

The Snake and the Scar



If I live to be two hundred and have Alzheimer's, I'll never forget that day. It's burned into my brain, not to mention the scar I still have on my arm.

It was the summer I turned ten. I had taken off into the woods for a quiet walk, something I did quite often. The woods were my safe ground. I felt comfortable there.

This particular day was no different. I was walking on the trail I usually take (I had probably made the things I walked it so much). I heard a snap to my left and turned to face the biggest wild hog I had ever seen. Despite everything my daddy taught me about wild animals, especially hogs, I turned and bolted down the trail. The hog followed suit, snorting and tearing up the ground with its hooves as it chased me down. I was screaming bloody murder, scared out of my mind.

I ran harder than I ever had or have since. Just when I thought this thing was going to catch me and rip me to shreds, I saw a copperhead coiled on the trail about fifty feet ahead of us. I gathered all my strength and burst forward toward the snake, causing him to go on the defensive and prepare to strike. At the last second, I cut hard right off the trail. The snake lunged forward, fangs bared, hitting the hog in the side of the head. In an instant, the hog forgot about me and set to work on the snake.

I took off again, over to the right of the trail towards the dirt road my family used as a driveway for the holler. I got far enough from the hog and snake brawl and sat down, leaning against an old oak tree.

“Man that was really close,” I said out loud, then began laughing to

myself. I remember thinking that I would probably remember that event for the rest of my life.

I had no clue.

As I was sitting against that tree, listening to the sounds of the country and feeling that cool summer breeze, I heard a faint sound off to my left. I stopped and listened for a minute and sure enough, I heard it.

Crying.

“Someone is crying,” I thought. It seemed to be very sorrowful and I had to go investigate. I walked closer to the sound, but I was careful to make any noise. I didn't want to make a bad situation worse by startling them.

I stuck my head around a large pine and saw him. He was an old man, gray hair on the side of his head and bald on top. He had tears streaming down his aged and weathered face and he was sobbing very loudly. My eyes slowly dropped to his hands in his lap. They were tightly wrapped around a 30.06 rifle.

I froze.

“What has he done with that? What is he going to do? Is that why he's crying?” All of these thoughts began racing through my mind, but I just stood there, halfway behind a tree, eyes glued to that gun.

All of sudden, the man tossed his head back. “God forgive me!” he screamed at the top of his lungs. Squeezing his eyes tight, he stuck the barrel of the rifle in his mouth. He let out a few muffled cries as his shaky hands fumbled for the trigger.

I stepped all the way out from behind the tree. I wanted to scream, to

help him, to keep him from doing it, but I just stood the like a deer in headlights. Silent and still.

BOOM!

I'll never forget the two seconds it took for the inside of his head to cover the ground where he sat. He slumped over silently, blood slowly pooling out of him and soaking into the sand. I remember looking all the way through the hole as I stood there in shock.

And then the burning started.

I looked at my left arm and saw blood. A lot of it. It had stained the whole sleeve of my shirt and part of the sleeve was ripped. Somehow, I turned and walked the quarter mile to the dirt road and the mile back home silently.

Momma saw me walking down the drive and came barreling out the front door, howling like a hound dog. She scooped me and and run me into the bathroom inside. She ripped my shirt off and stuck my whole arm under the cold water tap.

Boy, I really felt that burning then. It took over my whole arm, all the way down to my hand and I started to cry. Momma called her cousin from down the road, since he was the doctor for our area of the county. He came real quick and could tell what happened right off.

“Who shot you, son?” he demanded.

“I don't know, sir,” I replied. “I mean, I know who it was, but I don't know him, sir.”

Both Momma and Doc looked confused, so I took a deep breath and

told them the story. When I was done, both sat looking at me with wide eyes. Doc shook his head and rubbed his forehead, then got up and made a phone call to the Sheriff and let him know what happened.

The Sheriff and the undertaker took over an hour to get to our house. I walked them down the dirt road and into the woods where the old man lay.

“Shit,” said the Sheriff when we came up to him. He took off his hat and rubbed his brow. “I’m sorry you had to see that son. Go on back to the house with your momma and I come down after you’ve had some supper.”

I turned and walked with my momma back home. She held me close and cried the whole way. All I wanted to do was forget. Years have passed. I’ve learned and forgotten many things, but I still see that gray hair and sad face crying so sorrowfully at night.

And I cry.