

QUIVER RIVER

By
Paul Henderson



Line drawing Illustrations
By Lois White

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Second Edition

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Line Drawing Illustrations
By Lois White

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated
To the family members who have passed away.
To the family that is left here.
To the younger family members who must live the
legacy presented here.

“One generation
Shall praise Your works to another,
And shall declare Your mighty acts.”
Psalm 145:4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge a debt of thanks to many people:

To Mrs. Birdie Faulkner, cousin-by-marriage of well-known author William Faulkner, who instilled in me a love of words and respect for the mechanics of the English language. She was my tenth-grade English teacher in Belzoni. One day, while chewing me out for writing book reports for my fellow class members, Mrs. Faulkner told me, "Someday you will probably write a book!" Through all the many years since then of telling my stories to anyone who would listen, that thought has never completely left my mind.

To Ed Noel, a past City Editor of the Greenwood Commonwealth, who talked me into a short career as a reporter, where I learned how to write.

To my wife, Sarah, the retired school teacher, who edited and got the right sequence to my stories.

To my dear sister-in-law, Lois White, who contributed many hours of dedicated work on the wonderful illustrations.

And most of all, I thank the Lord for His goodness, graciousness, and mercy for allowing me to live, remember, and write.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	7
1. Off to Quiver River	9
2. Domino	19
3. Possums	29
4. Dummy	39
5. Bee Tree	47
6. Mashed Potatoes	61
7. It's Howdy Doody Time!	69
8. He Hit Me!	77
9. Blood Weed Worms	83
10. Fourth of July	93
11. Crop Duster	105
12. Drive-In Movie	113
13. First Bale	121
14. Pickin' Cotton	129
15. Grey Khaki Pants	139
16. Back to School	151
17. Ole Miss	159
18. Hog Killin'	169
Epilogue	183

FOREWORD

Quiver River is a true account of life on a farm in the Mississippi Delta in the 1950's. Some of the surviving family members chuckled and said they remembered some of the events a little differently.

Although they are entitled to remember these events differently from what I can still *vividly* remember, I am sure that all the events related here actually occurred, at least as seen through the eyes of a ten-year-old.

A few of the names have been changed, and some I can't remember.

MISSISSIPPI PLACE NAMES

Belzoni – (Say Bell-Zona, Rhymes with Arizona)
Known today as the catfish capital of the world

Schlater – (Pronounced Slaughter)
Nearest town to Granddaddy's cotton farm

Booger Den –
A farming community out from Schlater

PROLOGUE

A bunch of big ole mean high school boys was pushing and shoving Dummy around, back and forth between em. They wouldn't let him get on his bicycle and go home. "Hey!" I yelled. "Ya'll better leave Dummy alone!" They just laughed at me. "What are you gonna do about it, you snotty-nosed little brat?" They just kept on pushing him and calling him bad names. Well, I went over behind the service station and picked up a good thick oak limb off the ground next to the wood pile. When that mean ole red-headed Campbell boy pushed Dummy down, I popped Red across the back with that oak limb. He yelled real loud, cause I popped him like I was playing baseball and trying to hit a home run. A bunch of his friends started cussing and chasing me. They grabbed for the oak limb, but I wouldn't let em get it.

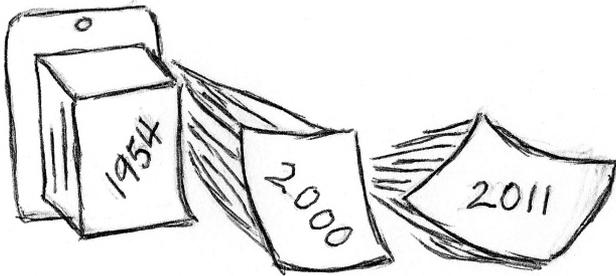
I looked up from reading my manuscript, leaned back, put my feet up on my desk, and

grinned, remembering that ten-year-old boy who was me over fifty years ago. I remembered that day so vividly I could still feel the weight of that oak limb in my hands. I still remember a lot of stuff from that summer.

I remember Granddaddy's old house, the barn, the mules, the cotton. I remember Grandmother's good cooking, and the scrapes and mischief us boys got into. Granddaddy, bless his agitating old heart, got us into more mischief than we could think of ourselves. He was always ready for a little bit of fun. Granddaddy was also a hard worker, and he taught us boys how to work. I was blessed to be able to spend several summers working and playing on Granddaddy's farm.

I remember best the summer I was ten years old. I did a lot of growing up that year.

But I'm not going to sit here, an old man, and tell you all about that summer. Let's just sit back together and listen to that young boy who was me thinking, dreaming, telling the story in his own words. Let's go back to 1954 and listen in



OFF TO QUIVER RIVER

It was barely turning daylight on Saturday morning. Everbody else was still in bed asleep. I was too excited to sleep. It was almost time to go to Quiver River.

Quiver is a funny ole river. It twists and turns out of Sunflower County over into Leflore County, then back into Sunflower County where it flows into the Sunflower River, which flows on down to the Yazoo River and finally into the mighty Mississippi.

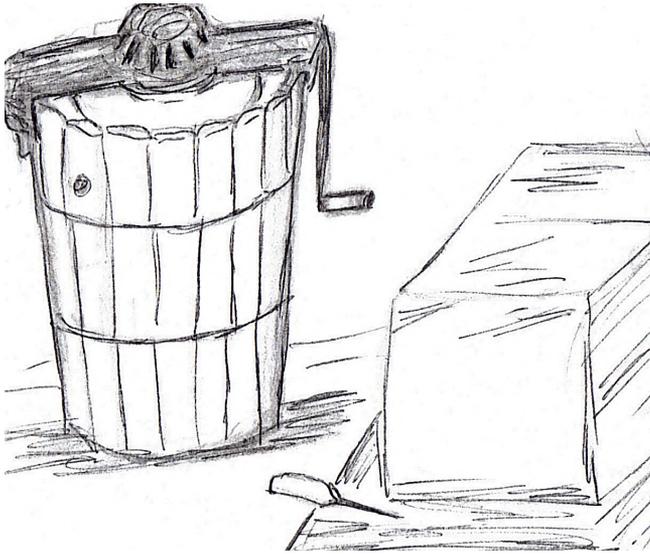
My Granddaddy lives on the banks of Quiver River. He's a sharecropper with about forty acres of cotton out there. Then there's Grandmother, and MaMaw who is Grandmother's momma, and my two uncles. Uncle Charles just graduated from high school. Uncle Johnny's got one more year to go. They're my Momma's younger brothers. Shoot! Uncle Johnny's only seven years older than me. Sometimes they seem more like my older brothers instead of uncles. I enjoy doing lots of stuff with em.

Every year since I was seven years old Momma and Daddy have let me spend the summer at my Granddaddy's farm. I've got to help him get his cotton crop in!

This time tomorrow, I'll be waking up out at Quiver River. After breakfast we may just go down to our favorite swimming hole. Uncle Johnny hung a rope in a big tree there on the river bank. We'll grab a hold to the rope, swing out over the river, and drop off in the cool water.

Or if you want to go fishing, just hold your breath, go down to the bottom and find some mussel shells. Pop them shells open and you'll find some meat. Cut out the hard center and put it on a fish hook on a cane pole with a quill bobber on it, drop it in the water close to a stump or a limb, and be patient, you'll catch something! You better be careful if you're hand grabbing, though. Once Uncle Johnny was hand grabbing fish out of a old stump when a big ole soft shell turtle bit the end of his left thumb off. It sure looked funny after that.

Or tomorrow afternoon Grandmother may go back to the pantry and pull out the ole hand-crank ice cream freezer.



Granddaddy will go down to Oscar Schaeffer's store and get a block of ice, and we'll make homemade ice cream. We'll get some empty syrup buckets and go pick some ripe dewberries. Grandmother will mix dewberries, sugar, eggs, and fresh milk straight from ole Bessie our cow and make us some dewberry ice cream. It always

comes out a pretty blue color, and it's so sweet and tasty!

I just lay there thinking, and I thought, "I wish we'd hurry up and go!"

Just then I heard Momma stirring around in the kitchen fixing breakfast, so I jumped out of bed and started cramming my clothes and stuff into a pillow case to take to Quiver River.

I walked in the kitchen just as Momma was putting a pan of biscuits in the oven. Then she opened up a jar of canned tomatoes and made some tomato gravy, cause she knew that was my favorite.

"Thanks, Momma." I gave her a quick hug as I sat down to eat. Momma smiled and ruffled her fingers through my hair. "Are you gonna miss me while you're gone?"

"Sure," I answered around a mouthful of biscuit and gravy. Then it hit me. Momma's gonna miss *me* this summer! "But you enjoy spending the summer at your Granddaddy's don't you?" Momma asked.

"More than anything in the world!" I grinned.

Just then Daddy came into the kitchen with the three little kids right behind him. "I get to say the blessing today!" four year old Cindy piped up. "Dale got to say it yesterday." So we all joined hands around the table and bowed our heads while Cindy prayed, "God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food. Amen."

After breakfast I started to carry my stuff out to Daddy's bright green 1951 Studebaker, but Momma called out, "Paul, you forgot your toothbrush." So I turned around and went back and got it.

We all piled into the car. Roy and Dale started arguing over who was gonna ride by the window. Momma turned around and told em, "Boys, you settle down back there!"

"Roy keeps tryin' to get my place," Dale yelled, as he shoved Roy toward the middle of the seat.

"It ain't fair!" Roy yelled. "He got to sit by the window last time!"

"Yeah, and I'll sit here next time, too," Dale came back as he seated himself by the window.

Dale is only six and Roy is eight, but I've learned you better not mess with Dale cause, boy, has he got a temper, and he'll fight you! Roy knew better than to try to get my place. I'm ten years old, and Roy knows I can whip him if he starts anything.

All the arguments stopped when Daddy said, "That's enough boys! Everybody sit right where you are." Everthing got real quiet after that.

I sat there looking at the cotton fields going past us on each side of the road.

"Cotton's getting' on up there," I said.

"Your Granddaddy's will be taller than that," Momma said proudly.

"That's because Doc always plants early," Daddy put in, "So he can get the first bale." Daddy always calls Granddaddy "Doc." So does everbody else, except when they come to ask his advice on planting and tending to crops, then it's "Mr. Miles." They all respect

Granddaddy, cause he knows so much about farming and all.

We drove through Itta Bena, past Mississippi Valley State College, and on down a bunch of gravel roads. When we clattered across the wooden bridge going over Quiver River, I started getting excited. Soon as I saw Granddaddy's cotton field, I started bouncing on the seat. "You're right, Momma." I pointed, "Look how tall Granddaddy's cotton is!"

"You'll be chopping weeds out of that cotton tomorrow." Daddy predicted, but I didn't care. Daddy turned down the little farm road going towards the house set back in the bend of Quiver River.

We drove past Granddaddy's watermelon patch, and Momma smiled. "Looks like there will be plenty of melons ready to pick by the Fourth of July," she said.

I smiled, too, but I wasn't looking at the melon patch. I was looking at the old weather-beaten house up under the shade of a humongous old oak tree. Cindy started

bouncing up and down on Momma's lap, cause she saw Grandmother sitting in her rocking chair out on the front porch. Grandmother got excited, too, when she saw us. She stood up and shook something out of her apron into the yard. All the chickens came squawking and pecking at what looked like butterbean hulls all over the ground.

Soon as the car stopped, we all piled out. Everbody was getting hugs from everbody else, and Grandmother was kissing up a storm. I let Grandmother hug and kiss me. She felt warm and soft, and she smelled good, too, like everthing she had been cooking. But when I came to Granddaddy and the boys, well, I just held out my hand to shake with them, cause we're boys and, well, we're just supposed to shake hands.

Grandmother picked up the bowl of butterbeans she'd been shelling, and headed towards the kitchen. Momma went with her. The front door was open, so I just opened the screen door and stepped inside. A little bit of a breeze came down

the hall from the kitchen, and I caught the good smell of Grandmother's cooking.

I walked past Grandmother and Granddaddy's bedroom, and on past MaMaw's room, then across the hall into Uncle Charles and Uncle Johnny's room. I guess I'll sleep in there with them this summer, like I always do. Through the door going back into the salt curing room came smells of cured pork, hog jowls, and salt.

Finally I crossed the hall to the kitchen. Grandmother and Momma was cooking stuff on the old wood-burning stove, and boy was it hot in there! They had two cast iron skillets full of chicken frying, a pan of turnip and mustard greens, and some fried field corn, along with the butterbeans.

"Paul, would you bring me a jar of peaches," Grandmother said. "While I have the oven hot for cornbread, I might as well bake a peach cobbler, too." I looked at the shelves along the wall, all sagging down a little bit cause they was loaded down with jars of vegetables and stuff. I found the

peaches and took em to Grandmother, and she started making the cobbler.

Momma said, "Paul, would you run out to the garden and see if there's any okra big enough to pick? I know you love fried okra." Just then MaMaw came in the back door, walking slow, bent over her walking cane, with a bunch of big green tomatoes. "We can fry these," she said. "The okra ain't quite big enough to pick yet." She started washing and slicing the tomatoes. I went over and gave her a big hug. Then real quiet, I slipped out the back door before they could think of something else for me to do.

I just took a stroll across the yard and on down to the river bank. That muddy water sure looked good to me. I pulled off my shoes and socks and poked my feet in the cool water. Sitting there under the shade of a big oak tree, watching Quiver River just roll on past made me think, "Heaven couldn't really be no better than this."

DOMINO

Grandmother always kept a good-sized flock of chickens on the farm. We'd most always have fresh eggs to eat, and on Sundays we'd catch a young rooster and wring his neck for a fried chicken dinner.

Grandmother had one big ole rooster she called Domino. He was about as good looking a rooster as you could find. Dark red feathers covered most of him, with just a little black on his tail and his head. Down next to his feet, he had great big ole spurs. Granddaddy said he was a fighting gamecock, and boy was he mean! Whenever one of the hens would do something he didn't like Domino acted just like a big bully. He'd run and fly at the hens and peck em till they did what he wanted em to do.

Whenever one of the little kids came to Granddaddy's, ole Domino would chase em and try to stick one of them big ole spurs in their leg. Roy and Cindy was scared of him, cause one time he flew up and popped Roy in

the back and made him bleed. Most of the time he didn't bother me or Dale cause we'd just pick up a stick and chase him away.

One morning I got up and went outside to the outhouse. As I headed back inside to wash up for breakfast, ole Domino caught me going up the back steps. He flew into the back of my leg and stuck a spur in me real good. Blood started running down my leg, and it hurt real bad.

It made me so mad, I went in the house and got my single shot .22 rifle and a bullet. That mean ole rooster was gonna get took care of once and for all.

When I got back outside, ole Domino was crowing, flapping his wings, and chasing a hen towards the garden. I yelled at him.

He just turned and looked at me.

I put my bullet in the chamber and my finger on the trigger and aimed at him. That crazy ole rooster started squawking and running towards the barn! My finger came off the trigger, and I started after him as fast as I could run.