

Joining the Work Force

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We boys did a heck of a lot of chores on our farm. We had to care for up to six sows and a bore, did the milking of two or three cows that we didn't even get to formally name (like a used dog they came with names when Pop brought them home) but we had pet names for them that we used according to the cows temperament at a particular moment. She might be called sweetheart one minute and a totally different kind of name the moment she stepped into the milk pail or swatted you with that wet tail sloppy with stuff. We fed 1200 caged chickens that didn't have individual names, and gathered and processed the eggs. Processing the eggs meant to sand each individual egg which we did in the evenings as we watched TV. One egg in my right hand, the sanding block in the other. Eggs don't come from the chicken looking like they do in the store. They come with these streaks and globs of brown and white stuff on them which makes an egg look not so appetizing but not like something dressed up for Easter, either. Still, it is kinda the same stuff that you got swatted with by that cow's tail. Later Pop got this sanding machine. It had eight bands of sand paper, I think it was, and these little cradle affairs that you put your egg into and then you rested the egg against the sandpaper. You worked your way down the line but you had best not tarry because the first egg could sand through before you got back to take it off the machine and then you had a mess to clean up and sandpaper to change and Pop wasn't happy when you wasted that sandpaper that way. Then you had to hold the egg up to a light, called candling the egg, to make sure it contained no blood spots or wasn't cracked or anything and then you put it on the egg scale to see what size it was before boxing it. Then you may get to go help deliver the eggs at the various places Pop had lined up as regular customers. Later on Pop bought a machine that weighed and candled and this helped a lot. Anyway, this is what I called regular chores. We also had to help clear brush, cut firewood, harvest hay, build and mend fences and do all that sort of thing. This was just called work! And it didn't pay any real money. I don't recall getting any allowance, ever, on the farm. So we boys would find outside work that did pay real money. Pop supported us in this as we earned the money to buy some of our school clothes and what not and thus saved him some money. Just as long as we got home in time to do the regular chores. Some of us boys, actually I think it was two of us, Dale and I, started our job careers by picking up discarded beer and pop bottles along the local roads. It too a heck of a lot of bottles at 1cent apiece and 10cents for a pop bottle. I think quart size beer bottles were good for two cents but you didn't find too many of them along the road. I think that size bottle was meant for home drinking. Then, as we got older, we worked hay fields and hop yards and fruit orchards. The fruit orchards we worked were mainly on Tunnel Loop, a pretty fair distance on a bike. And mainly we worked for Gladys and Harry Downs, and sometimes she would loan us out to other orchards that were short-handed. I remember one time working for Mike Batnich, one time for the Peterson's. Oh the cherry fights we had, and the cherries we ate. Well, actually I didn't eat all that many. I would develop a problem that caused me to come down off the ladder often if I ate too many. And many it took to make a pound and we got paid by the pound. Just pennies a pound, four cents I think it was during the main season but that went up about double during clean-up. Clean-up meant to go from tree to tree harvesting what was missed during the first picking and it meant a lot of ladder moving and took a lot longer to get that pound so we got paid more. I

remember one time Gladys was out there on a ladder too. We went over and shook her ladder for a bit and she didn't get off her ladder in time. She finally did make it down off her ladder and started running for the house. Then she stopped and looked at us with this really different kind of look and simply stated "it is too late to run". It was funny, even she was laughing, maybe too hard for her at that moment. We had some good times working for her. Besides making money for clothes and school supplies, one year Dale and I bought new bikes we wanted. They were these really light weight things with those really skinny tires. The Western Auto store where we got them called 'em racers, three speed racers. They raced alright, especially at days end when we held on to the shoulder straps on Johnny Halstead's leather jacket as he pulled us down Tunnel Loop Road, a not so smooth road, to Hugo Road, which was a little bit better to Three Pines Road, bumpy, to our farm at the junction with Russell Road. He didn't seem to be going any too slow on his Harley Davidson motorcycle but now I realize he had slowed down a lot from his normal speed, thank God and Johnny. My eyes leaked a lot. We found that those racers had lots more than just three speeds and maybe weren't intended for our part of the county. Wasn't too many trips on those roads and we were getting new tires for our racers and sometimes even new wheel rims cause the spokes had bent along with the rims in the good strong hits in the chuck holes. Now came the wishes for our own motorcycles but that meant many many more pounds of those cherries. But getting those motorcycles is another story.