

Requiem

by [Warren L. Molton](#) in the [June 20, 2018](#) issue

When the rattler bit Tom, our great mule whinnied in terror and his legs began shaking into a death dance as he fought going down and my big brother Ronnie and I slid off his back, and he killed the snake. We had ridden Tom down to our back forty to pick a gunny sack of fresh green corn at our acreage on the Carolina side of the Savannah River.

Finally Tom was on the ground and let me stroke his neck as I waited in a death watch while Ronnie walked the mile to our house and Tom was still having spasms when he returned with our hired man, two shovels and a small pistol. When he pointed the gun at Tom's brow, I turned away and jumped as he fired; then the men began digging at the near edge of the field.

Back at home, Ronnie nailed the snake through its battered head to our beech tree in the back yard, then using a sharp blade, he carefully cut a red necklace around the snake's neck and with mouse-nose pliers, peeled off its skin. After a good scrubbing and a day in the sun the skin was dry enough for him to begin rubbing and working it with cotton seed oil until it was soft and pliable, so he could slide it onto his belt and wear it off to war in the South Pacific; but I could never climb that bloodied beech again.