

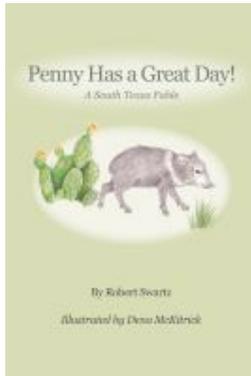
# Penny Has a Great Day!

*A South Texas Fable*



By Robert Swartz

*Illustrated by Dena McKitrick*



*After Penny Peccary adopts a seven-legged "beast", she learns that even a little critter can make a big difference. Joining Penny on her personal journey, we meet those she holds most dear and discover their lives in many ways mirror our own. Young and old will delight in this coming of age fable set in South Texas.*

# **Penny Has A Great Day!**

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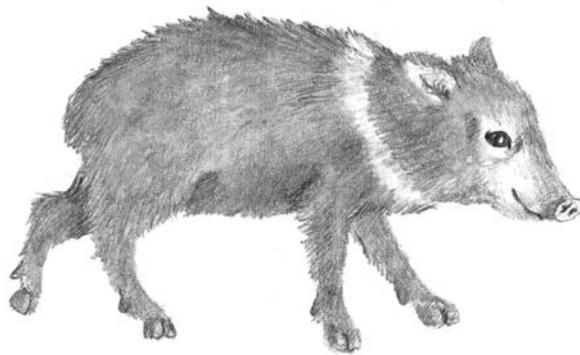
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Javier made a beeline for the Blue Hole. That place was almost always dry, dusty and brown. But, if enough water fell from above the hole would turn a bright blue, as blue as the blue above. The critters liked the hole when it was blue, and so even when it was brown, they called it the Blue Hole.

If the Blue Hole were blue, Javier knew there would be drifters aplenty for him to chase. He loved to hear them squawk as they flapped their arms and flew away. But what he really liked, what he really really liked, was playing with the moos.

The moos were always hankering for fresh water, and Javier figured that today they just might be at the Blue Hole. He would not be disappointed. There they were, every last one of them. Javier took off running under their bellies and between their legs. He nipped at their heels, and it wasn't long before one moo threw up her head and bellowed; then another, and another.



Soon, there was a whole moo chorus going, and that was music to Javier's ears.

A baby moo stood quietly. She did not know what to make of this little four-legged critter causing such a fuss. Javier ran right up behind that little critter and yanked its tail. All Javier got out of that was a little grunt, but he wasn't about to let it go at that. Then, a large shadow came over him.

Javier looked up. There above him stood none other than Big Moo, the biggest moo of all. Javier turned to run, but before he could take a single step Big Moo lowered her head and with it flipped Javier from behind.

"WHEE," cried Javier as he rolled head over tail down the hill. He was having the time of his life, right up to the moment –KERPLUNK– he splashed into the Blue Hole.

Javier thrashed, sputtered, and spat and finally managed to scramble onto dry land.

"Don't you know, Javi," laughed Big Moo. "Peccaries can't swim."

"I'm a javelina," Javier said between spits.

"Javelina, peccary, what's the difference?" scoffed Big Moo. "A little deeper and you'd be blowing bubbles. Now scam!"

\*\*\*

Penny walked the very same trail she walked with her family that morning. She took notice of everything. She examined a small twisty that was flat on the ground, and the two deep holes right where it once had stood. “Funny,” she thought. “How did that happen?” The more she walked, the more questions she had. But she didn’t have many answers.

When Penny got to Long Neck’s clearing, she marveled that not long before it was a beehive of activity, but now she had the place all to herself. Long Neck was there of course, but he was doing what he always did, which was pretty much nothing. She studied him and tried to figure out just how this four-legger did what he did. Then, out of nowhere — .

“Hiya, Toots,” boomed a loud voice.

Startled, Penny looked right and left to see who or what had called out.

“No, no, up here, sister,” the voice insisted.

Penny looked up to the rim of the Moo Bowl and what she saw took her breath away. It was the most frightening thing she had ever seen in her whole life. There on the rim of the bowl sat a beast.

It had two hairy red eyes and one long hairy leg hanging over the edge of the bowl. Where



another leg might have been, there was only an ugly stump, its end the color of dried blood. The beast crawled down the steep side of the bowl, and moved towards Penny. It walked funny, sort of in a rough circle, dragging its left side through the dirt.

“Forget it, darlin’” said the beast in a chipper know-it-all tone. “Didn’t get a drop last night. Dry as a bone. Not that you could reach it any way, short stuff. Just blew into town,” he added. “Tell me, where’s the action? When does the fun begin? Give baby, give.”

For every step the beast managed to drag towards her, Penny took two back. “I’m not his



sister and I'm not a baby. Action? Blew into town? There's no blowing."

"Excuse me," she said gently, not wanting to rile the beast. "But who are you and what are you?"

"I'll lay out the dope, Missy," he said. "I'm big, I'm mean and I'll make your momma scream. Maybe you heard about the two-legger up north. Been laid low a couple of weeks now."

Penny hadn't a clue.

"Okay" he said. "Maybe I did and maybe I didn't. I'm not saying one way or the other. But believe you me, sweetheart – I got the stuff, oh yeah. And where I step, a weed dies."

The beast waited for Penny to react, but she stood mute, with her eyes bugged out.

"Any look like me around here?" asked the beast. "Seen any?"

"No, I haven't," Penny struggled to answer. "I've never seen anything that looks like you. I've seen lots of leggers. Let's see, a two-legger, four-leggers, many-leggers. But I've never seen a seven-legger."

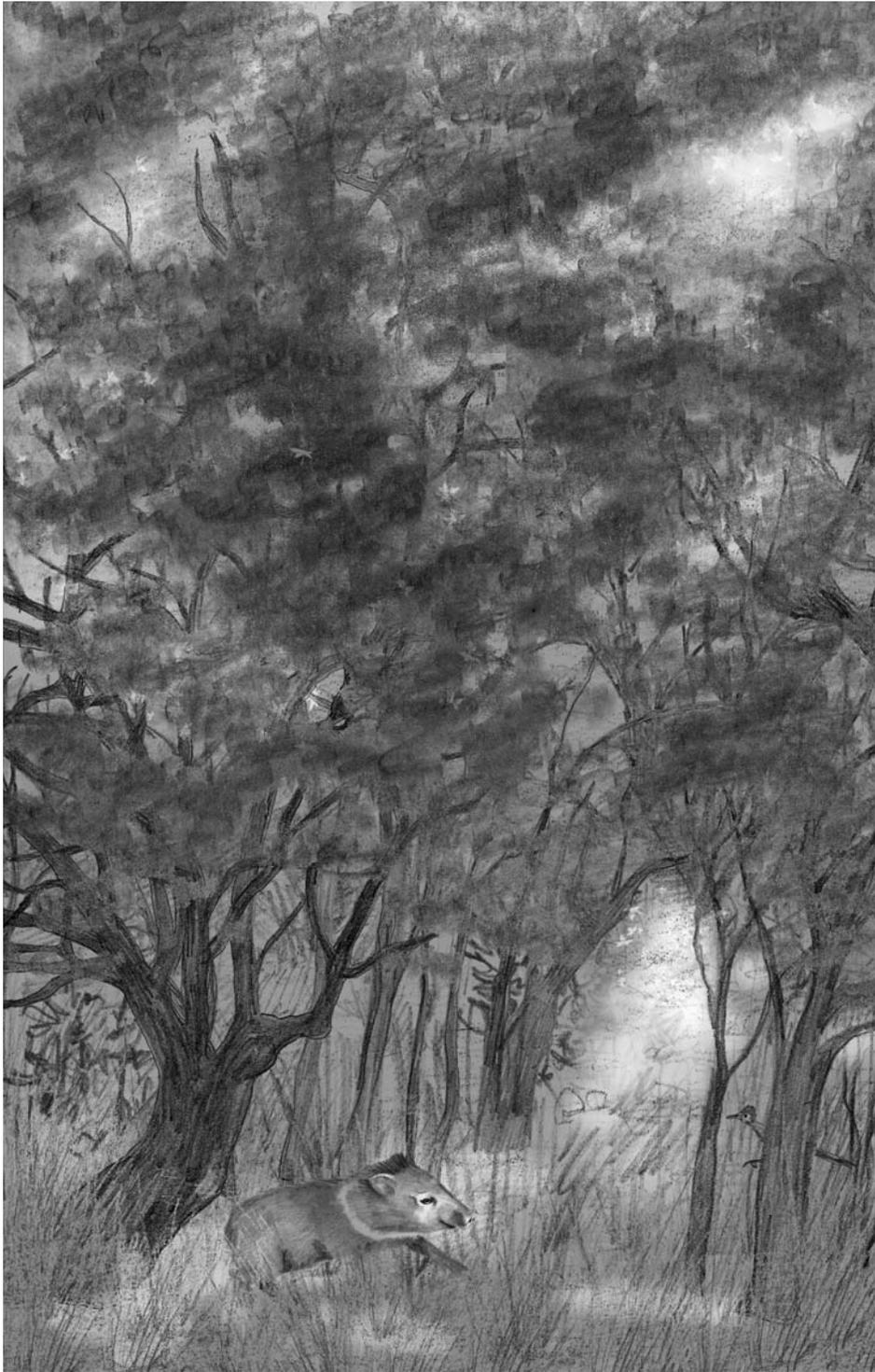
"I'm an eight-legger, thank you very much," said the creature. "I'm an eight-legger with seven legs. You got a problem with that?"

\*\*\*

After Big Moo had spoiled his fun at the Blue Hole, Javier went looking for other excitement. Before long he found himself in a place unlike any he had seen before. Here there were no twisties. The trees in this place grew straight up, and their arms were not bare, but covered with leaves. There were so many leaves, they nearly blotted out the light from the yellow ball.

The chance to explore this new mysterious place was something Javier could not resist. So in he went. The deeper he got, the darker it got. Javier began to think he might not ever find his way back, but still he went, deeper, and deeper. Up ahead he saw a spot of light, made right for it and found himself in a lovely bright clearing. But before Javier could relax for a moment, he caught a quick movement in the corner of his eye.

There on a flat rock, with its long body coiled tight, was a no-legger. It moved its head slowly from side to side, all the while shaking its tail that sounded TZT-TZT-TZT. His father had warned him many times of this no-legger. With that flat head, those dead yellow eyes, and those rattles, there was no mistaking the critter. It was a sidewinder.





Javier tried to run, but his legs would not move. He closed his eyes as tightly as he could and whispered to himself, “He can’t see me. He can’t see me.”

Javier never felt the blow that knocked the air out of him and sent him flying. Struggling to catch his breath, he heard a loud –

CLACK - CLACK - CLICKETY - CLACK

He had heard that furious sound only once before; that time he bit Penny’s ear real hard and made her cry.

CLACK - CLACK - CLICKETY – CLACK,  
thunderous now.

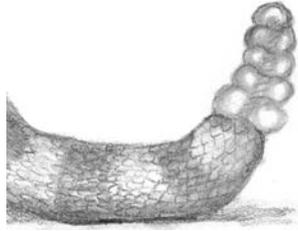
Javier looked up and saw his father, face to face with the sidewinder. At least he thought it was his father. With his chest puffed out, Diego looked the size of two javelinas put together. The hairs on his back stood so straight, Javier could almost count each one.

TZT - TZT - TZT

CLACK - CLACK - CLICKETY - CLACK

On it went, and neither Diego nor the sidewinder budged an inch. Then, the sidewinder slowly uncoiled itself and slithered away.

“You could have beaten him, Dad,” said Javier.



“Maybe,” Diego answered, gravely. “But he had five rattles, and I didn’t want to end up number six.”

\*\*\*

Penny had watched the hairy scary beast go round and round in circle after circle, and always ending up right back where he had started.

“You’ll never find them that way,” she blurted.

“Don’t you worry your pretty little head about it, Sugar Plum.”

“Look, eight-legger,” Penny said bluntly. “You’re lost. Face it.”

The beast dragged along.

“Why don’t you come home with me?” Penny offered. “You can rest. My father can tell you where they are. He’s been just everywhere.”

The beast just grunted.

“Get on my back,” Penny said. “It’s not far.”

“I’m fine right here.”

“No, you’re not,” scolded Penny, surprised at her own outburst.

“If you think I’m getting all the way up there, forget it.”

“You can do it,” Penny said as she rolled to the ground.

The beast reluctantly crawled onto Penny's back.

"Not too fast," he said.

"I'll go nice and slow," Penny said. She waited patiently until the beast was comfortably on her back, slowly got to her feet, then before she took a single step --

**"WHOA! SLOW DOWN! I CAN'T TAKE IT!"**

Penny had to listen to that all the way home.

\*\*\*



Gertie was worried. It was getting on dark, and they all should have been home by now. "It's all my fault," she thought. "I never should have let them go."

When Penny wandered into view, Gertie was relieved. But something was wrong. Penny was walking so slowly, it looked almost as if she were not walking at all. Then Gertie saw the beast.

"EEEEEEEEEEEE!" Gertie squealed at the top of her lungs.

"I told you," said the beast. "Didn't I tell you?"

"HE'LL KILL US ALL!, HE'LL KILL US ALL!" Gertie screamed over and over, running every which way.

"Oh boy. Just like a two-legger," said the beast. Penny rolled to the ground and the beast fairly jumped off for joy. He would have kissed the ground if he could kiss.

"I am never, and I mean ever, doing that again," he said. "You running like there's no tomorrow. Like to kill me."

When Diego and Javier heard the howls they lit out for home.

They arrived just as an exhausted Gertie collapsed to the ground.

"Save us! Save us!" Gertie implored when she saw Diego.



The moment Diego saw the beast he straightened up and assumed a most courtly air.

“Sir,” said Diego to the beast. “I am Don Diego de Diego de Diego, at your service.”

“*Vaquero, vaquero*” Gertie moaned weakly. “Where’s the *pistolero*?”

“Harry,” said the beast, lowering his head. “Sir Harry, at your service, Mr. Don.”

“You’re not so scary,” said Javier. “Why we—” Diego cut him off.

“And you, Sir Harry, you would be a tah-rah-*tooo-lah*.” He pronounced each syllable



of tarantula carefully, as if it were a word all its own. “I have met the greatest of all the eight-leggers. We are honored by your presence, sir. I see you have met my wife, Gertie, my daughter Penny, Penny Peccary, and this young fellow is my son Javier, Javier Javelina.”

“So where are they?” asked Harry.

“Where are who?” asked Diego.

“The tah-rah-ntoo-lahs,” Harry said, rolling his red eyes.

“Oh,” said Diego. “No, that was a long time ago, and they were far, very far from here.”

“I see,” said Harry, clearly disappointed.



“And you, I presume, would be pigs of the green thorn.”

“CLACK-CLACK-CLICKETY-CLACK,” chomped Diego.

“We are not pigs,” Gertie snapped as she stood slowly. “We are peccaries, eight-legger. Not pigs; collared peccaries. See the collar.”

“Javelinas, dear,” said Diego.

“That too, sometimes,” said Gertie. “Diego, we can’t have this. . . monster about. The children.”

“You need not fear this one, dear,” said Diego. “Other eight-leggers, perhaps, but not the tah-rah-too-lah.”

“What about the two-legger up north?”



I heard it was an eight-legger that looked just like this one that got him,” challenged Gertie.

“Ah, that would have been a distant relation,” said Harry, winking at Penny. “Perhaps the brown, or even the black. Madame . . .”

“So it wasn’t . . .” started Penny.

“Mrs. D, we tah-rah-n-too-lahs.” said Harry, having fun with Diego’s pronunciation. “We are lovers, not fighters. I assure you.”

“So, how’d you lose that, Mister Lover?” said Gertie staring at Harry’s bloody stump.

“Oh, that is a long story,” said Harry. “I don’t want to bore you.”

“Well, if you don’t want to . . .”

“But as you insist Madame, I will begin at the beginning. It was a while back. She was the prettiest tah-rah-n-too-lah you’ve ever seen. Harietta. We were in a lovely place, all green. Rich with six-leggers. Lots of two-leggers as well, but I was smitten and paid them no mind.”

“Sorry I asked,” said Gertie.

“Please, Sir Harry,” Diego interjected. “Continue.”

“We were lost in the moment. All of a sudden — there were terrible screams. Not unlike . . .” nodding towards Gertie.

“Go on,” said Gertie.

“Then he set upon us. The meanest two-legger ever. WHOMP! WHOMP! Harietta was flat, and I was running for my life – on seven legs, mind you. It happened that fast. I must have wandered for days. Next thing I knew, I was down here.”

“That’s a horrible story.” said Gertie suddenly sympathetic.

“Oh, Mrs. D,” said Harry. “That’s an eight-legger’s life; fat or flat, fat or flat.”

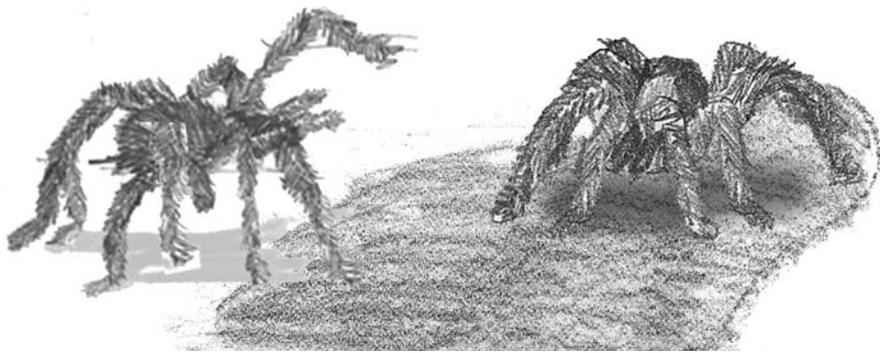
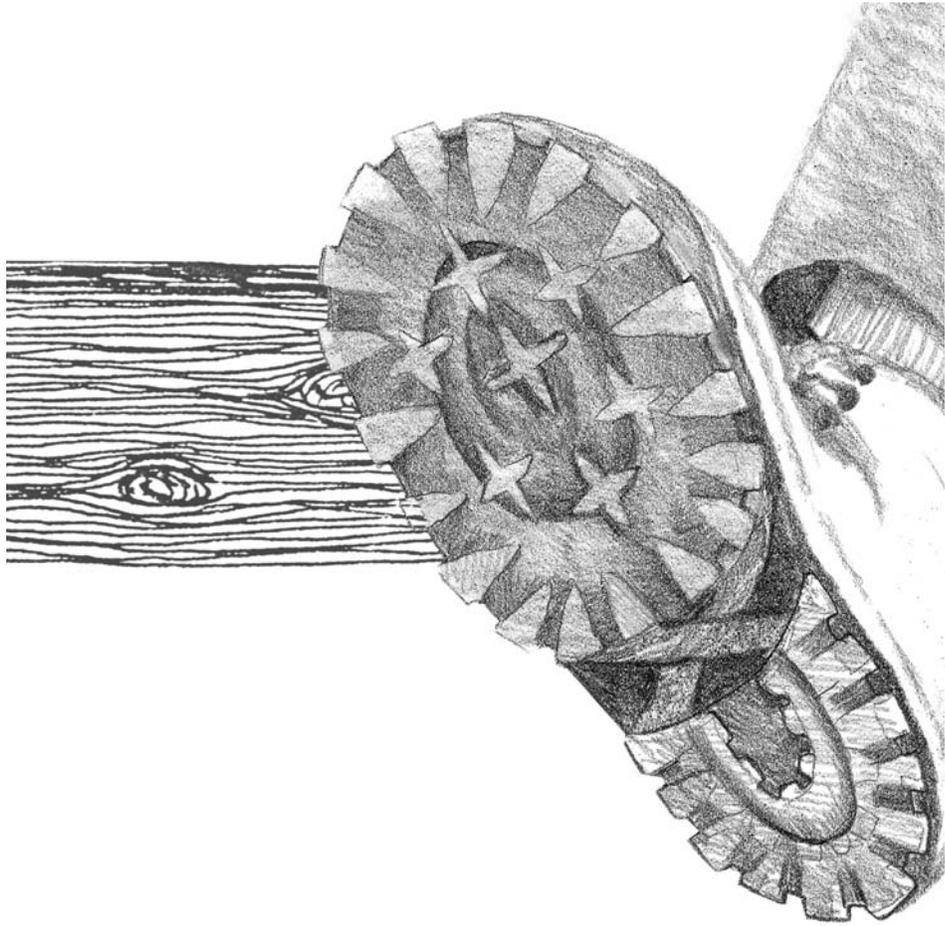
“Sir Harry,” said Diego. “I don’t think you will find tah-rahn-tooo-lahs in these parts, pretty or otherwise.”

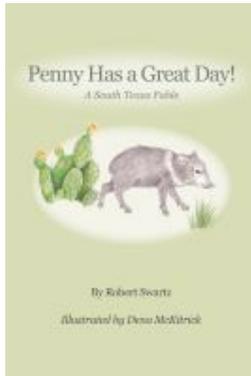
“Can he stay with us, Momma?” Penny asked.

“Penny has a boyfriend. Penny has a boyfriend,” teased Javier.

“No, he absolutely may not,” said Gertie, turning to Harry. “You can sleep outside, but don’t get any ideas about moving in.”

“Absolutely, Mrs. D,” said Harry. “And I thank you kindly for your hospitality.” Harry turned away muttering, “Momma said there’d be days like this.”





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