

He Did It for the LITTLE

Every summer, my father gets a hot new idea about where we ought to go. He means well, but he is no good at picking places. This time he picked a place he couldn't stand, himself

MY FATHER is a man who would like to go on trips but the only trips he takes is every day the Lackawanna Railroad to Hoboken and the Hoboken ferry to New York where he makes the money which he hands over to the government, retaining a small pittance to sustain life in himself and his wife, which is my mother, and his four children.

Every spring my father commences getting out the road maps and he says, "Well, Edith, where would you like to go this summer on our vacation? How about I take an extra week and we drive out to Yosemite?"

My mother turns pale. "Have you forgotten last summer?" she asks. "You are not sitting between these heathens in the back seat trying to keep them from killing each other all day long. You are not the one who has to change diapers with your mouth full of safety pins when we are supposed to be looking at the Lincoln Memorial."

My father starts putting away his road maps. He says he is doomed to live and die without ever knowing what life is like beyond the boundaries of New Jersey. He says a man which works under the terrific pressure under which he works needs a change of scene. "I will crack up," he explains.

My mother says, "We might go to Mother's for a while. Of course, four children tearing around make her nervous after a few days—"

"Your mother makes me nervous after a few days," says my father. "What we should do is go away ourselves, maybe on a boat. We would get a nurse to stay with the children—"

At this point my sister Janice, which is the youngest and the only girl and the apple of my father's eye, bursts into tears.

"Well, the curseword with it," says my father, throwing away his road maps. "We will stay home and rot."

My mother says timidly, "Other people take a cottage at the shore for two weeks—"

"I am not leaving my comfortable home for a water-front slum," says my father.

However, he is determined to go someplace, and a week later on a Sunday we drive down to the shore and look up a real-estate agent.

"I do not wish to rent a seaside tenement," says my father in fierce tones to the agent. "I wish to go to sleep at night without listening to the bedside conversation of people next door."

The agent explains he knows exactly what we have in mind. So we drive around and my mother likes one place but my father don't, and the next place when my father finds out the cost he explains to the agent he is not a member of the idle rich but a man who has to work for a living, and finally the agent says he has one more place he will show us but he don't think the owner will rent for only two weeks.

It is a one-story cottage in a pine grove. It is a good fifty feet to the next cottage, and if I stand on the porch on my tippy toes I can see the ocean. It is furnished inside with maple furniture and there is three bedrooms.

"The owner wants to rent for the season," says the agent. "He has priced it at a thousand, but if you signed up this early I might get it for you for eight hundred. He is planning to go to Italy this summer."

"He is, providing he can find a sucker with eight hundred dollars," says my father.

"Well, we are wasting time," says my mother, looking bedraggled after the long trip in the car. "It's an adorable cottage but we are looking for a two-week rental and this is silly."

"Wait," says my father. "Is there a decent morn-

ing train out of this place that goes to New York?" "The seven three will get you in the city by nine," says the agent.

My mother laughs. "George," she says, "I have to fight now to get you ready to make the eight-o'clock train at home."

"Edith," my father says dramatically, "we can go to Yosemite when the children are older. It is time I did something for you and the children. This is a one-floor house. No stairs to climb. The children can spend the summer in shorts. No washing and ironing. We will take the cottage and I will commute."

"This is preposterous," says my mother. "You'd have to ride the train four hours a day."

"Take a whiff of that pine-laden sea breeze," says my father. "Down here I'll be able to get up with the sun. I will take a dip before breakfast. I will feel like a million dollars. We will take the cottage for the season."

THAT was early in May. We move into the cottage on a Sunday the end of June. We unpack and have a swim and go to bed early because we are all tired from moving in.

The next morning I wake up and see my mother in the hall.

"Stay in bed, William," she says. "It is only six o'clock. I am trying to rout out your father."

"I will get his swimming trunks for him to take a dip," I say.

I go outside and get them off the clothesline. When I go back in, my mother is pulling the covers off my father. "George, you'll miss your train," she says.

My father groans and puts one foot on the floor, testing it. He puts the other foot on the floor and sits up slowly. My mother goes back to the kitchen and very slowly my father takes off his pajamas.

"I brought your swimming trunks, Father," I say, and toss them in his lap.

He gives a howl and flies off the bed. "They're kind of wet," I say. "Hurry up, Father, we're all going to watch you take a dip."

My father looks pale, then reaches for the trunks. "Well, come on," he says. "Get the other kids up."

"We got all day to swim," I say.

"In my day," says my father, with his teeth chattering, "we led a rugged existence. What kind of a man will you be if you are scared of a pair of wet trunks early in the morning?"

He goes running out into the hall, almost knocking my mother down.

"George," she says, "you didn't mean it."

"Open the front door before I freeze," says my father. He goes tearing off the porch and racing down the path to the beach.

"Don't let him go down there alone," says my mother. "Run down to the beach and see he doesn't drown."

But by the time I get down there my father is on the way back, racing up the path past me and into the house.

"Nice going, Tarzan," says my mother handing him a towel.

"It is too early in the morning for cheap humor," says my father, disappearing into the bedroom.

Ten minutes later he joins us at breakfast. "I feel like a million dollars," he says. "What is this mess on my plate?"

"It's a fried egg," says my mother tenderly. "I threw the first two away. Maybe by tomorrow I will have learned how to use the kerosene stove. Would you rather have some cereal?"

"I don't have time," says (Continued on page 53)



My father goes tearing off the porch and racing down

WOMAN

By WILLARD H. TEMPLE



the path to the beach. "Don't let him go down there alone," says my mother. "Run down to the beach and see he doesn't drown"

STINGIEST MAN

Boss of the Norfolk fuel depot, Jam



During Battle of the Bulge, Navy was asked to speed urgently needed fuel to Europe. Mac took charge. When sparkproof hammers were required to close gasoline cans, he made them, cheap

JAMES C. MACKECHNIE, the superintendent of the huge U.S. Navy fuel depot at Norfolk, Virginia—the biggest oil storage base of its kind in the United States—has a very peculiar allergy. It pains him to spend the taxpayers' money.

There are virtually no lengths to which this dogged old Scotsman won't go to avoid expending government funds. Just recently, for example, the Navy Department proposed to buy some new apparatus which was badly needed for pumping oil at the depot. Most government men would have greeted the advent of new equipment with cheers. MacKechnie refused to take it.

"No, no, laddie," he told a high-ranking admiral in the Scottish burr which is as thick today as it was when he left Glasgow 39 years ago. "I'll not have you paying out the Navy's hard-earned dollars for such nonsense."

Instead, he salvaged parts from the engine room of an abandoned destroyer, had them rebuilt and put them to work pumping oil on dry land.

Not long ago, the Navy decided that a mammoth water tank had to be shifted from one site on Craney Island, the 870-acre strip of land in Norfolk Bay on which the depot is located, to another some 750 feet away. It called in a private contractor and asked him how much he wanted for making the move.

"This is a tough job," the contractor said. "We'll have to construct an enormous flatcar, hoist the tank onto it with cranes and bring in several tractors to tow it. It'll take at least a week's work. I'd say that \$6,000 is the lowest we can do it for."

MacKechnie's ruddy, weather-beaten visage turned almost white when he heard the estimate. Luckily for him, he is a civilian employee of the Navy, not a serviceman, and is free to speak his penurious mind.

"Six thousand dollars!" he snorted. "Why, it'd be sheer sinful to lay out that much money. I'll do it myself."

He rented a bulldozer and dug a shallow channel between the old and the new sites for the 600-ton tank. Next, he pumped some water into this impromptu canal. Then he inundated the area around the tank with water, too. The water lifted the tank off its foundations and he just floated it down the canal to its new location. He didn't employ a single tractor. He and two other men pulled the tank along by hand. The whole operation took only eight and a half hours and the sole cost to the government was for rental of the bulldozer—\$75.

"I'm a Scotsman through and through," MacKechnie states, "and it makes me plain sick to my stomach to see money being spent when there's no need for spending it. I watch my oon pennies, and there's no reason why I shouldn't watch the government's pennies, too."

MacKechnie won't even spend money for oil to operate the depot power plant. He gets his fuel by salvaging it from ships' ballast water and sludge. And he sells the leftover oil to commercial freighters at two cents a gallon.

The economies this sixty-one-year-old mechanical wizard has achieved at Craney Island—and the fantastic way in which he has achieved them—have made his name a byword in the Navy. At Navy headquarters in Washington, D.C., Rear Admiral Malcolm G. Slarrow, the inspector general of the Navy Supply Corps, declares:

"Old MacKechnie has saved only Heaven knows how much money for the Navy, certainly hundreds of thousands of dollars."

Mac's immediate boss, Rear Admiral T. Earle Hipp, the commanding officer of the Norfolk Naval Supply Center, agrees with this view, adding: "In the 34 years I have spent in the naval service, I do not recall ever having met a man who was more conscientiously interested in saving money for the government than J. C. MacKechnie."

Collier's for August 4, 1951



One of MacKechnie's boosters is Rear Adm. T. Earle Hipp, who heads Norfolk (Va.) Naval Supply Center



Mac's junk pile at Craney Island Fuel Facility has saved buying new equipment