

My Favorite Radio Memory

Dad's solid life lessons of rocks and Cokes.

By LaVonne Gunn, Sebring, Florida

IT WAS EARLY MORNING when I awoke to the Farmall rumbling in the field behind the house.

I scurried to look out the bathroom window. In a soft mist cloud hanging over the field, my dad's blue cap bobbed up and down amid the tall, almost-grown corn.

You could see his love for the outdoors as this tall, handsome man walked, looking to the ground. Sometimes, he'd pick up some rich, black soil in the palm of his hand, then glance toward Heaven.

It seemed Dad was thanking God for the blessing of the new day on his farm, near Pearl City, Illinois.

Beside him was the big, old Farmall tractor, rumbling and shaking, as he let it warm up.

I was his little girl, only 2 or 3 years old. Dad knew I wouldn't grow up to run his farm someday, but he appreciated that I would learn and see his great gift for making things grow. He also knew how much I loved to sit on his knee while he worked.

He would stand in a field of corn just to listen to it grow or in a field of wheat as it whispered a soft song.

Of course, I would take only one turn around the field, and I was done. He always seemed to be happiest when he was on that old red tractor, plowing or planting.

I'd wait at the gate and strain my eyes just to get a glimpse of his cap, rush back to the house, get a bottle of pop and meet him at the gate.

My dad had one "vice" back then. He loved his Coca-Cola. He'd even hide a couple of those glass bottles of Coke under the seat of his truck.

"No need in upsetting your mother," he'd say. After popping the cap off with the opener kept in his overalls, he'd give me the first sip.

Then off he went, waving and yelling, "See you at supper. Tell Mother to make extra.

I knew what he meant when he said "make extra." In those days, we had people who liked to stay at the north end of our place

Dad would call them gypsies because we could see their fires burning at night. All the other farmers would run them off.

Not Dad. Extra chicken was fried and drinks were prepared. Once, I even saw tears in his eyes when he saw their children with no shoes.

Before the gypsies were gone, Dad would always find shoes for them. He would even plant an extra-large garden.

These people had a strong tendency to help themselves and still prided themselves on not being thieves.

When they picked up and left, they would place a rock on one of our wooden posts as a sign to other travelers.

Dad's farm had a rock on almost every post, and he seemed especially proud of this.

"These rocks will get me into Heaven," he would say.

After 85 years, Dad never lost his love for the land or respect for the

people he met along the way.

I still remember how he used to point his finger at me and tell me to collect as many rocks as I could

When it was Dad's time to go to Heaven, Mom placed a large stone in his honor. All of those he had met along the way were at the service, sharing their memories of him.

Me, I waited until everyone left. Then I placed one rock on his stone.

A few weeks later, when I returned, there was an entire pile of small stones beside mine. The caretaker said he didn't know where they came from, but I knew.

I guess Dad's ways spilled over onto me because I love my Coke, and I try to treat those I meet with the same love and respect that he did.

How I wish I could see an old blue cap coming around the corner, and how I wish I could run to meet him with a bottle of pop, just one more time.