

# The Valsetz Star

by Tami Richards

or knew someone there, which is why I felt something of a tinge of sadness a few years back when I learned that Valsetz was a town no more. I always meant to visit there.

The day we drove to Valsetz was a beautiful spring day; the sun lit our way down the hour-long drive along a private gravel logging road. We drove between towering trees the likes of which I rarely see down in the valley. We drove up a mountain, back down again, and across a valley, once being very closely passed by a logging truck. We were sprinkled on a couple of times, but encountered no real downpour of rain, which would not have been unusual considering that Valsetz is an area which receives 140 inches of rain a year.

Aside from wishing to visit Valsetz because I once knew someone who worked there, a bit of nostalgia if you will, I also wanted to visit Valsetz to see the place where Dorothy Anne Hobson spent her childhood.

In 1937 the town of Valsetz was still owned by its originators, Cobbs & Mitchell Lumber. Dorothy Anne Hobson was a precocious youngster who, at the age of 9, announced that she was going to edit a newspaper for Valsetz entitled *The Valsetz Star*. She made this proclamation while eating in the Valsetz cookhouse, where both of her parents worked, to Mr. Herbert A.



My husband and I recently drove to the abandoned town site known as Valsetz, Oregon about an hour and a half westerly drive from our house in Salem.

Valsetz got its name by combining the two words Siletz and Valley, the name of the railroad which ran through it when the town was established around 1919. Valsetz was a company town first owned by Cobbs & Mitchell Lumber out of Cadillac, Michigan and later by Boise Cascade.

In 1984 Valsetz's usefulness as a lumber town ran dry and it was razed and blazed. When I was growing up in the 1970s, I would occasionally run across someone who either lived in Valsetz

(above) Leanne Morales reads a copy of "The Valsetz Star 2000," a book about Dorothy Hobson and her newspaper (by Ron Fowler, ISBN: 0-9654479-3-6).

Templeton of the Valsetz Lumber Company. Mr. Templeton then offered to publish the paper for her in the company's Portland office and the deal was struck. Dorothy wrote out her rough draft with a pencil and Mr. Templeton passed it along to his office staff who typed it up as received; no corrections in spelling or grammar and without any censoring of the subject matter. The staff then printed it up on legal size (8.5"x14") paper and it was distributed around Valsetz, in the Portland offices of the company, and to various business associates.

The Valsetz Star made its way around the country, and even to international hot spots, by way of an advertising opportunity embraced by Mr. Templeton who almost immediately began mailing copies of the newspaper to lumber dealerships around the United States and to several foreign countries. Dorothy's wit, humor, and knowledge quickly made The Valsetz Star a much anticipated monthly read.

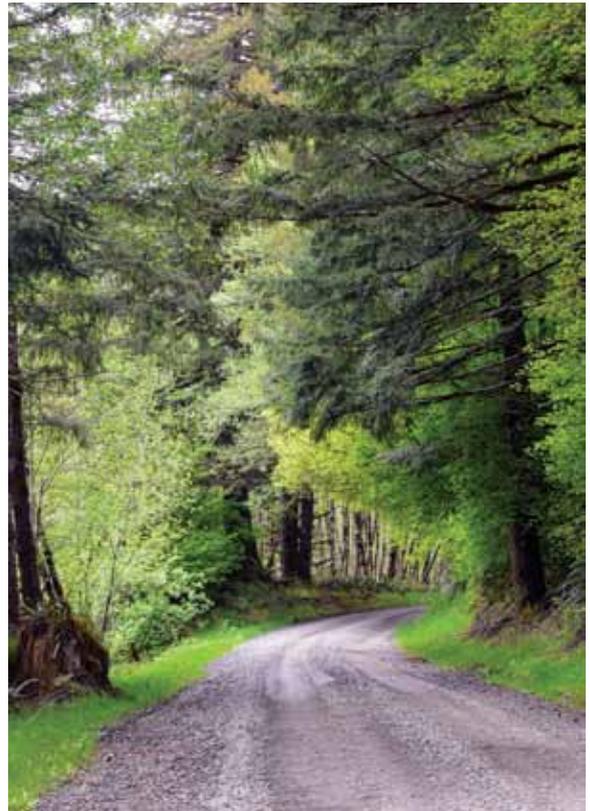
- 1937: "We believe in Hemlock, Fir, Kindness, and Republicans."
- 1938: "Russia and Finland stopped fighting but the cats are still fighting under our house something fierce."
- "We forgot to mention last month that we have no police or sheriff in Valsetz. Everyone just does what they please."
- 1940: "We received a letter from Shirley Temple and she thinks editing a paper would be fun-but it isn't."

Road at Valsetz >>

And of course, Dorothy seemed to understand the business side of things, or, how her newspaper came to getting printed.

- Advertising: "Hurry and get your order in for Cobbs & Mitchell's nice smooth lumber. It's going fast but it's not too late if you order now."

Radio stations began reading the paper on the air, The Valsetz Star had subscribers in nearly every state in the U.S., and by 1940 more than a dozen newspapers were printing excerpts from it.



From the Portland Oregonian to the Denver Post, The Christian Science Monitor to the New York Herald and the Washington D.C. Post, it seemed that the little adolescent living deep in the forest was a national sensation. Even Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt quoted The Star at her regular press conferences. Counted among the famous and semi-famous people who wrote to Dorothy were Herbert Hoover, Postmaster General James Farley, Wendell Willke (presidential candidate), and Charles McNary (U.S. Senator from Oregon).

Dorothy edited The Valsetz Star for four years, which amounts to nearly fifty issues, ending the streak with the December 1941 issue with nary a notice to her loyal readers. It seems she was going to move to Salem and attend Parrish Junior High School to “improve her education, take music and vocal lessons, and have her teeth straightened, with no time left for anything except the Parrish Pep Club.”

Dorothy finished junior high and high school, then graduated from Willamette University before marrying Frederick H. Graham in 1949. They raised three children together, then ran a hardware store, and Dorothy became involved with real estate and interior decorating. Dorothy was honored as a guest of the Valsetz High School graduating class of

The remaining foundation of an equipment storage shed. Once a year the community of the one-time town of Valsetz come together here for a reunion. >>

1984 (a class of 9 students), probably relishing the drive on a gravel road instead of the dust or mud (depending on the weather) in her day of the dirt roadway.

Later that year the town was demolished. Dorothy Anne Hobson Graham passed away twelve years later in 1996.

Towns without purpose always fade away. Mining towns and timber towns alike often suffer the same fate; resources become depleted or technological advances render them unnecessary. The people move away and it is, after all, the people who made the town. Valsetz still has a few roads, some foundations to long-gone buildings and occasional railroad beds, but it is no longer a town. The spire-like trees, trickling brook, towering mountains all around and fields of beautiful flowers make me wish it was, but just like Dorothy Anne outgrew the newspaper industry, the lumber industry outgrew the town.

