of payment. At school, he was embarrassed when he couldn’t bring a dime for a homeroom party or for some other special occasion. For awhile they had a cow, but even she had to be sold to meet their more pressing needs. Arrangements were made with a neighbor to turn the separator, for which they were given a bucket of skimmed milk. This, with cornbread, was their usual evening meal. Oatmeal was their common breakfast, with beans for lunch. Meat was almost unknown on their table except for an occasional piece of salt pork in their beans. Peanut-butter sandwiches were a favorite treat on occasion, and when the peanut butter was not to be had, beans were substituted. At a restaurant across the street from the school a hamburger could be purchased for a nickel, and a bowl of chili for the same price. On occasion when their father gave them each a dime to buy their lunches, the day was a happy one for all of them. On those days they were plutocrats, the equal of any pupil in the school.

An occasional rabbit was added to their home fare, the smell of fresh meat roasting over an open fire tantalizing them all. Alton was given four traps, which he set for skunks. On the way to school the next day, he inspected the traps and found three skunks in them. Excitedly he skinned them then and there, resulting in an unexpected holiday for him, the teacher sending him home the moment he entered the room. The event ended happily, for each hide was sold for a dollar and a half.

The summer he turned fifteen, Alton earned over a hundred dollars during haying, a bonanza for the family. With a portion of it, he bought some much needed clothes.

That fall Alton went through the most unhappy period of his life. Scott Newell, desperately trying to keep his family together but failing to make both ends meet, began once more to indulge his old craving for liquor. It didn’t happen often, his drunken sprees, but when it did, he was uncontrollable. He broke up everything in the house that he could smash, and then started all over again. The terrified children fled from the house when he was in this drunken state. When he left the house in the evening to go into town, Alton would lie awake for into the night listening for his footsteps on the gravel walk. He and his older brother, Walter, would get out of bed and help the drunken man get undressed and into his bed, though his violence on these occasions was sometimes more than they could cope with.

Alton followed him one evening to find out where his father was getting the illegal liquor. He watched as a bootlegger went into some bushes near the barn to fill his father's bottle. In the dark of the night Alton returned and emptied the contents of the jars of alcohol that were hidden in the bushes. It was a desperate measure taken by a desperate boy, but it was to no avail. Within a few days the father again went on a drunken rampage.

A nightmarish experience occurred shortly afterward. Alton had gone rabbit hunting with his ".22 short" rifle. When he came home, his father was drunk again. Seeing the rifle in Alton's hands, a strange look came into his eyes as he demanded the gun. Alton had taken the shells from it, so he handed the weapon to his father.

But let Alton tell of what followed.

"My father then asked me if I had more shells. I knew that it would never do for him to have a loaded gun, so I started to run away from him. He shouted, 'Stop, or I'll shoot.' I kept running and then I heard a click and, looking back, saw the gun pointing directly at me. He didn't know what he was doing, but neither did he know that the gun wasn't loaded when he pulled the trigger. I hid for almost an hour before going back. When I got to the house, he had put the gun away and was fooling with a leather strap, a part of a harness. I asked him what he was going to do with it and he said he was going to whip Mr. Ferguson. Chills ran through me as I thought of this being done to the man who had befriended us. What a tragedy it would be!

"Whirling away from me, he started in the direction of the store. In desperation, I threw myself at him and knocked him to the ground. As he lay stunned and bewildered on the ground, I tied his ankles together with the strap. He looked at me very puzzled and asked what I was trying to do to him. I told him to see how long it would take for him to get loose. He worked and worked at the strap until it was almost untied. Then I told him to be still and I would let him go. He laid back, but instead of loosening it, I again tied it as tightly as I could. Again he struggled with the strap, and again I tricked him.

"Several times he was almost successful, but each time this happened I promised to let him go, and he always trusted me. I was frightened and wondered how long this could go on. Just as it was getting dark, Pete came home, and we both begged him to come into the house and go to bed. He continued to struggle, finally getting loose and, leaping to his feet, started in the direction of the store. As he ran, he began to take off his clothes, piece by piece, until he was naked as a jay bird.

"All this time I was pleading with him and trying to wrestle him down. My dad was six feet tall and weighed nearly 200 pounds, and I weighed no more than 110, so it was a hopeless task. Just as I tripped him and he fell to the ground, Mr. Ferguson came along. The storekeeper was furious and scolded Dad something terrible. Dad took it for a long time, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, then he had had enough. Without a word, he got up and started for home. When we got there, he was already sound asleep.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

“For over an hour we sat around the table in the kitchen discussing what we should do. This could not go on. We considered trying to borrow some money and taking our Model T and going to California to find some relatives. We finally decided to wait a few days to see what would happen.”

The climax came the next day. Walter and Edna went somewhere in the car and Pete and Alton walked over to the store. When they left the house, their father was still asleep and they knew that he would be all right when he awakened. Soon afterward they saw him coming through the mesquite trees, walking rapidly but looking terribly frightened. They called to him, and Alton never saw anyone’s face change so fast from fear to happiness. He realized then that his father thought all of the children had run away and left him. At that moment the son knew that he could never leave his father, no matter what happened.

Days of extreme poverty continued. One day Alton and Edna got off the bus after school and were walking across the field to their house. Edna remarked how hungry she was. At that moment they each thought about the corn bread that may have been left over from the night before. They raced each other to the house and together they jerked open the oven door. It was empty. “Dad must have come home for lunch,” said Edna. There was no other food in the house.

The everyday living conditions in the home were equally bad. The mattress on which Alton and Walter slept had a large hole in it with a piece of bedspring sticking through. For towels, the children used old worn-out clothes. All the clothing that Alton had was one pair of pants and one shirt. When they got dirty, he would wait until he was home alone, then take them off and wash them.

“I learned to iron quite well,” said Newell. “I could also sew up torn spots and put on buttons, and I learned how to half-sole my shoes with a borrowed last. Many times I had to put a piece of cardboard or folded paper in my shoes in the morning to cover the holes. When the end would wear out of one of my socks, I would pull it off part way and fold the end under. This would put the hole in the heel down in the shoe so it could not be seen. The only thing wrong with this procedure was that often before night the whole sock had worked its way down into the shoe.”

Things finally got so bad that the family realized that it was slowly starving. They could think of no way out of their troubles except to go back to California and hope to get work there. Alton remembered how wonderful it had been when picking fruit out there to eat what he wanted of it.

They owed Mr. Ferguson over \$200 for groceries, but there was no way to pay it. Scott Newell went to him and told of their plight and the decision to leave. Mr. Ferguson had nothing to say, for he well knew that there was small probability of the debt ever being paid. Alton was with his father that day and never forgot the promise to pay.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Forty years later Alton Newell returned to the little town and called on Mr. Ferguson, who was old and in ill health. When he asked if the debt had ever been paid, the one-time storekeeper admitted that it had not. When Newell took \$200 from his billfold and gave it to Mr. Ferguson, tears came to the old man's eyes. It was a heaven-sent payment, he said, for he appeared to be in need of money. Alton Newell believes that incidents such as this are not mere happenstance. A short time later Mr. Ferguson died, and if Alton had not stopped that day, the just debt would never have been repaid to the kind old man.

They had almost no money, but decided to leave anyway, hoping to get odd jobs along the way. They worked through the day making ready, and by the next afternoon Alton had the car ready for the start. He had filed the coil points, cleaned the spark plugs, flushed the radiator, and put oil in all the oil holes that he could find. The car was a stripped-down Model T Ford, with no bumpers, top, fenders or even a back seat. Since there was room in the seat for only wheels where his father and Pete could sit holding on to the back of the seat. Edna, Glenn and Alton sat in the front seat. A couple of blankets were folded and put on the board to make it softer, and another was folded on the front seat. At the father's and Pete's feet were all of their worldly goods, a pitifully small horde – their blankets, a box with some tin plates, cups and spoons and a knife and a little chest that Alton had made in school.

In this manner they started the journey westward toward California. By noon of the next day they had arrived at the outskirts of Phoenix. Everyone was very hungry, but since they did not have enough money for both food and gasoline, they stopped at a roadside stand and bought a large, cold watermelon. There wasn't much nourishment in it, but it filled their stomachs for the moment and assuaged the hunger ache.

Just a few days before the family left Glenbar, Pete had brought home a little puppy which was the pride of his life. With many misgivings, the father consented to its being taken along, but it was now apparent that not only was it too much trouble, but it ate much more than they could afford for its food. Pete was told to leave it at their next stop. He cried as they got in the car and started out without it. The frightened puppy ran after the car, running faster and faster, with its tongue hanging out and making little yelping sounds. When Pete started to cry, Alton stopped the car and Pete soon had it in his arms. When they went through the next town Pete took it out of the car and gave it a piece of bread. The hungry puppy was so busy devouring the food that the car was able to drive away without its noticing. It was a sad day for all of them.

"There was a bridge across the Colorado River at Blythe, but there was a toll charge of 50 cents to cross it," recalled Newell. "All the money that we had was one dime. Dad paid this to walk across the bridge while we sat in the car and waited. He hitched a ride into the town where Aunt Luella lived and borrowed 50 cents from her. It was several hours before he came back and we were able to cross the river. We worked there for several weeks, earning the money to go on."

The family made an amusing sight as they drove through towns and cities. The weather was chilly and the father and Pete used the blankets that they had been sitting on and wrapped up in them. With one wearing a big black hat and the other a wide-brimmed straw, and with only their heads sticking out of the blankets, they attracted much attention. The people along the streets stared at the strange contraption and its occupants. But to the occupants, it was not funny, especially to the father and Pete, who had to hold their blankets with one hand and hold onto the back seat for dear life with the other.

When the car broke down completely, the penniless family camped by the roadside and wrote to Walter, who was working in Cupertino, to come to their aid. They were to learn now how kind some people can be to those in need. Their destitute condition was apparent to everyone who passed, the children especially receiving sympathetic looks. They had only bread to eat, but it was strictly rationed, so they were always hungry.

After they had been there several days, a man who had driven by several times stopped to ask if they needed help. Scott Newell explained what had happened and the man checked the car engine. He soon found that the transmission had gone to pieces. His son was a mechanic, he said, and he was quite sure that there was a transmission in his garage that would fit the car. Scott Newell quickly told him that he had no money to pay the son, but the man said that would be “no problem.”

As he left, he turned and said, “The kids look hungry. Have you anything to eat?”

“Dad was a proud man and he would not admit that there wasn’t even money to buy food and that we had all been existing on only a couple of slices of bread a day. He told the man, ‘We’re okay in regard to food. We’re doing all right.’ How our hearts sank with these words! We hadn’t eaten a meal in many days, yet Dad passed up the opportunity to get one. The man left to get tools and the needed parts, but he evidently did not believe Dad about the food. He came back an hour later with tools and also a box filled with food. We couldn’t take our eyes off that food box, and the moment he left, we cleaned up every bit of it in short order. I never enjoyed a meal more than I did that one that day.”

Scott Newell insisted that he would send the man money for the car repairs, but the request was dismissed abruptly.

“You are the kind of people who would do the same thing for somebody else in trouble,” he said, refusing to give his name and address. The family never saw him again.

Walter came the next day and all ended well when they got to Cupertino and took up residence in a little shack where they had lived before. Everyone was glad to be there. They were “home” again.

PART II

The Restless Years

Between the year when Alton Newell quit high school in the middle of his sophomore year and his marriage in 1938, he engaged in various business activities. He cried when he had to quit school, and resolved that in spite of the lack of formal schooling, he would someday own a business of his own.

For some time the family wanderings continued. The depression of the 1930s deepened and hard times brought additional trouble and discouragement. Scott Newell, after a period of sobriety, resumed drinking and began gambling, both habits that he could ill afford. To make matters worse, eye trouble caused him days of endless pain that eventually ended in total blindness.

Without funds and out of work, the father and his faithful family of children made their way to Santa Ana where Alton and Walter, both old enough to hold steady jobs, rented a house. Alton found work in a junk yard, working his way up to the position of manager, though he was the youngest man in the yard.

One day he found a dollar bill on the floor where he was working. Scrupulously honest, he turned the bill in to the owner. He did not know until years later that the money was dropped there by the owner to test his honesty. Shortly afterward, he was made manager of the yard with full authority to buy and sell as well as set prices for items in stock.

His experience in this place of business proved to be invaluable in his later climb upward in the business world. He had regretted leaving school, but eye trouble caused by an attack of measles made study impossible. By the time his eyes improved, family obligations made further schooling out of the question.

The jobs that he held were many and varied. Sometimes he was working at two jobs at the same time. He drove a truck for a soft-drink firm; he tried raising chickens, but disease depleted the flock and the enterprise ended in financial disaster. For a time he ran a gas station, but the highway route was changed, leaving the place of business far from a heavily traveled route. He even went back to fruit picking in season, returning to work that he had done from early childhood days.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Having gone the job route full circle, he returned to Santa Ana to the junk yard where he had formerly worked. He was happy when he learned that the owner had sent a letter to the people to whom he sold his metal, stating that "I have my old hand back and now I no longer expect to have any charge-backs because of improperly sorted metals." Encouraged by his employer's faith in him, he determined to do his best to justify that faith.

When the owner expanded his business, buying old cars for disassembling, Alton became an expert in auto parts. He could tell not only from which make of car a part was taken, but the year and model number. A big rack was built with cubicles into which small parts were put. Fenders, bumpers and other large items were stacked in the same manner, carefully classified. He had moved one step up the ladder, from "junk" to automobile parts.

Alton was placed in general charge of the auto parts yard. He bought old cars, directed the men in disassembling them, and supervised the storing of the parts. When a customer came in to make a purchase, it was Alton who set the price of the item wanted. His brother Walter came to work in the same yard, and the brothers were a team their employer was pleased with. They were usually at work long before the regular opening hour and stayed as long as they were needed, never expecting any overtime pay.

Blind Scott Newell closely followed the fortunes of the two sons. When they informed him one day that they were each making \$120 a month when most men were out of work or receiving half that wage, he said proudly, "You boys are sure walking in tall cotton!"

Edna was working also, and the younger children were still in school. Alton now began to buy many of what were considered by others to be the basic necessities of life that he never had before. The brothers began thinking of owning a yard of their own some day and often discussed the possibility together. Alton's social life also developed, especially after he began to attend young peoples' meetings at church. He had never before attended church or Sunday school services; in fact, he had thought it unnecessary since he had personally lived a clean life, was rigidly honest and did not use profanity.

It was a new experience for him to hear a minister say that *all* people are sinners.

"He doesn't know me," thought Alton. "If he did, he wouldn't say that."

But the time came when he realized that he was wrong; that this is not a world peopled by perfect human beings. At an evening service some time later, conducted by a visiting evangelist, he "went forward" when called, and to this day has been a staunch believer and worker in his church.

"I am grateful to God for all that he has done for me," he declared. "Without Him I would have a different story to tell. Although my life did not change directions after my profession of faith, it took on an entirely new dimension. The *quality* of my life changed for the better and my new faith affected my life's attitudes."

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

The next business step was taken when the brothers purchased a small auto-wrecking yard in Los Angeles on East Whittier Boulevard.

“It wasn’t much of a yard,” admitted Newell, “but it was a start.”

A lack of funds and the universal hard times of the 1930s condemned the new business to a precarious existence. For months the brothers made a living and that was all. The family, always closely knit, separated and the members went their diverse ways. Pete left the area and went to Oregon to work, and Glenn decided to join his mother, now remarried and living in Texas. Walter became discouraged and he, too, left for the Lone Star State. Alton, not being able to make a go of it in the parts yard, took a fulltime job in an automobile tire manufacturing plant. The long hours wore down his health. On a trip to Texas, he found Walter prospering and driving a new car and living in a fine house. He returned home, more determined than ever to make good.

“In the spring of 1938, production at the tire plant slowed down and I was laid off,” he said. “To me, losing my job was a tragedy. I didn’t know what to do or which way to turn. I didn’t know it then, but this was the most significant thing that had happened in my life. It was the turning point.”

Alton had met a girl several years before when he was twenty-one years old. She was only fourteen, but they became friends. Her name was Winnie Jandreau, a native of Los Angeles. As time went on, she had become interested in Alton’s business and liked to go with him on pick-up trips about the city. Sometimes when an old car was bought and had to be towed to the yard, she would drive the car that pulled it and Alton would steer. She would take his car downtown to pick up needed parts and run other errands until gradually the young businessman realized that she had become an integral part of his life.

Together they talked the matter over and decided that they would get married. The business would then be sold and they would start over again in Texas. The wedding date was set for March 17th, about two weeks away. When Alton went to Santa Ana to tell his father and his sisters of his plans, it was with regret, for he would soon be living far from them. Edna and Opal lived with their father and kept house for him. Scott Newell agreed that his son’s plans were sound and encouraged him to “go where you can do the most good.”

At six o’clock in the evening on Thursday, March 17, 1938, Alton Newell and Winnie Jandreau were married at the bride’s home. After the ceremony Alton could not understand why his bride’s parents and others were crying merely because she was leaving home to live in a distant city.

“We in our family had been separated so often and sometimes we did not see each other for several years at a time, so parting was always taken in stride,” said Newell. For his wife, leaving home was a new experience.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

As the young couple drove through San Antonio on their way to Kenedy, they had no way of knowing that the day was coming when this city would be their home and that here he would meet the success that he had long sought. They had one hundred dollars in their possession, the exact amount that was still owed on the car that they drove. Everything that they owned was in the small trunk of their Ford coupe.

“The house in which my mother and my stepfather, Jay Wright, lived was old and set on cedar blocks,” Newell recalled. “It was on a slope and faced downhill. At one time it had been a saloon, and several bullet holes could still be seen in the walls. It had no indoor bathroom, and for the first time in her life Winnie became acquainted with an outside privy. If we bought their business, which we were considering doing, this would be our home.”

Outside on the adjoin lots was the auto-wrecking and scrap yard run by the parents. From that day on, automobile graveyards were to play a significant role in his life.

Getting a Start in Business

Life was different for Winnie Newell in their new home in Texas, and Alton was dismayed when he came upon her on several occasions and found her in tears. Their home was not modern and was located in a poor section of town adjoining a junk yard. Business was poor, to add to their worries, the total sales the first week amounting to only \$30. From this amount the wages of two helpers had to be paid, taking half of the income.

Their investment was only \$4,500, but in that depression year it represented a sizable sum of money. They had come to Kenedy on a Sunday and took over the business on the following Wednesday, Alton's mother and stepfather happily leaving at once for Corpus Christi.

The business property purchased consisted of an acre of land on which stood a large sheet-iron building in which some auto parts were stored. Outside in the yard were fifteen or twenty old cars. The deal made included the old house in which they lived.

While living was cheap in their new home, it also lacked the quality of life in California. Many of the customers who came to the lot could neither read nor write. Alton would assist each one in making a purchase by writing out the check for him, even including the signature. Then the buyer would place the pencil between his fingers and make an "X" by his name. Alton would write "His Mark" by the "X" and the check would be honored by the local bank.

Everything was less expensive than in California. Gasoline was 12½ cents per gallon, a loaf of bread cost 7 cents and milk was bought at a cost of 15 cents for two quarts. Haircuts were 25 cents.

Scrap metal was plentiful but becoming increasingly valuable as Japan prepared for the coming war. Iron was selling for \$8 a ton in Corpus Christi, where it was loaded onto boats bound for the Orient. Car radiators were also in demand, bringing 3½ cents a pound.

Winnie, lonesome for her family in California, sought relief by helping her husband with his work when she wasn't busy with her housework. She would answer the telephone, ring up sales on the office cash register or pay for metal purchases by Alton. Sometimes she would go with her husband to San Antonio or to Corpus Christi when he delivered a truckload of metal.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Business picked up quickly, the weekly receipts soon exceeding a hundred dollars. As the summer months went by, farmers bought increasing numbers of parts and tires as they prepared for the coming harvest season. Drifters and migrant workers came into the area, ready for the approaching cotton picking season. Their cars were old and seemingly always in need of radiators, water pumps, tires and other parts that “went bad” during the hot months of summer. Later, when they left the area, moving on to other regions where their help was needed, Alton sold several cars to them that he had bought and put into operable condition. He also built several two-wheeled trailers which proved to be in demand.

Most of the money earned – they were now doing fairly well – went back into the business, building up their inventory. Alton was convinced that the more items that they had for sale, the greater their sales would be, which proved to be true.

In December, the approach of the Christmas season deepened Winnie’s homesickness. She was five months pregnant and hopeful that she could go to Oregon where her parents now lived, to stay with them until the baby was born. Alton was not in favor of such a long absence, but his wife’s happiness was paramount. He took her to San Antonio from where she continued on to Oregon. Less than a month later she was again at home, each of them agreeing that a four-month absence was much too long to be endured.

Alton, meanwhile, had purchased a Pontiac car, the first new automobile that he had ever owned. The cost was \$970 and the down payment was \$20 cash and the worn-out car that he had been driving.

On April 1 the baby arrived, named Scott after its paternal grandfather. Winnie’s mother came to help out, and the happy parents’ joy was complete. A new car and a new baby both within a few weeks were, to them, omens of better days to come.

However, the depression was far from ended. The summer months were too dry to produce good crops, and money became increasingly scarce. Business fell off as hard times deepened and tight money conditions prevailed. The good prospects that had buoyed up their hopes dissipated into nothingness. To add to Alton’s concern, war clouds gathered in Europe and threatened to spread to America.

September came and Hitler’s armies marched into Poland following the mighty strokes made by his powerful air force. One nation after another was drawn into the conflict. The demand for scrap metals increased as the need for war materials became acute. The Newells moved into a new home in Beeville where Alton took charge of the yard while Walter moved to Corpus Christi and Glenn took charge of the Kenedy plant. For six months this arrangement prevailed, but Alton was unhappy as a business partner, much preferring to be the sole owner of the business.

Winnie had been happy with her home in Beeville, for it was modern, and to please her, Alton agreed to have a bathroom built in the old home in Kenedy, to which they returned.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Walter had built a press with which he baled the scrap sheet metal which had accumulated in the yard, coming mainly from old cars. Fenders, hoods, doors and similar parts were baled by this press. It was a simple affair consisting of a steel box with a lid on it. The box would be filled with the metal pieces and the lid closed. A hydraulic pump then forced oil into a ram attached to one end of the box which squeezed the metal forward, crushing it. A ram attached to the bottom side of the box then squeezed it upward, again crushing the contents. The end product was a compact bale measuring a foot or so on each side and weighing about a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds.

This baling machine was the first one built in the area, so there were vast quantities of scrap metals available. Because Walter's baler was small, large pieces of metal, such as car fenders and doors, had to be cut up into pieces small enough to go into the box. This was done with a hand ax, making the process a laborious one.

Alton inspected the machine carefully, coming to the conclusion that it would perhaps be better to have a larger baler. He believed that he could construct one on the same principle but large enough to put in whole car fenders, hoods and doors. Plans were drawn that called for a box three feet wide and seven feet long. Rams would crush from three sides instead of only two. It was to be made portable, enabling it to be driven right up to a dump or scrap pile instead of requiring each piece of metal to be carried to it.

"After much thinking and considerable agonizing, I decided to begin construction of this machine," said Newell. "I knew that I would have to go into debt to do it and that it would take all my time for several months to complete. I drove to Corpus Christi with my truck and succeeded in buying enough steel to build the box, the cost exceeding \$200. It took me several weeks to build the box, which gave me a good start on the project. The next step was to get some steel plates and pipes to make the movable sections of the machine. Another necessity was a hydraulic pump and a ram capable of making a tight bundle. Only then did I find out that the cost of a pump was prohibitive, far more than I could afford, and times were such that no bank would loan me the money on what they considered a very dubious business venture. The only recourse left was for me to construct a pump myself out of such materials as I could come by cheaply."

Assuring himself that the bank's refusal to extend him credit was really a blessing in disguise, he set to work with firm determination to devise a press that would fill his needs. The original plan to purchase a three-cylinder pump was discarded in favor of an eight-cylinder pump that would crush and bale the metal much faster. It was an ingenious machine that he had in mind, complicated in design. His years of experience with engines and parts were now called upon to assist him.

"I went out to my junk pile and picked out an old motor from a straight-eight Dodge," said Newell. "Then I took off the cylinder head and took out the pistons, replacing them with four 1-inch plungers on one end and four 1½-inch plungers on the other end. Next, I made eight plunger housings and fastened them in the place of the cylinder head. On top of each

plunger housing I screwed a hydraulic tee with a pipe going out on each side. I next made and placed a check valve on each side so that as the plunger went down, oil would be drawn in, and as it came back up, oil would be forced out the other side. The four small plungers had a common intake manifold on one side and a common exhaust manifold on the other side. The same was true with the large plungers.

“When the power source reached its peak, I could bypass the large cylinders back to the tank and build up to a much higher pressure with the small cylinders. The large plungers or cylinders gave us high volume for more speed, and the small cylinders gave us high pressure for stronger compression in the press. I found a large gear from an old tractor and fitted it in the place of the regular flywheel. A small gear to run on the larger one was fitted on a shaft that was fastened along the side of the motor with a pulley on the other end of this shaft. Through this arrangement I would turn the pump with the same motor that would propel this portable scrap press along the highway.

“When this press was completely finished, I could get in it and drive along the highway down to the dump site. By letting down a wooden platform and shifting a gear, it was ready to go to work. As far as we were ever able to tell, this was the first such machine ever built anywhere in the world. In later years we built several more, making each one larger until we finally had one that would take an entire auto body. During the war years this portable press gave us a good advantage in being able to go right to the piles of scrap collected by the public scrap drives. The War Production Board representatives commended us for our operations and sometimes directed us to distant places to bale scrap.”

The design of this press represented a milestone in the rise upward for Alton Newell. Compared with the invention and subsequent construction of the huge machine that improved the process of reclamation by grinding the metal into small bits, catapulting him into a position of prominence in the industrial world, the baler was insignificant. However, steps must be taken one at a time, each one representing a forward move. Alton learned that before one can walk, he must first learn to crawl.

Eventually the United States was forced into the conflict, and materials of all kinds necessary to the war effort became valuable. Instead of taking scrap metals to a dump, where they rusted away, people were now urged to take them to dealers, who would turn them into products to further the cause for which the nation was fighting. Newell was given a deferment from the draft as an essential agent, spending much of his time away from home running the big portable baler in other areas. Although Winnie now had two small boys to look after, she nevertheless looked after the business when Alton was gone. Help was scarce, and on more than one occasion she took her two little sons with her in the truck when a trip to Corpus Christi was necessary.

It was a time of concern and tension for Alton. More and more often he and Winnie talked of the future, longing for a time when long absences from home would no longer be necessary. Often he worked far into the night to complete a task, eventually eroding his health.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

He was placed on a strict diet, for long periods eating nothing but tins of baby food. In less than two months he lost over thirty pounds. Through the illness, he seldom missed a day's work though often the results of his efforts were only meager.

The closely knit family suffered a great loss when word came that blind Scott Newell had died in California at the age of 56. Edna had married and her father had insisted upon living outside her home. He felt that none of his children should ever be burdened with him. Alton found a home for him in Orange, California, where he attended a school for the blind in which he learned to make belts, baskets and other items. In time, he became very proficient in their making and opened a shop in Orange.

In the back room of his new shop, he lived and prepared most of his meals. In the center room was his shop, while in the front room of the store were displayed the goods that were for sale. He was always friendly and cheerful and was known as "Scotty" up and down the street. Daily many people entered his store just to extend a friendly greeting and pass the time of day.

One day a young doctor stopped in Scott Newell's shop. He was convinced that an operation would restore the blind man's sight and offered to perform the surgery that would again give him vision. Upon hearing the doctor's words, hope filled Scott Newell's heart, but sober reflection brought conflicting thoughts. The next day he gave the doctor his decision.

"I have never been happier in my life than I am now. When I think of how I used to live and compare it with my life as it is now, I want no more of the old. I am most happy the way I am now; I want no change."

So the matter was settled. It came as no surprise to Scott Newell's friends nor to the pastor who served his spiritual needs. Often this kindly minister had called upon the blind man, reading the Bible to him and engaging in prayer. The man who had known no religious life heretofore made a sincere profession of faith and found comfort in the promises of the Bible. A Braille edition of portions of the book was given to him, the reading of which he soon mastered. In this way the life that had for so many years been filled with concerns and frustrations took on new meaning.

"It was wonderful to see the change that came over my father during the last years of his life," said Newell. "Peace replaced discord and tranquility filled his days. He lived in a world of eternal darkness that was made bright by his great faith, giving his children enough inspiration to last a lifetime. I saw him seldom and then only briefly for several years, but it was long after his passing before my grief lessened."

Life resumed its normal pace for Alton Newell, the two yards keeping him busy. The war neared its end in 1944 only to have the fighting renewed in furious intensity when the Germans attempted to break through the Allied lines in France and Luxembourg, resulting in the "Battle of the Bulge." The demand for metals lessened but the call for ever more men continued.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Newell prepared to sell his business and enter the army. His brother Glenn was in the navy and Pete was serving somewhere in the South Pacific. Two of Winnie's brothers were also in that area of action, no one knew where.

Only days before he was scheduled to leave for induction into the army, the draft age was lowered to 31 and Alton had already reached the age of 32. He was in Temple at the time, returning from a business trip into east Texas. He called Winnie to tell her the latest development, but she had already heard the news. Upon his return home, he went at once to the draft board, which advised him that his status had changed and he was no longer eligible for military service. He removed the "For Sale" sign from his Kenedy yard and hurried to Beeville to offer to take that yard back. Would they sell it back to him? Of course they would – at a price that was \$1,500 above that which they had paid for it.

"Keep it!" was Newell's succinct comment as he got back in his car and drove away.

The Invention of the Newell Shredder

The great war's end brought a new sense of peace to the Newells. Both Alton's and Winnie's brothers returned home and took up life from where it had been interrupted. Pete had contracted malaria in the South Pacific and suffered recurring attacks for the remainder of his life. When he died at the early age of 41, the family felt that he was, in truth, another war casualty, though years had passed since he had come home from the war.

The restless years were a time of conflict and turmoil. Between the Kenedy venture and the Newells' eventual permanent settling in San Antonio, the years were filled with one business effort after another, none satisfying them for long. When their real opportunity came, it was recognized at once for what it was and quickly seized. These were the crucial years of their lives.

Their primary business was concerned with automobile parts; scrap became a sideline or by-product venture. Buying cars and fixing them up for sale was a specialty with Alton Newell since there was an acute shortage of them. During the war years, few automobiles had been turned out to sell to the public. Alton Newell bought many cars and trucks at government sales and repaired them for disposal to the eager public. His business now was a threefold operation: renovation of used cars and trucks, the sale of auto parts, and baling of scrap metal.

For the first time since their marriage in 1938 the Newells began making a comfortable living. In 1945, their income reached a high point of \$10,000. They had become active in the affairs of Kenedy and liked it there. Alton was a member of the chamber of commerce and both he and Winnie were diligent church workers. Yet something was lacking in his life that continued to build ever greater, becoming a serious source of dissatisfaction in time. He was making a living, but beyond that he could see little promise for the future. Their house was old, the yard cluttered with old cars and parts. Thoughts of California were many and vivid. Perhaps they should return there and make a new start.

A hurried trip to California convinced him that it should be their home. He bought a house and a new car, and became partners with his brother Walter and a friend, Charlie Hixon, in two yards in Santa Ana, one of them the one that he had first worked in sixteen years before. Connections in Kenedy were severed and the young couple moved to California.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Business was good, but a definite challenge was lacking for Alton. Both he and his wife at once became active in the church in which they had once labored, and this was a satisfying experience for them both, but the restlessness continued to grow. They bought a church building and parsonage across from their own church, renting it to the struggling congregation. The partnership with Walter and Hixon was a successful one financially, with earnings of \$60,000 the first year, but Alton's thoughts continued to go back to Texas. He decided to sell his interest in the yards to the other two partners, and once again the Newells returned to Texas.

Their interests were now divided. Their house in California was still unsold, the church property was theirs and their one-third interest in the two yards was still not paid for. In spite of this, a house was again bought in Kenedy, and Alton set to work to build a big press and baler. Using a revolutionary kind of hydraulic pump, he worked many hours a day to complete the press. Three months later, it was finished and ready for use. He now had a \$50,000 press that had cost him only \$10,000 and three months of labor.

Visits to San Antonio had impressed him and he began to investigate the feasibility of opening a yard there. Unable to find a business for sale, he created one by buying hundreds of old cars and moving his big new press to the city to press and bale the automobiles, commuting from Kenedy, some sixty miles away. The car bodies had to be cut up with axes, a task that kept a crew of seven or eight men busy. Alton himself worked with them, side by side. Most of the work had to be done by hand in this manner. When a truckload of bales was ready, a truck was backed in and the bale loaded onto it. It was then hauled to the railroad yard where it was placed on board the gondola by hand. It was tremendous work, but profitable, each bale weighing from 150 to 250 pounds.

Business was good and Alton began to have a feeling that San Antonio might be the place to locate permanently. Without waiting to sell the Kenedy house, a new one was purchased in San Antonio and the family made it their home. Still he had no real place of business of his own and he knew that he would never be content until he had one.

The place that he had been renting on a month-by-month basis was put up for sale at a price of \$55,000. At first the figure seemed impossibly high, but more deliberate reflection convinced Newell that it was not beyond consideration. He wrote to Walter, offering to settle the \$20,000 debt for \$15,000 cash. The congregation in Santa Ana offered to buy the church property from him for \$12,000. Another \$30,000 was borrowed from the RFC, a government agency. The yard was now his!

To dare, to venture, to "buck the odds," that has been the story of Alton Newell's business life.

"No one can learn to swim in shallow water," he reflected. "Ever deeper water that presents a challenge is the only way in which one can test his ability to stay afloat and moving.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

To get into too deep water before one has learned to swim can be fatal, but to remain in shallow water after one has learned to stay afloat is foolish.”

Life became full and satisfying in San Antonio for the Newells. They selected a church and became involved in its affairs. Alton began teaching a Sunday school class of men; and today, more than twenty years later, he still teaches the class. Church work is important to both of them, bringing balance into their lives and providing them with abiding satisfactions.

Several years went by. Then one morning in the fall of 1951, while reading the newspaper, his glance fell upon an item that stunned him, the very bottom seeming to fall out of his world. An international company was planning to construct a huge scrap metal plant in San Antonio at a cost of three quarters of a million dollars, the news item stated. The press alone would cost \$150,000 and a \$200,000 warehouse as to be erected.

Newell stared in disbelief. What would such competition do to his business? He was heavily in debt and just beginning to get on his feet financially. He *couldn't* compete on even terms with such a huge company operating in the most modern of plants. To make matters worse, it was to be built only a few blocks from his yard.

With a heavy heart, he showed the paper to Winnie, his constant partner in all matters. Together they could see nothing short of catastrophe ahead.

“I passed the location of the new concern many times in the next few weeks,” said Newell. “I watched as carloads of lumber, steel and cement were unloaded. I was bitter at the blow that fate was dealing me. It wasn't fair, I told myself. I was discouraged, I was sick – and I was jumping at conclusions. When they opened for business three months later, I noticed no appreciable difference in our business. Life went on very much as usual.”

The experience taught Newell a valuable lesson. Worry, he realized, was impudence to God. Where was faith that he professed aloud in church on Sunday? Never again would he be a man of such small faith. His confidence returned as he went thankfully about his business.

One day he was told that a man had gone by the Newell plant where the men were chopping up an old car with their axes and remarked, “I feel sorry for the man who is trying to make a living that way.” Alton was stung to the quick. So that is what people thought of him! At once he and Winnie went to Dallas and came home with a brand-new Cadillac.

“That changed many a person's idea of my work. And the very next year when the Cadillacs came out with air conditioning, I bought a new one and did not turn in the old one. People had felt sorry for me for too long. It was time that I created a new image of myself. You know,” he reflected, “people prefer to do business with a winner.”

A chance remark led to another step upward. The big plant that Newell had feared would put him out of business had been in operation for several months. It was summertime

and the weather was as hot as only Texas weather can get. He found the feared competitors to be very nice people and on occasion business transactions between them had taken place.

One day as he was leaving their air-conditioned office, dreading somewhat going out into the heat of the day, he remarked facetiously to the manager, "Why don't you move out of this cool office and let me move in?" to which the manager responded, "You know, I may do just that."

Something in his tone of voice caught Newell's attention and he stopped, waiting for further comment. The other man continued, "I have been talking to my boss about you and he said that he would like to meet you."

Several days later he and Dave Bettin, the plant manager, drove to Dallas to see Jacob Feldman, president of the Commercial Metals Company which owned the San Antonio plant. Feldman sought Alton Newell's views on taking the job as manager, but the suggestion was quickly vetoed by Newell. Whereupon Feldman responded, "All right then, how about buying our San Antonio plant?"

Taken aback by the unexpectedness of the query, Newell replied, "It is out of the question. I couldn't swing such a deal."

"Consider it for awhile. I'll get in touch with you again," responded Feldman.

Newell returned home to San Antonio, his head in a whirl. To own such a plant would make a lifetime dream come true. It was a magnificent operation, modern in every detail with unlimited possibilities. But how could he purchase it, a million dollar investment? He could not get the idea out of his mind as the days went by and soon he was in Mr. Feldman's office again in Dallas talking the matter over. Several more negotiating sessions went by and in the end the deal was made. Alton Newell was in possession of the plant that only a short time before he had feared would put him out of business. Almost unlimited credit was extended to him, at times amounting to over a million dollars. The boy born in a tent in an Oklahoma field had come a long way.

Why had Commercial Metals given Alton Newell such generous terms? "Your reputation in this business is excellent," he was told. "We did not feel that we were taking any chances on selling to you."

Commented Newell, "That was the most important part of the whole transaction, as far as I was concerned."

Alton Newell was forty years old in the summer of 1953 when he became owner of the huge salvage plant in San Antonio. He was now a prominent businessman of that city. In a few short years he had risen to this position from a very humble beginning. When asked to what he attributed his unusual good fortune, he replied, "I have made an agreement with God in which I

have promised to help Him to take care of His business down here and in return I have His assurance that He will help me to take care of mine.”

If the agreement between this man and his Maker can be called a “deal,” it was one that worked. A short time after the purchase of the San Antonio plant, another one was opened in Austin, Texas. This was followed by the opening of a similar enterprise in Phoenix and another one in Tucson. The expansion of his operations and the attending skyrocketing of business was almost beyond belief.

“I do not mean to give the impression that everything was a bed of roses,” cautioned Newell. “We had our problems as every business has, and had to fight hard to maintain our position. Through it all, my wife was my greatest asset, as she is today. Not only did she work hard, but she encouraged me in whatever I did. At times it was necessary to put back into the expanding business almost everything that we made, and she was always willing that this be done. Neither she nor I have a strong desire for expensive material things nor have we a longing for great wealth. Money to both of us is a by-product of our busy lives, and should be used for the benefit of mankind. *From this comes our satisfaction.*”

These five words state succinctly the philosophy of Alton and Winnie Newell. *Service* is their watchword; all mankind is their field of labor.

The new plant and the immense amount of used metals that were turned out there to be reprocessed did not result in Newell’s sitting back in contentment, satisfied with the situation as it existed. His mind was ever at work attempting to solve a problem that had long plagued him. His plants were baling vast quantities of metals for processing elsewhere. *Surely there must be some method of cutting these metals into small bits by some mechanical means more efficient than that used by plants then in operation.* He could not get the problem out of his mind.

Newell’s thoughts went back to the days when he cut up automobile bodies with a hand ax. Perhaps several axes could be put on a rotor with the entire assembly enclosed in a strong housing. By spinning the rotor, the axes could well reduce the large metal pieces to bits. The idea had possibilities, every detail of which was thought through and either discarded or elaborated upon. Most of the year 1959 was spent making countless sketches before one resulted that satisfied him. A pilot model was constructed and tested in operation, the results elating him. A larger model was made which ran long enough to convince him that he was on the right track.

Repeated trials indicated that sharp cutting blades were not necessary, for the tests showed that the materials could be cut and densified by sheer brute force. A new machine was built, and it was so satisfactory that it was soon running on a steady production basis. Word got around and visitors in this type of business from all over the world were soon coming to San Antonio to see the strange machine. Nowhere was there another machine exactly like it. To protect his invention, Newell applied for a patent on the metal shredder.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Among the visitors to the Newell plant in San Antonio were two engineers from Germany who had heard of the Newell metal shredder and came to look at it. They were elated with what they saw, for it was just what they were hoping to find. They were eager to enter into an agreement which would be mutually beneficial. A meeting of minds was effected which called for the manufacture of Newell shredders abroad, a royalty on each one sold to be paid to Alton Newell. They represented one of the world's largest manufacturers of scrap-processing equipment, and the entire world, except North America, became their sales territory.

To complete the new enterprise, Newell formed a manufacturing company of his own to build and sell the huge shredders on this continent. At the present time (1972) there are more than seventy-five of the machines in operation. The sun never sets on a Newell shredder.

When the Newell Manufacturing Company was formed in 1965 to build and sell the shredders, it was to Lindemann K.G. in Düsseldorf, Germany, that a license was granted to manufacture and sell the units elsewhere throughout the world. Since then Lindemann has sold in excess of thirty units and Newell has sold more than forty of them.

During the three years following the granting of a patent, Newell traveled more than 750,000 miles and flew completely around the world several times to acquaint interested people with his shredder. During the first six months of 1972 alone, he traveled over 125,000 miles. Often he is accompanied by his wife, his copartner in business.

The Newell Shredder in Action

Patent number 3,482,788, granted by the United States Patent Office to Alton S. Newell on December 9, 1969, describes the hammer mill in these words:

“A hammer mill for treating scrap metal including a rotary hammer means for delivering impact blows to the scrap metal and having a discharge grate disposed across the generally upwardly directed outlet of the mill, the grate being located substantially perpendicular to a love tangential to the path of rotation of the hammer means.”

After some further technical information, the explanation continues:

“This invention relates to an improvement in hammer mills, and more particularly it relates to hammer mills for use in treating scrap metal.”

“It is an object of this invention to provide a hammer mill which is suitable for use in treating scrap material, such as sheet metal contained in automobile bodies and large appliances, by subjecting such material to the cutting, shredding and sizing blows of a series of hammers in the mill. The value of the scrap metal is increased by such treatment since it is a least partially cleaned by the removal of undesirable materials, such as paints, clinging to the scrap metal while changing it to a form and size which makes it easier to both handle and use.”

“It is another object of this invention to provide a hammer mill . . . wherein the grate through which the treated material must pass to leave the mill is located at or near the top of the mill and the material is thrown upwardly against the grate by the action of the hammers.”

It then goes on to point out the previously patented mills had the discharge grate located at or near the bottom of the mill so that the material fell against the grate due to gravity without necessarily being struck by any of the hammers. This frequently resulted in some of the materials being discharged without being properly treated by the hammers.

The first primary feature of the Newell hammer mill is, therefore, a series of revolving hammers which are designed to strike the metal being treated. The second essential feature is a series of stationary heavy anvils so located and arranged that the hammers pass between adjacent anvils whereby the material to be treated is subjected to a shredding, tearing and cutting action as the material is fed into the mill.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

Bill Barnes, business editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*, in an article printed in that newspaper on June 25, 1972, described the mill in nontechnical terms: "To understand how the hammer mill works, imagine a stack of 13 half dollars with a large nail driven through their centers. Pull each coin apart from its neighbors and in the space created insert a flat piece of metal shaped like the silhouette of the Liberty Bell by sticking a pin through the top of the bell and the two coins it fits between. Each of the bell-shaped hammers can swing around the pin which secures it between the coins. If the whole stack is spun or rotated around the axis of the nail, the hammers will stand out from the center.

"Such is the Newell hammer mill, but in the real thing each of the 15 hammers weights 250 pounds. The rotor itself weights 25 tons and is driven by a 2000-horsepower electric motor. The whirling hammers narrowly miss a heavy steel anvil. A whole auto, flattened between a heavy roller and steel sheet, is fed into the narrow space between the anvil and hammers, which chew it up into hand-sized pieces of scrap in less than 60 seconds."

In operation, the entire car is shredded, so that chunks of metal, glass, foam rubber and fabric are then sucked into a huge tube and sent through the rest of the system. At various points huge fans suck up 70 percent of the nonmetal trash and separate it for a trip to a land fill. Fine particles are wetted to prevent their being released into the air.

The remaining 30 percent of the nonmetal trash is separated from the metals with magnets which pick up the iron. Remaining with the trash and dirt on the conveyer are nonmagnetic metals such as copper, brass, zinc and aluminum which have to be reclaimed by hand.

John Newell, vice president and general manager of the Newell Salvage Company, commented, "Our customers prefer to buy our scrap loose instead of baled. Loose scrap isn't as likely to break the buckets in a steel plant and it packs in tighter without the voids you would get by putting it in bales."

San Antonio is close enough to the Mexican border to make that country an attractive market for the scrap that the Newell company produces. It is shipped by rail from that city to the steel mills of our southern neighbor.

Scott Newell, older son of the inventor of the Newell shredder, is head of the shredding operation of the company. He pointed out that the nature of the scrap business has changed greatly in recent years. "It used to be essentially a trading business where the dealer bought and sold the same material, but now it is a manufacturing business where the dealer buys a raw material, like an auto, processes it, and sells a finished product – iron, steel, copper, aluminum and other metals."

He is of the opinion that the shredder may well make it economically feasible to recover at least some of the metals which are now generally lost, such as those contained in discarded refrigerators and freezers. Heretofore, the cost of securing the metal by separating it from the

insulation contained in each unit was too great to warrant its being done. Now the entire unit can be ground up in a shredder and the trash extracted afterward.

The first automobile shredders were built by scrap yard operators for use in their own business only. Beginning in 1965, when Alton Newell built the first shredder of the kind that is now used in his plants, he began to construct them for sale to other businessmen. His first experimental model with 18-inch discs was built in 1959 for no other purpose than to see if it worked.

John Newell, Alton's younger son, recalled the occasion. "Another boy and I were standing under the housing of that first shredder and we pitched some pieces of metal into it just as it was turned on, to see if it would work. Pieces of chewed up metal flew two hundred feet in the air. There was no doubt about it, *that machine really worked*. It was turned off at once, for we had found out what we wanted to know."

A larger machine with 30-inch discs was then made and used for a time before Newell decided upon a 60-inch diameter disc, the size that is used at present.

The National Industrial Pollution Control Council, through research, has reached the conclusion that every American discards an average of twenty pounds of appliance scrap each year. A city with a population of a half-million people would therefore produce ten million pounds of appliance scrap per year. The United States, which has a population in excess of 200,000,000 people, produces *four billion pounds* of this material, most of which is now lost. Alton Newell's invention is now making it possible for much of it to be recovered and reprocessed, a tremendous saving of material.

These figures indicate that this industry is still in its infancy. America, a traditionally wasteful nation, is being shocked to learn that its resources are not inexhaustible, shortages already appearing in some fields.

"The science of ecology is waking the people of this nation up to the fact that unless serious and sustained action is taken now, our position of world leadership will soon be a thing of the past," observed Alton Newell. "Waste cannot be justified. We have always had so much of everything that we have been lulled into an attitude of indifference. The day of reckoning is nearing and it cannot be forestalled by halfhearted or sporadic efforts. It will take concerted action on the part of everyone to avoid it."

Automobile Graveyards

Said a member of one state legislature in all seriousness, "These automobile graveyards serve a good purpose. People who drive by them invariably look them over as they go by, distracting their attention from the monotony of driving along the highway and keeping the drivers from falling asleep. Many serious, even fatal, accidents have been prevented in this way."

Alert newspaper reporters, sensing a story in the quotation, were quick to discover that the legislator who uttered these momentous words owned a very large automobile graveyard of his own in the town in which he lived and which he represented in the state capital. Multiply the selfish interest displayed in this case by many thousands and one can readily see why the ugly rusting car bodies that blight the American scene have become a serious problem to the nation. One enterprising mathematician has figured that if nothing is done to get rid of old car bodies, America will someday have room for nothing else, with no land left for crops or trees.

Fantastic? Not at all. It is estimated that there are now as many as twenty million discarded automobiles cluttering up fields and pastures in this country alone. Add to this figure the worn-out cars of other countries and one begins to get an idea of the problem that is being forced on our concern.

Twenty million cars already rusting along the roadside – *and from six to seven million more being abandoned or scrapped each year. Just to stay even, this number must be disposed of annually.* Pondering these figures, one begins to get some idea of the task confronting authorities. Alton Newell recognized the problem years ago and set about doing something about it. Excusing the rusting roadside scrap yards or justifying them will not decrease their number by even one, he is quick to remind one.

It is a *condition* that confronts us, and not a theory," he says, proceeding forthwith to take action to eliminate their number.

From Maine to California the ugly steel carcasses continue to rust by the roadside. Not even board fences separate the junk yards from the eyes of passing motorists.

Why do these eyesores continue to flourish? Primarily because going into the junked-car business costs little or nothing and the potential profit is large. When a car is worn out,

passing the point where repairing it is unprofitable to the owner, it is logical to get rid of it. Sometimes it can be sold to a junk dealer for a few dollars, but it is usually more sensible moneywise to simply abandon it on a street or highway or even to pay a yard owner to haul it away.

Once the old car comes into the possession of the yard owner, it is towed to a spot in the lot and left there, its make and model noted. The expectation is that someone will come to the lot in search of a part needed for his own car of similar make. It may be a windshield or a wheel, a magneto or a carburetor or radiator. Whatever the need, the junked car can usually provide it. Often the sale of one item from it will compensate the yard owner for his small investment in the old car. Let the body rust away in the rain and snow of the passing seasons; it is the *parts* that are potentially profitable.

All too often the graveyard dealer eventually goes out of business and simply pulls out, leaving hundreds of old cars abandoned by the roadside. Local authorities could require yard owners to post bonds to guarantee this not happening, but this is seldom done. The owner usually has enough influence with the city council to prevent such official action.

So rapidly is the number of junked cars multiplying that many serious students of the problem doubt if they can be recycled fast enough to keep ahead of the game. In Philadelphia there were approximately 10,000 automobiles abandoned on the streets by their owners in 1965. *Six years later the number had more than doubled to 21,850.*

Everywhere the story is repeated. In New York City, 30,000 cars were abandoned on the streets during one year; three years later the figure had almost tripled to 82,000 vehicles. In San Francisco an official of the traffic department reported that his branch of the city government was towing away on the average a hundred and fifty cars a week. "but we can't keep up with them, for they are abandoning cars faster than we can haul them away."

It seems incredible to the average reader that such a condition can exist.

"Why," one asks in disbelief, "would any sane person want to abandon a vehicle that is worth money?"

That is precisely the point – these cars are *not* worth money to their owners. This is true for at least three reasons. In the first place, the jalopy owner has very little money invested in it. It was purchased for perhaps \$25 or \$50, the buyer knowing full well that the usable life expectancy of his vehicle is limited. When something goes seriously wrong with it, such as a worn-out transmission or differential, or even the need of a new brake job, it is economically unsound to have it repaired. The car cost the owner only a few dollars to begin with. Why put several times that amount into repairs when a runnable version can be bought for less?

Another reason for the unconscionable abandonment of old automobiles is the reluctance of car dealers to take "junkers" in on trade. The dealer himself has to convince a

prospective used-car buyer that the vehicle he is considering buying still has a number of more or less happy miles left in it. If he can't do that, the car is a liability to him rather than an asset, hence his reluctance to invest money in it.

A significant third reason for old-car abandonment is the increasingly stringent regulations governing the inspection of vehicles used on the nation's highways. There is little question that faulty conditions of automobiles in use on the highways contribute materially to the appalling death toll exacted each year. A tire that blows out or a steering column that fails to function can cause an accident that may well result in multiple deaths. "Junker" cars that are run beyond the logical period of usability must for reasons of safety be kept off the highways. When an owner finds that the cost of needed repairs exceeds the value of the vehicle, abandonment often follows.

A police inspector in an Eastern city expressed the seriousness of the problem when he said, "Abandoned cars are perhaps the greatest pollution problem that this country has today." Figures bear out the truth of this opinion.

Alton Newell is doing something about it. His machines can take a complete automobile body and reduce it to shreds in a matter of a minute or even less.

Not only are automobile bodies reduced to bits and pieces, but refrigerators, washing machines and other metallic discards are being given the same treatment. In addition to iron and steel, other salvaged metals include aluminum, copper, brass, zinc and others.

Various cities are facing the problem of abandoned automobiles in a diverse number of ways. New York City, for example, has placed the disposal of such cars under the jurisdiction of the sanitation department where it can, with considerable merit, be justified.

Baltimore, Maryland, deals with the problem in a twofold manner. A bounty system pays junk dealers and recycling processors five dollars for each old car disposed of. A companion provision enables the city to dispose of vehicles abandoned on its streets, scrap-shredding concerns being the usual buyers. These two means have enabled the city to get rid of virtually all of the junked and abandoned cars within its boundaries.

Chicago, once plagued by a similar problem, now feels that it has the matter well under control.

"We had a serious problem for many years," said a city spokesman, "but we feel that we are now out of the woods. We don't worry about abandoned cars any more."

His optimism is heartening, but it is not shared by some of the other Windy City officials and certainly not by the authorities of most American population centers. The general consensus is that the problem is serious and becoming worse. California, faced with a crisis in the worn-out car department, added an extra dollar to the automobile registration fee to be

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

paid by all owners in 1973. This is a one-time effort which, it is estimated, will bring in between \$14,000,000 and \$15,000,000 to be used to gather up all of the present junked and abandoned cars for disposal in shredding machines. While this clean-up effort will take care of most useless cars at the present time, it makes no provision for the disposal of those that are junked in the future.

Such a tax, small as it is, would to a large measure keep the number of such cars at a minimum if it were done on a national basis. However, sporadic one-shot efforts such as that being made by California are ineffective.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, a state organization, has a program in operation with a longer outlook. It advocated and the state legislature passed a bill that added one dollar to the cost of transferring ownership of a used car. It is estimated that this will bring in almost a million dollars a year, which the Pollution Agency will use to subsidize communities to collect and haul junked cars to a processing plant similar to Alton Newell's in San Antonio.

How many cars can such a plant grind up and shred in a year's time? At least 60,000, said Alton Newell. At this rate, no fewer than one hundred such processing plants are necessary to shred the junked cars that now desecrate our country's landscape and to keep others from accumulating.

In the District of Columbia, the location of our nation's capital, the Metropolitan Police Department is responsible for the collection and disposal of abandoned automobiles. Private contractors under the supervision of the police department handle the collection of approximately 60 percent of such vehicles. The remainder is taken care of by the department itself.

During the five-year period from 1963 to 1968, their joint efforts resulted in the removal of over 24,000 vehicles, an average of 4,800 each year.

"We get many of the 'junkers,' but let's face it, there are thousands of others still reposing in alleys and garages, in private yards and on vacant lots," pointed out an official. It is these cars that must be reached before a disposal program can be called an unqualified success.

When a car is abandoned within the district, it is first ticketed by the police. If it is still there five days later, it is towed away to a lot specially intended for this purpose near the police station. There the vehicle is permitted to remain for another five days, during which time the owner may, if he wishes, claim the car and pay the towing and storage costs. If, however, the car remains unclaimed at the end of the five-day period, it is then taken to a central impoundment lot where a six-month holding period is observed. At any time during this period the owner may claim his car by paying towing costs and other charges. Upon expiration of the six-month period, the car is auctioned off to scrap dealers.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

However, no final disposition of the cars is provided for. It is possible under this plan for scrap dealers to haul the cars to their own lots where they are added to the already excessive number of junked cars. To be effective, laws must provide for the actual reprocessing of the metal contained in junked cars, eliminating the unsightly “graveyards” that now dot the roadsides.

The Newell Enterprises

In his home city of San Antonio, Alton Newell carries his share of community responsibility well. Idleness to him is a waste of that which makes up life, so it is to be avoided. Ever since he can remember, from the time that he was a small boy, he has been busy. Picking cotton, gathering prunes, and harvesting apricots have been replaced by the multiplicity of duties and obligations inherent in a multi-million-dollar business enterprise. A trip to some far corner of the earth is as commonplace to him today as was a three-mile job into town behind the family mare in his childhood days.

Today he is head of Newell Salvage Company, Newell Manufacturing Corporation and half a dozen other business enterprises whose operations encompass the world. Their assets are worth millions, though his interest in money is only secondary.

"It's a by-product," he asserts. "The main objective of my businesses is service. I have a charge to keep and I intend to do just that."

Newell's wife, Winnie, is his partner and companion in his business interests as are his two sons and his son-in-law. This means that the Newell businesses are family affairs.

Scott Newell, the older son, as executive vice president of the Newell Manufacturing Company, is responsible for its varied operations. Since the first mill began operating in 1959, he has been involved in the company's affairs. The first shredding plants were crude and unsophisticated compared with today's giant machines, and Scott Newell has grown up with their progressive development. This has given him a keen and invaluable insight into the running of the shredding business.

"Our shredder was developed when steel mills began to impose stricter requirements on the scrap produced and antipollution laws were becoming more stringent. It came about as the result of an expressed need for a more efficient method of scrap production. The first Newell hammer mill was built in 1959 and it proved to be such a unique machine that it was patented in fourteen countries. Five years later the Newell Manufacturing Company was formed to meet the growing demand. Today there are about seventy-five of these huge units in operation throughout the world. That is the basis of our claim that the sun never sets on a Newell machine."

John Newell, Alton's second son, is vice president and general manager of the Newell Salvage Company. He supervises the operation of the eight Newell production plants whose

output accounts for a substantial portion of the company's business. These plants are located in Oklahoma City and Tulsa in Oklahoma, in Austin and El Paso in Texas, in Denver in Colorado, and in Albuquerque in New Mexico, in addition to the two San Antonio plants.

"The old image of a salvage operation is now rapidly disappearing," said John Newell. "Fences and shrubbery set off the yards from the viewing public. By using our shredder, open-air burning is eliminated and water-spray scrubbers located inside the shredding machine clean the air before it is emitted."

The newest member of the Newell family to join the organization is Robert Triesch, the Newell's son-in-law. He has been well trained in all phases of the salvage operations carried on by the Newell Company, from purchasing scrap to operating the shredding machine. He is one the management team qualified to teach its efficient operation and to do "troubleshooting" when necessary.

Referring to the expanding scope of operations of his company, Alton Newell said, "Shredding is rapidly replacing all other methods of handling automobiles and various kinds of baled scrap materials. Approximately half the world's shredders capable of processing complete automobiles are of our design, produced by us or by Lindemann K.G. of Düsseldorf, Germany, a Newell licensee."

One of the questions most frequently asked by visitors to a Newell plant as they watch in disbelief as entire automobiles are fed into a huge shredder to come out in less than a minute in the form of fist-sized particles is, "What does a Newell shredder cost? It must be enormous!"

"That depends upon one's concept of what constitutes an 'enormous' investment," counters Newell. "One can buy an automobile for \$2,000 or he can spend ten times that amount for one. Some buildings can be constructed for a sum in the thousands, while others cost tens of millions. All costs are relative and comparative. Our first baler was made largely from scrap materials and cost only a few hundred dollars. A complete shredder today costs in the neighborhood of \$500,000. We don't install the units but we do supervise their installation. This is a far cry from the days of dealers who needed only a vacant lot or a pasture on the edge of town to become business entrepreneurs."

Alton Newell is firm in his belief that the business in which he is engaged is directly beneficial to the economy of his immediate community as well as an aid to the conservation of America's natural resources.

"My firm deals with other companies in all parts of the world," he pointed out. "Much of our scrap metal, such as aluminum, brass and copper, goes directly to other countries, where it is reprocessed. In this way we take discarded materials and put them back into the economy. Steel mills buy much of our salvaged scrap. By conserving the metals that we already have, those that remain underground in the form of ore are conserved. All but 15 or 20 percent of

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

each old automobile that we shred is usable. The remainder, such as broken glass, rubber and fabric, is taken to the dump. Someday it will be salvaged. We know how to save some of it now and reprocess it, but it is too costly a process to be feasible.”

He reflected a few moments, then added, “And by the way, the waste that is discarded makes awfully good land fill.”

The president of the Newell enterprises estimates that the assets of his manufacturing company are well in the millions of dollars –“about eight million, I believe.” And their gross volume of business during the year was “about \$14,000,000, but we should go over that figure soon. Our Denver plant is just starting operations.” Which is not a bad figure for the man who was born in a tent and was forced by economic reasons to drop out of school during his sophomore year.

Alton S. Newell – The Man

“If we had had welfare when I was a boy, I would have been on it and *I would, in all probability, be on it yet today.*” Observed Alton Newell as we sat in his office on Probandt Street in San Antonio. “In rich America, people in need should be helped, but when the government is asked to support as many people as support it, a disservice is being done to our nation. Any nation that adopts a dole system as a way of life is on the way down. Rome was an excellent example of the evils of the dole.”

His philosophy is thoughtfully expressed and covers a wide area of beliefs. Loyalty is a key word in it and so is integrity. His religious views are genuine and deep-seated. He is the author of a Christmas prayer that is touching in its simplicity and depth.

Ever forceful in his views, he once wrote, “In this new generation there is enough enthusiasm which, if properly channeled, can solve many of the smoldering problems of America. Under that long hair may lie a brain as equally alert and functional as the one that we carried under our butch haircut a generation ago.”

His views are widely recognized and quoted. When President Richard Nixon read the Wall Street letter, he sent a reply in appreciation. From the White House in Washington he wrote:

Dear Mr. Newell,

The letter “Praising God and Country” that you placed in the *Wall Street Journal* recently came to my attention and I want to thank you for taking this means to share your thoughts with all of us.

You have given eloquent expression to the great spirit of patriotism in the American people. Ours is a nation unique in the political history of the world and more than any other nation, it is the sum of the energies and efforts of all its citizens. You state so well that America is a good country and each of us has the opportunity to make it better. That is our best hope for the future.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

With my best wished,

(Signed) Sincerely,
Richard Nixon

The President's views were shared by the people of America, hundreds of whom took the time to write to Mr. Newell.

The members of Alton Newell's family have been reared in the tradition of the father's ideals. Scott, the older son, is now 33. While attending Baylor College, he met and married Donna Emily Vaughn and they now have two children, Sabra Camille and Alton Scott III, the only Newell to carry on the family name. In 1959, Scott became manager of the Phoenix yard, acquired in 1957. He was in college but had come to Phoenix to "help out" during the summer. He liked the business so well that he asked his father to let him stay there permanently. He stayed on as manager, a position that he held for seven years. In 1966, he came to San Antonio to assume the duties of vice president of the Newell Manufacturing Company, a position that he holds today.

John Newell married Sue Peeler, also a Baylor coed, and they have two daughters, Natalee and Noelle. He went to Phoenix in 1960 to assist at the plant, later returning to San Antonio and taking over the vice presidency of the Newell Manufacturing Company, assuming a large share of the responsibilities of the concern. He has charge of the day-to-day operation of the company.

Sharon Lee Newell married her high school sweetheart, Gilbert Robert Triesch, and they have two sons, Gilbert Robert III and Justin Newell Triesch. "Bob" has become a valuable member of the team that manages the Newell operations.

Alton and Winnie Newell are members of the Baptist Temple Church of San Antonio and are active in its affairs. He has served as chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mission chairman, Personnel chairman and head of the Pulpit and Finance committee of his church as well as the teacher of an adult Sunday school class, a position that he has held for more than twenty years.

He is a member of the Inventors and Scientists of America and has served on the Board of Directors of the Iron and Steel Institute. He has a vital interest in civic and educational affairs, sharpened by his own inability to remain in school as a youth, and is Vice President of the Board of Trustees of Mary Hardin Baylor College. He has served on the Advisory Council of the Alamo Area Boy Scouts of America and as President of the Youth for Christ organization of San Antonio. The list of additional positions held is a long and imposing one, for he is never too busy to further a worthy cause. The gaps in his own boyhood years are many and he is sincere in his efforts to fill them for others.

"While the story of my childhood as told in this book reveals personal deprivations, I nevertheless believe firmly that the hardships and shortcomings of those early years provided me with personal strengths that I could not have gained in any other way," he commented.

“People vary greatly, not only in their makeups, but in their reactions to situations. What is a stumbling block for one individual is used by another as a building stone to give him a higher view. A man has said, ‘The fellow who says that it can’t be done is often interrupted by the other fellow doing it.’ The Good Lord has given each of us the wherewithal to build our lives and a book of rules to follow while using the materials provided. If we don’t have sense enough to follow them, whom can we blame but ourselves?”

It is such common-sense observations that have taken Alton Newell to the top in the business world. In a speech delivered at the “Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast” in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with eight hundred guests present, he declared, “Of all my many blessings, I thank God most of all for the United States of America.”

“I believe He had a hand in the founding of this great nation. The people who came to this land had faith in God as they came seeking religious freedom. Their faith was evident as they sought divine guidance in laying the foundation and designing the framework that was to hold this nation together. I also believe they were divinely led when they put together a system of government in the concept of the value, the rights, the freedom and the *responsibility* of the individual. This concept, I insist, has served this nation well. When a man believes in what he is doing and knows he is limited only by his own desires and ambition, he will stand tall and walk straight. People like this working together have built this great nation. The founding fathers passed their prescription down to succeeding generations. I believe this generation, yours and mine, has left out one ingredient, *responsibility!* Put back this one dynamic ingredient and America will get back on the right track again.

“We have tried to raise our children in a sheltered atmosphere. We didn’t want them to have to work as hard as we did, we didn’t want them to do without. We gave them everything. Everything but *responsibility!* If Johnnie didn’t learn to read, it was not his fault, it was the teacher’s. When he got into trouble in school, it was not his fault, it was the school system’s. If he got on drugs, it was the fault of the community. If he fell into crime, it was caused by police brutality. When a man gets into serious trouble today, the head shrinkers go to work to try to find out what went wrong. Broken home, drunken father, no parental love? They look everywhere except in the man himself. It’s never his own fault. What do you expect?

“Many times only one thing is lacking. *Responsibility!* Many young people today who are dissatisfied with the system are looking for freedom without responsibility. There is no such thing! All freedoms come with responsibility attached.”

Scott Newell is equally aware of the problems that face our nation. In a talk given in San Antonio in the summer of 1972, he declared: The Swedish oceanographer who led the Ra expedition has said that the earth is like a spaceship on its way through space, a spaceship without an exhaust pipe. Everything is self-contained and we must live with what we produce, both good and bad.

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

“This can be quite a problem in today’s world, for we are truly an affluent society. According to President Nixon’s Council on the Environment, in the United States today we have 6 percent of the world’s population and we consume about 40 percent of the world’s scarce or nonreplaceable resources. In 1969, industrial wastes amounted to some 110 million tons, of which more than 15 million tons were scrap metal, 30 million tons were paper and paper product wastes, and the balance consisted of waste plastics, bales of rags, and other textiles and assorted wastes.

“In addition, in 1969, Americans threw away more than 250 million tons of residential, commercial and institutional solid wastes. Collected solid waste alone in this category included 30 million tons of paper and paper products, 60 billion cans, 30 billion bottles, 4 million tons of plastics, 100 million tires, and millions of automobiles and major appliances.

“This is a tremendous amount of waste materials, but it has been projected to double by 1980.”

In hearings before the Subcommittee on Fiscal Policy of the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress of the United States, Ninety-second Congress, several recycling industry spokesmen described the current state of industry’s recycling act. We produce from 120 to 140 million tons of new steel per year and about half that amount comes from recycled scrap steel. Reused nonferrous scrap amounts to over three million tons per year and accounts for 45 percent of our country’s use of copper, 30 percent of all aluminum, 18 percent of all zinc, and 50 percent of total domestic lead supplies.

“In addition, almost 25 percent of the raw material supply of the paperboard segment of the paper industry is obtained from recycled paper wastes. Incidentally, the 11 million tons of paper recycled each year conserve some 200 million trees that would otherwise have to be used to make that much paper.

“In our own San Antonio community we have nearly 900,000 people, nearly 400,000 automobiles, and 1,500,000 major appliances. This means that about 40,000 automobiles are scrapped each year, yielding about 40,000 tons of recyclable material, 18,000 tons of appliance scrap is available to recycle and that San Antonio must dispose of about 775,000 tons of refuse.

“At Newell, we view the San Antonio area as being a tremendous mine above ground, a mine that has resources that are better recycled than wasted with the attendant disposal problems. At Newell Salvage Company, our “mining” operations have brought about 75 million dollars into San Antonio over the past ten years. Jobs have been supplied to about 150 families. During this time, we have recycled around one million tons of iron and steel and forty thousand tons of nonferrous items such as copper, aluminum, brass, zinc, and miscellaneous alloys.”

“Resources have been reclaimed and disposal problems have been lessened, and all of this is being done in a good ecological manner by private enterprise. At Newell Salvage Company, we were among the first companies in the United States to refrain from open

ALTON S. NEWELL, RECYCLING EXPERT

burning of automobiles. We were able to do this by making investments in developing new processing equipment to do the job in a better, cleaner manner.

“At Newell Manufacturing Company, the equipment that was developed at the Salvage Company has been sold to other scrap processors around the world. Out of the 140 or so machines of this nature in the world, more than 50 percent are of the Newell design. These machines process scrap automobiles and other miscellaneous scrap in a manner calculated to eliminate air pollution and at the same time manufacture a prime scrap raw material for recycling into new steel. In addition, other metals are reclaimed as a by-product of the process.”

Alton Scott Newell today is regarded as one of America’s foremost authorities on the reclaiming of used metals. This is ungrudgingly granted by those who know him. But his own family members have personal feelings about him that run far deeper. His son John says, with sincere conviction, “My father is a truly great man. He has given us the opportunity to assume responsibility in the company, which means that we also have the right to make some mistakes. He is a tough boss who carries his full share of the load. I find an uncommon enthusiasm in my father, and he is constantly surprising us with new concepts and plans. His stride leaves tracks in the sands so far apart that it takes great effort on our part to follow him.”

We leave Alton Newell reluctantly, for every visit with him is an inspiration. Inventor, business entrepreneur, man of vision and faith, he is leaving his mark on the world and making it a better place in which to live.