

### Chapter Three

#### Homer and Frog Giggin'

As soon as we could we went back down to the fishing hole and sure enough, we had a mess of catfish like you wouldn't believe. Doug reckoned it was a hundred pounds or more. I just know it was a bunch of guts. But all that fish posed a problem for us because we just couldn't throw away good catfish. Doug said we should take them over to Homer's house. Doug allowed since they were black folks they wouldn't be talking to our folks, leastwise before Saturday.

Maybe before I tell you more about Mr. Big'un

I should tell you a little bit about Homer. You see, him being black and all, I couldn't visit his house and he couldn't visit my house and we sure couldn't go to school together. But other than C.C. and Doug, he was my very best buddy. We just enjoyed one another's company. We didn't fuss or fight or have crossed words, we just hunted and fished and giggered frogs together and had fun.

We took up for one another too. One day two boys from town had been fishing on our creek in one of our holes. (They were not really ours but we played like they were). I spoke up as they passed us and said "Don't ya'll have fishin' holes down yonder in town?" And they said "What's it to you, nigger lover?" I tore into those guys, Homer did too and man they went running off toward town really cussing us.

Another time, some of Homer's cousins came down to visit him from Birmingham and I thought they were going to beat me up but Homer stepped in and told them we were real good buddies and for them to just "back off" and they did real quick like. Homer wasn't going to stand for them messing with me, no sir-ree, not for one minute.

Homer and me were real good buddies for a long time, until we joined the military, but that's another story. If I have time I might get to tell ya'll about it.

Homer and me spent an awful lot of time frog giggering. Homer could handle a boat better than anyone I ever saw. Only thing though, we both hated snakes and were scared to death of them. From time to time I would gig a snake. Not 'cause I wanted to but because the old snakes' eyes and frogs' eyes looked exactly alike when you hit them with the beam of a flashlight.

One night I giggered a big old snake. He coiled around the gig handle and he was so long he coiled on around my arm some. It scared the crap out of me so I threw the snake, gig and all down in the boat. Homer didn't have a flashlight but he could see enough to see that old snake wiggling all over the bottom of the boat. Homer took his oar and dang near beat the bottom out of Uncle Elrod's boat.

Uncle Elrod let us use his boat 'cause that man loved frog legs better than anybody I ever did see. He said, "No matter what time you get in, you bring me whatever frog legs you get."

Me and Homer always giggered a mess of frog legs every time we went. No sir-ree, wasn't nobody could beat me and Homer frog giggering. We took Doug and C.C. with us from time to time but they just never took to it like me and Homer.

So, anyways, that what we did. We cleaned all those fish and took them over to Homers' house. Homers' Mommas' eyes sure lit up when we gave her the fish. We told her we had caught more than ever before and we wanted to share with Homer's family. She seemed to buy that story. She said "Lordy, you boys must have caught a whole mess of catfish to give us this many. We really do thank you."

We didn't want to be making a big deal out of it so we left just as quick as we could.

After returning down to the hole, we baited up the trot line with the catfish guts. We had one end of one trot line tied up to a tree limb that hung almost into the water. All of a sudden that tree limb went to slapping the water like crazy! It sounded to us like Mr. Big'un had tried out our new bait.

Doug starts jumping around and waving his arms and carrying on so, again. We pulled that line in and there is only one fish on the line, one great big fish, an old catfish, but he ain't Mr. Big'un. We could all tell right away it wasn't him.

Man, we were mighty disappointed. We all set down right there just staring at the water. This was a big fish but he was not Mr. Big'un. After we set there for a spell, C.C. allowed that since no one had seen Mr. Big'un but us, we could claim that it was Mr. Big'un. Only thing, this fish was not nearly as big as our stories we told about him. This fish would weigh in at about 12 pounds but Mr. Big'un was twice that big. At least twice that big! Well, we decided that we would just tell everybody that he wasn't nearly as big as he looked in the water when he broke C.C.'s line.

We went running to Doug's house trying to sound all excited like this was the biggest fish we had ever seen. Uncle Elrod said "I thought you boys were exaggerating a little when you were carrying on so about Mr. Big'un. However, if you run your lines again we will probably have enough for us to have that fish fry anyway." Well, we did run our lines again and we had a few nice ones, probably another 15 pounds or so.

We had us a fish fry like you wouldn't believe. Doug's Momma can make the best hush puppies and catfish in the world. Everybody was bragging on her and telling her just that.

We setup some tables outside and Uncle Elrod and Uncle Troy had brought some Coca-Colas and had them iced down in a wash tub. Uncle Troy was kind of guarding them, but all us kids had plenty anyway. Us boys kept saying "old Mr. Big'un sure taste good, don't he?" I'm pretty sure everybody believed us.

We started in on Uncle Elrod to take us fishing over at the Black Warrior River. It is a long ways over there and camping out that far from home was really exciting.

Depending on what part of the river we went to it could be thirty or forty miles. My daddy had an old flat bed Chevy truck and Uncle Elrod had a '36 Chevy Panel Wagon. Uncle Elrod's flat bottom boat stuck out a little ways so the back doors would not close, but otherwise it fit pretty nice, so we took Uncle Elrod's truck.

One time my daddy, Uncle Troy and Uncle Elrod was going fishing on the Tombigbee. All of them were hitting the shine pretty good. My daddy curled up in the bottom of the boat and went to sleep. And Uncle Elrod went to sleep too, but he was driving.

He ran off the road into some tall wet grass. He jerked the steering wheel and spun that old panel truck around real fast. That boat just shot out of the back, it didn't turn over or nothing and it slid across that wet grass for a long ways.

Uncle Elrod (who was now wide awake) and Uncle Troy (who had been wide awake all along was now practically sober) got to looking for Daddy all though that deep grass and they finally decided to look in the boat.

There Pop was, still in the boat, still sleeping as if nothing had happened. Uncle Troy went to hollering, "He's dead, we done killed him, He's dead."

Daddy rose up and said, "What you carrying on so about." Uncle Troy nearly 'bout jumped out of his skin. My Daddy would always tell that story and laugh and laugh. It would make you laugh just to hear Pop tell the story.

Well, Uncle Elrod said we had all been working pretty hard so we would just have to take a little time off and go fishing.

Did I tell you Uncle Elrod and My Daddy were partners in a sawmill? My Daddy finally sold out his

interest in the whole thing to Uncle Elrod, but he kept on working for him. Uncle Elrod supported the whole dang family.

Even C.C. and I worked ever since I can remember at that old mill. We started out doodling sawdust. You may not know what that is. It's a kind of a technical term around us sawmill folks. That's when you take a big scoop to shovel sawdust away from the dust chain. You can shovel and shovel but that sawdust just keeps on coming.

But we made good money. Uncle Elrod paid us both \$2.00 dollars a week. No sir-ree, ain't nothing wrong with that. But later on he hired us to stack his lumber. That was a small mill and Uncle Elrod was the sawyer. Buddy, when he got that little mill to humming he could turn out the lumber. It wasn't nothing for him to turn out 12,000 board feet a day. If you don't know how much lumber that is, I would invite you to stack it for a few days. It's a back breaking bunch that's how much it is!

We got paid \$4.00 a week each for stacking lumber. Uncle Elrod said we were the best stackers he ever had because we never left any lumber laying on the ground overnight or over a weekend. We kept up with that mill every day.

But just like the dust from the dust chain, that lumber just kept on coming and coming. Anyways, you can probably figure out why me and C.C. were so excited about Uncle Elrod taking us on that fishing trip for a few days.