

[How Branson's Bulldog Courage Won]

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LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: HOW BRANSON'S BULLDOG COURAGE WON

Date of First Writing February 28, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Richard E. Broome

Fictitious Name Raymond E. Branson

Street Address 5433 Wilson Boulevard

Occupation Attorney at Law

Name of Writer Stiles M. Scruggs

Name of Reviser State Office "The boys at the Cedar Creek School nicknamed me 'B.D.', the short for bulldog, because, they said, of the way I bit into things with the determination to win or die.

"I was born on a farm in Fairfield County, South Carolina, on January 9, 1893. My parents were Jacob Broome and Ann (Bickley) Broome. Mother told me once that my life began about three o'clock that January morning during a violent storm of wind, rain, snow, and sleet.

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"I have often thought of that day, because my career to date has been stormy and full of obstacles. But I never have forgot a favorite hickory tree that stood on our farm. I knew it was buffeted by the same storm that 2 blew down the pine, but that it stood up straight and brave to greet the sun the next day.

"Mother took more time and interest in helping me with my lessons than she did with the other children, because I was the only one of them who really was striving to win an education. After helping with the chores, I studied my lessons before the fire, while the others retired.

"I started to the public school in 1900, when I was ten years old, and things looked good to me at the beginning. But soon father got sick and stayed in bed until he died. That tragedy threw a damper on my mind. Mother was left with eleven children, and I realized then that it would take hard scratching for us to make a living on that sandy farm. When father passed on, there were three old mules, three cows, and about a dozen hogs on the farm. It took plenty of costly fertilizer to assure an adequate crop there every year.

"The Broome children, me included, began farming in 1901. The oldest boy did the plowing, and the rest of us hoed corn, chopped cotton, set out sweet potato plants, and, in fact, did all the sundry jobs which are necessary on the plantation. From that first year, there was an unusual controversy about my going to school. I was one against ten. And if it hadn't been for Mother taking my side of the argument, I might have lost out. The other children didn't care much about school, and there was always plenty of work on that farm.

"In the fall, there was harvesting of crops and fall plowing afterwards. If the ground was too wet to work, our job was to cut, split, and haul wood for winter use. And the kitchen stove had to be filled the year 'round. One time during the debate on my going to school, Mother told the objectors that I did as much work after I returned from school as most of the others did who 3 stayed at home. I always put my books aside and pitched in and did my best

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on work programs after I came from school. I did this because I realized that Mother was striving to keep the home together, and I was in complete sympathy with the plan.

“I had made up my mind to get an education that was worth while early in my life, and I kept that idea right before me until I finished the public school curriculum in 1908. I was then fifteen years old, and I decided to try to get work at a neighborhood sawmill. I did get the job in 1908 and stayed with it until 1912. I was pretty stout for my age and enjoyed splendid health. The mill paid me a man's wages, about \$2.50 a day, and it was a great aid to the Broome's family budget.

“In 1912, I entered a competitive examination at Winnsboro, the county seat, for a University of South Carolina scholarship. There were about thirty-five young men in the contest. I was the only contestant from Cedar Creek, and the sons of successful lawyers and rich farmers appeared to look on me as if I didn't count. That spirit on their part only increased my determination to do my very best. When the hour expired, I had given an answer to every question on the blackboard. We were told that the winner would be announced in a day or two. And I returned home.

“Mother called me from a chore one morning soon afterward to pat me on the shoulder and tell me she had just read in the Winnsboro News that I had won the scholarship. This information came to us before the scholarship was forwarded to me from Winnsboro. Mother was, if possible, more pleased over my victory than I was. She did her best to raise \$60 for me to carry with me to the university, but all she could raise was \$32. The scholarship admitted me to room and classes, but there were such pressing needs as board, washing, incidentals and clothes. And it didn't take long to exhaust my \$32, 4 even though I cut out every luxury in the expense list.

“When I had only five dollars in my pocket, I decided to explain my predicament to the president and faculty, and they got busy. In a day or two I was paying my board by waiting on the table at the Mess Hall. And on Saturdays I made three dollars selling shoes in an

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uptown store. This three dollars paid ny washing and incidentals. During my freshman, sophomore, and junior years, between 1912 through 1915, I got by on this plan, by selling life insurance during periods I was out of school. In the fall of 1915 and the spring of 1916, I taught a country school. I expected to return the following year, but, early in 1917, the Columbia draft board sent me to Camp Jackson, where I was to train for overseas service.

“At Camp Jackson, I peeled potatoes, swept floors, or did some kindred work daily, in addition to drilling twice a day. One day, nearly three months after I entered Camp Jackson, I was mustered with a large number of other young men to entrain for New York, where a transport would take us to France. There a keen-eyed doctor gave us a rigid examination. He discovered certain disabilities in me and cut me out. I was given an honorable discharge, after serving at Camp Jackson eighty-two days.

“I returned to Fairfield County and did my share of work on the farm, as it was too late for me to get a job teaching school. In 1921, I returned to the university, with the ardent hope that I could work my way through the senior year and win my A. B. and an LL.D degrees, permitting me to practice law. My expenses that year were far higher than they had been, and I was unable to hold or get odd jobs. Clothes, books, and incidentals cost more. I soon fell behind with my board bill and other pressing obligations. I was so determined to win my degrees that I almost became ill over the vicissitudes I was facing.

“One morning, following an almost sleepless night, I went to the law office 5 of Senator James H. Hammond and told him of the trouble that was tormenting me. Mr. Hammond was courteous and sympathetic, but he told me he was a poor man and hadn't any money to loan. I kept talking. Suddenly Mr Hammond wheeled around facing his desk, apparently making a notation. When he revolved his chair and faced me again, he handed me a check for a hundred and twenty-five dollars. I was pretty well overcome when I realized what had happened, but I told Mr. Hammond I would return the money in sixty days.

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With money to supply all my needs till June 1922, I soon found more work than I could attend to, and my anxiety was lessened. I pressed on and won my degrees, A. B. and L.L. D., the following June, 1922. And I didn't let the grass grow under my feet after that victory was won. I opened my law office about the first of July and began practice. Clients came slowly. But older lawyers told me that had been their experience, too. I bent to the law, and also did jobs on the side. And I made sufficient money to live on and pay my office rent.

"In the meantime, my relatives had good luck and sent me a substantial sum of money. So, after the end of sixty legal days, I went around to Senator Hammond's law office and handed him \$125, as per promise. Mr. Hammond was quite amazed when I paid him. 'I thought you would pay me sometime,' he said, 'but I didn't expect you to pay me in sixty days.'

"As my law practice increased, I now began to think of my one and only romance. I had met Miss Cleo Shealy two years before. "We had decided to marry as soon as we could pull out of the financial fog, and both of us kept watch on our progress. About December 1, 1923, we decided to get married. And on December 23, that same year, we married and went to housekeeping at 5433 Wilson Boulevard. We still reside there. At first we didn't have a quit-claim deed to the house. But we had faith in ourselves and paid off 6 the mortgage a few years ago.

"I became a candidate for the House of Representatives in the General Assembly in 1925. I won that election and the two succeeding elections and served in the House from 1926 to 1932. This service in the legislature taught me much. The candidate on the stump, seeking such honor, generally is an optimist. I was confident I could secure many benefits for the people, but, when the moment came for me to act, I found many obstacles in the road. I came away from the State House sadder, but wiser, than I was when I entered it officially.

"There has not been a single year, since 1932, that my law practice has netted me less than \$3,000 a year. I have specialized in civil practice, particularly real estate matters.

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It put me in a more peaceful environment, and it is also more profitable. I am a retained attorney for the Columbia Federation of Trades, and at present two other organizations are negotiating with me for similar engagements.

“Since my legislative career started, I have been called on for many addresses by civil, social, and business organizations. That is why I have compiled this typewritten book of 1,108 jokes. There is nothing so good in public speaking as a bit of humor.

Here Mr. Broome picked up a volume from his desk and began to finger it. A single joke, credited to the late President Calvin Coolidge, may serve to illustrate the handmade joke book:

“The President was seated in his office reading a newspaper. His stenographer, standing at a window, said, 'There is Senator William Borah, taking a horseback ride!' Without looking up, the President asked: 'Are the Senator and the horse going in the same direction?'

“I love association with other men. That is why I became a Master Mason, 7 and was not content until I had taken the additional 29 degrees of the Scottish Rite. Then I joined the Odd Fellows, the Eagles, and the Junior Order of American Mechanics. I find good in all of these fraternal organizations. My wife is now a member of Rebekah Lodge No. 6, the woman's organization allied with the Odd Fellows order. We are also members of the Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church, which may be proof that I consider it a high privilege to bow my knee to God. But I am always ready to spurn dictators and tyrants.

“I think I have given you a complete account of my life to date. I am now in my forty-sixth year, and I hope to blaze more worth while new trails. To paraphrase the defiant reply of John Paul Jones to his adversary, 'I have just begun to fight.'”