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# Ambi

## By Ed Jennings

*The following tale takes place in a sleepy little community in East Tennessee, which lay in the foothills of the Great Smokey Mountains. The time is the middle 1950s. Ike was in his first term as President. We were between wars, the economy was good, and most folks remember those days fondly. Like most war stories, this one is true. The names of the perpetrators have been changed to protect the guilty little SOB's.*

My family resided just outside of town, in a community called Flat Gap. The town, which had originally been named Mossy Creek, was supported by the local farmers, a zinc mine, which my father was Superintendent of, and a small four-year college that largely produced ministers and schoolteachers. Our house, which had been built before the Civil War, was surrounded on four sides by fields and pastures. These open spaces provided a home for retired mules from the mine, or were at times leased to local farmers for crops. Small game was fairly abundant, and any youngster living in such a setting would have ample opportunity to enjoy a BB gun.

I got my first BB gun at a pretty tender age, around five or six. It was a lever action with a stock made from real wood. To a lad my age, it was "just like" my father's Marlin Model 39. Well, kinda-sorta, at least. Being a child who was small for his age, I struggled to cock the action. The only way I could do it was to place the butt on the ground and, while holding the barrel in my left hand, I could raise the lever with my right. I had to

use my right foot to hold the stock. It was cumbersome at best, and I assumed that as I got older and stronger I'd be able to lever it with the same ease that I could work the lever on the Marlin. I fired tens of thousands of BBs through the gun, but I never was able to cock it any other way.

My BBs came from Burton's General Store, which my mother visited on at least a daily basis. They were packaged in cellophane packages containing 250 BBs, and cost five cents. My allowance at the time was 26 cents a week, with the odd penny allowing me to buy something for a quarter and have money for sales tax. I rarely bought more than five to 10 cents worth of anything at a time, so in five weeks the extra pennies would add up to an additional package of BBs. My first encounter with inflation was gut wrenching. Suddenly and without warning, BBs were increased in price to 10 cents and the cellophane package gave way to a cardboard tube only containing 180 of the little pellets. I hastily negotiated a raise in allowance to 52 cents, but still came up short. This trend would seem to continue to the present day.

The original BB gun lasted at least two or three years, but finally it gave up the ghost. I don't recall exactly what misfortune came to it, but probably it was simply worn out. The replacement was a brand new Daisy pump, resplendent with a genuine plastic stock that emulated the finest burlled walnut. The pump gun demanded an entirely different manual of arms from the old lever action. The pump also had a positive-feed magazine that