

The Stagecoach

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Lee is an 8 year old boy growing up in rural Ohio in 1965. Lee loves to explore the many acres of land surrounding his home. One day while exploring the woods with his Sister an unexplained event occurs that could lead to a mysterious adventure



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THE BEGINNING

"Hey get up!" That's all I heard as my head fell roughly to the mattress. My brother had grabbed the pillow from under my head and hit me with it. "Leave me alone I don't want to get up I'm tired. Yea, well that's too bad, besides we got chores to do and I'm not getting stuck doing yours," he growled as he walked out through the bedroom door. My brother Sam is two years older than me and we share our bedroom or more like he rules the bedroom and I take what was left.

I rolled out of bed and threw on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt and headed down to the kitchen to join my brother and get some breakfast before he ate it all. Fortunately, I got to the kitchen just in time to get the last of the scrambled eggs. I slid in next to Sam and purposely stuck my elbow up and jabbed him in the side. He grunted but quickly recovered and lifted his elbow up knocking my arm up causing me to send scrambled eggs flying across the table into our older sister Dee's glass of milk.

"Lee," scolded my sister. "Sorry Dee, it's Sam's fault. I didn't do it you little squirt," mumbled Sam through his mouth full of eggs. Dee snapped a look at Sam and he instantly quieted down and went back to eating his breakfast. My sister had a way with keeping my brother and me in line and all it usually took was that look.

"Lee I'm going for a walk to the woods this afternoon do you want to go with me?" Asked Dee.
"You bet!" I blurted out. I hadn't been the woods in a while and had never been there with Dee. Dee was 16 and most of the time she stayed around the house helping Mom when my brother and I went off to play in the woods or went fishing and it wasn't too often when she would have time to come out and play with us.

"Dee I can show you our fort we have out in the woods," I said. "It's not a real fort but we pretend that it is. It's really a bunch of large rocks someone stacked up in a long row up on top of the bank overlooking the creek. I think some Indians piled them up there to fight off the pioneers.

"Maybe, it was the Pioneers who piled them up," challenged Sam. "I don't know who did it but it seems pretty weird that those rocks are all lined up perfectly in a straight line and I don't think they just rolled there by themselves either," I stated.

"Well you'll have to show me your fort later this afternoon when we go," replied Dee. "However, for now you and your brother better get busy with your chores if you want to go with me later."

We completed our chores by lunch time and after lunch Sam went to the Doctor with Mom. I told Sam, while we were picking eggs from the Coop that the Doctor wanted to see if he really had a brain that's why he had to go the Doctor. Sam's face turned red and I turned and headed up to the other side of the coop, but I was too late. Sam reached in his basket and threw an egg and hit the back of my shoulder. Egg slop went all over the side of my head and in my ear. You'd think I'd remember not to turn my back. When I spun around to counter attack with my own egg Sam was gone having jumped out of the coop. "I'll get you!" I yelled, but Sam managed to avoid me the rest of the morning.

Later after changing my t-shirt Dee and I headed for our hike in the woods. We live in the country and our home is surrounded by acres of fields either planted with corn, or wheat, however the field that backed to our house this year was a hay field. Our place was part of my Dad's family farm which was about a mile away at one time, but that was years ago.

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We walked along the outside edge of the field where the tractors traveled because the grass was much shorter and easier to get through. The grass in the center of the field came up to my shoulders and as the wind blew the grass would sway back and forth like light and dark green waves. Soon we reached the entrance to the woods.

The entrance isn't marked very well, it is more just an opening in the brush that was made years ago and was lined on either side by old rotting fence post and rusted barbed wire twisted around the post. We followed the path that headed down a slope towards the creek at the bottom. Near the bottom of the trail the woods opened up to a meadow where large bushes taller than Dee or I full of purple flowers lined the path. The air was full of the sweet musty smell of flowers mixed with the dampness of the soil from being so near to the creek. The area hummed with the sound of a thousand bees flying from flower to flower totally oblivious to the two intruders entering their domain.

We came to a creek and when we crossed Dee held my hand as I stepped from rock to rock. "Careful Lee you don't want to fall. Can we stop and look for cra-fish?" I asked. "You like those slimy things don't you?" I shook my head yes. "You gotta be careful though because they got pinchers and it smarts if they get a hold of you," I explained. "I bet they do silly," agreed Dee smiling at me as she let go of my hand when we reached the other side of the creek.

After a little bit we headed away from the creek and up a slight rise and as we reached the top of the rise I started to head to the right, which led to the rock formation that made up our fort. "Wait a minute Lee," stated Dee as she reached for my arm to stop me. "I want to go this way. I have a special place I like to visit a little ways from here," she explained. "But what about the fort?" "We'll go see it later."

I was a little upset, but when I remembered we were going to a part of the woods I had never explored I decided it would probably be more interesting to follow Dee. As we walked I tried to pick out landmarks, so I could remember how to get to this special place again. It must be pretty cool I thought if Dee is willing to share it with me.

It seemed like we walked for a long time, but soon we came to a small clearing in the woods with a large boulder in the middle. A small thin maple tree grew next to the boulder and the sun shown down on the rock as if it were a king's thrown.

"Wow, what a cool place." Dee took my hand and said, "This is my special place. I come here to be close to God and read the Bible and sometimes just listen and watch the world around me." Dee let go of my hand and scooted up and sat down, she patted the rock next to her and said, "Come sit down."

I crawled up beside her and looked around the sun was shining and huge fluffy clouds filled the sky above us. The clearing smelled sweet from the wild flowers that were growing all around and hundreds of bees and butterflies were hovering over the flowers landing here and there and the bees would disappear deep inside the flowers, while the butterflies slowly drifted about lightly touching each flower.

Dee opened her Bible and chose a psalm that talked about the beauty of the world and gave praise and thanked God for his generosity and wisdom. I sort of listened but quickly grew restless and wanted to get down and explore the area around this clearing. After all this area is new and who knows what cool things were waiting to be discovered?

By the time Dee had finished the psalm she was reading I might as well have been sitting on a box of nails; that's how hard it was sitting trying to listen to Dee finish the story. She realized that my attention span had drifted away along with the warm breeze and she closed her Bible and set it down beside her.

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“Lee why don’t you go and explore, but don’t go too far I don’t want you getting lost or hurt. I’ll sit here and read for while and I’ll call you when I’m ready to leave.” She didn’t have to tell me twice I slid down off that rock like it was a shiny new slide and hit the ground running. “Lee don’t go far!” Yelled Dee. I looked over my shoulder and hollered as I running, “I won’t!”

Earlier when we had arrived at the clearing I had noticed an opening at the far side of the meadow, so I ran for that opening and within a couple of minutes of entering the opening I was deep in the woods. I slid to a stop and looked around. The area was full of trees that were very tall and the leaves overhead were thick blocking my view of the sky and making it sort of dark. I could barely see the sun except from the small spaces between the leaves that let little pieces of light through like glittering diamonds.

I continued down the old path that snaked its way through the large trees and young saplings growing in the path and I noticed for the first time it was very quiet I looked up searching for a bird or squirrel but couldn’t see or hear anything. It seemed there was nothing but the forest, trees, and me. A chill started low in my spine and traveled up to my head. I had never been in a wood where there were no animals or noise of some kind. “Where are all the animals?” I whispered to myself.

I walked along the path and it led down a steep hill to a fast running brook of crystal clear water, gazing beyond the brook I could see what appeared to be another trail only this other trail was wider than the one I was currently on. I jumped across the brook resisting the urge to stop and look for crawfish because my attention remained drawn to the larger trail on the other side. I reached the other trail and I stepped onto the middle and suddenly I heard a noise.

It was a rumbling noise that was seemingly far off but getting louder as if getting closer with each pounding of my heart. Frantically I looked in both directions up and down the large trail trying to see where the noise was coming from, so I could find a way to get away from it. There to my left was an opening and I dove through into the brush and crouched low to the ground, but still trying to see what was making all the noise.

The ground began to vibrate beneath my feet by this time, but I still couldn’t determine from where the sound was coming, or from what. I continued to crouch on the side of the old road and the sound intensified and now I could tell it was coming towards me, but I still couldn’t see what it was. I knew now it was coming from my left and I tried to move my legs and feet but they felt as if they were glued to the ground. The ground was shaking harder and I was trying hard to hold back tears. I have never heard or felt a noise like this before in my life. I continued staring hard in the direction of the terrifying noise and if by magic two big black horses appeared at a full run that were closely followed by two other horses and they were pulling something that appeared to be a wagon. No it’s an old stagecoach just like from the Cowboy movies.

Time at that moment slowed down to crawl just like when my brother and I watch a football game and the instant replay would be in slow motion. The horses and stagecoach were coming closer and closer, their massive hooves came up high in the air and then drove downward slamming the ground with an earth shattering crash sending clouds of dust and dirt shooting in every direction.

The nostrils of the horses flared wide open as the huge animals sucked in the air around them and then blew it out like steam blowing out of a steam train whistle. Their eyes were open wide with bright orange rings surrounding the deep black center and their ears were pointed straight up listening, but would quickly lay back flat on their heads with each loud crack of the drivers whip swinging out over their heads.

The stagecoach driver sat on top and rocked from side to side with the coaches motion, his boots were firmly planted on the coach’s front footboard. In one gloved hand he held the flat black leather harness straps that came up from between the horses and in his other hand he held a long thick black whip that danced out just over the tops of the horses heads snapping and letting out an ear piercing “Crack!” At the same

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time the driver yelled, "Ha! Ha get on there!" The driver wore an old well worn tanned leather vest and a faded red plaid shirt with pants that matched the color of his vest, and his hat was equally worn with the front of the brim pinned up to keep it out of his eyes. He was slim built with a dark weathered face that looked as though he had been on the trail for long time. The driver didn't look right or left, or seem to even notice me, it was as if I didn't exist, but I could see his eyes they were black and cold set deep in a face that was chiseled with lines from years of working hard and long outdoors and having to squint through gritty dust and bright sun.

As the coach came past me and the huge wooden wheels were spinning throwing chunks of dirt high into the air and the vibration caused by the wheels was terrifying and I still couldn't move. I looked up into the windows of the stage and the shades that I often saw in the movies were not there, but were rolled and tied open. Inside the windows there was nothing but an eerie looking darkness, but I couldn't help but feel someone inside was looking at me.

The Stagecoach continued past me and I watched it as it swayed back and forth until it disappeared down the old trail the noise and vibration disappearing as quickly as it had appeared. It dawned on me at that moment I had left Dee not too far away and I was afraid that she wouldn't see the Stage or worse get run over. Before I realized it I was walking no longer frozen in position, so I began to run back the way I had come. I hadn't run but just a few seconds when I rounded a large tree and stumbled into Dee. I was out of breath and panting and I don't know if it was from running or if I had been holding my breath the whole time while the Stagecoach had flew by.

"Dee! Dee!" "Did you see that?" I screamed trying to catch my breath. "Did I see what?" yelled a startled Dee as she grabbed me by the shoulders and looked me eyes.

"Lee, settle down, catch your breath and slowly tell me what you're talking about. Horses, Stagecoach, loud, running! Didn't you see it? It went right by me and looked like it was coming this way," I said.

"No Lee I didn't see anything. You didn't hear it?" I asked. "I didn't hear or see anything. Are you ok? Why don't you calm down catch your breath and start from the beginning and tell me what happened," replied Dee. "Better yet let's go back to where you saw this era. Stagecoach and you can explain to me what happened.

"Ok!" I said relieved that she was not run over and that she was willing to go with me to check out the area.

"Come on its back there. Hey! Why are you here and not back at the clearing?" I asked.

"Well I'm no reason really I just got worried you might get lost so I saw you come this way and I thought I'd look for you. No reason other than that," Replied Dee.

"Oh! Ok then, the place is back here a ways down a slope and past a brook."

We walked back the same way I had come earlier and the birds were singing and the squirrels were chattering in the trees above us scolding us for intruding on their space. We went down the slope and jumped across the brook and stood in the middle of the large trail. But there was nothing no tracks from the horse's hooves, or ruts from the stages heavy wheels and what was even more confusing were the trees. A trail that had looked wide open when the stage came rumbling past was now full of young trees and saplings growing in the middle of the old road making it impossible for something to pass through without knocking trees over.

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Once again a chill climbed up my back. "Lee I don't see a stagecoach or any sign of one having passed through here. Anyway, how could it have gotten through this tangled mess of trees?" Expressed Dee.

By this time I was fighting hard to hold back the tears that were forming in my eyes. I wiped my eyes and looked all around the place and getting on my knees looking for any sign. "I know I saw a stagecoach Dee."

Lee look at this place there is no way a stagecoach could get through here least ways without leaving some tracks," explained Dee. "Are you sure you just didn't sit down somewhere and fall asleep and dream you saw a Stage Coach?"

No! I'm sure I was awake it was real! Dee the ground was shaking and the sound from the horse's feet and the wheels were so loud nobody could've slept through it," as I tried to rationalize it to her.

She came up and put her arm around my shoulders and softly whispered, "Come on lets go home and we'll see what Mom and Dad think."

I snuffed my nose and wiped my eyes and nodded as we slowly started walking towards home. There was no since arguing I thought. I looked one last time and watched as the birds flew in and around the trees and chipmunks scurried behind branches to hide. If there really was a stagecoach it seemed the only ones that saw it were me the birds and a couple of chipmunks and it didn't seem as though they were about to start talking. So, I looked away and took Dee's hand into mine and we headed home.

Mom and Dad were not much help that night, but they patiently listened to my story and allowed me time to try and explain what it was that I saw. They seemed concerned and at first I thought, even worried that something like a running stagecoach could be in our woods and possibly hurt someone. However, in the end I think they were convinced that they're over active imaginative eight-year-old son had fallen asleep and dreamed he was in the wild west when in reality he was fast asleep in an Ohio woods in 1965.

Sam on the other hand was not as thoughtful or understanding as my parents or Dee and found great pleasure in seeing cowboys and Indians popping out of doors and closets throughout the our house. It'll be a long time before Sam gets tired of convincing everyone I'm nuts. However, I am convinced I did see what I saw and no matter how much ribbing my brother gives me I'll not give up knowing what I really saw. And I made a promise to myself to go back and keep looking into the mystery as long as it would take, someday I'd prove to everyone what I saw was real.

Later that night down stairs, "Dee did you see or hear anything?"

Yea Dad I did hear something that's why I was running down the trail I thought Lee had taken, but I was too late to see anything I just heard a loud rumbling and then ran into Lee running like someone was chasing him.

"You didn't see any signs of this stagecoach? No," Replied Dee. "That's the weird part I heard the sound of something, but when we went back there to look there was no sign or possible way anything that size could have gone through the woods. It was sort of scary"

Dad slowly rubbed his chin staring across the room in deep thought and then said to no one in particular, "You know I remember my brother telling us about something like this back in the summer of 1933 when he was around Lee's age and we just laughed it off. The farms only a mile down the road."

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Whatever it is Dee I don't want you or Lee going back there until we get to the bottom of this," stated Mom in a stern voice. I understand Mom, but I'm not sure we'll be able to keep Lee from sneaking out there you know how he is when he puts his mind to something.

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