

“The Gang”

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Growing up in the country, you have a group of friends that you have known forever, or it seems like it anyway. My group consisted of Charlie, Larry Wayne, my brother Jack, and myself. I was the leader by default. I don't really know why but it was always that way.

Charlie, or Chuck if you were in a hurry, was a skinny kid with dark hair and eyes and a big wide grin with lots of white teeth that were much more noticeable when he was tanned by the summer sun. We were the same age and the oldest of the group. Charlie had a good sense of humor and a quick wit.

Larry Wayne was a redheaded, freckled kid who was the chubbiest of the group. He was humorous and a good story teller. He was also a real blowhard always bragging about what he could do, but anything he tried seemed to be considerably less than his brag. He was also a complete sissy and afraid of the dark.

Jack, my brother, was the youngest of the group and the runt. He didn't reach his full height until after high school. Jack was the one we always picked to do things we didn't want to do. He would sunburn on a cloudy day and wore rather thick glasses in order to see anything at all.

These three were the ones that I spent most time with during my childhood days up until high school. There were others that joined in from time to time but the core of the group was always the four of us.

During the school year we would always be together on weekends. Charlie and Larry Wayne went to Oak Grove School and Jack and I went to Allmon School but we all lived within a mile of each other. During the week we all had chores to do after school and only saw each other on weekends. The summer was different. The four of us were together most of the time. In the woods, up and down the creek, swimming in area ponds, there were times we camped all weekend.

We were the first to get a decent swimming pond. Dad was in the oil field construction business and one Friday evening he came home from work driving a winch truck and float loaded with a big bulldozer. When we asked him what he was going to do, he said, “It's about time you boys learned to swim!” When the pond filled with the first gully washer early that summer, we were in that pond most of the time. We built rafts to float around the pond acting like pirates and explorers and fought off imaginary Indians.

The next summer the rafts we had built were washed partly ashore, and big pieces and boards were scattered around the edge of the pond. We found, quite by accident, that huge bullfrogs were using the wreckage as a cool place to sleep away from the summer sun. After discovering the bull frogs' hideout, we would make regular rounds and gather them for a tasty lunch.

We were on one of these harvesting rounds and upon approaching the largest piece of raft Larry Wayne said, “You guys lift the boards up and I will get the frogs.” Larry Wayne was poised for the capture and the rest of us lifted the board in “ready, set, go” fashion. On “go” we quickly raised the boards, Larry Wayne pounced and grabbed a double handful of water snakes! He screamed and threw the snakes up in the air and we stood there watching the snakes unwind and writhe in mid air. Then it started raining snakes all around us. We all ran for our lives. That was the end of snake harvesting season. Our adventures, however, continued.