

THE BOY AND THE MOONSHINERS

By John F. Hall

To be honest with you, I confess that I really like the poet and writer Jesse Stuart. He wrote about all things in Eastern Kentucky. This is my true story about a boy, some moonshiners, a tiny steam tractor and a movie that I made 30 years ago. I gave away all of my VHS tapes and DVDs that I had of that movie. Then I remembered that I gave my oldest friend, Tom Vinson two DVDs many years ago. I hoped, by chance, that he kept those DVDs so this story could be told. I called Tom and asked if he still had those DVDs. He said he did. I told him that I would come over the next day around noon.

Tom Vinson is 92. Our friendship began in earnest back in 1983. We worked together for two years on the Trigg County Volume 1 History Book. He was the Committee Chairman. I served as the Historian for the Trigg County Historical and Preservation Society. I volunteered for that role. The Society knew that I had obtained a Kentucky Historical Marker for Golden Pond, over the objections of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). They had another task for me to help with a Kentucky Legacy project.

Several decades ago, the TVA wanted to make a documentary film about the Golden



Pond Moonshine Era. The TVA applied for a grant from the Kentucky Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund the project. The problem they faced was that no one on their staff knew anything about the moonshiners who once lived in Golden Pond. These moonshiners had no love for the ruthless TVA management that forced them off their land. The only person, to their knowledge, who interviewed former

moonshiners was this writer. I put some of the information that I had gained into the Trigg County History Book. A. (Pictured: Boyce Birdsong watching the fire on the still).

The TVA was given the grant to make the documentary, but it had no one with any expertise to direct the project. The other problem faced by the TVA is that my research published in the Trigg County History Book was copyrighted by the Trigg County Historical Society. They could not use it without the Society's permission. So the TVA approached the Historical Society and asked for its assistance. They also had the Land Between the Lakes Association request that the Historical Society cooperate in this project. The Historical Society Officers came to me and requested that I be the Project Director. I really did not want the job that paid nothing and would have me deal with

TVA officials. After some persuasion, I said I would complete the project only if I had final approval authority on the script. The TVA agreed to that requirement.

One requirement for receiving the grant called for a public demonstration of the making of the moonshine as it was done in the 1930s. From my research, I knew that the largest



moonshiner in the Golden Pond area was the late Joe Bogard. He distilled the best moonshine in Kentucky at that time. I also knew that he raised a boy named Billy Joe Hooks. He taught his ward how to distill the best moonshine that was in demand in many states. I married a girl from Golden Pond named Paula Oakley. Her grandfather, Chester Oakley, was involved in the trade. I lived in Golden Pond for just one year before I was forced out by the TVA. I was accepted in that community because of that marriage. (Pictured: Joe Bogard).

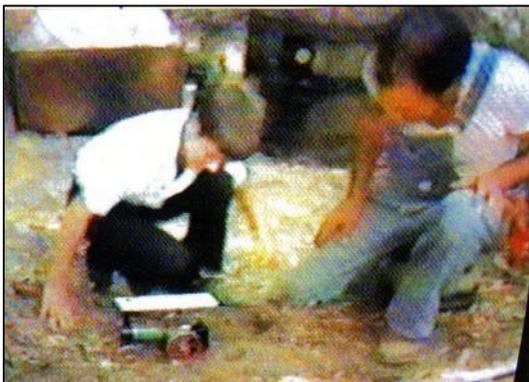
I was the Director for TVA's "The Golden Pond Moonshine Era, a Kentucky Legacy," but I also wanted to make a movie to prove that I destroyed the moonshine whiskey and the mash. A movie needs a story and I remembered



a Christmas gift that my sister gave me. She mailed me a Mamod miniature, live steam tractor when she was in the Air Force and stationed in England. The tractor has a tiny boiler that you fill with a little water. Steam is created when a wick, saturated with alcohol, is lit and inserted under the tiny boiler. Once it is hot enough to make steam, a tiny piston rotates a spring around one of the large tractor wheels that allows the tractor to move forward.

(Pictured: Billy Joe Hooks, Chief Moonshiner).

I wanted the tractor to be the focal point of the movie. I asked my nephew, Dale Garner,



who was six years old at the time, to play the role of the boy. The story line is that Dale gets separated from his parents and gets lost in the woods. He stumbles into the moonshiner's camp holding his toy tractor. They first put him to work pouring water into the mash barrels. One of the moonshiners befriends him and Dale tells him that his tractor is real and it runs on alcohol. The moonshiner gets some of the moonshine to make the tractor run. For the sake of the movie, I had to remove the spring

to keep the tractor from moving. (Pictured: Dale Garber and Arvil Birdsong).

One of the moonshiners discovers that Dale's parents are looking for him and that a Revenuer is with them. They decide to blind fold Dale and lead him out of their camp. Then they decide that they are about to get caught, and rather than let the Revenuer destroy their moonshine and mash, they would destroy it and run into the woods. The movie ends with the Revenuer coming into the camp, and then going after the moonshiners. That was my cameo performance.

This is the first time that I have been able to bring one of my stories to life by including a DVD of the movie involved in the story. I did not use a script for the movie. I used a storyboard to remind me what I wanted the boy and the moonshiners to do. Dale was a quick study. I just told him to get the moonshiner to help him get the tractor running. I enjoyed working with Dale, Billy Joe, Arvil and Boyce. After making the movie, I realized that my talent was not in being a movie director. It is in writing that I find motivation and satisfaction. The real joy is giving my stories to people that I admire and love.

To those who read this true story, never doubt that if you believe the incredible, you can do the impossible. Follow your dreams where ever they may lead you. David, the Shepherd boy, was probably 16 years old when he used his sling and hurled the small stone that killed Goliath. That small stone had about the same killing power of a .45 caliber round at close rang when it hit Goliath between his eyes. Just as the Philistines underestimated David, the TVA underestimated the people who once lived in the Golden Pond area. I helped make the TVA's Golden Pond Moonshine Era documentary to keep them from making a mockery of the former residents of that area. In the end, the TVA was fired from administering the LBL. I vividly remember sitting on the hood of my Chevy II and looking at the few remaining buildings in Golden Pond that soon would be bulldozed into the ground. I softly prayed, "God, please help me." David used a stone to defeat Goliath. I used a pen to defeat the TVA.

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