

Chapter 18 – Cotton

The summer between 7th and 8th grades, I visit my cousins in Robstown for 6 weeks. It is a long way from Roswell. I am excited to be near the ocean and fish. I am given \$20. When I arrive, I immediately buy a fishing rod, reel, and line. \$5 is all that is left.

I stay at Uncle R's, who is Father's older brother. He has ulcers and drinks all the milk in the refrigerator. He is a mechanic. He is a chain smoker. Aunt is a homemaker and plays the piano well. She does not read sheet music. She hears a song and can immediately play it with chords and embellishments. I am amazed.

In all 6 weeks, we go fishing on the jetties only one time. I am terribly sunburned. Aunt puts me in a tub of vinegar. I shed skin like a molting snake. I string my fishing line on the clothesline to wash and dry it from the saltwater use. The youngest cousin cuts the line on purpose. I tie it back together, but it creates a knot that prevents me from casting it beyond 25 feet. I am heartbroken.

At the age of 77, I called and apologized to him for all the hate I felt most of my life. He apologizes too.

At night, I learn to put the water hose in a grassy spot and let it run for a while. Then late at night, I come outside and pick up the huge nightcrawlers. I also collect beautiful butterflies from that southern region of Texas. The best one is a cloudless sulfur.



Uncle R. has a farmer friend who agrees to let my cousin and I pick cotton for a week. He provides the cotton bags. We pick all day. He gives us \$1.50 for 50 pounds including bolls. All the other pickers get \$5.00 for 100 pounds (no bolls). This is the hardest job I ever had. My back hurts all day long. The bag is so hard to drag.

Part 1 - Times and Places

I am ready to quit from day one, but I must work through day 5 to get paid. I do not make my quota for the week. The farmer pays me \$7.50 anyway. I have no idea where the money goes.

Aunt always has food preparation chores. She brings home a bushel of this and that. We often sit in the breezeway between the house and garage stripping out string beans, peeling this and that, and shucking corn. Occasionally we churn ice cream and carve watermelons. We all work to put food on the table. It is a good life lesson, except for way too little saltwater fishing.

