

DUST

JUMP

Monday was always wash day, when Mother went to town to wash the clothes at Miller Laundry, although most people did their laundry at home. It wasn't practical for the people West of town because the well water was too hard to clean the clothes and the soft rainwater in the cistern was too precious for drinking, cooking, and house cleaning, to be used for laundry.

By the time R.E. and I were six and nine years old we didn't like to make that wash day trip because it was so boring to stay at the hot steamy laundry all day so we would ask if we could stay home. Mother would be glad to allow us to stay home, after all, it gave her a day without having to watch us all the time. "What a break! All day without the kids." And all she had to do was stand over a hot wash tub for six or eight hours.

R.E. loaded the baskets of laundry for Mother with a few extra blankets to make sure she had plenty of laundry to do, then he and I loaded the baskets into the car just to help her get along as soon as possible, then we would have the whole farm all by ourselves.

Mother drove out of sight while R.E. stood looking around the corner of the house.

She's gone, let's do it!

I was already running to the barn for the large roll of binder twine that Dad kept in the granary, just when R.E. ran into the house to retrieve the new thin bedspread.

This is going to be the best parachute in the whole world, I was thinking as I returned with the ball of binder twine. After all, no one else has a pink parachute with little crooked rows of fuzzy things all over it.

How long do you want the lines R.E.?

About eight foot each, but you better double them so they don't break when we jump.

Pulling out about what I thought was about sixteen foot, I started cutting it on the cellar top with the shingling hatchet, while R.E. tied knots in the corners of the bedspread, then we tied the twine around the knots so they wouldn't slip loose.

I'll bet John Wayne would like to have a pink parachute like this one.

Gary, John Wayne wouldn't have a pink parachute!

Why?

Never mind.

Well he would! You don't know.

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"Gary!" R.E. said, in disgust.

R.E. you don't know everything. They probably never offered him a pink parachute.

"OK, bring the twine." he said, as he started off toward the tall Dutch barn with our new parachute rolled up under his arm.

Running along behind him as I passed the granary door pitching the twine inside asking, "Who is going first?"

I better go first.

(Somehow I knew he was going to say that.)

After climbing to the top of the barn, R.E. went over to the edge of the gable to look.

That is a long way down!

R.E. we are on top of the barn you know.

Don't you think I know anything?

No.

Oh! Here hold the center of the parachute while I put my legs through the lines.

Pulling the loops up his legs then holding the lines above his shoulders, he looked back at me.

When I say go, you throw the parachute out over the edge! OK?

Did you say OK or Go?

No! Hold everything! You don't understand.

All right I understand, when you jump to your death I'm suppose to help you by turning loose real quick.

OK.

Ready?

Ready!

Go!

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R.E. jumped and I turned loose as he plummeted out of sight. Easing over to the edge so I could see, far below there was a small lump under a pink parachute on the ground.

Did you break your leg?

R.E. emerged from under the edge to reply, "No, but that was a little bit too fast. Come down here, we need to tie some lines to the center of the long sides so it will hold more air."

After refitting the parachute with more lines we were ready for another try.

On top of the barn again R.E. unrolled the lines and started putting it on again.

Gary, you better let me try first, you might hurt yourself.

Not as bad as I'm going to hurt you if you don't quit hogging up all of the jumps!

Just one more test jump OK?

Just one more, then it's my turn or I won't hold for you anymore.

OK. I don't know why you always have to be so stubborn when we are having fun.

R.E. jumped again as I threw out the end of the parachute behind him, it opened in full bloom, while he floated slowly to the ground below, then collapsing over him as he touched down, throwing it off from over his head shouting, "Perfect! Now come down and we will tie a line to the center so we can pull it back up."

What do you mean we? I'm getting tired of climbing up and down while you ride. You bring the twine up with you and I'll wait, and don't think this new change is going to buy you another test ride!

After tying a knot in the center, then tying a long piece of twine to it, we were ready for some real serious parachute jumps just like John Wayne did in the movies.

Slipping my legs through the side loops and holding the stabilizer lines, I made my first jump. When the parachute opened it was the most exciting ride I had ever had and could hardly wait for my next turn.

After about four hours of climb and jump, the thrill of the ride was just as much fun as the first time. Then just as I went over the edge for about the one hundredth time, R.E. shouted, "Mother!!!"

Looking toward the house there was Mother's car just pulling up to a stop. Inside was a very pale faced woman with her mouth so wide open it would have held a softball.

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Suddenly the fear of real combat on the ground gripped my every thought, overwhelming enemy odds were evident, but worst of all was the thought that my support troop would probably turn tail and run. It was certain there would be no quarter and no mercy. Surrender was out of the question, capture would mean death by torture. Most men in combat at least had their Mother to support them and pray for them, but my position was hopeless, she was the dreaded enemy on the ground with eyes shooting deadly streams of daggers into the air straight at me. And that blasted parachute seemed to just hang there leaving me exposed. The enemy would surely leap out of her combat transport and cross the one hundred yard gap between us allowing her to be standing on the ground beneath me by the time I could touch town. I began to fight the tangled lines to free myself as I hit the ground and made a roll, there were words in the air but in the excitement I couldn't understand what she said, but I knew that they meant retreat to a safer place now!

Jumping up in a run, there was a sound of ratt-a-tat-taat above my head. Looking up R.E. was sliding down the roof over the shingles like he was on snow skies, just as I ran past the corner of the barn R.E. cleared the eve landing on a pile of barn cleanings, slosh! He hit the pile and was in full stride running beside me, shoulder to shoulder we made a dive through the wires of the lot fence, made a roll, and was up making our orderly retreat again. (Just as I thought. My support troop had turned tail and ran. If I hadn't been smart enough to know both my enemy and my support, I could have been massacred back there at the landing zone.)

Where are we going?

I don't know, my legs are just running, and they won't stop.

Do you think she's going to be mad?

Gary, you know darned well she is mad or you wouldn't be running with me!

Maybe we can join the circus.

We'll probably run across one before I will be able to stop my legs.

Do you think Dad will be able to make a peace treaty? Or will we ever be able to go home again?

I hope so. Let's go look at the house from the other side of the farm.

OK with me. Do you think she will come after us with the car?

Maybe we better stay in the canyon.

Do you really think she is that mad about her new bedspread?

HELL YES she's mad!

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R.E. and I wandered around in the canyon all afternoon, occasionally going out on a hill to see if Dad had came home to make peace for us so we could go home after he calmed her down about her new bedspread.

After a very long afternoon we saw Dad's truck at the house.

Gary, let's take the cows home. Dad is there now.

By the time we drove the cows to the house Dad had Mother calmed down enough that she allowed us to live.

For several years R.E. and I were the only boys in the county to have a pink bedspread with tattered corners, sides, and torn threads in the middle. We were very happy to be alive just to sleep under a pink parachute.

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