

**MY FIRST COLD DUCK**  
**By Howard Owens**  
(Writing Your Life Stories Group)

The farm where I grew up was called "Willow Spring Farm". That 18th century Pennsylvania German farm had numerous willow trees and many springs. Water from one of those springs had been piped by one of my ancestors into the lower level of a spring house located about 200 feet from the historic brick farmhouse.

My first job as a child was that of "water boy". For my fourth birthday, through a conspiracy between my parents and my paternal grandmother, she gave me a six quart aluminum can. It was cylinder shaped, about 7 inches in diameter and 15 inches high with a folding, arc shaped handle attached to two sides about four inches from the top, constructed of metal rod 1/4 inch in diameter. It also had a nearly flat lid with a 3/4 inch rim that fit tightly inside the container.

It was my job to carry water on a daily basis from the spring house to the farmhouse kitchen for table use at mealtime.

Filling this water can was no small challenge for a four year old. The three inch diameter water pipe, bringing a constant flow from the spring high in the meadow a thousand feet away, entered the spring house basement through the stone foundation wall immediately above a stone and concrete water trough. The pipe extended through the wall only a short distance, just far enough to deposit the water into the trough which was about three feet front to back ending at the wall and about six feet wide. The trough was about 3 feet deep and built mostly below the floor level of the spring house, its wall top about 10 inches above the floor. This trough had been used, for generations before refrigeration, to receive cans of milk from the dairy barn for cooling. Water overflowed from this deep trough into a shallow trough beside it. That shallow trough was used for cooling small cans and jars with food or dairy items for kitchen use. From there the spring water overflowed out of the spring house and into a spring fed stream which meandered on down the meadowland.

I was not permitted to fill my water can with the water in the trough. I was required to reach across the trough and float the empty can on the surface of the water in the trough to support it in a position where the spring water flowed directly from the pipe into the can until it was filled. Then I would float the can like a small missile silo back to my side of the trough. Then I placed the can on the floor of the spring house while I inserted the flat lid on the can and was ready to head back to the farmhouse kitchen.

Every time I filled that water can I was mindful of the danger of losing my balance and falling into this deep trough of cold spring water. One summer day in those very early years, several of my beautiful adolescent female cousins came visiting at the farm. It was a hot day long and before the age of the suburban pool. So these girls decided to cool themselves by a wade into the cool water of that deep spring house trough. They held up their dresses and stepped down into the trough. I watched them

as they splashed and giggled from the tickle of the cold water. As I stood there in my bare feet and short little pants, I was an article of tempting amusement. So they picked me up and placed me among them into the trough. As I was lowered into the cold water, up to my knees then up to my thighs and then up to my chest, almost to my chin by the time my feet hit the bottom, the cold water took my breath away. And then my cousins, never having heard of Archimedes, released me from their clutches which had delivered me to the deep. I immediately toppled over like a bobbing cork, and sank into the depths among a thicket of female thighs. With a flurry of sputter and splash, I was quickly rescued by that gaggle of frantic sirens, but I never forgot that early introduction to my first "cold duck".