

DUST

## COCONUT TRAP



In the late winter of 1946, Dad rented five acres of creek bottom land from Mr. Gene Taylor for the tomato field that year.

I was seven years old and R.E. was ten.

In the early spring Dad took Pa's Ford tractor to the tomato field to plow the ground for the spring planting of the tomato plants when the young hotbed tomato plants were about eight inches high. On Dad's birthday, May 11th, we always started transplanting them to the field.

Dad and Mother would stake the tomato rows with binder twine to make good straight rows, then Dad would take a hole puncher and start punching holes down the row about three foot apart and three inches deep. Mother would stand the young plants into the holes pulling dirt up around them while R.E. and I took buckets to the creek to fill with water so we could use a bean can and pour water around the plants to cement the roots into the ground.

That year the cutworms were very bad. They would move into the field at night and cut the plants off just about ground level which meant we would have to replace each destroyed plant.

After we had replanted the field twice Dad had only enough plants for one more planting of about three acres. Since there was one field of about two acres on the far side of the creek and a field of about three acres on the near side Dad decided to plant the two acre field to watermelons leaving him enough plants for one more planting of three acres.

With the cutworms being so bad Dad decided to wrap the tomato plant stems with cigarette papers at ground level that way when the cutworms came to the tomato plant they would find

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only dry paper causing them to pass the plant by without cutting the tender plants down. It was a slow tedious method of planting a field of tomatoes but the only way we were able to make a crop the summer of 1946.

Dad had injured his back working at the service station and had to wear a wide leather belt from his rib cage to his hips so that he was unable to bend over which made it even more difficult, however a good Fur Market with Russia and China made it possible for him to make a living hunting coon hides in the winter and farming tomatoes in the summer.

Spring planting was a good time to be together with family to work in the field in the morning, take a nap on a blanket under a shade tree in the heat of the day, go fishing at the creek, or check the mud along the creek banks for coon and bobcat tracks to see how good the fur crop would be the next winter and how many coon could be hunted and harvested without depleting the wildlife population too much.

That summer although we had a smaller tomato field than usual, no one else had any better luck because of the cutworm infestation, so the price for tomatoes stayed up enough to make a living from the smaller crop. On the other hand, the coon population was so dense that they destroyed the watermelon crop, a good indication that there would be a large amount of furs to be harvested in the coming winter if the weather would just be good and cold so the furs would all be number one pelts and bring top price when the fur buyer came down from St. Louis, Missouri late next winter.

Pa drove up to the tomato field early one morning to look over the tomato crop and see if we needed any help since he too had been good at tomato husbandry in years past.

Frank, how's your crop doing?

Dad, the tomato plants are tough enough that the cutworms aren't a problem now, but the coons are ruining my watermelons.

Well son, no watermelons for the summer means a lot of coon hides for the winter.

I know, but I would like to have both.

Let's go across the creek and see what they are doing.

Dad and Pa walked across the tomato field with me not far behind.

Pa what are you going to do about those coon ruining Dad's watermelons?

Son I don't think there's much we can do about them.

We crossed the creek into the watermelon patch.

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Pa look at what they are doing to Dad's watermelons, they have made a hole in every melon just big enough to reach in and pull the heart out as soon as the melon is about ripe.

Yes Gary, that's the way those bandits do it.

Frank, you might as well forget watermelons this year and take care of your tomato crop. Besides I have been over to Mr. Web's watermelon farm across the river and he is going to have a bumper crop so the price of watermelons is going to be pretty low this summer.

That's what I had decided, I'll take my watermelon crop from them next winter.

Dad and Pa both laughed, then walked back across the creek.

Well Frank, I wish I felt like helping you harvest that winter melon crop, but I just can't keep up with the hounds on a long hard run anymore.

I wish you could too.

"Pa can you raise watermelons in the winter?" I ask.

No, but you can harvest your melon crop in the winter, you see if the old bandits steal your melon crop in the summer, then you take their furs in the winter, because there is where your melon crop went.

Oh, I see. If they steal from you, then you just steal from them when the time comes for the weather to be cold enough for the hides to hold the hair into the pelt?

That's the way it works son.

Frank, these coon are so thick in here if they aren't thinned out there won't be a farmer within five mile of here that won't lose most of his chickens before the next winter is over.

I know, and I already have permission from the land owners around here to harvest those pelts.

That's good, I think I will bring a coconut trap up here and catch me a pet coon while they're still young.

OK, I'll check your trap for you.

Pa, what's a coconut trap?

Gary, I'll bring one back this afternoon and let you help me set it, then you'll see.

Pa drove away and Dad went back to hoeing the tomato field with Mother.

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Lunch time came so we all went to eat lunch in the car because the ants and bugs were so bad if you took it outside they would get into everything. Mother took the grub box out from the trunk of the car and handed everyone fried chicken, baked beans, coffee, tea, or whatever she had prepare for us.

R.E. had finished eating when he saw a young spring rabbit just over the pasture fence next to the car.

"Shhhh!" he said. "I'm going to catch that rabbit."

"R.E. you can't catch that rabbit." Mother said.

Oh Marvell, let him catch that rabbit if he wants to, at least he will be out of the car and quit shaking my coffee all over me.

I don't care if he chases it, but he can't catch it.

R.E. slipped out of the car and sneaked around to the fence. Once on the other side of the fence he turned on a fast burst of speed just as the rabbit ran off over the hill in fright with R.E. right behind him determined to run him down. "HELP! HELP!" R.E. shouted as he came running back over the hill twice as fast as he had ran away after the rabbit. Right behind him was a herd of Mr. Taylor's cattle chasing him, wide eyed with his hair and shirt tail straight out behind, R.E. reached the fence and made a headfirst dive over the fence, through the window of the car. Fried chicken, coffee, homemade pie, and ice tea all over everything. R.E. pulled himself up straight in the seat, and looked around at the cattle, which were standing by the fence.

"Son, did you catch that rabbit?" Dad ask.

No! They. They. I just, they.

I think if you would have ran as fast the other way as you came back, you would probably have overran that rabbit.

Everyone laughed. It was a good day.

Later in the afternoon, Pa returned from town and I ran over to his car to see what a coconut trap looked like.

Have you got it?

Yes, I have the coconut trap.

Pa stepped out of his car holding a coconut with a chain bolted to one end and a small hole about the size of a nickel drilled in the other end of the coconut shell.

Are you going to set it now?

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Yes, come with me and you can help.

How does it work?

Well Gary, a coon is pretty smart, but he's also greedy. Greed is stronger than intelligence, so you catch him by allowing him to have more than he can take.

How?

We'll tie this chain to a tree, then we'll scatter some of these small pieces of coconut meat on the ground. When the coons come into the watermelon patch tonight they'll find the pieces of coconut and eat them, but there will be pieces of coconut meat inside of the nut shell, those pieces are too big to come out, but the hole is too small for the big coons to reach into. Now if there is a small coon with them he'll reach in and grab a piece of coconut meat, but with the piece of coconut in his fist, he can't pull it back out, and he's too greedy to turn loose, so when we come back there he'll be trapped by his own greed, and we'll have a pet coon.

That is a good trick Pa, but I thought a trapped coon would chew his foot off to get free.

Not with this type of trap because it doesn't grab his leg so the circulation isn't cut off and his leg doesn't become numb enough that he can stand to bite himself.

OK, let's set the trap.

With the coconut trap set, Pa drove away returning the next morning to bag his pet coon.

After Pa left for home, I ask Dad, "Why don't we bring the radio up here to the tomato field so we can listen to music while we work?"

Gary, you have to plug that type of radio into an electrical plug-in for it to work.

We could nail a plug-in onto that Cottonwood tree, then we could listen to the radio.

(Years later when I was working as a helper for Mr. Ernest ("Ern") Horton, the local electrician, Dad said to me, "Son, I just knew the day you figured out how to get electricity out of a Cottonwood tree, that the world wouldn't be able to wait for you to become an electrician."

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