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## Aunt Mabel's Trip

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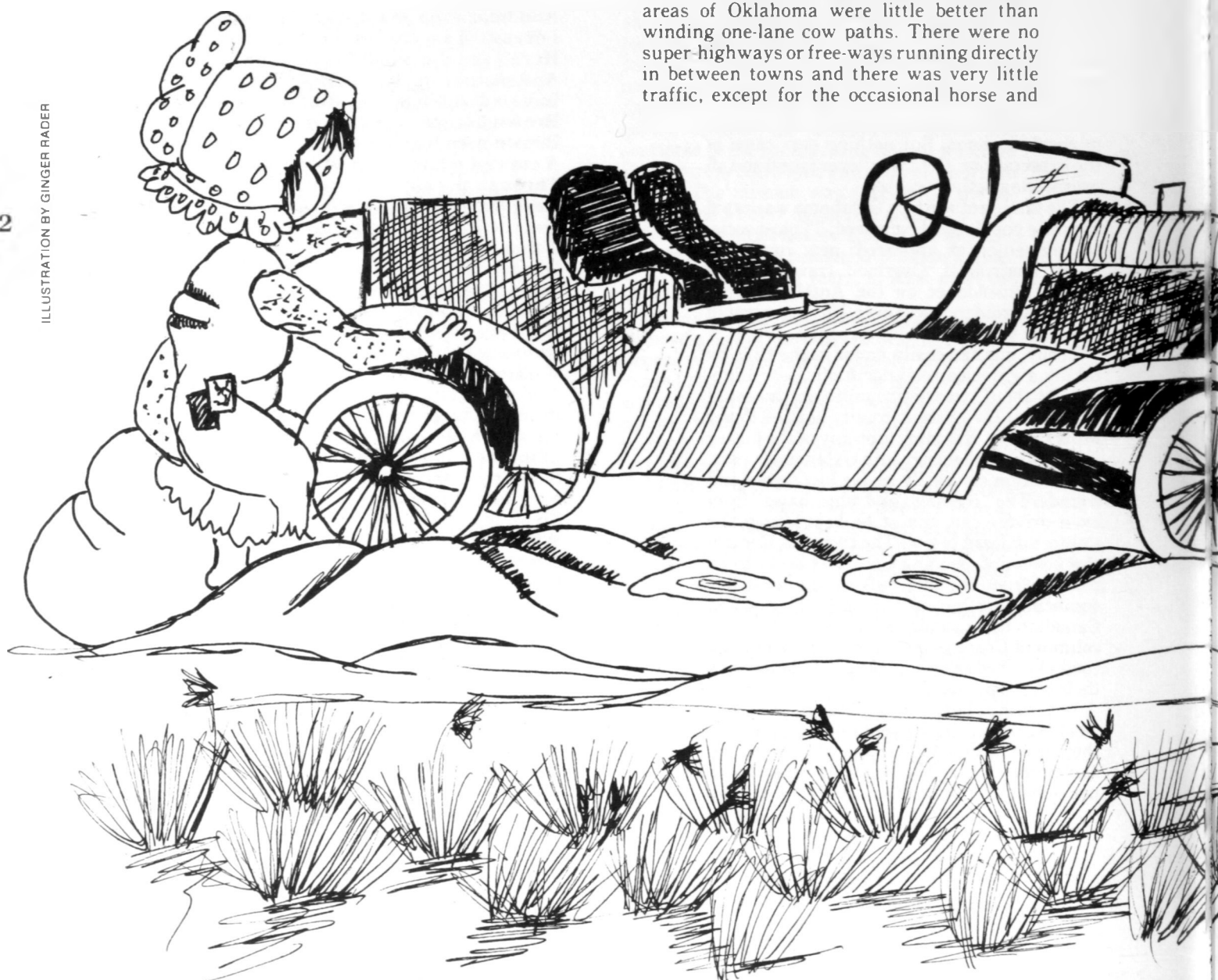
It was the winter of 1927 when Aunt Mabel took a trip in a Ford touring car which belonged to her sister's brother-in-law, Ed. They were going to take Ed's sister, Grace, and her two small children to Hominy, Oklahoma, to an Aunt's house. Dot, who was Mabel's best friend and Ed's and Grace's younger sister, went too. Mabel was about twenty and had been on her own for three or four years. She had been working as a dishwasher in a restaurant and a cotton picker in the cotton fields, before coming to Chickasha from Enid, to visit. They left Chickasha before sunrise early that particular morning and drove a circuitous route along the winding dirt roads, going through the paved outskirts of Oklahoma City to Hominy.

Travel was an infrequent and eventful thing in 1927 and contrary to common belief, according to Mrs. Mabel Wingate of Chickasha, Oklahoma, motorists in 1927 did not wear the hat, goggles, and coat seen in photos and movies depicting that era; only wealthy

people could afford them. In Oklahoma, most people were too poor to be able to afford such luxuries.

Instead of air-tight, sound-proof interiors, cars then were open, often having only a windshield for a windbreak and protection. The old model A had to be cranked, for there was no such thing as an electric starter, and both mufflers and shocks were non-existent. Nor did the cars then have the wide inflatable tires of today, which made riding in a car quite an uncomfortable and jolting experience. Although top speed was only thirty to thirty-five miles per hour, travel had advanced beyond the slow-moving horse and wagon of previous days and mobility was exciting. Owning a car was everyone's dream and a ride in one was the next best thing. Aunt Mabel will tell you as she did me, "... when you did get to go it was a big thrill. ... cause the car was everything then."

However, rural roads back then, were often sloppy in bad weather since farm access roads were not paved. In fact, most roads in the rural areas of Oklahoma were little better than winding one-lane cow paths. There were no super-highways or free-ways running directly in between towns and there was very little traffic, except for the occasional horse and



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Relics

wagon, unless you lived in or near a city. If you met another car, according to Aunt Mabel, "... you had to give them half the road or get run over. . . whether there was a mudhole or not, that car wanted by, you had to get over."

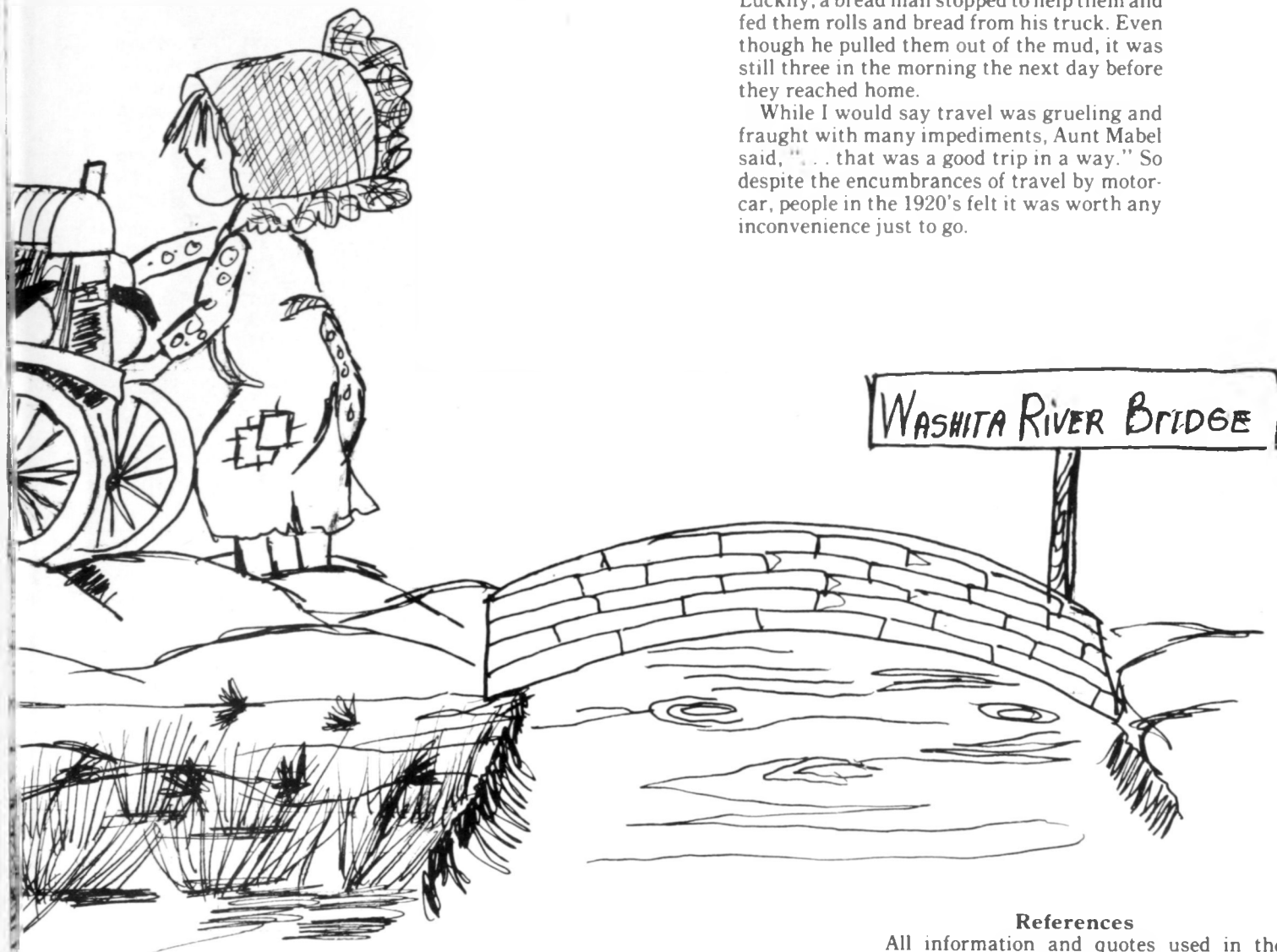
Proceeding from Oklahoma City in the cold and treading mud all the way to Hominy, Ed, Dot, and Aunt Mabel delivered Grace and her children safely. Since they had no money, they ate at the Aunt's house before starting home to Chickasha. It was dark and as they were leaving, Aunt Mabel stole the old setting hen she had seen earlier sitting on the roost in the outhouse. Quickly they tied the old hen's feet together and put her into the car. They drove and drove that night until they got stuck in the slush and the mud of a near-frozen country road. Because Mabel and Dot did not know how to drive, they pushed while Ed steered, but the mud was so deep that the girls lost

their shoes and couldn't find them. After getting the car unstuck, they drove until they ran out of gas and the girls got out and pushed some more. With their feet freezing and their toes spread apart like a chicken's from the ice and mud, they pushed until they came to a station where Mabel traded the old hen for some gasoline. They left the station and drove to the town of Pawnee, where they stopped at the train station and tried to remove some of the mud from their clothes and clean up. After they had washed their faces and hands, they sat in the depot trying to get warm before going on. They had eaten nothing since the night before and Dot fainted while sitting there because she was weak from hunger and exposure.

After reviving Dot and resting awhile, they drove as far as the old Washita River bridge east of Chickasha before getting stuck again. Luckily, a bread man stopped to help them and fed them rolls and bread from his truck. Even though he pulled them out of the mud, it was still three in the morning the next day before they reached home.

While I would say travel was grueling and fraught with many impediments, Aunt Mabel said, "... that was a good trip in a way." So despite the encumbrances of travel by motorcar, people in the 1920's felt it was worth any inconvenience just to go.

13



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#### References

All information and quotes used in the preceding story were taken from a personal interview with Mabel Wingate, Chickasha, Oklahoma, 17 March 1982.