

PROPHECY — Pneumonia, Rocks & Quicksand

By Jim Golden — Chapter Four

When I was growing up I had pneumonia the first six years of my life. It was a perennial visitor that blossomed around Christmas time every year, lasting well into the new year. It often yielded the fragrance of worry. I was considered a sickly child. This may explain the reason for what I perceived to be maternal partiality in my favor.

In later years, before my mother's home call, she told me she thought I would never live to fulfill the call of God on my life. Six years of pneumonia, compounded by tonsillitis almost succeeded in killing me. Remember Roy Rogers, the Lone Ranger and his faithful Indian companion Tonto? Well I wanted to be all three all at once. Shortly after an operation to remove a pair of highly inflamed tonsil, it happened. While trying to recreate an episode on TV in my living room I fell down a flight of stairs with an arrow in my mouth.

My eyes opened in the Hospital room with the Doctors embarking on, what I later considered a highly dubious adventure. I will never forget the next hour of my life. I had to remain awake while they inserted all kinds of shiny things down my throat. None of them tasted like ice cream or were less than painful. My only preparation for this operation was the serious look on one Doctors face, accompanied by the words, "Sonny, you're going to have to be a very brave boy." Brave had nothing to do with it. I couldn't have run if I had wanted to. Four large nurses and my own traitorous mother held me down trying to comfort me with one liners like, "It won't hurt for very long."

You have to listen for key words in life like, pain or hurt. When you hear them it's best to take them as a cue. to exit as soon as possible. In this case the pain brought by the Doctors saved my life as I was hemorrhaging severely.

As I recall I switched to cartoons after that. In fact my life in general settled down to a rather calming pace. We were getting ready for another move and I would have to adjust to another new school at the end of the summer.

"4995 East Capitol Street S.E. Washington D.C." I said. "Very good Sonny, now say it again." Doris said firmly. "Awe do I have to?" I said as I squirmed around in the kitchen chair. I was quickly recovering from the recent operation and move. Looking out the kitchen window I could see the woods our backyard bordered on. Therein lay a world of magic and adventure. "Yes you have to say it again, this is a new neighborhood and school. You must know where you live in case you get lost." "But mom, that doesn't make sense. If I know where I live how can I get lost?" I wined. "Sonny," the look in her eye and the tone in her voice suggested that I had sufficiently tested by boundaries. "Just say it again!"

The summer was passing slowly and the woods became a more than adequate substitute for the black-top playgrounds and alleys I had grown up with. I would spend hours pretending I was Daniel Boone or some other famous frontiersman embarking on a mapping expedition for the President or some wonderful adventure in the wilderness. Unfortunately scoundrels often hide in the wilderness seeking easy prey. "My God, what happened to you?" my Uncle Kenneth demanded. "I was playing by the old bridge in the woods and some big boys threw rocks at me." "Quick show me where!" "Oh no you don't Kenneth, the boy is bleeding. Come her Sonny!" Doris said. Kenneth was mom's little

brother but he was more like a big brother than an uncle to me.

Intent on revenge Kenny darted out the door like a hungry wolf on a blood-trail. I was so proud I could burst when I saw come out of the woods dragging the two rather frazzled and tattered culprits. It seemed as though they had already had a good trashing and now insult was being added to injury. "Go on tell him your sorry or I'll bust you again," Kenneth looked menacingly as he let the words snarl from his mouth in his best "wise guy" imitation. A narrowing of his eyes and a tightening of his grip quickly produced a whimpering apology. One sharp kick in the rear followed by as admonition never to repeat such as act of hostility launched them on their way.

The summer I had thought would never end did just that all too quickly. Looming before me like a giant chasm was the terrifying entity known as school. "But mom I don't feel to good." "Your OK Sonny, it's just the first day of school jitters," Doris explained. We had rehearsed the walk from the house to the bus stop many times. It was only a short distance from the house. From the front sidewalk my mother could watch my trek to the corner. I never knew a city block could seem like a country mile until that first day in the first grade.

Mud puddles, for me, held a mysterious attraction. They had as incredible ability to relieve stress. Something I was beginning to feel as I approached a rather large crowd of unfamiliar children waiting for the bus. I imagined the boys my uncle had recently educated in the art of being friendly lurking in the crowd waiting to pounce on me. To lessen the tension I decided to jump over the mud puddle near the woods before joining the crowd.

Much of Washington was built on a swamp. In 1954 it was still possible to encounter quicksand. We lived in an area that had just been developed in just such an area. What is it about six year old children and mud puddles? I don't know of one child of six that goes out of their way to avoid one. In this sense I was an extremely normal child.

By the time I realized my mistake it was too late. This was no ordinary mud puddle, it was quicksand! The more I struggled the deeper it pulled me into its unrelenting depths. Just in the nick of time a very brave little black girl, in her new school dress, jumped in and risked her life to save me. With the help of some other children we were both soon pulled to safety.

To this day I don't know who that little girl is but if she reads this book and remembers saving a sickly little white boy from quicksand at a bus stop in Washington D.C. I hope she will give me a call. As we grow older many of the things that happen to us seem like a book we've read or a movie we saw while others remain as vivid as the day they were lived. This is one!