

Firecracker Prayer

The firecracker was solidly inserted into the peach. Tom prepared to light it.

“Hold still!” he barked. I gripped the peach more firmly, planted my feet a bit wider for balance, and said, “Light it right on the tip. It might go off in my hand!”

It was a Big Red...an illegal firecracker brought back from Tijuana by our Mexican friends down the street. They always had a few left over from Fourth of July. We usually managed to connive a few from our buddy Eduardo.

Tom lit the end of the firecracker. It hissed, and I paused a second to make sure it was well lit before heaving it in the air. This precaution was essential to avoid wasting a good peach.

Fruit was plentiful that year. Apricots from our yard and peaches from Tom’s made fine ‘bombs.’ With our dads at work and moms off shopping, we took advantage of the sunny summer afternoon for this ‘experiment.’

Tom and I were good at inventing ‘experiments.’ He was a year younger than I, about 13, and we had already tested apricots with the little ‘lady finger’ firecrackers. These were small and made a sharp bang when they went off in the air. But the teeny bits of scattered apricot were hard to see, and we needed to improve our technique. If this was fun, reasoned Tom, then a peach with a Big Red would really be spectacular.”

Our mental image of the big peach spewing pieces over two quarter-acre lots was too delicious to resist. It was destined to be glorious.

I failed to convince Tom to throw the peach. He had long since learned to be wary of my ‘suggestions.’ “Hey man,” he said indignantly, “it was YOUR idea.”

“But it’s YOUR firecracker,” I countered.

Tom cocked his 13-year-old head to the side as he usually did when making a strong point. “You are the one with the good throwin’ arm.”

That argument was clearly irrefutable, so it fell to me to launch the peach. The Big Red could do serious damage to a person’s hand if it went off. But who considers insignificant details when you are fourteen?

Nor had we considered that the peach might not explode exactly at apogee as calculated... Nor had we thought where it might land if, in fact, it didn’t go off at all. Occasional particulars get overlooked in even the greatest of experiments.

That explains why we didn’t notice old man Jackson next door on his hands and knees digging in the garden. This was his therapy. His heart attack just two months before left him down but not out. Were he not stone deaf, he might have overheard our plans.

It was a beautiful toss, a good 20 feet nearly vertical. The peach spun and the Big Red sputtered, tracing a tenuous smoke spiral as it passed the apricot tree. And right at the pinnacle of its arch... it failed to explode.

That’s when we noticed Mr. Jackson on his knees digging rhythmically with a trowel. The peach was headed straight for his back.

No time to pray. Not even to cry out. Merely a second to fling myself on my knees and project desperate thoughts. He'll die and they'll never believe we didn't kill him on purpose! Can God read minds? Oh Lord Jesus, DO SOMETHING! PLEASE!

The hissing peach continued its plunge until about three feet above Mr. Jackson's back. The blast spewed peach all over his yard. Indeed, it was spectacular.

But our concern was for Mr. Jackson. Was he still alive? Had the shock given him a heart attack?

Stone deaf and concentrating on his work, Mr. Jackson never missed a beat in his rhythmic digging. He noticed nothing.

Apparently the firecracker exploded in the split second when it was *exactly underneath* the peach. This threw bits of peach horizontally rather than downward on Mr. Jackson.

We gave Jesus the credit for saving Mr. Jackson...and us. We abandoned all firecracker experiments. Well, at least for *that* day. We still disagreed about what happens when one is dropped into a Coke bottle. Tom thought it would break the bottle. I thought it would just explode out the mouth, which gave me fresh ideas about projectiles. But that's another story.

