Newsletter 2017

It really wasn’t much of a knife anyway. The grip was missing completely on one side, and chipped, and broken on the other. The blade was knicked and the pivot rivet worn so loose from unintended uses that it barely would fold over, the first requirement of any good pocketknife. But what would you expect from something that was 60 plus years old. It’s a miracle that it exists at all or did, that is, until it slipped from my hand and disappeared into the watery abyss under the boathouse where I was working. It could have happened to anyone, couldn’t it?

I found the knife in a box of junk that came to me after my daddy died a few years back. I recognized it right away. It belonged to my granddaddy, Pa Claud, and was the same knife I used to trim the calluses from his feet when I was a boy in the ‘50s. He’d rear back in his old recliner and throw me his knife. “Boy, trim my feet.” He would promptly go to sleep snoring to beat the band. Can you imagine trusting a third grader with a 6” tempered steel weapon sharp enough to shave hair from your arm and then go sound asleep? The man was simply fearless.

Born in 1903, that was ought three to his generation, he was the third born in a family of three boys and two girls, a pretty small family of that time. In the south of his birth, there was no electricity, no phones, no cars, little education and few jobs other than farming. His daddy Smith was a timber buyer so Pa Claud grew up running a sawmill. In those days, the sawmill went to the woods pulled by mules. It ran off steam and its fuel was the scrape wood waste from the sawing process. Mules pulled each handcut log to the centrally located mill and it was then sawed into boards. These were then loaded onto mule drawn wagons and were towed to town. When finished, they left the land looking not much worse for wear, while using not a single drop of fossil fuel in the process. Have you seen what the land looks like after today’s loggers leave a site? Depressing. During his life, he also farmed, wired houses when the lights came, worked as a blacksmith during the Santee-Cooper project, built a well drilling rig and drilled wells, and owned and operated a water powered grist mill that’s still in the family today.

By the time I was old enough to know him, he had retired from most of the above, but still looked after his beloved herd of Hereford cows. I’d ride with him sometimes when he’d check on them and thus formed many fond and astounding memories. I once saw his prized bull, in the effort to mount a female, knock down a full size apple tree. Needless to say, I rarely ventured far from the truck when in their presence. It didn’t bother granddaddy though, not much did. He had electric fencing around the pastures and we’d ride looking for breaks and shorts. The breaks seemed to always be the farthest from the barn. Rather than drive back and unplug the charger, I’ve seen him on more than one occasion, grab the pulsing wires by both ends and twist them together. Upon each shocking pulse, every 1-2 seconds, he’d grunt: uh….uh….uh. To this day, no matter how hard I try, I cannot make myself hold onto a charged wire long enough to mend it. Maybe that weakness explains why I couldn’t hold onto that knife either. I’m beginning to think dropping it could have been my fault.

Pa Claud could be crusty. It was Fall 1957 and all the men and me were in the front room at his house and all the women were in the kitchen as was the case on many a Sunday afternoon. How do I remember the date so clearly you ask? That was when Henry Ford first introduced his new line of passenger cars named for his son, Edsel. The Edsel was a fairly routine car of its day save one distinctive feature. It had a large chrome oval that dominated its front grill. Pa Claud was quick to point out that it reminded him of the most private parts of the female anatomy. He, of course, was not nearly so discreet in description, preferring instead the common “locker room” vernacular of Donald Trump. As a nine year old, I was slightly confused at the conversation and the snickers from all present. A few years later, I saw comedian Joan Rivers as a guest on the Johnny Carson show. They were discussing the pros and cons of college education for women when Rivers quipped, “I’ve never known a man to run his hand under a woman’s skirt looking for a diploma.” Carson hit the floor, of course, and me with a pre-pubresent smirk thought, “a diploma, heck, everybody knows he’d be looking for something to do with an Edsel.” Too many years later, after limited carnal knowledge, I was much relieved to learn it has nothing to do with diplomas or automobiles.

Apparently, there were a lot of Trump supporters during the 50s as that distinctive feature sank the Edsel and production ceased after only 3 years. It sank almost as fast as that heirloom pocketknife that I let carelessly slip from my hand. What kind of dumb behind loses his granddaddy’s knife, a knife able to evoke so many sacred memories, a virtual legacy to another time and as close to an immortality for Pa Claud as is ever to be his. Drops I say, into an ocean where redemption is rare. No, it wasn’t much of a knife, it was only the most valuable knife I’ve ever owned and I so wish I could blame its loss on someone else. But as Jimmy Buffet famously croons in “Margaritaville,” “It’s my own damn fault.”

Epilogue:

Sitting on the dock shivering after bobbing up and down for the last hour and a half in the chilly November waters under that despised boathouse that kidnapped Pa Claud’s knife, I look up to see my son Les approaching.

“What’s up, Pop?”

“Nothing good,” I reply.

“Haven’t found that knife, huh?” he smirked.

“No I haven’t, thank you very much.”

“Yeah mom said you weren’t fit to live with since losing it.”

“It’s not lost, I just can’t put my hand on it right this second.”

“Well let me take a shot at it.”

And before I could tell him no use, that it’s too cold, too murky, and what makes him think he can do better than me, he disappeared over the side of the dock and into the dark. I bet it wasn’t 15 seconds and bursting through the surface he came, with that knife squarely between his teeth like some want-to-be Tarzan.

“Is this it?” he said succinctly, tossing it my way.

“How’d you do that?” I said.

“You’re welcome,” he said as he climbed up the dock and casually strode back down the way. Over his shoulder he mumbled, “I don’t see the fuss, it’s not much of a knife anyway.”

If I wasn’t so giddily grateful, I’d give that boy a sermon on respecting his elders.

“There are three kinds of men. The ones that learns by reading. The few who learn by observation. The rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves.”

Will Rogers, The Manly Wisdom of Will Rogers

Our grass-fed beef marketing plan: 2017

First, I want to thank those of who bought beef from us last year. We’ll be selling it again this year in halves and wholes. A whole beef will be 350-400 lbs. of packaged meat and sell for $6.50/lb. A side (half) will be 175-200 lbs. of packaged meat and sell for $7/lb. We won’t know the exact weight of your portion until it’s processed. We dry-age the meat 21 days after which you’ll be able to pick it up in Kingstree, S.C. You’ll have a say in how you want it cut but generally you’ll get, in a whole cow, approximately 24 ribeyes, 24 NY Strips, 20 sirloins, 12 filets, 20 roasts, 6 lbs of liver, 15 lbs of marrow, 20 lbs of ribs, 30 lbs of misc (ox tail, heart, tongue, cheeks, brisket) and 100-150 lbs of hamburger. For a side, divide the above breakdown by half. A large chest freezer will accommodate a whole cow and a medium sized freezer does nicely for a half. It will be vacuum-packed and frozen and will last in the freezer 24 months or longer.

So, if you want one of these portions this year, respond with an email to riverrunfarms@live.com including your phone number, your mailing address, which portion you want, and when you want it (Spring, Summer, Fall). We’ll have a limited number of beeves this year and will take reservations on a 1st come basis.

Thanks for allowing us to be your grass farmers.

The Olivers of River Run Farms