

Rudy's Rifle

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My grandpa Rudy had a really cool 22 caliber rifle. It was a semi-automatic, but I had no idea what the heck that meant. It was not a high priced gun or anything like that, he told me. I just knew that I wanted to shoot it. It was a simple J C Higgins made for Sears and Roebuck. This I know now, but back then it was a great white hunter's rifle, stuff safari stories are wrote about. He had it out a time or two, in the back yard. He would shoot at the trees. He shot knot holes and limbs and leaves and acorns and pine cones. He was actually a pretty fair shot, hitting most of the limbs and knots but a few acorns escaped damage. I finally was allowed to carry it back into the house one time after he was through trimming the yard. It felt so smooth and gave me a sense of power, sort of.

Then came the time of the cats. They were everywhere. How we came to have so many cats on the place remains a mystery. I suspect Grandma brought them home from the restaurant she worked at. She was a cook at a motel restaurant in town; actually she cooked and cleaned at a couple of different places over the years before going to work for the county schools. She used to bring home left over table scraps for Yukon, the black and white mongrel that grandpa loved so and she brought home a kind of syrup that my brother Daryn and I would use in all sorts of manner, from making drinks to adding a different flavor to our cereals. And I think she also brought home stray cats. At any rate, or perhaps at a faster rate than that, we found ourselves feeding more of those left over scrapes to cats than Yukon ever got. Grandpa was not a cat petter. Never saw him try to pet one or have anything to do with them other than muttering a few comments that were not very easy to hear when grandma was near.

We were snapped to full awake one morning by gunfire. Grandpa had his safari gun out and was not practicing, judging by the quickness of the shot. I got a little more of an idea what a semi-automatic was that day. He ran out off ammo more than twice but the cats didn't seem to thin out. They simply vanished for the better part of the day but what did remain was a flat tire on Grandma's Chevy, two flats on Grandpa's Chevy pickup, they never had anything but Chevys, as far as I can recall, and there were a few holes in the bottom of the garage door, and even a new hole in the hose hanging on the pump house wall that I got to tape up later. I don't know how Grandma managed to get rid of all those cats but I did hear her talking on the phone begging a few of her neighbors to take a cat, but I don't think she was trying to protect cats so much as she was hoping to get him to go back to shooting trees. I spent most of the next day helping Grandpa Fix tires while Daryn watched, standing behind us holding a cat, for Pete's sake. Fixing tires is not easy, even if you have the proper tools, which grandpa tried to convince me we had. I did learn that Grandpa was not the great white hunter I thought he was. I guess moving cats are harder to hit than acorns, even.

One day a chicken hawk was trying to make a meal or three out of Grandpa's favorite banty rooster. That rooster put up a heck of a fight, and Daryn and I were out there by the chicken coop rooting for him. Grandpa came running to see what the ruckus was and fetched his safari gun.

Then, just as the hawk was gaining some altitude with that rooster in his claws, still making it hard for him, Grandpa opened up with the semi-auto. I guess he was better at shooting at things in the air than at ground targets. Down came the hawk and the rooster, but he had not only shot the hawk, but almost plucked that rooster. Grandma was not one to waste anything and we had chicken and dumplings for dinner that night. Seemed to me he might have managed to spare the rooster if he was good enough shot to hit a pine cone, but then again a pine cone doesn't move too much.

Then came the day Grandpa finally let me shoot the safari gun. I shot at knot holes, pine cones, limbs and Grandpa was convinced that I was big enough, or old enough, whatever, to take the gun off the place and go squirrel hunting with Dale. So Dale and I are on our way to Hall's pond to shoot at ducks, or maybe we'd go to the orchard near there to hunt ground squirrels. As we were making our way along the railroad tracks there was this sudden bang. We froze in our tracks. Alongside Dale's foot was a little hole and my safari gun had killed a railroad tie. I learned a lesson I never forgot that day. Railroad ties are easier to hit than acorns. Dale didn't seem to see anything funny, though. Sorta kept an eye on me and my gun the rest of the day.

Grandpa passed away in 1965 and I wanted that 22 so bad but my Uncle Tex took it home. Last month my uncle passed away and Aunt Pauline gave me the 22. I shall pass it and the lessons it taught me to a grandson one day.