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Raymond Collins

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The Big Story

by Raymond Collins

He was tall like a Redwood tree, his arms were thick like the cables that suspend the Golden Gate Bridge, his police record was as long and crooked as Highway 1, and he could run faster than the Santa Ana winds that blow hot and dry out of the mountains, across the bottom of the state, and down to the sea. They called him Big 'cause that was what his mama called him when she first caught sight of the 23 lb infant that she had just borne. Unfortunately, he was none too bright, having an IQ lower than the belly of a Death Valley rattlesnake.

In fact, it was in Death Valley when he first exhibited his incredible strength. He was only three years old when he was carrying his mama across the hot, flat sands, and they were getting real thirsty. That was about the time he saw a rock, a large rock—maybe a hundred pounds or so. He set his mama down in his shadow to protect her from the heat of the midday sun. (He had a large shadow, you know.) Then, not knowing any better, he picked up that rock and started to squeeze. By and by, the dang thing started to leak a stream of water and not much later, the two of them had enough water for a shower. His mama was amazed, but Big didn't know any better so he didn't think much of it. But then, Big didn't really think much anyhow.

Mama did some thinking, though. She heard there

was a brand new highway being built way over to the other side of the Mojave Desert. She figured a lot of big rocks would be needed for building a new highway so she and the boy kept moving until they got over there. When they arrived, they found a little shack near a quarry where they settled down for the next number of years and sold water to the road crews and all the people driving through on this fancy new road. Big saved what was left of the rocks he had squeezed dry, and one day when Mama had gone to visit the neighbors, he made a wonderful gravel path that wound around the shack and then out back into the desert behind, and then between and around all the the individual Yucca plants for miles. (They had sold a lot of water.) By the time his mama came home that evening, she was amazed and pleased to find a big and beautiful park out behind her homely little shack.

Well, Big just kept getting bigger and he kept getting stronger, and by the time he was ten or so he began to realize just how fast he could run. One day there was a bunch of local fellas gathered on the porch of his mama's water store just chewin' the fat. That's when that warm wind that blows out of the mountains on down to the sea started acting up. Before too long it was really whipping and Big told his buddies that he bet he could run fast as that wind could blow. He didn't even wait to wager on it. He took off and was out of sight before anybody could say "Look at him go!" It wasn't but an hour and a half later that he was back wearing a Venice Beach t-shirt and carrying a Mason jar full of salt water just to prove where he had been. He said he would have

been back sooner but he had trouble finding a Mason jar.

There was a rumor that went around when Big was about fifteen that he had gone to race the wind again, and he got so far ahead of it that when he got to the edge of the mountains, he stopped and waited for it in the last pass before the mountains opened up to the valleys down below. Well, the rumor goes that he had grown so big by that time, that the wind couldn't get around him as he stood in the middle of the pass. Without the wind to blow it away, the fog rolled in all over the bottom of the state and the air cooled down so much that they had the earliest frost in history down in those valleys and it didn't warm up until Big moved out of the way. (Personally, I think that's a little far fetched.)

Well, some day when we have a little more time I'll tell you about all the banks Big wound up robbing – cause he could – after his mama took off with some old geezer fella. And all the jails he broke up bustin' out of 'em and how, in the end, he got tired of being just one foot ahead of the law and took off running one morning. He didn't stop 'til he got to the top of the state, in an area of large forests and trees that he had to look up to. To make it harder for the authorities to track him down he figured what he needed was a last name. He thought on it a bit (he had learned a little about thinking by that time). Then he decided that because he had spent so much time running that 'Foot' should be his last name. Then he grew a lo-o-ong beard and slipped away into those forests, rarely to be seen again.