

**The Following is a few samples from an unpublished children’s book written by Ryan Barbin. The book, “Dem Bayou Boyz” is a fictional story based on actual events from the author’s childhood, growing up on a swamp in a small Louisiana Town.**

### **Tall Tales and Old Shoes.**

“Hey Casey. Wait up!” I shouted, chasing after him along the muddy banks of the Coulée. It was a nice summer evening down in the central region of the Cajun country known as Louisiana. It was a calm, breezy evening at the end of a long and humid day. It had the look as if a storm was moseying its way in to visit us for a while, as it did all too often this time of year.

My best friend, Casey Koolrie and I had spent the whole day together, just as we always had during the long summer months. He was my best friend in the whole world. Whether we were swimming, selling lemonade, building tree houses, fishing, or even running around in our underwear with bath towels draped around our necks, pretending to be superheroes; we did everything together.

Now on this particular day, we were exploring! We crawled and climbed our way through the wooded area of the Coulée looking for anything we could claim as our discovery; whether it be a new hiding spot for hide and go seek, or something as simple as an old shoe. Now, I know that may sound crazy, but you wouldn’t believe just how many old shoes we encountered in our past explorations. In fact, I bet for any man in the state of Louisiana who had one shoe, I bet you we had the match. We could have opened our own Footlocker for one-legged men.

Why keep a bunch of old shoes? You wouldn’t be the first to ask this question. Simple. Storytelling is the answer! What more joy can a 10-year-old boy get out of life, than to pretend he knows it all?

“You know, years ago a man was fishing in a boat right here on this bayou, when all of a sudden, a giant 50 foot alligator swam up out of the water and swallowed him up! When they found his boat, this here shoe was all that was left of him.”

When you could tell a story like that to all of your friends, and have the shoe as evidence to prove it, you’d earned your bragging rights. You were top dog of the playground! I guarantee next time we got together at recess to play power rangers, I know one fella who wasn’t getting stuck being the pink ranger again.

## **Lemonade Stands, Lemonade Falls.**

The Coulée was Casey and I's first discovery. It was a hidden, stream like bayou that emptied out into a larger bayou not far from my house. It was nothing special to most people, but to us, it was everything. The Coulée as we called it, was surrounded by thick, mossy trees that grew right up out of the water, and was home to many fish, frogs, and snakes. There were no alligators in the Coulée, even though we would have liked to believe so. The woods surrounding the bayou were dense and scary, and tons of fun for two little boys with a knack for exploring.

For many summers in the past, we wished for a pirogue, or a small boat that we could use to paddle down the Coulée. We had a lemonade stand every summer to try and raise money so that someday we could buy our boat. Unfortunately, the little profit we made at \$0.10 per cup mostly just bought us more lemonade...and more cups.

Well, one day I had an idea Casey's little brother Alex was 3 years old, blonde haired, and blue eyed. Most adults thought he was "adorable" or "precious". Casey and I found him to be more "annoying" and "pitiful". Today however, could be the beginning of a new era for little Alexander. Today, he would join us at our lemonade stand and we'd probably still find him annoying, but he would do the work and we would reap the benefits. We would be rich and we could finally afford our little boat.

We stood Alex at the end of the driveway and had him hold the lemonade sign upside down. This would appear extra cute to the adults who drove by. We in turn, sat on the porch under a heavy-duty industrial sized fan. Sure enough, people stopped, pinched his fat little cheeks, and paid him dollars! Fives...tens...good lord! We were rich! Filthy stinking rich! At this rate we could buy a yacht. No! The Titanic. Yes...the Titanic, and its maiden voyage would have us sailing across the Coulée into uncharted territories and bayous abroad.

"Great job Alex", said Casey. "Just one more customer and we're done for today." And the lucky winner is..."Mom? Uh-oh!"

Just as we were about to clean up and count all of our money, Casey's mom shows up. She was furious that we exploited her son and made him do all the work while we just sat and watched. She counted all the money.

"One hundred and twenty four dollars and twenty cents. This is going to Alex's college fund", she said. "You're gonna have to do the work yourselves and make your own money."

Our little Titanic had hit the iceberg. Our plan had failed. Now we had no money, no boat, and no more lemonade! We had no hope left. Or so we thought...

## Like a Fridge Over Troubled Water

As exciting and adventurous as it was, exploring through the woods was no piece of cake. On our past explorations we had encountered all of the hardships that Mother Nature had to offer, including; poison ivy, snakes, thorns, spiders, and all of the things little boys loved to hate. However, today's exploration led us to discover God's answer to all of our prayers. Now, to most people it would appear to be nothing more than garbage, an old dumpsite on the far end of the woods, but to two young boys with a large imagination, it became the gateway to a world of possibilities.

Amongst all of the clutter and debris, we found an old Frigidaire. In any normal circumstances, an old rusted refrigerator with both doors broken off would be considered trash, but in this situation we finally understood why Grandpa always said, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." So it seems that we asked God for a boat, and we got a fridge. Close enough I guess. After all, beggars cannot be choosers. It's like mama said, "You get what you get and you don't throw a fit." It wasn't going to be easy, but with a little luck and some elbow grease, this just might work!

We pushed the old fridge up onto the banks of the Coulee' and carefully stood it up. We removed the old muddy shelves and drawers, so as to hollow it out so that we could sit inside. The back of the fridge was all rusted and would be replaced by wooden boards to make it able to float.

We attempted to break away the rusted out backside of the Frigidaire by stomping on it, kicking it, and hitting it with large rocks. Our futile attempts seemed hopeless as they were getting us nowhere fast, and it was really tiring us out.

"I bet your next-door neighbor has a sledgehammer that we can use in that old shed behind his house", Casey announced. "He probably has some wooden boards in there too."

Of course, that was a great idea, except for the fact that our next-door neighbor was an elderly man who didn't care too much children. He thought they were too loud and rambunctious, and that caused nothing but mischief. I suppose his reasons for thinking so were spot on, seeing as Casey and I had accidentally set his roof on fire with a bottle rocket on the fourth of July last year, and here we are now planning on breaking and entering onto his property, and attempted burglary to boot!

But then again, I didn't think too much of him either. He was just a grumpy old man who is mad at the world because he never married and lives too far out in the boonies for meals on wheels to deliver. Heck! I'd be upset too if I had lost all of my teeth, hair, and most of my hearing. Anyway, we pretty much swore never to bug

him as long as he was still living next door, or still living for that matter. Which was ok by me, because I have plenty of patience.

After debating on the matter for a while, we decided that the only way to get the sledgehammer was to sneak it and take it, and we were not about to let this golden opportunity pass us by. We weren't exactly stealing it anyway. We were simply borrowing it without asking, and when we were finished, we would return it without him ever even knowing. It wasn't a horrible thing to do. I mean, I seriously doubt he would need it and what he don't know, sure won't hurt us.