



What we'll read in Ken's memoir, is almost typical of young people from a dysfunctional family. Although as you read his story, you'll find how he overcame his adversity, and lived almost a normal life.

YOU OLD THING! I can't wait to leave this place!

By Ken Wood

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sliding! The vine I was holding onto comes crashing down curling on top of me as it falls! The wind was knocked out of me and I was gasping for air when Ty and Pearl get to me! They were trying to carry me back to the house but I was too heavy! They set me down! Thereafter I regain my breath, and I sure was scared not being able to breath. On another summer school vacation Ty and I with our sister Pearl of course, hike way up into the mountains further than we had ever been before. We come across a very big old stump where a humongous tree once stood. Time and weather had degraded it so much where we didn't know what kind of tree it had been many, many, years ago. Ty brought matches with him so we unwisely decide to build a fire inside this big old stump. Pearl and I search around for dry small tree branches and with dry leaves from the forest floor we stuff all this in this old stump that had most likely been cut down by loggers a long time ago. Ty and I were both unaware how strong a draft this hollow tree stump would make. Ty lights the fire and as the dry leaves burn we put more dry wood inside that hollow stump. After a minute or so the fire takes off and roars like a lion, real hard and fast and then like a freight train it roars! So loud as such we had never heard before this day! The three of us became so scared! Fire was shooting out the top of that hollow stump as it roars with anger towards us scared kids! The three Breeden kids were searching for water to douse the flames! There; was not one drop of water nearby for us kids to put out this hungry fire! Ty and I dug down deep pulling wet dirt from under the leaves on the forest floor using both hands we threw all this moist dirt on the fire. After a bit the fire was out but still smoldering. We dug down deeper in the forest floor for more wet dirt much, much

deeper under the leaves we dug and rubbed the wet dirt on the inside of this smoldering stump. Finally just to make sure the fire was really, really distinguished. Ty and I stood on top of this humongous tree stump and piss on our fire. It quits smoking but the three of us scared kids lingered awhile just to make sure that fire would not start up again. We agreed never to set fire to another stump. I didn't have a father-son relationship with my father and that has troubled me through the years. Regrettable I did not try to understand my father better and wished I had been more mature back then. I also felt as if I was the black sheep of the family. Never receiving a kind word from my father and was never good enough for anything. No matter what! I could never please my father. During the winter months it was always cold in our house. There wasn't any type of heat in our bedroom. When it was zero outside well then for sure it was zero in our bed room for there was not the first lick of insulation in our bedroom or heat of any source except our bodies. Ty and I slept in one old metal bed. We wrapped ourselves around each other and tried to keep warm and get some sleep. Then if weather required we pile on four or five quilts our mother has made but we were still cold. And of course we did not have indoor plumbing so we secured an empty coffee bucket to pee in. During those cold winters the pee in that bucket for sure would freeze.

Mother and father slept downstairs near a heater to keep them warm during winter. The kids had to tuff it out. During cold weather I recall always being cold. My good friend and cousin their father looked out for his boys. He had cut a rectangular hole in the floor above an oil heater downstairs

and the heat from that stove went straight up into the boy's bedroom. When I spent the night over at my cousin's house I slept in a nice warm bed upstairs. I think back on those days and knew my father could do the same thing.

The Breeden's always seemed to live near an orchard of some kind and most likely it was an apple or peach orchard. When I was old enough I worked in the orchards picking peaches and apples but the job I remember most was driving a sled pulled by a horse. I traveled to and fro to the picking fields with this old horse, then back to the trucks that hauled the peaches away to markets. I enjoyed driving that horse and sled to pick up peaches and take the load of peaches to a truck waiting nearby. Invariably there would always be a few unripe peaches left on those peach trees after the picking season was over. Those peaches were left and would ripen much later in the fall. The owner of this nearby peach orchard where we lived rarely went into the orchard for those peaches that were left to ripen later. After school Ty Pearl and I would sometimes go searching through that orchard. We were always hungry coming home, after a long day attending our school. And, we were hoping to find some of those few peaches that were left on the trees to ripen later. Most times we were rewarded for our effort. The owner of that one peach orchard knew what we Breeden kids were doing. Mr. Martin the [Grinch] aptly named by us Breeden kids because of his demeanor. One evening when after he saw us Breeden kids harvesting his peaches he didn't scold us but corrals our father one evening when he was coming home after a hard day's work. Mr. Grinch reminds our father those peaches are his and he doesn't want us kids picking

them. Our father told us kids what the owner said, but did not forbid us from what we had always been able to do. And for sure neither Ty nor I paid the least bit of attention to what Mr. Grinch told our father. Those peaches were there so why not pick them before someone else does the picking. No one would know and besides the owner didn't know how many peaches were left on those trees and he never goes looking for any ripe peaches anyways. And on top of that every year peaches are left on those trees and no one cares to look for them, except us Breeden kids. That Mr. Martin was for sure a Grinch to us kids. After school one day in late fall Ty and I and our cousin slip into the forbidden peach orchard. We start searching for those unfound unpicked and unripen peaches that were now ripe. After searching a few trees in the orchard we soon find some very nice ripe peaches and figure it's best to leave before Mr. Grinch happens upon us. Now I was meandering along a bit farther ahead of my brother and cousin maybe some fifteen- twenty feet in front walking on a straight path toward our house. And I was admiring what handful of peaches I had snatched from Mr. Martin's peach trees. As I turn around and was about to proclaim to my brother how we had snatched some of Grinch's forsaken peaches. But then! All at once I was hit square in the eye by an unknown object! I vividly remember that evening long ago! I jump up and down up and down, while screaming," "I'm going crazy" I'm going crazy" "I'm going crazy" several times I say those words! That was how those words came to me! After a spell, I realized I wasn't going "crazy and while Ty was comforting me I find out that my own brother had thrown one of Grinch's peaches meant to hit me in the back of the head and for why? I never do find out why!

Miserable for sure I was and in so much pain! I was in such a wretched state, in fact when I get to the house I do not eat any of my peaches right away but I go straight to my room laid down on my bed. When our father comes home from work Pearl informs him of my misfortune and how it happened. My father comes in my room and checks on me as I lay in bed. By this time my eye was bruised and now had turned a blackish blue. Now my father after checking on me his youngest son well he doesn't lectures Ty for hitting his brother with one of Mr. Martin's peaches. Neither Ty nor I were punished for snatching peaches from Mr. (Grinch) Martin's peach orchard. One fall evening the Breeden kids find out just how far Mr. Grinch will go to exact his revenge. After school one evening during late fall. The Breeden kids rush home wanting to go search for any peaches now ripe on Mr. Martin's peach trees. Well I'll be doggone I say we were shocked dismayed and astonished also sadden when we see this huge D-8-bulldozer, {sleeping he cow} knocking down every single peach tree in his orchard and piling them all in a row to rot away. We were hoping at least one or more than one peach tree would be spared. There was nary a tree left for us to pick peaches from next summer and fall. That Mr. Grinch could have at least left one tree we proclaimed. Of course we were very much disappointed" and angry because those peach trees had been there since before our family moved into our house on this hill. After school I climb an apple tree I preferred I'd look for a strong limb to sit on. There I'd pluck an apple from a limb near me then eat" till my hunger was gone. Other times if I found a loaf of bread I'd make myself a mayonnaise sandwich if we had mayonnaise. Not much for a growling twelve year old's belly

but it had to suffice till my mom comes home from work. It could have been better for the Breeden family. Now I shall chronicle an episode of colossal absurdity and as usual when something is amiss it concerns me. This was when I was around maybe eleven or twelve years old. It was a travesty of the worst kind. As this drama played out that evening and without one stick of evidence you'll read for yourselves where I was not guilty no way, shape form or fashion. (by *an overdue confession*) *This happens to be one of my most memorable incidents.* This farce happens upon me where once more I had no control over what-so-ever. It came upon me one evening after supper was over, table cleared dishes washed dried and put away. My sister Pearl and I were watching television when suddenly without warning! Our father burst into the room and announces. Your mother is missing a dollar! Wow! One dollar now to the Breeden children back then that would be like holding a fifty dollar bill today. The Breeden kids rarely get to hold a dollar. On the night in question our father out of the clear blue informs me that I had stolen this missing dollar from my mama's purse! Was I surprised to hear I had stolen this missing Georgie! No matter; I was the culprit for this missing dollar even though there was not a witness not one single strand of evidence presented that I had taken this sole peso. Money was always scarce at our house because of our father's drinking! But alas! I didn't know a dam thing about this missing dollar bill! And I tell my father repeatedly again and again I had not taken that dollar from mama's purse! But little ole me telling my father and mother such, well that made very little difference to him! My father for whatever reason he may have had believes me to be the guilty thief.

to now is dubbed a scenic highway by Federal Govt. Traffic Administration and looms downhill for almost half of a mile. At the bottom of this long downhill length of highway we start our approach to the bridge. The driver somehow miraculous has made it this far. When again I glance up front I notice the driver's wife has her hand on his shoulder she could be praying. Then I start thinking, about time I should be doing the same, but other thoughts crowd my thinking. We now start across this long bridge that spans the Buffalo River. The fast Olds has left the hill behind and enters onto the bridge which spans a cold dark fast moving river. This bridge I've crossed many times in my thumbing life and I take time to peer out the window while listening to those tires as they go, clipty-clop clipty-clop over the bridge struts. Again I look down at the icy cold water of the river below fearing I might end up there very soon. The olds.88 is picking up speed as it nears the exit and that long curve of highway to the left. Contractors had recently within past three years added this long curve to the highway hoping to slow traffic. This was done after several accidents involving three semi-trucks a like-amount of cars, and two fatalities. When the driver leaves the bridge he should be prepared for that long curve to the left. At this most critical section of the road our driver of the mighty Olds must have passed completely out for the car keeps going straight! When I see the car was not about to make that curve to the left! I am terrified knowing what was about to happen! Quickly! Without hesitation I drop down on my hands and knees in the cramped confines of the backseat floor board. For sure I didn't want to witness what was about to happen to me! When the right front tire drops down into the ditch that runs

by the road side, the car now without a driver hits the embankment and starts flipping. As the car flips end over end I could feel my arms were breaking for I felt sharp pain in both arms. But I don't recall feeling much pain after that moment from those broken bones. Now I am surely unconscious and still inside the car as it flips several more times end over end. All this time as the car flips I was being tossed about inside the car such as a ragdoll. At some point as the car was flipping and while I was unconscious I was thrown from this car! And now after the car finishes flipping it comes to rest upside down high up on the bank. As the car settles down other occupants of the car were either thrown from it or were still inside maybe trapped. For sure I do not know what their situation was nor do I ever find out. Their car is high on the embankment where another car or truck passing through could not see it from the highway. For a time I lay unconscious on the frozen ground of this hillside. When regaining conscious I am not yet aware what happened on this cold January night. And I'm wondering why I happened to be on this hillside with no one around except me. No idea yet what has happened. Then I consider! Why those people I was riding with must have beat me up and threw me on this frozen hill. I keep trying to rise but couldn't move my left arm. For some reason it does not work and I'm wondering why I am unable to move my arm. When trying to move my right arm, why it's broken I say to myself. I felt sharp pain from bones grating together as I try moving it. Thank goodness though I'm able to lift that right arm. Then, when I happened to look over my shoulder and see that there's a billboard with lights shining brightly right above me and they're advertising rooms for rent. Those lights, shining

so bright! I can see from those lights my left arm is mangled. Then I know why I couldn't use it considering how mangled it was. For sure I need somehow to get off this hill. My shoes I was wearing were not on my feet, nor anywhere near me, and the windbreaker I was wearing is now missing. With my right hand I cradle the left arm to me, then try rising to my feet. Not so fast won't work. I try to get on my knees still holding my left arm with the right. And now with help from those billboard lights I plant one foot forward and continue rising on my cold sock feet. And you know what? This cold frozen ground for some reason doesn't bother me at all. After I rise to my feet I check myself again. My chest and abdomen hurts, and my legs and face hurt from cuts on my lip and chin. Later I would learn aside from having both arms broken I also suffer broken ribs and a collarbone. And my entire body has been hammered from being tossed around inside that Olds and then thrown from it. Bleeding from several cuts on my face, and lips and chin and I must look a terrible fright. When I was thrown from the car I must have landed face down and likely caused those deep gashes to my chin and lips. And one of my front teeth was driven into my gums out of sight, and other teeth are chipped. Although my right arm is broken I can use it to cradle the left arm so it won't dangle, as there was just some skin, and muscles, and such holding it on. Now I start my perilous journey down off this [hill] from whence I was dumped unceremoniously. I stumble, slide walk and fall down off this frozen hill. After finding my way off that hillside I sit right by the highway, right on the asphalt close as I dared. Believe at this time I became scared and wanted my mother and I cried. Hurting so just about everywhere! And I wish someone, anyone would

come here right now and stop load me in their vehicle without a “question” and take me to the nearest hospital. While I was sitting here on this cold frozen ground hurting and sulking there’s a set of headlights near the top of that hill. And that vehicle was heading my way. As the set of headlights get closer there’s now two sets of headlights. Both cars seemed to be traveling at high speed as if they were racing. When those two cars cross the bridge and approach near me I’m holding my right arm and hand high over my head. And I’m anticipating someone or anyone in either car will see me. They will see how badly I am injured and stop to help. And was I evermore disheartened as both cars fifty-one ford’s running almost bumper to bumper did not slow down! Neither driver put a foot on their brake pedals! And soon were out of sight! It’s hard to believe those folks in either car could not see me. But they had to have seen me holding my right hand high over my head sitting near to the road as possible. As I settle down sitting by the cold highway waiting and wishing for another car or truck to come my way. I began thinking of my mother and cry wishing she were here with me to help. Most of my life experiences have me aching for my mother. As I continue to sit by the now deserted roadside still sulking. I don’t know how long maybe, fifteen-twenty minutes. My heart picks up a beat when I hear a truck and it was climbing a hill somewhere. Finally the big semi-tractor comes into view when it tops the hill. The big semi-tractor-trailer starts down the long half mile stretch of highway leading to the river. The driver keeps changing gears as it roars across the bridge and heads toward me and the center of that curve where I sit right by the roadside. This time I am almost positive that whoever is in

that big rig will surely stop and take me to a hospital for I fear time is running out for me. As this big semi-truck rumbles towards me I'm readying myself, got to raise my right arm high as I could possible manage. The big rig leaves the bridge behind and now storms my way as I sat nervously waiting on those headlights shinning so bright. But to my heartfelt dismay and shock the big semi-truck keeps rumbling on by and it barrels right on by me! "O" no I exclaim, and hang my head and cry! For sure I don't want to die out here in this cold dark night! With no one around! Not even my mother! Suddenly! I'm brought out of this terrible anguish I find myself in! For suddenly I hear the swoosh of air-brakes from that big-semi-stopping! And "yes" they had stopped that big rig! Then I hang my head and cry with emotion at last these truckers have seen me and would save me from an early death. After the big rig stormed past I start thinking and wonder what I must look like. And I continue sitting and glancing over my right shoulder every now and then! Keeping an eye on the big-truck where it had pulled off on the shoulder of the highway. It has been too long I quip while I kept a vigil on that truck! Not another vehicle has come my way since those truckers have stayed put. Obviously the driver had saw me why else would he pull off the road. The semi-tractor-trailer sits idling but how long would it stay there? After a spell I don't recall how long the truckers still had not backed their big rig back toward where I sit on my cold numb ass. For a long time I was sitting by the side of the road for so long, and now I felt my body was starting to go into shock. Although badly injured I must find the strength to stand up on these weak legs of mine. And I must act fast before the truckers might think I was just an old



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