

Chapter Nine

That Old Alligator Gar

You remember me tell you about that old alligator gar that was in our swimming hole. The one with Mr. Big'un still living there and the old cypress stump in the very middle and how on a clear water day you could see way too much.

Well, I was scared to death of that old gar and C.C. and Doug was to. I didn't want them to know that I was more afraid than them, well, I am pretty sure that I was.

Now, Cleo, you remember me talking about him. He wasn't scared of nothing; I mean N – I – L, nothing. He would swim along side a snake and try to out race it. I mean that boy's blood was colder than the water in Middle Creek.

This particular day Cleo and I were sitting up on that old stump, not fishing for a change, and we were not really swimming either, just enjoying the sunshine. We did have to swim out there but mainly we were just talking about the squirrels playing nearby and we were also watching the fish as they would come into view.

This real pretty bass was swimming close to one of the cypress knees and we got to watching it and talking about how we would like to catch it. It was very relaxing up there just perched above everything soaking up the sun.

All of a sudden that dang old alligator gar hit that big old bass and the fight was on. Well, you know it was a lost cause as for as that bass was concerned. He had been on the gar's menu that day and didn't even know it. I looked at Cleo expecting to see the same fright on his face as I imagined was on mine.

Matter of fact, he said that I looked kind of pale. Cleo is looking just like nothing had happened and I'm already wondering how I'm going to sleep on that stump. I ain't getting back in that water, no sir-ree bob, not me, no way, no how, you better believe that. But I don't want to appear too scared to Cleo knowing how brave he is.

As I said he ain't afraid of nothing but he is a little thick headed. He took after Uncle Troy more than the rest of us. Cleo was Doug older brother and he was worse than Doug about wanting to be first.

One night we were coon hunting and the dog's had bayed down the swamp a ways. We took off trying to get to them. We were all wearing rubber boots for wading sloughs. During all this our boots would fill with water if a slough happened to be deeper than the tops of our boots. We waded this one slough very close to where the dogs had bayed and the water was over the tops of our boots.

C.C., Doug and I stopped to empty the water out of our boots. Not Cleo. He was afraid one of us would get in front of him, so he just kept going.

At the next slough there was a small pole that most everyone used to cross this slough because of its depth. By the time Cleo got to the pole we had just about caught up with him after emptying our boots. He dumped one of his boots and C.C. was closing in on him, so Cleo had one boot empty and one boot full as he started crossing the pole.

Cleo is normally sure footed, but every time he lifted the water filled boot he became a little more off balanced.

However, he was doing pretty good until C.C. started walking across the pole and changed the way it was swaying, making Cleo lose his balance. Cleo hung with his back out over the water and with the heavy water filled boot countering his weight for what seemed like a real long time.

Finally, something had to give 'cause ain't nothing can stay suspended forever. He made a big splash as he entered the water. By now all three of us are out on that skinny little pole and all the commotion is making that thing shake something awful. The three of us was pretty sure footed too, but not sure footed enough to keep up with that pole. So, we joined Cleo.

Well, anyways, back to my story of the alligator gar. After sitting there for what seemed like forever, Cleo said he best be getting on home. He asked me if I was ready to go. I told him, "Naw, I think I'll hang around a while and see if I can see anymore nice bass. I may want to come back tomorrow and try to catch one."

Cleo made a nice dive off the stump and swam to the other side with out the gar eating him.

Well, I sat on that stump for what seemed like an hour. I figured it would be getting dark pretty soon.

You know, I never been in the woods by myself at night. I always had Doug or C.C. or Cleo or one of my Uncles or my Dad with me. I got to wondering if I was going to be brave or what. I mean, what could get on this stump out in the middle of the creek? I thought on it some, maybe a little too much.

Well, snakes could I thought. And spiders could. Panthers? I don't know if panthers can swim or not. I bet they can swim if they see something they want to eat real bad, like a young boy that's been fed good all his life.

Panthers have real big mouths too, even bigger than an old alligator gar.

You know Cleo just dove right into the water and swam away. I think in choosing between that old panther and that alligator gar, I believe I can out swim that old gar better than I can out run that panther. I got me a running start and made a long shallow dive and I made about two good strokes and I was at the bank and out of the water before that dang gar knew what was happening. That made me feel pretty good after I got out. But I ain't ever going to swim in that hole any more.

I started my walk home going down that logging road. Every step I took I could hear something walking out in the woods just out of sight. Every step I took, it took one. If I stopped, it stopped.

At first I thought it was Cleo playing a trick on me. So I hollered out, "Cleo, is that you?" Nothing happened. So I yelled again, "Cleo, I'm about to get mad, If that's you, come on out." Absolute silence.

What I mean, there is not even a bird chirping. Something ain't right. I started at a fast walk and whatever was out there started walking just as fast. It was matching me step for step. Pretty soon I had shifted on up to high running as fast as I could go. And whatever it was out there in the woods was still just as fast. When I got to the open pasture near the end of that road I was plum give out. Nothing came out of the woods after me, thank goodness.

I'm not going to tell C.C. or Doug about this just in case it was Cleo out there pulling my leg. I believe if it had been that old panther it would have growled or done something.

Anyway, I learned later that it was not Cleo. He told C.C. and Doug about me staying on the stump after he left and that it was getting on toward dark and that he was impressed with my courage. He said up until then he always thought that I was a "fraidy cat". I didn't tell them any differently.

But I still ain't going swimming with that dad-blamed old gar.