

“Big Brother, Little Brother”

Written by “Big Mama,” Jackie Layne Partin (2005)

Several years ago, two of my sons, Curt and Daniel, and their father Grady Ward Partin made a trip out to “Pigeon,” as it is called. There had been a forest fire three or four years earlier in the area, but the ferns had faithfully come back in the bottom of the hollow sporting all their various shades of green. That’s why the three of them were there – digging ferns. It was a warm summer day, and the brush which had grown up after the fire with its new, fresh foliage, was so thick one could hardly see through it. It was about shoulder high on the sides of the hollow.

They had gotten hot and tired while digging the ferns and decided to take a break. Daniel was a teenager at the time – maybe fourteen and happy to be out with his older brother who was nearly twenty-seven years of age. While they rested, they began prowling around looking for other interesting plants. Grady Ward went up one side of the hollow, and Curt went up on the other. Of course, Daniel followed his big brother. Daniel’s head was barely noticeable above the brush as his dad scanned over the hollow toward the pair. Curt stood head-and-shoulder above his younger brother at the time. Big brother was leading little brother on the venture through the woods.

Suddenly, the two boys stopped – “locked up like a pair of bird dogs on point.” Grady Ward yelled, “What’s the matter?” Daniel looked up out of the bushes with a big grin and excitedly announced to his Dad, “It’s a big black snake, Daddy, and Curt’s going to catch it!” About that time, Curt disappeared down into the brush like a hawk diving for a mouse. Immediately he surfaced with his right hand above his head and a large black snake wrapped around his right arm. He had a tight grip with his fingers right behind the snake’s head. The two brothers started walking, coming back up the hollow toward their father. They hadn’t gone ten steps until they went on point again. Their dad yelled, “Now what is it?” His face shining with glee, Daniel answered, “It’s another big black snake, and Curt’s going to catch it too!” Down Curt went again. This time when he surfaced, he had both hands above his head with a black snake wrapped around each arm, gripping each tightly behind the head.

Off they went toward their dad – Curt walking through the undergrowth with both arms above his head, a snake in each hand, and little brother, bouncing up and down, around and around with merriment, following the classic carnival act. They walked right up to their dad, and they all began admiring the pretty black snakes. Then Curt said, “Daddy, why don’t you take these snakes home and put them inside your barn to keep the mice out?” His father answered, “Well, they say that they are awful good for that, but I’ve not got a thing to put them in until I can get them home. Why don’t you just turn them loose?” Father and son’s eyes were locked on each other; then Curt’s facial expression began to change from a smile to a strange look of bewilderment. The predicament had just dawned on Grady Ward what was causing

the change in Curt's expression. "You can't turn them loose! Can you?" If Curt freed either snake's head, it would bite him, and if he didn't let go of one head, then he couldn't unwind the other snake from his arm. The bite would not have been venomous, but Curt was still in a dilemma.

There was a long period of silence among the three woodsmen. There they stood looking and thinking and waiting for someone to speak. Then with a pitiful look, Curt asked his dad to unwind one of the snakes from his arm; with careful timing, they were able to cast one blacksnake into the bushes. This freed Curt to remove the second snake and let it go back to whatever it was doing before the interruption came.

The moral of this story is to never catch more snakes than you can turn loose even if your little brother is watching you.