

*David O. Dodd*

Wilson Elementary School was just like any other Arkansas elementary school as far as I knew but I had only known four of them by the fifth grade. It had monkey bars, my favorite, and slides and a thing that goes around in circles that you jump on and off of. But by the fifth grade, I no longer played on such childish things because I was no longer a child.

Since I had discovered sports and Wilson had a softball field where the big popular boys hung out and showed off, that's where I headed. I wasn't big like them but wanted to be. I wasn't popular but wanted to be. I was puny and couldn't see good. With my blurry vision I had trouble judging a fly ball so I was usually the last one chosen when the teams were formed. What the other bigger kids didn't know, but would find out soon enough, was that I now had dirt-digging muscles, could run fast, and never cried when I got hurt even though I got hurt a lot.

It took a while, but David O. Dodd was the first to find out. He was the fat kid, but wasn't fat all over. He was also the most popular kid. And the second-richest. And the second-smartest. And the teacher's pet—because of his famous greatgrampa (or it may have been his great uncle, or his great something else) who was dead but had been another David O. Dodd, the first one. But this David O. Dodd, who wasn't dead, was followed around by his brown-nosed-buddies. I wasn't one of his brown-nosed-buddies. But wanted to be. I was still almost invisible. To everyone but my idol. After several weeks and after I started hitting some home runs and after stealing some bases, eleven-year-old David O. Dodd noticed me.

I usually ate my homemade peanut butter and jelly sandwich alone in the lunchroom while David with his store-bought lunch, that he didn't have to buy because his daddy owned the store, was surrounded by his loud adoring friends. One day I finished early so I headed out the door for the softball field.

David yelled out, "Ralph, wait a minute!" He came over to me and said, "I'll be out a little later, would you like to borrow my glove until I get there?"

David O. Dodd knew I didn't have a glove while he had the very best most expensive glove, a black 13-inch web Rawlings that was too heavy for me but that was OK. It was the glove he wouldn't let anyone else even touch. All his brown-nosed friends would have been honored to use his glove.

His friends were now jealous of me. I was now David O. Dodd's second-best friend.

"Sure!" I said.

David returned to finish his lunch. Because my hands were full carrying my food empty tray, I carried the treasured glove using my teeth. David O. Dodd didn't see that but one of his evil friends did.

"David, that kid's slobbering all over your glove!" the friend yelled. David ran over to me and yanked the glove out of my mouth almost taking my teeth as well.

I was no longer David O. Dodd's second-best friend. His number one very best friend was Ricky Trotter. Ricky Trotter's family was as rich as David's, maybe richer. Ricky was a bookworm nerd with no other friends. He was a sissy. I think he and David must have been forced to be friends because their parents wanted them to be. You see, David O. Dodd, the still alive one, was Little Rock famous because of his dead relative who was famous all over the South because the dead David had been a teenaged confederate spy. David's parents made sure everyone knew that both Davids were somehow related. Someone, who may have been David O. Dodd's parents, posted a

full-page ad in the Arkansas Democrat with both Davids' pictures explaining how our little David had spyblood in his veins seeing as how he was the great-grand-something-or-other of the 17-year-old spy during the War of Northern Aggression. The one who got hung right there in Little Rock. The one who still has a memorial statue in Little Rock. The one where the rope broke making it hard to finish him off.

Because I wasn't a sissy, David soon forgave me about the glove and started back being my friend and eventually bestowed on me the ultimate honor—an invitation to his mansion for a sleepover! I had never been invited to anyone's mansion for a sleepover before or to any other kind of sleepover. I didn't even know sleepovers existed, especially for boys. I told my mother about my good fortune and she was happy.

The Dodds' house wasn't really a mansion after all, but it was a very nice house located in a good place that was a long walk away, beyond where the John Barrow Addition comes to a stop. When I arrived just before dark with my paper sack full of pajamas and other stuff, David welcomed me and showed me his large room and then the rest of his big house that had a hallway, a real hallway not like our hallway, and the spare room where I would sleep and told me that his parents were not there yet.

"Ralph, what would you like to do?" he asked.

Before I could answer he said, "Would you like to box? I have some new boxing gloves!"

I had never boxed before and David was a lot bigger than me and he would probably kill me even with my biceps but he didn't seem to realize it, or maybe he did. But I was no sissy, not like Ricky Trotter was, so I said,

"Yes! I would like that very much!"

Just as I was about to be killed, the front door opened and in walked David's well-dressed, good smelling parents. Mrs. Dodd looked hard at us with our boxing gloves on. And looked especially hard at me and my patched blue jeans and my paper sack. It wasn't a good look.

"David?" she said.

"Mom, this is my friend Ralph. He's spending the night."

"David, you didn't tell me you were having company. Your friend is smaller than you. He might get hurt. Remember what happened to Ricky."

"Don't worry. Ralph's tough. He's not like Ricky."

Looking at me again with her narrowed-down eyes, she said, "David, we need to talk."

David and his tight-lipped, disapproving mother left the room to talk. When David returned he said, "You have to go home now, Ralph."