

## Old Slew Foot (A Ghost Story)

By M.D. Smith, IV

This story is real and was typical of many summer and fall evenings back in the late 40's. My father who bought WAAY Radio in 1958 and changed the call sign from WHBS to WAAY, was not only a promoter, marketer and loved contests, but he was a story teller extraordinaire. In the 40's when I was around 9 years old, my parents, Kirby and M.D. Smith, III had a group of friends and they would have social parties what seemed like every other weekend, but perhaps it was once a month. I was 9 and my sister was 4 years old and it seems all these other couples had one or two kids my age and younger. Sometimes it was held in backyards, but other times it was held in a park with a BBQ pit where they'd cook out.

My father had friends in Homosassa Florida where he would go bass fishing several times a year. Those old salt of fishermen, would hang out at a bar and they'd all tell the most astounding stories, tales and fables you have ever heard. I think that's where he got his penchant for story telling that would amaze young children. He was in the best mood for story telling when he was a bit "lubricated" at these parties. The adults didn't seem all the interested in his tales and fables, but kids sure were. I am sure he got amusements from watching us gather round a Coleman lantern not far away from the campfire, but on the edge of the woods, so it already felt a bit scary on a summer night with the night sounds in the forest nearby.

My mother would say, "Now M.D., Don't scare the children. They'll never be able to sleep tonight." And my father would promise to keep it non-scary, but it always was for us. He'd talk in a hushed tone and slowly look around at each one of us when he spoke, to make sure they

were paying attention. I know he'd make up some parts of the story different each time, but often he'd start with the same character and the story would end differently and always scary.

His favorite and most scary character was "Old Slew Foot." Even at the beginning of the story, the way he'd describe this part man, part creature was scary. He'd say that no one ever saw Old Slew Foot in the daylight, but you could hear him coming from around a darkened corner on a street or from out of the forest on a summer's night. He had some kind of terrible foot deformity and his left foot sort of hung to the side and after he'd take a hop step forward, he'd drag his outward pointing foot and wore old shoes that had holes in them. This would make a dragging sound that my father would speak with a "pppppppsssssttt – thump" kind of sound with each step. This certainly got our attention. Sometimes there might be a little girl or two with us boys, and often they'd leave even before the end of the story. Well, that's "girls" for you! We guys loved it. We loved to be scared. This was a time when we listened to "The Shadow" and "Inner Sanctum" on the radio late on a Friday or Saturday night. These were good and sort of scary but nothing like my father's stories.

So here we are, with him sometimes putting himself in the hero's role, and telling of "Old Slew Foot" on his trail as he took a short cut through the grave yard going home from my mother's house when they were dating. Then he'd get real quiet and say, "Listen . . . do you hear something in the woods?" The pause was deafening and we heard all sorts of things, but not the dragging foot sound. So my father would say, "Well, I guess not. It's too early." He'd continue to tell his tale with great enthusiasm and emphasis on certain words, just like those radio mystery dramas, only better.

As he would near the end of his strange and sometimes gory tale of ghosts walking in the graveyard and shadows following him, he'd always end as he'd be nearing safety of lightening streets or his home and "Ole Slew Foot" would be catching up with him. At this time, he'd talk slower and in more hushed tones and drag out all the words to make sure we heard every one as clearly as possible. When he'd finally decide it was time to end the story, as he was talking slow in hushed tones he'd say, "And while I am here to tell the tale, I just want to remind you kids to be very, very careful when you are out at night and you better watch out . . . . (and then in a very loud voice, throwing up his arms and arching his back), OR OLD SLEW FOOT WILL GET YOU!" At that point, every kid would scream and run back to the safety of parents. Since I had heard parts of these stories before it didn't scare me . . . as much, and I really laughed at the startled shrieking of the little girls if any were left as well as my boy friends who were running as fast as their little legs would carry them, back to mama.

Those were really fun times and I wish my father were here today to tell me whatever happened to "Old Slew Foot" who I guess is immortal. If you ever find yourself walking through a graveyard on a quiet dark evening, you better be careful, or Old Slew Foot will get you!

