

HUNTING AND FISHING

My father was rarely indoors when he could be out. From the earliest time I can remember, he was an avid outdoorsman and especially loved to hunt—deer, ducks, squirrels, dove, and quail—but he liked to fish equally as much, for bass and crappie in East Texas lakes or deep sea fishing down on the coast.

He always kept up with the hunting and fishing seasons in the newspapers and knew who was having the best luck on which lake and what “bait or plugs” the fish were being caught with. From my earliest remembrance he always subscribed to the *Outdoor Life* and *Field and Stream* magazines. He loved to read about big game hunts, the latest in gun legislation, hunting and fishing techniques, conservation movements, and just good old hunting and fishing stories. Often he would tell us about some character in one of these stories if it was extra exciting and had good hunting tips. For several years before his retirement, he planned a trip to Alaska, and subscribed to the *Alaska* magazine. Alaska was a big dream that was never fulfilled, but he spent hours dreaming about it.

When I was about four or five, we lived in Aransas Pass on the Gulf Coast for several years where Daddy was drilling shallow gas wells in South Texas. For some period of time, two years or so, my dad ran a duck club—something he had always wanted to do. When he made up his mind to start the club and had it all planned out, he had business cards and advertising posters printed which he put up in conspicuous places. Next he placed an ad in *The Houston Post* to advertise his new business. As a result, he got all the clients he could handle from duck hunters in every corner of the state. After advertising his services, he acted as a guide and rented blinds, decoys and boats, putting hunters in just the right places to have a good duck hunt. Fees from the duck hunters supplemented the family income in between the times he was drilling oil wells. He worked evening shifts so he could take shooters, mostly oil and businessmen from the Corpus Christi, Houston, and Dallas areas. For so much a day, he would haul them across the channel into one of the back bays where he had built from eight to ten duck blinds, nestled back in a marshy area with saw grass standing three or four feet high.

Summer and fall were special times when many leisure hours were spent working on his boats and duck blinds. Great loads of reeds, grass stalks and other material were needed to construct the blinds for camouflage. The work was hot and tedious, but his love of duck hunting made it all worthwhile. Besides, he always had an abundance of energy and enthusiasm for whatever he undertook to do.

Using a wooden duck caller, my dad learned to produce a sound like the call of a hungry mallard or greenhead duck. He enjoyed practicing and showing off his skill for calling in ducks. He had other types of callers too. With a lot of practice, he could call up rabbits, squirrels or crows. We kids sat around his feet many times, waiting to take our turn on his caller to see if we could produce the same sound a duck makes.

It seemed to my two brothers and me that daddy knew everything about duck hunting as he explained the basics to us. He told us why ducks would land coming in to the wind,

that too much calling was worse than none, that you should sight and swing your aim through the birds to establish a lead, to always leave room in between decoys so the ducks could alight, and most of all, to always treat a gun as though it was loaded. “And always,” he emphasized, “make sure you know exactly what you are shooting at.” And more. He was never at a loss for words and he had theories on many subjects, particularly, a lifetime of recollections and an unofficial study on the ways, whys, and wherefores of wildlife and the great outdoors in general.

On some days he might explain the intricacies of catching bass or crappie. Sometimes we just walked along the Trinity, Angelina, or Neches riverbanks in the woods and he would point out signs of turtles, snakes, or squirrels. On other occasions he would relate some of his boyhood adventures in Kentucky and later in Coryell County, Texas, where the family lived several years when he was about nine to twelve years old. These stories were our favorites because we could use our imagination to identify with them.

Hunting, fishing and outdoor sports with only nature’s creatures for an audience provided many pleasurable hours for him over his lifetime and he loved telling about them. Love of the outdoors played an important part of his life.

Later on he put in untold hours hauling brush and posts to erect a duck blind for himself at his favorite spot on Lake Striker, about 10 miles from his home. Then he spent hours sitting alone, shivering in the cold duck blind waiting for the ducks to begin flying over. But he also enjoyed watching the sunrise and the clouds drifting overhead and listening to the rustle of the reeds and grass in the early morning breeze, or the fluttering wings of a fast-flying mallard or teal. It was just relaxing to him, hearing the water lapping against the sides of the boat—a great place to think and make plans for the day or week ahead.

He was one of the most ethical sportsmen I know, and would pass up shots at ducks or other game if he thought they were out of range, because he didn’t want to risk crippling them. Even if it meant going home empty-handed, he was happy just the same. He had several favorite hunting and fishing buddies throughout the years, but he was just as happy if he had to go by himself.

One morning I decided I wanted to go duck hunting with him, so we got up about four o’clock, fixed a pot of coffee, filled his thermos, and drove to Striker Lake. I helped him unload his boat and put it in the water, then he quietly paddled it out to his duck blind. Sitting there, I nearly froze to death while we were waiting for the ducks to come in, all the while being unable to say a word. Soon, ducks began flapping south over the bottomland near the convergence of the creek into the lake. I watched my dad sitting there in the duck blind he had spent the week building, dog by his side, talking to the mallards, trying to call them down to light among his decoys. Down the lake there were one or two hunters standing nearly knee-deep in water dotted with decoys in a flooded forest of willow oaks. Ducks winged overhead like bats in the pre-dawn sky. To my dad, it was just another old-fashioned duck hunt – something he had been doing each year whenever he had the chance. There we sat, shivering out on a dark, cold lake, waiting for daylight. As dawn cracked, Daddy started kicking water to make the decoys move.

Boom went his shotgun. "Go get him, Lucky," he said, and out jumped his faithful dog into the cold water, eager to bring back a trophy to his master.

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(Add to this story some of the oral history hunting and fishing tales daddy told about).

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GARDENING

In the early years my mother always put in the garden every year because my dad was away from home working on the railroad, until he built up enough seniority to hold a job close enough to drive back and forth from Palestine. Mother always had our neighbor, Glenn Tennison, to plow up the ground and lay out the rows and then we kids helped her get the ground ready for planting. She did the majority of work most of the time until we grew older. Mother always laughed and told of the time when Doug was less than three years old and he was "helping" plant the garden. Upon inspection, she found he had planted the onions upside down.

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Until he retired, my dad never had much opportunity to garden in the four-acre growing space on either side of our house. But at the first warm hint of spring, he got an itch to start digging in the dirt. Growing vegetables became a hobby, just for fun. He didn't try to garden for profit, although one year his cantaloupe crop was so bountiful that he sold several bushels.

He usually grew enough vegetables to keep them supplied throughout the season, producing enough for eating, canning and freezing. One year he grew peas and corn on one side of the house and had a regular vegetable garden on the other side. He became so serious about gardening that he bought a large tractor as well as a garden tiller. Soon he was growing corn, peas, beans, squash, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, and bell pepper, as well as cantaloupes and watermelons. He also took a lot of pride in the strawberry patch that he cultivated and planted out between the barn and the house. There he grew large, juicy, red strawberries that kept everyone in the family well supplied.

Like all garden chores, weeding was the one that took the most time, and he got up early to work while it was still cool, before the sun got too high and too hot. Another problem he had with his garden was in trying to keep out the rabbits and other pests. Without a fence, it was an open invitation to small animals. He laughed and said he always tried to grow enough so that the rabbits and birds could eat what they wanted and still have enough left over for the family.

And he spent many happy hours running his tractor and keeping his place mowed.

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OUR NEW HOME

(There is an oral history about moving to New Summerfield. Find it to add to this section. He and granddaddy built the house, tearing down the one in Kilgore that Granddaddy owned, and moving it to Summerfield and rebuilt it – three rooms. Great nail keg story here.)

In the spring of 1940 when Gilbert Cox decided it was time to put down firm roots for his growing family, he returned to the part of East Texas most familiar to him – not far from where he had worked in the 1930's during the great East Texas oil boom. In finding a place to build a home, one of his top priorities was settling in an area with good schools for his children. Summerfield had acquired a reputation for having an excellent rural school system under the superintendence of H. C. Schochler.

In 1941, my dad had saved enough money for a down payment on a five-acre tract he found at New Summerfield where he planned to build a house and put down roots. Gladys Darby Underwood sold him five acres of land two miles north on the Troup highway in the vicinity of a crossroads known long ago as the Pleasant Plains area. He made the purchase with a cash down payment of \$100, giving her four notes of \$100 each to be paid annually in four succeeding years.

It was February 1941, when my dad and his father Jasper Newton Cox roomed and boarded with the Summerfield postmaster and his wife, Roscoe and Hollis Edwards, while working on the weekends to build a small frame home. Douglas Tipton, a carpenter, also helped out with his labor at \$2.00 per day, the standard wage in that day. At the time, Daddy said he was only making \$8.00 a day. They put up the little house in a little over a week. While they were finishing it, we stayed over at Granddaddy's and Grandmother's for a week or so at Mexia. We had come up to East Texas from Corpus Christi where Daddy had previously been working as a driller for the Magnolia Oil Company in South Texas.

It was spring and the blue bonnets were in full bloom when we moved to Summerfield from Corpus where we lived on Leopard Street. "Beer Barrel Polka" and "San Antonio Rose" played over and over on the car radio as we made the five-hour drive. (Later Summerfield was renamed as "New Summerfield" due to the existence of a town previously given that name by the postal service). That first spring they had some ground plowed up and immediately planted potatoes

Gilbert Cox, his wife and family were happy to settle in their first new home and especially loved the many wonderful new neighbors who were so helpful to them. Living across the highway were Mack and Jewel Tennison, and their two daughters, Curley and

Joann, and nearby were their neighbors, Newman and Eva Mae Darby, Tom and Ruth Tennison, Boyd and Ima Tennison, "Miss Effie" and "Miss Fannie" Gill, and the families of Floyd and Mary Richardson, Jimmy Thames, Frank Tennison, Grady Underwood, and Marvin and Bertha Wallace.

MISCELLANEOUS FACTS

**G. O., Cox sr. went to work on MOP on March 22, 1942.
He was promoted to engineer, September 1, 1950.
G. O. retired October 31, 1974.**

Bub went to work for MOP on Feb 1956

(Much more to be added here from oral history tapes, letters and notes that I made through the years).

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Two of my dad's oft-quoted sayings were: "If it's worth having, it's worth working for" and "do a just day's work for a just day's pay." When he woke us up in the mornings at an early hour, he would say, "Roll out, roll out, it's a cold, cruel world"...meaning that we should get up and at our chores, or else getting ready to catch the school bus which came at an early hour. Those are some of his sayings that I won't ever forget.

Many families this day and time never know the joy of doing without and enjoying the simple things of life. It's true that we worked hard and didn't have a whole lot, but so did everyone else around us. Nevertheless, our family enjoyed a closeness and love for each other that can't be measured. To this day all of us consider ours to have been a close knit family, and we visit as frequently as our jobs and family activities will allow us to do. Reggie, Doug and I usually talk to each other every weekend.

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RAILROAD RETIREMENT NOTICE

G. O. Cox, Sr., engineer in the Transportation Department for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, retires October 31, 1974, after thirty-two years on the main line and locals.

He went to work as a fireman when the trains were run with steam for the old International Great Northern Railroad in Palestine, Texas, March 22, 1942. In 1950 he was promoted to the right side of the engine.

Formerly, Fox was an oil well driller for the major oil companies in Mexia, Wink in West Texas, and Pampa in the Panhandle. He worked on the first wells drilled on the Gulf Coast at Aransas Pass. He also worked on some of the first wells drilled in the great East Texas oil field in 1931.

Brother Cox belonged to the B.L.F. and E (later the UTU) and B.L.E. Brotherhoods for the past thirty-two years.

Cox is an avid fisherman and hunter and hopes to do lots more in the future.

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CHARACTERISTICS

My dad was energetic and always enthusiastic about things. He also believed in work and when he wasn't off working for the railroad as an engineer, he saw to it that we always had plenty of chores to do until he returned home again. If he didn't leave something for us to do, mother would find something. There was never any time for us to get in trouble.

My dad was good to his parents and they visited back and forth everyday because they lived just across the highway from our house. Every afternoon as a signal that she was waked up from her nap, his mother opened her front door so that Dad would know it was time to come drink coffee, discuss the current events, and tell of the day's happenings.

Daddy was energetic and always full of enthusiasm about his hobbies and at any job he tackled. He could be quite jovial and loved a good joke. He also enjoyed telling jokes and laughed more than anyone at his own stories. There were times when he had a hot, fierce temper, but he never held a grudge toward anyone that I knew of. He could be very stern, but on the other hand, he had a very compassionate heart. He believed in always trying to improve your mind through reading good literature.

He liked to sing, a trait he inherited from his father and mother, and he always taught us the songs his father taught him, such as "The Shores of Ponchartrain," a large lake in Louisiana not far from where they once lived. At one point in his early railroad career, Gilbert Cox composed and wrote the lyrics for a railroad song, which he titled, "The MOP's No. 69." He said No. 69 was their fast, crack train with one of the railroad's newest and best engines, operating on a track from Little Rock, Arkansas down through the Ozarks, all the way to San Antonio. He said that sometimes in those days of long ago he would get a long freight train for his run and once in a while he would catch Engine No. 69. He told how good it felt when he had a good steam engine and when he, the engineer, got all the cars strung out behind. He went on to tell his grandchildren about how the train talks to the tracks and just sings a song and how the tracks talk to the train. He told about the old steam engines and how the crew learned to depend on each other. With all his grandchildren gathered around him with rapt attention, he once burst out and sang the song he had composed to them:

“The M.O.P.’S No. 69”

When you see a freight train,
Balling the jack down the line.
And you hear the whistle blowing,
You can bet you know where she’s going,
She’s the M.O.P.’s No. 69,
Heading for San Antonio,
Looking for sunny skies.

She was snaking through the Ozarks
Tipping over tip-top,
And Little Rock will be her next stop.
Headed for San Antonio,
Looking for sunny skies.

The kids all laughed and clapped. We all thought he was so smart. He had an amazing recall and memory, another trait he inherited from both parents, but especially from his father, who told the old stories so compellingly that everyone listened with such intent you could hear a pin drop.

He never met a stranger, always had a firm handshake, and like his father, his word was his bond.

(Write from oral history notes about the closeness between him and his father – because they had always worked together, and hunted and fished together.)

Gilbert Cox lived in the home he helped build with his own hands for a period of 43 years until his death on August 19, 1984. He is buried at McDonald Cemetery at New Summerfield, in the family plot near the graves of his wife’s parents. His father, Jasper Newton Cox died September 21, 1974 and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery at Tyler. After my grandfather’s death, my grandmother, Eva Cox, at age 95, continued to live across the highway in her own home until her son’s death, when she moved to Tyler to live with her youngest daughter, Darrell Appl.