

Sorting through personal writings leads to college paper by 'vagrant'

Dwight L. Bolinger was an internationally recognized linguist and emeritus professor at Stanford and Harvard universities. He died of cancer earlier this year in Palo Alto, Calif.

Bruce Bolinger began tape-recording his father's reminiscences last year, when Dwight Bolinger recounted the time he was abandoned by an uncle in the Borger-Panhandle area. Dwight Bolinger roamed the area for three days in 1926 with no food and no money.

Following his father's death, on Feb. 23, Bruce Bolinger began the enormous task of sorting through his father's professional and personal correspondences. Among the personal writings, Bruce Bolinger said he found a copy of a paper written by his father for an intercollegiate literary



DWIGHT L. BOLINGER

contest.

The paper was entitled "Three

Days as a Vagrant in the Panhandle."

"He didn't mention writing it when he told me about the experience, and may have forgotten about it," said Bruce Bolinger, now the county clerk in Nevada City, Calif.

"When he recounted his experience in the Panhandle and the kindness of Mr. Monday, a local businessman who loaned him the 75 cents he desperately needed, he said to me, 'If any of his descendants . . . happen to be listening to this tape, I want to express my gratitude to this gentleman here and now, which I haven't had the opportunity to do before.'"

Efforts to locate the "Monday" family Bolinger referred to have not been successful.

— DAVID STEVENS
Globe-News Regional Editor

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Area was big disappointment

BY DWIGHT L. BOLINGER

The wonder of it all is that I wasn't arrested for vagrancy; but law enforcement isn't of the best in the Panhandle and that possibly saved me. Besides, there were enough of the same class to keep the officers' hands full without attending to me. At least, I kept well away from others, didn't beg and gave no cause for any offense.

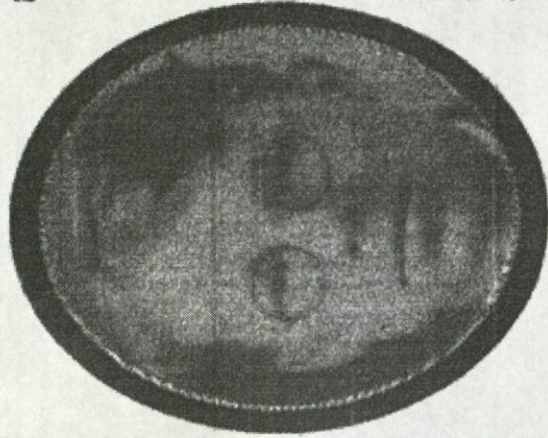
The going there from Southern Colorado was fine as an experience or as something to tell one's grandchildren; but it was totally devoid of pleasure.

A typical, half-blind Ford with its rattles and conclusions without number provided the transportation; and my uncle and I spent every cent we could lay hands on to keep it supplied with gasoline.

In the neighborhood of Clayton, N.M., our funds began to run low.

My uncle suggested trading in our spare tire for some gasoline; I assented, for there was nothing else to do. But the spare had a split in the tread and that wouldn't do, according to the man with whom we tried to drive the bargain.

We removed our best tire and offered it. He accepted and assisted us in replacing the good tire with the spare one. We drove on, 10 gallons of gasoline to the better.



THREE DAYS AS A VAGRANT

This is the first of a three-part series on Dwight Bolinger, who spent three days as a vagrant in the 1926 Texas Panhandle.

Both of us had started to the Panhandle with cases full of suit samples, hoping to make enough at our selling to pay our expenses and have a little besides.

The stories that reached us concerning the oil fields represented the Panhandle as a place where everyone had

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Penniless: 'Vagrant' arrived broke and hungry

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more money than he could possibly spend, and we determined to set about acquiring some of the excessive wealth.

No disappointment could have been more complete.

We arrived at Panhandle, penniless and very hungry. We tried to work the town that day, but without success.

Any man who has ever sold knows that no salesman can sell when he has to; besides, who could sell suits on an empty stomach? It was just another of those "vicious little circles" — we had to work to eat, and we had to eat to work and we couldn't do either.

My uncle had contrived in some way to get a loaf of bread. We ate it greedily, then started on the 30-mile ride through the hot July forenoon to Borger.

Automobiles by the dozen passed us, until we and our car were thickly coated with the penetrating dust. Our windshield had broken a day or two before, and we were fairly blinded by the flying particles; but we had to

drive rapidly to relieve ourselves from the oppressive heat.

Soon, however, a derrick or two came in sight. Presently we were among them and their choking smell of new petroleum. That odor pervaded everything.

Here and there on the ground near the wells were little puddles of crude oil. The derricks were begrimed with the oozy stuff where dust had adhered to it.

The grass (what there was of it) appeared to have been singed and had we not known that the black oil was responsible for it, we might easily have blamed the sun, for it was so hot. The roaring sound of escaping gas caught our attention, but a danger sign warned us away from the spot.

The numerous camps surrounding Borger were not long in appearing. We stopped beside a row of little low frame houses, with piping and hydrants in front of them.

I turned on the faucet and put my lips to the water. It was hot almost to burning, for the pipes were not placed underground. I tasted. Faugh! The liquid — could it be water? — tasted

as if it had been skimmed off an oil tank. There was no other to be had, however, so I drank my fill and went away belching the hot gas I had swallowed with it.

Almost anything could happen under that broiling sun; it seemed. My uncle had gone to the car and was calling me in a mandatory tone, "Hurry up, I can't wait all day." The order was a little too much, I decided I'd not hurry to obey.

Of course, this angered him a little and he started to drive away slowly at first. Still, I took my time. I wasn't going to let him make me run to the car. It was his car anyway, and he might drive away in it if he chose.

Indeed, he wasn't long in doing so.

Speeding up the car, he was soon out of calling distance and then out of sight, and I was alone in the Panhandle, sine sample cases, money and a course of action.

I was a bit dazed at first and wandered aimlessly about wondering what I had done. Slowly I realized that I must find my uncle if I were ever to get away from there.

He had driven toward Borger. I quickened my step in the same direction. I examined closely every automobile camp to see whether the car was there, but there were cars by the score.

I walked down the road a short distance when a car drove up, going toward Panhandle. The driver stopped and invited me to ride. With some misgivings, I climbed in and he drove on, but the thought of going to Panhandle bothered me.

I ought to give myself a little more time to find my uncle, even if doing so did seem impossible.

Still, my father was to have mailed some money of mine to Colorado, and there was the chance that it would be forwarded to Panhandle. Better wait a little longer though.

So, I told the driver that I wished to get off at a certain place. Obligingly, he stopped and allowed me to jump out, then drove away.

There would be cars going by in the morning I thought, and if the worst came to the worst, I could wire home. Dad would send me the money.

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Comfortable sleeping arrangements hard to find

BY DWIGHT L. BOLINGER

Now, where was I to sleep? It was becoming dark and I needed shelter from the cool breeze that was rising.
At length I lay down among some weeds that looked as if they might help some. After a short nap, I awoke. It was quite dark.

Now, it occurred to me I might be able to find a vacant house in which to sleep. I set out to look for one, but every vacant building seemed to be guarded by a night watchman. Again, I sought the protecting weeds and slept there a little more.

It must have been near midnight when I woke the second time. The monotonous sough of the oil pumps still sounded on all sides and in the distance loomed a few brilliantly lighted derricks.

I began my hunt for warmer quarters again and this time was more successful, for among a row of houses I found one that did not seem to be guarded.

I ventured to enter it, but I found a spot at one side where the wind did not seem to reach. I lay down on the ground against the wall and slept for an hour or two.

I was awakened by a brilliant light-shining full into my face. Some watchman was there with his searchlight, but fortunately, he failed to notice me and hastily I left the place.

Away in a more isolated spot, I discovered the base-

I slept there unmolested until about 4 o'clock, when I was disturbed by the voices of the workmen, who were coming to complete their job.

One of them must have noticed me, for I heard him say, "... man down there." I jumped up, groggy with sleep, raised the ladder to its original position and climbed out.

It was still too dark to see well, but I struck out in the general direction of Berger, peering about for the Ford touring car with the Colorado license.

After I arrived, I realized there was not a chance in a hundred of my finding my uncle in the mob of people there. I could see but one thing to do: return to Panhandle.

A three hours' ride - thanks to a big supply truck - brought me again to Panhandle. I went without delay to the post office and asked for my mail. There was none.

My 24 hour fast was beginning to tell on me a little, I wondered what I could obtain in the way of food to keep me until my money came. It occurred to me that I might be able to pick up some grain near the elevator down by the railroad tracks.

I went there and as I had hoped, found a little pile of comparatively clean wheat beneath a freight car.

I filled a pocket with the kernels and went away munching a mouthful. It was a little dusty and once in a while, I had to throw away a pupated insect that had hidden among the grains, but for all that, it was filling and sufficed to keep my jaws occupied.



THREE DAYS ASA VAGRANT

This is the second of a three-part series by Dwight Bolinger, who spent three days as a vagrant in the 1926 Texas Panhandle.

ment of what was to be a house. The concrete of its walls was well hardened and it looked like a pretty good hiding place.

A ladder there too, as if it had been placed for me, I climbed within, lowered the ladder after me, then pulled it down to the floor.

The thought struck me that it might serve well as a bed - the concrete was almost too cold to lie on, so I shoved it over into one corner of the basement and over its rungs placed some boards that I found on the floor.



THREE DAYS AS A VAGRANT

This is the last of a three-part series by Dwight Bolinger, who spent three days as a vagrant in the 1926 Texas Panhandle.

Waiting becomes routine for man seeking funds

By DWIGHT L. BOLINGER

Nothing has impressed me as being more like a circus than this place. The incessant stream of people walking on the main street, the noisy shouts of the bus drivers calling out their destinations, the beggar with his hand organ — all lent the air of activity and apparent confusion that one associates with a circus. The great number of people was comforting, for I did not fear being noticed among so many.

I was surprised that my desire for food was not greater, but as I kept my mind off the subject, almost the only ill effect was a wobbliness about my legs.

Toward evening, I went to the post office, stepped into the long waiting line and when my turn came, asked for my mail. Again, there was nothing.

Later in the evening, I went outside and again lay down among some weeds, but I couldn't sleep there, for the night was too cold.

I eventually hunted out a place beneath a pile of boards in a lumberyard. Now and then I could see the watchman pass with his lantern, but he didn't find me. I slept until morning.

I went early to the post office and waited there. I was first in line, but there was only a card for me — no money.

I walked down the main street, passed a beggar or two, looked into a restaurant, wondering if I someday would be able to enter one and eat.

Later in the morning, some young boy approached me with a money-making trick he wished me to be his accomplice in. I refused him and walked away, taking a seat at the other side of the room.

I picked up a newspaper, read it through, advertisements and all and then re-read it.

It began to look as if I might have to send the telegram after all. The idea grew on me, until by the middle of the afternoon, I had made up mind to do it.

Accordingly, I walked across town to the telegraph office, wrote my message and asked that it be sent C.O.D.

The clerk took it, checked it over and asked me for my deposit. I asked, "What deposit?" unaware of the rules governing C.O.D. telegrams.

The man replied that I would have to give him 73

Please see **WAITING** on Page 4C

his service to the Portales and Clovis communities.

new economic challenges that we face, Bingham, going to go down.

Waiting: Man endures long lines during time spent as a vagrant

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cents, the payment for the message, to take care of costs in case it was not accepted at the other end.

Could he not find some way for me to send it?, I inquired.

Obviously he was embarrassed, but a soft heart has no place in the Panhandle, this was probably only another bum, runaway or something, he must have thought. At any rate, the company's rules were fixed and could not be transgressed.

No, I might not send my telegram without a deposit.

A fourth time I tried the post office. Still, there was no money.

Again, my concern was a place to sleep. The ball park, I remembered, had a high board fence and was well out of town. One side of the fence ought to be sheltered from the wind, too.

I crossed a field or two and finally came to the place. The ground near the fence was well covered with grass, I lay down upon it.

At daybreak, habit took me again to the station, where I waited until mail time. Almost breathlessly, I went to the office and got — nothing.

There was only one thing to do. I must have 73 cents, whether I had to ask for it or not. I remembered a place — a tin shop — where I had shown

my suit samples. Perhaps there, I might obtain the money.

I asked for Mr. Monday, the proprietor.

The man had a kind face. He was fairly round and gentlemen of that type are usually good natured. I remembered. My hopes brightened. Now, with my pen and pencil in hand, was the critical moment.

"I wonder if I can raise a loan on this pen and pencil?" I asked him hurriedly.

"I was down here with my uncle to sell suits, but I was separated from him at Berger, and he has the sample cases, and I want to telegraph home for money, and I haven't enough to pay for the telegram."

"Do you think the old man'll send it to you?" he asked, after a pause.

"I'm sure he will, for it's my money I'm sending for," I said.

He thought a moment. "What did you run away from home for son?" he asked slowly.

Here was a new side. How could I convince this man that I had not run away from home? I could only tell him I had not.

He pondered awhile, then asked me how much I needed. I replied, "Seventy-three cents."

Reaching into his pocket he drew forth a handful of change, selected a half dollar and a quarter and gave them to me.

I was having difficulty in keeping back the tears. I thanked him a thousand times and went out

to the street. The tears would come, then.

At last the telegram was sent. "How long would it take to get a reply?" I asked. "Oh, about three hours," the agent told me. Another long wait would have to be endured.

I was wealthier by two cents than I had been an hour before. I took my treasure to the slot machine in the railway station and received a tiny chocolate bar and a stick of a gum for it. They helped to allay the cravings in my stomach.

Several times I called at the telegraph office, walking with some difficulty now. My telegram had been accepted, but still there was no reply. I asked if I might use the money to send another one, the agent told me I might, so I wrote another to be sent to a relative in Kansas City and handed it to him.

Mail time had come again. I fell in line at the post office and received the customary nothing.

I was wondering how much longer I would be able to hold out without food. I was beginning to feel rather feverish and breathing was difficult after the slightest exercise.

With grave fears that I would never receive my money and that I would be unable to repay Mr. Monday (trivial as that may seem, it worried me), I returned to the telegraph office.

Yes, there was something for me. It had come just after I had ordered the second message sent.

I was handed an envelope. I tore it open. Oh, that blessed fifteen dollars!