

My encounter with the redman



Clearly out of view, I lay vomiting over my Grandmothers azalea bushes. Counting the bugs in the earth between heaves and thinking over the reasons that had gotten me there; All I could do was smile despite myself. My Papaw and I had shared a very eventful day together as it seemed we always did. We were both a little mischievous, especially since he was my mentor. It seemed the more mischievous he was, the more I loved and adored him. My Grandfather, Papaw as I called him, was hard at work splitting firewood as I approached him with a tall glass of iced tea.

Papaw was a very hard working man. He worked from daylight till dark always in his denim overalls and boots. He stood what seemed to me to be eight feet tall, but I believe was only six. His character reaked out through his crystal blue eyes and sun parched face. When he spoke it was deliberate and so very country. As I sat next to him, I could smell his sweat with a hint of Old Spice . Quietly, I watched him pull a red handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his head and face free of sweat as he settled back in the swing to enjoy his glass of iced tea with e.

It was too hot to play as I sat leisurely in the swing underneath the big oak tree with my Papaw. As he stood up, he winked at me; you could just see the playfulness in his eyes as he pulled a packet of something with an Indian on it out of his pocket. Before I could ask any questions, he opened the packet. He pulled out a big wad of something that seemed to resemble a huge piece of gum, only it was brown and he placed it in his mouth. His cheek was so full of this mysterious Indian stuff that it puckered. I thoughtgosh it looks awfully good!

I had never seen this sort of candy with the Indian on it before, but I was sure of one thing; I wanted some! I asked for some, very politely and with great anticipation. I could still see that twinkle of mischief lurking in his eye as he snickered and said, Do you know what this is Doodlebug. With all the innocence of a child, I looked up and said, Why yes Papaw, it is some sort of Indian candy . His eyes lit up as he laughed out loud in utter delight. He said, Nope, Doodlebug, this is Redman chewing tobacco.

He went on to explain that you chewed on it for several hours, much the way you did chewing gum, only with one exception, you had to spit out the juice and not swallow it. He then proceeded to ask, Do you still want some Doodlebug With that wad in his mouth looking so tasty, and without any hesitation I said, Of course I do. With an impish grin on his face he opened the packet and proceeded to tell me to get a big pinch. Then he said place between my cheek and gums. Doing just as he said, I got the biggest pinch I could, thinking the more the better.

Placing it exactly between my cheek and gums as instructed; I closed my mouth to savor in my sweet expectations. Before I could react to this monstrosity in my mouth, I looked up at my papaw. I could tell he admired my grit and in some country kind of way was proud of me . We sat silently sharing in a special moment. I was very careful not to look his way too much in fear he would see I was turning two shades of green and had vomit slowly building its way up my throat. My gums and cheeks were burning; the taste was bitter sweet, and besides, I didnt even know how to spit!

I was scared to breathe in fear of swallowing the juice which would ultimately lead to me losing the contents of my stomach. I did not want to let him down. I was feeling a bond with him I had never experienced before. Just when I thought I could not hold it any longer; my grandmother saved me by calling us in for supper. I quickly excused myself, running out of his sight to find a bush to lose myself in. While still hanging over the azaleas I made a vow to never let him know how awful that Redman tobacco really was.

The adoration and bond I developed with my Papaw that hot summer day far exceeds the despicable taste, burning sensations, and nausea the tobacco brought. That day was a major milestone in my Papaw's life as well as my own. No other grandchild had ever experienced chewing with my Papaw which set me apart. He never forgot that day; he took that story with him throughout the remainder of his life. And now, like him, I too will take with me that horrible moment I met the Redman as one of my greatest memories and tales as I live out my life with my children.