

# **Short and Tall Tales**

## **Very, Very Short Tall Tales**

*Collected and adapted for telling by Chuck Larkin*

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# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## My Father's Brother's Family and Ridge Farming

The first time I ever visited Georgia was in Habersham County. Uncle John and Aunt Irene had a ridge farm in the Georgia mountains. You may never have seen a ridge farm or if you did you may not have realized how they farm the ridges. You can't use a tractor. It would roll over on you the first time you tried to turn a row. Folks use mules for the ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting. Not my Uncle John, he was a gentleman farmer. He raised razor-back hogs, a mountain species of the wild piney wood rooters. The mountain variety have long back legs and long ear lobes with holes in the bottom of the ear lobes. The first time I saw one I thought they wore ear bobs in their ear holes. They are ugly. Their heads look like their necks had barfed. One fell into the pond up in front of the farm house. They had that 550-pound hog out of the water in about five minutes. Aunt Irene told me they had to scum ugly off that pond for a year.

My Uncle John raised that species of mountain, razor-back hogs, because of the long back legs. The hogs could root right up the side of a ridge turn around, tuck them long back legs into their ear holes and slide right back down the root path. Then they would turn right around and root their way back up the ridge. When it was time to plant, Uncle John tied little disks on the hogs' tails. Disks look like Frisbees and they break up clods of fresh turned dirt. Uncle John would throw table scraps out over the ridge and at dusk turns the hogs loose. By morning the hogs would have rooted and disked the whole side of the ridge. Uncle John would sit on his rocking chair on his back porch with a bag of seed grain and his sling shot and plant the side of the ridge.

When the harvest was ready all he had to do was hit the side of the ridge with a two-by-four piece of wood, wham bam! All the vegetables would roll down off the ridge to the catch fence. I mean that does make farming a whole lot easier.

Uncle John never had to worry about drought and lack of rain like other farmers did. Across the top of the ridge he would always plant three rows of onions and potatoes

mixed together. He surely was a smart farmer to have worked this out. You see if you mix the onions and potatoes together at the top of the ridge the onions would make the tater eyes weep and keep the whole side of the ridge irrigated.

The only mistake Uncle John ever made was the summer he planted some of those hot, hot, hot Mexican jalapeno peppers along the catch fence. When those fiery, hot peppers got ripe, they put off an incredible amount of seething heat that just rolled up the side of the ridge. Well that summer, so happened to be a summer so hot that I've watched stumps in the pasture tear themselves out of the ground and on their roots crawl underneath the trees to cool off. I have even seen the shade in the middle of the day creep under the trees to cool off. Hot and Dry! We had the Health Department out to spray the fish in the cat fish pond for ticks. The fish would come out of the pond around noon each day and swim around in the dust to keep away from the boiling water. Well to make a long story short let me tell you what happened. I know you may not believe this but I do not have any reason to lie to you. Oh I might tell you something seven or eight different ways but I wouldn't lie. On the hottest day you could imagine coupled with the scorching heat waves coming off those Jalapeno peppers and rolling up the ridge a 465 pound hog got into the middle of the ridge field and flat out melted! That's a fact. Though I admit some might tend to argue but I was there and I seen it for myself. The only thing Uncle John harvested from that ridge field was french fried potatoes, onion rings and the first sweet fried corn ever to be sent to market.

Well they're all retired now. Besides farming Uncle John took up road building part time. Lots of folks from Florida came up into the mountains to build retirement homes at the top of the ridges. There was a need for road building and Uncle John figured out how he could under bid his competition. He made a ton of money. It was the experience of his cousin Rutledge that gave him the idea.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## The Fence Posts

This adventure took place about 1939. I was about eight years old. It was so cold that winter that we had to put stockings on all the bare table legs and two coats of paint on our house. Back then, we always planted and raised a small cash crop of knobby sticks for walking canes. Just before harvest time, out in the field, you have to heat and bend the handles over. But before the knobby canes were ripe, we were caught by an early freeze and the crop was too brittle, so we lost it.

We knew we were in for a hard winter when the grasshoppers' skins began to grow good-looking fur coats. The weather was so cold the chickens went off their feed and got as thin as split splinters. They began laying thin eggs that looked like silver dollars. When they finely stopped laying eggs altogether, dad sold the hens to the hardware store for weather vanes.

It all started one Saturday morning. We decided we wanted to go into Pocomoke to the Marvel movie theater. Pocomoke only had one theater and it only showed one movie show a week at 5.00 PM Saturday.

We had heard in school that in addition to the Buck Rogers serial, there was a controversial place in the Roy Rogers movie. Roy kissed his horse Trigger at the end of the movie! This was exciting. You have to understand the times. In the Roy Rogers cowboy movies Roy never kissed Dale Evans his wife but he was going to kiss Trigger his horse!

We came down stairs at breakfast and asked our Pa if we could go to the movies. He remarked, yes, if you have your extra outdoor chores done.

What extra outdoor chores?

Pa, with a grin, announced, I want you boys to run a barbed wire fence from our East pasture to the Scott farm fence.

But Pa, that is three miles! The ground is frozen solid six feet deep. We can't dig a fence post hole with a fence post digger in that frozen ground!

If you youngsters want money to go to the movies, you're going to have to figure out how to get the job done. And that was that.

After breakfast, we were outside watering and feeding the stock with buckets of hot water (If you used cool water it would freeze before the stock could get a drink). My sister Barbara Anne declared, brothers, I believe I have figured out a way to get the job done. If you take a pick ax and hit that frozen ground, that should make a hole. Put a fence post in the hole, hit the post with a sledge hammer and it will stick for sure. Just nail the barbed wire up and we're done. I think that will be faster than using a fence post digger in good weather.

We hitched Sally our gray mule up to the cart and headed into the woods to cut a mess of small trees and trimmed them into fence posts. Once we started, we moved like greased lightning through a gooseberry bush. Marvin, the oldest, whacked the pick ax into the ground. I held the fence post and Frederick hit the post with the sledgehammer. The post stuck and we nailed the barbed wire up, two strands. Suddenly in the early afternoon we realized we had made a terrible mistake. We had been setting the post shafts too close together and now we were about to run out of fence posts. There was not enough time to go back into the woods and cut enough posts to finish the job and still get to the movies in time. We were broken hearted.

Frederick being a mite feisty hauled off and kicked a tuft of grass sod. He almost broke his toe. The grass sod went flying and we looked down and he had uncovered a hole into the ground. Suddenly, out of the hole came a mess of snakes. Apparently they had been hibernating in the ground and we had stirred them up. They pored out, fat ones, long skinny ones, short ones, all sizes. We jumped back until we seen they were snakes we called Coach Whips, which are not dangerous. The snakes got out about ten yards and started to get sluggish on that cold ground. At fifteen yards, they stiffened up like boards. Brothers, commented Barbara Anne, I think we just found some fence posts. Grab an arm full of the long snakes and load them in the wagon.

We started again. Marvin hit the ground with the pick ax and I stuck the snake into the hole tail first. Frederick wrapped his gloved hand around a snake's head and tapped his other hand on the head a little so they would stick but not break. The first snake we hit with the sledge hammer. That was a mistake. A frozen snake breaks like glass. We tied the barbed wire to them and finished the job. We learned with the second snake you can't hit a nail in either or they shatter like glass. We got home and our Pa was amazed to hear we were done. When Marvin explained how we started the project, he did not mention how we finished the project. He did not lie. I did not lie when I was a kid and I do not lie now. We went into Pocomoke to the Marvel theater and saw that Roy Rogers Movie. When he kissed Trigger, I got goose bumps all down one side and had to walk home all tilted over and lopsided.

We almost got away with it. However, the following Tuesday the sun broke through the clouds, heated up and thawed out the snakes. They crawled off with a half mile of brand new barbed wire. Pa later said that we may have straddled the truth line some, but the next time we taradiddled him, we were going to be in trouble.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

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These are very short traditional stories collected and adapted for telling by Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin. Permission to use, revise and tell the stories from this manuscript is granted to the storytelling public.

# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## Rutledge

Rutledge used to live up near Cherokee North Carolina. His Cherokee mother had married an Irishman who had brought from Ireland generations of family skills as pooten medicine makers. Fact is, Rutledge kept the family business and had a small bottling plant. He produced a beverage folks called "A Corn Holiday." A one ounce sample and you took time off from life to find a blade of grass to hold on to in order to keep from falling off the world.

I remember Uncle John telling us about Mr. Hicks, a Yankee tourist. Mr. Hicks bought a small barrel of Holiday on his way to Sarasota, Florida. When he got down there, he started to sample some Holiday. Well, in making that long trip down to Sarasota, back before we had fast super highways, the medicinal elixir in that burnt oak cask had aged and turned from a holiday to summer vacation. I mean one sip and school was out. We heard that Mr. Hicks rented a store front and charged people to come in and see all the strange creatures crawling all over the walls. Naturally people became upset and claimed Mr. Hicks was using false advertising. The high law was called and during the discussions the Sheriff had a sip. Not only did the Sheriff buy part interest in the store-front zoo but he and Mr. Hicks turned around and sold out to a Mr. Barnum who had that big three ring circus with Mr. Bailey. Mr. Barnum not only bought the rights to the business but also bought a two-year supply of Holiday from Rutledge aged it into Summer Vacation and gave sips to his adult customers who came in to see the varmints exhibited in the side show part of his traveling circus.

However this is not the experience of Uncle John's cousin Rutledge that gave him the road building idea. That all started when Rutledge was in town and bought a mule from a traveling mule trader. A good-looking mule but it was not until Rutledge got him home that he found out how lazy the mule was. Now Rutledge was known as a penny-pincher. He was so tight-fisted he would get up at night, go out side, turn around and come back in and get back into bed. He did all that so he wouldn't have to turn over and

wear out his sheets. Now that is what they meant when they said Rutledge was cheep. With that mule Rutledge would not give up. He did all the usual tricks but could not get that mule to pull his plow. It was when he got to inventing that one might say he hit pay dirt.

Rutledge hitched the mule to the plough's traces backwards. Next he hung a covered up sign, on the plough. Rutledge, facing the mule, got a good grip on the handles, leaned forward and uncovered the sign. What was lucky was when he leaned forward the galluses on his bib overalls accidentally hooked him to the plough. When Rutledge uncovered the sign the mule read WORK. The mule started backing away from that sign so fast Rutledge's feet were straight out behind him in the air. The more he hollered woe, stop the mule went faster up, over and along the tops of the ridges. They were all the way up to the Shenandoah valley in Virginia before he realized that by saying getup the mule slowed enough for him to reach forward and cover the sign. That stopped the mule. Rutledge looked back and saw a furrow that reached back to his farm outside Cherokee, North Carolina.

Slowly he turned the mule and plough around. Next he rigged the plough so he could sit and see over the mule's back. Getting a good tight grip Rutledge uncovered the sign and the mule took off backwards again. Rutledge had suspected correctly that all of his commands had to be backwards for the mule going in reverse to understand. The mule, you know, was backward in the plough's traces. By hollering woe and stop the mule went faster and by gee and haw he could follow along side of the furrow back to his farm (ordinarily for directing a mule, gee is left and haw is right). The next day he got rid of the mule. He also went down to the courthouse and to make a long story short he convinced the U.S. Government to buy his double furrow from his farm up into Virginia. The U.S. Government paved it over and today they call it the Blue Ridge Parkway.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## Rain and Mud

Sometimes today I think people have never seen real rain. I remember once it rained so hard the creek began to rise. By the second day the creek rose so high you could walk under it, look up and down both ways, cast your fishing line up into the water, above your head. Once I just reached up and tickled a fish on the tummy, which puts them asleep you know, so then I just reached up and pull them down out of the water and the whole time I stayed dry. That's a fact. I watched rain water run into an old barrel lying out in the yard with no bottom or top. The rain came down so hard that the water ran in the barrel faster then it could run out. The barrel swelled up and busted, sent kindling chips flying everywhere.

We used to have a small creek in our back pasture that flowed into the Nassawango creek. I watched the rain water come down one day so hard that the rain water pushed the little creek into reverse. I watched the rain water climb back up over the dam. Up above the dam we had a grist mill. You know, one of the ones where a water wheel turns and grinds corn into flour. Now I know you may not believe this, but it's the truth! I watched that rain water put that water wheel in reverse and un-ground a hundred-pound sack of corn meal. I mean it turned that corn meal back into ears of corn that were so green they weren't ready to be harvested yet. That's what I mean when I say people today have never seen heavy rain.

I remember sometimes after a rain storm the mud would be so deep I had tunnel down in order to milk the cow. I am not telling a lie. I did it and it is true.

Have you ever heard people use that old country term in a heavy rain storm? They'll say, it's raining cats and dogs out there! Well, I've seen it. I have walked out of our cabin right into a poodle and gotten puppies all over my feet. And I ain't lying. Cross wire my heart and hope to fry before I'd tell a lie. That is why I'm so hog wild mean that sometimes I get so bad I charge people to live.

March was always a strange time. We were used to the wind always blowing up a mite. We'd do our plowing in March. I'd hitch Sally, our gray mule, to the plow and cut a furrow about ten feet long. Next, I'd move Sally and the plough sideways and let the wind push the furrow across

the field.

One March, some revenuers came out to the farm. They weren't paying any attention as they climbed out of their pick up trucks. A big gust of wind snatched them off the ground tossed them up and laid them out on the side of the barn as flat as one-sided pancakes and as dry as the desert sand. When the wind gave us an intermission, we peeled them off and rolled them up. Later we sold some to Barnum and Bailey to use as circus posters, and we sold the rest to a folk art dealer as examples of early Southern abstract art posters. A few years ago, I visited the Atlanta High Museum art gallery and found the gallery had those weird posters glued to the body of a denuded, striped down pick up truck on cement blocks. It looked just like the truck we'd sold to that same art dealer, 'long with those flattened up revenuers. We made enough money to take a trip to Florida. That's a fact.

I recall one March in 1937. I was trying to carry a bucket of water to the barn. The wind blew the bucket out of my hand so fast the water hung in the air. That is a fair to middling, stiff wind. If you wore a hat outside it would take three people to hold it on your head, and I'm talking about a ski mask type of hat. I'm not telling any lies.

Oh, I do not think I'll ever forget the time I was watching a poor chicken out in the barn yard with her back to those fierce March winds. It was the Ides of March. That poor chicken was gripping the ground with her claws trying not to slide across the barn yard. That poor pitiful chicken, with her back to that fierce wind laid the same egg five times. Now that is a heavy wind. My parents told me that in 1933 the wind kicked up so hard the days of the week got all mixed up. Sundays blew right in on Wednesday afternoon. It took about six weeks to get it all straightened out. But to this day people in small towns close their businesses and, along with the Doctors and Dentists, take off on Wednesday afternoons. And bunches of people go to churches on Wednesday night. That is the truth and that is just how it all got started.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

# Short and Tall Tales

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## The Georgia Peach

Rock Eagle, Georgia once was the setting for one of the best Folk Festivals in the south eastern region. Rock Eagle is located about 70 miles East of Atlanta. The second year I was there as a Bluegrass Storyteller, I think about 1987, there arrived a farmer from over near Eatonton by the name of Orville Outon. I remember this incident because he had to use sixteen mules and thirty-two logs to roll one Georgia Peach into the festival fairgrounds. It sure was one humongerest peach.

Orville stuck a faucet plug into one side and drew off about 1,530 gallons of peach juice. I received two of the one gallon plastic jugs of that peach juice in the first draw. I stored the jugs under the stage where the bluegrass bands were playing and where I was the M.C. when I was not on the storyteller's stage.

Violet Outon, Orville's daughter, went around on the backside of the peach and started cutting out plugs and fixing little sticks on the plugs. I was told that she sold about 1,332 peach-sickles over the three-day festival.

Marvin Outon, Orville's son, scraped the long peach fuzz hairs off the peach (they were about nine feet long). The weavers made some of the prettiest patchwork quilts I've ever seen. Of course they had to tie dye the spun peach fuzz first. One weaver did hers in the bow tie pattern that has been hung in the big folk art museum in Atlanta. They also made multi-color quilt jackets and throw rugs. I heard later they paid state taxes on the sale of 306 of the patchwork quilts. I never did get the count on the other items the weavers made.

After Marvin got the peach fuzz off, he began to peel off that thick peach skin. The leather workers queued up for strips and began to make belts and belt buckles. I did buy a peach skin belt buckle, with my name on it. I have been wearing the belt buckle now for several years and it still does not show any signs of wearing out. The funniest thing to happen was to a bunch of Yankee iron cross motorcyclist. They came through the festival and they bought new sets of ridding leathers made from that peach skin. I thought it was kind of wimpy to ride a motorcycle wrapped in peach-skin leathers.

Orville had some folks began to peel off slabs of the peach. The skinless, thick, lush, peach strips were pur-

chased by a peach preserve canning plant over near Eatonton. It's been several years now and I have been told by reliable sources that they were still canning until 1993 and selling preserves from that massive, towering peach. I tried to contact Orville but he and Geneva are still on a world cruise from the peach profits.

Finely in the second day the peach pit was uncovered and Irene Outon (Orville's other daughter) placed a long fire truck's extension ladder up to the top. You should have seen the northern tourist paying cash money to climb up in order to look out over the country side. I was told that from the top you could see both of the Native American assembled giant birds that the name Rock Eagle comes from. The two birds are about 120 feet from the head to the tip of the tail feathers and about the same length from wing tip to wing tip. The bird formations are about 8 miles apart facing each other and built about four feet deep from rocks not native to that area of Georgia. Which Native American culture it was has not been determined but from my look see I believe they were making a couple Turkey Buzzards. I had only a quick look because a bunch of hang gliders started jumping off and I did not want to join them. I was getting somewhat spooked by the height.

On the third day of the festival the peach pit was stripped and uncovered. And in that hot, dry summer sun that peach pit suddenly cracked and split itself into long slivers. Someone discovered that the peach pit slivers had high flotation qualities. In no time at all they had placed lantern sail rigs and dagger boards on those peach splinters. One of the big events now in Georgia is the annual Peach-pit sailing regatta held on Memorial day at Rock Eagle Lake (I call it Turkey Buzzard Lake).

I do not know if you are aware of the alcohol content of spoiled peach. Some peach pieces were in the sun before being eaten and after being in the sun for a couple of days, well-let me just say a whole lot of folks went home feeling good. What I found to be unusual was the preservative quality of peach juice! Even today I still have about 1/2 gallon left of that peach juice I had stored under the stage. Whenever I pour out a small glass of that particular peach juice I can take a sip and still sit back and listen to some of the finest bluegrass music ever preserved.

AND THAT IS A TRUE STORY

# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## Will, The Tornado

As I was saying, we had just got back from Uncle John's when the tornado bumped Silvester's barn and then came over to our place. Will that is what we later named him got confused when he dipped down into the well. He actually pulled the well right out of the ground and turned it upside down and got himself caught underneath. At first my dad was upset, until he realized that an upside down stone well would make a fine corn silo. I removed some stones until I had a hole big enough to talk through. Tornadoes can talk if you can get them to slow the spinning noise enough to make out what they're saying. I finally opened enough for a door that Will could wiggle out of. The reason he was so friendly is that he was so embarrassed that he had gotten himself caught. After I promised not to tell anybody, we became good friends.

Once when my Grandmother Addie was having the family over to dinner, Will said he would help with dinner. Will swept along the bottom of the creek and caught a dozen good eating-sized catfish. He dragged the catfish along a barbed wire fence until they were cleaned and flayed. Then he carried the pieces over into the pasture and rubbed the catfish on a large salt block. Next, he carried the pieces up into a nearby storm front and held the catfish filets near a lightning bolt until they were nice and brown. The last thing he did was to put the fried catfish on a blue serving platter and put it on the picnic table. I remember my Grandmother saying: "Will, where did you get the blue serving platter?" Will said he borrowed it in town when he saw it wasn't being used. Grandmother flat out told Will that was stealing, and that he needed to be punished. I learned one thing that day. It's not easy to punish a tornado. You can't spank them. If you tell Will to stand in the corner, he'd just

start digging another hole. Well, Grandmother gave up and for punishment gave Will the ingredients for home made ice cream. Will took the churn up into the sky into a storm over in the next county and loaded the churn with ice cold hale stones. He spun the churn and added some wild blackberries he drew out of a blackberry patch. He even extracted and strained a pound of wildwood honey from a wild honey bee hive out in the woods. That Sunday we ate some of the best homemade ice cream I have ever tasted.

In the late '30s, farmers were starting to buy automobiles. Now, my dad did not want to spend the money during the depression. So what he did was to build a two car garage, so all the farm neighbors thought that we not only had a car, but we were so rich we had two cars!

One morning, Will called us out of the house to the garage and there was a brand new 1936 Buick automobile with Arkansas license plates. That car was from a thousand miles away from our farm. Grandma said that's what comes from not being able to punish him before. My dad agreed and spent the next ten years driving that car looking for the owner.

Corn shucking time of the year was best. Will would suck the corn cobs through a knot hole in the corn crib wall and let the kernels of corn fall into a catch barrel. We never had to worry about drought either, because when we needed water, Will could pull all we needed and spray it over the crops.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

# Short and Tall Tales

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## The Trained Squirrels

I remember once when we were up visiting Grandma Dorothy. I was quite young myself but I do remember she had five preschool red-haired kids. I think that included one set of twins. Grandma Dorothy and Bill were out in the field planting tomatoes and had the red-headed youngsters under some oak trees in the shade. I never will forget watching the woodpeckers baby sitting all morning and feeding those kids. Grandma Dorothy was mountain raised. I remember once she described the area she grew up in as so primitive their country church had their own SWAT team.

Training squirrels to harvest came about later when the family was living in Fitzgerald, Georgia. They have lots of pecan trees in that area of Georgia. What Grandma Dorothy did was to train a pair of tame squirrels to harvest pecans. She told us at first the squirrels would climb out on a branch and bounce up and down until they had shaken all of the pecans off the branch and onto a sheet spread on the ground. What was unexpected took place later as the squirrels had babies and trained the next generation to shake the branches the same way. The family now uses the homestead for a Bed and Breakfast business but there are several pecan trees on their place and several generations of squirrels. The squirrels are whistle trained and they all

ride out on the large pickup trucks with a special designed body to catch the pecans. The squirrels, on command, go up into the tree and when the driver is ready they begin shaking the tree branches by all jumping together to the rhythm chatter, kind of like the old work chanteys, lead by one of the older chief squirrels. The pecans fall into the canvas catchers and pour into the pickup trucks.

Someone always asks about what they feed the squirrels. Shelled pecans were the basic diet. One of the Veterinarians in Fitzgerald became a squirrel specialist. She provided any necessary extra supplemental diet and also medical care under a rural/farm based health maintenance organization. The family also has built squirrel houses high up on poles between two huge white oak trees under a roof. The squirrel houses are connected to the main house by a large bore Plexiglas pipe like a connecting tunnel. Inside the house one room is set up for the squirrels as a play and exercise room. The room contained all kinds of equipment that allowed the squirrels the ability to stay dry and play or workout during inclement weather. A second smaller connecting room has special nests and serves as a medical clinic and hospital. After all healthy workers are productive workers.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

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## Dynamite

We did not know the wind was unusual. I had a pet tornado when I was eight years old. Will was his name. We had just got back from my uncle's house. The day before Uncle John had been out in the new east field using dynamite to blow up tree stumps. One of his razor back hogs had eaten a stick of dynamite. That night the hog sneaked into the barn to steal some of the mule's corn and got kicked by the mule. The explosion woke us all up. We ran over to see what had happened. The damage was bad. The explosion

knocked the mule into the top of the oak tree. I never have seen anything funnier than watching all of the neighbors getting the mule down out of the tree the next day. Mule recovered fine, but never kicked anything after that. The barn was wrecked and the windows on the barn side of the house were gone. The hog was really sick for about a week. He never tried to steal corn after that neither.

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# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## Road Building

It was this experience that Rutledge had from earning money using the unusual ability of his farm stock that got my uncle John to thinking. He was able to underbid all the other road builders in the mountains by using the unusual ability of his mountain species of razor back hogs.

After Uncle John got a road building contract for one of the ridges he would take a four foot long pointed stick and a small, hard rubber headed mallet. Then he drove a series of holes about a foot or so deep sygoglin up the side of the ridge where the road was going to go. Each hole he filled

with shucked corn, about one inch deep. Last, he would haul his hogs to the beginning of the trail and turn them loose without any supper. The hungry hogs would smell the corn and root down and then sideways to the next hole filled with some corn until they had rooted a road right up the ridge, switchbacks and all. All Uncle John had to do was grade the road and throw down some gravel. He got so rich he was able to park a Leer Jet on cement blocks in his front yard.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

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## Nassawango Creek Rip Tail Roarer

I'm half horse and half alligator. I have a mouth chock full of bear's teeth, a jaw like a Mississippi snapping turtle and part of the devil's tail for a tongue. I am mean. I do not shave in the morning, I just hammer in the bristles and bite them off on the inside. I have never seen a man or woman yet that, if you will pin back their ears and grease their heads, I can't swallow whole. Mean, my daddy could whip any man east or west of the Mississippi River, and when I was six years old, in the second grade, I could whip my daddy. I can out run a fox, out grin a panther, swim like an otter, out wrestle a bear and tote a steamboat on my back. I can scream like a banshee, out stare a flash of lightning, or even slide down a lightning bolt with a wild cat under both arms and not get scratched. I can chew nails and spit bullets. I can move so fast, I can shoe a horse on the run and at the same time lather and shave a rabbit on the run. I can even swing a stick over my head in a rainstorm so fast that not one drop of rain water can touch the ground or get me wet. I can walk like an ox and not bend a blade of grass. So look out. I am wicked mean.

I eat rattlesnakes for my breakfast. For lunch I like an old possum. In case you do not know, a possum is a little flat furry creature that lives out in the middle of the highways. Their relatives go to lots of funerals. I'd hate to be a midwife for opossums, 'cause it sure must be dangerous. However if you are ever lost in the woods, look around and find a opossum and they will lead you straight to the nearest road. I like to spot a opossum that has been roasting out on the side of the road in the hot summer sun for four or five days until they swell up and get that sweet odor. Then I leans over and (slurrrrrp) sucks on their nose until the eye balls collapse. That's why I am just ugly mean.

I understand that most people like to take a flat opossum, fold in half and fill him up with shredded cheese, tomatoes, sour cream and lettuce and call him a opossum taco. Myself, I do not care for possums that way. That's a fact. Even though I am fierce mean.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

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These are very short traditional stories collected and adapted for telling by Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin. Permission to use, revise and tell the stories from this manuscript is granted to the storytelling public.

# Short and Tall Tales

Traditional Stories from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

## Donald and The Wild Tornado

My nephew Donald used to tell the story about Will, and no one would believe him. So he promised to try to catch another wild tornado. Well, he had his chance. He was staying at the Holiday Inn over in Columbia, South Carolina a few years ago when a tornado hit town. Donald ran into the motel kitchen, peeled off his clothes down to his under-britches, grabbed a hand full of lard grease and smeared that stuff all over his body. He ran out into the street and hollered at that tornado: "Here, here I am, come get me!" Well, that tornado jumped on him and tried to pick him up. The tornado got tall and thin spinning and got short and thick spinning, but with that coating of lard grease the tornado couldn't pick Donald up. Finally, Donald leaned back and went, Na na na naaaa. Do not ever do that! Do not ever tease a wild tornado! That tornado got itself into a rage, went over to the Congaree River, picked up a load of sand, brought it back and rubbed that sand all over Donald. In no time hardly at all, the tornado had Donald clean as a

whistle. Not a speck of lard grease on him. Now, that tornado picked Donald up and carried him cross country, now and then dipping low over the tops of trees so he would get smacked on the seat of his underpants, which he was still wearing at the time.

Finally, the tornado sat my nephew Donald down in Nashville, in Tennessee, in the middle of a large group of Southern Baptists having a picnic. That is about 400 miles as the crow flies from Columbia, South Carolina. Since Donald was mostly naked he had to explain to the police that a tornado had hauled him from South Carolina. His wallet, all his money, clothes and identification were back in the Holiday Inn motel. You can guess what happened. Donald was charged with indecent exposure, vagrancy, public intoxication and I do not know what else. It just doesn't pay to tease a wild tornado.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

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## The Lightning Bolts

Thinking about Will reminds me of Little Jim and Charles. That all started with two large stacks of rubber tractor tires we had in the back of the barnyard. Little Jim and Charles arrived in a bad storm. We heard all this commotion after the storm, so we looked and each stack of rubber tires had caught a lightning bolt. My dad fixed up a rubber lasso of inner tube strips and lassoed each one and hung them from the oak tree limb until he was able to build a glass box to hold them. We named them Little Jim and Charles. A captive lightning bolt is a big help on a farm. With Little Jim, we could recharge our rundown batteries and start fires in the fireplace with wet wood. It was a lot faster to boil water for laundry and to take hot baths.

We even used Little Jim when we went rabbit hunting. Little Jim would chase rabbits out of their holes and right into our sacks, slightly singed.

My dad made himself a glass chisel and started to chip Charles into smaller pieces. Had quite a good business selling lightning flakes for cigarette and pipe lighters. Also sold some for eternal flames attached to graveyard grave-stones. It was sad though. We just did not know. When Charles had been whittled into fragments and sold, Little Jim just pined away and went out. We just never realized they were sentient beings with feelings.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY