

MY WALKING STICK

By Paul Popik,

Sr.

I first saw my walking stick many years ago, but it seems like yesterday. I was approximately 4 years old, and the walking stick belonged to my grandfather (my mother's father, John Kraynak) who lived with us. For the next 11 years, I walked with him and his walking stick to visit friends or sometimes just to walk.

On some of our walks I saw him kill snakes. He hated snakes. Every fall when the potatoes were taken from the garden, he would build a huge fire. All the children from the town came and we were allowed to throw our potatoes into the hot ashes. He would move the potatoes around with his walking stick until they were done. Then he would pull them from the hot ashes to cool. We all carried salt shakers to put salt on our potatoes, a treat when you don't have much.

My grandfather always had his walking stick with him. We slept in the same room, but each had his own bed; his was to the left of my bed. Sometime during the middle of one certain night, he used his walking stick to wake me up by hitting my bed. He asked me to get my mother, which I did. My mother and Uncle took him to the hospital, but he passed away before they got there. This is when I inherited his walking stick and a knife (I think it is homemade) his only 2 possessions. Yes, I still have both.

Sixty six years have passed, and due to health problems it is now time to bring out the walking stick, which is 1-1/2 inches in diameter. My wife didn't like the looks of it, so she bought me a cane. It failed to hold me up, so I went back to the walking stick, getting various comments wherever I went.

One day at a restaurant in Pittsburgh, a fellow asked if he could see my walking stick. He looked at it very closely and then said, "There is no wood like that in the United States." and with that comment walked away. Later, as I was eating, he came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder, saying, "If you are offered money for it, do not sell it," and left. I felt I should have asked him more, but failed to do so.

One year later my wife and I were on a cruise in the Caribbean. I thought security

wouldn't let me take my walking stick on the plane to Florida, but it went through without a hitch.

The first morning aboard the ship, my wife and I went to eat breakfast. Naturally I had my walking stick with me. The first two people we met in the dining area were fellows from South Africa. Their first comments to me were, "Nice yellow wood stick you have. It only grows in the desert," they moved on.

We filled our plates with food and went to sit down, it was a table for four, and in a few minutes a fellow and his wife sat down. We were talking and he mentioned my walking stick. He then said he and his wife came from Russia to this country and he was a wood worker. He then proceeded to tell me my walking stick is a branch from a yellow wood tree, that it grows only in the desert, and that it takes 150 years for the tree to grow. I told him my grandfather came from what was then known as Austria-Hungary and I knew of no desert there. He told me that the Ukraine is not far from Austria-Hungary, and there is a huge desert there. He assumed that was where the wood came from

To this date, this is all I know about my walking stick. I certainly am going to try to find out all I can about it. My guess is that the it is about 120 years old, but deep down I think it is older.

I do hope one of my sons will hold on to the walking stick and knife. I will certainly give them a copy of this short (but true) story.

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