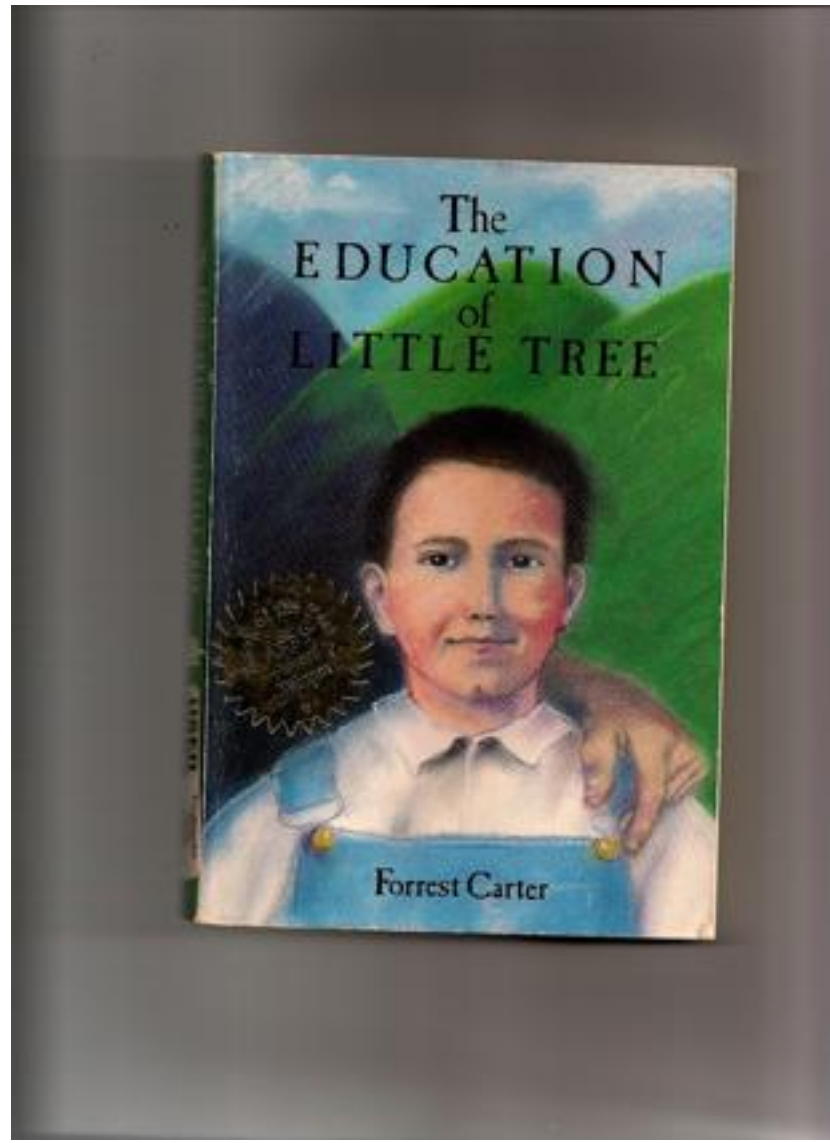


# The Education of Little Tree



Merritt Collins

Land 110

9/18/09

Forrest Carter's novel "The Education of Little Tree", tells of a young boy and his adventures with his Native American grandparents. The main character, Little Tree, is about 5 years old at the beginning of the story. His parents die, so his grandparents take him into their home. His grandpa is half Indian and half Scottish, while his grandma is full Indian. They live in a small cabin out in the



wilderness on a mountain. Most of the novel is a coming of age story of how Little Tree grows to know his heritage, how to survive in the wilderness, and his grandpa's trade.

This story is also one of loss, sadness, but optimism to the future and what happens after physical death.

The story begins as most stories do, with the introduction of the main characters and some of the supporting

characters that play small, but key, roles in the story and in Little Tree's life. The other two main characters that are brought into the picture are Little Tree's grandma and grandpa. The grandfather, or Wales as he is called later in the book, is the one who Little Tree follows and is a father figure and teacher to Little Tree. The grandfather is half Scottish, half Indian by descent. He is over seven

feet tall and about seventy years old. Little Tree listens and learns all he can from his grandfather. Wales is devoted to his Cherokee side of his heritage. He does everything and Indian does and believes in. Little Tree's grandmother's heritage is Cherokee Indian. She is a shorter individual and is just about the



same age as her husband. Since she is full Cherokee, she does all the same things the Cherokee women did. She knows all about nature, just like her husband, Wales. She is a very good cook, and uses all natural ingredients, like berries and wild game that Little Tree and his grandfather would pick and hunt. Now Little Tree's

grandparents weren't a very wealthy people, in fact they lived very simply. Wales was the only one who would make money for the family, and it was a decent source of income for the family. They didn't need much money to survive since they grew and hunted for most of their food and anything else material that they need that they couldn't get from a deer skin, they traded or received from friends. Little Tree's grandfather was in the whiskey business. It was a dangerous business, as it was against the law to make our own whiskey and sell or trade it

with other people. It also had its rewards; Little Tree and his grandparents were paid fairly well for their contribution to their local market store, The Crossroads Store. Wales had his own still hidden out on the mountain in some bushes. The grandfather would take some of the corn he grew and use that to create his



whiskey. Wales was strict in the way he grew his whiskey. He revealed to Little Tree his secrets and the art of whiskey making. It seemed that Little Tree was to become Wales protégé and successor. Wales only used his copper still and pot to distill and store his whiskey. He also told Little Tree that aging the whiskey did nothing for his whiskey, and the distillers that did it in barrels were stupid and the people who liked the “barrel flavored” whiskey

were even more stupid. After Little Tree and Wales had added all the ingredients and the whiskey was distilled, it was ready to sell at The Crossroads Store. They made about eleven gallons of whiskey, but kept two gallons for themselves.

Little Tree and his grandfather would haul the other nine gallons in bottles stamped with Wales own “makers marker” a few miles to Mr. Jenkins and The Crossroads Store so it could be sold to whichever consumer came to the store needing whiskey. Little Tree learned and experienced this and more about his grandfather’s art and trade.

Wales also taught Little Tree about his Cherokee heritage and how the



Cherokee live and what they believe.

Wales enlightened Little Tree about how the Cherokee and Little Tree's grandfather and grandmother lived harmoniously with nature. They considered that all things were children of mother earth, all animals, vegetation, and the way of life came from mother earth. Since they lived on a mountain, Little Tree learned quickly and

easily how to treat the animals, nature, the life cycle, and mother earth with respect and dignity. Little Tree learned to get in touch with nature and could even hear what the wind and trees were saying. It took some time for Little Tree to get over the nature processes in regards to the food chain. One day Little Tree and his grandfather saw a hawk swoop down and catch a quail for its prey.

Little Tree looked depressed and sad that the quail had to die, but Wales had put it in a way, so that Little Tree wouldn't become sad every time he saw something like that again. Wales told Little Tree that the hawk picked off the slower and weaker quail so that they couldn't mate and have slow and weak babies. It was for the better good of the covey of quail that the weaker ones were

taken from the covey. Little Tree soon became one of the Cherokee and he even



was following some Cherokee traditions without even realizing it and without ever being taught about that tradition. One example of this happening would be that Little Tree found a secret spot. Little Tree's told his grandmother about his secret spot, to which his grandmother replied that it was tradition, that she had one, his grandfather had one, and all Cherokee eventually found a secret spot. It was



revealed at the end of the novel that Wales' secret spot was on top of the mountain where it also ended for Wales. Little Tree had become a Cherokee in the eyes of his grandfather and his grandmother, for Little Tree had learned from Wales, who was a Cherokee himself.

The supporting characters only had emotional value for the Little Tree and the reader. Pine Billy, who was also a Cherokee, was a younger man who played the fiddle really well. Everyone loved his playing, but his songs were usually sad. He helped turn in a "big-city" criminal and he won a "Red Eagle Snuff" contest, which made him a very wealthy man. He was there at the end of Little Tree's grandmother and grandfather's days. Willow John, also a Cherokee,

was more of an emotionally closer character to Little Tree. Willow John was at least as tall as Little Tree's grandfather, but about ten years older. Little Tree would always see Willow John at church even though both Wales and Willow didn't agree with most of the church's teachings. Willow John was a closed person, but a very kind person. Mr. Wine was a really old Jew. It was said that he was over a hundred years old. He would bring the family clothes and knitting supplies. Little Tree liked him because he was very forgetful about his things and Mr. Wine had given him a yellow coat. Mr. Wine had made it for one of his great



grandson  
s, but it  
was too  
small for  
him. Mr.  
Wine had  
felt as if  
sin and  
burden  
was  
placed  
upon him  
now that  
he had  
the coat,

but no one to give it to. Little Tree ended up with the coat and Mr. Wine was really thankful that Little Tree had lifted the sin off of him. There were also Little



Tree's grandmother and grandfather's mountain dogs. They were really good and very faithful dogs. They could sniff out and find Little Tree, his grandmother, or his grandfather. An example of this was that Little Tree had to run from the law, because he was seen carrying bottle of his grandfather's whiskey and the lawmen came up the mountain and saw Little

Tree with the moonshine. Little Tree ran up the mountain and hid. Later on that day, when the lawmen gave up on the search, Wales let the dogs of their chains to go find Little Tree. They ran straight up the mountain and led Wales straight to his



grandson. They would do the same with their own kind. If one of the dogs was lost, like "Ol' Ringer", when he had ran into a tree, the dogs found him pretty quick. The supporting characters, really had nothing to offer to any main part of the story, but the hounds and Willow John had significant emotional affect to Little Tree, as seen in the end of the story.

The ending of Little Tree's adventures and Forrest Carter's novel was a sad and pretty depressing. The last few chapters had a very prominent theme of death. It started going downhill when Little Tree was taken by the law, because "he wasn't getting a good education" from his grandparents. Mr. Wine had been teaching Little Tree, so they went looking for Mr. Wine to testify that Little Tree was getting a good education. When Little Tree and his grandfather reached Mr. Wine's home they found it deserted. Mr. Wine had died. So there was no hope



to keep Little Tree on the mountain with his grandparents. Little Tree was taken to a reform orphanage/school, where priests and teachers beat him. It was a horrible thing to hear about. Even death was around that place, though it was more subtle. The author had a very descriptive passage about the only tree on the orphanage grounds. It was a bare tree, no leaves, it was wintertime, and it was even said that Little Tree couldn't hear or talk to the tree.

These are all signs that point to that the tree was dead, that Little Tree was empty in the orphanage. The plot morale increased a little bit when Wales and Little Tree escaped from the orphanage. They made it back to the mountain and Little Tree's grandmother without any trouble from the orphanage or the law. Then it reversed and the plot started getting more dismal. A few happy days back from the orphanage and Little Tree and his grandfather come across Willow John. He was just laying on the trail. Little Tree and Wales take care of Willow John and tried to nurse him back to health, but the next morning, Willow John said his good bye and he was no more. Little Tree rarely ever cried, but after Willow John had passed on, Little Tree couldn't help himself. Then the book skips ahead two years. Their plow mule old Sam doesn't make it to winter. After, the author was just leading up to Wales's death, with clues like, he was dragging his moccasins and Little Tree was starting to carry more whiskey bottles than his grandfather. Wales passes on just like Willow John, on his own terms, and he just kind of slips away. Then two more of the dogs that Little Tree love so



much, Maud and Rippitt, die during the winter. Then one day before spring came, Little Tree went up the mountain and came back seeing his grandmother dead on her rocking chair. She had passed on, but it seems

like she purposely died. She had a note pinned to her chest saying that she has to go and she will be waiting for him. Little Tree and Pine Billy buried Little

Tree's grandmother next to Wales along with their marriage stick. Little Tree then set off to find farms to work for. Little Red, one of the last two dogs, fell through some ice on the Lake of the Ozarks and couldn't be saved. Blue Boy, the last hound Little Tree had left, had his age catch up to him one day. Little Tree took him up to a mountain to die, because he believes all good mountain dogs die on a mountain and should be buried there. And that's how it ends, on that down note. Everyone that Little Tree has known or ever loved was dead.

Forrest Carter's novel "The Education of Little Tree" is somewhat educational, but this is mostly read for enjoyment. It is the story of a young boy, Little Tree, and his escapades with his Native American grandparents. Most of the novel is a coming of age story of how Little Tree is revealed his heritage, how to survive in the wilderness, and whiskey making by his grandfather, but this is also a story of loss, sadness, and optimism to the future and what happens after physical death.