

Four Year Old Smoker!

By J. W. Henson

WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD

It is not very often that one can remember with such clarity the happenings of early youth. It is only those things that make a deep psychological impact that really stays with us throughout a long lifetime; those things that give us great joy, embarrassment, or sorrow.

Yet this experience lives fresh in my memory even today.

It was a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1935. My Mother had gone to a training session at our local church, and had left me with aging grandparents. The day was humid and hot. They were sitting under a large Mountain Ash tree that grew in our front yard. The tree was used in lieu of air-conditioning in those ancient, torrid days. I was too full of hype to sit, and used my time at play in the great out-of-doors that surrounded our farmhouse.

By mid afternoon distant relatives dropped by for a visit. As the day grew old we began to hear the rumble of distant thunder in the west, and the sun soon took refuge behind the growing clouds. Just as one of our visitors lighted a cigarillo, large drops of rain began to fall. Everyone jumped up, took their chair and sought refuge on the front porch. The burning tobacco was discarded on the lawn in their haste to find shelter from the approaching storm.

I had been skylarking in the lawn at the rear of the house, but made a dash for the front lawn as the thunder began to boom overhead. Everyone was gone when I arrived, but spiraling upward from the grass was a thin screw of smoke. I grabbed the cigarillo and bolted for the smokehouse. The smokehouse was a small single room building with a covered chest running the length of the right side of the building. In this chest was our supply of smoked hams and salt pork for the coming winter. Within the room lay a waste of garden tools, spread without order, upon the floor.

Crawling over and around these tools I hid behind a large wheelbarrow. I was securely out of sight as I sat smoking. At last I had finished the small cigar down to the butt. Flipping the remains into the grass before the door, I sat back and reflected upon what had just been accomplished. I had scarcely finished when I heard Mother calling for me. Tobacco was not looked upon with favor by our family and I knew that I had done wrong.

Dusk was coming and the guests and grandparents had gone, leaving Mother and me alone. An uneasy feeling was beginning to force its way to prominence in my mind. As waves of nausea washed over me, I confided to Mother that I was ill. She said never a word about my misadventure, but the rank smell must have informed her of my deed. She brought the burning kerosene lamp and a mirror to me. I was aghast at my appearance, for I had turned green. I asked Mother if she thought that I would die. She told me to go into my bedroom and say a prayer; to

promise that I would never do such a thing again. I prayed and promised more than any red blooded American lad could live up to, but live I did, and I never smoked another bit of tobacco.

END