The Hickory Toothpick

One winter we sure had a big snow. I was livin' up a ways on Pine Mountain, and one morning I tried to open the door, and I couldn't. The snow had piled up plumb over the house.

I kept my stove goin'. Had me a fairly good pile of wood in the house—and enough rations for a day or two. But after about four days my wood was gone, and the meat, too. The snow didn't seem to thaw much, and.after I'd burned up all my shelves and a couple of chairs I knew I had to get out and find some firewood.

So I took the stovepipe down, knocked a few planks loose from around the fireplace flue, got my ax, and crawled out onto the roof and I finally made it out on top of all that snow. It was a big snowfall—plumb over the tops of all but the tallest trees.

But 'way up on one cliff of Pine Mountain there was one tree—a hickory—the snow hadn't buried. So I headed for it. The crust was hard enough to hold me up as I went. I could see directly where other folks' houses were snowed under.

Got to that hickory tree finally and then I cut that tree. Went to trimmin' it. Piled up the limbs right careful, so's I'd have plenty of kindlin'. Oh, I saved every twig! But—don't you know!—when I hacked off that last limb, the main log jumped and slid top foremost down the south side of the mountain. There went my stovewood!

I watched it slitherin' down, faster and faster. It was goin' so fast it shot across the bottom and up Black Mountain it flew. I thought it 'uld go right up in the air and over yon' side of The Black. But it slowed down just at the top of the ridge, stopped

with its top teeterin'—and here it came back. Scooted across where the river was and headed up The Pine again. Stopped right at me, and down across the valley it went again. Hit the bottom goin' so fast, it was smokin'. Went right back up Black Mountain, clean to the top, and back down this way again. Well, I watched it see-sawin' a few times, and finally gathered up that pile of brush and made it back to the house and started my fire—and forgot about the big log a'swayin' in the valley.

About a week later I finally heard, drip! drip! drip! So I shoved on the door, mashed the snow back, and got out. Snow was still about eight foot deep. I got my ax and headed for the nearest tree. Got me a good pile of wood in and fixed the fire till my little stove was red-hot.

Had to go fetch some meal and other rations. I was gettin' a little hungry. So I took off for the store at Putney.
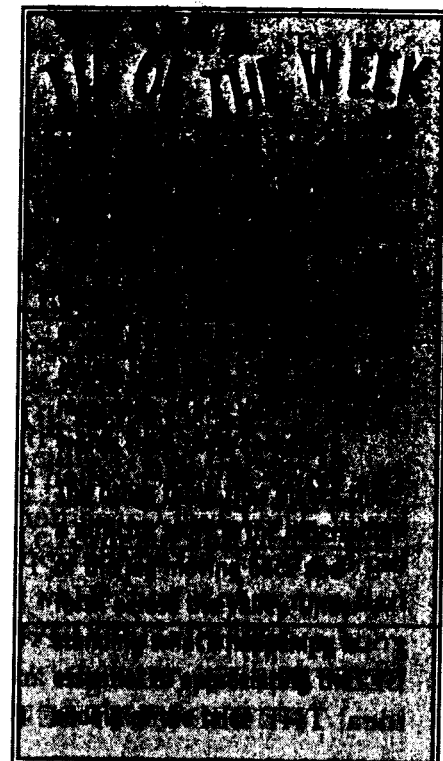
I looked over the country and noticed a sort of trough there between the two mountains where that log had been slidin'. I went right down there. Couldn't see that hickory log at all. But when I got to the bottom of that trough I looked, and there—still slidin' back and forth just a few inches—was my log. And don't you know! With all that see-sawin' that log had worn down to the size of a toothpick. I leaned over and picked it up, stuck it in my pocket.

You may not believe me, but I've kept it to this day. There. Look at it yourself. Best toothpick I ever had.

Dear Parents

This lively tall tale about a hickory tree is sure to captivate your child— but only if he or she can understand the unusual language. This story is written in dialect, meaning that the words are spelled to reflect the way they're spoken, such as "I went shoppin'" instead of "I went shopping." This story requires you to read along with as well as listen to your child.

The Questions

Circle the following words in the story. Then on the line beside each word, write what you think each one means based on how it's used in the story. Do not copy a dictionary definition, but use your own words to describe its meaning in *this* story. These words could mean something very different if they were used in another story!

1. plumb _____

2. rations _____

3. thaw _____

4. trimmin' _____

5. see-sawin' _____

6. trough _____

We have completed this assignment together.

_____   _____
Child's Signature   Parent's Signature