

"THE MONKEY BLOOD DANCE" by Brian Fuller

Sidewalks and lawns are nice, but a child needs room to run and play. Back in the 70's, the term "SPECIAL", had several layers of nuance and inflection when applied to children. I was trying the patience of my parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and teachers alike; basically anyone fortunate enough to be assigned the task of "watching" me.

After a rough second grade year, full of many parent-teacher conferences and trips to the principals office, it was decided that I might benefit greatly if allowed to spend some time with my cousins in the country. The change of scenery and rural atmosphere was a godsend. I had three other boys my age who were like brothers to me. And I would also get a fresh start in a new school that year for 3rd grade.

It was a whole new world to a kid from the suburbs. Now I had forests, fields, and barns to play in. There were hundreds of acres in every direction. People had horses, cattle, chickens, and every other animal you could think of. Certainly all those barbed wire fences were only put there for the livestock. Us kids seemed to have no problems making it over, under, or through them just fine.

We were testing our limits and had become a force to be reckoned with. That is, until the day that our fun little game of "SPOOK THE COWS" got out of hand. It was hilarious watching something bigger than us jump and run. Sometimes we'd throw a cow patty or a dirt clod. If you were really sneaky you could run right up and kick them.



So imagine our surprise when the thundering hooves and breaking branches signaled that a ton of angry charging bull was bearing down upon us. We're in the middle of a mesquite thicket trying to run with our arms up in front of our faces so the thorns don't poke our eyes out.

I've always been the slow, fat kid in the bunch. Plus, my cousins were alot better at clearing these fences than I was. I'd barely made it to safety before the massive beast came up stomping and snorting along the fence line, letting us know well beyond the shadow of any doubt just exactly who the boss of that herd was.

We were all scratched and cut up, but we were laughing and bleeding at the same time. Lucky to be alive and basking in the glow of another small victory, our adrenaline induced euphoria was cut short by the sound of aunt Linda hollering at us - "Y'all boys get up here NOW!" She was standing in the road with a belt.

"Whoopins" was a common occurrence in those days. I can honestly say that we weren't never abused, and we rightly deserved every one we got. Usually, which ever relative, teacher, or neighbor present at the sight of said offense took their licks first. Then we got another one when we got home. But aunt Linda, in all her wisdom, mercy, and grace, had a better idea. Instead, we'd receive some good old fashioned "country doctorin'."

There were a couple of very common iodine based



medicines we used back then. One was called methiodate, and the other, mercurichrome. I can't remember for sure which one burned worse than the other. But us kids simply referred to them both interchangeably as "MONKEY BLOOD," because of the red stain it left across our cuts and scraped knees. Evidently it worked really good because we're still all alive and kickin' - and nothing ever got infected that's for sure.

We were given the order to line up and strip down to our shorts. The warm soapy water on a rag felt good. Even the cotton ball with peroxide didn't feel too bad. But then came the cotton ball with the alcohol, and finally - THE MONKEY BLOOD. I was last in line. So I couldn't help but giggle a little bit watching my cousins dance around.

Right down the line she came. "Now hold still. QUIT SQUIRMIN'! Alright. There you go. NOW GET!" And off we went a jumpin' and a twichin'. I ain't never been too graceful on my feet. Still ain't. But I was sure cuttin' a rug that day. And those events will forever be recorded as; THE MONKEY BLOOD DANCE.

Later that day my dad came to pick me up. Him, aunt Linda, and uncle Dennis all had a little talk and a good laugh while us boys tried to stay out of sight and out of mind. On the ride home dad says, "So ... what'd y'all do today?" He already knows, but he's enjoying making me squirm. "Oh ... nothing much," I said. But there was no hiding all the little red lines that covered my arms and legs. He made me



wait until we were almost home before he spilled the beans. You see, my dad had played in those same fields with his cousins when he was a boy. Him and my uncles were a fearsome lot in their own right. They found plenty of mischief to get into back in their day as well. That's when he told me that "WE" didn't invent the MONKEY BLOOD DANCE. It's sort of a family tradition or right of passage with us. "Y'all aint the first, and ya won't be the last! Boys will be boys," he laughed.

Just before we walked in the back door he says, "I'll go talk to your mom before dinner. You'd probably do well to go and hide out in your room for a little bit and behave yourself. You already know how these things tend to go!"



by Brian Fuller