

STORY NUMBER 1 - I FELL INTO THE CREEK - SHERIDAN, NEW YORK
As told by William J. (Bill) Kuhrt, 1990

This is the first episode that occurred to me in my life. It occurred when I was on the farm there in western New York, round about 1905. I was ten years old and in the fifth grade in school. I was running a trap line. It came to a Saturday and I had to look at some traps. We'd had a very, very heavy winter with lots and lots of snow and cold weather. Then we'd had a thaw. And we'd had a rain along with a thaw. With all that snow melting and with the rain, there was water everywhere. The creek that goes through the farm was just swollen until it was practically a river, and flowing very, very rapidly.

But I hadn't paid any attention to it. Anyway, I started out to look at my traps down at what was known as the Tooke's Woods, and I got down there and I couldn't get across the creek. I had to find a log, a tree that was fallen across.

So I did. I found one and I got out there and stopped for a minute. Chunks of ice were coming down in the stream, they'd bump against the log, and then they'd suck underneath and go down this stream. The stream was flowing very, very fast, and it was deep; much, much deeper than I'd ever seen it.

And so I watched that, and then another one came along and it did the same thing, sucked down under and then it went on down the stream. Well, the next one was a great big one. It was about, oh I don't know, six feet across, something like that. And it was thicker, too. It was four inches thick of ice. And it bumped up against the log but it didn't go down under. So I took my trap stick (which was nothing but a broom handle) and I pushed down on it a little bit, but it didn't go under. It started to, but anyway, I could see I was going to have to push harder. So I pushed down real hard in order to get it down there where the water would take it.

And it did. It went down under with a great suction, threw water all over everything, but ... I went into the stream, too. I lost my balance and fell right into that stream above the log. The next thing I knew I was on the other side of the log down underneath in that fast stream, and I was going head over apple cart down the stream for maybe 40 or 50 feet. And the water was over my head. I had on open rubber boots and they were filled with water in no time. And I just barely got enough air. Even so I shipped a lot of water. But I didn't know where I was going to go. I couldn't see the end to it.

Finally it threw me down under and then I came up. When I came up to the surface gasping for air, here I was in sort of a pool on the side of the stream. And there was a deep pool, way over my head, where a tree had fallen away from this stream and left a big hole in the ground. There were some roots that were sticking out over the water, but I could hardly reach them because I could barely get above the water line.

Anyway, I finally grabbed a small one and that helped me. I got some air and got some water out of my lungs. And finally I edged myself over to the bank. I tried to get up the bank, but with all my wet clothes and the boots full of water and everything I had a terrible time getting up on the ground. I finally did. I dumped the water out of my boots but I couldn't do anything with my clothes so I set out for home.

In no time I found that my clothes were frozen stiff because it was practically back to zero again. Anyway, I managed to get up to the house. I got into the kitchen, and my mother took a look at me and she said, "What happened to you?" "Well," I said, "I fell into the crick." We called it a crick at that time. And she said, "Well, get those wet clothes off and I'll get you some dry ones." She did and then she put my clothes through the wringer. We didn't have any washing machine or a dryer or anything like that in those days. But she put them through the wringer and got most of the water out. And then she said, "We'll hang them behind the stove and maybe they'll dry out in time." So we did that.

Then came noontime. I didn't say anything to my family and my mother didn't say anything. My brothers would have razed the daylights out of me for falling into the creek, so I didn't say anything. And it went on til Monday morning, and we went on to school.

Well, in school we had ten or fifteen minutes and I got to talking to some of my close boyfriends there. I was in the fifth grade. I started telling this story, and pretty soon I had quite an audience of six or eight of the boys. And then the teacher came down and she said, "What's this all about?" One of them said, "Well, Willie [they called me Willie] fell into the creek and he almost drowned on Saturday." She said, "Well, it's quite a story. Now we have English class this afternoon at three o'clock, and why don't you tell the whole class what happened?" I said, "Well, I guess I can do that."

So we did. I waited until three o'clock in the afternoon. Of course school was out at four. I told the story and there were a lot of gasping's around, and some of the fellows said, "My gosh Bill, you sure came awful close to drowning." I said, "Well, it was too close to suit me, I can tell you that."

Well, anyway, about that time a girl that I was kind of sweet on (I didn't know her very well but I wanted to talk to her), she piped up and said, "Why Willie," she said, "you almost drowned." She said, "Then I wouldn't be able to see you." Then she corrected herself, she said, "Why we wouldn't any of us see you here in the class anymore." But I got the drift of what she said the first time.

So after school was out I went down and said, "Thank you very much." And I said, "I would like to see you some more." She said, "Well, I'll be home Sunday afternoon if you'd like to come down." She lived just down the road about a mile. So I went down.

And you know that girl was my sweetheart all during the grade school and most of the high school until she drifted away.

So that's my story. I thank you very much. Quid erat zu erzhalen.