

DRIED LAND FISH

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'Writer's Corner'

When I was a kid I loved dry land fish. I didn't know they were fake meat. They were as good as the fish fillets that they looked like when battered and fried. The first time I went hunting, I didn't know what they really were. I was expecting to find a fish that had crawled out of the creek to be grabbed on the bank.

My mother insisted that we go with Ma Haney to visit her family down on Flint's Lick in Jackson County. After dinner, I got me a paper sack and took off in the woods hunting some dry land fish. I stumbled across an old rotten oak tree that had fallen across the creek bed. At its base I found 10 big, pretty yellow ones and nearly a dozen of the smaller black ones. I knew I would eat good that week. On the way back, I found another dozen.

As soon as I got back, Baby Hewey saw the bag. He wanted to know what was in there and I wouldn't show him. Ma Haney looked, grabbed the bag and said, "You need to learn to share like a good Christian boy."

"Dry land fish!" Baby Hewey yelled. "I want them for supper."

Ma Haney started on my mother that it would be a good lesson on sharing and Christian values if she took my Dry Land Fish home with her. My mother agreed to it. She always acted like her mother was right on everything.

I tried telling my dad, and he just said, "Boy, you learned a valuable life lesson today. Your grandma is the most selfish and greedy woman the Devil ever created." Pap grinned. "She would take the pennies off a dead man's eyes."

Next Sunday was no better. All Baby Hewey could do was brag about how good those dry land fish were. He would rub his belly and say, "Especially the yellow ones."

The whole thing burned me to the core since I had spent the week eating beans and fried potatoes. It didn't help that every night at supper Pap would say, "Some dried land fishes would sure go good with these tators."

Over the next few weeks I thought about the whole situation. I came to the opinion it had nothing to do with learning to share and Christian values. I decided that I had been done wrong.

The next time Ma Haney brought Baby Hewey to visit, I took off to the woods squirrel hunting. I got three young, juicy tender one. "Prime eating," as Pap always said.

When I came out of the field, I stopped at the creek where the spring flows in and dressed out the meat. I washed them real good in the clear, flowing spring water and got all the wild smell out of them.

I sat there watching the house, waiting for Ma and Pa Haney to get ready to leave. Just as they headed to the car, I crossed the yard and started towards the house.

Baby Hewey spotted me and said, "What's in the tote? More dried land fishes?"

I said, "No." The dummy didn't even have enough sense to know that dry land fish had dried up weeks ago. "It's just squirrels." As I saw the little wheels turning in the little head, I added, "You know what squirrels are. They are rats that live in trees."

"I like squirrel!" Baby Hewey squealed.

"You know I ain't had a good mess of squirrel this year," Ma Haney added, grabbing the old grass sack from my hand. "These are dressed," she said.

My mother just said, "Take them." She had no backbone when it came to saying no to her mother, Ma Haney.

That night, Pap said, "I thought you went squirrel hunting today. Fried squirrel would have good with this poke sallet."

I just sat there smiling, not saying a word as I enjoyed my beans. There was a good piece of meat in it. I knew I would rather eat it than the field rats I knew Baby Hewey was feasting upon.

*Read more 'Writers Corner' at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>