

A Nickel for a Dead Rat

Transcribed Jackie Layne Partin

This short story was told to me by my husband Grady Ward Partin on Dec. 2, 2003

Back when I was a young boy if you had the chickenpox, you couldn't go back to school until all the sores dried up even though the fever was gone, and you felt just fine. Well, I found myself in that situation around the age of eight or ten. So daddy, seeing that I had some time on my hands, came up with a plan. Daddy, didn't *cotton* to idleness. The "gopher rats," as we called them, were just destroying his cattle feed that was stored in the barn that was across the road from our house on Partins' Farm Road. The sacks were cut open, and you could see where the rats had just undermined the barn with holes, coming up here and there from the dirt floor and along the walls.

The plan was that Daddy would bring me four or five steel traps from the family store, and he would give me a nickel for every "gopher" that I caught while I was out of school "sick." I had to stand on the spring handle of the trap and reach under the jaw and set the trigger. You made sure to reach **under the jaws**; otherwise, you could lose a finger or two if your foot slipped off the spring's handle. The trap had a short chain attached so that you could tie it off to keep whatever you caught from dragging off the trap.

Busily, I set my traps, baited them by pouring a little cottonseed meal on the trigger and set them near some of the largest holes. Then I went outside the barn stall, closed the door and stood there peeping through a crack in the wall. Pretty soon I saw a big gopher stick his head out of a hole near the trap and sniff a little. Then it came out and approached the trap. The rat looked it over, smelled around a little and turned back into his hole. I was disappointed, but I didn't move. In a minute or so, out came another rat and right behind him came two or three more! Big as squirrels, they were! They all gathered around my steel trap and started eating the cottonseed meal off the trigger.

There was a lot of pushing and shoving going on as they competed for the bait, and then it happened—the trigger tripped; the rats all jumped up into the air as the jaws slammed shut; one rat came back down with a hind foot in the steel jaws of the trap. I jerked the door open, rushed in and grabbed the end of the chain on the trap and dragged the rat outside and clubbed it in the head with a piece of stove wood! Then I reset and rebaited the trap, went back outside and waited and watched. I didn't have to wait long until there was a replay. I dragged another rat out and knocked him in the head.

By the time Daddy got home I had a pile of "gopher rats" waiting for him. He paid me for what I had, but then said that he would have to call the deal off because I was breaking him up!