

# *A Meandering Youth*

**B**ORN AUGUST 24, 1915, DAVE “SONNY” MCCOY, the only child of Bill and Edna McCoy, spent his first five years nurtured by warm breezes in the Southern California coastal town of El Segundo. At the end of Sonny’s first year of school, Bill McCoy left his job at Standard Oil Refinery to work for Valley Paving, a road construction company in the Central Valley of California. For the next ten years, the McCoy threesome moved from tent camp to tent camp following Bill’s road construction jobs, living an itinerant lifestyle that forced Sonny to switch schools every few months, sometimes every few weeks. Happy just to be with his family, stimulated by what he was learning outside of school, the young boy didn’t mind the changes.

In July of 1928, shortly before his thirteenth birthday, Sonny and his mother spent four days on the east side of the Sierra visiting their friends, the Frank Cooper family, who had bought Jim’s Place, a restaurant in Independence, California. Sonny fell in love with the Eastern Sierra, its snow-covered peaks, high country lakes, and the warm feeling of a community where people lived for years at a time. He secretly vowed to return one day and make the region his home.

Two years later, Sonny’s world crashed. In the heart of the Great Depression, his father left the family. Unable to care for her fifteen-year-old son, Edna secured a job as a housekeeper in Sacramento and sent Sonny to live with his paternal grandparents, the Coxes, in the coal-mining town of Wilkeson, Washington. Sonny had never met his grandparents. Nor had he known that as a teenager, his father had run away from Washington, dropped the family name of Cox, and adopted the name McCoy.

Upon his arrival in Wilkeson, Dave McCoy abandoned the nickname Sonny. Though he grew to love the Coxes, he longed for California and the life he had known with his parents. In December of 1930, Dave hitchhiked south to find them. Edna welcomed her son for a short visit, but on Christmas Eve when Dave knocked on his father’s door, someone walked to the window, pulled the blinds down, and returned to the dinner table.

For the next five years, only fly-fishing and athletics eased Dave’s yearnings. The restless teenager lettered in football, basketball, and track, but after each sport’s season he would hit the road again—hitchhiking back and forth between schools in Washington, where he lived with his grandparents, and Irwin, California, where he lived with his friend Sonny Fletcher.

During the summer of 1934, eighteen-year-old Dave and his friend Joe Logan drove Joe’s 1929 Model A Ford from Washington to California for a month-long visit in Independence. At Jim’s Place, Dave made friends with Vic Taylor and Ed Parker, hydrographers from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). To Dave, Vic and Ed had the ideal job—being paid to spend time outdoors measuring snow depths and water flows.

Focused on becoming a hydrographer, Dave returned to Wilkeson for his senior year at Buckley High, the only time since eighth grade that he stayed in one school for a full term. By June of 1935, he had excelled scholastically as well as athletically. Four colleges offered him football scholarships, but he declined them all. The day after graduation, Dave packed his football sweater and fishing tackle, thanked his grandparents for their support, and walked down the road, Independence on his mind.



Edna McCoy

*It didn't matter if we were living in a tent on the side of a hill, my mother kept our living quarters immaculate, made each camp a place I was proud to call home.*

—DAVE MCCOY



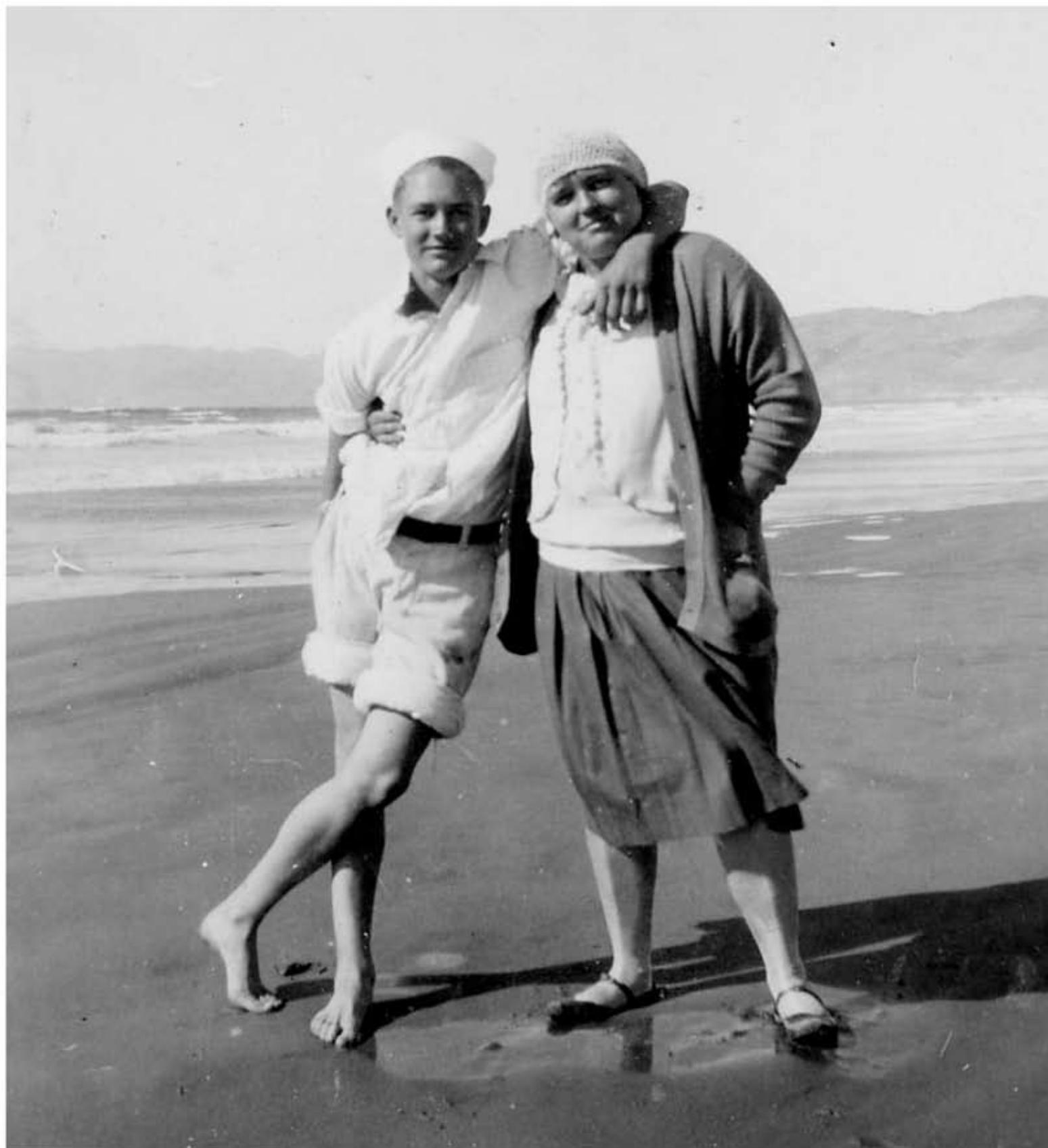
Edna and Sonny McCoy



Bill McCoy



Sonny McCoy



Sonny and Edna. With her husband gone, Edna secured employment as a housekeeper in Sacramento and sent Sonny to live with his Washington-based paternal grandparents, relatives whom he had never met.