

RHAPSODY

Waiting for the Rain

It was hot, unusually so for early fall. The rains were late this year. David tried to rub the sweat out of his eyes, but they only burned worse. He dragged the biggest of the juniper posts down to the truck and let it drop, then sat down to gather his strength before attempting to lift the big end of it into the pickup. He was glad that his father had brought the old Willy's instead of the newer truck, since the bed of the Willy's was a good foot lower.

David looked up the hill and saw his father fell another juniper tree, this one bigger than the last. After a short rest, he stood up and lifted the post into the pickup. He laid the big end on the back of the bed, then lifted the small end and pushed it into the pickup.

David was hot and miserable. His arms were red with scratches from the knots that remained on the posts, and his gloves were sticky with pitch resin. In July, the heat would have been bearable, but summer had long ago worn out its welcome. The sparse vegetation on the rocky hillside where they worked had dried up weeks ago.

There was a streambed about a hundred yards below the road. Normally the water ran cool and fresh, but now a white line on the rocks and an occasional damp patch of sand were all that proved its existence. The sound of grasshoppers rattling their wings (so familiar in summer) now seemed out of place and distracting. Every creature was on edge, waiting for the replenishing rains to arrive. With the temperature near ninety and not a cloud in the sky, it seemed they waited in vain.

David argued when his father first mentioned coming to cut the posts. There was only a week left until fall term began at the University, and he hadn't planned on spending it cutting posts. The closer his departure came, the more confused he felt. David was the first in his family to go to college, and he feared he was leaving something he could never completely return to.

At first he worked blinded by his anger, oblivious to his surroundings. But in the heat he began to sweat and tire, until sustaining anger required too much effort. It was then that the significance of the juniper grove came back to him. Walking back up the hill, David saw the stumps of posts cut long ago by his father and grandfather. This was the only place that they came to cut posts. It was a shallow depression on the north side of a small mountain. The junipers here grew relatively tall and free of limbs. All of the juni-



per posts for the corrals back at the farm came from this grove.

The road leading up to the grove was narrow and steep; that was why they brought the Willy's. The road had been picked out between the rocks and trees with it thirty-five years ago and wouldn't accommodate the wider wheelbase of the newer Chevrolet pickup. In some places the ravine dropped almost vertical the hundred yards down to the creek. David could remember trips with his father and grandfather farther up the mountain to where the pines grew. While his father cut firewood, his grandfather would take him on walks, pointing out and explaining bird and animal tracks. When they heard the chainsaw shut off, they would walk back to the pickup and help load the wood.

On the way down the mountain the two men would tease David by telling him that the load was too heavy and they were going to slide off into the ravine. It wasn't a malicious sort of teasing, David could tell by the grins on their faces. He took great pride in standing on the seat between them and exclaiming "I ain't afraid!" The men always chuckled at this and David was sure they were proud of his bravery.

David was lost in these memories until he heard the chainsaw shut off. Then he hurried up the hill to where his father had been working. Eight trees lay in a pile. His father told him they would untangle and limb them after lunch.

He said that would be enough to patch the corral, and if there were any left over they could use them for fence-posts.

They walked down the hill to the Willy's and David tilted the seat forward and pulled out a brown paper bag. Inside were two sandwiches of sourdough bread and thick slabs of cheddar cheese and two bottles of beer wrapped tightly in newspaper. The beer was wrapped with four sheets, one sheet at a time. It stayed remarkably cold this way. The sandwiches were just warm enough for the cheddar to take on its full flavor. David's mother had baked the sourdough bread with a thick brown crust, just the way his father liked it. Laying in the shade, alternating bites of the sandwich with sips of the cold beer, David couldn't remember enjoying a meal more.

After they finished eating, David and his father rested before going up the hill to limb and drag down the rest of the posts. David's father asked him if he remembered the time they had found the Indian arrowhead on the deer trail above them. David said he did. He also remembered trying to put it in his grandfather's shirt pocket at the funeral, and his father stopping him, but he didn't say this. Later when the grave was still soft, he had taken the arrowhead and laid it on the replanted sod, then covered it with dirt.

After fifteen or twenty minutes, David's father stood up and said they had better get back to

work. They went up the hill and began to limb the trees. By the time all the limbs were cut off they had sweated through the blue chambray shirts they wore. It took four trips to get all of the posts down. David kept up with his father, but it wasn't easy. He hoped to have his father's strength and endurance when he reached sixty. They loaded the posts into the pickup and were finished before David realized how much easier it was with two of them working at it. They were both covered with pitch and sweat, and it felt good and natural to work together. David was ashamed of his anger earlier, and was glad he'd kept it to himself and worked it off. There had been too many confrontations lately. They loaded the axe and chainsaw securely on top of the posts, then climbed into the Willy's and started the hour-long trip home.

David looked out the back window up toward the juniper grove going out of sight. He didn't know whether to hope or fear that one day he'd bring a son there to cut posts. He wished that he could yell "I ain't afraid!" now and it would all be simple again. But as he looked out the windshield and saw the swollen, angry sun beginning its descent, he was very much afraid. And this time the source of his fears ran much deeper than the dry ravine.

-by Robert Stubblefield



Writers' Club

CONTEST
W
EDITION



centimeters

16 (M)	17	18 (B)	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
49.25	38.62	28.86	16.19	8.29	3.44	31.41	72.46	72.95	29.37	54.91	43.96	82.74	52.79	50.87
-0.16	-0.18	0.54	-0.05	-0.81	-0.23	20.98	-24.45	16.83	13.06	-38.91	52.00	3.45	50.88	-27.17
0.01	-0.04	0.60	0.73	0.19	0.49	-19.43	55.93	68.80	-49.49	30.77	30.01	81.29	-12.72	-29.46
0.75	0.98	1.24	1.67	2.04	2.42									

SN: P0013 Colors by Munsell Color Services Lab

L* a* b*

Dor Williams