

Boyhood memories: How I met Napoleon Bonaparte

I awake very early this morning. It is quite light in the house even though it is a rainy day in late May in the year 2012. Something compels me to get up and write of a time and place many years ago. It is hard to believe that in a few days I will be eighty two years old. I've been in this house at Stone Arabia for sixty four of those years. My mind drifts back for some seventy plus years. I've arrived at the house along the creek at Marshville, NY. The day and time I have chosen is evening. In fact it is early evening and the light in the house is about the same as it is this morning so many years later. My mother tells me it is time for me to go upstairs to bed. She says that I have chased too many dogs, cats, turtles or bull frogs for one day and I am over tired. I don't agree but mother is a registered nurse so she should know best about such things.

The only trouble is that it is still daylight and how I hate to go to bed before dark. I suppose there is one other thing to consider. It was still light enough to see that scary steel engraved picture in the enclosed stairway. Right now I'll put off for a few minutes getting to that picture. At the bottom of the stairs there is a fireplace that great grandfather Hubbs built years before I was born. There are all kinds of treasure there on the mantle. Over it hangs a deer head from a dear grandpa Garlock shot when he was young. On those horns hangs an old muzzle loading gun that was something of great interest to me. Well I guess I'll just have to go on up. There on the right side is that scary picture. It is very large. In big letters was the title "Napoleon at Waterloo". I do not know if I then knew who Napoleon was but it was still scary for a small boy.

There was Napoleon on his horse in a vivid battle scene. It was almost as if I was meeting this man. The ground was covered with muskets, swords, broken cannons, cannon balls and worst of all many dead and wounded soldiers. One wounded man partly rose as if to ask Napoleon to help save him. Possibly from being trod on by Napoleon's horse. Boy am I glad I'm now beyond that picture. It is only a few steps until I reach my bedroom at the top of the stairs. The only thing was that it was yet fresh in my memory that my uncle Duggie, Douglas Allen Garlock (1923 to 1936), who was only seven years older than I, had died in that room only a few years before. I could almost see the oxygen bottles sitting outside the door yet. They were there in an effort to save a young boy with pneumonia, which did not work. I had lost my companion. The only young person except me to come to that house.



I'm now to the top of the stairs. The floor boards are somewhat loose. Stepping on them made the old catches on a large cupboard rattle. I'll turn left toward the bathroom. Yes, we did have an inside bathroom when lots of others did not. The old outside one was still preserved just in case. Before I reached the bathroom there on the right under the low roof was a door. When I opened it there were trunks and lots of other treasures stored there that were of great interest to this young boy. Once when I was quite young I climbed on one of those trunks so I could turn the button on the electric socket of the light. It did not come on. The next step to check things out was to unscrew the bulb, put my finger in the socket and again turn the button. The result was a lifelong respect for electricity. After the bathroom trip I went back to my bedroom. I have not chosen the time of year for my story.

If it was in summer the bullfrog help to bring about sleep. If it was early spring the ice had broken up and huge cakes of ice crashed against the big willow tree.

The old house is gone now but boyhood memories about it still fill the mind of someone no longer young.

Skip Barshied

Stone Arabia

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