

CROOKED STICKS MAKE BETTER HORSES

When I was a boy in the 1930's, we didn't have electric refrigerators. We had iceboxes.

Iceman deliveries came twice a week but during real hot summer times Mama needed extra ice. That's when she sent my brother Billy and me to the icehouse about a mile from our home.

Mama never objected to us riding our 'horses' to fetch the 25-pound pieces of ice. Billy's horse was an old broom handle with traces of green paint still visible near the middle part, he called that his saddle. My horse was a fine, solid red oak limb, somewhat knotty, crooked, and twisted. "Ole Bark" rode 'good' and especially since one curve in the limb sat like a saddle on a swayback horse. Cowboy Billy's horse made more noise riding down the gravel streets, keeping him from slipping-up on any Indian.

At the icehouse, Mr. Sam, a wrinkled face man, chipped a 25 pound piece from the 100 pounds block. He flipped his ice pick from one hand to the other as he swiftly pecked a steady bead into that large hunk of ice.

About as quick as a hunger hound could catch a biscuit in the air, we snatched slivers of good tasting ice from Mr. Sam's chipping.

He tied twine around our ice and slid it across the wet, slick, wood porch and said, "Okay, boys, which stick are you using?" I held my horse towards him.

Billy and I had been foolish enough to use his slick pole before. The problem was that as we carried it, the ice slid towards my hold or down near Billy's hands on the

opposite end. It is possible that this action resulted from our lifting the broom-handle-horse-turned-carrying-stick ever higher in dispute as to who had more weight to carry.

Ice toting was hard work when one kid held about 20 pounds against five pounds on the other end. Sometimes, justice didn't come until we were home and the loser had more water on his overall pant legs.

Crooked sticks make better horses and better ice carrying poles, too. My horse, 'Ole Bark', had a sag between two small knots right in his middle. Once the twine was placed in that sag, ice never moved. We could argue, raise, lower, or bounce up and down, yet the weight remained equal. I attribute this fairness to my stick horse.

In time, my horse got old and lost his bark. I brought him inside on a cold winter day just to warm him near the fireplace. Mama burned him for starter wood.