

Chapter Ten Running Away

I don't remember today why we decided to run away from home. But we were very serious about it. We were going to build us a raft and float down Middle Creek to The Tombigbee River then to the Black Warrior River then into the Alabama River. Mobile, Ala was our final destination.

I'm not sure what we were going to do if we ever got there, however, that was the plan. Work commenced shortly after we conceived the idea.

We took several railroad cross ties and tied them together. We took our anchor rope and secured the raft to the bank of the creek.

We saved all our money for supplies. We purchased R.C. Colas, Coca Colas, Baby Ruth candy bars, Hershey candy bars, Milky Way candy bars and one can of Prince Albert tobacco.

So as you can see we had everything we could possibly need on such a long journey.

About the time we were all set for the trip, it went to raining. Before the creek got back to normal, it rained again. It did that a couple of times and since our raft was secured to the bank it stayed under water most of the time the creek was out of its bank.

Finally the creek went down to where we could see our raft and it seemed to be floating ok so we decided that the next day was "the Day". We had all of our supplies ready to go, every thing in big brown paper bags. We got everything on board and shoved off. The raft, which had become water logged, made it to the middle of the creek then it just nosed dived, dumping us into the creek along with all of our supplies.

Some of the supplies floated. The ones that did were chased by each of us and most of them caught. The rest we had to dive for. We spent most of the day diving for our goodies. Most of the things were never found. One of the things we found was our can of Prince Albert.

We decided to go back to some railroad box cars that were parked on a siding where the old railroad depot used to be when our town was thriving. Only one company in town still received a rail car shipment anymore and that was only once or twice a year.

Anyway, we decided to sit in the boxcar and smoke some of our Prince Albert. Mr. Pickens just happened to have been fishing on that

day and came by the box car and every one of us had one lit up when he stopped by.

I don't know how word got out so fast, but we all went home just after seeing Mr. Pickens and word of our sins had already been received by my Momma. She told my Dad when he came in and I was where I could hear her telling him what Mr. Pickens caught us doing.

My daddy had a belt that had to be seventy inches long and about 2 inches wide. He said it was a marine belt but he was never in the marines. I told you about the logs rolling over his feet, keeping him out of the military. But he might have told the marines about me so they just gave him the belt. Anyway, the marine that wore that belt was one big sucker, I can tell you that. After Momma told him about me smoking, He doubled the belt and went to pulling each end real hard making it pop. He did that every time he whipped my butt. By the time he got around to whipping me I was plum wore out. Listening to that popping sound was a whole lot worse than the whipping.

Anyways, that was a bad day for me. I ain't gonna run away anymore and Pop didn't even know about that and I ain't talking.

Mr. Belton lived just down the road from us and he could grow some of the prettiest watermelons you ever did see.

One day all us boys raided his patch. There must have been eight of us. We were not satisfied with a couple of watermelons, each one of us took a couple. It turns out we took way to many watermelons and Mr. Belton got pretty darn mad. He threatened to call the High Sheriff on us. He saw us sitting over at Mr. Austin's store. If any one of us would have admitted being in his patch he would have had us in jail. We figured we did need to tell him and apologize, but not right now when he was so mad.

He said, "You boys not talking but I know you the ones who has raided my watermelon patch. Next time I be waiting on you boys with my 20 gauge."

I imagine we looked pretty guilty. I can tell you I felt mighty guilty 'cause I knew we had been wrong to take so many. We had gotten one or two off Mr. Belton every year but we had never abused his patch until this time. When I got home that evening I heard that popping sound that only that old marine belt can make.

My daddy said, "Come here, boy". When my daddy called me boy I knew I was in for it. He popped that belt the whole time he was talking to me about the error of my ways, which I tried to tell him I had already repented and was now a different boy. Didn't work, wasn't no way to do it except pay.

I don't know how many licks I got but it was a plenty. I'm gonna stay out of Mr. Belton's watermelon patch for a long time.

Well, I might try one or two next year.

