

Climbing the Live Oak Tree (6)
Paul Rodriguez

WC: 760
Revised: 7/7/18

Bright sunlight was shining upon the land.
I had a catfish and smile at hand.

My sister came runnin' and wavin' her hat.
"A storm's a-brewin', you best believe that!"

On TV the message was clear and strong—
"Pack up and get out, and don't wait too long!"

*They're closing up everything. Get yourself home!
Don't leave your pets and your families alone!"*

My daddy shouted, "Now never you fear,
all-a-dem dark clouds will soon disappear!"

The levee was leaking and losing her grip.
We were all in for one heck of a trip.

The storm's getting worse! Take only your skin!"
My poor Ma didn't know where to begin.

A furious rain ripped through the backyard,
and the wind was screeching incredibly hard.

The levee gave way and water plowed through.
We panicked! We didn't know what to do.

I slapped on my lucky old baseball hat,
I said a quick prayer and scooped up the cat.

No neighbors to call, they already fled,
but that didn't matter the phones were all dead.

The shelter was full, the roads were a mess,
and both of my parents were feeling the stress.

They saw the heavens blow down on the sea
and thought about climbing our Live Oak Tree.

Then houses tore up and cars floated by,
so up the Live Oak, we rose toward the sky.

Midway through the climb, a branch caught my hair.
It swung back and flung my hat in the air.

From high in the tree, I looked all around,
but there was no person or hat to be found.

Losing my hat made me mad and upset.
I hated that tree, the storm, and the wet.

Then darkness loomed in, chilly and grumpy.
Shadows were spooky, and branches were bumpy.

The mighty wind tossed us around like a flea.
We had to hold tight or get thrashed in a sea
of murky black water with junk and debris
and who knows what dangers that we couldn't see.

A branch to my left held a scary surprise,
a cottonmouth snake— looking right in my eyes.
But I didn't move, and neither did she.
I think that poor snake was more scared than me.
The tree dropped a leaf that revealed a small hole.
The snake slithered in, and fate salvaged my soul.

My dad was worried, my mom was scared,
my sister looked like she thought nobody cared.

Then it appeared with a snarl and a hiss,
a gator lurched up at us from the abyss,
with gnarly sharp teeth and eyes seeing red
I thought for sure my whole family was dead.
Just then we heard a loud crack and a crash
as a branch from above took him out with a smash!

My sister sniffled and trembled with fright.
So, I took her hand and held onto it tight.

The wicked storm winds were still blowing strong.
We all held on tight, but it wouldn't be long
before we grew weak and could no longer cope,
so we tied ourselves to the tree with a rope.

Through twigs overhead, I saw an old kite
and dreamed of a rescue by magical flight.
But slowly as hours drifted on by—
no magic came, and I wanted to cry.

That spooky old tree kept us safe through the night
and morning brought with it a heart-lifting sight
as sunbeams glittered through dew-covered leaves
and hope filled our lungs up with promising heavens.

We screamed. An echo rebounded our hail.
We waved our bright clothing but to no avail.

We hollered and shouted as loud as we could
but nothing we did seemed to do any good.

Looking down from my perch high up in the tree
wavy reflections were all I could see.

Curved branches like smiles, lost out at sea
made me think the Live Oak was laughing at me.

Just then a loud shout rang out through the air,
“Hey, you in the tree! Hey, you over there!”

“Thank God we found you! We almost went back.
Then something we saw put us right back on track.

I found your hat, and that's how I could tell,
that somewhere upstream you were caught in the swell.”

Only now that it's past, can I finally see
all the good deeds that were done by that tree.
It turns out the Live Oak was laughing with joy
because it had cleverly rescued a boy.
By tossing my lucky hat out to the sea
that tricky old tree saved my family and me.

I tipped my hat as we floated away
and treasured the blessing we got on that day—

“When all the heavens blow down on the sea—
thank God for the Live Oak, that glorious tree!”