

This story was written on to the end of a letter to an unknown correspondent between 1930 and 1942. It was found among the papers of his daughter Myra Esarey Evans, September 2009.

Aunt Lucindy and the Water Dog
by Logan Esarey

This story will introduce one of your ol' friends and relatives years long gone, in fact this story dates back to the time I was about ten or eleven years of age. The old friend here quoted did some of her trading at Branchville, although she lived about six or eight miles away at Fosters Ridge [a place off to the west northwest of Branchville - a bit over two miles west of St. Croix]. At the time she was a gay old maiden of something like forty summers and at least a few winters.

Enter Aunt Lucindy,

"You ax me whether them water dog critters is pizen. Lawsakes they's plum pizen. The folks thinks they's pizener than snakes. I don't know about that. I mind the time when Tobe Johnson's little boy Tob got bit by one. Of course his name wuz Tobe, named after his pappy, but you couldn't have two Tobes in the same family, so they always called him Tob. Tobe lived down at the Mud Crick, right below where the old log school house wuz. He must have been about eight or nine years caysed of Johnson's moving out to Ioway about five years ago. They first intended to go out on the cyars, but Nancy, that wuz Tobe's woman's name, had some tinchenes. She didn't reckon they could get way out where they wuz going. Tobe liked his hoss beef so well he jist couldn't make up his mind to leave them. So they kivered their wagon and when several other movers came along that spring; they just jined in with 'em hut law! I started to tell ye about Tobe's boy got bit, didn't I?

Well I lows it wuz about the middle of May or thereabouts cause Tobe wuz down plantin and the boys, Tob and Bob, Bob wuz littler than Tob, went down on the high bank fishing. Tobe and Nancy they loved them boys and no differences what kind of fishes they kotched, Nancy always cleaned em and cooked em. As I says the boys wuz down there fishin about eleven o'clock. Tob kotched a water dog. Must of been a big one. Course I never seed it, I wuz just jedgin from the bites on his ankle. Tob threw him out into th grass and then went back and picked up the line to see how he might git im loose and when he liften him off the ground he swung him ginst his ankle and it bit him. Tob drapped his line and squalled and started fer the house. Bob follered after him aas fast as he could. Tobe had been plowing down the big field but I reckon he wusn't much pushed with his work caysed he'd onhitched and kum in and just hadn't got to the barn when he heered Tob squall. He sayed something to him right then like what wuz the matter, and he jist drapped everything and broke fer the house. When Tob got there he grabbed him up and axed him what it wuz, but law, Tob wuz squallin so he couldn't say anything.

When Bob got there he hollered "water dog" and pointed at Tob's foot. Shore enuff there wuz the print of every one of the critter's teeth. Tobe grabbed it in his mouth and tried to suck the pizen out but Tob kept screaming something awful. Tobe ssed it wuzen't doin any good that way and he axed Loucy to git him some slices of fat meat. Loucy already had her biling's on fer dinner and had jist come back from the smoke house with some side meat out of the barl. She sliced off three or four pieces and Tobe tied it on his ankle quick as he could. The boy jist kept squallin.

Spoonbill Hawkins wuz workin fer Tobe that summer. He wuz plowin with another nag, but when he heered Tob squall and saw Tobe break fer the house, he onhitched and kum right in. He knowed ther wuz something the matter. As soon as he got there Tobe axed him if he knowed anything to do

fer pizens and he said no. He said Aunt Lucindy (that is meself) lived up on the hill above their house and had right good luck treatin pizens. Tobe says to him without ever lookin up, "*You throw the saddle on Maggie and don't let her pick any grass till you git Lucindy down here.*" Maggie wuz a young mare and they wuz all right proud of her. They'd run her in the fair in the fall before and she had got something or the other, whatever it is they git, when the run thet way. Spoonbill rid her and you know they wear caps with long bills. Spoonbill wuz so well pleased with hisself that he kept right on waring his cap. That's why they called him Spoonbill, caysome catfishes have a long bill like it.

Spoonbill didn't have to be told twict to take a ride on Maggie. He wuz going up the road before Tobe's red house and don't low that mare ever broke the lope. I seed him kummin way down the lane. Couse I didn't know but the way he wuz comin, you pert near knowed they wuz somethin wrong. I jest had on my ever day dress but law, I didn't take any time. I just tied my bonnet tighter and when Spoonbill lit off of that mare and told me the boy wuz bit with a water dog, and Tobe wanted me to come right down, I tole him I wuz ready right then. I wuz never no one o keep people waitin when the wuz sick or sufferin. Spoonbill jest took me around the waist with his two hands and sot me right on that mare's back afore I knowed how it wuz done, he wuz in the saddle and we wuz turned to go.

It's only about ten steps from the corner of the yard to the big road. That mare wuz lopin when she 'it the road and law, she wuz weighted down till I thot our feet would strike the ground, but she never broke the lope. I read about people loping that way but law I never thot it wuz did except in them story books or maybe when somebody wuz eloping. But law, I went right that way meself. Course with a rider like Spoonbill sittin up in front of ye and ye holding on around him with both hands and him with one hand clinched on yer arm there wasn't no danger a tall. But it wuzn't any time it didn't seem to me till I heern Spoonbill whisper Whoa, just like that in front of the gate and afore I begun to wonder how I wuz goin to git off, Spoonbill wuz off and set me down.

I went right in and didn't even take off my bonnet caysome that boy wuz stil l squallin and big drapes of sweat running down his face. Nancy wuz sittin in the cheer thar and didn't even see me comin in and her feet up on the cheer rounds, her hands in her lap jest lookin and not seein' anything either.

I axed Tobe what he done and when he tole me I told him them things wuz mighty good, but I seen right away it wuzn't doin any good here so I axed Tobe to get me a live chicken and most afore I had the meat offen the boy's laig Tobe came in with a big hen. Jest as soon as I teched that hen I knowed she was a layin hen, but law, no time then to wait. So I tole Tobe to hole one laig and I took the other and reached over and got the axe leaning against the fireplace and split the chicken right down through his middle from his neck clean down. Never said a word about gitting the blood and stuff on the floor. I axed Tober to git me a string as quick as he could. He jest retched inside the kitchen wall and handed me one, sayed they had it offen of the bag they got down at the store Christmas time and knowed it would come in handy fer something or other. I tied the chicken on the boy's laig as tight as I could. Later the prints of the string were on the laig next day when I took it offen to see how it wuz gittin along.

Twuzn't long until Lil' Tob quit a yelling and began to whimper, jest kind of filling up and then blubbern out, you know how a big lad will stop cryin. I laid him down on the pallet and I believe it wuz the first time I got my breath since I got there. Tobe sot down on a cheer, skeered me. I think he wuz a goin to fall out, but he didn't. Nancy wuz jist a sittin that, not movin a hand or anything, jist a lookin and not seein a thing. I axed her in a little while if she wuz cooking dinner. She looked kind o' curious at me and I axed her agin.

“*Heh*” she said, “*I wuz a cookin dinner, wuzn’t I?*” So we went into the kitchen and she wuz soon at herself. Spoonbill come in by that time. I axed him to put Tob in a bed. He could lay his foot out on a cheer effen he didn’t want to git the quilts red. “*Golly*” he said “*what do we keer?*” I axed him then to talk some to Tobe and git him to talk back effen he could afore he drapped out of his cheer. He got all right.

While I wuz setting that all to once Nancy stopped and looked right square at me. “*Did you say that pizen would bust a person right open effen you didn’t git it stopped?*” I dodn’t know what to say. I minded then that I had said to Tobe, effen he couldn’t git that pizen stopped it would bust his laig open, but law, I didn’t think that Nancy wuz hearin anything we wuz saying. Cain’t be too keerful about what you say afore people when they’s a sittin that way. Sometimes they git ever word of it. “Law, yes” I said, “that pizen would bust a person wide open. Course I had never had a case where it had, but Lem Clark lives a mile or two still further up a little creek, was snake bit comin now four years ago. He got his corn all laid by and his hay all in and wuz coming out to cut the weeds out of the fence rows. He sat down on the end of a fence rail and a snake bit him jist above the knee. I think they call that part of the leg the thigh. Mebbe I could point to the place, but some of the men folks might be a lookin in and I wouldn’t them to see me a pointing to my laig not knowing what we wuz a talking about. Lem headed up to the house and got some whiskey, but there wan’t much in the jug. It didn’t do no good. He tried meat on his laig but that didn’t stop it. They heered that a doctor lived over thar in a day or two. His leg just swelled up and busted. Lem wuz telling me you could lay your finger right down in the busted place. He must of got bad along the beginning of dog days. He didn’t get out till after Christmas. Yes, that pizen would just bust you wide open, but if it’s someplace where it can’t bust you it will sure kill you.”

Exit Lucindy:

Fate played a curious trick on old Aunt Lucindy’s doctoring career. As Shakespeare would say, just as her greatness was aspiring there came a killing frost in the form of a great big six foot husband, which fate left on her porch, and he had a great big boy twelve or fourteen years old who thought the world of old Lucindy, and she had such a good time ever afterwards that she quit doctoring.

Very truly yours,
Logan Esarey