

DUST

THE POTTERS

When we moved from town to the farm west of Thomas, R.E. and I already knew some of our neighbors, just a mile Southeast on the Silvers farm was Uncle Olen and Aunt Jennie Potter with their children A.L., Bud, and Don, although the boys were some older than me, Don and R.E. were the same age, also Dad and Uncle Olen were first cousins. So there was a lot of interaction between our families.

Uncle Olen farmed, drove the school bus, barbered in town, and did custom wheat cutting, plus he was an all around nice guy who could do almost anything he wanted to, ALMOST.

Soon after moving to the farm Dad decided it would be necessary to shingle the main chicken house roof so Ab, Dad, Mother, and Lee Welchel went to work.

Dad lifted the shingles up the ladder while Ab broke the bundles of wood shingles and carried them to Mother and Lee. R.E. kept them supplied with nails and drinking water. Of course I did the hard work of boss and tromping the shingles down so they would stay in place. While all this was going on Uncle Olen drove by on the way to town and stopped to see if Dad might need him to bring anything back when he returned.

While the work proceeded up on the roof Uncle Olen stepped up the ladder one rung at a time until he was level with the roof top so he just stepped over onto the roof while he was visiting with Dad.

"Ouch!" Lee shouted, as he hit his thumb with the hammer driving a shingle nail through his thumb.

Mother quickly looked at it, and said, "We better go to the house and take care of that thumb or it will get infected."

While Mother and Lee went to the house, Dad said, "Let's all go to the house for a cup of coffee and rest while Lee is being patched up."

Everyone climbed down from the top of the chicken house and started to the house when Uncle Olen shouted after us saying, "Wait a minute! I can't get down from here!"

"Go over to the ladder and come down." Ab replied.

I can't.

Why?

"I am afraid of heights." He explained.

DUST

So while Lee was bleeding to death everyone else went back to get Uncle Olen down from the six foot tall chicken house.

"Olen. If you are afraid of heights how did you get up there?" Ab ask.

I wasn't looking down when I went up there.

So it was that Uncle Olen could do many things and do them well as long as it didn't require him to climb up on anything higher than a church house step.

A few days later Mother stopped at the Potter farm to see if Aunt Jenney wanted to go with her to town and do their laundry together since the water West of town was so hard it wouldn't wash the clothes clean. When the pickup stopped in their yard, R.E. and I jumped out of the back to go see what Bud and Don were doing swinging shingles in the air out by their old log smoke house.

"Bud what are you doing?" R.E. ask.

"Batting bumble bees with a shingle." Bud replied.

Why?

To kill them so they won't sting anyone.

Oh. How do you do that?

Bud stopped his bumble bee batting business for a minute to come over where we were and explain how simple it all was.

"Well R.E., the way you do this job," he said, "first you take this shingle and go over there where those bumble bees are boring holes into the cedar logs of that smoke house. When one of them flies out, you bat him with the shingle. They really make a splatter when you hit them."

Bud went over to the wood pile picking up a shingle which he split to make another bee bat about three inches wide.

Can I have a bat Bud?

No! Gary, you're too little and this is serious business, but you can go out there and peel the paint off of that old school bus body if you want to.

Not being particularly interested in peeling more paint off from the old bus I set down on the running board of the pickup to watch the great sport of bumble bee batting while Bud stepped up to bat first so R.E. could see just how it was done by a professional bumble bee batter boy.

"Bud, what if you miss the bee?" R.E. ask.

DUST

Bud looked apprehensively at R.E., then explained, "R.E., you DON'T MISS!"

Bud pulled his bat back waiting for the next bee to try an escape. Just then one came out. Buzzzzzz. Swishhhh. Pop, the bee flew back bouncing off the log wall of the smoke house.

OK Don it's your turn.

"There he comes!" Don shouted. Bud turned and swung. Swishhhhhh. Pop. But there was two. Swishhhhhh. Nothing! Bud had only fanned the air. Buzzzzzz the bee flew in a high circle all the while picking up speed. Bud threw the shingle aside and started to run for the house. The bee zeroed in on the petulant perpetrator, all of a sudden that bumble bee looked as big as a chicken, everyone else remained frozen in place as the bee hit Bud in the back of the head with a stinger as long as a pool cue, knocking Bud down face first into the dirt as if he had been hit with a bat himself.

After a lot of hollering and commotion Mother loaded R.E. and I into the pickup truck for the trip to the laundry.

As we drove out of the yard Bud was setting on the porch step with dirt still on his face and a bath towel full of ice on top of his head which was so swollen his eyes were almost shut.

That's how I learned the ten rules of the bumble batting game.

- #1 You must bat a thousand.
- #2 If you miss, you can't make a home run.
- #3 You should wear a batting helmet.
- #4 If you make an error, the game is over.
- #5 The looser is always a sore head.
- #6 If you try to slide home, the bib of your overalls will catch a lot of dirt and stop you.
- #7 Shingles are best used to shingle a roof.
- #8 You can only hit a bumble bee in flight once, but a bumble bee can hit you in flight several times.
- #9 Bumble bees do not like this game.
- #10 Everyone is too little to play this game.

Bud was older than most of the rest of the boys in the neighborhood so the rest of us thought him to be quite the genius. Some of his inventions worked for a little while and some only worked until Aunt Jennie saw them.

Mother and Aunt Jennie were both raised in town so they had some sympathy for each other. Mother longed for the brick paved streets of Weatherford with their shade trees and neatly trimmed lawns, but Aunt Jennie mostly missed the indoor plumbing of town living especially the large comfortable bathtub with its hot and cold running water.

DUST

Mother tried in vain to plant some trees, vines, and strawberries, in the hard dry land of the farm, but the fact remained that the only things which could survive was the old Mulberry tree by the carriage house, one wild rose bush, and the volunteer Indian peach tree.

Aunt Jennie was somewhat more successful, after becoming totally exasperated with the round tin washtub she took a trip to Oklahoma City returning with the ultimate for a lady of the farm, an object that even caused Mother to cast an eye of envy and spoken of with admiring reverence, an ARKANSAS BATH TUB. Unlike the small round tub everyone had which was the share-croppers version of water torture, this ultra modern bathing apparatus was made of extra strong galvanized iron shaped in an oval about three foot long, with sides about twelve inches high, and a handle on each end, just in case the owner should be crude enough as to hang it on a nail on the wall instead of leaving it in the middle of the floor for everyone to admire.

Like every other home the world over wash day inevitably came around, so Aunt Jennie went to town to wash the clothes because the well water West of town was too hard to do laundry.

Bud took one look at the new tub and like any great inventor Bud did not see a bathtub. Oh no, it was obvious to him that anything that could keep water on the inside, could also keep water on the outside. It was transportable. It had handles. It would fit in the livestock tank. **THAT THING IS A POOR BOY'S BOAT!**

Out of the house and across the yard to the stock tank the little boat went. Once in the tank all that was needed to make it go was a paddle, so in fine mental form Bud quickly decided an old bumble bee bat would do just fine, since he no longer had any use for the bumble bee bat.

An Arkansas bathtub boat floated one day.
A bumble bee bat for propulsion they say.
A livestock tank in which Bud can play.
Aunt Jennie's in town for the long wash day.

A day of fun in the sun is here to stay.
An Arkansas bathtub Bud can paddle away.
And another paddling is sure to happen today.
Aunt Jenny's wash is done and she's on the way.

The first try at floating his new found boat wasn't extremely successful. The bottom of his boat was too flat causing it to turn over. But a good inventor is never defeated on the first try, with a saw, some boards, a hammer and some nails, Bud soon had some nice looking outriggers affixed to the unstable craft. Back in the water, it works! Almost. The last obstacle to success was overcome with a bean can to bail out water that seemed to trickle in around the small nail holes. Now everything is just fine.

Just fine. Until Aunt Jenny drove in from a hard day's clothes washing and saw her new bathtub with Bud in it floating in the stock tank. Things were less fine real quick when she saw the boards nailed on the bottom of her bath tub!

DUST

A week later Uncle Olen stopped in at our farm house to ask Dad when he thought the wheat would be ready for him to come up and cut.

Olen, are Bud and Jennie talking to each other again?

Well. Jennie's doing a lot of talking, but Bud isn't saying much yet.

Well at least Jennie is talking.

Yes. Especially right before, during, and after, she takes her bath.

Well. Maybe she will get over it soon.

I don't think so Frank. The bad part about it is that Bud is a tinker kind of person and Jennie is a serious person. He is always going to tinker, and she is never going to understand it. So I'll just stay out of their way.

Well don't worry Olen. Some day Bud will probably tinker his way into making more money than all the rest of us put together.

Yes, and Jennie will swear up and down that he did it by mistake.

Forty-five years later, after Bud was a successful Pharmacist, Farmer, and Business man, I went back to my home town for the Pioneer Day celebration. There in the center of the Joe Sewell City Park, Bud had his NEW INVENTION. Two mules going around in a circle turning the largest ice cream freezer I have ever seen. Bud handed out ice cream cones to the children, great big ice cream cones.

Someday, if there are museums in Heaven, there will be a museum of Grace. In it there will be an Ark, and a Cross of wood. There will also be a museum of innocence. In it there is bound to be a shingle bumble bee bat, and Arkansas bathtub full of holes with outriggers attached, and a mule powered ice cream freezer. FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE.

DUST