

BEAR IN A GOLDFISH POND

Excerpt from Oral History by G. O. Cox – Feb 1977

Daddy told me this story about a bear when they lived in Mexia, Texas in Limestone County, where Darrell was born - – he was almost 16 years old when Darrell was born in May 1926.

“There was a man who ran a oil field supply store there in Mexia. His name was B. R. Walkup. And he had a big place over near Kilgore later. Well, he went hunting all the time down in Old Mexico...every year...and I delivered his papers to them at the store, and I also worked on the ice truck right across the street. His place was right across the street from the ice house.

“Well they went hunting and they captured a baby bear...just about this high (measuring with his hand). About as big as my dog...and brought it back with them. Well, they drank a lot. They had a room in the back of the supply house and they would all get back there and mix drinks. That was part of his business. But they built a cage for this baby bear out of sucker rods...welded it together...about 10 foot square...higher than your head...and had him a little house in there. And everyday I went by down there on my paper route to deliver a paper and I stopped and played with the bear, and fed him.

“And Walkup, he thought a lot of me. He treated me real good. He was always giving me money and telling me to go get the bear something. He liked soda water, and I got strawberry ever time. Strawberry soda water was what he liked. And he would give me some money and tell me to go get the bear a drink. And I would go get a bottle of soda water, and sometimes a loaf of bread. And then they would all come out and watch me feed the bear. And make him set up. He would set up and hold that soda water in his paws just like this and drink it.

“And then he got big. He kept getting bigger all the time. And I would cuff him and play with him. And he would try to bite me, but not...not very hard. Then he got *real* big. I’m talking about...up pretty high. And he had a collar and a chain that he made for him and I would take him out and exercise him. And one day, I was down there and it was Sunday and everything was closed up. And the light plant and the ice plant was all built together. And they had a big fountain out in front. And two fish ponds. One on each side of the fountain, and they was full of gold fish.

“And I had a chain about 8 or 10 feet long to lead him with. I would get in there and box with him. He would stand up and box. But at any rate, I took him out that day to exercise him and it was hot, and I thought, well, I will just take him over there to the fountain and let him get him a drink. And when I got him over to the fountain, he looked down in one of them fish ponds...it was about waist deep...and he saw all them fish, and heck, he just jumped in there. I’m talking about, and commenced to catching fish and eating ‘em.

“Well, they was all having a drinking party. And I couldn’t pull him out. I done everything I could to pull him out. Well, a man from the icehouse come out there to help me. And we got him out of the pond once, but he made a run at both of us and we both run and out of the way. And right back in the pond he went.

“But the man had to go back in the icehouse to tend to something, so I run across the street, and went in there where they were doing all of that drinking and I told them what happened, and they all come out –and B. R. got a hold of the chain and I did too, and pulled him hard to the edge of that fish pond and he was still catching fish and was just as muddy as he could be. Every time one of them fish came to the top, he would grab it and swallow him. And he just laid against the side of that thing like this with his paws and us pulling on his collar, and we couldn’t lift him out of there, he was so heavy.

“And finally, D. L. reached down and got him but the collar and was going to pull him out, and the bear snapped at him, and boy he just ripped the back of his hand from right here down. I’m talking about...the blood just poured. And them other guys come over there and all of them got a hold of the chain and pulled him out and got him back in the cage. And when we got back across the street, B. R. Walkup had done got his pistol and come out there and was fixing to shoot him. He was half drunk. And I just begged and pleaded with him not to shoot him, and some of those other guys did too.

“But he got mean. I couldn’t even box him any more. He got so he would knock me down. Taught him to box, and he would hit harder and harder. He would start off playing.

“I don’t know what ever happened to him, because we moved away from there. But he sure did attract a lot of attention. People would stop and look. And more especially if I was in the cage with him...giving him soda water or boxing with him. A crowd would gather every time.”

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