Pat Barton frying up a mess of channel cat for the delectation of his friends

Pat Barton, Bill Clark, Gene Barbin, and the editor at the Hatchett’s Ferry fish camp
TOBY’S HOUND
by Pat Barton (1934–2001) of Nacogdoches

[Pat Barton’s exit left a large hole in our lives. We hunted and fished together, and we camped and cooked and explored the woods and water together—and we listened to Pat tell stories and generally entertain everybody within earshot. Or we listened to him deliver a long, uninterruptible lecture on some esoteric aspect of mathematics, his profession which he dearly loved. Whether he was telling stories or being arithmetically erudite, Pat was the center, the binder of our group, and we always listened.

“We” are “Wink” Barbin, Bill Clark, and the editor, and we send our fond regards and sweet remembrances to Pat with this story that he told at our Angelina River fish camp at Little Sanchez or at Hatchett’s Ferry or at the log cabin on his Beech Creek farm. Pat told so many stories that we can’t keep track of them, but we can still hear them in our minds. Needless to say, Pat’s stories lose a large dimension when they move from the spoken word around a campfire to the computer-written word in an academic publication.

When any two of us get together, Pat is always close in our midst, grinning and talking and making us happy—all of this in the sadness of our loss.—Abernethy]

One time we were ‘coon hunting with Mr. Rawlinson up on Beech Creek. His nephew Toby was along with us, and some country boys from Sacul had brought some dogs that we didn’t know very well. I could tell Mr. Rawlinson wasn’t too pleased with these unknown dogs. He was particular about running his dogs
with any others that might be less cultured than his own famous well fed, highly refined ‘coon dogs. With him it was a matter of pride and worthiness as well as concern that some ill-mannered ‘coon dog might cause his dogs to suffer confusion or possibly even embarrassment. Sure enough, before the night was over it got them into a controversy.

About midnight we had a big fire on a sandy bank of Beech Creek, warming our hands and backs and lighting up the lower limbs of a big old beech tree towering above us. We had had a couple of good races and got two good ‘coons. We were enjoying a pleasant rest by the fire and a pot of coffee when the hounds opened up again about three or four bends down the creek toward the river. Something was wrong though.

The Sacul boys’ dogs struck the trail first and pretty soon Mr. Rawlinson’s big dogs chimed in, but he didn’t think they sounded right at all. I thought that even I could detect a certain tentativeness and lack of enthusiasm in their baying. Mr. Rawlinson immediately blamed it on the Sacul dogs. Said they had led his dogs into trailing some trashy ‘possum or rabbit or deer.

They all started in to bickering about it when Toby spoke up. He claimed he had a way to find out for sure what they were running. He walked to the back of his truck and let down a pen door. Reaching in, he pulled out an old-looking dog with one ear nearly gone. We watched surprised as he knelt down and said something in the old dog’s good ear. I could nearly swear I saw that old dog nod his head ever so slightly as Toby whispered to him a good fifteen seconds or longer. Toby then gathered the dog up in his arms, and walking out to the edge of the firelight, he pitched him out into the darkness toward the distant baying hounds. Watching this, everybody fell silent occupied with his own thoughts about Toby and his one-eared dog.

Half an hour later we were rinsing out the coffee pot and kicking dirt on the fire when Toby’s dog came trotting back in amongst us. Toby dropped down on one knee and the old dog stuck his muzzle right up in Toby’s ear. They carried on this whispering act
for half a minute or so, this time Toby doing the nodding. Finally Toby arose, looking grave.

One of the Sacul boys with profound anguish in expression and voice blurted out, “Well? WELL? What in the HAIL did he say?”