

# BUBBLEGUM MIKE

The Great Skeeter Battle

Book 1

# Also by Geoffrey Saign

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KiraKu Press

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For Loras and John...

*Simpletown Gazette*  
*Minnesota*  
*July 1, 1855 pp1*

**LAST SKEETER  
CAUGHT BY  
TRAPPER JOE!**

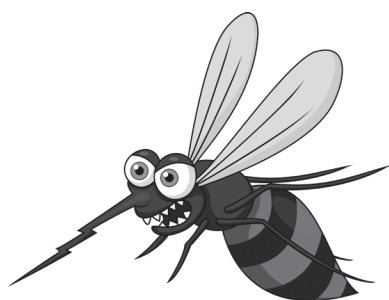
Top trapper Joe Possums claims to have caught the last of the giant mosquitoes, called skeeters. He brought the monster into Simpletown this morning on his buckboard wagon. It measured ten feet.

This should make it safe for all Simpletons to travel. The mayor has also declared it safe for children to play in the woods again.

After many years of terrorizing Simpletown citizens, and attacking farm animals, skeeters finally met their match in human courage and trappers like Joe Possums. Never again will Simpletown children have to live in fear of the dreaded zzzzzzzzzzz of a giant skeeter.

Now, if we can just get rid of those pesky little mosquitoes too!

*And 50 years later,  
in 1905...*



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE BIG DARE

*Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.*

Mike Josephs stopped chewing his gum. From where he was sitting on top of the ten-foot-tall haystack, he looked at the woods. It sounded like a mosquito. But that didn't make sense, because the trees were a hundred yards away. How could he hear a mosquito that far away? His stomach tightened.

Bow Wow barked somewhere below. The dog was probably chasing a rabbit. The mosquito sound made Mike nervous, but Skim and Teddy didn't look worried. Mike didn't want to act scared in front of them so he kept quiet.

Skim—short for Kim Sanders—was lying on her



back. She stretched her skinny legs up in the air. She had pigtails, bare feet like Mike, and wore bib overalls too.

“I dare you, Mike, to chew twenty pieces of that newfangled bubblegum,” said Skim. “And then burp twenty bubbles.” She smiled. “Consider it an experiment. If you do it, we buy you ice cream.”

Teddy—short for Theodore Barker—said, “And I double dare you, Mike.” Teddy sat next to Skim, and he pushed up his straw hat. “If you can do it, that sure would be a sight to see. But I guess I never will see such a thing.”

More than anything in the world, Mike wanted friends. His one and only best friend had moved away three months ago. Since then, Mike had felt mostly alone in the world. It would be nice to have friends to play with during summer vacation, which wasn't that far away.

He wasn't sure why Skim was interested in bubblegum. But he did know that she was the smartest, tallest, and skinniest kid in school. Skim wanted to be a scientist someday. Mike admired her. He had never really talked to Skim or Teddy, but they had come out to the farm today just to see him.

At least they weren't daring him to do something scary, like being tied to a tree in the woods for hours.

“Okay,” said Mike. “I'll do it.”



He spit on his hands, and then pulled a big wad of gum out of his mouth. Bubblegum cost money, so he wasn't about to throw it away. He stretched it and swung it around several times to make it the same thickness. Then he wrapped it around his wrist like a bracelet.

Skim and Teddy watched with wide eyes. Mike had the strange feeling that if he succeeded in this dare, his whole lonely life would change.

From the pocket of his bib overalls, Mike pulled out a handful of white bubblegum. One by one he stacked the square chunks on his leg. He glanced over his shoulder at the white house on the other side of the field. His mom was inside baking a pie. She didn't know about his bubblegum floating, and he hoped she wouldn't see him. He didn't think she would like it.

From his pocket Teddy pulled out a pencil and his official reporting notebook. He wanted to work someday for his father's newspaper, the *Simpletown Gazette*. Mike thought Teddy was as interesting as Skim.

*Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.*

Mike looked at the woods again, but saw only trees. His mouth turned dry.

"It's just the wind, Mike." Skim sucked on a piece of straw.

Mike tried to sound calm. "I know that." Maybe the dare was making him jumpy.

“Mike, how do you get your hair to look like that?” asked Teddy. He held his pencil ready.

Teddy looked serious, so Mike felt he had to answer. “When I chew gum and play with it, bits of it get stuck in my hair. Then, you know, it kind of sticks together.”

Mike’s hair had spikes and clumps. And today he had a toothbrush, yoyo, and small screwdriver stuck in his gummy blond hair. In school, kids had made fun of his hair for months. But he liked the newfangled gum’s odd, bitter flavor, and chewing kept him calm.

“That’s sure sticky gum.” Teddy scribbled in his notebook.

Skim sat up and pulled her knees to her chest. “Let’s get to it, Mike.”

“Yep,” said Mike. One at a time he popped the fresh chunks of gum into his mouth. His cheeks didn’t even puff out until he had stuffed in a dozen pieces.

Mike slowed down when he reached fifteen. That was the most he had ever chewed before. After that he had to chew hard for each piece he shoved in. His jaw muscles began to ache at eighteen. He wasn’t sure he would make it.

Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes. Slowly, he squeezed the last two pieces of gum past his lips, chewing them into the wad. Blinking his eyes open, he gave a wide grin.

“That sure is something!” Teddy wrote furiously.

“That’s only half the dare, Mike.” Skim rubbed her nose. “I bet you still can’t burp twenty bubbles.”

“Wow.” Teddy wrote as fast as his hand could move. “Amateur scientist dares local boy to burp twenty bubblegum bubbles,” he muttered.

Mike felt he had a real chance to succeed. He chewed a little more, and then gave a long, satisfying burp. A large, oblong white bubble expanded from his mouth.

Teddy tilted his head. “How can he burp bubbles? It was hard just to blow one bubble the first and only time I tried.”

“Amazing!” said Skim. “And the bubbles are like balloons!”

Each time Mike burped a bubble, he shifted that part of the gum with his tongue to the side of his mouth, so he could burp another. After three bubbles, his butt rose an inch off the haystack.

Teddy stare at Mike wide-eyed. Skim just crossed her arms and smiled.

Mike burped more bubbles. He continued to rise until his feet left the haystack. He always got excited when he floated. It made him feel like a young bird learning how to fly.

Teddy’s jaw dropped.

Skim smiled broadly. “I told you I’ve seen him float!”

“Wow! I thought you were just telling me a

whopper,” said Teddy. His pencil flew over his notebook. “Local boy floats with newfangled bubblegum!”

Mike wondered when Skim had seen him float. Two months ago he had discovered the gum’s floating ability by accident when he first tried it. He had kept it secret, because he didn’t want the other kids in town buying all the newfangled bubblegum from the General Store. But making new friends felt more important now than keeping the floating a secret anymore.

“It must be the gas in his burps, or else it’s the bubblegum, or maybe it’s both,” said Skim. “Maybe we’ll have to do another experiment to figure it out.”

“This will make headlines in the *Gazette* for sure!” said Teddy. “MYSTERIOUS STRANGER FROM THE NORTH SELLS NEWFANGLED BUBBLEGUM THAT FLOATS!”

*Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.*

