

The Early Years of 'Squirt'
Malone

Richard W. Kelly

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THANK YOU

To all the men and women over the decades that gave up
relationships, families, health, and sanity for the perfect
entertainment art of professional wrestling

Before it All Began

I wish that I could recall what my early childhood was like. Maybe if I had written my memoirs when I was thirty I could have remembered, but this old brain does not recall anymore. I was born at the turn of the century, in fact, I was considered a new year's baby. Born January the first in eighteen hundred ninety-eight, the year of our lord. My father owned a ranch in Denton County, Texas. I was one of eight children. I had four brothers and three sisters. I landed somewhere in the middle.

I spent a lot of time in my youth raising cattle because that is what our family did. We raised cattle and sold them off to butchers, rodeos, farms, boot makers... I learned a lot in those days, but little of it stuck with me. I guess my connection to animals remained and if I had not worked with

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cows all those years, I probably would not have been able to steal a horse at twelve and start my life. But that is getting ahead.

I did not go to school much. I went on occasion and so did my brothers. I think our father thought that one of us might make something of ourselves, but he needed too many hands on the ranch to let us all go. We sort of traded off. I probably spent a couple months a year going to class. I learned how to read, how to do my arithmetic, and some basics civics. My sisters tended the calves and helped mama with the house. They did not have a chance in this world, but back then, they just dreamed of marrying well.

I also worked for Denton Record Chronicle in the winter months when the cattle prices were down. Less demand, you know. The winter did not have butchers and farmers competing with the rodeos and cattle drivers for available cattle. If I was not learning or tending to the herd, I was either in the town square trying to sell papers or hanging around the telegraph office waiting to hear about the wrestling matches.

I had an obsession with wrestling. There was something about the clash of two powerhouses putting one another into impossible positions and using both their physical dominance and their intelligence to out maneuver their opponent.

In 1907, a carnival came to town. It was the first time we had a carnival stop in Denton. We were one of the bigger counties in the state, but the town of Denton had maybe four

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thousand folks that were close enough to actually go to the carnival. More showed up than you would have thought, more showed up than the carnival folks had thought.

They did not stop because they thought it was a good place to make some money, but because there was damage to the old Kansas-Missouri-Texas rail line. It was a couple days before the line would be fixed and the carnies just figured they had set up the tent and make some money.

It is one of my first memories. I was just nine years old and I remember the whole family making the hike to the fairgrounds. It was one of the only times I remember the whole family going somewhere together. It was not the same back then, you did not just up and leave very often. There were things to be done and animals to be tended to. So, that carnival was a special treat that children today would not understand.

I can still feel the dust in the hot summer wind making me squint my eyes as I watched the big red tent come into view as we trudged across the university campus to reach the fairgrounds. It was a couple hours walk that would have been twenty minutes on horse, but we did not have five horses to take us all. I could not believe the size of the tent, I could see it from a mile away. The excitement built within my belly and I got more and more giddy until we reached the edge of the grounds where they had a humongous sign that we walked under that read 'Johnny J. Jones Exposition - The greatest feats of man under one tent, one midway, and one spectacle for the entire family'.

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It was kind of like Christmas to me. I spent so much of my time working and learning when you got a chance to just have fun, it was special. Outside of Christmas where we got a new toy and a morning where pops did all the work this is the only memory I have of a moment in that family where we were all having a grand time.

I remember pops handing me four quarters. I had never held so much money. He assigned one of my sisters to stick with me. I can still hear his gravelly voice, "That money best last you both all day. I came here to see the show in the big top and play some midway games. The Wild West show is in the big tent around sundown and is a dime an entry. If you waste your money you will have to sit outside the tent and wait for us."

When those words disappeared into the scuttle of people and ring of the calliope, he dropped those coins into my hands and rubbed his heavy calloused hand across my forehead tousling my hair in the process. I drug my older sister, Mazy, with me as I took off down the dirt path between the shoddily made booths and small tents.

We went overboard. The amount of food we ate, the games we played, and the sideshows we saw. It was a glorious day for my childhood. Mazy and I shared a humongous turkey leg. I swear the thing was bigger than my head. But, I think most things back then seemed large.

But, nothing was as large as Farmer Slate. When I was questioning whether or not to spend a nickel trying to get into the hootchie dance show, I noticed a circle of people

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rooting someone on just past the tent. I walked over trying to see over the spectators when a man suddenly stood up. He towered over the crowd of people watching. He was tall and muscular which he had on display only wearing a pair of tight pants and boots. His hair was a mess and matched his thick and unruly mustache. He laughed in a deep powering rumble claiming that he pinned his opponent in less than ten seconds.

As I reached the edge of the circle of spectators, I could see another man, much younger, much smaller crawling away from the scene.

“Any other takers? Spend one minute with me Andrew the Farmer Slate without getting pinned and win fifty green backs.” The man said as he slowly turned in a circle with arms spread wide.

Eventually, I would come to learn that the Farmer was at the end of his career. And even though I had heard tales of his matches with Tom Stat, Billy Mulders, and Geoffrey Dubois, he was well past his prime. Just a few months prior to my meeting him, he had lost back-to-back matches to Fred Gottlieb and never rebounded.

But, at the time, I did not understand what an out of shape wrestler looked like. In my head, the man in that dirt circle beating up kids twenty years younger than him was a living God.

I stepped forward looking at the giant.

“Costs a dollar kid.” Mr. Slate looked down at me expecting me to take him on. I just shook my head and tried to mumble my awe and inspiration to him. He patted me on

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the head and pushed me out of the way to see if he had any other takers past me.

I watched for hours as he manhandled teens and young twenty-somethings taking each boy's dollar as he made him groan and scream in agony. After all the bravery had left the men and boys at the fair and the Farmer knew he wasn't making any more money for the day he knelt down next to me and handed me a small piece of paper with an address on it.

"Squirt, I see the look in your eyes." He did not know it, but he just gave me a name. "That's the same way I looked at wrestlers when I was young. That address there is mine. I have a workout program that will help you get to where you need to be in the next ten years to try and do what I do. Send me twenty-five dollars and your address and I will send you the program."

The rest of that day is a blur to me. I think it was a blur when it happened also. My mind was so awestruck by a real life grappler that I did not know how to handle it. My sister ate ice cream and saw the gorilla show while I just waited patiently for her.

Even at the end of the night when everyone met back at the big red tent, I claimed I spent all my money and waited for the family. I already had it in my head that I was going to send off for that correspondence package.

I missed out on the Wild West show. From what I heard about it on the walk home and the research I have done in the rest of my life, I believe it to have been a knock off

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Wild Bill's show. But sitting on the dirt listening to what was happening on the other side of the tent, I could not have been more at peace.

I might have been the only non-carny out there. But, I watched the sunset while the carnival folks packed things up, shared some spirits, and collected their day's pay.

The walk home took twice as long, partially due to the lack of sunlight, partially due to our feet hurting. It did not matter to me, I was trying to devise a plan where I could make twenty-five dollars and start my journey to becoming a professional wrestler.

Planning for My Future

You had better believe that my mind was perfectly focused on making that twenty-five dollars. I put in extra work where I could. I also was not the most ethical of children, I pocketed extra change when selling papers, I took money that my parents had laying out and lost track of. But it took a long time. Twenty-five dollars was a lot of money in 1907.

I think it was after six months I started to think that it would never happen. Around this time, I confided in a friend at school. He was a very small kid for his age. He

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must have been a few years older than I was, but looked to be younger. He was full of hair, dark hair that invaded everything. His name was Trefor Baker. His family were bakers. They emigrated from Italy twenty years before and dropped their real last name because they did not want it known they were Italian. It was not a good time in the states for Italians. They had originally landed in New Orleans, but were ran out of town when the chief of police was shot to death by a supposed Sicilian. They fled to Texas.

Denton seemed like a good place for them to settle because of the huge alliance mill that towered over the town. Any place with that much focus on wheat would have space for bakers.

One day at the schoolhouse Trefor and I were chosen to go get the water for the class. Back in those days, we did not have running water in the schoolhouse. Instead, we would make a trek a half mile to an old well. We would pump out a couple buckets of water and bring it back for the class.

During the walk there and back, I quizzed him on the carnival from the previous summer. I asked if he went, what he saw, and how much fun he had. It was so much fun reminiscing over that weekend. But, he had not seen Andrew 'the Farmer' Slate. I told him about the man and his physique. I reveled in the fact that I was telling the tale of this amazing man who was physically dominating every man and boy at the fair. Trefor was infatuated with the story. So much that we stopped halfway back to get it out of our system before we got back to class.

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The importance of the conversation was him agreeing to go in with me on the correspondence course. It had been six months and I had collected three dollars, mostly in pennies. Trefor would scrimp and save with me and although it would take nearly a year from the time that I met the Farmer, we would be able to afford the training that I so desperately wanted.

I still remember the mailman seeing me in the barn on his way to our house and stopping to give me my first piece of mail. As adults, we forget the magic of someone recognizing us. But, when I was ten years old and the mailman handed me a package with my name written on it, I wanted to jump out of my skin in excitement.

When you spend that much time and effort to acquire something you use it. We were desperate to become grapplers. Every time I saw a newspaper article about wrestling, I imagined it was me living the big life, fame and fortune within my reach. Trefor and I would talk about it at school and twice a week we would sneak out and work through the program.

We were too far out from the city to have electric lights back then and because of that, we still ran our lives off the sun. I would wait an hour or so after the sky went dark and then I would crawl out the window and head to the barn. It was over a little hill from the house and using a gas lantern was not visible from the house.

Trefor would show up whenever he could and we would go through the illustrations and explanations. We

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would take turns applying holds to each other, escaping holds, and learning combinations of moves that flowed with one another. I thought back then that I was learning a sport, but since I was working with a friend and we were attempting to perform these moves without injuring each other I was really learning more about the professional wrestling world than I realized.

This lasted for a couple of years. The course was very extensive. As time went on it dominated more and more of our days. I used my daily chores with the cattle as a way to get in some weight training. We would find ourselves at the square reading articles together about the latest wrestling bouts and who the champions were. And two nights every week, we would grapple throughout the night in my family's barn.

Even in school, we were usually reading or writing about wrestling instead of the subjects our teacher would suggest. I had become infatuated with the 1908 match between Gavrie Stepanchikov, the Russian lion who had been deemed the first world's champion, and Fred Gottlieb the sneaky German who mastered the toehold. Stepanchikov had been World Champion for three years after defeating the American champion.

The two met at Dexter Park in Chicago. Gottlieb pushed the limits of the rules and wrestled a rough bout, with some closed fists and questionable holds. Even though Stepanchikov had complained about Gottlieb being covered in oil, the first fall went just over two hours. When the men

returned from the dressing rooms for the second fall Stepanchikov forfeited the match relinquishing the title to Gottlieb. I would be there for the rematch in 1911, but the wrestling world would have already changed my life by then.

I think it was mid 1910 when Trefor and I had finished the course in grappling. We had big plans to run away and join a wrestling troupe. I think we would have if his family had stayed stable. A year earlier a bakery from Gainesville had expanded and moved into Denton. It would only take 6 months until Trefor's family bakery would go under. They sold the shop and took jobs in the alliance mill.

Trefor told me that he had let it slip that he wanted to be a grappler and his father was enraged that he would abandon the family. The next day he donned a black eye and lots of bruising which his father claimed proved he would not make it in wrestling.

I do not know that I ever believed the story. I still think to this day that he got in a scuffle with a family member, but used the story to break ties with me. Looking back the best thing I could have done for that boy was to encourage him to go help his family, they meant a lot to him. Me on the other hand, I had no emotional connections to my family. They were my coworkers at best and wardens at worst. The best thing Trefor could have done for me was to push me away to find his own path, and he did that. I am forever grateful to him.

But, his story also gave me the excuse to make my move. I could not risk the chance that Trefor's father would

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come and let my family know of my plans. I could not have my dreams ripped from me.

I remember that day seeing Trefor with all the bruising and swollen face. It bothered me. I was twelve years old and could only see the pain and misery. I could not see the love he had for his family, I could not feel the pressure for him to provide for those closest to him. All I could see was my friend giving up on me.

I spent that day on the square pretending to sell papers while I read through the Denton Record Chronicle and the Pilot Point Post-Signal trying to find some way out of town. From what I could tell there were no wrestling troupes anywhere near Texas in the heat of the summer. I would have to find a way to get to California or the northeast. My best bet was a carnival that was coming through Dallas in just over a week. I figured I could attach my hopes to their carnival and maybe they could lead me out of Texas to find my dream.

It was an awful night. I spent most of the day dreading what I would do and when my parents finally went to bed I snuck out and headed to the barn. I sat there for hours before I got the gall to take one of the horses and head southeast. I think it was my childhood saying goodbye to what I knew of as life. Everything I had learned to love at that point had taken place around that barn. Even today, where I do not feel any real connection to my family, I think down inside, my soul wanted to mourn the end of that life. It wanted a few moments to recognize that my life was

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starting anew and I would not have the luxury of being a child anymore.

It was a dark night that I do not remember much of. I tried at first to ride by the lantern light mostly because if that horse had broken its leg, I would have had no other choice but to return home. But, once I got to the train tracks of the Texas-Kansas-Missouri rail, I realized it was easier to just let the horse use the moonlight. I was only five or six miles out when we got to a bridge that we could sleep under for the night. The bridge is still there today, but it crosses Lewisville Lake now. If that lake had been there, I do not know what I would have done. I might have turned back if I did not find somewhere to sleep for the night.

My Foot in the Door

It took me three days to go the forty miles to Dallas. I should've arrived in a day, but being a child and my first time traveling I was worried about everything. I was afraid of tiring out the horse, scared of getting lost, and paranoid my parents may come after me. If nothing else, it was the best preparation for what would become a life on the road.

I stopped after the first day in Lewisville. It was a small town. It might have had a few hundred residents at the time. My plan was to spend the night out in a pasture sleeping under the stars. It is kind of funny to think of it now, but the idea of sleeping alone, in the open at night was a core part of life back then. I understood the basics of fire, shelter, water, and food. It was something that everyone had to know back then.

But, that first night I did not end up sleeping outside. Instead, I met an elderly couple that took a liking to me. Her name was Nancy and her husband Neil were taking a stroll through town that afternoon. It is hard to not stick out in a small town. You are either someone everyone knows or you are not.

They had seen me stopping at a public water trough for my horse and called me over to them. Being the first people I spoke to since running away from my home, I was nervous. I remember making sure my horse was tied to the post and I walked over to the older couple with my riding hat held down in front of me. I was spinning it in circles keeping my hands doing something.

They were both very grey and had a bit of a stoop in their back. Their advanced age had taken their posture from them. Neil spoke slowly and with some deep vibrato in his voice, "What brings you to Lewisville, boy?" I continued to approach as Nancy lightly backhanded her husband, "Don't be rude!" She had a softer, smoother voice that didn't seemed as aged as her body.

I was very afraid my parents would be looking for me, a fear that was truly unfounded, so I tried to keep my story far enough away from the truth to not tip anyone off that may be looking for me.

"I'm coming from Pilot Point. Making my way down to Dallas. For work, for a living." I tried to sound like an adult as if I could fool them.

Nancy butted in, "What's your name young man?"

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I grasped for something other than my real name. Anything but John Malone. The only thing that came to mind was Andrew "the farmer" slate calling me Squirt. "I go by Squirt, ma'am."

Neil retorted, "Mighty young man to be making that kind of journey alone." He smiled to show that he wasn't trying to be difficult.

"Sir, my father fell ill months ago. My mother left to remarry. I may be twelve, but I am out to make something of myself." I hoped the story would suffice. It wasn't outlandish or even uncommon. Children trying to fend for themselves before their teens was probably one in a hundred.

Nancy smiled and placed her head on her husband's shoulder. She squeezed his hand tightly speaking to him through their years of connection.

"Grab your travel companion," Neil motioned to my horse, "and come with us. We always make too much food and would be honored to hear your tale of adventure from Pilot Point."

Over the years I have learned how to tell when someone is genuine and when someone wants something from you. I was probably lucky to have run into that couple when I was still at such an impressionable age. But, it was nice to be wanted.

I don't recall much of the conversation that night. I remember the incredibly dense cornbread they fed me. Like the child I was, I ate more than my share, but Nancy and Neil didn't mind. They had taken a liking to me because I

reminded them of their own children. Of course their children were adults at this point. Adults who probably didn't give their parents enough attention anymore. Adults who were obsessed with their own problems.

Not that Neil and Nancy were bitter. They understood growing up. They knew they still had each other. And for one night I was there to remind them of their best times.

That night was amazing. Lewisville had electric lines run and there were street lights that illuminated the park with its little gazebo. Couples in love walked in the night under the halo lights of the street lamps. It was the most serene thing I would ever see. It felt like the world showing me I was making the right decision.

The second night I should have made the rest of the way to Dallas, but called it a day around Farmer's Branch. It was a small settlement that didn't consist of much more than a train station. I saw a general store and a few farms, but it was essentially just a blip on the rails of Texas. There weren't any troughs. I had to rely on the streams that ran off the nearby Trinity River.

It was the night that I expected. I caught a rabbit for dinner, made a fire, and slept under the stars.

The third day I rolled into Dallas. As I came into Dallas on Elm street I was surrounded by a bustling city. There were people up and down the porticos. Horses and buggies tied up at every store front. The sight was amazing, but the smell was pungent. Even with a city employee

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walking through the street picking up manure, there was still an overpowering stench that seemed to invade your entire body.

I had trouble dwelling on that when I had business to conduct. Not used to the city I realized that I was not likely to find a rancher about downtown looking to buy livestock. This was much more like the square in Denton where there were specific businesses that could house their inventory locally. The difference was in Denton two hundred yards off the square was a farm. Here it would be a full day's walk to get from a farm to downtown.

I rode in cautiously expecting to be questioned at every turn, but the city was too large and too self-absorbed to care about a random kid that came unaccompanied. I knew from the family business that a three-year-old steer was worth seventy-five dollars. I knew that a saddle horse would be worth much more. Plus, the saddle and dressings, I didn't need.

I surveyed the area as my horse slowly trotted down the beaten dirt road. Insurance companies, banks, cotton distributors. It was a city that was so far advanced from what I was used to. I eventually saw the Sam Freshman liquor and saloon. It was the only logical place I could stop.

I tied the horse to the hitch out front and headed into the saloon. It was dark and loud for an early afternoon. They had obviously closed off many of their windows thinking their new electric lights would illuminate the place, but those early lights were so dim.

The place featured a round bar in the center of the room with a handful of tables sprawled out around the outside of the room. On one side was a door that led out to Lamar street, on the other was a door that led to a handful of rooms the saloon rented out to out of towners. It was a practice that would die out in a couple years when the Adolphus hotel would put all the saloons out of the hotelier business. The place didn't feature a piano or a bunch of cowboys gambling like they show in the movies. Instead it was a bunch of men drunk in the middle of the day making a ruckus in a room with a tiled ceiling that echoed the noise to unbearable levels. Dallas had come too far and evolved too much to be the old west that everyone likes to think it was. Half the men in the room were bankers that never learned the basics of life like catching a dinner.

I walked up to the bar, but gravitated towards the saloon girl as opposed to the bartender. It was probably my youthful-self trusting a motherly figure as opposed to a male, but it is something that I never really outgrew.

I approached the woman who was full figured in a corset that had given up at its job of holding the woman in many moon ago. She had long red hair and was obviously trying to cover up a few decades of aging under a few pounds of makeup. As I approached her she shook her head disapprovingly.

"Ma'am." I said as I tipped my hat in her direction.

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She let the corners of her mouth dip down. Her voice was deep, but she tried to raise it to be more feminine. "Please don't tell me you are looking for a good time."

"No ma'am. I was hoping to talk to someone about a room." I replied trying my best to be respectful, cautious, but adult like all at once.

"And what is it you are planning on doing in that room? I may be here to keep this place afloat, but heaven knows you are still a baby and no how am I..."

I cut her off before she had more time to insult me. "No, ma'am. I've made my way down here from Pilot Point. I am looking to sew some new roots. I need a place to sleep for the next few days."

"Child, I pray for whatever tragedy you had to endure that leaves one as young as you trying to start a new life. We have a room that runs three dollars a night." She tried to reach out and pat my head like I was a puppy.

I squirmed out of the way. "Thank you ma'am. I need to find someone who will buy my horse, then I can pay for the room."

She put her arm around my shoulders and quickly walked me to the side door. "Your best bet is to go down Elm street to where the Mulattos and Chinese are. It's down near first, called Ellum." She whispered all this to me as she shuffled me out the door onto Lamar. "Bless you, child. And don't you take anything under a hundred for that horse. You should have sold it back north and taken a train down. Be careful everyone in Dallas is going to want to swindle you."

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Basically thrown out the door I went around and mounted my horse. I took the slow path down Elm Street looking for First Avenue. The experience stayed with me for many years. At the time I saw a land of opportunity, businesses that existed to simplify life, people who had a singular purpose, and places that were existing for no other reason than to entertain people. In my young eyes it was the world I had dreamed of. Decades later in my older years I would see this all as the destruction of man's self-reliance. There is a benefit that I couldn't understand at the time that comes with the ability and passion to take care of one's self.

I continued to ride in my excitement which left pretty swiftly as the storefronts turned into residential porches. The street lights became fewer and farther between and the newer architecture was replaced by shotgun houses.

I should have been more at ease and more at home as the scenery became more and more like Denton, but I was very aware that I was suddenly the only person of white skin around me. There were a few huddled groups of Chinese off down the alleyways, but the vast majority of the people that were lounging on their porches and talking in their yards were black folks. Many of them looked up at me in confusion, but most of them kept to their selves. A few of them yelled out at me with what sounded like non-sense, "Lulsquatohkuck ohyoutut" or "Whackhasheyetutee bubohyub".

I had seen a black person or two in my lifetime, but in 1910 there was no love lost between the races in the south. As much as it appalls me now, I feel that I was trained to

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distrust groups that I wasn't a part of. It isn't something I blame on my family or even my community. It was the time and what our ancestors had put each other through. Just as I trusted and listened to my parents, the stories and ethics of my grandparents were somewhat bred into me.

I didn't get very far into Ellum before I was approached by a group of black men. They were all dressed better than anyone in my family with vests, hats, and shiny boots. They attempted to approach me in a friendly manner, but there was palpable caution being presented. The man in the front was short and stout. He displayed a wide grin that contrasted his dark complexion. He was flanked by two men on his right and one on his left, all taller and thinner. The smiling man raised his hand as he started to speak, "I think you might be a bit lost. This here is Deep Ellum. I have a feeling you are looking for the West End."

I slowed my horse, but remained saddled as I didn't think it was wise to give up my tall stature while riding. "I'm sorry to bother you fine folks. I am looking to plant some roots. I need to sell my horse and find some work."

There was a general chuckle amongst the men in the street. "I really think you want the West End." The smiling man paused thinking to himself before he resumed our dialogue. "No reason to pretend you don't see it. You in a negro neighborhood. Now, my brothers here don't have any problem with you coming through our neighborhood, but what happens when you sell us that horse of yours?"

Tomorrow you come back with your father or the sheriff claiming that we stole your horse.”

I started to rebut, but the man continued.

“And you say you are wanting to work. Well, I suggest you head back to the West End where you can sell some papers or fill some troughs because out here in Deep Ellum you be unloading trucks, putting up buildings, repairing buggies, you know, real work.” His statements brought support from the group of men at his sides.

I nodded my head understanding that we were on different teams and this wasn't going to be a marriage of convenience. “I understand.” I turned my horse to start heading back to downtown. “But, I come from a cattle ranch north of here. I know what a day's work is. You don't trust me. I understand. But, if you could trust me would you be interested in the horse for one fifty?”

The men perked up at the price. They talked amongst themselves making me realize that I was still low balling myself.

Smiles called out as I was still slowly trotting away. “You selling that horse you sitting on for one hundred and fifty dollars?”

In a panic I responded, “Two hundred with the saddle, shoes, packs, and all.” I hoped I was getting close to the actual value.

I was almost out of ear shot, so the man shouted back. “We would take that deal. But, we don't trust you, as

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you said.” They all turned back and headed out of the street as I picked up my speed heading back to town.

It was less than two hours before I returned to their side of town. I was escorted by a Dallas county deputy. I had come accustomed to the presence of police being a positive thing. So, I didn't expect the reaction I got.

The smiling man came out of his house at a swift jog. The smile had left and he was shouting with his fist up in the air, “I told you! You were here to set us up! We don't want you in our neighborhood you need to be in the West End!”

The deputy jumped down from his horse immediately placing his right hand on his revolver and his left hand up trying to calm the man. My fight or flight kicked in and I was off my horse holding up both hands at the deputy trying to hold back a fire fight. I dug as deep as I could let out a voice that shouldn't have been summoned by a child my age. “Hold on!” The deep bellow startled both men who silenced and stopped their forward motion. “I came here to sell a horse. I brought this deputy so you would have a lawman as an eye witness to the transaction. I need you to know that I am not going to welsh on our deal. If one of the two of you leave here with a toe tag, then this was a colossal failure.”

Smiley faced me, but kept his eyes locked on the deputy. He nodded his head slightly while licking his lips. “Sir, if you would take your hand off your gun I would feel much better about everyone's motives here.” He watched as the deputy let go of the handle of the revolver and dropped his hand. Smiley visibly relaxed as the threat disappeared. He

turned his focus to me and while he still had a fiercely serious look on his face he growled, "You are young so I am going to let it go. But, this could have been duck soup if you would have run it by me earlier. But you bring a lawman into this neighborhood unannounced and everyone here thinks they are going to the pokey." With that he let his smile come back out.

Everything went well. I had two hundred dollars and a ride back to town. The fellows in Ellum had a horse that was in good shape and could resell for a decent profit. And the deputy managed to not shoot anyone.

As I was riding off hanging onto the back of the deputy, Smiley was walking beside us. I asked him, "I don't want to surprise you again, but I am going to show up here in the morning looking for work. I am not setting the roots I want selling newspapers to bankers."

Smiley laughed at my tenacity. "Tell you what boy. Carnival coming into town on Tuesday. That's your best bet. If you try and get anything before then the folks around here are going to assume you want to take all our jobs. So be here by sunrise on Tuesday and we'll give you a lift to fair park." He waved as he finished talking and walking.

I understood. I had enough money now to last me a few weeks, it wouldn't hurt if I waited until Tuesday to find work. I had wanted to connect with the carnival anyway, I had no real plans of staying in Texas.

The Early Years of 'Squirt' Malone

The deputy took me back to Sam Freshman's saloon where I got my room, got some grub, and started to acclimate to life on my own.