

THE RESTLESS WATERS (Part Two)

It wasn't long before the vibrant filaments of my mind were incubating new ideas. We had a sawmill on our farm which disgorged a huge pile of sawdust while it was in operation each spring. The mill was set up at the edge of the ravine that had been gouged out by my creek's predecessors. Some glacier, and a river I suppose. The gully was deepest at the mill, and it seemed the ideal spot for our new project. The material was plentiful, and we would be well-hidden from view. The creek's banks would lend themselves well to the building of a dam, I thought.

The next obstacle was one I hadn't counted on. My young brother was reluctant to join me in this one. It took all of my considerable powers of persuasion to convince him that I couldn't do it without him. I had to give him several of my tadpoles before we finally got started, and then I had to be especially good to him throughout the operation.

The sheet of tin that we had used for the first operation had been returned to the granary roof, and, like the gravel, I dared not disturb it. The only way we could think of to move the sawdust was to use one of the horses' blankets. The blankets were almost new, and therefore sturdy. We could lug a good pile each trip.

We made sure to get away from the house early, before the chores were assigned. It felt good to be starting a new project.

Even the most magnificent of projects have disappointments and set-backs along the way. The first few loads floated away almost immediately. As we dug into the pile, the sawdust would sink. It worked some, but barely. The horse blanket was



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showing signs of wear, and a few holes were appearing. Despair was setting in.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and the apple pie and other goodies that we had taken from the kitchen pantry were long gone, and we were getting hungry. The problem was to reintegrate back into the family, who, hopefully, wouldn't have noticed our absence. With such a large family it sometimes worked. This time we were lucky. In the mad rush to the supper table, we sat down unnoticed.

My body was enjoying this repast, and was just beginning to come back into its own, when I heard my father complain to his second in command, that a neighbor downstream, was complaining about sawdust in his drinking water. I froze in my seat, and I think my helper froze in his. Apparently, straining his drinking water didn't bother our neighbor all that much. But he was damned if he was going to strain it for his entire herd. My brother, who had been in the gully a short time before, assured my father that the pile was nowhere near the creek. It was decided that this new nuisance was coming from somewhere up the line.

I couldn't get rid of the feeling that it was a worried look that my good brother cast my way. Was the jib up? I didn't want to think so. The answer, I felt, was to get as much of the wet sawdust into the creek as quickly as we could, and if we got the narrows filled up, then the dam would stay put.

I hadn't yet learned to listen to my creek. Looking back, I must say, she used every ripple in her lore to warn me that my methods just weren't going to work. While some of the sawdust was sinking to the bottom, most of it continued to go off in the wrong direction. We were on our second horse blanket, and it, too, was showing disturbing signs of wear.

We returned to the house just in time for the noon lunch bell. We were tired, and thoroughly broken in spirit. To make matters worse, we walked into the arms of the authorities. After they brushed the sawdust from our hair and clothing, they plied us with questions, after which they requested that we take them to our dam site.

They were a good-humoured group. They were laughing throughout the ordeal. Even my father was laughing until he saw his horse blanket. Then he stopped.

One giant came down on his hunkers, and lowered his voice, supposedly to a tone for his and my ears alone. He imparted some advice that has stayed with me to this day.

It went something like this, "Son, if you ever get the urge to build a dam again with sawdust, make sure that you do it on dry land, and well out of the way of running water." To my great discomfort, everyone around overheard, as was evidenced by the resounding laughter.