The Celebrated Jumping Flippit of Tau-Ceti IV

by Hugh Barlow

I'm Samuel Clemens Arora. I'm 8 Teranyos old. For folks who don't know what a Teranyo is, its a Earth Year. I'm a bit over 10 Tau-Ceti years old. A year on Tau-Ceti IV is shorter'n a year on Old Earth. I ain't never been there, but that's what Mami tells me. I seen pictures, though. I asked Mami why I ain't never been to Old Earth, an' she told me its too far away for me to go there. I asked if she'd ever been to Earth, an' she said both she an' Papi were born there. I asked her where I was born, an' she said that I was conceived on the trip to Tau-Ceti, but born in New Madrid. I've been in New Madrid. There's a lot of people there. I asked Mami what the word "conceived" means, an' she jest colored an' said that I'd understand one day. I looked it up in the Oxford English Dictionary, (I couldn't find it in the Anglish Dictionary on my pad—Mami an' Papi often speak in English instead of Anglish like everone else, but mostly I understand them). The Oxford Dictionary says that "conceived" means to become pregnant with a child an' to think o' an idea. I think this means that Mami an' Papi thought about what kinda kid they wanted on the trip to Tau-Ceti IV an' put in an order for me. It took a while for me to catch up, an' I was delivered when they lived in New Madrid. I wonder if I was delivered by Gal-UPS (if it is important, have it delivered by Galactic Universal Parcel Service TM), or Wells Fargo Delivery (Hey, LOOK! It's the Wells Fargo Wagon! TM). I bet it was Gal-UPS. They don't let no wagons go into New Madrid.

I asked Mami why she called me Samuel Clemens Arora. There ain't no other kids named like me in town. She said that Arora was our family name, but that my first an' middle name came from a famous writer from the American sector o' Old Earth. I asked who Samuel Clemens is, and she downloaded a bunch of stories from some guy

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named Mark Twain onto my pad an' had me read 'em. I still don't know who Samuel Clemens is, but I think Mami 'spects me to find out by readin' the stories. Mostly, I let the pad read the stories for me, an' I jest listen. I don't like to read much, but I do like to hear the stories. I like the ones 'bout Tom Sawyer an' Huckleberry Finn. Tom sounds like the kinda feller I could be friends with 'stead o' the brats I have to play with 'round here (not that there's many kids 'round here). I like Huckleberry too. I named my keeper Huckleberry, not that he's much fun. He jest follows me 'round an' keeps an eye on me. Sometimes he rats me out to Mami an' I get in trouble, but sometimes he's helpful—like the times I forget to bring a wagon when I get tenpenny darters for Papi. I wade into the river with a bucket o' chum, tip the bucket so's that it lays sideways in the water, an' wait for the darters to come eat the chum from the bucket. When there's enough darters in the bucket, I tip it up and pull it out. I put the lid on it, an' if'n I don't have a wagon, Huckleberry carries the bucket back for me. Huck has 6 legs an' is made o' metal an' plastic. Papi tells me that he never gets tired, but not to use 'im too much 'cause he can wear out an' we can't afford to fix 'im right now. Mostly, I don't use 'im to carry the bucket but sometimes I forget.

Darters is SO stupid! I would NEVER get caught in a bucket if I was a darter. I can sort out the darters with a net if'n I'm quick. You can't use your hands in a mixed bucket of darters like you can with the tenpenny darters. The tenpenny darters have tiny teeth that are too small to hurt you. Eightpenny darters hurt when they bite, an' sixpenny darters will draw blood, but the tenpenny darters don't hurt at all. I asked Papi why they are called tenpenny, eightpenny, an' sixpenny darters, an' he said it was 'cause they looked like nails an' that nails used to be sold by the pennyweight. You would get ten tenpenny nails for a penny an' six sixpenny nails. That's why tenpenny darters are SMALLER than sixpenny darters. I don't know, but if'n it was ME, I'd make it so that tenpenny darters was bigger'n sixpenny darters. Ten's a bigger number than six anyways.

One day me an' Elvis was down at the riverbank with Huckleberry, chasin' darters an' watchin' barges go by. It was a lazy day bein' a Sunday an' all. We had jest got back from Church an' Mami told me to change my clothes so's that I didn't get my Sunday clothes dirty, an' mostly I did. I took off my shoes an' socks an' put on some shorts, but I left my shirt on, since I figgerd that I'd just take it off when I got to the river, an' it wasn't gonna get dirty hangin' on a branch. Elvis was wandrin' 'round sniffin' things as dogs do, when his ears perked up an' he hopped into the mud on the riverbank. I was takin' my shirt off when I saw Elvis jump, an' rushed over to see what he had. Elvis had trapped 'imself a flippit. Now, a flippit is a curious critter. It is comfortable in both water an' on dry land. In water, it swims 'round an' eats bugs an' other small critters. On land, it is harder to catch the bugs so the flippit waits for one to fly by an' jumps up an' swallers it. It don't matter what kinda bug, if it flies past, the flippit jumps. Flippits kinda look like a plate with legs. They has eyes on the top o' their heads, an' a bitty tail that kinda sticks up. Papi says that they use their tail like a rudder, an' they kinda glide when they hop. Anyhow, I wrestle the flippit away from Elvis, who kinda gives me a hurt look when I scolded him for catching the silly thing. I tried to let it go, but when I tweaked the tail, the flippit didn't jump. I figgered Elvis musta hurt it somehows, so's I bring it home in my Sunday shirt. Mami was kinda mad at me at first when she saw the shirt was dirty, but she smiled when I showed her the flippit. She helped me set it up in a cage an' helped me trap some bugs for it. One day I got bored and started flippin' pebbles at the cage when one got through an' the flippit caught it. I asked Papi why the flippit ate the pebble, an' he said somethin' 'bout “autonomic responses” an' scolded me for throwin' rocks at the flippit. I didn't throw rocks no more.

It was 'bout a week afore the flippit was well enough to set free, but when Mami an' me let 'im go, he jest kinda hopped 'round after us. I guess us feedin' 'im bugs kinda got 'im used to us an' all. Mami said that he found it easier to eat the bugs that we fed 'im than for 'im to find 'em on his own, an' that if'n we stopped feedin'

'im, he'd eventually go away. I didn't want that to happen, so's I got out an' catched the flippit some bugs and feeded 'im when Mami ain't lookin'. I got the idea that she didn't want me to keep no flippit nohow, so's I feeded 'im on the sly. Come Sunday, I got to braggin' at Church 'bout my flippit when Juanito says that his is better. Now, Juanito is one of those stuck up brats that lives near my family's farm. I don't much like 'im, but I sometimes play with 'im. Not often though, 'cause every time I do, he calls me “Apu,” an' starts doing things that hurt me. I asked Papi what “Apu” means, an' he says that it is the name o' an old cartoon character that comes from a place called India on Old Earth. Mami and Papi were both born in India, but met in the American sector when they was goin' to school. Papi told me that he an' Mami have a kinda “Romeo and Juliet” story 'cept that theirs has a happy ending. I asked Mami who Romeo and Juliet is, an' she downloads a story by some guy named William Shakespeare. I got to stop asking Mami those kinda questions. I don't understand most of the story, even when the pad reads it to me, but from what I can figger, two kids like each other but their families is fightin'. The kids run away an' get married but end up killin' themselves. It is a STUPID story, an' I wonder what Papi sees in it.

Anyhow, Juanito's papi raises chickens. He's got some pretty chickens that they calls “roosters” an' he takes 'em out to have fights with other pretty roosters sometimes. Sometimes Juanito's papi's rooster wins, an' Juanito an' his family eat dinner at the diner in town. Sometimes the rooster looses, an' they have chicken soup. Juanito is usually his meanest after he eats chicken soup. I think it is because his papi is mad that his rooster lost. Juanito bet me at Church that his flippit could jump farther than my flippit. I went by after Church to see, an' Juanito flicked a bug out for his flippit to catch. Sure enough, his flippit jumped up higher an' farther than mine. Juanito said that there was no way that no flippit owned by Apu was going to beat his in a contest. This made me mad, so I bet him it would. We set the contest up for the next Sunday, an' I went home hoppin' mad. I got to thinkin' about how I was goin' to beat

Juanito when I was sure that my flippit wouldn't be able to jump like his. I tried to train my flippit to jump farther, but the more bugs I flipped, the less far he hopped. Then I remembered a story by that Mark Twain feller. He wrote 'bout a critter called a frog that was supposed to jump far like Juanito's flippit. Some smart feller went an' fed the frog something called “quail shot.” I asked Papi what quail shot was and where I could get it. He asked me where I heard about it. I told him about the story by Mr. Mark Twain, an' after readin' it, Papi told me that it was little lead balls that they used to use to shoot birds back on Old Earth. I asked what lead balls were, an' he said that lead was a heavy metal that was easy to mold into whatever shape was needed. I didn't have no lead, but I figgered rocks was heavy, an' I didn't have to even make 'em into balls.

Late Saturday afternoon, I snuck over to Juanito's farm, an' while everyone was workin', I flipped pebbles at Juanito's flippit. He caught nearly ever' one. Come Sunday, I showed up with Elvis, Huck, an' my flippit in a little cage. I put my flippit in the same pen as Juanito's an' we start flippin' bugs. Elvis got all excited an' started barkin' like crazy. Elvis's barkin' scared my flippit to jumpin' like he never jumped afore. Juanito looked quite silly when the video showed up on the web with him braggin' his flippit up only to see that the silly thing could barely get off the ground. MY flippit did JEST fine! Juanito don't talk to me in Church no more 'cept to glare an' say “Apu.” I don't mind so much now.