

Building a Kite

By Ethel Weehunt

It was 1924, and my brother, Abner, was in a building mood. “Don’t go away,” he said. “I need someone to hold things together while I tie them.” Scattered around him was a conglomeration of objects gathered from here and there—newspaper, string from the tops of sacks, baling wire from the haymow, a long darning needle and, most mystifying of all, a pair of ladies’ silk hose.

I stared at the rubbish and said, “Sure, I’ll hold things. You’ve been talking nothing but kite, kite, kite for a month. I suppose this is it?”

Abner looked me square in the eye and said, “If Benjamin Franklin could bring lightning to earth from a cloud using only a kite, so can I. Now go get the scissors and the wire cutters.”

I nodded. I was really quite awed by my brother’s ambitions, and I trotted away to do his bidding.

“Don’t run with the scissors,” Mama cautioned. “Why do you have the wire cutters?”

“Abner wants them,” I said. When I returned, Abner was sitting in deep thought, the twine roll and the newspaper in his hand, flapping in the wind. He came back to reality with a start. “Now,” he said, “we shall build a kite.”

And so we did. It was my job to hold the newspapers flat while Abner laid the baling wire on the paper in the shape of a kite. He threaded a darning needle with string and, with a neat overlap stitch, fastened the rolled edge of the newspaper to the wire frame and crosspiece. He puffed as he worked, and when the body of the kite was completed, he let out a long breath. I giggled from the strain.

Abner said, “Cut loose the twine and hand me the ball.” He shifted his weight to his other knee. “Now the stocking.” He was surprised there were two stockings and said that two were even better.

“The long tail will balance such a light frame,” he theorized. I again nodded in assent, although I was totally ignorant of the fine art of building lightning-capturing kits.

Abner knotted one stocking in a series of hard, small knots. He handed the remaining stocking to me. “Knot it,” he said. “Pull those knots up tight.”

He slid the end of the string around the center of the wire crosspiece, then said, “Hand me your stocking.” I watched as Abner snipped off three or four inches of baling wire with the wire cutters and used it to attach the long, knotted-stocking tail to the lower point of the kite.

The wind was snapping and pulling at the kite. Abner folded his arms across the kite protectively and chuckled. “She wants to fly already! Here, hold it, Sis!” He handed our prize to me. The kite was like a live thing, jerking and jumping against a strong south wind.

Abner delved into his overall pocket and brought out a large harness ring. “Found this in the barn,” he said. “Lay it flat. I want to get this ring on the end of the string as a handhold,” he explained. I did my best to keep the fragile kite flat on the porch floor while Abner fished in the center

of the twine ball for the lower end. Triumphant at last, he quickly attached the ring to the twine. The kite was finished.

“Go to the door and announce us,” he ordered, and I did. Mama and little Alice came out to watch, joining my sister Ruth and me on the porch as Abner moved to an open space in the yard. As he slowly let out the string, the kite rose, dipping, then rising, farther and farther after each dip. The wind tugged, yanked and ate at the newspaper-and-wire construction. At last the kite soared high on the wind, flaunting its power.

Ruth and I each got to fly the contraption, to actually feel the lift and pull of the moving air. Papa came from the field and he and John, his helper, stared, amazed. John said, “If that ain’t something!”

Abner, complacent to the last, said, “I always knew she’d fly.” ❖

