

## **SPRING CREEK DITCH**

### **As Recorded by Kay Cox**

Jay sat high in the apple tree and watched his Grandpa talk to the men. It was summer and water was in short supply.

“How’s your well doing, Jake?” one of the men asked Grandpa.

“It’s fair,” Grandpa admitted. “There’s enough for the house, but not much for anything else. It’s only got an inch pipe, ‘cause I drove it myself.”

“Shore would be a good thing if we could get some of that water from Spring Creek down onto our crops. There’s plenty there, but it’s a good two-three miles to our fields, and the land’s so flat. Don’t know that we could get a grade so the water would flow,” one man commented.

“It flows down to the lake, and that’s no more drop than to our fields,” Grandpa pointed out.

“Yeah, but then water has a way of finding out which way is down. And it goes about the way it wants to go,”

“Unless you got a good ditch. That would bring it to our fields.”

“If you could get the grade right, it would, but we got no fancy tools nor any engineers to help get the grade just so. Couldn’t do it without that.”

“I got a spirit level,” one of the men offered with a grin. “It’s all of six inches long!”

“Ok! You get to crawl along the ground every six inches and tell us if it’s level!”

“Might as well crawl along and spit on every plant,” another answered.

The men left laughing, each on their way to their fields. Jay came down from the tree and tagged along behind his grandpa. He kept asking questions, but Grandpa was real quiet all day and didn’t answer most of Jay’s questions or even seem to hear them. At supper that night as they were eating their bread and milk, Grandpa finally drew a deep breath and stated, “That’s it!”

“What’s it?” Grandma asked.

“I think I can figure out a way to bring the water from the big springs over east to the farms around here,” Grandpa answered.

“That would be a Godsend to have water enough for the garden as well as the crops, “Grandma stated, “but just how are you going to get a ditch that will carry it and enough drop to make the water run? This land is pretty level. I can’t see how you’re going to make water run west when it wants to run south.”

“You’ll see,” was all Grandpa would say, but Jay could see a smile just behind Grandpa’s eyes, and he knew something was up.

The next morning Grandpa was up and had all the chores done before Jay even stirred. “Anybody that wants to come with me better be up an’ fed. I’m a leavin’ soon as the horses finish their grain,” Grandpa hollered up the stairs.

Jay gulped down a fast breakfast and grabbed the lunch packed in a lard bucket. “Now you see to it that you mind and stay out of trouble!” Grandma called as Jay climbed up on the seat by Grandpa. The bed was off of the wagon and the wheels were just chained together.

By the time the sun was overhead they were in Pole Canyon and Grandpa had found a tall pine tree that seemed to suit him just fine.

“This one will do,” he stated and proceeded to tie the horses well out of the way. “You set right here with the horses and eat your lunch. I’m a gonna drop this tree.” After felling the tree, lopping off the branches, and lots of pulling and tugging from the horses, Grandpa finally got the tree loaded onto the wagon wheels, chained it down, and said, “Let’s head home.”

Jay could see that Grandpa was pleased with the tree he had, but he still couldn’t see how this was going to help get water to run over to their farm. “Whatcha going to do with this tree now, Grandpa? How’s it going to help get water to our farm?”

“Well, son, you have already figured out that water will run just one way, right?”

“A course.”

“Well, if we can build a ditch that runs west to’ard our farms, and we can mangle to make that ditch so it drops just right, then the water would run in it, wouldn’t it?”

“Sure, but how’s the tree going to help?”

“You know what a spirit level is?”

“Yes, it’s one of those boards that has a tube of water nailed to it, and there’s a bubble in the tube. And when the board is level, then the bubble is right in the middle of the ...hey! You’re going to make a giant spirit level!”

Grandpa just grinned.

“But where you gonna get a tube of water as long as that tree?” Jay wanted to know.

“Don’t need no tube. I’ll just hollow out a trough the length of this tree and make a line all around it to show when it’s level. Then we’ll fill the trough with water and have the biggest spirit level you ever saw! Instead of exactly level I’ll put my marks so I can just get water to run down, and then we’ll know that water will run in a ditch that is the same level.”

It was easy to tell how to make the giant spirit level, but it took a lot longer to actually do the work. The bottom of the tree had to be leveled, and then the trough dug. Even with a sharp adz and the other men helping, it took a long time to hollow out the whole tree. When the tree was finally ready, the men all around came together at the big springs with horses, scrapers, shovels, and high hopes.

The tree was drug into place by the horses, water added, and then the task of seeing where to dig the ditch. In order to get enough drop for the water to run, the tree couldn’t go straight west, but had to be angled somewhat south. Day after day, tree length after tree length the ditch grew. Different men were there at different times, but Jay and Grandpa were there most of the time. Grandpa’s big horses grew used to dragging the huge water-filled tree and moving it back and forth until the water was just exactly on the mark.

As the ditch got closer to the farm, Jay could tell that Grandpa was getting worried. He didn’t know what was wrong until one day one of the men said, “If we keep having to go south to make the water run, we’re going to miss your farm, Jake.”

“Yup,” replied Grandpa and went on digging.

That night at supper Grandpa looked up from his bread and milk and announced, “The water’s going to miss our farm. It’s too far south, and there’s no way to make it run farther west. We’re going to have to do without or drive us another well.”

Grandma looked shocked, and Jay dropped his spoon. They had been counting on that water. Grandpa had worked part of the summer and most of the fall to get the ditch going.

“That’s not fair!” Jay cried. “You’ve done most of the work on that whole ditch and the spirit level.”

“Yep,” answered Grandpa.

The next morning Grandpa hitched the horses as usual and started out toward the ditch. “Where you going, Grandpa? You’re not going to keep working on that ditch, if we never get any water from it, are you?”

“Of course I am. I said I’d help bring the water to the farms, and I will. Even if we don’t get any, it will still help the other farmers. That’s what being a neighbor means. You do what you say you’ll do, whether it does you any good or not.”

Jay watched as Grandpa started toward the ditch that was already too far south to help their farm and thought about what Grandpa has said. A man did what he said he’d do, no matter whether it helped him or not. A man could be trusted. Little Jay vowed then that he would be that kind of man.