

Chasing those Cotton Picking Rabbit Trails

The delta fields had exploded in white... like huge bags of popcorn nuked in the September heat. Everywhere thick tufts of cotton burst forth from the bolls that had once concealed their glory. It was harvest time.

The gins workers stayed late into the night, spitting seeds and stacking bails. The farmers rumbled along wearily atop the growling steel mammoths which hungrily ravished the fields- two rows at a time. Payday was near, and it pleased a man to see the fruit of his labor. Excitement was in the air. Well... not for me- really. I was just a bored little kid wishing my Papa would get down off that big John Deere long enough to take me fishing. Back and forth he rode, wiping sweat from his brow with an old shop rag. From sunup to sunset he continued, and beyond. For me it was the most boring time of the year.

I had been assigned the job of helping pack the cotton trailers. At one stop my Italian Papa yelled down from the cab, "Hey der boy, hop up on da picker here and come catch me one of them rabbits I been seeing."

He didn't have to tell me twice. I sprung out of that trailer like a crazed Elmer Fudd on an intravenous Espresso drip. Now I was feeling some excitement!

I wedged my narrow rear in between the rungs of the ladder leading up to the cab. I was just over the front tire, so I figured to be safe since it'd take a pretty stiff bump to throw me from there into those hungry spindles that churned up the cotton stalks. (Of course, the safety rules may have changed a mite since the seventies with regards to how a kid's supposed to launch from a moving piece of farm machinery.)

Anyway, forty yards down we spotted the first cotton tail. I leaped from my perch and took out with Papa hollering directions from the cab. Each time I'd close in on that little varmint he'd turn on a burst of speed and leave me in the dust; literally. I got so mad!

Papa's thought it was funnier than the Loony Tunes. He got to laughing, and taunting, and just having a regular 'Good ole' time'; but he also kept moving. After each rabbit trek I'd have to make a mad dash back to the picker.

Eventually, the silly wabbits wore me out. I just puckered up, plopped down in the dirt and bawled. Muddy trails streaked my flustered little cheeks. Fishing for sympathy, I was treated to the sound of Papa's guffawing over the roar of the engine as he lumbered away. I did feel better after slinging a few dirt clods at him.

On his way back Papa finally took it out of gear long enough to explain to me how to catch a rabbit. "Dem rabbits is fast der boy," he said, "But they can't go long. You gotta stay with em' till they tire out."

With this new found wisdom, I wiped my eyes and climbed back up the ladder. Sure enough, I stayed with the next rabbit relentlessly until I simply wore him out. Poor thing sat there shivering, its little heart pounding ninety to nothing.

"Dat's it der boy," Papa called, "We'll have him for supper!"

I cradled the little critter in my arms and started back to the picker, but on the way those poor little brown eyes started to work on me. By the time I caught up with Papa I reluctantly flagged him to a stop, "I'm just going to let him go, okay Papa?"

Papa shook his head, rammed it back in gear, and rode off roaring with laughter.

But anyway- I wish I could say those were the end of my days running the rabbit trails, but you know, there always somebody out there who seems to get a big kick out of dangling some worthless carrot in front of you. They seem intent on luring you away from the work the Lord has directed you to do. We must be careful to recognize the devil's devices, because he also gets those same people to jump up and laugh as they leave you crying in the dust!

Do you want to know what's up Doc? I'll tell you. Rabbit trails are just a diversionary tactic to keep you from fulfilling the plan God has for your life. Follow the Lord. (*Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go. Isaiah 48:17 NKJV*)

We Christians need to stay busy harvesting. Can't you see how white the fields are? Can't you feel the excitement in the air? It's almost payday! You won't catch my tail stuck in the rungs of the devil's ladder anymore. Tricks are for kids.

-Guy Sheffield 3-09-07