

Squirrel Tales and Cow Poo

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Instructor: Mr. Wade Heaton

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I had gotten rained out from work around 6:30 am on a Tuesday morning in February 2004. I came home and made another pot of coffee. Standing in my kitchen, leaning against the counter, I could hear the rain battering my concrete driveway outside. The sound of the rain was immensely relaxing; it came within an ace of being hypnotizing. Gazing out my kitchen window, smelling the freshly brewed coffee, a childhood memory suddenly burst into my head. I immediately ran to my dining room table and sat down to write.

One early mid October Saturday morning, in Walker, La, 1982, I awoke to the sounds of pots and pans softly bumping against one another in our small country farmhouse. The aroma of fresh brewed coffee and biscuits baking in the oven lingered in the air and wafted into my bedroom. Momma was cooking breakfast for my brother and I, as she did every Saturday morning.

As I slowly rolled off the side of my bed, I heard my stomach growling in anticipation of the hearty meal being prepared. I pulled up my blue jeans, put on my favorite blue-checked flannel shirt, and slipped my cowboy boots on. Holding my arms above my head and stretching, I gave out an early growl, followed by a yawn.

"Is that you, Cecil?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"See if Ty 's up, it's 5:30, and breakfast is almost ready."

As I walked into my brother's room, he was still lying in the bed half asleep. When I entered the room, Merle Haggard's "Sing Me Back Home" was playing on the radio that he fell asleep to the night before.

"Hey! You gett'n' up?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Mama said breakfast was almost ready. You still want to go huntin' don't you?"

"Yeah, I'm goin'."

"Well, come on! I'm goin' to eat."

"Ok! I'll be there in a few minutes."

I slowly lumbered into the kitchen rubbing my eyes, still sleepy and tired. I took a seat at the snack bar and waited patiently to taste the deliciously smelling breakfast.

"Mornin' baby," My mom said, as she fixed our plates.

"Mornin'."

"Are you and Ty goin' to the stock yard with me this mornin'? They're havin' a big cattle sale in Amite, La., and I wanted to go get a couple more calves."

"No ma'am. We're goin' squirrel huntin' behind Uncle Richard's in that big oak flat."

"Well, I didn't wanna' go by myself, but if ya'll goin' huntin' then I guess I'll have to."

"Sorry!"

"Oh, that's ok. Ya'll go' head, just be sure the field gets plowed today and be careful not to shoot towards Richard's house."

"I know mama. We know bettern' at."

My brother Ty finally made it into the kitchen, and we all sat down to eat. Breakfast was simply scrumptious, with hot buttered biscuits, fresh bacon, yard eggs, and last but not least, a hot cup of coffee to wash it all down.

"Ty, 'fore you and Cecil go huntin', I need ya'll to help me hook up the trailer."

Ty nodded his head, 'yes' since his mouth was full of food, and he knew better than to talk with food in his mouth.

"Do ya think you'll be able to back the truck up?"

Desperately trying to swallow, Ty said, "I can try. If Cecil guides me back, I think I can do it."

"If you can't, I will."

"You can't drive, boy!"

"Neither can you, Ty!"

"Well, at least I've drove before!"

"Yeah! 'Round the field while I was loadin' hay!"

"Shut up, Cecil!"

"You shut up!"

"Hey! Hey! Ya'll behave!" yelled mama, "Cecil, Ty is driving! You just help guide him back to the trailer, understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

One thing my brother and I learned as kids was not to talk back. We could speak our piece, but when Mama spoke, there was no arguing. The best choice was to simply say, "yes, ma'am," as I did. My brother was only thirteen and beginning to drive. I was twelve and desperately wanted to learn, but instead had to ride or watch.

After eating, we hooked the trailer up for mama. As much as I hated to admit it, Ty done just fine at driving, and I done a pretty good job making him look good! Afterwards, we went inside, got our shotguns, and headed out into the woods behind our house. As we walked toward our Uncle Richard's place through the woods, I could hear the gravel in our driveway crunching beneath the tires of mama's truck. The sound of gates clanging together on the trailer echoed through the woods as she pulled out of the driveway.

We quietly slipped through the woods, watching the treetops for movement. After twenty minutes of walking, we found ourselves just where we wanted to be, surrounded by enormous Pin Oak and White Oak trees that were bearing an abundance of acorns. It was perfect for squirrel hunting. The dew flickered in the twilight of the rising sun, as a light north wind blew the smell of autumn through the woods. An occasional falling acorn echoed through the still woods as it struck the leaf covered forest floor below. All we needed now was to see a few squirrels. Then as suddenly as if someone opened a cage door, squirrels came from everywhere.

My brother and I began to shoot. We were ripping the trees to shreds with lead, shooting anything that moved and not hitting very much. After our "war" was over, we had killed nine between the two of us. Not bad for fifty shots, or two boxes of shotgun shells. We had saved our allowance to buy a box of shells for Saturday morning. I didn't plan on shooting my entire box of shells, but what the hell, it was worth it. We sure had fun, although our shoulders paid the price.

When we arrived back home, the dreaded task of cleaning our kill was all we had to do before we could watch Saturday morning cartoons. We managed to get the squirrels skinned, bagged, and put in the freezer. Of course, we saved the tails to hang out and dry. These were our trophies. After they dried and got stiff, we sometimes pinned them to our caps and played in the woods pretending to be Daniel Boone.

As the morning passed and afternoon arrived, Mama drove down the driveway with three half-breed Brahma calves. I could tell they were crossed with Brahmas by the slight hump between their front shoulders, their long ears, and the long flapping skin beneath their necks. They were a bit wild and slightly nervous from the noisy ride home. When Mama got out of the truck, we could tell she was a little angered. We were told the night before, as well as that morning, to plow the rye-grass field, but we hadn't done it.

"Did ya'll kill anything this mornin'?"

"Yes, Ma'am. We kilt nine," said Ty.

"Ya'll must a' been gone a long time. I don't see my field plowed!"

Ty looked at me to give a good excuse.

"No ma'am, just a couple a' hours. Ty wouldn't help me hook up the disc."

"What? You liar! You been sittin' on the couch watchin' cartoons all mornin'!"

"Have not!"

"Have too!"

"That's enough, you two!" yelled Mama. "Ya'll unload these calves in the barn and get your asses on that tractor. It's one o'clock. Ya'll got a lot a' work to do."

Like the twins we were always accused of being, we replied together, "Yes, ma'am."

Mama backed the trailer up to the front of the catch pen. My brother and I closed all the stable doors so the calves wouldn't go in them. Mama got out of the truck and told us to give the calves feed, hay, water, and to leave the truck there. She would get it later. She was going inside to relax for a while and start supper.

We herded the calves out of the trailer and into the hallway of the barn and shut the gate. We did as Mama directed us. The calves were in the hallway of the barn. We had put the feed,

hay, and water in the catch pen. The hallway gate separates the catch pen from the barn. When we opened the gate, the calves ran out into the catch pen kicking, bucking, and trotting around like wild beasts. Then Ty got a rather fun idea!

"Wanna have a rodeo?"

"Are you crazy? We gotta plow the field or we gonna catch a whoopin!"

"Mama ain't gonna know. She's in the house. You jus' scared!"

"I ain't scared!"

Hesitant to reply, knowing we would probably get into trouble, I replied,

"Get a rope!"

Ty grabbed a throw rope, and I closed the hall gate so the calves would stay in the catch pen. After a few attempts, he managed to rope one. We dragged it to the front of the barn and pinned it between the gate on the shoot and the barn. I climbed the gate and lowered myself onto this half wild, three-hundred pound bull calf. I took the rope in my right hand and held my left arm in the air. The calf began kicking, bucking, and pounding me into the barn.

"Open the damn gate!"

Ty opened the gate and off we went.

"Ye haw! Ride'm cowboy. Hang on, Cecil!"

With me hanging on for dear life, the calf slammed into the catch pen fence, dragged me down the partially rotten boards we used for fence, tripped over the feed trough, and threw me into a huge pile of cow manure. Ty was laughing hysterically and so was I. Although I landed backside in the manure, it was still hilarious.

Still laughing, he asked, "Are you alright?"

"A lil' scraped up and full a' shit! But I'm alright."

"Ha, ha, ha! You got it all over the back of your shirt."

"I know, and man does it stink! Damn, mama's gonna kill me. Oh well, it sure was fun.

Ok, your turn."

"Rope one, I ain't scared, lil' brother!"

"The rope's still on him, Ty, all we gotta do is catch him."

"Well get the rope, cowboy!"

I grabbed the rope; we wrestled the calf up against the barn and pinned it with the gate.

"Damn, you stink! Don't get that shit on me!"

"Yeah! Well let's see how good you smell after you get bucked off."

"Ain't gonna happen, cowboy! Ain't gonna happen!"

"We'll see. Now get your ass on that crazy bastard 'fore we get caught!"

Ty got on, I opened the gate, and away they went. Kicking, bucking, snorting and farting they went, straight toward the water trough. The calf tried to jump it, but didn't quite make it. Ty fell, and luckily avoided falling directly in. The calf had kicked over the water and Ty fell into the spilled water. He was soaking wet. I laughed so hard. He was dripping with muddy, shitty water, and I was covered in manure and, wouldn't you know, here came Mama.

"Oh shit! Ty, I think we're in trouble!"

"What would give you that idea?"

"Well look at us, we're..."

"Shut up! Shut up! Here she comes!"

"What the hell is goin' on? Look at choo two! What cha' all been doin,' Cecil? Why's the feed and water spilt all over the place?"

When my brother's eyes and mine met, I couldn't help but laugh. I tried not to, but the moment I did, so did he. Staring at the ground giggling, I decided I better tell the truth.

"We had a rodeo. I got throwed in cow poo and Ty got throwed into the water trough. We'll clean it up Mama! Please don't punish us, we's jus havin' fun!"

"Look at choo two; I can't believe this shit!"

Then Mama, giggling beneath her breath, couldn't help it and began laughing, and we laughed that much harder. What a sight we were! Mama said if she had film for her camera, she would have taken our pictures. But she had spent almost all of her money on the calves for beef that year. After the laughing was over, Ty and I had to clean up the mess we made. Mama did scold us, but we managed to escape the butt whipping due to the shape we were in. It was the highlight of her day. After spending four hours at a cattle sale, she needed a good laugh. After we cleaned up our mess, we attached the disc to the tractor and took turns plowing the field until dark so we could plant rye grass for the winter.

We grew up a little different from other kids. We seemed to struggle financially for quite awhile. Not having a father with us meant the three of us had to do everything around our small farm. Most of the time we were working before school, after school, and on the weekends. The work was hard, and our days were very long. (We didn't seem to mind, knowing Mama couldn't do it all.)

It's funny how sometimes the smallest detail can strike such a vivid memory. It was the coffee that did it. When the memory hit me, I knew I should start writing or else it would probably get lost in the back of my mind for another twenty-two years, or possibly forever.

I'm thankful to have captured this memory. It denotes a typical day in my childhood. As many young boys will do, my brother and I enjoyed ourselves every chance we could, even if it involved getting cow shit all over us.

Cecil Willie Sr. is an English major.

Mr. Heaton's comments on this paper:

Sometimes life can be surprising. To a veteran and full-time worker employed in the petro-chemical industry, Freshman English can be daunting. When non-traditional student Cecil Shayne Willie Sr. decided to find out if his life could be improved with a college degree, he never expected that he would fall in love with writing. Cecil's sophisticated frame of memories sparked by the smell of coffee and his humorous, ironic slant on "family fun" needed to be shared. He hopes to pursue a degree in English and even publish in the future. This is a good start.