

*Bedroom Canoe - an Excerpt from "They Shoot Canoes, Don't They?" by Patrick McMannus*

It took me about three weeks to build the canoe in my bedroom. If you've never built a canoe, you probably don't realize the hardest part is shaping the bow and stern just right. I came up with an ingenious solution to this problem that, if it had caught on, would have revolutionized canoe design. I put square ends on it. There were a couple other minor modifications that also simplified construction - the bottom and sides were flat! I painted it with some red barn paint as a final touch, and the end result was a sharp-looking canoe. Everyone else in my family thought so too, except my grandmother. She said it looked like a coffin for someone's pet boa constrictor. Grandma, of course knew next to nothing about boat design.

The canoe's one drawback was that it weighted just slightly less than a Buick sedan, and since I was the only man in the family, we had to ask our neighbor, Rancid Crabtree to come over and help us carry it out of the house.

Mom, Grandma and I got on one end of the canoe, and Rancid on the other, and with a great deal of shouting and groaning managed to lift it until it was resting on our shoulders. We carried it out of the bedroom to the head of the stairs, at which point Rancid gasped that he couldn't hold up his end a second longer. While he was looking around frantically for something to rest the canoe on, he accidentally stepped down backwards onto the stairs. We at the rear end of the canoe naturally assumed from this gesture that he had changed his mind about resting, so we charged forward. It was just one of those innocent misunderstandings. As it turned out, no one was seriously injured, but some of the language would have made the hair of a wart hog stand on end. The only ill effect I suffered was psychological. As we all galloped around the sharp turn at the stair landing, I caught a glimpse of the expression on Rancid's face, and it just wasn't the sort of thing a ten-year-old boy should be allowed to see. For years afterwards, it would cause me to wake up whimpering in the night.

When Rancid came into the kitchen for coffee after the ordeal was over, he complained that he felt two feet shorter. Grandma pointed out to him that he was walking on his knees. Rancid was always doing comical things like that.

Beautiful as it was, my first canoe was never launched but sat for years in the yard at the place where it was dropped. My mother later filled it with dirt and planted flowers in it. Strangers sometimes got the mistaken impression from it that we were holding a funeral for a tall thin gangster.