



DADDY'S TREE CUTTING

The Great Depression caught my Daddy, a good ole country boy, living in the city with a large family to feed. Daddy still had his double-bit axe, and it served him well.

One bright fall day, Daddy removed the backseat from the Model T and told his boys to “load-up”. He beamed, explaining his latest job offer – a task we could finish in less than three days while he continued to work his regular night shift at the fire station.

It seems there was an old oak tree leaning precariously over a house. The owner offered five dollars to remove it – plus we could keep the wood. As our Model T pulled up to the curb, Daddy pointed out the tree that reminded me of the leaning Tower of Pisa.

My bigger brother unloaded the prized block and tackle with almost-new ropes. I carried the crosscut saw, careful not to nick any of the freshly sharpened teeth.

Meanwhile, Daddy stepped from the car with his axe, walked over to the oak and spat tobacco juice at the base.

With his eyes, he sized up the entire tree from the trunk to the highest limb. Finished with his mental measurements, he let loose with some more tobacco juice on top of the first.

Watching all of this, the worried homeowner asked, “Well, Cully, what do you think?”

“I came to cut her down,” Daddy answered, swinging his axe and plunging the blade into the base of the tree. “I’ve marked her here, boys.” He said to us. “Get the crosscut and start right on that mark.”

“But, Cully,” the owner pleaded, “are you real sure it won’t fall on my house?”

“It can’t fall on your house.” Daddy assured the owner as he continued to direct us. “Okay, boy, climb that tree and take a rope with you.”

My brother fastened the rope to the designated limb while Daddy took the other end and tied it to another big tree in the yard. Within an hour or so, my oldest brother and I made the preliminary saw cuts almost through the trunk, into which Daddy hammered wooden wedges. The big oak creaked and shook all the way to its top limbs.

“Now open that yard fence gate as wide as it’ll go. You boys stand-by at the rope,” Daddy told us, pointing with one finger, and holding his axe in the other hand.

“I’m gonna put this tree right down the sidewalk and out through the gate.”

“Isn’t it going to fall backward, the way it’s leaning?” the nervous owner asked.

“Can’t!” Daddy yelled once more as he swung his axe for the final, accurate cut. The oak turned slowly on its stump as we tightened the ropes --- then it headed down the sidewalk and out through the open gate with a crash.

“Told you,” Daddy said proudly to the owner.

“Beautiful!” the owner shouted. “Tell me how in the world did you know for certain that it couldn’t fall on my house?”

“Well, it ain’t luck,” Daddy said, shifting the tobacco to his left cheek. “It’s my business to know that kinda thing.”

The happy owner went back into the house he’d been so sure was marked for destruction. As my brothers and I began making firewood of that big oak, one of us asked Daddy how he could be so sure of what would happen.

Daddy grinned and explained, “It’s pure and simple. We got no insurance and we can’t afford to buy his house.”