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# POTTER'S POND

*Jon L. Grissom*

A mile from the interstate I parked on the edge of the red sand road which Granddaddy, my Dad and I had long ago used to drive cattle. Little Keith bounded from the car like Spiderman, jumping up and down.

"Where is it? Where is it?" he cried.

Shelly, a seven year old picture of serenity, looked at me and I pointed. "It's right through there, but you can't see it from here." Actually you can't see it from anywhere until you get right next to it, as it is in a low spot and surrounded by trees.

As we walked down the bare red rock wash, the pond came slowly into view and I saw Granddaddy there, water spiders dancing in front of him, his cane pole reaching out over the water and the pigeon he cut for bait next to his feet. He gave me that big grin and I felt a little silly, carrying three poles, an ice chest, store bought worms, chicken livers, and a tackle box full of fancy lures.

"Oh, it's so pretty!" said Shelly, her oval face now filled with excitement.

Keith, always down-to-earth, said "Come on, let's fish!" So I gave him his pole first, before he took off to explore, then baited mine and Shelly's, and we settled down to fish.

The pond wasn't as big as I remembered; a copy of the image in my mind, but shrunken

somehow by time. Huge cottonwood and elm trees encircled the water, the branches reflected perfectly in the dark green shallows around the edges. The green faded to blue, then to a shimmering silver mirror of the sky. As I watched, a brave pair of bullfrogs broke through the water thirty yards away to see who had dared to disturb their domain. Scattered about on the warm red clay of the bank were the remnants of fallen trees, giving us as comfortable a seating as we could wish for.

In early statehood the main road to town had gone through here, and now the remnants of a bridge, long since abandoned, protruded from the earth at the south end like a prehistoric rib cage.

When I was small, only an occasional pickup or tractor would disturb the birds resting in the green tangle of branches which overhung the pond. Now, cars and eighteen-wheelers roared unchecked down four lanes barely over the hill to the north.

The sounds didn't bother the kids any and sure enough, they caught fish after fish. Big ones, some of them bigger than my

hand! We put every one of them on the stringer just like it was a trophy catch. I watched Granddaddy as he would pull in a two-or-three-pounder, hold it up, and then let it slip without a splash back into the water.

The hours passed quickly and we ate our lunch. Keith caught a little leopard frog, which promptly got away from him, but he found a baby turtle while chasing the frog, so he was



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happy. Both kids were getting tired of fishing and from reeling in all those 1/4-to-1/2- pound fish.

Granddaddy got up and beckoned for me, pointing to the spot he'd been fishing. I said to Shelly, "Let's try over there before we go, okay?" and we walked around to the other side of the pond.

"Wait for me!" called an anxious four-year-old voice, as Keith came running to catch up with us.

I put the ice chest and tackle box down on the smooth sand where Granddaddy had been. They each cast into the pond without tangling their lines and I had settled back when Shelly's bobber suddenly disappeared.

"Help me, Daddy!" she called as her pole bent toward the water. I started toward her when Keith yelled "I got one! I got one!" I told them both to just walk backwards and hang onto their poles.

Shelly pulled hers out first, and it was a catfish as long as Keith's leg, whiskers dragging wearily in the sand. The reflections of her in its golden eyes contrasted oddly with the wet cucumber green skin. I couldn't believe how big it was! As it flapped on the shore, Keith dragged his in and it was just as big, mouth open as if it would like to swallow him. It was a hard run as to whose mouth was widest, the kids or the fishes.

We let the little ones off of the stringer and hooked the two big ones on it. In the next few minutes, they each caught another good one. Not as big as the first two, but good enough to keep.

I could see Granddaddy grinning at me

like he did when I, twenty five years ago, would catch a big one.

After a few minutes of no more bites, they were ready to go. "Let's go show Grandfather," they said, meaning my Dad, Bill, back at the farm. So we gathered everything up and headed back to the car. As we got to the rock wash, Keith said "See my pretty feathers. They were under the fishing box." In his little hand there were about a dozen beautiful gray, white and purple hued pigeon feathers.

I turned back to the pond and Granddaddy waved his worn straw hat at us. I waved back and Keith asked "What are you waving at?" a puzzled look on his face.

"Oh, I'm just waving," I said, and we turned back to the car.

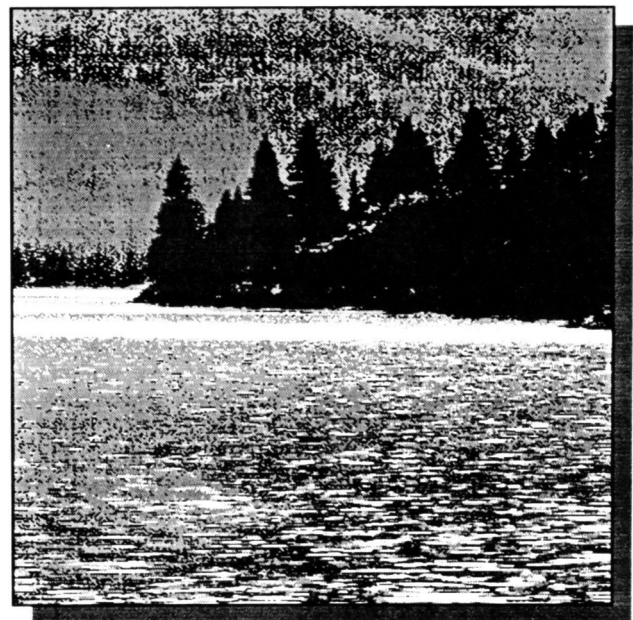


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