

## A FOGGY MORNING WALK

by Lee Netzler

It was a chilly, foggy autumn morning in 1903. I was walking north along back roads just west of the Mississippi. Visibility was poor; sight distance barely 25 feet.

The fog thinned, revealing a figure ahead of me. In order to avoid surprising him I called out, "Good morning." He stopped and turned toward me. He was an older gentleman dressed in a slightly crumpled white suit walking with a cane. He had a full head of thick white hair and a bristling brush mustache.

"Good morning," he replied, and waited for me.

I told him my name was Lee, and asked if I might walk with him.

"Come along," he said, "I'm Sam."

He asked where I was going and I replied, "Back home." I explained that for the past few years I had gone south every spring to work on a plantation in the Arkansas delta. When the farming season ended and the employer paid us off, I went back north to winter over in my old home town.

"And where's that?" he asked.

"Northfield, in southeastern Minnesota. It's a small farming town."

"I know of the place," Sam said. "When I was about 40 years old the Jesse James gang robbed the bank there. Caused quite a stir."

"Yes, that happened the year I was born. Our local library has a permanent display of the newspaper accounts from that time."

"And what do you usually do during winter, Lee?"

"Well, previously I've done odd jobs to supplement my savings from the plantation work. But this year I was promoted to Field Overseer with a raise in pay. We were also given a substantial bonus, so there's plenty of money to last through next spring. So this winter, Sam, I want to try

writing. It's a life-long dream of mine. I plan to visit the editor of the *Northfield News* to see if he will give me an assignment for the newspaper. I could cover local events, sports, and so forth."

"Well, Lee, I confess that I did some newspaper writing in my earlier days. Would you like some advice on the matter?"

"Yes sir. What can you tell me?"

"Well, don't just write the news. Write a story. Don't just write that the tornado touched down in empty pastures for 12 miles. Tell how it swooped down from the heavens, cut a mighty swath through fields and fences, and how no one was killed only by an act of God. Don't just list facts; write a story. And when you get discouraged, write all the more. Bad writers can become good, and good writers great, by writing without letup. Regardless of how you feel, write. *The rule is to keep on keepin' on.*

"Well Lee, here's where I take the crossroad. My town's over that hill. Next time you're passing through, stop by. I'll guarantee you a good meal and we'll enjoy some more conversation."

"Thanks, Sam, but how will I find you?"

He chuckled. "Just ask for directions to Sawyer and Finn. They'll send you to my door."

"And what's the name of your town, Sam?"

"Hannibal. Hannibal, Missouri."