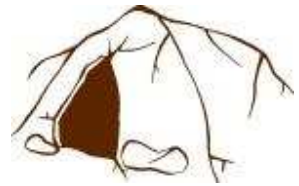


Prelude

Dudley's Cave and The Circle of Fire

BOOK ONE: THE CAVERNS OF DARKNESS

The morning air was cool as I began my walk that day in the rolling hills of New Mexico. My 13th birthday had just passed and this trip with my family was to be a celebration of my becoming a



teenager. The desert was beautiful with its wonderful, long vistas of scrub brush and countless ravines. In the distance I could see a cowboy riding his horse along a line of fence posts. A chill went through me as I envisioned Indians riding across the valley. "Relax", I told myself. "The days of war parties and scalping are gone."

Acoma Pueblo, the oldest continuously inhabited Indian Pueblo in North America, was visible farther to the south. We had tried to visit the pueblo the day before, but the tribe was having a closed ceremony. Virtually unchanged for centuries, tribal families have lived atop the 357 foot high rock, without benefit of water, electricity, or most other conveniences. The mesa, as the hills in the area are called, made the entire area seem sacred. It was simply an awesome view and a great place to spend the day.

There was a tall, bolder laden hill in front of me and I knew Dudley would want to climb to the top. Dudley was my dog, a Cockapoo, which my family had obtained to keep me busy and out of trouble. So far, the tactic had only partially worked as Dudley seemed to get into more trouble than I. Almost a year old, Dudley was full of mischief and energy. He had wonderfully curly hair, long ears, a piercing look in his brown eyes, and a mustache that all together made him appear like royalty from the 1800's. I called him "Sir Dudley" because of the aristocratic sitting stance he

would take when he stared at me as if I should be doing something important, such as playing with him. My Dad called him “Dudley Do-Right” after some cartoon he had watched as a teenager, many, many years earlier.

Dudley was at my side and excited to be climbing in this strange land. It was all I could do to keep up with him as he ran from bushes to rock piles causing small avalanches to cascade down the side of the hill. Dudley loved our walks together in the early mornings. At home, he would wake me at six o’clock every day, like an alarm clock. Today had been no different as Dudley was anxious to be outside and exploring.

The sun was just coming up over the distant South Baldy Mountain as we pressed our climb on up the hill. I wondered if this was the same type of land traveled long ago by the prophet Elijah as he ministered to the people of Israel and then hid from an angry King Ahab. My youth Bible class had studied Elijah the Sunday before we left for vacation. It was difficult to forget such a strange person. We stopped for a rest on a huge bolder and I fed Dudley some cheese, which he loved. He was calm for a few moments, but couldn’t stay in one spot very long as if on a mission to find something.

We climbed until late morning and the day was becoming hot. Dudley as usual was exploring all the rock piles he could overturn, when suddenly he stood still and began to bark. For a moment, I thought he had unearthed one of the many snakes of the area and was about to feel its bite. He began digging with all his might. Before I could get to him, he tumbled out of sight through the hole he had dug. His barking became distant as I frantically dug the hole wider to allow me to enter. Finally I squeezed myself through the small opening and into the darkness, wishing that I had thought to bring a flashlight.

To my surprise, I was able to stand in a large cave. Dudley was on the opposite side already nosing some odd looking features. The cave went deeper into the mountain. I followed Dudley’s barking in what was just

barely enough light for me to see the path. There must be another opening somewhere to let in sunlight, I thought. After a few minutes of negotiating my way through the cave, I came to a bend and rounded the corner.

The light was much stronger in this part of the cave. Dudley had stopped barking and was sitting next to a small campfire surrounded by eerie looking objects that looked like stone statues. Suddenly a strange looking man appeared wearing a sack-like garment with a goatskin bag tied around his waist and carrying a staff. He had a long white beard and unkempt grey hair. The sandals on his feet were well worn and needed replacing. The hand that pointed at me was covered with dirt and his nails were long. "Prepare to face yourself and choose who you will become", he said in a gravelly voice.



Slowly, the old man turned and pointed to one corner of the cave. A bush appeared and the darkness of the corner was suddenly ablaze with fire. Oddly, the bush was not consumed by the blaze. What kind of magician was this old man! Dudley faced the flame and lay silently down in front of it. Now that was odd behavior for him! What, no sniffing or barking or digging.



The old man caught my attention again and pointed to the opposite side of the cave. There the darkness was so black and cold it was difficult to make out the object he pointed toward. I closed my eyes to allow them to adjust. When I opened them I saw a tall dead tree with what appeared to be snakes or worms crawling on the crooked branches. Dudley looked at the tree and whined pitifully. I could feel the coldness of the tree gripping my body as if to compress me like a constrictor snake. This was a strange cave indeed!



“Light or Darkness, choose wisely”, said the old man. I asked, “Who are you?” After a silence that seemed forever, he answered, “I am Elijah”, he replied, “prophet of the one true God, I AM. But the better question is; ‘Who are you?’”

“Sit at the campfire in the place prepared for your journey.” I didn’t need to be told twice ... I sat at the fire. But there were other places prepared around the fire. I watched as what had appeared to be stone statues around the fire came to life. Others had joined me and taken their place at the fire. Elijah spoke, “Welcome, each of you, to the Circle of Fire. You come together in a quest to discover the real you. Before you were born, God knew you. He dreamed you, created you, and loved you. He prepared a plan for your life in this world to which He sent your spirit. The great “I AM” provided for the ‘I am’ that would become your life.”



“I have asked a guide, Nimbah, the “Keeper of the Cave of Wisdom”, to come and help you find yourself as God intends for you to be. Together with your guide, hopefully, you will find that life, for that is your way out of the cave. But you must be courageous and wise on your journey. There is much darkness in the cave. But there is also light and hope. You will not be alone. You will have the Spirit of “I AM”, historic characters, and each member of the tribe assembled here to help you on your way. As God promised the people of Israel a Promised Land, so too has he provided a Promised Life for you. Before you were even a dream in your parents’ minds, God knew you, envisioned your life with Him, loved you, and prepared the way for you. Prepare to claim your Promised Life.”

