

The Apple Orchard Slingshot



A Short Story
By C.R. Evans

Author's note

A few years ago, my good friend, Dave Palmer told me an account of one of his childhood experiences. It is that tale of his past that inspired me to write this short story.

I first met Dave, and his wife Nancy, in 1991 while working in Little Rock, Arkansas for an aircraft modification center. That's when I learned about his career working in the aircraft and missile industry as a designer and technical illustrator/writer in Michigan, California and finally in Little Rock, Arkansas where he retired from Raytheon in 1993. Although, thirty years my senior, Dave's youthful and outgoing personality always gave him the appearance of one much younger. We quickly found that we had many common interests and became good friends. For me, it has been a blessing to not only have had the opportunity to know him as a co-worker, but also as one of my best friends. I do miss those times we had together, but I am so thankful for all of the great memories.

After his passing, I decided to put pin-to-paper and make Dave's recollection of the '*Apple Orchard Slingshot*' into a fun story that can be shared with the rest of the world. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I had writing it.



John David Palmer
1926-2009

This story is dedicated in his memory

Copyright © 2011 by C.R. Evans.

Thank you for downloading this free eBook. You are welcome to share it with your friends. Although this is a free book, it remains the copyrighted property of the author. This book may be reproduced, copied and distributed for non-commercial purposes, provided the book remains in its complete original form. If you enjoyed this book, please visit mygoodreads.com to discover other downloadable works by this author. Thank you for your support.

The Apple Orchard Slingshot

I would have to imagine that everyone has probably heard the old saying, ‘Boys will be boys’, and it would appear, everywhere around the world, these testosterone driven adolescents are pretty much the same. More often than not, they seem to be fully committed to waging their persistent battle against the dreaded phantom of boredom, constantly on a never-ending quest in search of fun and amusement.



As we begin this tale of two boys, we find ourselves going back in time to the year 1939. The sounds of barnyard roosters can be heard signaling the beginning of another day in a rural farming community. In the early morning light as the rising sun breaks over the horizon, little drops of dew on the grass glitter like diamonds, while the growing warmth fills the air with smells of vegetation.

That summer season was proving to be an excellent one for the agricultural folks, especially for the apple orchards. The fruit trees had completed their annual metamorphosis from spring blossoms into a bumper crop of apples ready for the picking.



In this small town, where the residences lived far from the hustle and bustle of the big city, there lived a thirteen year old boy named Dave. He loved the life that he, his family and friends were living in the little colony they called home. During those years at the end of the depression, most small American towns were relatively similar in their characteristics, and Dave's little hamlet was certainly no exception. An almost old-fashion air hung over their settlement with the boundaries of its city limits extending only two blocks from one end to the other. The population of 250 on the city limit signs at each end of the town had not changed in over 50 years. The two-lane black-top highway that passed east to west through their mini municipality carried a State Highway number before entering and after leaving the town, but while the highway was within the confines of the city limits, it was known as 'Main Street'. There were only two other streets in town that were given common names. The one north of Main was Washington Street and the one on the south side was Lincoln Street, obviously named after the American Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Dave's home was in one of those typical little burgs where everyone knew each other in the immediate area by first name. The few local businesses consisted of a general store, a barber shop, a café, a feed store, an ESSO gas station at the west end of town, and a Sinclair station at the east end.



Like many children of that era, Dave started his mornings with his daily chores. During the school season, he almost drug his feet fulfilling his morning duties before going to school. But during those summer vacation months, while they were out of school, Dave would finish his chores as quickly as possible and run to Jack's house to play. Jack was Dave's best friend and had been ever since Jack and his family had moved to the little settlement when they were in the first grade.

Now, being red-blooded boys, they did have a slight propensity for getting into mischief. Whether in school or during the summer break, they seemed to be attracted to pranks and shenanigans like bees to flowers or steel to a magnet. But, on this warm summer morning, as Dave started his short walk along the dirt road toward Jack's house, he had vowed to himself that they would not do anything to get themselves into any kind of trouble. It had been a whole week since they last found themselves in a minor infraction with their parents. Dave could clearly

remember how uncomfortable it had been for the next two days just to sit after the punishment had been passed with the belt of truth. Yes, today was going to be just a nice, quiet day spending their spare time, swimming down at the river, working on their tree house in the woods or perhaps just exploring the countryside. “*No trouble,*” he thought to himself. “*No, not today!*”

As Dave stepped off the road and began strolling across the back side of Jack’s family property, he spied Jack still working in the apple orchard filling wooden barrel baskets with big red ripe apples. Approaching the fence surrounding the orchard, Dave leaned against a fence post and asked, “How long will it take you to finish your little job? It’s a great morning to go swimming!”

Jack didn’t even slow his pace as he continued picking apples and placing each one in a barrel as he replied, “I still have several more of these to fill before I can leave. It will probably take me about another hour... that is, unless I could persuade another able bodied person to help me speed up the process.” Then with a big smile he added, “And it’s really a lot of fun too!”

Dave jokingly responded, “Okay Tom Sawyer, I’ll give you a hand so we can get on down to the river.”

Promptly climbing over the fence, Dave began picking the apples on the next tree. In less than thirty minutes, they had filled the required number of barrels and with that obligatory task accomplished, they were totally free to enjoy the rest of the day.



As they stood at the back of the two acre lot of apple trees, Jack seemed to be held in a trance as he stared across the fence at the grassy area just behind the orchard. Dave could see a distant look in his friend’s face and asked, “Hey, what’s got your attention? Looks like you are you having a serious daydream.”

Glancing back at Dave, he answered, “I was just noticing of that old, dead tree.”

Now this particular object that had drawn the young boy's interest was a single, old dead tree that stood between the apple orchard and a large corn field that ran to the tree line on the edge of town. Its lifeless boughs were completely void of any leaves or vegetation, with only an occasional bird seen perching on its barren branches. Although Jack had looked at that tree a hundred times before, this time there was a certain feature that seemed to just stand out. As he continued studying it, he began pointing out the natural fork that started at about five feet above the ground, then projected upward and outward with almost symmetrically angled limbs.

"Look at the shape of that tree!" he exclaimed. "Don't you think it looks just like a large bean shooting slingshot?"

Looking intently at the tree for a long moment, Dave's face suddenly lit up with an obvious understanding and responded, "Yeah, you're right! I can see what you mean."



Turning and looking at each other, they shouted in unison, "Let's make a giant slingshot!"

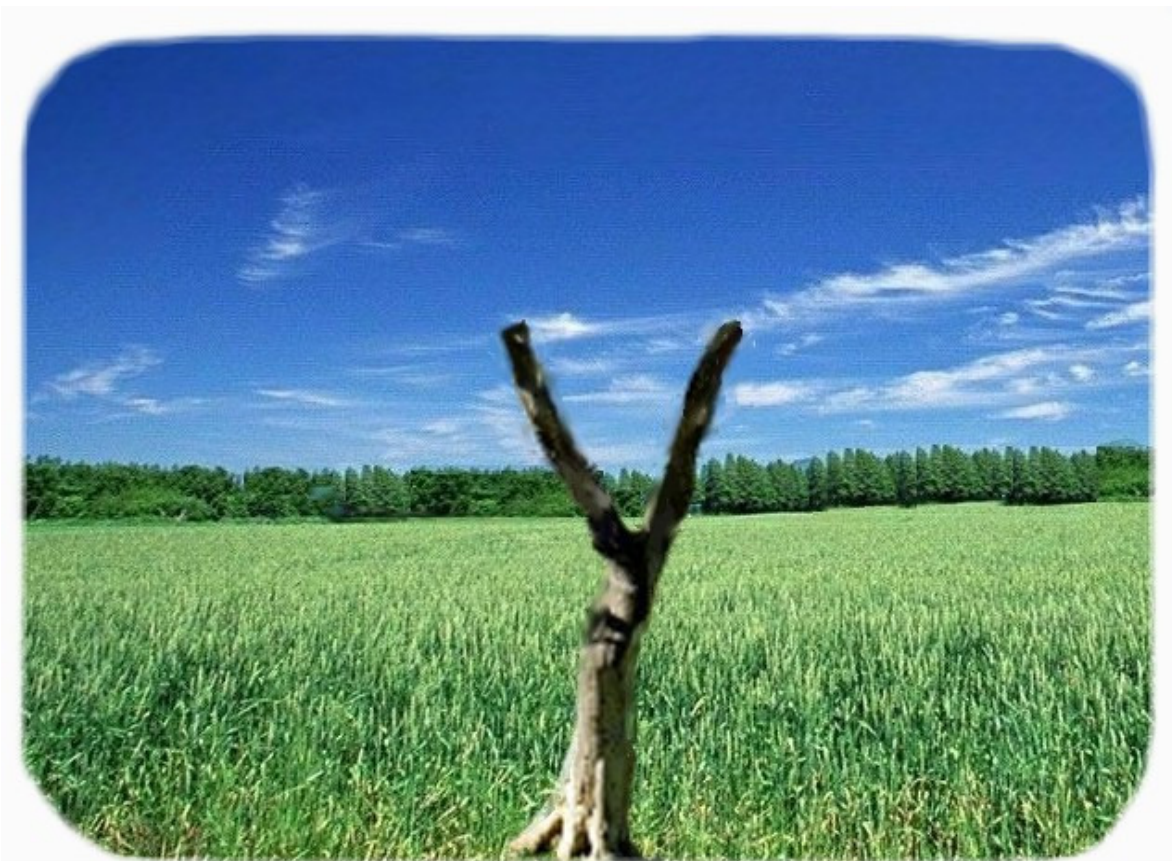
Quickly, they ran to the barn where Jack's father kept his tools and an assortment of miscellaneous paraphernalia. They knew that the most important part of their new contraption would require a material with a strong elastic resilience. Looking in a wooden box where his

father stored old truck tire inner tubes, Jack pulled a couple of rubber tubes out and held them up like some trophy. Stating mater-of-factly, he said, “I think these will work!”

With the inner tubes tucked under one arm, Jack grabbed a roll of hay bailing string as he started out of the barn door heading for the tree, closely followed by Dave with the required basic hand tools.

As they stood at the base of the old tree and with saws in hand, they carefully evaluated the first part of their new project seeing that it would be their mission to simply cut off everything that did not look like a slingshot.

In no time, they had the tree cleaned up and the forks trimmed to the proper proportions. Feeling confident that they had performed their self-appointed assignment properly, the duo began the next step in the process by preparing the rubber straps. Completely caught up in the excitement of creating their new invention, they couldn't help giggling and saying, “This is going to be great!”



Pulling a pocket knife out of his pant pocket, Jack opened the blade and cut the two inner tubes, changing them from the original circular shape to a five foot long thin black rubber rectangular sheet. With the material laid out flat on the ground, Dave held one end in place while Jack continued using his knife to cut them into strips of six inch widths. The young engineers began to calculate what the final length of the slingshot's straps should be for the size of the fork in the tree. They reasoned that if they first combined three of the six inch strips of rubber, layering the three strips together into a five foot long assembly, then by using the bailing string

to hold everything together, they could then join two of the five foot straps end-to-end, giving them a full length of ten feet.

Once they had the two ten-foot assemblies fabricated, they knew that they would need a good pocket to hold the intended projectile. Running back to the barn, Jack returned in less than a minute holding a piece of leather about eight inches square and saying, "I figure this should be the perfect thing to give our rubber catapult engine its finishing touch."

In less than an hour from the time the very conception of their idea had come about, the boys had completed the essential part of their project. Stepping back, they gazed in near awe at the giant band of rubber lying on the ground, knowing that once it was installed in the tree, there was little doubt in their minds that this combination would give them a formidable weapon.

No time was lost as the boys excitedly scaled the tree each holding one end of the rubber strap. Again, they utilized the bailing string to connect the two loose ends to the very top of the recently trimmed tree limbs.

As they descended the tree, they stood there for a moment to admire their new creation. With a low whistle, Dave commented in a voice of pride, "That's got to be the biggest slingshot in the whole wide world!"

With a big grin, Jack said, "Well my friend... let's see how good she works!"

Turning and scanning the surrounding area looking around for the proper object to be used as a cannonball, Jack's eye caught notice of some of the large apples that had fallen off a tree and lying on the ground next to the fence. Picking up one of the softball size apples, he held it up and exclaimed, "Let's try this and to see how far it will go!"

Dave picked up the end of the massive slingshot strap and held the leather pocket open while Jack placed the big red apple in the pocket's center in preparation to launch the first projectile. Without any comment, they began backing away from the tree, pulling the tension in the rubber tighter and tighter until they could hardly keep their feet firmly planted in the green grass.

With a straining grunt, Jack said, "Alright, on the count of three, let it go! Okay, one... two... threeeee!!!"



There was a mighty swooshing sound as the rubber straps quickly flew toward the tree attempting to conform to the original length and shape. Standing side-by-side and keeping a keen eye on the apple, the boys watched in amazement as it rocketed away across the corn field. They were stunned at the velocity the apple had obtained after leaving the slingshot and noted that it was still be gaining altitude when it soared out of site.

Smiling ear to ear, Jack looked at Dave and said enthusiastically, “That was great! Let’s do that again!”

Over the next 20 minutes, they sent dozens of apples sailing into oblivion, or at least, who could really know where their fruitful bullets fell to their final resting place. The boy’s imagination carried them to a far off land, seeing themselves as knights at King Arthur’s castle, capitulating fiery balls toward an invading enemy. They shot one apple at a time, and then they tried two at a time, finally getting up to four apples in one shot, but they quickly determined that the best result was with one apple or two at the most. Finally, the novelty of their orchard warfare began to wear off, not to mention that the day was starting to get really hot. For a few minutes they sat under the shade of an apple tree discussing their successful engineering feat and how proud they were about how well it functioned.

“I can’t wait for my dad to get home,” Jack declared, “so we can show him what we’ve built!”

Then remembering that he had a nickel, Dave suggested that they walk to the general store on Main Street and buy an ice cream bar. Although five cents was only enough money for one bar, that was not a problem. It wouldn’t be the first time they had shared an ice cream or a piece of candy. Jack agreed that a cold vanilla ice cream sounded really good after the toiling labor they had endured in giving their imaginary enemy a tremendous pounding.

Now, from Jack’s home, the most direct route to the general store was directly across the corn field and down to the west end of Main Street. As the boys plodded through the corn field toward town and in the same direction they had been shooting the apples, Jack declared, “Let’s keep a look out and perhaps we can find some of the apples we shot to see just how far they really traveled.”

As they sauntered along, their conversation quickly changed from searching for the expended apples, to the thought of going down to the river to swim after they finished their ice cream. Turning the corner near the ESSO station, they could almost taste the creamy frozen delight that was waiting there for them. When they drew closer to the store they began to notice an unusual quietness on the street. They looked at each other and Dave asked, “Where is everyone? Is it a holiday?”

Continuing along the sidewalk, they then began noticing that the street was littered with an abundance of smashed apples. Dozens of apples were lying in the street from curb to curb, while other remnants, of what was now mostly apple sauce, were splattered against the store windows and on parked cars.

Mister Jones, the barber, was hiding behind the front door of his shop when he saw the two lads approaching. Opening the door slightly, he yelled out, “Get off the street boys! Apples are falling out of the sky!”

Looking up and down Main Street, they suddenly became aware of numerous perplexed faces of the local population peering out from the store windows, too afraid to even leave the buildings.

They turned and looked at each other with mixed expressions of unbelief and blatant guilt. What had initially been the whole intent and purpose for their coming to town had now instantly

changed into a fear-provoking nightmare. A fear of only guessing what would happen if the town's people ever found out that they were the responsible culprits. And heaven forbid if their dads became aware of what they had done. They wouldn't be able to sit down for a week.

The boys quickly snapped a wave to Mr. Jones while attempting to put on their most innocent faces and then turning around, they ran back down the sidewalk. Their minds were racing as they hoped that all the onlookers would simply think that they too were merely trying to avoid the next onslaught of the apple bombardment. In Olympic record breaking time, they sprinted as fast as their legs would carry them and made their way back across the corn field to Jack's home.

Hastily entering the yard and running up to the big slingshot, Jack shouted with nervous anxiety, "We've got to get rid of this stuff before the news of what happened gets back to my father!"

Within two minutes they had cut the two rubber straps free from each fork and rolled it up into a tight bundle. Trying to figure out where the best place would be to hide the objectionable collection of rubber and leather, Jack thought about a spot in the barn where his father kept some old discarded junk. Quickly, he carried the material inside and properly disposed of the short lived apparatus in great hopes that no evidence of what they had done would be found and could be used against them.

As Jack ran out of the barn and back to the scene of the crime, Dave began pointing up at the forked tree and saying, "What about this? If your father sees this tree, he still might put two and two together and figure it out!"

"We only have one choice!" Jack exclaimed. "We have to cut that thing down!"

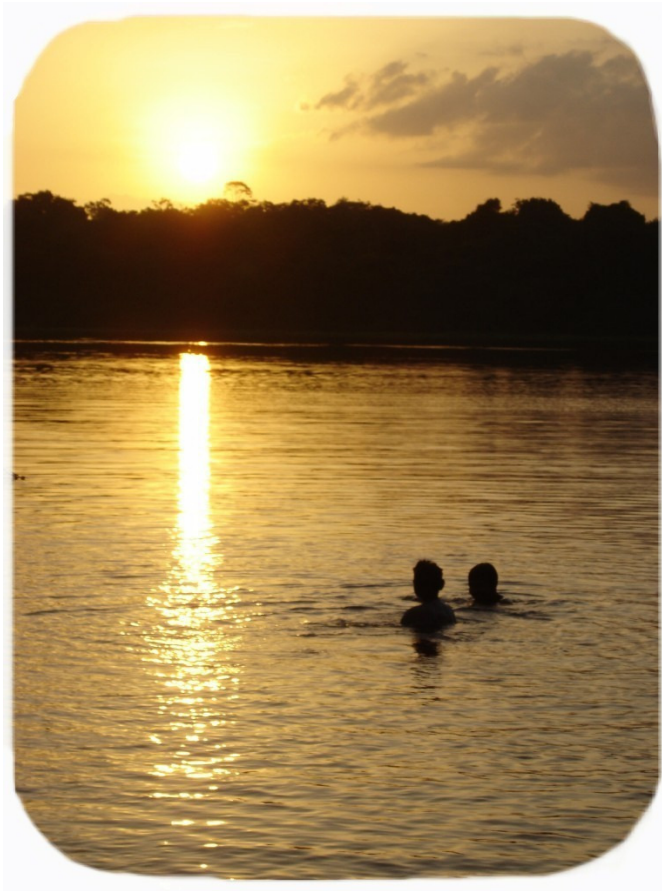
The boys grabbed the two handsaws that had been left on the ground near the tree earlier and in a combined effort of frantic motion they began cutting away at the old tree. With the tree down and on the ground, they continued hacking away at the wooden remains in a frenzied pace that would have made any lumberjack proud. Driven by fear of the truth being revealed, all they could think about was that they had to have the job done before Jack's father returned home from his visit to the next town. With great vigor, the boys sawed until there was nothing left but a pile of fire wood.

At the same instant they were just finishing stacking the last of the freshly cut wood, they heard Jack's father's truck pull into the yard. Seeing the boys behind the orchard fence and curious about what they were up to, he walked back to check. As he approached, he was amazed to see that the two youths had chosen to work hard in the hot summer sun instead going off to play somewhere. With a face shining with approval, Jack's father asked, "Son, did you decide on your own to cut that old tree down?"

Jack gave Dave a quick glimpse, then looking back at his father he simply answered sheepishly, "Yes sir."

"Well now, I've wanted to cut that old dead tree down for weeks," Jack's father commented. "I do appreciate it." Then reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a coin and said, "Boys, for all your effort in taking care of that little job for me, here's 25 cents. Go into town and get yourself some ice cream."

They thanked him for the quarter and proceeded to return the tools back in the barn. Now, it was at this point the boys weren't real sure whether it was guilty remorse or just plain fear, but they were still too afraid to go into town right away. So they chose to go back to the original plan they had made earlier that morning and go down to the river to spend the rest of the afternoon swimming.



When they could see that the sun was falling close to the western horizon, they climbed up the bank of the river and changed back into their clothes. As they casually ambled back toward home, Jack asked, “What do you say that we go get that ice cream now?”

After a long moment of thought, Dave replied, “I think I would rather wait until tomorrow... if you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Jack agreed. “It would be better not to show up in town until all of the fruit salad has been removed from the street and people kind of forget about the whole thing.”

Not much else was said as the boys walked back. Once at Jack’s house, Dave said, “Well, I need to get home. I have a couple of afternoon chores to take care of before dinner.” As he turned and started away, he looked back over his shoulder and said, “See you tomorrow and we’ll see what else we can cook up.”

Grinning at Dave’s provocative comment, Jack replied, “That’s sounds good.” Then putting his right index finger to his lips, he said, “But as for today’s activity, it’s our secret!”

Laughing loudly, they went their separate ways only imagining what new adventures tomorrow would bring.

The Apple Orchard Slingshot

Like most boys, Dave and Jack were always looking for ways to amuse themselves. In this story, follow the two boys on a beautiful summer morning in 1939 in their rural community as they are planning to spend the day swimming in the river. That is, until they suddenly stumble across an idea. See how they use their innovative minds to construct the biggest slingshot they could have ever imagined and see what the outcome will be from their inventive design.

It is in the memory of my good friend, Dave Palmer that I dedicate this story.

A Short Story
By C.R.Evans