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THE EXCURSIONS OF YOUNG HONDO

by

Uncle George

*A collection of fun, short bedtime stories
with life lessons for young and old alike.*

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HONDO'S DAY IN THE WOODS

Chapter I

Hondo sat next to the window in the sixth grade class, not paying much attention to what the teacher was saying, but listening for the first voice of the whippoorwill. Once Hondo heard that whippoorwill song, he would know it was spring. That meant it was time for shoes to be put away until fall. School would soon be over. Hondo would be a seventh grader and also a teenager. That teenager thing troubled him the most; folks talked about it being a big change. What would change? He decided he would worry about it when it happened in three months.

Hondo stood just a bit taller than his five-foot grandmother. He was just an average fellow. He had black hair, eyes so brown they looked black, and a skinny frame. His dad had given him the name Hondo while his mom was in her last month of pregnancy. His mom gave him the name Regis Resio Ridgeway. No one except his mom called him Regis. Sometimes “Hondo” would slip out before she could stop it. Hondo would always answer.

Before that day in class was over, Hondo heard the voice of the whippoorwill. Without a thought he whistled back to the whippoorwill. The teacher and every one of his classmates looked at him and started laughing.

At recess he had to stay in class by himself while all his classmates went to play softball. He had to write “I will not whistle in class.” He only needed to write it one hundred times. He smiled as he wrote every line, knowing he would be barefoot soon.

Chapter II

Within a week school was over and Hondo was at his favorite place in his world—his dad’s parents’ house. He had laid claim to his dad’s old room since he had been three.

The first day of that summer break, Hondo was awakened by his granddad’s famous “Dutch Rub” on his head. He rolled over and smiled at his granddad.

“It’s time to get up, sleepyhead.”

“I’m awake,” said Hondo, while he stretched out his arms and legs as far as he could.

“Breakfast is waiting,” Granddad said as he left the room and headed downstairs to the kitchen.

Hondo hurried to brush his teeth, put on his shorts and tee-shirt, and waved at his shoes setting on the floor, not to be worn anytime soon, then down the steps to the kitchen table where the pancakes were waiting, smothered in love.

Hondo sat down and started eating and at the same time Granddad said, “We have lots to do today. Don’t eat too much.”

“Don’t worry,” said Hondo with a big smile while taking another bite.

While Hondo ate, Granddad told him to get their old boat oar, the cross-cut saw they used to cut down Christmas trees, and a burlap bag with a short piece of rope. Then Granddad was out the back door.

“Wonder what he’s going to do with all that stuff?” asked Hondo.

Grandmother gave her little chuckle that she gave when she wasn't sure what to say. "I have no idea, Hondo. But get everything he wanted."

"Don't worry, I'll get it all," yelled Hondo as he went out the back door. He knew he had time. Granddad had gone to fill the truck with gas.

Chapter III

Hondo stood in front of the garage, waiting for his granddad. The items lay at his feet, except for the boat oar, which was standing beside him, his left hand resting on top of the oar. His left foot was crossed in front of his right foot, his relaxed position, standing cross-legged.

Granddad came across the twenty-foot-long bridge that separated his house from the tiny town of Fellowsville. The town was made up of one grocery store, one service station, and thirty homes. There was an old grist mill that sat on the bank of the small creek and it turned the paddle wheel that powered the mill.

Granddad pulled up in his truck beside Hondo and asked, “Why do you always stand with your legs crossed?”

“I saw it on an old cartoon once,” said Hondo.

Granddad sat in the truck and smiled to himself as he watched Hondo store the items in the truck.

As they started to drive off, Grandmother was standing on the front porch. Granddad stopped so they could talk.

“Be home for lunch?” asked Grandmother.

“Yeah, but we might be a little late. Try to keep it warm for us,” answered Granddad as he threw up his arm to wave bye.

Chapter IV

Going down the road, they rode in silence, admiring the countryside. The radio was playing, but neither was listening. Hondo finally asked, “Where we headed?”

“I wondered how long before you asked,” said Granddad with a smile. Then he went on to say, “This fellow at the gas station, who lives on Scotch Hill, was talking about two all-white squirrels he had seen.

“He said they were playing on an old split rail fence. His name is Junior. He watched them until it started getting dark, then followed them to their den tree,” said Granddad.

“I’ve never seen an all-white squirrel. Have you, Granddad?”

“After I graduated from high school, I was hunting and saw an all-white squirrel—an albino—playing in the leaves and jumping from tree to tree. I thought about shooting it, but couldn’t bring myself to do it. It was a pretty sight. Instead, I sat on an old log and watched it run around for over an hour. I never went back to those woods for the next ten years. Don’t know what happened to it.”

“Bet that was a cool thing to see. I’ve seen several gray squirrels, a few fox squirrels, a couple stuffed black ones, and two small flying squirrels on the farm,” added Hondo.

“That’s more squirrels than most folks have ever seen.” Granddad went on to outline his plan. “I think we can catch them and let them go on the farm where all those big oak trees are. That way no one can hurt them.” When Granddad and Grandmother were first married, he had purchased the farm from her parents, over 300 acres, trying to keep it in the family. No one had

lived in the old farmhouse for years. “If we can catch those white squirrels, they can have the run of the farm,” added Granddad.

They drove to Junior’s house so he could show them where the albino squirrels lived. Fortunately for them, the wind was blowing, so they could walk to the squirrels’ den and not be heard. Usually, on windy days, all squirrels stay in their den or nest. Junior showed them the tree, then he asked if he could stay and help.

“Sure you can, but you can’t tell anyone how we catch them,” said Granddad. “It’s my personal secret.”

“I will not tell your secret,” answered Junior.

“We need to get the tools from the truck, then cut down that small oak tree over there,” Granddad said quietly as he pointed to a tree. It was about two inches in diameter at the base and over twenty feet tall. Junior and Hondo carried the tools they needed from the truck.

“What do we do with this boat oar?” asked Junior while looking at it in his hands.

“I have no idea,” said Hondo, knowing his granddad knew what to do with it.

“I’ll show you two in a couple minutes,” answered Granddad.

Junior and Hondo cut down the small tree, then carried it to where the squirrels’ den was. They put the base of the tree inside the burlap bag, then stood up the tree and leaned it against the hollow tree just under the hole where their den was. They worked as quietly as possible, so not to scare the squirrels.

Granddad added, “You two hold up the tree with one hand and keep the burlap bag wide open with the other hand so the squirrels can run inside. And do not let go for any reason.”

Granddad looked at Junior and Hondo, making sure they understood what they had to do. Both nodded they understood. “Then we’ll close the bag around the tree after the squirrels run inside.”

All three of them held the bag open with one hand and held the tree with the other hand. With Granddad’s other hand he swung the boat oar hitting the hollow tree with a loud *whack*. Granddad swung the oar again, *whack*. It seemed to get louder with each hit.

Hondo was watching the hole, waiting for the squirrels to come out. *Whack*. Granddad swung the oar again. “Ew” slipped out of Hondo’s mouth when he saw the squirrels coming out of their hole and running down the tree. When they came to the tree that Hondo, Junior, and Granddad were holding, the albino squirrels jumped onto the tree and continued running down toward the burlap bag. The first white squirrel ran across Hondo’s fingers that were holding up the tree, like his fingers were part of the tree’s bark. The second squirrel did the same and ran over Granddad and Junior’s fingers, too.

Junior and Hondo let out just the tiniest and quietest yell, but never let go of the tree. They didn’t scare the squirrels. They toughed it out and hid their pain until the squirrels were in the bag. Hondo knew the pain in his hands would not compare to the disappointment Granddad would feel if these squirrels escaped their grasp.

Just like they had planned, both squirrels ran directly into the bag like they had been trained to do so. All three closed the bag around the tree, trapping the two white squirrels inside. The squirrels ran around for a while, then settled down like they both knew they were going someplace a lot better than here.

“Yahoo,” yelled Hondo. Junior and Granddad smiled like they might on Christmas morning.

“Let’s pull this tree out of the bag so we can tie the top of the bag,” said Granddad.

“Did you see them? They were beautiful! Wow! I’m glad we did this,” said Hondo.

They pulled the tree out of the burlap bag very slowly while keeping the top tight around the tree trunk so the squirrels wouldn’t slip out.

“Tie the bag, Hondo,” said Junior.

“Okay,” said Hondo as he tied the bag.

Chapter V

Both squirrels were not moving around inside the bag. They had calmed down as they lay at Hondo's feet as they rode to Junior's house. Junior rode in the back of the truck to his house. Then Granddad and Hondo rode on to their farm, the squirrels' new and safer home.

"Didn't take long to catch them squirrels. We can still make lunch," said Granddad.

"Good, I'm starved," said Hondo.

"You're always hungry."

Hondo smiled as they rode to the farm.

"You did a good job this morning, Hondo."

"Thanks, Granddad. Could I carry the squirrels then?"

"Okay, but carry them away from your legs so they don't scratch you through the bag," said Granddad.

"I can do that," added Hondo. He was very proud to be given the responsibility of carrying the squirrels to their new home.

It wasn't long before they were at the farm. Hondo picked up the bag very carefully, not wanting to hurt his new friends.

"They're not made of glass, Hondo!" said Granddad.

"I know, just want them to be okay in their new home."

"They will be okay. We'll bring them some field corn on the cob for them to eat," replied Granddad.

“That’s a great idea, Granddad,” said Hondo. After thinking for a second, Hondo added, “Is it possible they could get too fat to climb a tree?”

Granddad laughed at Hondo’s comment as he patted him on the back. “I’m sure they will be able to climb.”

After walking for about fifteen minutes, they were at the spot Granddad wanted the squirrels to live. Hondo set the bag down, then untied the rope on the bag so he could set the squirrels free.

“Be careful,” instructed Granddad while standing beside him.

“Okay.”

Hondo released the rope and out came the squirrels, faster than greased lightning. One squirrel went left, one went right as they came out of the bag. They jumped onto Hondo’s legs and around each leg they ran until they reached his shoulders, then down his arms, where they jumped onto the tree and climbed up to the hole in the tree, their new home. All the while Hondo was screaming like they had stuck him with hundreds of straight pins.

Even after they had jumped off of Hondo, he continued to scream and shake his arms like they had a colony of red ants on them, while doing his version of a Mexican hat dance after eating a pocketful of Mexican jumping beans.

Granddad was laughing harder than Hondo had ever seen him laugh. He was slapping his leg with both hands as he leaned forward, pointing at Hondo. Finally he asked, “You okay?” but was laughing so hard he was wiping the tears from his eyes.

“I didn’t know which way to go or what to do!” said Hondo, still doing a slower hat dance and shaking his arms about in the air like they were made of rubber.

“You’ll be okay except for a few scratches,” said Granddad still laughing while looking at Hondo’s legs and arms with all the scratches on them.

Granddad had seen the squirrels go in their new den while trying to stop laughing at Hondo. Finally Hondo calmed down enough to stop dancing around, then started laughing at himself with Granddad. They continued to laugh as they walked to the truck.

“That was scary!” said Hondo.

“You handled it like a true trouper,” said Granddad. Then he put his arm on Hondo’s shoulder as they walked. “I can’t wait to tell your grandmother this story.”

THE END

HONDO'S FISHING TRIP

Chapter I

There were few things twelve-year-old Hondo enjoyed more than to go fishing with his dad and granddad. Friday was the day they would catch the bait for the weekend. The bass fish loved salamanders, hellgrammites, and a few crawfish.

“Hondo, do you remember what the bait looks like that we’re after?”

“Certainly do! The salamander looks like a Geico, but it’s black.”

Granddad started laughing, then added, “You mean a gecko, silly. What do the others look like?”

“The hellgrammite is white, as round as a big pencil, with lots of legs, and is about an inch long,” said Hondo.

“That’s correct!”

“The crawfish looks like a miniature lobster. A full-grown one is about three inches long, including pinchers.”

“Very good! They’re also known as a West Virginia lobster.”

“Good one, Granddad! So what’s my prize?”

With a smile, Granddad said, “We’ll find something.”

“A Pepsi and a candy bar would do the trick!” said Hondo.

“That reminds me, we need to make you an appointment with the dentist,” replied Granddad.

“There’s nothing wrong with my teeth.”

“Well, I’m telling you there is, dear boy. I’m sure you need to get that cotton-pickin’ sweet tooth pulled.”

Hondo smiled, knowing his granddad was picking on him. “Hopefully no time soon, because I love eating candy, like no man before me.” Hondo made a fist and raised his arm high in the air.

Chapter II

Granddad and Hondo walked toward the small creek, carrying an old coffee can with a piece of wet moss on the bottom, as to keep the salamanders moist so they would live for a longer time.

Hondo put on his tennis shoes without being told, because last year he had cut his foot on a piece of broken glass, which caused him to have sixteen stitches to be sewn on his foot. And because of that he missed most of the fishing trips. That hurt even more than the cut.

Reed, Hondo's dad, wouldn't let him go catch any salamanders until he was over ten years old, because Reed was afraid he might get bitten by a snake. This fear came because Reed was bitten when he was seven by a small black snake while he was trying to catch it. To this day Reed was very scared of snakes.

Chapter III

“The crawfish and hellgrammite are slow-moving animals, so you shouldn’t have any trouble catching them. The salamander moves faster than greased lightning, so a person has to be fast to catch one of them.”

“What are you saying, Granddad? That even I should be able to catch something?”

“If the shoe fits!” said Granddad.

“Well, my shoes are too small for me.”

“Funny!” said Granddad. “Just keep your eyes open.”

“Got it!”

“And make yourself watch out for snakes.”

“They don’t scare me, Granddad,” said Hondo bravely.

“Maybe they should scare you a little.”

“I’m too fast for an old stupid snake to bite me,” said Hondo.

Granddad smiled and shook his head as he walked up toward the creek to see what he could find. They left the smaller salamanders for next year’s catches. Hondo didn’t miss catching most of the bait and it wasn’t long before he had plenty of creatures in his can.

“I bet you, Granddad, I have more salamanders than you!”

“You might have, but I caught a fat gecko and he’s in my can!”

“No way!”

“Way, dude! I’ll show him to you tomorrow,” said Granddad.

Hondo laughed as they walked back to the truck.

Chapter IV

The sun was just starting to come up when they started the motor on the boat. Their old aluminum, flat-bottom boat had a 65-horsepower motor on it that Granddad loved to drive. They were headed to the fishing hole that Granddad had fished many times before.

By ten o'clock that morning, they had caught a dozen bass and they were in their cooler, chilling. Granddad was drinking a mug of hot coffee, Dad was eating beanie-weinies right out of the can, while Hondo was trying to talk his granddad out of his candy bar, because he had already eaten his.

About that time, Granddad saw a snake swimming near the front of the boat.

Granddad pointed to the snake, then yelled, "Take the oar and hit that snake, Hondo."

"I don't see it!...Okay, okay, I see it now." He quickly grabbed the oar and swung at the snake, but missed. Without thinking twice he rose the oar over his head again and tried to hit the snake. This time he hit it, then rose the oar to strike it again. Somehow the snake had wrapped itself around the oar, then fell off on Hondo's backswing and landed by Reed's feet.

Reed's arm started moving in every direction. He tried to say something but nothing came out. His feet looked like they were on ice and he was dancing the Mexican cha-cha. Finally he got control of his legs and was able to jump backward. In one swift move, he was beside Granddad.

"Get it out of here. Get it out!" he screamed viciously.

Reed still didn't feel safe beside Granddad. In a second he ran behind Granddad and stood on top of the boat's motor while saying, "Get it out! Get it out!"

Gingerly Hondo was trying to get the oar under the snake so he could pick it up and toss it back into the water. Hondo had a big smile on his face, but not wanting to laugh, because his granddad was laughing so hard at his dad.

Finally he tossed the snake back into the water before his dad could go overboard, and he sure didn't want that to happen.

"There you go, Dad. Now you can sit down and relax in your seat."

Still shaking, Dad stepped down off the motor and started working his way back to his seat. Then he asked, "Why in the world did you put that snake in the boat, Hondo?"

"I didn't mean to, Dad. It was an accident."

Granddad was still laughing so hard, his eyes were full of tears and his belly ached, but he forced himself to say, "Another story your grandmother will not believe." Then he continued to laugh while Dad just looked at him, not saying a word. Hondo went back to fishing with a smile.

THE END

HONDO MEETS A WIZARD

Chapter I

Twelve-year-old Hondo was talking with his granddad and dad in the driveway to his granddad's farm. They were waiting on a water wizard to find a new site for a well. The old well had changed to hard water. Hondo said it tasted "yucky" and it smelled like rotten eggs.

Granddad, Hondo, and his dad had been talking about the big old groundhog that lived next to Grandma's garden. He had been eating more than his fair share of garden vegetables, which upset Grandma, but she didn't really want the groundhog hurt. They decided to catch it in a trap, then move it far away from Grandma's garden.

Dad pointed down the road, then said, "Here comes Wizard."

"What is he driving, Granddad?" asked Hondo.

"A 1948 Chevy panel truck! They don't make them like that anymore," answered Granddad.

"It's purple!" replied a shocked Hondo, who had never seen anything like this truck before.

Granddad and Dad laughed at Hondo's shock at the truck. Then Dad added, "Look at the side!" It said *WIZARD* painted in two-foot-tall letters, with various sizes and colors of stars painted in different places all over the truck.

They also heard him coming, because he was playing “Magic Carpet Ride” by Steppenwolf very, very loudly.

“Why in the world is he playing that song so loud?” asked Hondo.

“That was our song when we were in the Army,” said Granddad. “Especially while we were stationed in southeast Asia together.”

“You were in the Army, Granddad?” asked Hondo.

“Yes, I was.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I will, another time, okay?” said Granddad.

“Okay!”

When Wizard pulled into the driveway, Hondo saw that he was wearing an old straw cowboy hat. His dad, Reed, elbowed him in the arm, because he was staring at Wizard with his mouth open, not saying a word nor knowing what to say.

“Snap out of it, Hondo. You were staring again,” said Reed.

“Sorry, Dad! I have just never seen anything like this before.”

“It’s okay! I understand.”

Wizard stepped out of his truck as Hondo walked over to the truck. He wanted to get a better look at the outside and inside of the truck. Hondo was surprised as Wizard stuck out his hand to shake Hondo’s hand, then said, “You must be Hondo. My name is Junebug M. Fishpacker. How do you do, young man?”

Again Hondo was standing with his mouth wide open, not knowing what to do. The man in front of him was wearing a pair of Carhartt bib overalls. His red flannel shirt was buttoned all

the way to the top, like he might put on a tie. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, while his boots looked like a snake's skin. His long, gray hair was pulled back into a ponytail that reached halfway down his back. He had a mustache that was so long, you could not see his lips, and then it grew around the corner of his mouth and reached to his chin. There it had grown past his neckline and onto his chest. The rest of his beard needed a shave, badly.

Finally Dad gave Hondo a small push. "Shake Mr. Fishpacker's hand, Hondo."

Hondo very slowly reached out his hand and took Mr. Fishpacker's hand and started to shake it.

"Squeeze my hand, boy, like you mean it. You can tell a lot about a man's aura by the way he grips your hand. So squeeze."

Before Hondo knew it, he asked, "What's aura?" as he started to squeeze Wizard's hand harder.

"It's what's deep down inside your soul. There's only two kinds of aura, Hondo: good or bad. Now, that's a better shake," said the man standing before Hondo.

Hondo was still shaking Wizard's hand when he said, "WOW! What kind of boots are they, sir?"

"Just call me Wizard. Your granddad has been calling me that for almost fifty years. We went to school together and have been friends ever since. And to answer your question, my boots come from an alligator that I wrestled in Florida."

"WOW! Now he's your boots?"

"That's right," said Wizard as he raised up his foot and turned it left and right. "He sure looks good on me, doesn't he."

Everyone smiled, then Granddad said, "He sure does."

Chapter II

“Let’s go find a place to drill a well,” Wizard said to Granddad. Then he shook Granddad’s hand and hugged him.

Wizard walked to the back of his truck and opened both rear doors. One opened to the left, the other opened to the right, and they covered the entire back of the truck.

Hondo was right there beside Wizard, wanting to see what was in the back of the truck. It was about six feet deep, with a wall behind the front two seats. There were large and small drawers on both sides and behind the seats.

“Goodness! Look at all these drawers,” said Hondo.

“And they’re all filled with all the stuff a good wizard needs, my little friend.”

There on the floor was a giant slingshot. Wizard picked it up and gave Hondo a better view.

“Looks like a slingshot for a giant. Is it?”

“It could be, but it’s called a divining rod or tuning stick. It’s used to find water that’s underground.”

“Can I hold it, sir?”

“Remember, Wizard. And yes, you can hold it.”

Hondo took it and held it like it was a slingshot. “Where’s the rubber?”

“No rubber, it’s a divining rod. You hold it like this.” Wizard took it and held the two forks of the slingshot, one in each hand, while the one remaining fork stuck out straight from his

hands. “Now, you just walk around where you might want the well, holding it just like this.

When you find water, it will turn and dip toward the ground. That’s where you drill.”

“What kind of wood is it, Wizard?”

“A fresh hazel or willow branch, from the birch family, is what you need.”

“Can anyone do it?” asked Hondo.

“No, it takes a special sorcerer, with the right kind of karma, to be able to feel the magic in the divining rod so it will work for him or her to find water.”

Chapter III

Wizard had been walking around the house for about an hour now, with Hondo right beside him. Both were waiting on the divining rod to point at the ground, but nothing was moving.

“You folks sure have a lot of snakes around this house.”

“Got any suggestions what we could do?” asked Hondo.

“I have a suggestion for almost everything that needs to be fixed.” Then Wizard laughed at his joke, and Hondo laughed too.

“Get a lot of mothballs and spread them out along the edge of the grass. The snakes will not go past the mothballs. And that’s all you need to do to fix your snake problem.”

“Thanks, Wizard.”

A few minutes later, while covering a new area in the backyard, the rod began to move and then point toward the ground. Hondo’s mouth went open again. He could not believe what he was watching. The rod was completely vertical now, straight up and down, pointing at the ground.

“Here’s where the water is located,” said the sorcerer. Then he started back-stepping until the rod was level again, like it had been for the last hour. “Put your hands on top of mine while I walk back to where the water was.”

Hondo could feel the power of the rod as it very slowly, but steadily, pointed to the ground in the same spot again. “WOW! I could feel it moving and I couldn’t stop it from moving.”

“You have good karma with you, Hondo. Most folks are so negative the rod will not move.”

“That’s a good thing, right?” asked Hondo.

“Yes...yes, it is, my friend.”

They drove a stick into the ground to mark where to drill.

Chapter IV

Hondo and Wizard walked back to the truck and put the divining rod on the floorboard. Then Wizard asked Granddad, "Wonder if there are any turtles in that little creek?"

"No one has ever hunted them, as far as I know," said Granddad.

"Well, do you care if I check it out?"

"No...no. Help yourself."

"It's been a long time since I've had some good turtle meat," said Wizard.

The sorcerer sat on the back bumper of his truck and changed into an old pair of tennis shoes, an old pair of blue jeans, and left his hat in the truck to keep it dry.

"Let's go see if there are any turtles in this creek." With that said, he jumped into a hole in the small creek that was about knee-deep. He moved toward a bank and started feeling around up under the bank that Hondo and his dad were standing on. They could not see his arms; all they could see was his head above the bank.

"Well...well! What do we have here?" He smiled at Hondo. Then he pulled out a turtle by the tail and held it up so he could inspect it. It was a big turtle, about two feet in diameter.

"Most turtles are about half this size."

With that he threw it at Hondo's feet. In a blink of the eye, Hondo jumped back away from the turtle, then said, "Holy smokes! Look how big it is. WOW! What a turtle!"

"Don't let him bite you, Hondo. If he bites you, he will not let go until a thunderstorm happens," said Wizard as he winked at Hondo, meaning he was just playing with him.

Hondo then jumped back another two feet from the giant turtle. “That thunderstorm could be a long time coming!”

With a smile, Wizard added, “Yes...yes, it could be.”

Hondo stopped smiling, then said, “How old do you think it is, Wizard?”

“I would say at least a hundred years old or more.”

“WOW! That’s old.”

The turtle was watching Hondo. His legs and tail were out of his shell also. With a slight movement, Wizard had the turtle on his back. The turtle, with a move faster than a blink of your eye, was back on his feet and still watching Hondo. The turtle looked like he was trying to decide which way was home. Then, without notice, he withdrew back into his shell. Maybe he just wanted to feel safe.

“Can I pick him up?” asked Hondo.

“Be very careful. You see how fast he is, and he weighs about forty pounds, so he’s fast and heavy.”

“No problem, I can carry forty pounds.”

“Okay! First thing is stand behind him, so his head is on the other end.”

“He’s in his shell! Which way is his head?”

“You are standing in front of his head now.”

“Oh! MY! I’ve got to move!”

“Good idea!” Wizard said with a smile. “Now grab him on both sides, between his feet.”

“Like this?” Then Hondo reached down to pick him up off the ground. The minute the turtle was off the ground, his head, legs, and tail shot out of his shell. With this fast movement, Hondo was not sure what to do except drop the turtle and jump backward quickly.

“You sure are a fast one, like greased lightning!” said Wizard.

“I can carry forty pounds, but I believe that turtle is just fine where he is,” said Hondo while taking a couple more steps backward.

All the men had big smiles at Hondo.

“That’s good thinking!” said Granddad.

Chapter V

Everyone was looking the turtle when Hondo said, “Granddad, I don’t think it’s right that this turtle gets eaten!” Hondo was a little scared of what his dad and granddad might say.

“Why do you say that, Hondo?” asked Wizard.

Hondo did not hesitate in giving his answer. “Because he’s lived for a century or more, and might live for another hundred years. None of us are really that hungry, even if they do taste good.”

Everyone was looking at each other and no one said a word. Finally Wizard said, “You are right, Hondo, I agree. No turtle will be eaten today, my friend.”

Hondo’s dad put his hand on Hondo’s shoulder, then added, “Good job, son!”

“Very good, grandson!”

“Thanks!” said Hondo while Wizard was putting the turtle back into the water, then started walking toward his truck. Everyone followed him.

Wizard took off his wet clothes and shook everyone’s hand before getting into his truck. Hondo gave him a good hard squeeze while giving Wizard a big smile, then said, “Thanks for not eating our turtle, sir!”

“No problem, Hondo! I’m sure he would have been too tough to eat anyway.” They all had a good laugh.

It was not long until Wizard was on the road home.

While waving good-bye to Wizard, Granddad said to Hondo, “You know, I’ll have to tell your grandma about this day.”

“Think she’ll be mad? Does she like to eat turtle?”

While smiling at his grandson, Granddad said, “No...no, she’ll be just like we are—very proud of you.”

“You made a decision and stuck to it,” said his dad.

THE END

HONDO'S GOOD NIGHT SLEEP

Chapter I

It was a little after eight o'clock on Friday evening. The sun was setting behind the tall trees and the symphony had been playing for several minutes.

"The frogs are in tune tonight," said Grandmother while she sat in the old wooden swing beside Granddad.

"I bet there's two hundred frogs singing tonight," added Hondo. The rain was falling on their tin roof over the porch, making a great background for the frogs to sing their tune to everyone. The loud bullfrog kept a steady beat going while the crickets were chirping to add their sounds. Then you could just make out the whippoorwill's voice as the lead singer of the chorus. All the other members of the group lived in the small creek that flowed through the farm.

Hondo was twelve and loved spending time with his grandparents. He had black hair, eyes as dark as coal, and a skinny frame. He stood the same height as his grandmother, five feet even. Granddad stood five feet, six inches, with gray hair and a stocky frame. They were Hondo's dad's parents and they had spent many happy days together since Hondo's birth.

It was starting to rain harder and you could hear the thunder rolling over the hill. Hondo loved hearing the rain on the tin roof, but tonight he had an extra pleasure—the thunder. He would sleep well tonight.

“Well, I’m tired. I’m off to bed,” Granddad said as he yawned and stretched out his arms. Everyone was tired, after a day of pulling weeds and tilling the soil in Grandmother’s garden. She enjoyed growing her own food, as she had done her entire life. Then she would “can” it in the fall, to eat all winter.

There is nothing more wonderful and peaceful than being sung to sleep by Mother Nature’s singers, while the rain falls on the tin roof over your head. Neither the thunder nor Granddad’s snoring could keep Hondo awake.

Chapter II

About a mile down the road, Linda was tying her horse, Patricia, to a stake in the ground she had used many times before. Pat was secured with a rope attached to her bridle. The other end was tied to a chain about ten feet long, and the chain was attached to the stake. This allowed Pat to walk around in a thirty-foot circle while she grazed on the grass that grew in the pasture.

Linda had decided to leave Pat tied to the stake all night, so Pat could enjoy the grass and being outside.

In the late hours of the night, the storm that had put Hondo to sleep was ever so slowly moving in Pat's direction. After the second crack of thunder, Pat was rearing up on her hind legs, trying to get loose. Pat moved around, trying to get the stake loose. She kept trying and trying, but the stake would not move.

Pat was a beautiful horse that stood over fourteen hands, with a deep chestnut color and a braided mane. She continued to pull and tug on the rope, trying to get free. After each rumble of the thunder, Pat continued to rise up on her rear legs and shake her head, left to right. Finally she did pull herself free from the stake. The thunder was still rumbling as she started running in the direction she thought was the barn. The rain had not started, but the thunder and lightning was in full force. Pat was running so hard, she didn't realize she was dragging the chain and stake.

Pat ran to the edge of the hard-surface road. Without slowing she turned right and kept going. She was running like she was halfway through the Kentucky Derby and she wanted to win. The rope and chain didn't slow her, but they sure were bouncing around and making lots of noise.

Chapter III

Grandmother had gotten used to hearing Granddad's snoring years ago. So, it was not a problem for her to hear all the ruckus coming down the road. She had never heard anything like these noises. She finally decided part of the noise sounded like hooves running on blacktop. But what were the other noises?

"Is someone dragging a chain?" Grandmother whispered to herself as she got out of bed. She walked quietly out of the bedroom, down the stairs to the front door. She opened the door very slowly, then peeked outside, not knowing what to expect in the darkness, wishing it would lightning so she could see what was making all that noise. The noise was getting closer to her, then she realized what it was.

"A horse running and dragging a chain? At two o'clock in the morning? And he's headed for my garden. We'll see about this!" said Grandmother.

And out the door she went, running for her garden, so she could scare off the horse. "That big stinky, hay-eatin', four-legged hooligan is not eating my vegetables. I'll fix his parade."

While Pat was running at full speed in front of the house, she saw Grandmother heading out of the front door. That was exactly what Pat wanted to happen. It was as if Grandmother had invited her to go right on inside, so she walked right up to the front door and began hitting the door with her front hooves. After the second hit the door went *thud*, *crash*, and *boom* as it hit the floor. Then the glass shattered in the door as she ran in over top the door.

Pat had lunged through the hallway and was just inside the kitchen doorway when the chain and stake caught on the remains of the door. It spun Pat around, so she was facing where she had come from. Only her head was looking out the doorway of the kitchen when she stopped moving. She realized the thunder was not so loud inside. So, Pat just stood there, catching her breath.

Chapter IV

Granddad woke, thinking he had had a bad dream. Then Hondo came running into the room.

“What’s all that noise downstairs, Granddad?” asked Hondo.

“I’m not sure,” said Granddad while rubbing his eyes. “Thought I was dreaming, guess I’m not.”

“You’re not,” said Hondo. “Woke me up.”

Granddad looked around the room, then asked, “Where’s your grandmother? I bet she knows where that noise came from.”

“Thought she was sleeping!” said Hondo.

Granddad stood up, then said, “Let’s go find her.”

They walked out of the bedroom and looked over the railing at the downstairs, where the front door lay in pieces on the floor.

“Holy smokes, is that our front door?” asked Hondo.

“I think so! Sure is a lot of pieces. Let’s go find your grandmother,” said Granddad.

Hondo started yelling for her, but no one answered.

Finally Grandmother came in the front doorway, where the door was. Granddad and Hondo were looking at the remains of the front door. No one had seen the horse, which was still standing in the kitchen doorway, just happy to be inside, out of the storm.

Then Granddad asked Grandmother, “What in the world is going on?” as Granddad threw his arms up in the air and shook his head in disbelief of what he was seeing.

“That’s what’s left of our front door after a horse kicked it to the floor, trying to get inside,” said Grandmother as they continued to look at the door.

“A horse?” asked Hondo and Granddad at the same time, while looking at Grandmother.

“Yes, a horse,” said Grandmother as she began to follow the rope to its end. When she looked up, Pat was looking at her and standing there in the kitchen doorway, covered in what looked like soap suds.

“Where in the world did she get soap suds on herself from?” asked Hondo. While he stared at Pat, he thought he saw her smile at him. But he sure wasn’t saying anything until someone else said something first.

Grandmother started to reach out and scratch Pat’s head when Granddad yelled, “Don’t touch that horse, it has rabies!”

“What?” asked Grandmother as she took a big step backward, not wanting to get any closer to Pat.

“Horses get rabies?” asked Hondo.

“Yes, they do! Don’t get too close to that horse,” said Granddad. Everyone was looking at Pat like she had three eyes. Pat was just happy and this was her happy face. She was looking at them, wondering what was wrong with them.

“Having rabies made her covered in that white foam-looking stuff?” asked Hondo.

Granddad nodded his head.

“Well, maybe she does have rabies, I don’t know,” added Grandmother as she watched Pat.

“How do we get this horse out of here?” asked Hondo.

Chapter V

“We need to call the police and have them get this cotton-pickin’ horse out of here,” said Granddad.

“Hondo, run over to Mrs. Davis’s and ask her to call the police about getting this horse out of here,” said Grandmother. She went on to say, “Be careful.”

“I will. Let me get dressed,” said Hondo while going up the stairs. A couple minutes later, he was dressed and going out the front door.

Granddad yelled to Hondo, “Tell them to hurry and that this horse has rabies!”

“Got it,” said Hondo as he ran toward the road. It was starting to sprinkle, but it didn’t slow up Hondo as he ran toward Mrs. Davis’s. He was dressed in his T-shirt and shorts. Granddad and Grandmother followed Hondo outside, then watched him as far as they could until he disappeared into the darkness. They could still hear Hondo’s bare feet slapping on the wet pavement. *Slap...slap* was the only sound you could hear. The frogs were not singing their symphony that time of night.

Finally Hondo made it to Mrs. Davis’s house. It was difficult for him to get her awake, but after a couple minutes of knocking on the door, she opened her door and asked, “Is that you, Hondo?”

“Yes, ma’am. Can you call the police for me?”

“Of course. Is someone hurt?” asked Mrs. Davis.

“No, ma’am, everyone is OK. They’re just upset about a horse being in our kitchen,” said Hondo.

“What did you say?” asked Mrs. Davis.

Hondo started from the beginning and told her how the horse ended up in their kitchen.

Mrs. Davis was still very confused, but called the police anyway.

Mrs. Davis tried to explain why she needed the police, but the officer was also confused.

The officer finally asked, “There’s a horse in a house? Have you been drinking, ma’am?” He paused while he was thinking what next to say. “You know it’s two o’clock in the morning, ma’am?”

“Yes, I know what time it is, young man, and I’m not a drinking person. And there is a horse in this young man’s house. Now will you please get someone out here?” said Mrs. Davis, not happy with the officer’s questions.

The officer sat the phone down and yelled for his lieutenant, then told him the story as Mrs. Davis had told him.

“A horse?” the lieutenant yelled in disbelief.

“Who’s on the phone?” asked the lieutenant.

“It’s Mrs. Davis, sir!” answered the officer, then added, “She’s not been drinking either, sir,” in a meek voice, because he was a little scared of his lieutenant.

Then out of nowhere Mrs. Davis’s phone line went dead. No one was on the other end. Mrs. Davis held the phone out from her ear and looked at it, then said “Hello...hello!” But no one answered.

“If they hung up on me, that sheriff will not be getting my vote come election time,” said Mrs. Davis. Hondo had a small smile or a smirk on his face and hoped Mrs. Davis didn’t see it in the dark room.

Mrs. Davis sat the phone down and asked Hondo, “Would you like some water?” trying not to let on she was mad at the officer. Hondo could tell she was upset, but didn’t say a word.

A couple minutes passed in silence, then the phone rang. It was the lieutenant and he began explaining they had been disconnected and he was very sorry. He went on to tell Mrs. Davis that a squad car would be there shortly.

Hondo thanked Mrs. Davis, then headed home in the rain. When he arrived he told the story of what had happened at Mrs. Davis’s house. Grandmother thought the story was funny and laughed about it for several minutes.

About thirty minutes later the squad car pulled into the driveway.

Chapter VI

The first officer stopped to look at the remains of the door while the second officer sat in the patrol car, waiting.

“You folks the ones that called about a horse in your house?” asked the first officer, Mr. Jack, with a smile on his face, not really believing a horse was in their house.

“Yes, sir, I called,” said Hondo.

“We need your help getting this rabid horse out of here before it hurts someone,” said Granddad.

Mr. Jack was still looking at the front door pieces when he asked, “You the gentleman that’s been drinking?”

Granddad did not say a word, just stomped over toward the kitchen, then said, “What do you call this?” as he pointed at the horse. Then Granddad added, “I do not drink, sir.”

The smile on Mr. Jack’s face disappeared, then he added, “Well, I’ll be a monkey’s uncle, it really is a horse.”

Then Mr. Jack called the second officer, Mr. Jill, on his radio. “There really is a horse in here! They say it has rabies, too. You know about horses, come in here and help us.”

Mr. Jill said nothing back on the radio, just came walking in the doorway, looked at the door on the floor, and kept walking to where the horse was. “Holy smokes, it *is* a horse.”

“Yes, yes...it sure is,” said Granddad. “Can you please get this rabid, stinky, four-legged monster out of my house so I can go back to sleep?”

“This horse does not have rabies,” said Mr. Jill.

“It sure looks like she does to me,” said Granddad.

“After a horse runs hard for a long distance, they perspire and it shows up on their hide like foam,” as he pointed to Pat’s sweaty hide that looked like foam.

“That’s what that is?” asked Hondo.

“I’ll be darned. That’s good to know she doesn’t have rabies,” said Granddad. “Now how do we get this four-legged monster out of here?”

“Don’t you folks have chickens?” asked Mr. Jill.

“Yes, we do!” answered Hondo.

“You think the chickens will scare this horse outside?” asked Granddad.

“No, sir, but the chicken feed will get him out,” said Mr. Jill.

“Horses eat chicken feed?” asked Hondo.

“She will eat enough to get her outside, then we can call her owner to come get her,” replied Mr. Jill.

“I’ll go get the feed,” said Hondo as he went out the door.

It was not long before Hondo returned with an old coffee can full of chicken feed. He handed it to the second officer, Mr. Jill.

“No...No, just pour some feed in your hand and stick it under her nose,” said Mr. Jill.

“Remember to keep your hand flat so she doesn’t eat your fingers.”

Hondo poured some feed in his hand and very nervously offered the feed to Pat. She ate it like she had not eaten in a long time. Then Hondo started walking backward toward the door and Pat walked forward, following Hondo outside.

Mr. Jack untied the rope from Pat's bridle and gathered up the rope and chain as he followed Pat out the door.

"That wasn't a hard job," said Hondo.

"If you have what they want, they will do what you want," said Mr. Jill.

Pat had eaten all the feed, but stood in the front yard. Before Hondo could ask, "What do we do now?" Mr. Jill grabbed a handful of mane in his left hand and threw his right leg over the horse's back and landed on Pat's back, ready to ride.

"You can ride her without a saddle, Mr. Jill?" asked Hondo.

"Been doing it for years, Hondo," said Mr. Jill.

Then he nudged Pat in the ribs with his heels and off they went toward Pat's home.

"Follow me in the car, Mr. Jack," yelled Mr. Jill as he rode away.

"On your heels, Mr. Jill," answered Mr. Jack.

Everyone else watched as they rode off into the darkness. After they disappeared, Hondo and his grandparents all went back in the house and back to bed.

THE END

HONDO ENTERS THE WORLD

Mom and Dad sat on their patio, enjoying a glass of iced tea while talking about the day Hondo came into the world. Dad shared how he had sung and talked to Mom's belly every day of her pregnancy.

Mom told Dad how she had enjoyed all the special attention he had given her. But the very special moment was having their baby grow inside Mom. Words could not express what a wonderful feeling that was, even when morning sickness came.

At the hospital, her contractions were coming every couple minutes. Dad had stood beside her, holding her hand. Mom told how she couldn't wait until Hondo came into the world. Finally, they watched as the nurse bathed him, then weighed him. The nurse dressed Hondo in a tiny blue hat and swaddled him in a blanket. After that, it was time for Mom to hold her son. The nurse laid Hondo in her arms.

"I will admit, I was a little scared of being a Mom. It didn't take me long to get comfortable holding Hondo, especially after our eyes met and we just stared at each other. I know how silly I was to check that all his parts were there, but I did."

When Dad told Mom how beautiful he was, Hondo turned his head toward that familiar voice.

"I was convinced he recognized my voice after all the months of my talking to Mom's belly. I got so excited and asked the nurse if that happened a lot. She wouldn't agree or disagree with me."

Mom was quick to change the subject, telling Dad it was his turn to hold Hondo.

“You were scared of holding him until you looked into his dark eyes, then you melted like butter on a hot day. How Hondo smelled was something you never forget, and all that dark black hair, stuck out from under his hat, was a wonderful sight.”

It wasn't long before Dad was holding him with one arm, touching his face with his free arm, rubbing his arm and touching his hand with his finger. It was like Hondo had been waiting on his touch. Hondo grabbed his finger with his tiny hand and held it.

Mom watched while her men got to know each other. It was then that the nurse came in with a wheelchair to carry Mom to the lab to have blood work done. Dad spoke up quickly, saying they would be fine sitting where they were.

When they were alone, Dad whispered into Hondo's ear, saying he didn't care if Hondo had his nose, eyes, or anything. “The bottom line is you're my son forever. I will always love you, even if your Mom names you Regis.

“One day we'll go fishing, find a dog for you, teach you your ABC's and to count, and tell you why you play chess. How important it is to memorize the multiplication tables. I'll show you what to do with marbles. You can show me what to do with a cotton-pickin' computer. Help you to understand the process of being able to think for yourself. Being comfortable is being loved by your family.

“That's just a few of the many things I'll show you, my son.”

Dad continued to look into Hondo's eyes. Hondo continued to hold Dad's finger, knowing there would be many loving moments in their future, every day.

THE END

HONDO'S PIG FARMING DAY

One of the moments I cherish was when I was eight years old, eating my fried eggs and potatoes, with the back door open. Eggs always taste better when you can feel nature.

I was about to take my second bite of my second egg when we heard brakes squealing. I ran outside to see what the problem was.

The problem was a very laughable scene. The squealing had come from an old one-ton Chevy flatbed truck with a set of cattle racks on the bed. Inside the racks, lying next to the cab, was a four-hundred-pound sow with at least six tiny piggies running around. Somehow the gate had not been latched correctly and was swinging in the breeze. Three piggies were running across the road at full speed toward our house. The last piggy made his escape out the gate while I was watching, following the other three piggies.

Two teenagers were running after the piggies while their dad worked on shutting the gate to keep the rest of the piggies locked in. I watched one piggy run at full speed around the corner of our house. One son was about to jump on that piggy. When he did, he grabbed the piggy around the middle and raised him off the ground. The piggy kept his feet moving like he was running in air but not going anyplace. Something happened and the piggy got traction, leaving the teenager empty-handed, lying on his belly. He hit the ground with his fist, then said something I didn't understand. He was up and running after another piggy in a flash.

The father had the gate securely locked, so he started to help his sons. He tried to catch up, but they were just too fast for him. Trying to catch his breath while the piggy headed for the tall grass in our field, I heard him say, “Dag nab it,” when he sat on the ground, shaking his head.

The sons had two piggies cornered up in our yard fence. They got down on all fours, trying to slip upon the piggies. The piggies just stood there, watching the boys and not moving. The boys moved very slowly toward the piggies. They even started “snorting” like a piggy, trying to make them feel comfortable. When the boys were within two feet, they jumped and grabbed both piggies by their hind legs. The piggies started squealing like they were yelling for their mommy to help them.

Neither boy let their piggy loose until they were safely back in the rack with their mommy and family. Their dad yelled that they had done a good job and gave them a thumbs-up. Two more to catch.

While they caught their piggy, I had one piggy cornered up on our back porch. I walked up on him very slowly and then I jumped to grab his legs. I was able to grab one front leg and one rear leg. This seemed to work and I was very proud of myself until he tried to bite me. I gave up on the idea of holding his front leg and held him by both rear legs. He was squealing very loudly. When I got to the truck, Mommy was standing up, watching her baby. The dad came and opened the gate for me. I wasted no time getting the piggy back with his mommy. That left only one.

The four of us walked toward the tall grass where we had last seen the little four-legged shirker. We tracked him to the woods. We stopped to talk. It was then that the dad said if I could find him, I could keep him. I sure didn’t see that one coming. I needed to catch him first.

I called my old friend. He told me to dig a hole three feet deep and three feet wide, then cover it with small sticks and lots of leaves. We knew he would be getting hungry soon.

Made myself a homemade baby bottle with lots of warm milk in it. I sprayed a little around the edge of the woods, then went and sat by the hole.

You could hear him coming through the leaves. He was snorting with his nose on the ground. I sat quietly next to my trap, waiting. He fell in and couldn't get out. I tried to lean down and give him a drink of milk from the bottle. I don't know what happened, but I fell in the hole with him. He walked on my chest, stepped on my face, and sat on my stomach while he drank his milk.

I finally was able to get out after he drank all the milk. I called the owner and told him to come get his pig.

I was not a pig farmer.

THE END

HONDO'S NOCTURNAL FRIEND

Supper was over, all the weeds had been pulled from the garden, and everyone had showered. The sun was about to set. Soon it would be time to watch the lightning bugs fly about in their random flights. They would turn on and off their lights to entertain folks. Last summer Hondo would have spent the evening trying to see how many he could get in a quart Mason jar. This summer he was happy just watching them fly around. Being seven changes the way you think.

The time Hondo spent sitting on their porch with his Mom and Dad was always a very enjoyable and peaceful time. But it wasn't long before Dad said, "Time to hit the sheets." That was Dad's way of saying it was bedtime. Hondo was ready. By the time his head touched the pillow, he was asleep.

Dad was about to go to sleep when he heard Hondo yell, "Dad...Dad." Hondo had been awakened by something crawling on his sheet that covered his leg. The thought of getting out of bed was not even part of his thinking. He yelled for Dad again because Dad was his own personal monster slayer. Finally Dad flicked on his bedroom light.

Hondo hadn't moved except to cover up his head. When his dad came in, he peeked out with one eye. There stood his monster slayer in his new "Thor" PJ bottoms. Dad asked, "What in the world is wrong, buddy?"

"There's something crawling up my leg on the sheets."

"I don't see a thing," as he looked around the bed, then under the bed.

“Do you see anything, Dad?” asked Hondo from under the sheets.

“No...still looking. Stay where you are. I’ll find it, just hang on, buddy.”

“I’m not going anywhere!” said Hondo in a serious voice.

Mom stood at Hondo’s door, looking around, trying to see if she could see something.

Finally she got up the nerve to go and sit on the bed with Hondo.

“Shut the door, Mom!” yelled Dad. “Don’t let it out of the room. Get me a towel. I’ll wrap it up in the towel.”

“What is it?” asked Mom, handing the towel to Dad through a small opening in the door, just enough to throw the towel to Dad.

Mom yelled again, “What is it?” through the small opening of the door.

“Haven’t got a good look at the critter yet!” He was still looking under the bed.

Then Dad threw the towel over something. “Missed it.”

“Missed what, Dad?” asked Hondo from under the sheet.

“I think it’s a mouse, buddy!”

“A MOUSE!” screamed Mom as she slammed Hondo’s door.

“Hurry up, Dad. Catch it!”

“Trying!” Just as he saw something move, he threw the towel on top of it. “Got it!” He carefully closed the towel around the critter. He held it tight so he could carry it outside.

“I’m going to take it outside,” said Dad. Then he added, “Oh, I dropped it.” Dad acted like he had lost it on the floor.

Hondo quickly asked, “Where’s it at now?” Hondo was waiting under the sheets when his dad grabbed Hondo’s leg. Hondo let out a yell that broke the silence of the night. Someone a mile away could have heard his yell.

Dad started laughing, then said, “Got ya!”

Hondo was not happy with his dad. He screamed from under the sheets, “Stop doing that, Dad!” but still knowing his dad was just playing with him.

“It’s so much fun, buddy.”

“Get it out of here, Dad,” begged Hondo.

With that request, Dad took off like someone in a 100-meter foot race. He continued his dash out the back door and into the yard with his wife and son close on his heels, but they stopped at the screen door to watch.

Dad raised the towel high over his head, planning on throwing it to the ground as hard as he could, the same way a professional football player would spike the football after making a touchdown. It was a first-class spike, with a clap and cheer from Mom and Hondo inside the house. They had only clapped a couple times when they saw something small and dark coming out of the towel, flying off into the darkness.

“What was that, Dad?” asked Hondo. Mom and Hondo looked out into the darkness, but were unable to see anything past where the porch light lit up.

“I’ll be darned,” said Dad, raising both arms over his head. “There’s only one thing I can think of that looks like a mouse and flies: a bat.”

“My first bat, how about that!” said Hondo. “I was attacked by a boy-eating bat.”

“I hope it’s your last,” added Mom.

Dad started laughing. It wasn't long before Hondo and Mom joined in, having a good laugh at themselves for being so scared.

When they stopped laughing at themselves, they made it to the kitchen. "Milk and cookies, anyone?" asked Mom.

"Yes...yes!"

The more Hondo thought about the bat, he started shaking himself all over, like a dog might do when it gets wet. "I'm taking another shower."

Mom and Dad were both smiling at their son while going to their room.

Dad said, "Night, son!"

Hondo was in the shower, saying, "Yuck...yuck...yuck!"

HONDO LIKES POLLYWOGS

Hondo was on summer break between the sixth and seventh grades. He was staying with his grandparents for as much of the summer as he could. Hondo was an average twelve-year-old, about five feet tall, with a skinnier frame than most. That was the reason his Grandma used to fix his favorite meal, hamburgers and home-fried potatoes, any time he wanted.

Granddad walked into the kitchen, saying in his sarcastic voice, “Oh goody! Hamburgers!”

“Come on, dude, it’s only the fourth time this week.”

“This week is only three days old, Hondo,” added Granddad.

Knowing his Granddad was tired of eating hamburgers, Hondo quickly changed the subject. “When do tadpoles change into frogs?”

Granddad smiled, knowing Hondo had changed the subject. “You know that answer—in the spring.”

“No...no...I mean what time of the day do they change? I’ve been watching them since the third grade and still haven’t seen a tadpole change to a frog.”

“I know what you mean. One day a tadpole or a pollywog, then like magic, a tiny frog. I don’t have that answer. All I know is, full-grown frog legs taste good,” said Granddad.

“Really! What do they taste like?” asked Hondo.

“Chicken,” answered Granddad with a smile.

“You always say everything new tastes like chicken.”

“It’s true. I’m not making it up.”

“That’s all you two think about—your tummies,” added Grandma.

“Can we go catch some frogs?” asked Hondo.

Granddad looked at Hondo, then a quick look at Grandma while he rubbed his chin.

Hondo had seen this before. His Granddad was coming up with something.

Finally, after a bit, he said, “If you don’t ask for a hamburger for three weeks, we’ll go hunting frogs tonight.”

This caught Hondo by surprise, never thinking Granddad would come up with this idea. Hondo thought for a while, then said, “Two weeks!”

The verbal duel continued until they finally agreed on two weeks and two days. Hondo knew it was time to make a deal when he did, so he could go frog hunting. They shook hands, binding the deal.

“Cool beans,” Hondo responded.

Granddad responded by getting up from the table and starting to dance and prance around, clapping his hands. Hondo and Grandma joined in by clapping as Granddad did.

Grandma leaned over and said quietly to Hondo, “He’s a fruitcake.”

“True, but I get to go frog hunting,” added Hondo with a smile.

Everyone pitched in and cleaned up the supper dishes. After that, they loaded up the truck with the stuff to catch frogs. Hondo was still dancing the jig when he got into the truck to leave for the farm.

When they pulled up to the small brook, you could hear all the frogs croaking everywhere. Within an hour, they had over two dozen frogs in their bag.

Hondo was searching for more frogs when he heard his Granddad slip and fall into the water. The water saved him from getting hurt, but he had fallen on his back. His arms and legs were frolicking in every direction. Hondo grabbed him and pulled him to his feet.

“You OK, Granddad?”

“I’m fine as frog hair,” said Granddad as he paused to catch his breath, then added, “Did you see the size of that chimera that knocked me into the water?”

“He must have slipped off into the night. I missed him,” said Hondo.

“After all that noise, we’ll not get any more frogs tonight. We can drop off the frogs at the butcher shop on our way home. He’ll have them ready tomorrow for us to cook them,” said Granddad.

“Frogs have hair?” asked Hondo.

“Sure do. It’s just very fine,” Granddad said with a smile.

Hondo looked at his Granddad, not sure what to say, so he said nothing. He’d figure it out one day.

The next afternoon Grandma started frying the frog legs after she had rolled them in flour. Hondo watched his Grandma’s every move. After a minute a leg jumped out of the pan and landed on the floor.

“What happened, Hondo?” asked Grandma.

“I don’t know. Maybe they’re haunted!”

This time Grandma was watching when two more legs jumped out of the pan like they were alive. Grandma let out a tiny scream and looked very puzzled at Hondo. Hondo had the same look on his face and was hoping Grandma had an answer. Were they haunted?

Granddad walked into the kitchen, asking, “What’s going on in here?”

Hondo spoke first, “They’re haunted!” as two more jumped out of the pan.

Granddad started laughing. “It’s nothing more than a muscle reaction.”

“I’m not eatin’ any,” said Hondo.

Grandma added, “Me neither!” in a louder voice than normal.

“I’ll finish cooking, you two get a glass of iced tea,” said Granddad.

It wasn’t long before Granddad yelled it was time to eat. Grandma and Hondo kept watching the plate of frog legs, expecting them to jump onto the table. But they never moved. Very carefully Hondo and Grandma put one on their plate.

“They do taste like chicken,” as he took another bite.

“I’m glad they’re not haunted,” added Grandma.

“How did you keep them in the pan?” asked Hondo.

“Put a lid on the pan. You could still hear them hitting the lid,” answered Granddad.

“Cool beans,” said Hondo.

Everyone chuckled as they continued to eat until all the legs were eaten.

THE END

A BEDTIME STORY FOR HONDO

Chapter I

Mike sat in a chair next to his son, Hondo, who lay in bed waiting on his bedtime story about a water wizard. The water wizard's real name was Junebug M. Fishpacker, but everyone called him Wizard. Granddad had known Wizard since grade school. After high school they went to the Army, then Viet Nam together and had been friends ever since.

Granddad had asked his buddy to find a new well on the farm, because the old well smelled like rotten eggs.

Hondo was listening to his dad's every word. He had no questions and had no plan to stop his dad from talking. He just listened and watched his dad.

"I remember he was driving an old 1948 Chevy panel truck. It was painted a bright purple, with many different sizes and colors of stars all over the truck. On each side of the truck was painted *WIZARD*. I had never seen anything like that truck before."

Chapter II

His dad continued, “He stepped out of the truck wearing an old straw cowboy hat, bib overalls, with his long, gray hair pulled back in a ponytail that reached down his back. He had a mustache that was so long, you could not see his lips. It grew around the corners of his mouth, down to his chin. Wizard was the first man I ever saw wearing a pair of alligator boots, especially one that he had killed.

“I see by your nodding, Hondo, that you are impressed too. You sure are a smart one.

“In the back of that truck was a forked stick—he called it a divining rod—made from a willow tree. That was what he used to find water. It just looked like a big slingshot to me.”

Chapter III

“I followed him around the farm most of that morning. All the while he held that stick in front of himself. After about four hours, the stick dipped down toward the ground, marking where the new well should be drilled.”

Mike caught Hondo yawning. He knew the story was working.

“After we found the new well, Wizard wondered if there were any turtles in the small creek that ran through the farm. He decided to change his clothes and get in the water. He was feeling around under the water, trying to find a turtle up under the bank. I still remember what he said: ‘Well...well. What do we have here?’ Then he threw a two-foot-diameter turtle at my feet. I jumped back four feet in one jump.”

Chapter IV

“Are you paying any attention to me, Hondo? You think that smile will get you out of trouble? We’ll see about that.

“Wizard went on to tell us the turtle was about one hundred years old. He wanted to take it home and eat it for supper. I asked him not to eat it, so it could live another century. He looked at me awhile, then threw the old turtle back into the water. He looked for another turtle but never found one. He said his good-byes and was gone.

“Did you like my story? I’m thinking about not telling you any more stories.”

Hondo smiled, knowing his dad would tell him one tomorrow night. Dad knew Hondo had him wrapped around his tiny finger. What else can you expect from a four-month-old?

THE END

HONDO AND THE DONKEY

Hondo and Mary had been buddies since kindergarten. They were on summer break, ready to go into the seventh grade. Hondo had walked over a mile to play *Grand Theft Auto* with Mary.

Under normal circumstances, Mary would have been Hondo's girlfriend, but his Grandma wouldn't have it. She had said many times, "You're too young to have a girlfriend, Hondo. Nothing wrong with being buddies." Mary knew how Hondo felt about her; that was all that mattered.

Mary lived on a farm owned by her Grandpa, with no animals except for Calvin the donkey. Grandpa had retired Calvin several years ago. The only excitement Calvin got was when Babe, the family dog, would chase him. Calvin would run away until he got tired, then he would stop and not move until the dog went home. Grandpa said he saw Calvin smile after the dog left. No one else saw it. Mary didn't know a donkey could smile.

After a couple hours, Hondo and Mary decided to go sit in the gazebo and talk about becoming teenagers, being in the seventh grade, having a barbecue on the Fourth of July, and how many watermelons to order.

Hondo saw something moving, turned his head, and there stood Calvin, eating grass by the fence. Without thinking, Hondo said, "I'm going to ride that donkey." Mary looked at Hondo, knowing there was no way—he wasn't wrapped too tight, a total fruitcake he was.

Before she could tell him to stay out of the pasture, Hondo had jumped the fence and was walking toward Calvin.

In one swift moment, Hondo grabbed a handful of mane and threw his right leg over Calvin and was sitting on his back, ready to ride. He didn't want Mary to think he was scared of Calvin. The donkey turned his head very slowly and looked into Hondo's eyes. If Calvin could talk, he should have asked Hondo, "What are you doing on my back?"

Hondo wondered what that look in his eye meant, then Calvin bit Hondo on the calf.

You could hear Hondo's screams of pain back at the house. He fell off Calvin and was lying on the ground, holding his leg and screaming, "OW!...OW!...OW!"

In a flash Mary was beside him, looking at his leg. There was no blood; it had been more like a pinch with his teeth than a bite. When she realized Hondo was going to be okay, she began to laugh and laugh.

"I told you no one had ridden Calvin in four years," said Mary.

"I don't remember that! All I know for sure, he's a man-eating cannibal that has given me a big boo-boo."

Mary continued to laugh.

Holding his leg, he limped back to the gazebo. He was given first aid by Mary and her mom while Mary laughed.

Hondo finally said, "I'll never ride that donkey again."

Mary added, "You didn't ride him this time, you just sat on him for a minute," going back to laughing at her buddy.

THE END

A PARAKEET FOR HONDO

It was Hondo's eighth birthday. All his family was there, with several of his classmates. Hondo had requested his mom make him a four-layer chocolate cake with lots of white icing. After the candles had been blown out, everyone had a plate full of cake, two bon-bons, and a pack of Bazooka gum on the side. Hondo was on his second piece of cake, and he was making it disappear faster than the magician Houdini could have made it vanish.

His presents consisted mostly of money, the one thing everyone knew he liked. Then he saw his Aunt Olivia's present: a green-and-yellow-feathered parakeet. It was very tiny, lying there in that birdcage. Very gently Hondo picked it up, put it in the palm of his hand, then walked around showing everyone. When Hondo walked by his Aunt Olivia, he leaned down and whispered in her ear how perfect the present was, sealing it with a kiss on her cheek. He then announced that the bird's name was Bernard.

Over the past years Hondo would visit his Aunt Olivia to enjoy Pixy and Vixy, her two parakeets. After they stopped pecking him in the head, he got them to perch on his shoulders and whistle different tunes with him while they walked around the house singing together. That made her get him a parakeet, knowing he would take good care of one.

Hondo's grandparents gave him a harmonica, because Hondo would sit and listen to his granddad play. He enjoyed it so much, now he could play his own with his granddad. Hondo was certain this was the best birthday ever.

* * *

Hondo was learning to play a new song by the band Magic, “Why You Got To Be So Rude.” Pixy and Vixy, with Bernard, tried hard to keep up with the song. Bernard perched on Hondo’s finger, while Pixy and Vixy perched on his shoulder, singing the new song. Hondo walked and played his harmonica at his aunt’s house.

When Barnard was at home in his cage, he learned to whistle for the German shepherd dog, Babe. He whistled just like Hondo did. It was easy for him to fool the dog. Babe would always come and sit at the base of the cage, which was about five feet tall. Hondo’s dad always said that the only reason the dog barked was he wanted Bernard to come out and play with him.

Sometimes when his cage was left open, Bernard would fly around looking for Babe. If he couldn’t find him, Bernard would land on the top of Mom’s head. Mom would start swinging her arms at Bernard, trying to chase Bernard back to his cage or just get him away from her hair.

Bernard would attack her hair several times over the next six months. Finally she had enough. She called a veterinarian to make an appointment to have Bernard’s wings clipped. That way he couldn’t get on her head anymore.

At first Hondo was upset that Bernard wouldn’t be able to fly anymore. After Mom explained that one day Bernard might fly out the back door and be gone forever, Hondo thought about it for a bit, then agreed that his mom was correct.

The following Saturday Bernard was scheduled for an appointment with the veterinarian to have his wings clipped. The operation was to last only fifteen minutes. After breakfast was over, Hondo put Barnard in his carrier, then walked out to the car to wait on his dad to drive them. No one talked at breakfast about the operation.

To Hondo it seemed he had been waiting for hours, but it was only a few minutes. For whatever reason, Hondo took Barnard out of his cage, letting Barnard stand on his finger and petting his back with his other finger.

It was then Hondo looked to his left and saw that his dad's window was wide open. Right after that, Barnard saw it also and off he was, out the window, flying over the neighbor's house and still going.

Hondo started calling for Barnard frantically, but Barnard never turned around; he just kept flying away. Hondo ran back into the house, starting to cry, telling his mom and dad that Barnard was gone—he had flown out Dad's window.

Dad and Hondo jumped in the front seat of the car, with Mom in the back. They followed the way Barnard had taken, but never saw him. The family searched for the next three hours with no results. By now Hondo was very upset, knowing his buddy was gone forever. They finally gave up their search and went home. Hondo went to his room to look out the window, hoping to see his friend. He watched until dark, then gave it up until tomorrow.

Dad came to his room to tell him Barnard would come home tomorrow. It was a long time before Hondo went to sleep.

Hondo was up with the sun, outside waiting on his buddy to come home. It was about ten o'clock when the phone rang, telling Hondo they had a bird that looked like his.

Hondo and his dad drove to their neighbor's house. Sure enough, it was Barnard. Hondo put him in his cage and with a small happy tear and happy dance, he walked quickly to the car.

Dad told Hondo, on the way home, how happy he was they found Bernard. As he rubbed his son's head, he added, "It's not very often you get a second chance after a small mistake."

Hondo nodded his head in agreement.

THE END

HONDO HELPS MOM WITH HER FISH TANK

Hondo's mom had always talked about how much she wanted to have a big fish tank in the dining room one day. While Hondo spent his summer vacation with his grandparents, she was able to look for a 200-gallon tank when she wasn't working.

Mom volunteered to work all the overtime she could at her job, saved all she could on the weekly grocery store trips. One weekend she worked as a waitress and even had a yard sale. Hondo came home that weekend to help her; being eight, he could only do so much.

She was finally able to purchase the 200-gallon tank of her dreams, with the rocks, lights, some living plants, and a large plastic cabin for the bottom of the tank. The cabin had no doors or windows, only an opening where the fish could swim in and out of the cabin. She stored everything in a closet in the basement until she was ready to put it together one Saturday morning.

Finally she was ready to purchase all the tropical fish she wanted. All the fish were only about two inches in length but very colorful. There were no goldfish, only very expensive fish.

She even got the water to be a bright bluish-green when the lights were on in the bottom of the tank. The bubbles made a very pretty sight. Very easy on the eyes and nice to watch all the fish swim around.

After a little training, Mom finally let Hondo feed the fish. Hondo enjoyed watching them chase the food, then get the food before it made it to the bottom of the tank.

Mom and Hondo would sit in front of the tank and watch the fish swim around, go in and out of the cabin, and through the green plants in the bottom. Mom enjoyed the moments she had watching her fish swim around. They allowed her to relax from her busy life. That gave her something to smile about. Even Babe, their German Shepherd, would watch the fish when she wasn't napping in Hondo's bed.

"Mom, is Babe watching the fish or the bubbles?"

Mom answered with a smile, "I'm not sure. Maybe she's wondering how they might taste."

Hondo laughed as the three continued to watch while Mom rubbed Babe's head, knowing they enjoyed her fish tank. Hondo asked his mom, "Are we getting any more fish?"

"I've spent more money than I thought I would. We'll have to enjoy what we have, Hondo."

"Wouldn't two or three be nice?" asked Hondo.

"Maybe!" said Mom, still watching the fish.

It was then that Hondo got the idea of how he could help his mom and make it a surprise.

The next morning Hondo was up at the crack of dawn with a fishing pole, a can of bloodworms, and an empty gallon bucket. He and Babe walked toward their neighbor's pond. There were bass and perch in the pond. He wasn't sure which one he wanted, just two fish. After about fifteen minutes Hondo had two perch about six inches long. He put them in the bucket that was half full of water so they would live until he got them home.

Hondo put one perch at a time in his mom's tank with the other fish. They swam around, checking out their new home. He made coffee for his mom. Afterward they ate breakfast. Mom dropped Hondo at his granddad's garage, then she went on to work.

Hondo couldn't wait to get home to show Mom the two new fish. Mom was fixing supper when Hondo told her he wanted to show her something. When they reached the tank, there were only two perch swimming around.

"Where did those two fish come from?" asked Mom.

"I caught them this morning to surprise you, Mom."

"There's no other fish in here! What happened to the other fish?" asked Mom while she looked in every corner and inside the cabin. None of the fish Mom had purchased were in the tank.

"Those perch ate all my fish!" said Mom sadly.

"Oh no!" said Hondo, still looking in the tank. "I'm so sorry, Mom. I was trying to surprise you."

"I know you were," while giving Hondo a hug. "It's OK! Maybe I should have gotten a parakeet or parrot as a hobby." They walked arm in arm to complete supper. Not a word was ever said about that day again.

THE END

HONDO'S BIG FEET

Chapter I

In Hondo's twelve years, this had been his best summer ever. He had accepted any job that he was offered and always completed it to the best of his ability and with a smile.

Some of his jobs were mowing grass, painting porches, and sweeping the floor in his granddad's garage. He would walk the roads collecting aluminum cans. If he wasn't fishing on the weekends, Hondo would set up a stand near some store and sell root beer floats. Hidden from plain view, he offered fifty fishing worms for his fishing buddies at a good price. He did anything and everything to make his own money. He liked being able to buy his own candy and drinks.

Hondo's favorite uncle, Uncle Burtie, had mailed him a cross-country bicycle with seven speeds. He put many miles on it. Almost every day he rode by a dairy farm with lots of milk cows. The smell of cow doo-doo was in the air. On a clear spring morning, the smell was like an invisible blanket over and around Hondo's house in all directions. He knew if he got hired by Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, he would have lots of money.

Mrs. Jenkins always spoke and asked how he was. Mr. Jenkins rode by Hondo's house on his farm tractor while plowing fields, baling hay, or harvesting the wheat. Mr. Jenkins also gathered up the green corn to make fodder. He preserved it in a silo pit underground, then fed it to his cows in the winter months. Except for the milking parlor, all the work was outside, under

the sky. Hondo had watched the milking process many times and knew he could do the work, even carrying the heavy milk containers or shoveling out the doo-doo.

Mr. Jenkins was an older man with thinning gray hair. Six feet tall, hard work was all he knew, with his wife by his side. Every time Hondo asked for a job helping, he always got the same answer: “Next summer you will be bigger.”

Chapter II

That morning when he gave his grandma a hug, she had seemed to be even shorter than her normal five foot. Hondo finally asked, “Are you standing in a hole, Grandma?” while he looked at the floor.

“No, I’m not, silly!” answered Grandma with a quick glance up at Hondo. “Maybe you’re getting taller.”

“I don’t think so,” replied Hondo. Then he was off to work.

Hondo came back for lunch. He had an old-fashioned peanut butter sandwich with a thin layer of sweet pickles, a handful of potato chips, all washed down with a glass of sweet tea. In a flash, he was gone to see Mary, his friend of many years.

Mary’s grandparents had two chickens perched on a roost over three eggs each. Mary wanted to show the eggs to Hondo. He was sitting on the porch swing when Mary yelled at him to “snap out of it.” Hondo had been smiling while he thought about the money he had made.

“You always find something to smile about,” said Mary. “What were you thinking about?” as Hondo was getting in the car.

“There’s always something to smile about, Mary. This time I was thinking about what a great summer it has been.”

On Hondo’s birthday last week, Hondo’s mom had taken them to see a movie. Hondo had smiled a lot that day. Now he was thirteen, a teenager, not sure what that meant. All he was certain about, he would enjoy and smile through life.

After school had ended last year, Hondo and Mary spent a couple weeks bird-watching. They had watched a pair of robins build a nest and play together as they chased each other from branch to branch. They noticed how they worked as a team, making their home for the babies soon to come. The robins shared all the work to feed the new babies. Hondo and Mary never did see the babies sleeping. They always had their mouths open, wanting a worm.

Chapter III

Mary's mom looked down at Hondo's shoeless feet, then asked, "When was the last time you had shoes on those feet?"

"The last day of school, ma'am! Right after I heard the whippoorwill whistle his tune."

Then Mom asked, "Do you think you have grown any this summer, Hondo?"

"Not sure, ma'am. Never checked."

"I think you have sprung up like a weed, Hondo. You are a lot taller than Mary. At school you two were about the same size." Mary nodded in agreement with her mom.

"I'll measure myself when I get home then."

They continued to talk about school starting soon and what kind of clothes they wanted to get. Then Mary's mom said, "Hondo, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you have some big feet."

Hondo replied quickly, saying what Eeyore says: "Don't worry about me, I'll be OK," while holding his hand to his forehead, palm out. Mary and her mom laughed at Hondo's joke.

It wasn't long before they arrived at Mary's grandparents' farm house. As soon as the car stopped, Hondo and Mary jumped out of the car, running to see what her Nana had to eat. After all, it had been more than an hour since they last ate.

Nana had fresh-baked chocolate-chip cookies for all. They ate the cookies, drank a glass of milk, and were off to the chicken coop. Hondo followed Mary in the gate. Before he was inside the gate, he stepped on a pile of white chicken doo-doo.

He let out a yell that could be heard for a mile. Hondo looked at his toes, with the doo-doo being squashed up between his big toe and the toe beside it.

Hondo yelled again, “Dagnabit! Why me?” Mary was laughing very loudly while she pointed at Hondo’s toes. Then Hondo tried to wipe it off in the tall grass, all the time saying, “YUCK...YUCK...YUCK!”

Finally Hondo got calmed down enough to say, “I will never go barefooted again...never.” Mary continued to laugh at Hondo’s actions.

“You know as well as I do, you will go barefooted again, silly!” said Mary.

“No way, dude. No way!”

“These things happen on a farm, Hondo.”

“I know! I’m not mad, just why me?” All Mary could do was laugh at Hondo.

“Do you want to see the chickens?” asked Mary.

“Yes, I do! Can we see the eggs?”

“No, we can’t disturb the chickens. If we do, they might never set on the eggs again.”

They watched the chickens setting for a while, then Hondo said, “Nothing happening here, dude! Let’s go wash my feet.”

Mary agreed, then said, “Nothing happening!”

Hondo walked on the heel of his foot, not wanting to touch his toes to the ground.

“Stop walking like that, you look silly,” said Mary.

“I feel silly,” said Hondo as he hobbled along back to the house. “I can promise you this, I will never go barefooted again. Never!”

When they arrived at the house, Mary grabbed the water hose and washed the remaining doo-doo off his foot.

“There you go, good as new.”

“No way, dude. It will never be the same. I think I’ve been scarred for life,” Hondo said as he looked down at his foot and wiggled his toes. Hondo went on to say, “Did I tell you I’ll never go barefooted again?”

Mary shook her head, then added, “Yes, you did.”

With all the noise it wasn’t long before Mary’s mom and Nana came outside to see what was going on.

Nana was the first to ask, “What’s going on?”

Then Mary’s mom asked, “Are you two OK? What are you doing?”

Mary still had the water hose in her hand, then added, “The Barefoot Contessa here stepped in a chicken’s number two. And he will not stop whining about it.”

“That’s not true, Mary. I have boldly gone where no man has gone before me,” said Hondo as he raised his fist over his head.

“Oh really, Mr. Spock?” asked Mom.

“But it’s true, madam!” Everyone had a good laugh at Hondo’s very serious face.

“He’ll be fine, Mom!” added Mary as Hondo started hobbling on his heel toward the car.

Chapter IV

Mary's mom dropped off Hondo at his grandparents' house. Hondo jumped out of the car and ran into the house like his pants were on fire.

"He didn't even say thanks," said Mom.

Mary just smiled and added, "I'm sure he meant to, Mom."

Inside, Hondo started the shower, then jumped in with his clothes on. While he stood under the shower, there was a knock at the door.

"You OK in there, Hondo?" asked his grandma.

"Yes, but I stepped in some chicken doo-doo and it got between my toes."

"Keep washing, young man, you will be OK," said Grandma with a chuckle in her voice.

"Are you laughing at me, Grandma?"

"Not me, silly!"

Hondo knew she was as he smiled to himself because he was OK with her smiling at him.

After a long shower, he went to his closet to find his shoes. When he tried to put them on, his foot would not fit in the shoe. He started running to find his grandma.

"Grandma, my shoes have shrunk. What can I do?"

"I'm sure they haven't shrunk," added Grandma. "I'm sure your feet have grown."

"There's no way my feet grew that much. Is there?"

"I have some bad news, young man. Your feet have grown that much, just like you put fertilizer on them. Or maybe too much chicken doo-doo."

“The doo-doo made my feet grow?”

Grandma just smiled at Hondo, then Hondo knew that she was playing with him.

“Go see what your granddad says!” added Grandma.

With his shoes, he went to find his granddad. “Granddad...Granddad...help me, my shoes have shrunk.”

“What in the world are you talking about?” said Granddad as he came from under a car he was working on.

Hondo showed his granddad that his shoes wouldn't fit anymore. Then Granddad added, “We'll have to find you a pair that do.”

“I don't want to go without shoes.” Then he told his granddad what had happened at Mary's grandparents' farm.

Granddad didn't start laughing until Hondo told about the old, cold, and yucky doo-doo going up between his toes. It was a while before he stopped laughing. He grabbed one shoe, got his knife out, and started cutting the leather at the toes.

“Whoa...whoa, what are you doing? You are ruining my shoes.”

“You can't wear them the way they are.”

“True.”

“If you want to wear shoes right now, this is all I can do for you.”

“Well, OK then. When you put it that way.”

It took Granddad three tries to get the old shoes so Hondo could get his foot inside. His toes stuck out the shoes and went far beyond where the shoe ended. Granddad looked down at Hondo's toes sticking out. He had controlled himself not to laugh at his grandson. Finally he

said, “Go show your grandma!” Granddad tried to bite his lower lip so he wouldn’t laugh, but Hondo could tell he wanted to laugh.

“It’s OK, Granddad, you can laugh at my toes,” said Hondo. Granddad just smiled, then said, “Show your grandma!”

“You think she’ll laugh, too?”

“Let’s see what she says!”

After a couple steps, Hondo found out that walking without your toes touching the ground was a little difficult. His toes wanted to touch the ground, a natural reaction. It was long before Hondo even began to smile at the sight of his own toes.

Just as Hondo had suspected, his grandma laughed at his shoes, or was it his long toes sticking out the front of the shoes. Grandma didn’t want to hurt Hondo’s feelings. It sure was very difficult to stop herself. After a bit, Hondo joined her in the laughter, then said, “My toes look like those mini hot dogs they stick in a wrapped-up roll and feed them to those fancy people at parties.” Grandma continued to laugh.

Chapter V

When they arrived at the store, Hondo stayed in the car until Grandma purchased a large pair of flip-flops to wear into the store. Once in the store, they measured his feet. It turned out to be a size 13 shoe, triple E width. They started looking in the big men's section for some. There was not a very large selection of shoes. Finally, he found a pair of shoes that fit and didn't look too bad for a young man to be seen in.

For the last three months, the only thing Hondo had worn had been shorts and a few T-shirts. Now it was time to get school clothes. After he was measured, Hondo was very surprised that he had stretched out to be 6'4" in height. He picked out some jeans and shirts that he liked.

It was only a couple days before Hondo was walking into his new class as a 7th grader. He was still having a little trouble walking in his new shoes. Sometimes he would trip on any small thing. Most of his friends just shook their heads in disbelief how big Hondo had become over the summer. Some friend even said how his shoes looked like boats. Hondo just smiled and kept walking with his friends.

Hondo knew there was nothing he could do about how big his feet were, so he would laugh with his friends. He didn't let it bother him.

That winter, Hondo played on the basketball team and was pretty good at it. Mary enjoyed watching Hondo play. That made it all worthwhile.

The school year went by very quickly for Hondo. It was the day everyone gathered in the auditorium to receive their awards for the school year.

The basketball coach called out, “Regis Resio Ridgeway, please come up here and receive your letter for playing basketball.”

His friends gave a little chuckle with his real name. Someone yelled, “You mean Hondo?” Everyone laughed again. Hondo was sitting beside Mary. She patted him on the arm. She knew how much this letter meant to Hondo.

While Hondo walked to the steps going to the stage, he had an idea. The coach added, “We have high hopes for Regis in the future. He is the only student I’ve had that his shoe size is the same as his age.” Everyone in the auditorium laughed out loudly.

Hondo was walking up the steps. When he got to the top step, he acted like he tripped and almost fell, at the very same time the coach commented about his shoe size and age. All the teachers and students roared in laughter for several seconds.

Then Hondo turned around and smiled at the auditorium of students and then he winked at Mary. Mary knew what a jokester he was. That was why she liked him.

When he returned to his seat, he gave his “letter” to Mary. She gave him a big smile. That made it worth all his efforts to get the letter.

THE END

GRANDDAD'S FIRST TRIP TO THE OCEAN

Chapter I

Granddad was explaining to his ten-year-old grandson, Hondo, how to catch a live raccoon. He was going to do it the same way his dad had done it years ago.

On their way to the farm, Granddad said, "We need to find a hollow tree down by the creek. We'll drill a one-inch hole into the base, then put a shiny quarter in the back of the hole. For whatever reason, raccoons like shiny things. When he comes to the creek to wash his supper, he'll see the quarter, reach in the hole and grab that quarter. With the size of the hole and his paw around the quarter, his paw will be too big to come out of the hole. That's when we'll have him because he will not let go of that shiny quarter."

"Why can't he let it go, Granddad?" asked Hondo.

Granddad got a smile on his face before he answered, "I asked my dad the same question." He stopped talking like he was thinking of his dad and him catching a raccoon.

Hondo had waited as long as he could, then said, "And?"

"Oh! He didn't have an answer either." Granddad still had a look like he was thinking and remembering the times with his dad. "All I know is, he'll not let go. Then we'll put him in a burlap bag the next morning."

"He'll make someone a great pet," replied Hondo.

"Yes! Yes! He will."

On their way to the farm it started to rain. By the time they pulled into the driveway, it was raining cats and dogs (a very hard rain).

Granddad and Hondo sat in silence, watching and enjoying listening to the rain hit the truck—the same sound as rain on a tin roof—something they had done many times in the past, as far back as Hondo could remember, since he was born.

Granddad was the first to break the silence. “Did I ever tell you about the time my parents and I went to Atlantic City?”

Chapter II

Hondo had heard those words, “did I ever tell you,” many times in his ten years. But he knew a good story would follow those words. Hondo had a big smile on his face when he answered, “No! No, Granddad, you have not.”

Granddad began his story. “It was mid-August. Dad, Mom, and I went to Atlantic City for a vacation. I had never been to the ocean before. I was very excited about seeing the ocean. I remember the first time I saw it, I couldn’t believe how big it was. All the way to the horizon it went; big ships looked very small on the horizon.

“The lady behind the desk at our hotel told us it was high tide. I just nodded my head, acting like I knew what she was talking about. I didn’t have a clue what she meant. Later Dad explained to me. I wanted to get to the water; that was my number one priority.

“We walked out of the hotel and there was this big wooden deck. It went left and right as far as I could see. It reached out to the beach and there were more people than I’ve ever seen walking in both directions. Off in the distance I could see the ocean. I took off running, ducking the people as I ran. I jumped off the deck and hit the sand, still running. I stopped long enough to take my shoes off. The sand felt different than anything I had ever felt on my feet. I liked it.

“Dad caught up with me and took his shoes off, too. I stopped when I got to the edge of the water because I wasn’t sure what was making those waves. They came toward the beach every couple seconds. I knew there was a giant machine out there beyond the horizon making

these waves, but why? Dad explained this mystery to me that night. It wasn't a machine; it had to do with the moon and gravity.

“It wasn't going to hurt me; that was all that mattered. Dad and I walked out in the ocean about knee deep. The wave would hit you pretty hard. Dad told me to jump up when they hit me. When I did, it took my feet out from under me. I went down into the water, not sure what I was hit with. I started to fight to get to the top of the water. Then I felt a hand on my arm that was pulling me up. It was Dad, he had me. ‘Thanks! Wasn't sure what to do.’ Time to move to the raft that Mom was getting inflated.”

“Granddad, you didn't say how the waves were really made.”

“We'll get on the computer and find out for sure.”

“OK!” replied Hondo.

“What do you mean ‘OK,’ smarty pants?” said Granddad.

“Well then, without further ado. It seemed like I had just started rafting in the ocean when Mom yelled it was lunchtime. On my way towards Mom, I stepped on something hard in the soft sand. I rubbed my foot over it, even tried to look down at what it might have been. Finally I leaned over to touch it with my hand. The water was just over knee deep. While I leaned over, a wave came in and covered me with saltwater. I was not expecting it, so I got a mouth and nose full of water. I let the next wave go by, then I started digging with my hand. Then I would rise up before the next wave could get up my nose. I kept this up-and-down motion with my head to dig until it was loose. I picked it up after a lot of trouble. I carried it to Mom to show her what I had found. I didn't know what it was. It was a seashell; it seemed there were two of them stuck together.

“While I was running to Mom, my index finger got in the small opening between the two shells. It closed on my finger, pinched it hard. A tiny whimper slipped out of my mouth; it had hurt. I remember how I got a blood blister on my finger by that evening. Whatever was in there between these two shells was alive and strong.

“I asked Mom what it was as I stuck it in her face. After a few close looks, she decided it was either a mussel or an oyster. She wasn’t sure. Dad said the same thing. Even a man sitting near us on the beach said that it was either one or the other. Then he added, ‘Oysters live far out in the ocean and on the bottom. Not on the beach; never happens,’ he said. He said I should throw it back into the ocean. But for whatever the reason, I wanted to keep it and take it home with me.”

Chapter III

“After a lot of discussion on our last night, it was finally agreed my mussel would ride home in the trunk of our car. That last day I spent every minute I could in the ocean. I really enjoyed my time in the ocean.

“When we got home, I laid my shell on the back porch floor. I wanted to keep my shell in my room; Mom wasn’t going for that idea. I soon gave up that idea.

“I carried my bag up to my room. I soon heard Babe, my German shepherd, barking. I ran toward the barking. There she was down on all fours, barking and swatting at my shell. Every time that shell would open, just a tiny bit, she would bark and swat at it. Babe was ready to play as she chased it on the floor after every swat. I started laughing at her actions. She was a silly dog, but I loved her anyway. I finally picked my shell up and took it to a fence post out in the yard. I still laugh when I think about her chasing my shell.”

Chapter IV

“I kept myself busy for the next week, not paying any attention to my shells. Those two shells were going to be my way of remembering my first trip to the ocean. When I finally had a chance to check on my shells, my mouth flew open when I saw what was happening with my shells. It was something I had never seen before. There was a line of ants walking up that post, then inside my shell. They continued down that pole, then on to their home. Mother Nature had helped to clean up my shells. Thanks, ants.

“It was again several more days before I got back to my shell. To my surprise when I picked it up, it was completely empty. I looked inside, but couldn’t see anything. But when I moved my shell, I heard something moving inside. I was not sure what it was. The two shells were still stuck together.

“Without giving it a second thought, I pried open the two halves. Out came something tiny. I was lucky enough to get a quick glimpse of it when it fell to the ground in our yard.

“For the first time in my short life, I felt panic. What had I done in my haste to get my shells open? Will I ever find out what had fallen? My stomach felt like I had just eaten too much ice cream. I dropped to my knees, started feeling where I thought it had fallen. It took me several minutes of fast feeling, but I was lucky enough to find my mystery piece.

“I ran to show Mom and Dad what I had found. Neither of them had ever seen anything like it; that made three of us. The opening between the two shells was too small for someone to have put it inside my shells.

“Dad asked Mom to make an appointment at their friend’s jeweler shop. He said to bring it by tomorrow afternoon and he would run a couple technical tests on my mystery piece.

“I remember that ride to the jewelers like it was yesterday. Mom and I rode together. I was very nervous and couldn’t wait to hear what the jeweler had to say. Mom looked over at me about halfway there. She asked me, did I have ants in my pants? Told her I didn’t think so. She added that I needed to sit still. I laughed, then she laughed.

“We finally got to the jewelers. I wanted to run into the store. Mom held my hand, so I couldn’t. The jeweler took my mystery piece. He looked at it, rubbed it between his fingers, then he rubbed it on his teeth. I was scared he was going to swallow it. He held it in his hand, then said that it was a very rare black pearl and was worth over \$2,000. I let out a loud ‘Yahoooo’ and did a happy dance. Mom smiled.

“After I calmed down, I asked the jeweler, that thing of rubbing the pearl on his teeth was the highly technical test? He said that it sure was.

“I had never been happier than I was that day. I gave Mom and Dad \$200 each with my thanks. I put the remainder in my new bank account.

“Hondo, that just goes to show you, something beautiful can be hiding in a not-so-cute package, no matter where you find it.”

THE END

AN EVENING OF BASKETBALL

Chapter I

It was a Sunday afternoon. Twelve-year-old Hondo was watching basketball on TV with his granddad. Basketball was Hondo's second-favorite sport; soccer was number one.

They sat in silence watching the game until Granddad said, "Did I ever tell you about the time I refereed a girls' basketball game while I was a junior in high school?"

"No, never heard that one. Go ahead, I'm all ears."

Granddad began telling his story...

* * *

At first I didn't want to be a referee. I had played basketball for five years by now and I didn't like a referee myself. Finally all the girls asked me to please do it. If I didn't they couldn't have a game.

I was sitting at a table in the library doing nothing, with some silly book in front of me. I turned to look at what all the noise was. It was all fifteen of the girls' team marching toward me. They sat on both sides of me and across from me. Some even stood behind me. I have to say, I was a little scared. None of them were smiling.

Rita was the senior; that made her the spokesperson.

"We need you to be a referee, so we can play," said Rita without a smile. Seeing a girl without a smile toward me made me feel very uncomfortable.

“If I don’t, you all going to beat me up?” I said jokingly. They still didn’t smile.

Rita answered with a simple “Yes!”

“Well! OK then, you can count on me.” They didn’t even know how really scared I was.

After I agreed, they all smiled, they were happy.

Chapter II

The big game was scheduled for Friday night, before the varsity basketball game. Today was Tuesday; lots of time to get out of this referee thing, I thought.

After I agreed, they told me it was different from boys' basketball. There were six girls on a team.

I replied with a loud, "What?" Not the right thing to do in a library. Everyone looked at me like I had three eyes.

"You girls didn't tell me I had to learn a new game. It's taken me almost five years to learn the basketball I play. The only thing I see I can do is resign. Because I'm not smart enough to learn it in three days. I'll see you girls later," and I started to get up out of my seat.

"Not so fast there, hot-shot," said Mrs. Kirby, the Home Economics teacher. "I have all the faith in the world in you, Hondo. I was the one who told the girls to ask you."

"Well, aren't you the slick one, Mrs. Kirby. You knew I could never turn all these girls down," I said.

"I'm very slick, thank you for noticing," said Mrs. Kirby. She went on to say, "I'm typing up all the rules. The girls will give you a copy."

"Thanks, nice lady!" I said out loud, but under my breath I added, "You dirty rat!" She knew anything to do with basketball was my weak spot.

Chapter III

By lunchtime Wednesday, I was handed a copy of the rules. After reading them, I was surprised there were not many differences. The big one was there were six girls on a team. Three girls always played defense and couldn't go past the center court mark. That left the other three playing offense or scoring all the points. If there were to be any points scored, snicker-snicker.

Remember, Hondo, that when I was in high school, there was no physical education class for girls. It was a luxury they just didn't get to have. Several of them liked to play basketball when they could. They would come to the gym and play ball with the fellows. The boys liked having them around.

It was Friday evening, time for the big game. When I walked out on the court in my black-and-white-striped shirt, a few folks applauded. I bowed with a big smile on my face. The girls were doing practice lay-ups on each end of the court. Some of the girls were having difficulty in getting the ball in the basket. I sat down to wait until it was time.

The timekeeper finally rang the bell; time to start. I threw up the ball for a jump ball in center court, and away we went. The scoreboard showed the game had only been going on for five seconds before I had to blow my whistle. One of the defensive players had crossed over the center court mark into territory she was not allowed. Got that straight and two players were fighting over the ball; blew my whistle again, jump ball.

I understand now why professional referees hold the whistles in their mouths, something I really didn't plan on doing. By the time I did two more calls, the whistle was staying in my mouth even when my jaw was yelling to let it go.

Five minutes into the first quarter, I'm asking myself while running up and down the court, "Why did you do this?" No answer flashed before my eyes, only the slow-moving scoreboard on the wall. The score was 4 visitors, 2 home, and I know of at least 100 times I whistled to stop the play. Girls play rougher than the varsity team.

The first quarter was finally over, the longest fifteen minutes of my life. Never get that time back, it was gone. I couldn't think past my dry mouth. I needed water. I knew my mouth was as dry as a bag of salted popcorn. That water sure was good.

During the second quarter, the whistle-blowing eased up some. I remember asking a member of the audience with hand signals if I could pay them to take my job. No takers!

I even thought about hiding at halftime; just drank some more water, came back to finish the game.

The thing I really remember about that night was all the dirty looks the players gave me. To this day, those looks said to me, 'I want to do mean and terrible things to you.' I wanted to cry, but I controlled myself. I've never been given any dirtier looks than that long night in my life.

To my surprise, after the game, all the girls came running at me. My knees were knocking and my feet wouldn't move, I was so scared. But they all gave me a hug and said, "Thanks!" What a surprise!

No girls ever played basketball at our school again!

THE END

AND THE WINNER IS...HONDO?

Chapter I

It was only four more weeks until twelve-year-old Hondo's second-favorite holiday, Easter, would be here and all that candy. It was also the arrival of Hondo's second-favorite sport, baseball. Soccer had been number one since he was five. He would play either anytime he could, rain or shine.

When Hondo arrived at school Monday morning, he noticed several students were gathered at the bulletin board. He heard someone reading a new posting. "...whoever's name is drawn will win four tickets to opening day at the Nationals Stadium. The tickets have been donated by our own hometown slugger, Casey Rudy."

Hondo heard all he needed to hear. Without thinking he let out a loud, "Yahoooo, I'll win those tickets."

The tickets for the drawing cost \$4.00 each. Second place was two large pizzas at Tony's Subs. At that moment Hondo knew he would win that first-place ticket, never second place. Hondo's granddad had told him long ago that second place was the first loser—not for Hondo.

Chapter II

Hondo couldn't wait to get home. He was very excited about going to the game, more than he had ever been about anything else in his life. He ran into the kitchen, yelling as he ran, "Mom... Mom."

"What's wrong?" she asked while cooking Hondo a snack.

"Mom, I need four dollars to buy a ticket at school."

"What kind of ticket, Hondo?" asked Mom.

"The winner goes to the Nationals opening day game."

"Wow, that's a great price."

"I'll clean up the garage this weekend for the money. Think Dad will give me the money?" while he opened the fridge, looking for something to eat.

"I'm fixing you something to eat. Shut the fridge."

Hondo ran out to meet his dad as soon as he pulled into their driveway. After a lot of talking, it was agreed Dad would give him two dollars and Mom would give him two dollars to clean the garage. Hondo was so happy he gave out a loud "Yesssss" while still sitting at the dining room table.

That night, when Dad came to tuck him in, he asked Hondo, "What makes you feel you are going to win those tickets?"

"I don't know, Dad, it's like I can see myself sitting in the stands and catching a home run ball," replied Hondo.

“Well, I’ve never had any feeling like that, so you must get these feelings from your mother,” said Dad with a laugh.

Hondo lay in bed, not saying a word until a couple seconds had passed. “You think Mom’s a witch, Dad?”

Dad didn’t answer, he just laughed his way down the stairs. Hondo was not sure what to think. He was asleep in a couple minutes. He dreamt of watching the baseball game on Easter.

The next morning at breakfast, Hondo had the much-needed \$4.00 in his pocket. While eating his oatmeal, he asked his mom, “Do I have any of your powers as a witch?”

“Why do you think I’m a witch?” asked Mom. She knew what he meant because Dad had told her about what was said at bedtime last night.

“Last night Dad said you had special feelings!” replied Hondo.

“You could have some of my special feelings. We’ll see if you win those tickets. The bus will be coming soon, my son. Have a spellbinding day, my young warlock,” said Mom with a smile.

The first thing Hondo did when he got to school was go and purchase that ticket. Without the slightest hesitation he told his friends how he had cast a spell and was going to win those tickets. His friends only laughed and said, “Sure you are.” Hondo turned and walked away proudly, with his head held high, not bothered by his friends’ laughter. He knew in four weeks he would have those tickets in his hand and he would have the last laugh.

Now that the winning ticket was safely tucked in his wallet, he would start dropping hints to the different chocolate candies he wanted on Sunday. Then that afternoon he would be at the baseball stadium, sitting in left field with glove on, ready to catch that home run.

Chapter III

By the time the drawing came, everyone in school knew that he had said he would win those tickets. Half the school believed he was really a warlock. When the time came for the big announcement, over half of the school was waiting outside the principal's office. They wanted to be certain that the drawing was not rigged to make Hondo win. Hondo was in the gym, shooting the basketball, not the least bit excited.

The principal came over the intercom ten minutes before lunch. "It's time to draw the winning ticket, folks, to the Nationals baseball game. The winner is..." you could hear paper being unfolded "...well, I'll be darned. He did it...Mr. Regis Ridgeway. To you folks who don't know who that is, it's...HONDO!"

The school kids all had dropped their jaws at the same moment after his name was called. "Is he a warlock?" several asked each other. His friend said he was just lucky. They started chanting, "He did it...he did it...he did it."

Hondo just kept on shooting baskets for about five more minutes. Then he walked up to the principal's office. Everyone was still standing around, waiting on him to arrive.

After he walked up, they all clapped and cheered, saying his name in a chant, "Hondo... Hondo...Hondo." They were just happy he had won the contest, but not sure how he did it. Several had agreed he still looked normal, no matter what he was.

The principal handed him his tickets, shook his hand, and said congratulations loud enough for all to hear.

Then he said softly, “How did you do it?”

Hondo just smiled at him. Then he said softly in the principal’s ear, “My mom’s a witch!”

They both laughed loudly. Hondo bowed to the principal and walked out of the room. Before he was out of the room, the leader of the school said, “Very funny, Hondo!”

Nothing could spoil the joy and happiness he was feeling, not even the principal with his rules of conduct. Hondo waved the tickets high in the air, showing everyone. One of his favorite people was standing by the stairs, watching his every move.

Hondo walked past the other kids, straight toward this pretty girl. He stood in front of Mary, showed her the tickets, then asked, “Would you do me the honor of accompanying me to this game?”

“Let’s do this, my favorite warlock!” They laughed and the other kids clapped, showing their support. Hondo gave out a loud “Yesssss!” then a few minutes of his famous happy dance.

Chapter IV

Hondo was the first one up. Downstairs he went in a half run. Just like all the years past, on the kitchen table was one big basket and two smaller ones on each side for Mom and Dad.

One large hollow chocolate bunny, three purple marshmallow rabbits, and four Reese's eggs, undressed, was Hondo's breakfast. All was washed down and topped off with a large glass of chocolate milk. Then came a big "Ahhhh!" to finish a great meal. When Mom and Dad came downstairs, Hondo said, "Tell the Easter Bunny thanks for me."

With a smile Mom said, "Will do." While Dad was digging around in his basket looking for his breakfast, she added, "Will do that soon as I see her."

By 10:30 Hondo and Mary were sitting in the backseat of Dad's car on their way to the Nationals stadium at RFK. While riding up the interstate, Mary asked Hondo, "Did you see that rerun of *The X-Files* the other night?"

"Sure did!" said Hondo.

"Do you believe?" asked Mary.

"Doesn't everyone?" replied Hondo.

Mary's only answer was a smile. At the same time Mom and Dad shared a glance at each other with a smile. But not a word was said.

Finally Hondo asked Mary, "Which one do like the best, Mulder or Scully?"

"Well, Scully is smarter than Mulder," said Mary.

"No way! Mulder always gets the bad guy," added Hondo.

“He would never get them if it wasn’t for Scully’s investigation.”

“What do you think, Mom?” asked Hondo.

“The idea behind the show is they make a great team, getting the weird bad guys together.”

“True.”

“Agreed, Mom.”

They enjoyed watching the countryside go by the remainder of the trip, even if they couldn’t wait to get to the stadium.

Chapter V

Dad pulled into the parking lot a little after 11:00. There were only a few cars in the lot; several were setting up to have a tailgate party. Hondo wondered what kind of food they might have.

He gave up on that thought and realized he had eaten too much chocolate. He couldn't sit still. *Maybe I have ants in my pants. No way!* Hondo decided he was like a racecar motor on race day and wanted to go 200 mph. He grabbed his glove and hoped Dad would park soon, checked to be sure he had the tickets.

Hondo and Mary hopped out of the backseat and started walking quickly to the ticket booth; he was going to booth #4. They stopped and waited on his dad and mom to catch up.

He wore his glove on his left hand. He hit it a couple times with his right fist. Mary said, "You ready to catch that home run?"

"Casey will put it right in here," as he hit his glove again, showing her where he would catch it.

Hondo handed the man inside booth #4 his winning tickets very proudly.

"Oh, you're the one who won Casey's free tickets."

"Yes, sir, I am."

"You know when your principal called to tell Casey who won, he said there's a chance you might be a warlock. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is, sir."

At that moment his mom hit his arm. “Stop telling people that,” Mom said softly to Hondo.

The man in booth #4 gave them directions to where to find Mr. Rudy. They walked through Gate 8, took the first right, and then a left. There it was: the Nationals ballpark. They stood high above first base. Everyone stood with their mouths open, looking in every direction, taking in how really big it was, and how beautiful it was, also.

Hondo was the first to speak. “Wow! This place is a lot bigger than I thought it would be.”

“It sure is,” added Mary.

Dad finally spoke. “Down there’s Casey in the batter’s cage.” Then he pointed with his hand where to look. The bat made a loud crack when Casey hit the ball, then the ball would crash into the seats in left field.

“Right there is where I want to sit,” said Hondo, knowing he could catch a home run in that spot. “Let’s get a drink from the concession stand then go meet Casey.” Everyone agreed.

They started to turn around when someone yelled, “Hondo!”

Who knows my name? he thought to himself.

“Hey, Hondo! Come down here,” someone yelled.

They tried to see who was yelling, then they saw someone waving for them to come down to home plate.

“It’s Casey who’s waving and yelling at us,” said Mom.

“How does he know my name?”

“Let’s go ask him,” said Mary.

“Don’t worry about me, I can wait on my drink. My feeling like I’m in a desert is no problem,” said Hondo in his ‘poor me’ voice. Really, he couldn’t wait to walk on the field. He was the first one down to the field. Mary was behind him. They left Mom and Dad in the dust behind them.

Mr. Casey Rudy was still hitting home runs at home plate. He stopped to say, “You must be Hondo!”

Hondo stood in silence, not sure what to say. Finally Mary gave him a gentle nudge to help him snap out of the spell he was under.

“Uh...yes...yes...it is, sir. How did you know my name?” Hondo had never been unable to speak before. Was he under a spell?

“Your principal told me your name last night on the phone. He’s a good friend of mine, Hondo. Then this must be Mary, your pretty friend. And Mom and Dad, Mr. and Mrs. Ridgeway.” He shook their hands. “Pleased to meet you all.”

Chapter VI

Mr. Rudy asked everyone if they were OK and things were OK also. They all said they were really enjoying their time and thanked him for the trip.

“Now Hondo,” Mr. Rudy tossed Hondo a baseball, “go out on the mound and pitch me a couple fastballs.”

Hondo turned to look at his mom and dad, then took off running toward the pitcher’s mound. Dad and Mom watched with pride on their faces. Mary gave a clap to encourage Hondo. Dad took a picture to remember this moment and this day.

“Let’s go, Hondo. I don’t have all day. The game is starting soon,” said Mr. Rudy with a smile, letting Hondo know that it was all in fun.

Hondo nervously stepped on the mound, threw the ball into his glove a couple times, looked at the catcher, shook his head, then nodded and threw the ball. The ball went about eight feet over the catcher’s head.

“You might need to put a spell on the next pitch. You are a warlock, right?” said Mr. Rudy.

“The principal told you that?”

“Yes. Now pitch me a good pitch!”

Hondo gave him one of the finest fastballs he had ever pitched. Mr. Rudy hit the ball so hard it almost went out of the stadium. Hondo watched it go and go! Then he gave out a loud “Wow!”

Hondo walked toward Mr. Rudy. "That was a great hit, sir."

"Please just call me Casey. You folks better go to the concession stand, get your food, and pick out some souvenirs for yourselves. Everything is my treat. They know you're coming, just tell them your name's Hondo. They have directions to your seats. Enjoy yourselves and have a good time."

"There's no number on the hot dogs I can eat?" asked Hondo.

"No, eat all you want."

Hondo said, "Thanks, Casey." Everyone added their thanks.

Dad took a few more pictures of everyone with Casey.

Chapter VII

They made their way to the concession stand to get their food. Everyone ordered a foot-long hot dog with all the trimmings, except Hondo. He ordered two. Four fries, popcorn, and a cold drink. Hondo asked for some bubble gum for later.

Mom picked out a Nationals shirt to wear, Hondo and Mary got a Nationals hat, and Dad wanted one of those big foam number-one fingers. Those were their souvenirs for their first baseball game. Dad continued to take pictures on the way to their seats and more when they sat down.

They ate in silence while watching all the seats fill up before the big game. Today's game was against the Boston Red Sox. Hondo wondered how many of the people were going to their first game today also.

Everyone removed their hats after standing for the National Anthem. Hondo's Granddad would expect that because of his time in Vietnam.

In the first inning, Casey hit a foul ball to the first baseman. The Nationals only scored one run. In the bottom of the second inning, Casey pointed his bat in the direction of Hondo. After that, Mary elbowed Hondo in the ribs. Of course he yelled, "Ow, you big bully." Mary just pointed at the mega screen very calmly. On the screen was the entire family, clapping and cheering, showing how much they enjoyed what Casey had given them.

Hondo stopped eating his hot dog long enough to wave at the camera. He looked to his right. There was Mom and Dad kissing for the camera. Hondo didn't say a word, but he thought,

Yuck. When he looked at Mary, nothing was said. He just extended out his hand to shake Mary's hand. After their shake, both just smiled at each other. The folks in the stadium clapped and cheered while they watched the big screen. Several laughed as they watched Hondo and Mary's handshake.

For whatever reason, Hondo took a closer look at the big screen. He decided who the camera had been watching—it was “Sly” Sylvester Stallone, seated behind them, whom the camera was really getting a shot of. When Hondo turned around, he came face to face with one of his favorite movie heroes.

Hondo and Mary had eaten many a bowl of popcorn while watching reruns of *Rocky*. By the time they watched *Rocky II*, “Sly” was Hondo's hero. Mary liked him too, she just wouldn't admit to liking him.

It was one of those involuntary reactions. Hondo's mouth flew open in the excitement of seeing his idol. Finally Mary elbowed him. “Stop staring at him! And shut your mouth, silly.”

“OK! OK!” Hondo was about to ask “Sly” for his autograph when he heard the familiar crack of a bat. Hondo didn't even think about where the ball was going. He knew it was coming at him. By the time he turned around, the ball was at its peak and starting to descend in an arc. It was coming straight at him. Everything seemed to be in slow motion for Hondo. He felt Mary touch his arm, then add, “Here it comes, Hondo.”

Hondo hit his glove with his fist before he caught the ball Casey had hit to him. Hondo didn't have to move in any direction, stand up, nothing, just hold his glove up, that was it!

Mary started to clap and cheer, “You caught it!” Then it seemed like everyone else started clapping. Hondo's picture was on the big screen now, just him cheering.

As Casey was running between second base and third base, he pointed up at Hondo with a big smile. The stadium was buzzing with cheers and clapping from the Nationals team and for Casey.

Dad had recorded every amazing moment of Hondo's catch. Then Mary proudly said, "We'll see that catch on YouTube tonight." Hondo was very happy with himself, as were his mom and dad.

Someone said softly in Hondo's ear, "You are a warlock! But I still will give you one thousand dollars for that ball, Hondo."

"How did you know my name?"

"Casey told me about you! He's a good friend of mine," said Sly.

"If I refuse your offer, Mr. Sly, can I still get your autograph?" asked Hondo.

"I would be very happy to give you an autograph, Hondo."

"Thanks, Mr. Sly."

He signed the program and handed it to Hondo.

"My friend, Mary, was wondering..."

"No problem!" He handed her one also.

"Thanks, Mr. Sly."

"You're very welcome."

After the game, which the Nationals won 7-2, Hondo and his family and Mary went down to the locker room. Casey signed the home run ball that Hondo caught. Then the rest of the team signed another ball for Mary.

Everyone was very happy on the ride home. They knew they would go again, one day.

“Thanks for bringing me, Hondo!”

“Anytime!”

THE END

SPEAKING OF GIRLS

Chapter I

It was the 30th of May, Memorial Day for everyone else. But for Hondo and his dad and granddad, it was time for their annual male ritual: a fishing trip for trout. It began ten years ago, while Hondo was two years old. Those first few years Hondo just sat on the bank, throwing rocks and sticks into the water. Dad or Granddad never said a word to him that he was chasing off the fish; they enjoyed having Hondo close to them. Hondo grew to enjoy the time they spent together, even if they didn't catch any fish.

They were up before the sun peeked over the hills and on the road. Hondo sat in the back seat, about half asleep. His dad and granddad talked about what fishing hole they planned to fish. The sound of their voices helped twelve-year-old Hondo slip into a deep sleep where he dreamed of being the first to catch a fish, something that had a lot of prestige with it.

One of their favorite fishing holes was only about an hour's ride from where they lived. When the car stopped, Hondo was awake instantly and ready for some weak coffee from his thermos. He stepped out of the car and took his first sip of coffee, where he noticed there was no breeze. He knew that meant it was a good day to fish. A mist was rising off the water; it rose up about a foot where it disappeared, like a magician had waved his wand over the water. The mist danced on top of the water, waiting on the sun to make it disappear. Hondo took another sip, knowing this was another of Mother Nature's sights to enjoy until it disappeared.

Chapter II

The mist was gone in minutes. All fishing lines had been tossed into the water. Everyone had their secret bait attached, hoping to catch the first fish of the day. That way the other two had to change their bait to what caught the first fish.

Over the years, Granddad had developed a habit of casting a half a dozen times into a fishing hole. If he hadn't caught a fish, he was off, walking to the next hole, no matter how far away. Dad had told Hondo that Granddad had itchy feet; when he took off, he was scratching them. Dad and Hondo continued to fish where they had started.

There was one thing for sure: you didn't have to be quiet, like you do when you hunt in the woods. Hondo watched Granddad go out of sight around the bend in the river. Dad continued fishing, but asked, "Hondo, I've been meaning to ask you, how do you feel about these bullies at school I've been hearing about?"

"The first thing that comes to mind is what Granddad has always said: 'Never say anything to someone you wouldn't want them saying to you.' The second thing is, 'If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything.'"

"Those are both good things to live by," said Dad.

"Yes, they are," added Granddad, who had walked up the road to get back to where he started.

Before Hondo could speak, he had a tug on his line. Without thinking he automatically pulled back quickly on his pole, setting the hook in the trout's mouth. His pole bent from the

strain of his fish fighting to stay in the water. It took Hondo a couple minutes of reeling, with his pole held high in the air, before he could scoop up his catch in his fishing net. It was a rainbow trout about twelve inches long. Hondo liked catching trout; they always put up a good fight.

This was Hondo's first catch on his new ultra-light pole with a new open-face reel. What made it even nicer was Hondo had purchased it with his own money that he saved from his odd jobs.

He caught his fish on a wet fly and a #3 spinner from Granddad's tackle box. So, per the agreement, his dad and granddad had to swap to a fly and spinner. Hondo had picked a yellow-body fly with green tail made from a peacock feather.

Chapter III

It didn't take everyone very long to get back to fishing. Within minutes Dad caught the next trout, a nice 14-incher with dark colors on its sides, meaning it had been in the water for at least a year from the fish hatchery, a place that hatches trout eggs and raises them until they are at least 12 inches long. They're raised by the thousands for the anglers to catch in each state.

Before anyone else could speak, Granddad said, "I remember this time I was in the seventh grade, or maybe it was the eighth, I can't remember for sure."

"It doesn't matter, Granddad, just tell the story," said Dad.

"Thank you, son! I will!" said Granddad with a smile aimed at his son.

"Anyway, as I was saying, a boy named David moved to where I lived and went to school with me. He was a big boy for his age and didn't make friends easily.

"David started a fight his first day of school with Tommy for no other reason than David just wanted to fight someone.

"Tom never saw David's first punch coming; it was a sucker punch. Tom shook his head but never fell down. Tom looked at David for a second; I remember that look still today. It was a look between hurt and why did you hit me? Tom never said a word; he ended up hitting David three quick punches. The last one put him on the ground. The few of us who watched cheered a loud cheer for Tom. The fight was over before it really began. David never started another fight. By the end of the school year, David and Tom had become good friends."

Granddad went on to say, “Today it would have been on the news because there’s cameras everywhere in our world today. Young folks’ attention changes with the wind.”

“Granddad, do you think there’s more bad people today than there was fifty years ago?” asked Hondo.

“No, I don’t,” as he placed his hand on Hondo’s shoulder and gave him a little squeeze. “We just know and hear more about these things that happen. There on the Internet is everything. People tell on themselves, bragging about what they have done. Some even think they did something great; the rest of us figures it was plain stupid.”

“Well said, Granddad!” added Hondo.

Dad added, “Cyberbullying is all around the world.”

Hondo was surprised to hear his dad. Hondo thought he was just fishing.

Dad went on to say, “Not all kids in the world are loved like you are, Hondo. You also have developed a lot of good qualities like self-esteem and self-confidence in yourself.”

“You have these astute qualities because you have a loving family that supports you and you know we’re there for you,” added Granddad while Dad listened, too.

“Being comfortable with yourself is difficult to do, Hondo, especially when you’re young,” replied Dad.

“Very true,” added Granddad. “My whole life I’ve tried to be nice to people and hope they’d be nice to me. And old people have opinions about everything.”

They all laughed together, enjoying life.

Chapter IV

It was Dad who caught the next trout. As Dad reeled in his catch, everyone could tell there was something wrong with this fish. Granddad and Hondo walked over to get a closer look.

“I’ll be darned. That fish you caught must have had caught a fish of his own some days ago.” The tail of another trout was sticking out of the one Dad had caught. “I’ve never seen anything like that before,” added Granddad.

“That fish sure must have been hungry, to start eating another fish and still wanted that fly on my line,” said Dad.

“Wow,” replied Hondo. “This is one for the record books. I’ll tell my kids about this one.”

“You may never see something like this again in your lifetime, Hondo,” replied Dad.

The sun was reflecting off the water now, making it difficult to see where you were fishing at. Granddad and Dad each had a fancy pair of Ray-Ban sunglasses they wore. Hondo had a pair from the cut-rate store. His dad told him when he was older, he could get a pair of Ray-Bans. Hondo couldn’t wait to have a pair.

Chapter V

Granddad told Hondo that he never would have thought Hondo was paying attention to the old sayings he had said to him.

“Always have, always will, Granddad.”

“That warms my heart, thank you.”

Granddad went on to tell Hondo how the young girls of today are not like the ones in his day. “There would never have been a girl bully when I was twelve.

“I do like all the independence the girls of today have, with a big truckload of self-confidence. They want their own careers in all kinds of professions.

“When you get older, Hondo, try to find someone who will be your friend and who enjoys a good laugh, a special person who loves you, and be sure she likes chocolate.”

Hondo didn't have an answer; he just nodded his head in agreement. He would ponder what his granddad and dad had told him for a long time. Especially, why does she have to like chocolate?

The one thing he was very certain of was how their fishing trips were not about who caught the most fish. It was about an outing that formed a lasting unity that would last forever, friends!

THE END

HONDO MEETS AN OLD GIRL

Chapter I

Hondo was following his Uncle Burtie and Aunt Pam down the aisle of the giant 727 airplane to their seats by the window. Their son, Roy, walked behind Hondo. Both boys were twelve years old. Roy lived in Texas, so the cousins didn't get to see each other very often, only on summer vacations.

Before school was over, Uncle Burtie had called Hondo to ask if he would like to go with them to the Bahamas for ten days.

Hondo couldn't believe his ears. "Really! Me?"

Uncle Burtie was chuckling when he said, "Yes, you."

"Yahoooo!" was Hondo's reply. "Thanks, Uncle Burtie. I appreciate you asking me." He ran to ask his mom and dad if it was OK. They agreed he could go. Hondo was happier than a bird-fed cat about going. He started looking up what he could find about the Bahamas on the E-net, then talked to Roy about his finds.

This was going to be Hondo's first plane ride. Roy, on the other hand, was an expert at flying. Roy had started flying when he was only five years old. As long as they were still on the ground, Hondo acted like he was an old hand at flying. Truth was he was not sure what to think or do about flying. He kept a stiff upper lip, knowing he had to do it.

Both boys were very excited about going to a tropical island. They talked on the E-net each night about something new and different they had found to do on the island. Roy had found this place that offered scuba lessons and deep sea fishing on their boat. The business was Old-Girl.com, the owner was Bruce Jeffers. They also noticed that the owner had a twelve-year-old granddaughter, Bridget, who was very attractive and also the first mate on their 40-foot boat.

She replied to both boys with a business letter, offering them a reservation and a coupon for a one-hour free scuba lesson. Both boys were more excited about this offer than they might have been over a date offer.

Hondo was on his second trip to the lavatory and was holding tight to that little blue airsick bag from the pouch in front of him. When the stewardess locked the front door of the plane, Hondo let out a small sound from deep in his chest. "Aha!" He didn't make another sound for almost an hour. Roy smiled at Hondo, knowing Hondo was not sure what to feel.

"Look out the window, Hondo!" added Aunt Pam.

"OK! Thanks, I think!" said Hondo.

By the time the plane started moving backward out of its parking spot, Hondo's eyes got very large, then he said, "What was that?"

His Uncle Burtie patted him on the shoulder and told him it would be okay. "Just relax!"

"I am relaxed, Uncle, just not sure how much I need to relax!" Hondo's neighbors laughed at his statement, but made him feel very brave and that he would be OK. "Why didn't we take a boat?"

Chapter II

The pilot announced over the speaker that they were flying at 32,000 feet and the weather was perfect in the Bahamas. Hondo's ears had been hurting for a while now. He worked his jaw to relieve the pressure. Nothing worked until Uncle Burtie told his nephew to tilt his head to the left, then put his left thumb over the opening in his ear. "Squeeze your nose closed with your other hand, blow gently until you feel the right ear pop, and that will relieve the pressure you feel. Repeat the process on your left ear being up." It worked great.

"Thanks, Uncle Burtie. My ears feel normal again."

After that Hondo put his little blue airsick bag back in the pocket where he had picked it up. He found a magazine showing pictures and some stories about the Bahamas. Hondo didn't even look up to see the movie that was playing.

The magazine showed pictures at the straw market, where they weaved bags, hats, mats, chairs, and even fans to cool yourself. People were parasailing 200 feet over the bay. Everyone wore bright and beautiful clothes. Hondo decided he needed one of those shirts with all the bright flowers.

He showed Roy the magazine, then added, "Roy, they even rent motorcycles, so you can ride around the island."

"Sounds good. Maybe Dad and Mom will go with us."

"That would be great!" said Hondo. "They have more horses than cars on the roads."

"Look at this 'Fruit Loop' bird!" added Roy.

"WOW!"

Chapter III

It seemed like it took no time and they were landing at their vacation spot. The boys couldn't wait to get off the plane. It seemed everyone was shuffling very slowly toward the door. Finally they made it outside. The weather was perfect. "Yahoooo!"

They rode in a taxicab to the hotel. He took them on a little tour around the island. The driver told them the taxi was a 1954 Chevy Impala car, built before he was born.

The next couple days were spent walking around looking the place over and eating all kinds of new foods. One afternoon they rented a motorcycle for Uncle Burtie and Aunt Pam. They each got a moped to ride as long as they stayed close to the family. They found a garden with these different kinds of beautiful wild flowers growing everywhere.

Finally it was time for their appointment at the *Old-Girl* boat. They were excited to see what Bridget's granddad, Mr. Jeffers, looked like up close. They knew Bridget was a real looker. On her page she talked about living in North Carolina in a small town near the ocean.

They met at the boat dock where the *Old-Girl* was tied up just after sunrise. Bridget had coffee and donuts for everyone. Bridget gave everyone a big smile and a fancy curtsy as they came on board. After everyone was introduced, Bridget gave them a tour of the *Old-Girl*. Bridget's granddad had moved to the wheelhouse with his coffee. He was a man about 6 feet tall, thin frame, with a full head of jet-black hair that he wore in a ponytail. Bridget's hair was up in a ponytail also. Her hair was a little shorter than her granddad's.

The *Old-Girl* was an older boat made from teak wood, and it was kept in first-class condition. It had a fresh coat of bright yellow paint that made it stand out on the dock. The words *Old-Girl* were painted in big six-inch red letters on both sides of her stern.

While everyone enjoyed their coffee, Mr. Jeffers told the story of his first boat. It was one of those catamaran boats, the ones with two parallel hulls. Her captain was an old Englishman. “He showed me what I needed to do and make a living. He had painted her a bright yellow. It was a wonderful sailing machine. On a clear day, the water in the cove was like sailing on top of a sheet of glass, so smooth.” Mr. Jeffers looked out toward the horizon like he could still see that catamaran sailing. He continued to watch the horizon.

“Granddad,” said Bridget, snapping him back to finish his story.

He went on to tell his story. “After five years I traded it for this forty-foot gem that I loved the moment I saw her. She made it possible for me to do more things, which meant more money and more fun. I painted this one the same bright yellow my first boat was.”

For the last five summers, Bridget had come to visit him as soon as school was out for vacation. She loved to scuba dive and spent all the time she could doing it. In less than six hours, she had taught Uncle Burtie and the boys the correct way to dive and swim underwater. Aunt Pam just wanted to watch. Everyone was to meet at 0700 the next morning, high tide.

Chapter IV

Again Bridget had coffee and donuts waiting, with sandwiches and drinks for lunch. After the boys untied *Old-Girl* and everyone was in a seat, Mr. Jeffers turned the switch to start his new Caterpillar engine. It came to life in a second. Off they rode out of the cove and out into the open ocean. Bridget drove the big boat with the skill of a much older first mate. After about an hour, she stopped the engine. It was then that her granddad started beating on the side of the boat with his hand. They noticed he was beating out some kind of calypso song. It was a lively tropical folk song he was playing. Made you want to get up and dance.

While everyone was watching Mr. Jeffers, not sure what was going to happen next, Bridget was getting two raw hot dogs out of the cooler. Uncle Burtie, Aunt Pam, and the boys all looked at each other with puzzled looks on their faces. No one noticed Bridget hand her granddad the two hot dogs.

After a couple more minutes of beating on the hull, a large head appeared out of the water.

Roy was the first to ask, "What are you doing, sir?"

"Come here and see for yourself," answered Mr. Jeffers.

Roy and Hondo leaned over the side to see what all the excitement was. Hondo looked, then asked, "Is it a unicorn?"

“No, no! It’s a logger sea turtle that’s been my friend for the last thirty years. I met her when I first came out here with that Englishman I got my first boat from. He had known ‘Old-Girl’ the sea turtle for the fifty years before my thirty years.”

“Looks like she has a single horn growing from her forehead,” said Hondo.

“Just keep watching, OK?”

Mr. Jeffers held a hot dog in his hand as he leaned over, giving the hot dog to Old-Girl. She took it from him more gently than a house dog might.

“It gives me great pleasure to introduce you folks to my buddy, Old-Girl,” said Mr. Jeffers as he rubbed her head, the same way you would pet a dog. Old-Girl gave out a tiny “ahh” sound while he petted her.

Bridget watched the boys, hoping they were comfortable with this turtle. They seemed to be fine with it, even wanting to feed Old-Girl.

Old-Girl moved slightly in the ocean to get her second hot dog, and you could see how large she was, about the size of a VW car or bigger, with two large fins in front.

“She’s beautiful,” said Aunt Pam.

“She sure is!” added Roy.

“Can I feed her?” asked Roy, never taking his eyes off the logger.

“After she comes back,” said Mr. Jeffers.

“Comes back from where?” asked Uncle Burtie.

“Giving the three of us a ride on her back,” said Bridget.

“WHAT?” yelled Roy.

They looked at each other, then at Old-Girl.

“How do we hold on?” asked Hondo.

“We’ll hold on to her shell around her neck,” added Bridget.

“Really? All three of us?” questioned Roy.

“That’s right! I know for a fact she’s been giving rides for the last eighty years,” answered Mr. Jeffers.

Hondo thought for a second, then added, “Can’t go wrong with eighty years of experience. Count me in.”

“Let’s do this,” added Roy.

Chapter V

It didn't take the kids long to get their diving equipment on.

"I'll get in the middle, you two will be on each side."

"OK!" answered both boys.

They were over the side of the boat and had a hold on Old-Girl's shell within a couple of seconds. They checked if they could breathe OK.

"Hold on tight. If you fall off, it might be a while before we come back around to get you."

"OK! Let's go!"

Bridget gave Old-Girl a pat on the head and down they went into the ocean. The ocean was only about 30 feet deep in this area.

With every move of her fins, they moved very quickly. Maybe even faster than the Caterpillar engine on the boat could move through the water.

They went down about 25 feet. They looked at the beautiful coral with all the different colors and shapes. They saw a school of seahorses swimming among the coral.

Everywhere they looked there were fish, all sizes, shapes, and colors in every direction. All kinds of big game fish were swimming around but not paying any attention to the large turtle and his three hitchhikers. The bright sun shone clearly to the bottom of the ocean, making everything even more beautiful. The fish looked like colorful rainbows with oranges, purples, and blues. Looked more like dancing they were doing than swimming.

Then out of nowhere was a large shark swimming very close to them. The boys shifted, but held on even tighter to the shell. Old-Girl never changed the direction she was swimming, just kept moving all four fins, but never went any faster. A quick and steady movement.

Old-Girl would turn to her right, then back to her left in a heartbeat. Each turn showed the kids a new and more beautiful sight than the last.

Somehow, with a breathing tube in his mouth, Hondo was able to get out a loud “Yahoooo!”

Roy and Bridget looked at him, making sure he was OK. When they were sure he was OK, they laughed with him as they continued to ride.

Before they knew it, they were back at the boat. What seemed like maybe a five-minute ride was really over 30 minutes. Old-Girl had made over a ten-mile circle. She swam to the boat to get her reward, two hot dogs, for all her work.

Hondo watched the giant turtle eating her reward and knew that Old-Girl had enjoyed giving them a ride. Maybe more than the kids enjoyed the ride.

When everyone was back on deck, Hondo said, “That was, by far, the greatest water ride I’ve ever been on in my life.” Roy nodded his head in agreement.

Bridget added, “There’s no ride like that at any amusement park.” Everyone agreed.

“How did Old-Girl know it was you beating on the side of the boat?” asked Hondo.

“You’ll have to come back next year to find out,” answered Bridget.

“We’ll be needin’ a second mate next year,” said Mr. Jeffers.

THE END