

FIRE IN THE CORN CRIB

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This story happened in the springtime when I was seventeen. I was plowing in a big field about three quarters of a mile from home. About 10:00 in the morning, I could hear my mother calling out to Dad shouting, "Come over here quick!". Mom was screaming at Dad in a loud voice, saying, "Hurry! Hurry!" I plowed another round or two and Mom was still hollering at Dad. She sounded very excited and I knew there was something bad wrong. I had four head of horses on a riding, turning plow, so I pulled them over to a tree and tied them up. After taking the harness off of one of the work horses, I jumped on his back and started for home to see what was wrong.

I was running the old work horse at full speed. About half way there, I could see smoke coming from the corn crib at our neighbor's place, which was across the road from our house and up on a small hill with a big two story rock house. John Childress and his wife, Sylvia, lived there. They had two children; a girl, Wanda, who was five and a three year old little boy name Dewayne. I could see those angry flames coming from the old corn crib. The corn crib was a wooden structure and it was a good sized building. As I came riding in, Dad had just gotten little Wanda out of the burning crib and was getting her little brother, Dewayne, out. I jumped in and helped Dad taking little Dewayne out of Dad's arms. Dad's shirt sleeves were on fire and much of Dad's hair was burned away.

I hurried and laid little Dewayne down on the ground away from the burning corn crib. I quickly took off his clothes which were on fire. Then I started taking off his little leather shoes, but they were almost burned away. His little toes were gone, and the little guy was burned very badly. This was almost more than I could bear. I came very close to breaking down and falling all apart when I saw how badly he was burned. The little fellow was screaming and crying, in so much pain. He was suffering terribly.

All of his hair was gone, his little eyebrows and eyelashes were burned away. I somehow held myself together, for I knew we had to get these kids to the hospital. The kids' mother had fainted dead away when she saw her kids trapped in the burning corn crib. Little Wanda didn't seem to be burned nearly as badly as little Dewayne was. When Sylvia, the kids' mother, woke up, Dad told her to run to the house and get a sheet to wrap little Dewayne in, but she was a total wreck. She went all to pieces and seemed to lose all control of herself.

Dad told me to run to the house and get my car so we could take the kids to the hospital. We headed for Sapulpa on a winding dirt road, twelve miles away. We had gone about eight miles when little Dewayne stopped crying. Dad and I looked at each other, each knowing we had lost the little fellow. He had slipped away. His spirit had left him. When we got to the hospital, a doctor there pronounced him dead on arrival.

They put little Wanda in the hospital, then doctored Dad's hands and arms and bandaged them up. Dad was suffering from some bad burns, but he didn't want to stay in the hospital so he and I came home. We found out later that little Wanda had gotten some kitchen matches out of the house, then she and little Dewayne went out in the old corn crib to play. There was only one door to the corn crib. There was some hay at the door way. Wanda had set the hay on fire trapping herself and little Dewayne inside. Their mother missed the kids just a few minutes later and went outside to check on them. She found the kids trapped in the burning corn crib. She started screaming and crying for help. She said, "My kids are trapped in the burning corn crib!" Mom heard her calling for help and started shouting for Dad.

Dad was working over around the barn, which was across the creek and a good distance away. He was at least a quarter of a mile away from where the kids

were trapped in the burning corn crib. Dad was doing some raking and cleaning up over there when Mom started calling him, shouting, "Hurry, Hurry! - the kids are trapped in the burning corn crib.". Dad had that rake in his hand as he was running toward the fire. Mom hollered out to Dad and shouted, "Why don't you throw that darn rake down so you can run faster!" For for some reason, Dad just hung on to that old rake which had a 1/2" steel pipe for a handle. When Dad got to the burning corn crib, he took that old steel handled garden rake and started ripping and tearing the siding off the crib so he could get to the kids. Little Dewayne was a fine looking little guy and a much loved son. Understandably, his mother and dad took his death very hard. It took them a long while to get over their loss of their little three year old son.

Time passed. John and Sylvia had five more children over the years. But somewhere in his mid-fifties, John died of a heart attack. He was laid to rest in a Kellyville cemetery on a cold, blizzardy day. I was one of the casketbearers. Two weeks later, John's wife, Sylvia, was killed in a car wreck. I also was a casketbearer at her funeral. She was buried beside her husband John on another bitter, cold, windy day.

The burns on Dad's arms and hands left some very ugly scars that time would not erase. But he never was ashamed of those ugly scars because he knew they were there for a good cause and a right reason. Dad took those scars to his grave with him. This winds up my sad story of little Dewayne. I will always remember that tragic day of long ago. And this is how it happened in the springtime, in the green hills of Oklahoma. Where the beautiful wild flowers come up every spring and life goes on.