

# Survivor's Notebook

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## DOG DAYS

Long ago on a farm far, far away in Georgia, I would spend the first month of summer vacation reveling in the sheer joy of being free to climb trees, to wade streams, to explore the corners of old buildings and seek out the spots that red ants had claimed for their colonies. My days were full of activities that country boys had enjoyed for many years. Then the pace and the enthusiasm would slow as the long hot days followed each other with a certain monotony. It was during this lull when my parents and the older farm workers would comment about something they called “dog days.”

I always asked what “dog days” were and in all my years of asking I never understood the answers I got—no one seemed to have the same explanation. I came to understand that it was a period of time when bad things were most apt to happen; a time to be extra careful in climbing and to be especially careful where I stepped—watch for snakes, etc. Should I fall, or stump my toe or step on a nail, it was often blamed on “dog days.” Among the workers, an unsuccessful day of fishing was blamed on “dog days.” The malaise of those few weeks was heightened by the annoyance of flies, gnats, mosquitoes, and the unrelenting heat of days and nights.

Strangely, when the Old Farmer’s Almanac showed that “dog days” were over, everything seemed to improve and very soon the freedom of summer gave way to preparation for school in early September ... and the pesky “dog days” were forgotten again until next year.

## SCHOOL BUSESSES

The one thing that I remember about riding a school bus for the first time was its smell. Not a bad smell, but one that seemed to be unique to all school busses—it was the same for the bus that I rode during my last year of high school as it was for the one I rode to attend first grade. I never was sure what caused the peculiar odor, and as the years passed, it became so common that I no longer noticed it.



My first mis-adventure on a schoolbus was on the day that the first grade students were issued their first readers—*DICK AND JANE*. We were allowed to take the books home and practice reading with our parents; a matter of great pride for us, and my classmate Ann Norwood and I were proud to show our books to the others who shared the Highway 39 bus. In those days of late 1936, long before air-conditioning, schoolbus windows were customarily opened halfway during warm weather, and on that day I was seated next to a window. In the excitement of showing our new readers, Ann and I were holding our books over our heads for all to see and my book suddenly was outside the window and then gone from my hand in the wind! I was so shocked at this loss that I could not speak, but others who saw what happened began to shout for the driver to stop. I cringed in shame as the bus stopped and then backed to where my book lay in the road. It was retrieved by the bus patrolman, a teenager, who laughingly warned me to keep it away from the window. After the embarrassment of that moment I was super careful and when I was a teenager and patrolman on my bus in later years, I was careful to pass along that bit of caution to first graders—and with a big grin.