

“Conquering Mountains”

“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

St. Mark 11:23-24

I remember the day I rode my 65 Honda down through the Georgia pines surrounding my father’s pond. It was a cool afternoon and the chill of the air was mixed with mist of a late afternoon fog. Winter was a cool and damp time on our farm, but to me it brought days of pleasure riding my Honda through the pines to our pond. Arriving, I stared at the dam that stood tall against the afternoon’s setting sun. As a 12-year-old, the pond dam looked as if it, actually, touched the sky.

Racing my engine, I prepared for a ride of my life. This time the old routine of riding up the right side of the dam would not be a gentle treat. I stood staring at the destiny I was about to undertake. “Would it present a problem that I had not imagined?” I wanted this to be my destiny; yet, somehow, because of being a girl, I found myself wondering. “What had it been internally that had always kept me from this leap, every time, before today? Was it just because I was a girl?” Dad had told me to never stop at fulfilling my dreams simply because I had been born a female. “Could I really be like the boys I had seen fly over these hills while riding their motorcycles? Was there

something that lurked inside of my very being to become whatever I dreamed?” I stared at the huge dam of Georgia clay mingled with its’ beautiful colors of orange and red. I knew, without a doubt, what lay over this dam. “Could I clear this mountain in front of me and land safely in the green grass that awaited me on the other side?” Again, I raced the throttle of my motorcycle’s idling engine with my right hand.

Frost from exhaust coming out of its’ tail pipe increased, as the engine whined. My own breath, now heavy, was visible as white puffs as I, boldly, put the motorcycle into first gear. Closing my eyes, I said a prayer. “Oh, God, help me clear this mountain and land safely on the other side.” It was a simple prayer with so much meaning. Not only then, but remaining a thread that would manifest itself throughout the rest of my life. I stared, once again, at the dam and, then, with a calmed assurance I chose my course. I popped the clutch and hit second gear as I sped up the embankment. Then, as I topped the hill, my front tire went airborne, followed only by a split second, before my back tire leapt into the freedom of air. I felt suspended in a joyous most exhilarating moment where the spirit flies as it is unleashed from the stronghold of nature’s gravitational forces.

I was, literally, flying and it was the ride of a lifetime. Never, again, could I return to this first time when one anticipates, but has no idea of the outcome, and, in faith, plunges ahead to obtain the dream of success hoped for. I found the pleasure of flying through the air an enormous and satisfying thrill. Then, as the gravitational pull of the Earth took hold, I felt my bike and I descending to the ground. Preparing to land, as that, too, was something I had never done before, I braced myself by standing bent kneed

and hovering above the bike. The landing was a bit hard as my Honda 65 was not equipped with the springs of a dirt bike. It landed with a hard thump. Holding on with all of my might, I secured the handlebars with only a slight wobble. My leap of faith was over and I had successfully completed my mission.

Grabbing the clutch, I slowed down using my brake and came to rest on the lip of the pond. The crystal water reflected my image. There I was sitting proudly upon my Honda 65 with a huge smile glimmering across my young face. “I did it, I really did it,” eased from my almost frozen lips. The moment was filled with such splendor of accomplishment. After all, being twelve years old was on the verge of becoming a real independent teenager.

The moment was filling my senses with so many wonders about other possibilities that lay out there waiting for me to conquer in my life. I contemplated the reflection of myself in the water. My green helmet, with metallic flakes, that was a hand-me-down from my father, Bop Pete, glistened on my head. I felt proud. I felt strong. I felt invincible. Then, to reassure myself that I had really made it, I turned around and looked over my shoulder at the path I had just taken and successfully completed.

I stared at the hill and envisioned my ascension over the embankment and my landing. I closed my eyes and relived it over and over. Each time, I felt the feelings of air, freedom, and exhilaration. I could have stayed in that moment for the rest of my life. I had not been afraid to ride out my dream and to blaze a path where no other girl had gone before me. I was in control of my destiny and if I put my trust in God, then, I knew that I could conquer all.

The evening light of day started to draw dim. The pond, with pine trees surrounding it, began to display unique mystical shadows formed from the sun's last rays. It was a beautiful sight, which included a musty smell of the damp from mist in the winter air surrounding me. In the chill of it all, I found myself warm; almost glowing. "Tomorrow," I thought out loud, "I will return, again, tomorrow!"

Now, that I knew what to expect, the ride would become easier and easier. The jump would be like an old hat and any fear, I, once, had, would, forever, be a thing of the past. I turned my Honda 65 around and, slowly, released the clutch. I rode safely up over the dam on my trip home. The afternoon had been so serene. The moment had touched my soul for a lifetime. Somehow, I was no longer a little girl. I had gained my first step in developing the wisdom of a woman; a woman with a destiny. All that would be required of me, in my future endeavors, would be one thing ---- I must only believe.

“Christmas – The First Time”

“And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Deuteronomy 11:19

It was a cold December afternoon. The type of afternoon, in Southeast Georgia, that is filled with a mist in the frosty air. My grandfather and I were making our way down through the forest to search for an old-fashioned Christmas tree. The kind that grows quietly in the woods unnoticed, until Christmas time when seekers begin combing the forest for the perfect tree to adorn their houses. This annual event had been a part of my life since I could remember. The only difference, today, from times past, I was, now, old enough to be carrying my grandfather's old hatchet that always brought the chosen tree down. I, proudly, held the heirloom in my tiny cold hands and felt a sense of pride in that this year would be my year to choose the tree that would be harvested for my Ma-Ma Paulk's home. Ma-Ma, Christian Annie Hatfield Paulk, was my mother's mom.

Dow O, the strange name I, inadvertently, gave to my father's dad was quite unusual. No one really ever figured out how I came up with it. Even so, it stuck and my grandfather, C.B. Jeffries, seemed to love it. He was an extremely tall and handsome man to me. I, dearly, loved being with him while he went about his daily routines on our farm. He had always chopped down a Christmas tree for my Grandmother Paulk; ever since her husband, Pa-Pa Nassie Paulk, had died. Pa-Pa Paulk passed away years

before I was born, so all I knew about him came from delightful stories my mother and grandmother would share. Needless to say, on this special day, Dow O and I, both, shared a sense of fulfillment in our quest for Ma-Ma's perfect tree.

My Grandfather helped me along as we walked the hills and eased through the fences that separated Ma-Ma Paulk's farm from her neighbors' land. The mist in the air felt like small bits of ice as it played upon my nose, similar to the beat of a drum. In my mind, I wished for snow; but, in South Georgia that particular sight was a rarity. It had, only, snowed once that I could vaguely remember, because it occurred only a few years after I had been born. The Polaroid pictures that mother had taken were the only means by which I could barely recall the event. Even so, Christmas songs and the feeling of sleet-like mist in the air just made one wish that it would choose to snow, again.

As Dow O and I continued to ease across the woods, I spotted the perfect tree. It seemed to soar high above the other ones we had seen on our way down into the forest. This tree met our required expectations. It was completely rounded with a good firm straight stalk that would fit nicely into Ma-Ma's tree holder without tilting.

I grabbed hold of Dow O's arm and pointed, anxiously, at the tree. He smiled and gave me a quick nod. Rushing to the tree, I remember standing there looking up at it with so much exhilaration. Not only had I found the perfect tree, I was going to be the one, this year, to chop it down. In my mind, I recalled the story about a young George Washington cutting down a Cherry Tree and the thought of it drew a smile of laughter across my face. Unlike him, I

was getting approval before I started chopping away. My grandfather, quickly, inspected the tree to make sure it did not contain any visible bugs or the dreaded vines of poison ivy. He measured the tree to ensure it would fit in my Grandmother Paulk's house. Then, he smiled; giving me his famous wink that it was, indeed, the perfect one.

Dow O lifted up the bottom branches to expose the wood at the base of the cedar tree. It was perfect and round. Having watched him, patiently, so many times before, I eased to the tree and kneeled down at its' base. In my cold little trembling hands, I held on to his prized hatchet with all of my might. Drawing back, I clinched my teeth and let go with the force of an Apache Indian. The bark splintered only a tad. This was going to be tougher than I had envisioned, so I stuck one foot out in front of me and drew back with all the force a child could muster. Catching a glimpse out of my right eye, I saw my Grandfather swelling with pride as if he was about to cry. I guess, somehow, he knew he was, now, passing the torch to the next generation and there was happiness and sadness all being felt by him at the same time.

After several attempts at chopping the tree, I had whittled what looked like a pencil; reminiscent of tree trunks that beavers cut down with precision using their teeth. Finally, I heard the familiar last crack and yelled with excitement to the top of my lungs, "Timber!" The beautiful tree, slowly, fell over on its' side. I smiled at Dow O and he beamed with emotion back at me about my prize. The spot where the tree had, once, stood was, now, empty. It had been growing there, all those years, just waiting for my discovery on this fateful cold December afternoon.