



# Cannon Blast

## *Classics*

### **WHEN A TREE LIMB TALKS, WE NEED TO LISTEN**

*By Bart Cannon*

During the 1998 Christmas holidays, Momz and I took the kids—as the song says—“over the river and through the woods,” but it wasn’t to Grandmother’s house we went. Rather, “the horse carried the sleigh” to my sister-in-law’s live oak sanctuary in Lavaca County.

We envisioned spending a few days leisurely reconnecting with family and communing with the great outdoors. What we didn’t expect was an object lesson taught by a seven-foot live oak limb.

On prior visits to the Hallettsville “Ponderosa,” I spent endless hours walking down winding trails and along fence lines, accompanied only by a seven-foot live oak limb that resembled the rod Moses wielded during his encounters with Pharaoh.

My “Moses staff,” as I called it, didn’t part great waters or invoke plagues as Moses’ did. I just knocked off dead limbs and used it as a prop while watching the sun rise or set behind the tree line beneath the blushing Texas sky.

In those peaceful moments, I could almost hear the psalmist David exclaim, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.” (Psalms 23: 4).

On this particular day, I completed my morning rounds, emerged from the dense underbrush and sat on the deck to remove my muddy boots. My timing was almost perfect. I entered the living room and headed for my place at the table.

After lunch, my son Jonathan wanted to know what I did on those walks. Jonathan notices everything I do and still thinks becoming a man like Dad would be a neat accomplishment. In philosophical tones, I replied, “Well, Son, I explore trails, talk to God and knock off dead tree limbs.”

Jonathan asked, “Dad, what do you need the staff for?” I extolled the virtues of being armed with a Moses staff in the woods and agreed to take Jonathan on my next outing for a class on limb launching. He would have to learn the sideways swat, the baseball swing and my patented punch move. Apparently the time I spent in army bayonet training was not in vain.

We bundled up with sweaters, jackets, gloves and stocking caps, then grabbed my staff at the tool shed, crossed the cattle gap and headed for an opening in the underbrush. As we trudged through the woods, we inspecting fallen trees, dilapidated deer stands and assorted varmint tracks. Occasionally we stopped to inflict blows on dead tree limbs with my mighty staff.

Our conversation rambled. We talked about the “tree house thingy” (deer stand), the difference between evergreens and other trees and typical guy stuff—until the inspiration came. “Son, this kinda reminds me of something Jesus said: ‘Every branch that bears fruit, [My Father] prunes it, that it may

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bear more fruit.' (John 15:2). Pruning a tree is sort of like a spanking. When you demonstrate a bad attitude or habit, the spanking is supposed to help you get rid of it," I said.

I continued, "When we cut off a dead limb, it helps the tree grow stronger, healthier and prettier. So, when we prune a tree, are we helping or hurting it?" "Helping," Jonathan replied. "When parents discipline their children, are they helping or hurting?" I asked. "Helping," he said.

Jonathan adjusted his grip, aimed carefully and propelled the Moses staff into another dead limb. "Good job!" I exclaimed as wood particles exploded into smithereens above one of Aunt Barbara's clearings. Then, I inquired, "Did you help this tree or hurt it?" "I helped it," he said. "Hey, Dad. You just taught me a Bible lesson. Cool."

I guess I learned something, too. When a tree limb talks, we need to listen.

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