



Chapter One

NEWTON AND ROGER CAREFULLY PLACED TWO PENNIES ON THE tracks. They scampered away and down over the bank to watch the train rumble through. They could feel the ground vibrate as the engines approached. They dropped to their knees. The roar of the diesel engines pulling thousands of tons of steel grew deafening. The boys lay flat on the gravel railroad bed.

“We’ve gotta stay down. Don’t move any closer,” Roger shouted. “If you get too close, that train will suck you up in it!”

They saw the Kansas City Southern southbound train coming. Those big diesel engines pulled a mile of cars all the way from Kansas City to New Orleans.

“Gosh” was the only word that came out of Newton’s mouth. And it was so soft-spoken that Roger couldn’t hear it over the rumble of the massive engines. The train roared, rocking back and forth with shrill, heavy squeaks, throwing dust and oil into the air.

Newton and Roger both clung deeper into the bank and covered their ears with their hands. As the grain cars passed, the boys were pelted with pieces of crushed corn. A string of tanker cars reeked of a nasty petroleum odor.

“Oh, whew!” Newton hollered, his voice shaking in unison with the ground. “Let’s get out of here!”

“Stay down, don’t move,” Roger blurted out. “Keep your head covered.”

Roger wasn’t going to admit this to Newton, but he had never been this close to a moving train before. He had heard some of the big guys talk about laying pennies on the tracks, but figured they probably put the pennies down and then

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ran a city block away. Roger was absolutely afraid to move. He remembered hearing that a moving train creates a suction that can pull a man right into the eight-hundred pound steel wheels.

“Just stay down, Newton!” Roger repeated.

Newton felt a mist of oily stuff in the air, mixed with grain dust. He knew if they survived, they would look as though they were tarred and feathered. At this point, he hoped the train would get on by without dropping off some big chunk of something or the train derailing itself.

The noise level changed just slightly. Newton peeked up to see box cars rambling by. They were empty, with doors wide open. Each one was a dark reddish-brown color with big white letters “KCS” painted on the sides. Some cars had the Santa Fe name. Others had a big “IC” for Illinois Central. Cars from all over the country were on the KCS line. “Cushioned ride!” was painted on the sides. Many cars wore graffiti with names and words that Newton didn’t understand. He watched the cars go by, one after another.

A man, a hobo, stood in the open doorway of a box car. Dust blew about. The man stood relaxed, with one hand on the edge of the open doorway, the other hand in his pocket. His feet were firmly planted but his knees bent slightly. His whole body swayed with the movement of the train.

Nothing defined the man except for a yellow bandana flapping at his waist. He was a tall, stout man with a gray scruffy, short beard. His menacing black eyes squarely fixed on Newton.

“Wow, that’s a real hobo,” Newton thought, “and he’s staring right at me!” He ducked his head again.

The image of the hobo stayed with Newton — this rough and tumble, wayward soul that stood tall, swaying in the box car as though he were a part of it, suspended in time despite the blur of the speeding train.

Newton had seen hobos before but never had one stared through him as this one had. Never had Newton seen a colored hobo. For some unknown reason, Newton felt as though this man had somehow entered his life. He wasn’t afraid, he wasn’t glad, but he was perplexed.

The steady wind trough, created by the fast pace of the train, kept the boys pressing against the bank, blowing dust and oil and penetrated their hand-clasped ears with shrill squeaks amid the heavy rumble.

“When’s it going to end?” Newton said, his words muffled by his buried face.

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Both boys were locked into position, refusing to move until the rumble and wind stopped. Newton still visualized the hobo.

“He’s going to New Orleans, I’ll bet,” Newton thought to himself. “He’ll curl up in a corner of that dusty old car and sleep tonight and tomorrow he’ll be in New Orleans. All the way to New Orleans!”

Moments later, the last train car passed and soon the rumble faded. The boys got up and looked at each other. They were covered with dust. Newton’s eyes were as big as saucers. He was speechless.

Roger laughed and said, “We’ll clean up at the river. Now let’s get our pennies.” The boys found their pennies in the railroad track bed. Once perfectly round copper coins were now oval shaped, paper-thin good luck pieces.

Roger hadn’t seen the hobo, so Newton told him all about the box-car rider, “And he stared at me until the train was way down the tracks!”

“Yeah, I’ve seen plenty of hobos. They all look the same to me. They don’t much often stare at people though. I’ve never had any of them stare at me,” Roger related.

“This one was a Negro!” Newton exclaimed. “Have you ever seen a Negro hobo before?”

“A Negro hobo? No,” Roger said. “I’ve never seen a Negro hobo before. Come to think of it, I wonder why?”

“Is he going to New Orleans?” Newton asked.

“You never know about those guys,” Roger responded.

Ten-year-old Newton Carriger didn’t know much about trains. He didn’t know much about small towns. Roger did. Roger had lived all of his life in Noel, Missouri. He knew everything about trains and the river. But Newton’s family had moved to Noel from St. Louis just a year before –in 1960. It was quite a change for Newton. The kids, school, everything was different in 1961.

Noel was a tourist town in the northwest foothills of the Ozarks. Situated just three miles from Arkansas and ten miles from Oklahoma, Noel’s natural beauty included towering limestone bluffs which flanked the town on the west, hanging over the main highway. The Elk River meandered through town. People came to camp, swim, and fish.

A lot of visitors were from Tulsa or Kansas City. Tourists seemed filled with anticipation. As they walked up and down Main Street, they carried with them a seemingly perpetual grin. On vacation, they were bound and determined to have a good time.

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While many small, rural towns across the Midwest and south were struggling to stay alive, Noel was lively and lovely. The town's smaller population doubled because of tourists during summer months. Tourists brought money. Tourists spent money. The winters weren't bad either. The tourist money came in the summer and filled the pockets of business owners and employees who spent the money all winter long.

The businesses were well-maintained. Homes were well-kept. The business community consisted of a row of single-story flat roofed buildings along either side of a four-block long Main Street. Houses in the Noel valley were mostly single-story frame houses clad in asbestos or a masonite-type material. A few newer brick homes were in a development overlooking the valley. People with money lived there. Not that anyone was rich – but some had more than others. The folks with the least money lived in 'dog-town,' an old neighborhood that for some reason always had a bunch of mongrels running the streets.

The little town of a thousand was nestled in a valley surrounded by bluffs and rolling hills. The year around residents were nestled in a storybook setting. Townsfolk were like one big family. Everyone knew each other and enjoyed each other. They looked out for and supported each other. Even newcomers were welcome. Many Noel inhabitants were newcomers. Several newcomers came every year. Vacationers came to Noel, went home, sold out and moved to Noel to stay. A miniature golf course was on Main Street next to the Dairy-Ette. The Ozark Theater was across the street. Several cafes and gift shops and a tavern and the Shadow Lake Resort were built by the river. During the day, folks could swim, drink, and dance. At night, they could drink and dance. Some went swimming afterwards with the mirrored reflection of hundreds of yellow lights shimmering on the water.

Noel was almost too good to be true. Some neighboring town residents were jealous. They often referred to Noel as "sin city." Newton thought the town was magical to have so many strangers who were usually friendly. He liked his new found, small town life. And he liked his new found friend Roger.

Roger was a year older, one grade ahead of Newton, such a friendship would have been taboo in Newton's school in St. Louis, but in a small town like Noel, it was common for kids to have close friends a year, or even two years apart.

"Take all you can, Newton. For every ounce you take, give back two! That's the law of my fun and return program! You'll get the most out of life when you give

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the most. Now let's play some ball!" Roger loved baseball. Newton didn't care much for it. But he played catch with Roger once in a while. Newton often went to the games to watch Roger play.

Young Roger Sampsel seemed more robust than smart. Newton knew different. Roger was a leader, a mover, and a shaker. That's why they had a strong friendship which had more value than a leprechaun's pot of gold.

Playing on the railroad tracks sounds dangerous, but not in the company of a savvy mentor like Roger Sampsel in the summer of 1961. Little did Newton know that years later, what Roger knew and did would change his life forever.



THE TWO BUDDIES HEADED NORTH ALONG THE RIVER BANK, WALKING the steel ribbons of the railroad bed. Newton balanced himself with outstretched arms and his eyes focused on his feet. The top of the rail was shiny, like chrome, but the side of the rails and the ties and gravel were all dark and dirty. He saw a loose spike lying by a cross tie, thinking how valuable it would be if it were the golden spike he had learned of in American history class.

"Maris hit another home run," Roger said, "I'll betcha he'll set a record this year!" Baseball was Roger's favorite sport, and his favorite player was Roger Maris. Newton had it figured that Roger liked Roger Maris because they both had the same first name. The only famous *Newton*, Newton knew of was Isaac Newton or Fig Newton. And neither an Isaac nor a Fig did he want to be!

The railroad track curved off to the east and soon was no longer visible. They turned their attention away from the train now and towards the river, knowing the day still held new adventures. Across Stanley Mitchell's field, they went, through the tall fescue grass gently waving in the summer breeze.

"It won't be long before Mr. Mitchell cuts this field for hay," remarked Roger.

"Yeah, this is cow food we're walking in, isn't it, Roger?" Newton said and then he let out a "Moo!"

Roger mooed too and both boys left the field "mooing."

Newton broke into a run.

Roger yelled, "Hey, 'walk, don't run!'"

Newton spun around, "What?"

"You know, the Ventures, 'Walk, Don't Run!'" and then Roger planted his feet

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in a stance with his arms mimicking that of a guitar player and he screamed out “da da . . . da de da de da de da . . .”

Newton hollered back, “Oh yeah, well I’m Del Shannon and I’m doing ‘Runaway,’” and he started singing, “Run, run, run, runaway!”

They piddled along the river bank, wading and looking for crawdads. Roger found a big one, but it pinched his finger so he threw it way out into the river.

Elk River, fed by springs and two creeks, snaked its way through the county. Indian Creek came from a northerly direction. Another, Sugar Creek came from the southern Arkansas hills which were on a higher elevation. Roger had explained this to Newton — how water starts in Arkansas, goes through Missouri and then ends up some thirty miles west in the Grand Lake of the Cherokees in Oklahoma.

The river had a gravel bottom so the water was very clear. It looked clean enough to drink, but Roger had cautioned Newton to only drink where the springs empty into the river.

Litter from poultry fertilizer runoff, coupled with bottom land septic tanks, had begun polluting the main river. Nobody was doing much about it. When state and business concerns failed to recognize the pollution, most local folks knew about it and cautioned tourists not to swallow any while swimming. But tourists threw caution to the wind. Each summer several cases of ear infections and twenty-four-hour bugs plagued the tourist river-goers.

Deep holes were found alongside the high mud banks and limestone bluff footings. Some of the lowland areas had big, long gravel beaches. Shallows here and there became swift water and interrupted the long deep pools of water.

The Elk River was a fisherman’s paradise. Springtime fishing for goggle-eye and small mouth bass was successful. The serious fisherman arrived early morning during the summer. With fresh-caught minnows as bait, he went after the big largemouth bass. Those big lunkers made for a great fish fry, Roger told Newton.

Newton had spent hours standing ankle deep in the shallow water by the beach. Staring into the water, he would see all kinds of things swimming around. He could see crawdads and minnows and little spiders that would skate across the top of the water.

“You can’t do this in St. Louis, Roger,” Newton said. “The Mighty Mississippi is too big and too muddy. You can’t see anything in it!”

“You suppose there’s mud-monsters in the Mississippi?” Roger asked, acting very serious.

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“Ha!” Newton spurted out, “Probably big enough to swallow you up whole!”

Roger laughed, “Yeah, well, I have heard stories about the demon of the deep here in Elk River. Some fellow stumbled out of the bar up at Ginger Blue. They said he went around to the back and fell into the river one night. All the other people in the bar heard him screaming, and when they pulled him out of the river, he kept yelling about a demon of the deep. The ol’ boy said the demon of the deep got him and pulled him in and was going to eat him. Yeah, that’s supposed to be a true story.”

“Aw, Roger. There isn’t any demon of the deep.”

“I’m just telling you what I’ve heard, that’s all. You never know! The demon of the deep, he’s a heathen creep, the demon of the deep!”

“It’s getting awfully deep here,” Newton laughed.

They came to the slue where the river backed up into the bottomland. The river’s edge changed from gravel to mud. It was slick with holes in the mud. “Do snakes live in those holes?” asked Newton.

“Yeah, snakes and muskrats and turtles. All kinds of things live in there. But they won’t come out and get you,” Roger assured.

“Look over there, Roger,” Newton yelled. “It’s a boat. Look at the boat!”

Newton spotted an old wooden Jon-boat. Stolen by recent floodwaters, the old hand-made boat rested on the mud bank. It was a type of boat common in the Ozarks and southern water regions. The “Jon” was a homegrown name for a flat-bottomed rowboat with both bow and stern being square. Usually 16 to 20 feet in length, these three-seat boats were used by giggers and fishermen.

“Let’s see if she’s seaworthy,” Roger said.

The boys wrestled the Jon-boat out into the water. The old tub was leaky. There wasn’t much paint left on the weathered wood, but that didn’t matter. She was a mighty pretty vessel to these two explorers.

Newton wondered aloud, “How are we going to paddle it?”

“We’ll pole it,” Roger answered back. So the boys looked for a dead willow tree. They found a tall one and broke off three, long straight poles.

“She’ll float. We can make it down the river,” Roger said, puffing out his chest.

Newton was as excited as Roger. “A boat like this must be christened,” Newton sputtered. “She’ll be the pride of the river. It’s her maiden voyage.”

“Let’s name her ‘Slue-Foot,’” Roger stated. “She’ll be Slue-Foot of the Elk River!” It was to be their vessel and last all summer.

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They pulled the Jon-boat high upon the bank, hidden to anyone passing by on the river. Back to town they went, for they had the grandest idea of all times! Slue-Foot needed a flag!

“Yeah,” Roger hollered, “A flag! Her own colors! Whipping in the breeze! What’ll we put on it? You draw good, Newton. What will you draw to make our flag? We need a design!”

“I’ve got an idea,” Newton shouted as they ran. “I’ll draw a great big foot, real long and with a great big, big toe! That’ll be the slue foot. Then I’ll print the name, ‘Slue Foot’ right below it. How’s that sound?”

“Ha! That’s funny! Have the big toe sticking way up in the air!”

“Yeah, okay!”

Soon they were heading for Newton’s house. Plinking of piano notes softly filled the air. Cindy Griffin, Newton’s next door neighbor, was practicing. She lived with her grandmother in the small frame house situated not more than 50 feet from Newton’s home on Harmony Street. With everyone’s windows open, Cindy’s piano practice echoed throughout the neighborhood.

Most homes on Harmony Street were well-kept single story frame houses. Some had garages. All had television antennas, and most had a small garden spot in the back yard. Harmony Street was one of the few streets in town that had a sidewalk. Folks could walk out of their homes and go straight south to the school or straight north to Main Street. The concrete walkway was also a good place to play hopscotch or to roller skate.

Cindy was just finishing her practice and looked out her window. She saw the boys running towards Newton’s back door. She ran out, “Hey, guys, what’re you doing?” She was in Newton’s yard by the time the screen door slammed shut.

“Not now,” Newton cautioned, “we’re on a mission!”

“Can I be on your mission, too?” Cindy asked.

“Not today, Cindy. You can come over tonight after supper!” Newton answered.

Cindy was a couple of years younger than Newton and spent about as much time at Newton’s house as she did her own. Newton didn’t mind unless he had something really important going on, like today.

Newton and his parents, Frank and Sara, had actually become like Cindy’s second family. Her folks were killed five years earlier when their car brakes failed as they descended the Ginger Blue hill north of town. She lived with her grandmother, but adopted her new neighbors instantly. To her delight, Newton’s family had a

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piano. It was a beautiful old Packard-brand upright piano. Sara had inherited it from her grandmother. It looked a little out of place in the dining room, but that was the best spot in their small frame house for such a big piece of furniture.

Sara had taken lessons as a child and played fairly well. Yet she rarely touched the keyboard. But little Cindy couldn't keep her fingers off of the Packard's ivories.

Cindy had her own piano at her grandmother's house. She practiced one hour every day at home. Even so, every time she was at Newton's house, she just had to play at least one selection from her limited, but growing repertoire.

"Come on, guys!" she hollered. The boys ignored her. They had more important things going on today.

Newton knew of sheet scraps his mother kept for rags. They burst into his house, short of breath from running. They shifted themselves into low gear as they crept through the house to the laundry room. Newton rummaged around in the pile of rags and withdrew a handsome piece of sheet, some two by four feet.

"What are you kids doing?" Newton's mother called out.

"Nothing, Mom," Newton yelled back. And they were off, out the back door. They were a half a block away before the screen door slammed.

They ran down the neighborhood streets, took short-cut paths over to the alley and hit the back door of Roger's house.

Now sitting quietly with tense concentration, they spread the white sheet scrap on the kitchen floor. Equipped with model airplane paint and brush, Newton drew the big, funny looking foot and then he gave their boat its name. Slue-Foot christened! The vessel of the river. They beamed with exuberance, knowing these colors would fly at the bow of their boat.

"Here," Roger said, handing their new flag to Newton. "Fold it up nice."

Roger rummaged through a dresser drawer and pulled out shorts. He sat on the bed and pulled off his jeans.

"What are you doing?" Newton asked.

"Changing. For trains, it's jeans. For the river, it's shorts!"

Roger puffed out his belly and patted it with both hands. He swiveled his hips in a rotating motion and started singing, "Slue-Foot, a ship of the sea, Slue-Foot, with room for you and me."

"I ought to put on shorts too," Newton said. "You should have told me to change back at my house. Let's go back so I can put on some shorts."

"We haven't time. Our mighty river boat is waiting."

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“Aw, Roger!”

“You don’t have to wear exactly what I’m wearing. Your jeans are okay. I’ll push and pull the boat on and off the bank. You won’t get wet.”

They scrambled out of Roger’s house. They skipped and ran and laughed to a run, talking to a walk, jumping with fun, over and over, back to their ship. They tied the flag to a willow pole and rigged it to the bow seat. Two proud boys stepped back to honor the Slue-Foot flag as it waved in the early summer breeze.

Half of the day had passed. The afternoon sun shot bright rays of light into the little ripples in the water. Downstream, the little Elk River took on the grandeur of the mighty Mississippi. Their river adventure began.

They first tacked a sliver of tin can over the hole in the boat’s bottom. Then they slid the flat bottom boat off the bank and into the river. Poles in hand, the boys found out that the water was too deep. The poles didn’t touch bottom. Newton was scared and told Roger he had never been in water over his head before.

Roger reassured him, “I know the river well enough. There’s shallow water ahead, and we can pole our boat closer to shore. I’ll be the captain of our ship!” He pushed the boat close in to the high bank. Exposed roots in the mud bank scraped the boat.

“I want to be captain!” Newton hollered. “After all, I found the boat!”

“We both can’t be captains,” Roger answered. “You can be the first mate.”

Roger reached over towards the bank and grabbed a large tree root. Some loose dirt dropped off into the boat. A few little white squiggly grub worms peeked out from the exposed topsoil.

“How about me being the Admiral?” Newton laughed.

“Let’s draw straws,” Roger decided. “That’s the way to solve this rank issue.”

“Rank?”

“Rank.”

“That’s rank, man,” Newton laughed. “You’re rank!”

“Quit kidding, goof-ball.” Roger then reached up and grabbed a handful of long, dried and dead grass stems left over from last year. Roger let go and the boat began drifting downstream. He broke several stems into various lengths. He carefully positioned them in his left hand, pushing one, and then pulling another. The boat drifted on. Newton stood at the bow curiously watching Roger fiddle with the sticks.

“Fiddle sticks!” Newton screamed at the top of his lungs. He laughed and laughed.

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Roger didn't take his eyes away from his work. No surgeon knew more intense concentration. Roger's tongue eased out of his tightly drawn lips.

Roger finally grinned. "Here!" he announced. "Draw your straw!" He held out five straws in his right hand.

"You'll cheat," Newton called out.

"Can't. What it is, it is. Draw your straw, mate!"

Newton took a step. The boat rocked back and forth. He took another. Roger reached out his hand. Newton reached out his hand. His fingers twitched. The index finger and thumb grabbed at the straw in the middle. He withdrew the straw with the precision of a watch repairman. Roger closed his eyes. He pulled a straw. He opened his eyes. The boys compared straws. Roger had the longest straw. He was the captain.

"Oh, rats, I say!" Newton said. "You cheated. I knew you would win."

"Oh, never mind, you little pirate," Roger responded. "Let's both be captains!"

"Now you're talking! Let's get this thing chuggin' down river! I be a captain, you be a captain, we both be captains of ole Slue-Foot!"

Roger remembered part of a song chorus from glee club and he began to sing, with Newton quickly joining in. . . .

Dance boys, we're going downstream

Dance boys, we're going home

Dance boys, we're going downstream

Dance boys, dance.

Slue-Foot was floating with her flag proudly flying. But flying no higher than Roger and Newton's hearts. But was all this too good to be true? They quickly learned the need to continually bail water from the leaky craft. "That's okay," they chimed, "one pole, one bail, we'll take turns." And Slue-Foot continued her trek down the river.

They floated into the north edge of town. The train that had passed them earlier now quietly sat on the side track.

"Look Roger," Newton hollered, "there's our penny-smashing train! Has it stopped to let off some cars?"

"No, they just side-tracked it. It's waiting on the north bound train. It'll sit there 'till the other train passes, then they'll head it on down south. It's the little trains, the ones they call locals, that bring down the cars for the feed company. They

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come out of the switch yards up at Neosho with just one engine pulling only a few cars. They don't even have cabooses."

"You suppose that hobo is still on that train?"

"Give me the can, Newton. We gotta start bailing faster!"

It soon became apparent that Slue-Foot needed two bailers. But they had only the one can. The situation worsened. Two buckets wouldn't be enough. Ol' Slue-Foot was sinking.

Newton felt water over his ankles. Both boys stood up as water began rushing over the sides of the boat.

Roger laughed and hollered, "We're going down with her!" Roger dove towards shore.

Newton stood still as the boat slowly sank. His laughter had stopped, realizing that they hadn't reached the shallow water. He saw Roger swimming towards the bank. Newton's legs felt heavy. His jeans felt like chains around his legs. Suddenly, Newton was afraid. The boat disappeared. Newton's feet were free but motionless. He felt water around his chest, then his face. He looked up, seeing the top of the water several inches above his head.

It was the oddest thing he had ever known. No sound and nothing was clear. The noise of splashing and hollering of the previous moment was gone. Newton was now surrounded by an eerie silence. His vision was no longer sharp and focused. A soft, rippling light was above him. All around him it grew darker as he sank deeper. He couldn't feel himself sinking but he could see the surface moving farther away from his head.

"It's like a dream," Newton thought to himself. His chest began to hurt, and he knew he must climb through the darkness to reach the light above.

Suddenly Newton felt something around his belly. It felt like a big snake or an octopus tentacle, and then he shot upwards, his eyes wide open and focusing on the surface. He quickly broke through, shut his eyes and gasped for air. The grasp he had felt disappeared with a booming command, "Swim boy, swim to the bank!"

"Come on, Newton," a second voice screamed. "You've got the lucky penny. You can do it!"

This voice was Roger's. Newton looked around through watery, blurred eyes. He saw his buddy standing knee deep in the shallow water by the riverbank. Newton swam with all the energy he could muster. His clothes felt like heavy blankets wrapped around his body. His tennis shoes felt like they weighed twenty

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pounds each. At that moment he wished he were naked. Water splashed in his face with every stroke. He knew he was tired, but he wasn't about to stop until he reached Roger.

In waist deep water, Roger extended a hand. He grabbed Newton by the arm and they sloshed their way to shore.

"You did good, Newton," Roger whispered.

Out in the middle of the river, they saw a man floating on his back. "That was the other voice I heard," Newton exclaimed. "He was out there with me!"

"Yeah, I didn't see him until I reached shallow water. When I turned around, he was there, and it looked like he went under to get you."

"Who is he, Roger? Is he that hobo? He looks like that hobo."

"Yeah, maybe so. 'Hey, mister!'" Roger hollered out.

There was no response. The man continued quietly floating and slowly lifting his arms out of the water to glide him in no particular direction. Every so often he would spout a little water out of his mouth like a whale. They watched him while he floated on downstream. He drifted further and further away. They turned their attention toward their sunken vessel.

"She was a proud ship," Newton sputtered as he shivered, "wasn't she?"

Both boys started giggling and proclaimed their greatness as they stood dripping on the riverbank. They looked out at the empty river where just moments before Slue-Foot and her crew navigated the 'mighty' Elk River.

"Yeah," Roger commented, "it's just too bad we didn't make it closer to town so people could see her." But that really didn't matter. They knew that they had been captains of the river, even though just for one day. It was almost supertime. Newton had to go home.

"I've got to go, Roger. My folks expect me home at five."

The two buddies, sopping wet but otherwise unscathed, then headed back towards the field that separated them from home. With each step, they recounted the exciting sinking of the ship. Their clothes were nearly dry by the time they crossed the field. Upon reaching their street, Roger went his way home and Newton went his way. Too tired to laugh, they just smiled and said, "So long." "See you tomorrow."

Newton's soggy sneakers squished on the sidewalk. He kicked off his shoes. He turned them upside down and shook out the little creek bottom pebbles that

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had found their way in. Newton hid the wet shoes behind the trash can next to the back porch. He quietly opened the screen door and tip-toed to his room.

“Oh man,” he said, as he plopped on the edge of bed to pull off his wet clothes. “If my folks find my wet P.F. Flyers, they’ll tan my rear!”

Newton had bugged his folks for weeks to talk them into buying him a pair of P.F. Flyers — the neatest sneakers on the market! Roger and all the other kids around town had P.F. Flyers. They were the sneakers advertised as being quiet enough to sneak up on renegade Indians!

“Aw jeez!” Newton said out loud. “Heck, I’ll have to tell them. I know they’ll find out. They find out everything! I might as well tell them at supper.”

He emptied his pockets and laid the lucky penny on his desk. He smiled, knowing that Roger was probably doing the same thing at that same moment.

During supper, Newton told his parents about the river adventure. They expressed concern that he and Roger could have gotten hurt, but Newton assured them that they were really close to the bank when Slue-Foot submerged. “It was an easy swim, Mom, really! I can swim real good now!”

Newton’s dad recalled similar days when he was a boy growing up in this same town. He was glad that he had moved his family away from the city and back to Noel. “It’s a great place to grow up,” he thought, remembering his youth, playing in the woods along the river and climbing on the limestone ledges. “I’m glad to be back.”

No longer was he “Frankie.” Since he had left Noel fifteen years ago, he graduated from University of Missouri and taken the reporter’s job at the *Post-Dispatch*. He had many times earned the name Frank Carriger as a byline on several award-winning articles. Since returning to Noel and buying the local weekly newspaper, most folks now called him Frank or Mr. Carriger. He did, however, see a lot of “little Frankie” in his son.

Frank was a handsome man, standing six feet tall. Slender, he had broad shoulders and long, muscular arms. He carried himself with purpose and dignity, his forceful presence softened by twinkling blue eyes.

Newton was pretty much the spittin’ image of Frank when he was ten. Newton had a little bit of an extra obstinate trait, however, one that Frank surmised came from Mrs. Carriger. Newton’s mom wanted everything in life to be right and fair and if something didn’t add up quite right, she jumped in the middle of it until she prevailed.

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Frank, on the other hand, was a bit more receptive to compromise or to live and let live. He could tell that Newton was going to be a handful during his teen years, “and it’s just now starting!”

The switch from the city to a small town was easy for the Carriger family. The small, rural town was a wonderful place to grow up and to live. As a boy, Frank had loved the river. So much so, that upon his return to Noel, he had saved up enough money for a down payment on a twenty-acre tract of land on the Elk River. It was on the River Road, a seven-mile dirt buggy trail that followed the river north to Pineville, the county seat town of McDonald County.

The land was bottomland, but had not been worked in years. It was covered with black jack oak trees on the upper half and tall, old sycamores on the lower half. It did have one attractive attribute. It had some 400 feet of riverfront. When Frank was able to sneak away from work, he could drive out there and drop a line into the river. Frank planned to teach Newton how to fish. Those big bass were just out there waiting for them. Frank planned that the little chunk of land would be the place to form a stronger bond between him and Newton. It gave Frank a good feeling, knowing that his son was growing up in such a wonderful environment.

Newton’s river adventure was drawing some pretty harsh looks from his folks. They repeated their warnings about messing around on the river. Newton figured he had better change the subject quickly.

Newton interrupted them, “We saw a hobo, too!”

“You didn’t go the hobo camp, did you?” his dad asked.

“No, no. We saw a hobo riding in a freight car. He was standing in the doorway of a boxcar. He was swaying back and forth with the train.”

“Swaying’ like a sailor, huh?” his dad quipped.

“Huh? A sailor?” What do you mean by that, Dad?” Newton asked.

Newton’s dad laughed. “Swaying’ like a sailor! Yeah.”

“What are you on about now, Frank,” Newton’s mom said to his dad.

“Oh, there’s an old saying about people who cuss a lot. They say, ‘swearing like a sailor.’ Well, a good hobo has to ‘sway’ with the train, so now we have, ‘swaying like a sailor!’ Hobos need sea legs to stand up on a moving train.”

“Sea legs?” Newton asked.

“Yeah, sea legs. Sailors have to have sea legs. It’s a combination of a piston action and swaying action to maintain balance while boats bob, pitch, and roll along on

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their course. Standing while riding anything — boat or train — a person needs his sea legs,” Newton’s dad explained. Newton rolled his eyes at his mother. She laughed. Frank grinned.

The family finished up dinner. Newton figured he was pretty lucky not to be in real trouble. He even offered to help his mother clean the table.

Newton went to bed early. He was almost asleep when he thought about the lucky penny. He jumped up out of bed and grabbed the penny. Holding it tight in his hand, he crawled back to bed. Again he thought about the day’s adventure. Newton knew the lucky penny hadn’t helped him reach the river bank. He also knew that it was his and Roger’s friendship that had made their pennies “lucky.” Newton’s imagination danced in anticipation of tomorrow’s adventures.

Suddenly he shivered. It was the same feeling he had when he was by the train and again when the boat sank. “Oh, wow!” he thought. Still tightly clutching the penny, he sat up in bed. He knew of scary things in St. Louis, things his parents and teachers had warned him to watch out for. Yet he had never really before known fear. Not like today, anyway. It had been a great adventure, but Newton now realized the dangers were real.

He knew now that he would think things through before “getting himself out on a limb” like his dad had always warned him.

“I wouldn’t trade this day for anything,” Newton thought, knowing he had conquered his fears. He had grown up a lot that day.

“There just couldn’t be any greater adventures than what happened today,” Newton thought to himself. “Hopefully, tomorrow’s adventures will be a little tamer. Maybe a whole lot tamer.” Yet he still wondered about that man in the river.