Midland Texas - 1963. Me my mom and dad just moved to a different part of town. The new house had a huge backyard separated in half by a low wooden fence. In the back part of the backyard was a left-over fort. It was a wooden fort and had two levels. There was a jump-off plank on the second level. It was a big deal to climb up and bravely jump off.

We would live in that house till my parents divorced and I moved off to Texas Tech in 1980.

The front part of the back yard had a menacing tree. Over time, it had grown around frayed rope and resembled long blond hair. We teased ourselves believing a little girl had been caught by the tree.

It was a wild time politically. President Kennedy had been assassinated just a month earlier. His funeral interfered with my favorite comedies like Mighty Mouse and Woody Woodpecker. Our 19 inch black and white TV that had rabbit ears. There were at that time only 3 TV stations-ABC, CBS and NBC and nothing but test patterns after 12 midnight. ABC had all the great sports and Howard Cissell. Cartoons only on the weekend. The best cartoons were always on Saturday mornings with American Band Stand and Soul Trian to follow.

So, anyways, we had just moved to the new neighborhood and my mom took me over to a boy’s house. I remember her dragging me ‘cause I didn’t want to go. The boy’s house was on one block from my house.

With one hand clinching my hand, she knocked on the door with the other. Joe’s mom answered the door. Joe-one year older than me and only a block away. We would end up being lifelong friends-sort of.

Joe was the youngest of 4 kids. He had 3 older sisters. Terri, Nanett and Cindy.

Joe’s dad was always angry and mad. It was scarry to be around him. I remember he always had a 6 pack of Budweiser beer with him and a lit cigarette. Joe’s dad was in World War 2. He was a pilot and flew missions over Norway until he was shot down. He spent some time in a German POW camp. He never spoke of his ordeals – he never mentioned any of it. I only found out after reading his obituary many years later. Somewhat ashamed now for how carelessly we played with his medals and air force wings. .

In the neighborhood around the new home all the houses on one side of the block were connected by back yard fences. Each house shared at least one fence with its neighbor. If you did not live on the end of the block, you would be sharing each side of your back yard with two neighbors. Most of the fences were made of cinder block, yet a few were wood.

Around 5 years old, we started to use the fences that surrounded out back yards as our personal way to get from one house or fort – to another. We would walk along the top of the cinder block fences. Hands and arms stretched out to the side like airplane wings for balance. The wooden fences took more skill. That would require walking on the top plank on the wooden fence one foot slowly in front of the other in a heel-to-toe

We built many a fort in Joe’s back yard. Joe’s backyard had a fence halfway to the ally. The back part of his backyard was open to the ally. We used any and all scrap lumber, carpet, cardboard and used nails that we could find, steal or borrow. Our forts were well insulated and enclosed with an entry and emergency escape door through an underground tunnel. The escape tunnel was connected more underground passage ways we could crawl through.

The boys across the ally were our enemy. We would wage “cold fights” against them. Me and my pals had a special recipe for clods. We would prepare our clods by first adding water to equal amount of dirt until forming a thick mud. The thick mud was hand wrapped around nice sized rock. The mud-covered rocks were set in the hot summer sun and presto, you a “clod”.

In a clod fight, we would throw our clods at the enemy boys across the ally. And they would return with a volley of their own clods. It was a fine sport until I was hit in the eye.

A lot of my time was spent with my grandfather. Pop - He was on my dad’s side. Born 1903 in Quart Ireland. A large broad chested man and he had a full head of white hair. He always wore khaki pants, farmers ankle high tie up boots and long-sleeved shirts. He topped with a farmer’s light grey felt hat. Pop and his family were from Quart Ireland. They went through New York to Comanche County Texas. They lived in a dug out. It was a big deal when they obtained their first cast iron oven. Pop moved to Fisher County in his 20’s. He share cropped for a few years and saved enough money to buy the home place. He had just started his family when the stock market bottomed out and the Great Depression began.

He had 3 sections - about half of the 3 sections were in pasture. He cultivated cotton, sorghum, sugar cane and alfalfa. The land was a burnt red clay in color. The south fork of the Brazos River ran through the back of the home place.

We roamed the pastures at a young age with our BB guns, racoon hats and David Bowie knives. We were warned about the danger of feral and Javalina hogs. Pop warned us to climb up nearest tree if we heard or saw any of them. Javalina hogs have big wolf like teeth and feral pigs get up to 400 lbs and will eat anything – including little boys.

We thought they were joking. We would walk the pastures every morning joe and I were exploring around the creek (south fork of the Brazos river). hearing snorting, we jumped up a large cottonwood tree. Just as we climbed up, the javalina hoggs gruffed and growled at us from the bottom of the tree. They stayed around for 30 minutes hoping we would fall out of the tree!! We shot our bb guns at them, only making them mad.

We ran all the way home after the hoggs disbanded.

One summer while staying with Pop, there was flooding. The flooding was so bad Pop could not get to town in his beat up old pickup. So, he decided to send me to town for groceries on Midnight, a ten year old gelding. He was black old quarter horse and basically pet that had not been ridden for years I had ridden him only once before – and he bucked me off.

But Midnight was up for the trip with a sparkle in his eyes.

Rotan was the closest town. There were other towns around – roby closest to farm, but no grocery store. Pop pulled out the saddle from the barn – it must have been 100 years old back then.

I tightened all the straps and got the bridal in his mouth. I looked more like tom sawyer than a cowboy. I never had cowboy boots or cowboy hat until I got into high school. I always wore blue jean cutoffs, tank top and tennis shoes.