



Ben Tuggle And His Grandpa's Flatbed Pickup Truck

ONE

Now, I'm not saying I'm a time traveler or nothing like that. I just have this strange thing I do that takes me back in history to places right when things are happening.

Confused? Well, think how I felt my first time. I'm just a farm boy from eastern Kentucky. I've never been out of the state, much less out of my place in time.

Oh, there may be others who can do the same. You may be one of them yourself, but we can talk about that later. I'm just talking to you about me right now. Who am I? Why, I'm Benjamin Nathan Tuggle, of course, time traveler and adventurer.

I live on a small farm with my mom and dad outside Irvine, Kentucky. Oh, you've heard of Irvine. It sits on the Kentucky River right where the Appalachian Mountains meet the Bluegrass. My dad likes to say it's the best of two worlds, the beauty of the mountains and the fertile flatlands.

Did I mention my older brother, Blake? I didn't! Well, we'll just leave it that way for right now. Why ruin a friendly conversation, I like to say.

You should have already seen my self-portrait, a pencil representation, if you will, of yours truly, drawn by me, standing next to my Grandpa's pick-up truck. I like to say I got my pa's good looks, my mom's intelligence, and my granddad's pleasant personality.

I've always fancied myself as quite an artist. Some of my friends say the pictures I draw of Mr. Polk, our principal at middle school, are the funniest drawings found in any public school classroom in Estill County. My reputation as an artist has grown to the point that every time someone puts a mark on a bathroom wall, yours truly is blamed: "*Ben Tuggle, report to Principal Polk's office, Ben Tuggle, report to the Principal's office... Immediately.*"

As a true artisan, I don't work in public bathrooms, but that hasn't kept me from being accused of such. On more than one occasion Ms. Miller, my art teacher, saved my hide by telling Mr. Polk the drawings on the bathroom stalls were just too childish to be the work of Ben Tuggle. You gotta like that Mrs. Miller.

Back to the point of my story. I'm Ben Tuggle, adventurer.

Did I say that?

All I have to do is hold something old in my hands or something made by a person who lived and died years before I was born, and suddenly, Zippity-Do-Da, I'm there at that time in history, standing next to General George Washington at Valley Forge, or running alongside Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad, or taking council with the Cherokee chiefs long before our ancestors ever stepped foot on the North American continent.

I'm there, visiting places I've read about in the history books. I thought I was dreaming the first time it happened, but I found out real quick that I was awake. One hundred, two hundred, even three hundred years or longer, there I am right in the middle of whatever was happening.

I've never tried to push the limit on how far back I can go. I guess I could go back a far piece if I chose to. I could take hold of a dinosaur bone and go back to the days before man, but I'd probably get eaten by one of those big meat eaters and then there I would be, dinosaur poo in some swamp, making oil for Mom's station wagon, or Mr. Orbey's school bus.

No sir, time traveling is serious business. I like to think I have control, but the fact is I don't plan my little trips, they just happen in a spontaneous kind of way.

Mom says I've been a spontaneous kind of guy since the day I was born. I just happened.

What! You don't believe me. Let me remind you that some things in life require a little faith. Like the faith I have that in spite of myself, my parents like me... most of the time. Well, that's not really a good example. How about the faith that my grandparents love me no matter how goofy I act? That's the kind I'm talking about, the faith I have when I leave the here and now and travel back... back to the there and then. The faith I will survive all that history and get back to my time. I've met some real interesting folks on my adventures, some nice and some not so nice. It's always a hoot and I bring a lot of learning back with me.

I can see you have doubts, so sit back and listen. Let me tell you about my first adventure, my very first trip back in time. It happened last summer, the day after I turned twelve years old. The family was spending a long weekend at Grandma and Grandpa's farm in a little community called Redhouse, just outside the big city of Richmond, Kentucky.

I was standing out in Grandpa's field, down by the spring, and my older brother was being his usual rude self. You could say my first trip back in history was a field trip. Mrs. Dabney, my sixth grade teacher, says I got a way with words — field trip. I amaze myself.

TWO

“What you doing, bonehead!” yelled my brother Blake as he walked down the hillside toward me. “Grandma says supper is on. Go wash up.”

“I’m not hungry,” I said as I picked up a fresh chunk of plowed dirt and hurled it at Blake. He was walking toward the *putt, putt* sound of Grandpa’s tractor somewhere over the hill. He easily dodged the clod and turned to give me a mean look.

“Mom don’t care if you’re hungry, she just wants you at the table. Your stomach will do the rest,” shouted Blake. “You ever hit me with one of those, you’re a dead man, bonehead!”

I reached down and picked up a softball sized clod and took aim at Blake as he stumbled over the plowed rows of dirt. As I reared back to hurl the clod at his backside, I felt a hard object in the dirt. Something undirt, if you will, so I broke loose the dirt and found a metal thing about five inches long. I don’t care to tell ya, the thought that I might have actually hurt Blake was a bit unsettling. Not that I’m against inflicting him pain, I’m just against the pain Pa would inflict on my backside.

I bent down and washed the thing off in the spring. I figured it was a piece of disk or some other piece of farm equipment that had broken off one of Grandpa’s or maybe even Great Grandpa’s farm machinery a long time ago. There’s no telling how long it had been buried there in the dirt next to the spring. As the water washed away the dirt I was shocked to find it had a golden luster.

“Gold!” I whispered.

My mind raced. Now maybe I could buy that shiny red bike in the front window of the Western Auto in Irvine.

I washed faster and found myself holding something much more valuable than gold, something every young boy in America would trade his best Mickey Mantel baseball card for. I was holding a genuine American Indian, tomahawk head!

It had a brass pipe on one end, the middle was brass and the sharp tomahawk head on the other end was made of iron. I had struck it rich!

My brother Blake had a small arrowhead collection he had gathered from around the farm. He would find a few arrowheads every time Grandpa plowed a field, especially after a hard rain. I was secretly jealous of his collection, but he had nothing as good as this.

I felt as if my horse had won the Kentucky Derby. I had hit the Mother Lode. The mother of all Indian relics, the... uh oh... my mother was going to kill me if I didn’t get up the hill to the house...

But did I care? Not a bit ‘cause Blake was going to wet his britches with envy when he sees my tomahawk. Heck, I nearly wet on myself as I stood there holding it in my hand. My heart was racing, my knees were weak. This new find would be the centerpiece of my collection, along with my hide scrapper and three broken arrowheads.

I gripped the brass tomahawk head in my hand, closed my eyes and screamed out a loud, *Abbbbb!*

When I opened my eyes... I was someplace else!

Now stay with me on this, ‘cause this is where things get kind of complicated. I was still standing by Grandpa’s spring, but I was in a different time. The spring was now surrounded by a forest of giant trees – no milk barn up in the barn lot, no open field, and no *putt, putt, putt* of Grandpa’s tractor on the other side of the hill.

I have to admit the whole thing was so creepy, I dropped the tomahawk and suddenly I was back in the here and now – the plowed field and the *putt, putt, putt* sound of the tractor just over the hill.

I stared down at the hunk of brass and iron lying there in the dirt and said, “What the heck was that all about?” That’s exactly what I said to nobody in particular, or at least that is what I thought.

“That was the sound of Mom whoppin’ your butt with her hairbrush,” cried out Blake as he walked up the barn lot. “I’m going to enjoy watching her wear you out.”

Being the educated man that I am, I felt it best to ignore his insensitive remark. He had once again confirmed my suspicion that he had been adopted.

Looking down and staring wide-eyed at the prize laying in the dirt at my feet, I wondered what had just happened.

Maybe I was hungrier than I thought. I had heard of people seeing things as they starved to death. Maybe I was having one of those out-of-body experiences my Uncle John spoke of when he drank too much moonshine.

I bent over and picked up the tomahawk head, tried to remember exactly what I had done just prior to my strange moment and talked myself into trying to do it again. Only this time, I would not cut the trip short by dropping the thing just when things were getting interesting.

I closed my eyes, squeezed the tomahawk and everything went quiet. When I opened my eyes, there I was once again, standing in the giant forest. I looked around in amazement, dazzled by the size of the trees. They were monsters, not your garden variety big trees you might see today. I’m talking giants, the trunks three and four feet across, a couple a hundred feet or more tall. Real whoppers!

There were white, red and black oaks, and beech trees a guy could build a tree house in and live in the rest of his life. Right next to me was a chestnut tree three grown men could reach around and never touch each others fingers.

My grandpa had told me stories about the giant chestnut trees he saw when he was my age. His pa cleared them off the farm and piled them at the edge of the field to rot.

“There was plenty of timber to go around back then, Benji,” he would say. Grandpas never call you by your given name.

Grandma would call out to me from her big porch, “*Benjamin Nathan Tuggle, you come here this instant!*” Of course, I was usually hiding from her right under her feet.

Grandpa would quietly say, “Benji, come out from under there boy, before you get a tick on you.” He really liked to throw in that “boy.” Grandpa can put things in a way you understand, ‘cause I guess he was a boy once too, and he was right; you get a big tick on you, it’ll suck all the blood out of ya. You start stumbling around with a big fat tick the size of a marble behind your ear, the next thing you know nobody will get close to you or let you pet their dog.

Grandpa said all the giant chestnut trees died from blight in thirty-seven, which I think means 1937. The ones we have now are no bigger than a tall bush.

I reached out and touched the bark of the chestnut next to me and looked straight up its trunk to the heavens. The tree top canopy was so thick that the sunlight couldn’t shine through it. The forest floor was clean, except for the leaves and me. I had found paradise.

I did a quick reality check and looked down at the ground, glad to see that the spring was still bubbling and flowing down the hill. The water was a lot cleaner looking; everything was a lot cleaner looking, natural, if you will. The way God meant for it to be before we

came and messed it all up with plowing up the ground and cows stomping around, leaving cow pies all over the place.

I had found a little piece of paradise and I was taking it all in... when it happened.

I wasn't prepared for it, but how could I know what to expect? I'll bet you didn't see it coming either, did ya?

One minute everything around me was tranquil, a Garden of Eden and the next moment all *H-E-Double Hockey Sticks* broke loose.

It started with a loud, *Thump!*

I turned and saw a brass headed tomahawk identical to mine sticking in the chestnut tree next to my head. The handle or haft was still vibrating and the leather thongs and feathers that decorated the handle were blowing in the wind. I stood there and stared back and forth at the tomahawk head I had in my hand and the one stuck in the tree next to my head.

That's when I heard the scream.

EEEEAAA!

As I said, things got ugly, fast!

The yell came from up the hill and you guessed it, it was an Indian warrior and he seemed bent on getting to me real quick as he came down the hill through the trees on a dead run, pulling a big knife from his belt just like something out of a movie. I froze, thinking maybe he hadn't seen me. When he was about thirty feet away I could tell he was looking straight at me with murder in his eyes.

Blake would always get upset when I touched his play-pretties, so I held out my hand offering to return the old brass tomahawk head I had found. I was thinking that maybe that Indian feller was angry that I had taken something that belonged to him.

I had just about given up the ghost when I felt a wind blow past from behind and then there was a great collision out in front of me. The Indian and a woodsman looking feller, as much as I could make out, collided in midair and fell to the ground in a heap, fighting fist to skull, biting and swiping at each other with their big knives, all the time swearing and grunting.



Fighting Fist To Skull

I could make out a few words the woodsman was saying and I'm sure it was words I'm not supposed to repeat, so I won't use them now.

The Indian was making Indian talk, and by the look on his face, I'd say he was swearing too. I'd try and repeat some of those Indian curse words for you, but if I do, I might accidentally let one of them slip in front of Mom and I would get a whoopin' for sure.

I want you to know my mom doesn't swear, but her and the other moms do keep up with all the latest swear words so they'll know when us boys use them. I figure she knows them all, white folk, sailor and Indian swear words alike.

Blake will sometimes play baseball with the older boys, come home, use a word he heard on the ball field and, *Wham!* Mom smacks him upside the head and sends him to his room to think about what he's said. Of course, he doesn't know for sure what he'd said that was bad, which is the beauty of it. But, back to my adventure.

The leaves and dirt were flying as the men flung each other about.

I was rooting for the woodsman, when suddenly the Indian kicked the knife right out of his hand.

I wondered how I might have gotten myself in this fix as I put the tomahawk head in my pocket and got ready to make a run for it.

I thought, *Oh man, this Indian feller has got us now*, when he, to my amazement, spoke up and said as much.

"Good fight, Widemouth, but now I got you and your boy. You no run and hide in canebrake. You no jump off big cliff and land in treetop. You no get away anymore."

"Dragging Canoe," interrupted the woodsman, "thee and I have traded pelts and thee has stole a few from me. I hold no remorse toward thee, since them pelts sort a belonged to you Shawnee in the first place."

The woodsman was tossing his hands around like Brother Stewart at a Sunday morning service.

"I normally don't interfere with private disagreements, but I didn't feel right standing by while thee tried to scalp this boy. Thee may have a feud with him or his, but thee must surely understand that he is one of my kind, and I don't take such rudeness lightly."

The woodsman had just lost a life and death battle with the meanest Indian I'd ever seen and he was cool as a cucumber. He was a talker and went on jabbering as he took a step toward me.

"This boy and I are meetin' thirty of my men from Fort Boone right here on this spot..." He looked up at the sun, "just about now, so thee had better run along. My men won't be so polite with thee when they hear about this mischief."

The Indian's eyes started darting around, getting kind a jumpy like. The woodsman took another step and stood next to me.

"Thee are surely going somewhere, aren't thee, Dragging Canoe?"

"I take you and boy to Chillicathe. You run gauntlet for Chief Blackfish. Stop talk and come now before Long Knives come."

"Well if thee insist, but at least let me get my big bag of buffalo tongues I gathered this morning at the lick. It'd be a shame to let all that good eatin' go to waste. We can have a great feast at Chillicathe to celebrate thy great victory over Widemouth.

"It's down yonder," and the woodsman stretched out his arm as if to point down the hill. When Dragging Canoe turned to look in the direction he was pointing, the woodsman pulled the tomahawk from the tree.

Now it was the Indian's turn to think about running. His eyes got real big and he turned and ran up the hill as hard as he could.

I yelled out, "Look out Grandpa!" as loud as I could. No sooner than I yelled it, I remembered that Grandpa wasn't up over the hill anymore, at least not at that moment in time.

Dragging Canoe stopped in his tracks, crouched, looked to his right, looked to his left, and dashed over the hill out of sight.

"Thy pappy up there, boy?"

"Just trying to put a scare in him, mister," I countered quickly. "Make him think there are more of us around here."

The woodsman gave me the look. The one like mom gives me when she thinks I'm up to something. A few seconds passed and he rolled his eyes, just like mom when she gives up trying to figure me out.

"I knowed Dragging Canoe was up to some secret mischief," the woodsman declared as he gave a quick look around the woods. "He usually runs by himself, but I couldn't be sure, otherwise I could have finished him off with Ol' Tick Licker as he ran down the hill toward thee."

I looked around for a big mean dog.

"I don't like to shoot his kind unless I have too. He could have shot thee, but chose not too and I had a fair shot at him, but if'en I'd a shot him, his red brothers would have heard the report and been on us before we could make a run for the fort."

Ah-ha! Ol' Tick Licker was the name of the woodsman's rifle. I vowed then and there to come up with a name for my trusty single shot shotgun when I returned home to 1976. Ol' Fur Buster had a lethal ring to it for all those cottontails that lived in the fence rows around our farm.

The woodsman continued, "The whole Shawnee nation would have been singing songs about Dragging Canoe's big coup around their campfires, had he got us across the Ohio River and all the way to his village."

Suddenly he stopped talking, put his hands on his hips and looked down at me as if he had just noticed me standing there.

"Boy, where'd thee come from, and why are thee out here in the wilderness alone? This han't no place for young'uns."

Well, I knew there wasn't any sense in trying to explain to this simple woodsman where, and when I was from, and frankly, between you, me and the man in the moon, I didn't understand it myself. So, I said the first thing that came to mind.

"I'm lost, mister."

"*Lost!* Boy, this place is the middle of nowhere. Thee han't near anything and thee got to start somewhere to end up lost."

The woodsman didn't say much, but what he did say was to the point. Of course, if he was trying to talk himself out of trouble with an Indian, he would talk all day.

"Where exactly in the middle of nowhere are we?" I asked.

"Why, Cantuckee, boy. This is the Inden's hunting grounds, CAN-tuck-ee!"

The woodsman referred to that Indian as an *Inden*. Kind a like saying, *N-den!* He also pronounced Kentucky as Can-tuck-ee. I can see where he's coming from with that. Occasionally I will see a word I can't make sense of and I'll sound it out phonically. Since I'm a man of many words, it doesn't happen that often, but I could see real quick that the woodsman also had a way with words, just like me.

Besides, if a real Cantuckee woodsman, fights a real N-den, and saved my hide, who am I to question how he wants to pronounce his words.

“When, are we, mister?” I questioned.

The woodsman looked up at the sun, at the shade coming off a big tree and said, “Purt near supper time, I reckon.”

“I was thinking more in terms of the year,” I countered.

“Why, the year of our Lord, seventeen hundred and seventy-six, although I’m not sure what day in July it might be. I’ve been exploring for two weeks down river and I was on my way back to Fort Boone when I spotted thee playing around with thy new friend, Dragging Canoe.”

“I thought you said you were shooting buffalo and cutting off their tongues.” I had caught him in a lie. Mom says it is easy to remember the truth, but hard to remember a lie. I know that to be true because I have personally proved her right many times.

“That I did, boy, but let me explain. That Inden had mischief on his mind. I got his mouth to watering thinking about a big sack of tasty buffalo tongues and he didn’t notice me slipping over next to that tomahawk. Talk’d my way out of many a jam that way. Indens are woods smart, but innocent in conversation. They take everything for what it is.”

So this woodsman was a talker and pretty smart too. One of them quiet intellectuals like me. I could see a strong bond developing between us.

“Dragging Canoe is Shawnee and the Shawnee and the other tribes across the Ohio River share the hunting grounds here in Cantuckee. By rights it really belongs to the Cherokee, who live south of here on the other side of the great mountains, and by rights, we aim to settle on it and take it.”

At least he was an honest woodsman. I had to admire him for that, and of course the fact that he saved my hide.

“The 4th of July, 1776,” I said knowing the day was my birthday and I was born on the 4th. Isn’t there a little war going on over there in the Colonies?”

The woodsman eyed me.

“I don’t pay much mind to what them folk back East are up too, unless they bring their foolishness to the wilderness. It’s enough to keep my hair with the great deal of mischief going on with the Shawnee running around stirring up things.”

It appeared that I had insulted him by bringing civilization into our conversation. He must have thought I was one of those city folk from the Colonies, when in fact, I was a mountain boy just like him. I decided to properly introduce myself.

“Ben Tuggle, adventurer.” I said, extending my hand out to the woodsman. He took it and gave it a hardy shake.

“Howdydo! Daniel Boone, frontiersman, hunter and Inden fighter.”