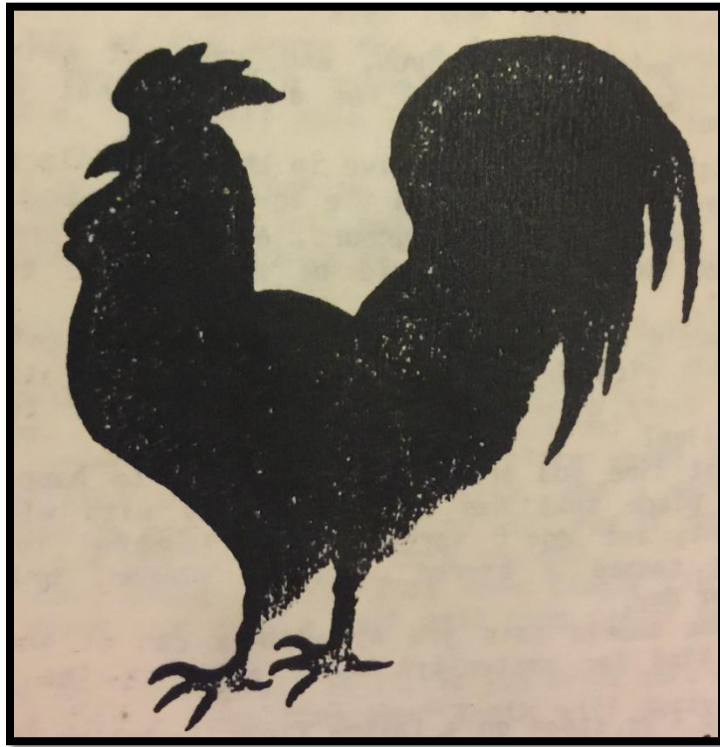


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DEMON THE RED ROOSTER



Going to my Grandparents farm was always a lot of fun for R.E. and me, there was all sorts of things we didn't have on the sharecropper farm where we lived such as shade trees, a fruit orchard, watered garden, a fenced yard with real grass, but there was also something else, DEMON, the meanest Road Island Red rooster God ever gave breath to.

Aunt Grace [Hooper Dickerson], my Dad's youngest sister, was often there on the weekends when she wasn't at collage or later teaching school in Piedmont.

One weekend in the spring, a time when the Rooster is very protective of the hen house, Ma told us boys, "R.E. if you or Gary need to go outside the yard fence, be sure to take this broom stick with you because that old red rooster is very cranky and if you don't have something to hold him back or hit him with he will flog and scratch you up with his claws. And don't allow him to jump high enough to scratch at your eyes."

Of course as soon as she said that, I needed to go down that long narrow trail to the small house just past the hen house. It was kind of like someone telling you that there is no water and you suddenly become very thirsty.

Out on the long screened in back porch I stood for a long moment looking at the broom stick leaning against the icebox while listening to the slow drip, drip, of the ice melting into the catch pan that seemed to keep saying "Take the stick, take the stick." No! A real red blooded American

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boy would never take a club out to fight a chicken. Out the door I went careful to look making sure I knew where Demon The Red Rooster was lurking.

Just outside the West yard fence Demon was under a Walnut tree picking up small rocks to fill his craw. (I'll just slip out the yard gate real quiet and he will never know.)

Reaching the North gate without Demon noticing me I reached out, opening the gate, but when I started closing it behind me the gate squeaked a little and Old Demon's head came up real fast alerted that an intruder had entered his personal domain, with eyes red, and full of evil, Demon started his act of defense with an all out attack.

Turning loose of the gate I started running up the path toward the outhouse, looking to my left I could see Demon was running stride for stride with me, only fifty foot away, but not to worry he couldn't cross the angle and catch me before I could reach the little house just past his hen house, I'd be inside before he could reach the door.

(Ha, ha, Demon, I beat you!)

Reaching up to pull the door open.

"Just a minute." Aunt Grace said.

(Just a minute? My foot. By then I will be clawed, flogged, pecked, and eaten alive.) PANIC TIME.

Quickly running into the Currant patch and diving under the bushes, then crawling as fast as I could the fifty foot to the other side of the Currant patch, then into the Lilac hedge, and out into the North drive looking behind me to see if Demon was following, but he had ran around the bushes and was now standing in the middle of the North drive waiting for me. Being cut off from making a dash around the hen house, I ran across the drive, through the gate into the orchard, while Demon followed, wings stretched out, and neck extended.

Running West through the orchard, I looked sideways at Demon, he was running parallel with me so I stopped. Then he turned to come straight at me, but he was so intent on keeping his eyes on me that he didn't see the bottom wire of the fence and he ran straight into the wire. Catching himself by the neck on the wire both feet flew into the air causing Demon to do a backward flip landing in a puff of dust so hard an fast that he didn't have time to close his eyes or mouth. With blurred vision he tried to clear his mouth of dust and nostrils of mud so he could breathe.

I knew he would be stalled long enough for me to find a safe place to hold up until he calmed down. Without looking back again I ran around the barn, jumped into the cattle chute, crossed the feed lot, climbed the lot fence, ran across a soggy cow lot, and out the milk gate, then across the turnaround to the safest place I could see, the windmill tower. After climbing to the second brace on the tower I stopped to look around and see where Old Demon might be lurking to ambush me again. Hanging there on the windmill, I wondered if it were possible for a six year old to have a heart attack.

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Demon was still wandering around behind the hen house trying to figure out what had happened to him.

Aunt Grace was strolling across the yard toward the house just as if there wasn't a problem in the whole world.

(I'll swear if we don't find someone to marry her and take her away from here one of her tricks is going to cause me to get hurt some day!)

Later back in the safety of the house Aunt Grace said, "Gary. I'm back."

Me too. Ma where did you say that chicken club was at?

Honey, it's right next to the icebox.

R.E. do you want to go with me?

Yes I'll go with you. What's the matter, are you afraid of Old Demon?

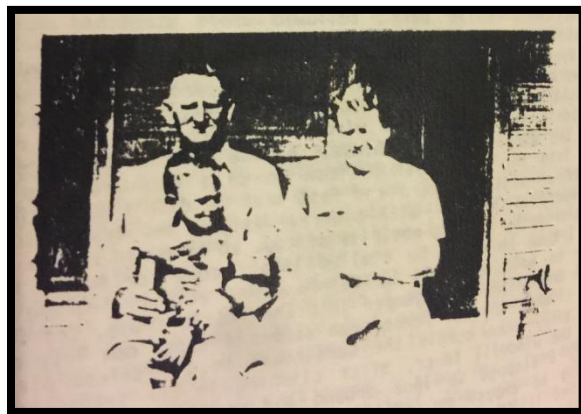
Who? Me afraid of a chicken? Don't be silly.

Ma did something that always made us feel real important. Every other time we were going to be there for Sunday dinner, or on our birthday, we were allowed to decide what we wanted for dinner. That week it was R.E.'s turn to choose, but next week it would be mine. Old Demon only had seven days to live.

There isn't anything that tastes better to a six year old boy than Grandma's homemade noodles and an Old Red Rooster.

Demon just thought he was the meanest thing on the hill, but he hadn't met Ma with a leg hook in one hand and a broom stick in the other.

Demon was kind of tough, even stewed with noodles, but I enjoyed every bite of him.



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