

# Amos Branson-Part 2-The House

*Remember, this is written in the third person.*

We have just turned off the main road onto the road which steers through the corn fields, by-passing the Branson property. Like most midwest roads this one is also of whitish coloring due to the gravel used for decades on such roads. It's a five, or so, mile trip to Branson's driveway and we finally get there when we see an old weathered and cracked sign hanging from one nail which has three letters left on it: B-R-A. We smirk at the spelling and turn left onto the drive. It isn't one hundred and fifty yards before we are stopped by a 1954 Cadillac blocking the road. It was a convertible with white top and the chrome is still attempting to shine through decades of rust to say, "I'm still here!" While its age speaks to us we notice that the hood is missing as is the intake manifold and carburetor. A vestige of the convertible top flaps in the wind behind the rear seat adding a little haunted atmosphere to the scene. Still, we feel that a good restorer could make this a prize still as the patina of rust shows no holes or rot in the fenders or rocker panels.

Now we have an idea of what to expect as we proceed. If the Caddy looks like this we need to prepare ourselves for what lies ahead. With a little trepidation we dismount our Subaru Forester rental and scramble around the old Caddy to walk the rest of the way on foot. It's hot and humid and we neglected to bring any water. We can't blame ourselves, though, as we really never intended to actually make this trip out here in the first place. Ruminating about the wisdom of this short journey is crossing our common sense somewhere in the back alleys of our mind. The thought comes unbidden whether we should trust anything that Mr. Branson might be willing to offer us should we get so thirsty as to ask. With nothing

known for us to lose we throw caution to the wind and trudge onward.

It isn't long before we make a slight left turn and there we are, looking straight at what fills the need for shelter. It is long and rambling as we witnessed in the plane. From here, however, it is more decrepit than we could have imagined. It is approximately 60 feet in length, 30 in height and had once, by all appearances, been a tight and water proof dwelling. No longer. We see holes in the roof in at least 7 places and doors hanging ajar on one rusted hinge. These are haphazardly boarded up to keep them from falling from the doorway completely. No professional carpentry job this. Looking beyond the house proper we see the roof of the barn has collapsed inward and only the rear wall still stands. What looks to be a faded "Burma Shave" sign was once painted on that roof.

Looking farther west we see a couple of outbuildings which are reasonably well maintained. The tower that used to house the windmill for the well is fallen over on yet another outbuilding. One of the well maintained buildings has power lines running to it so the well pump must be fairly new.

In the foremost front of the house it looks like the original homestead has been incorporated into the house which was added on. Obviously sod, the structure has not been properly kept and is disintegrating as we gaze upon it. It also houses the front door which, lo and behold, is brightly painted an azure blue. We make our way to the front door trying hard to quell our stomachs in preparation for what we might meet once through that portal. Our fears and trepidation are met by an obnoxious odor on the wind blowing past the rear of the building and into our faces. An odor redolent with decay.

Screwing up our courage we knock on the door. There is a doorbell button to push it is hanging out of the receptacle by a single wire; useless. With no answer to our knock we knock yet again. No answer so we launch a fullisade of knocks.

Still, nothing. The urge to just barge in is tempered by our fear of trespassing. If we just walk into the house we are "open season" to be shot, stabbed or bludgeoned by any occupant of the house. We decide, instead to walk around the house yelling, "Hello! Anyone home?" We do so, not once, but twice. To be honest, we are feeling more than a little foolish and wondering what the hell we are trying to prove by even being here. Still, our curiosity grows. Not only from our hours spent finding the house but from the plane ride overhead.

As we look at each other the same question is etched in our eyes, *"What the HELL were we thinking?"*

That's when we hear a voice yell at us, "Stop! I have a gun!"