



Fritz Creek Mysteries

Did you know there are sea serpents living under the bridge that spans Fritz Creek? Surely you've seen them. They have long snouts filled with needle-sharp teeth. They are covered with diamond-shaped, interlocking scales that are hard like armor. And they can leap out of the water with frightening, grunt-like noises. Did you know there's a castle on Fritz Creek? Its garden pinned to the ground by great stone statues - their stone eyes watching your every move. And, did you know, wild creatures roam the woods surrounding Fritz Creek - fierce, lumbering creatures with sharp horns and cloven feet?

By now you're probably thinking, "Kal, have you been nipping the cooking sherry again? There are no sea serpents in the waters of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, nor do scary creatures roam its woods." And are you asking yourself, "Where's Fritz Creek?" As Sherlock Holmes told Doctor Watson, "Patience Watson, all will be revealed."

Back in the early Sixties, my sweet Granny from D'Lo often came to the Coast for summer visits. It was on one of those visits that she roused me from sleep, one pre-dawn morning, to go fishing. I was up like a jack-in-the-box. I helped Granny load up her used 1947 Buick Special that was painted blue. Now when I say "painted blue," I mean just that: it was PAINTED blue!

On my previous summer visit to D-Lo, Granny and I decided her old car needed a facelift. So, she purchased 5 quarts of sky-blue Rust-Oleum paint, and with brush and can in hand, we knocked that painting job out in about an hour. Voila'! New color! New car! Looking back on our sky-blue Rust-Oleum masterpiece, I now understand my parent's facial expressions as Granny and I whirled into the driveway, with a honk and a screech.

Granny never had much money; painful rheumatoid arthritis cutting short a promising career as a registered nurse. But poverty and pain never stopped Granny. I often heard her exclaim, "I'm poor as a church mouse,

but happy as a pig in slop!" No mincer-of-words my Granny!

All was quiet the morning Granny and I eased out of the house. We finished packing the blue Buick Special; in went our cane poles, a can of squiggly, freshly exhumed earth worms, and a box breakfast of cold, crispy-fried bacon, and delicious cold biscuits, oozing with jelly and butter. Granny and I piled into the blue Buick Special, as Aesop, her Doberman pincer, held court in the back seat. She cranked the car, put it in gear, and floored it. With a resounding back-fire and a lunge, we were off.

Our journey took us west, along Highway 90. At Loraine-Cowan Road, we took a right, and headed north. It was a fine summer morning. The sun had just awakened, and was pulling back the tight, warm coverlet of night. Brilliant, orange-pink-and-lavender light raced across the morning sky. The morning breeze was infused with the balmy, sleepy warmth of summer.

After a journey of five or six miles along Loraine-Cowan Road, we arrived at our destination: an old wooden bridge supported by pungent creosote pilings. Just before the car crossed the bridge, Granny hung a sharp right, firmly grasping the Lucite suicide knob on the steering wheel. (No power steering in those days.) The blue Buick Special eased down a dirt path, and came to rest with a jerk, just at the water's edge. I jumped out. Carpe diem!

The early-morning silence draped everything it touched with tranquility. As we began unloading the car, Aesop plunged into the water with a splash. He swam across the creek, and plummeted into the woods; his barking punching small holes in the silence that surrounded us. I helped Granny unload an ancient wooden lawn chair; its rusty hinges opening with a screeching grate.

"Anthony, get the poles and the can of worms," said Granny, flopping down in the lawn chair that groaned in protest, "and we'll get started." Doing as instructed, I unloaded our fishing gear, and plopped down on the cool brown



earth of the creek bank. “Now, Anthony, crab a worm, and run the hook through it,” said Granny. I did. The worm promptly fell to the ground. “Try again. Don’t give up,” said Granny. I did. Same thing. The worm escaped. “Try again. Don’t give up.” I did. Eureka! Success! “Now, put the hook in the water,” said Granny, “and watch the cork. When it bobs up-and-down, that means poor Mr. Fish is about to be our supper.” Plop! In went my hook and worm. Plop! In went Granny’s hook and worm. And thus we waited in silence.

It was during that silent wait, that the sea serpents first appeared. From under the bridge they came, two of them, slowly making their way through the dark, deep water. “Look Granny! Sea serpents! Just like the ones in that story your read me.”

My sweet Granny from D’Lo smiled at me. “Anthony, you’re a mess. There are no sea serpents in Fritz Creek, only alligator gars.” “What’s an alligator gar?” I ask. Granny – patient teacher she was – explained, answering each one of her eight-year-old grandson’s questions. Silence fell upon us once again.

“Granny! Listen! Across the creek! Somethin’s movin’!” My youthful eyes and imagination scanned the lush, dense tangle of honeysuckle vines and wild roses that submerged the surrounding woods in splashes of yellow-white and magenta. “Hear that Granny? Hear that rustlin’? It’s creatures! I can see their horns.” Granny smiled once again. “Oh, Anthony! Those aren’t creatures. They’re only stray cows, comin’ to the creek for a drink.” Silence again. But my mind was anything but silent.

“Look Granny! There’s a castle with stone statues! They’re starrin’ at us. Can stone statues talk?” Granny smiled once more. “Anthony, Anthony. That imagination of yours is workin’ overtime.” Granny looked at the house built by the creek bank. “That’s no castle. It’s only a house. And the people who own that house make concrete

statues and pots for people’s yards.”

Once again, silence was all around us. The dark, deep water before us crept along on cat’s paws. Droplets of sunlight dripped through the crisp-green leaves of the surrounding oaks – their long, stout branches touching the ground like loving arms. Granny re-arranged her lawn chair, which once again creaked in protest. We ate a strip of bacon and a biscuit. The smell of piping-hot coffee from Granny’s thermos filled the air. Time trickled past us.

“Come on Anthony! Let’s go home,” said Granny with a sigh. “It seems the only things bittin’ this morin’ are the gnats. The fish aren’t! Your sea serpents must’a scared’em off.” “But Granny, just a little while longer.” “Maybe tomorrow,” she said. “We’ll try again. We won’t give up.”

Granny and I re-loaded the blue Buick Special. She whistled for Aesop, who galloped from the woods – tail wagging, tongue hanging, and legs covered with burrs. We piled into the blue Buick Special. She cranked it, put it in gear, and floored it. And with another back-fire and a lunge, we were off.

That early-morning fishing trip took place forty-five summers ago. Now, the two-lane road that once twisted through the woods to the bridge at Fritz Creek is now a four-lane highway bristling with traffic; the tranquil silence of those long-ago days shattered by honking horns, blustery eighteen-wheelers, and sporty autos. The old wooden bridge, once held high by creosote pilings, has been replaced by concrete and steel. The dirt trail down to the creek is also long gone; overwhelmed by briars and brush. My “castle” is still by the creek bank, but is slightly care-worn. A few concrete statues and pots can still be seen.

Do sea serpents still live under the bridge? Do creatures still roam the woods? I can’t answer those questions for you, because I can’t remember the

last time I stopped to peer into the dark, deep water of Fritz Creek. Nor can I remember the woods; they’ve been felled, replaced by subdivisions.

But one thing does remind me of those long, lost days: the memories of my sweet Granny from D’Lo, and her unquenchable spirit. And in a world that appears to be disintegrating in bulky, sharp chunks, I would love to hear her say one more time, “Anthony try again! Don’t give up!” ☀

Please pray for our troops,
May God bless,
and keep a song in your heart.



Kal

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