

Cottonwood Summer (Pages 122-124)

Horse Barn Paratroopers

On Danny's first visit to the farm, Jase shows Danny the horse barn. After becoming bored with feeding and scratching the workhorses, Danny asked Jase a question.

Danny looked around, then questioned me, "What else can we do here?"

"Wanta play paratrooper?"

"Yeah! Howdaya play?" he replied with his I'm-ready-for-anything look.

I led Danny back out to the area between the mows. While Danny watched eagerly, I jumped over the wall into the ground floor mow and bounded across the springy surface of the hay toward the corner of the barn. Once there, I climbed effortlessly up the side of the barn using the beams and corner supports as steps. I had made this climb dozens of times before.

When I reached the crossbeam that spanned the width of the barn, running just under the peak window, I turned around with my back against the wall. I stepped backwards onto the crossbeam and planted my feet firmly. By alternately pivoting on my heels and the balls of my feet, I slowly sidled across the narrow beam to its center. I stopped when my head was even with the window's sill. At this point, I was standing about twenty-five feet above what hay remained in the near-empty mow below.

Without hesitation, I took a deep breath and jumped. I plummeted downward.

"Geronimo!" I yelled, pulling my imaginary ripcord.

Whoosh!

I landed in the dry and welcoming bed of hay. Sunbeams piercing the barn's wall painted vivid white-yellow stripes across the cloud of dust and dried pollen that exploded around me.

Danny was astonished. His eyes were as big as saucers. He leaped up and down noisily.

"Me next! Me next! I wanta do it. Me!"

"Okay! Okay! Climb over the wall. I'll guide you up to the crossbeam."

Danny bounded to the corner and started his climb. I coached him from the mow below, "Put your foot there. No! Use your other foot. That's right. Now, grab that support. Pull yourself up onto that beam. Turn around this way. You're doing fine. Okay, move your feet like this. That's great. Okay! When you get even with the window, just jump."

Just jump, indeed!

After an exhausting forty minutes of cajoling, I finally gave up and returned to the house. When I entered the living room, Grandpa looked up from his paper. I gave him the bad news, "Grandpa, I need your help. Danny's stuck at the top of the horse barn. He won't jump, and he won't try to climb down."

"Oh, laws!" Grandpa muttered, leaping up from his chair.

When we reached the haymow, Grandpa looked up. There was Danny, stuck to the wall like a stubborn tick. Grandpa didn't waste a second. Up the corner of the barn he went. Facing the wall, he mounted the crossbeam and wiggle-stepped on his toes toward Danny.

When Grandpa arrived next to the frozen chicken, he spoke calmly, "Danny, I am going to move in front of you. I'll be facing you. When I tell you, I want you to put your hands around my waist and hold on tight. Okay?"

Danny nodded meekly. Tears of terror streamed down his cheeks.

Grandpa gracefully moved in front of Danny. When he was in position, he ordered, "Danny, put your arms around my waist -- now! Hold on like crazy!"

Danny obeyed immediately. When Danny's fingers were intertwined and his grip secure, Grandpa surprised even me. He grasped Danny's waist and leaped off the beam backwards.

As he and his frightened parachute partner fell like a rock, Grandpa yelled, "Geronimo"

Danny countered with a weak, "Geranium!" just as the combo hit the dusty hay.

Once they were safely back to earth, Grandpa sprang to his feet while I delivered a standing ovation. True to form, Danny, in response to my applause, bowed from the waist. Then, crazily, he pivoted and ran across the hay toward the route to his nemesis, the top of the barn.

Grandpa and I watched in shock as Danny nimbly climbed upward.

When he reached the dreaded crossbeam, he looked at us over his shoulder and pronounced smugly, "That was fun! I'm gonna do it again."

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