

Farm Life Was Hard...But Fun!

Chores didn't get in the way of a little excitement.

By Lynn Polson, Waterville, Washington

My heroes left tough steps to follow in. Life on the farm for my dad as a boy was a lot harder than for children of today.

My dad, Elton, and his brother Randall started each day milking the cows and feeding the animals, even on school days. They did find some entertainment in this job—seeing how good they were at squirting the cats and giving them a drink.

School back then started at 9, but in the winter, when they had to ride a sled to school, I'm sure they started for school early.

On weekends, they had to clean out the chicken coop and barn. They found things to make even this more interesting. Once, while cleaning out the barn, they thought dried horse manure looked like tobacco, so they tried making cigarettes out of it. It didn't take them long to discover it didn't taste like tobacco!

They'd help plow the fields in the spring. Later, they walked the fields with a hoe to get scattered weeds. One time, they hooked up their saddle horse, which had never pulled anything before, to the push tiller, figuring they could make short work of the job. They made short work of the weeds and some of the garden plants, as they took out some of the garden rows along with the weeds.

When the wheat was headed out but still a little green, they cut the outside rounds for hay. In one 480-acre field, it was 3-1/2 miles around the edge. Dad and his brother had to walk around the field, pick up the bundles of hay and stand them into shocks to dry.

Later, they loaded the shocks on the pickup or truck, hauled them to the ranch and put them up in the barn. I can see where the driving part could be fun, but I think my dad got short- changed on the driving end of the job.

Several years later, they cut the hay with a mower and raked it into piles. Dad said they would find rattlesnakes in the piles when they picked them up—up to 13 in one day!

Once, when cooling off with a swim in the river by the hay field, they got out and found a rattlesnake between them and their clothes. I don't know if I would find this fun, but it certainly would have been exciting.

Besides keeping them busy, Grandpa did provide entertainment for them. He made a boat out of a metal tub for the pond in the spring. For winter, he built a skating rink by the house, and he and a neighbor erected the first rope tow for skiing in the area with a five-horsepower engine.

Dad said when he and Randall were a little older, they'd pull each other behind the pickup, skiing alongside the road, up on the banks of snow. When they hit a weed patch under the snow, things got more exciting.

One of Dad's cousins asked the engineer of a steam train if he could tie on to the train and get pulled behind it on his skis. He was told yes, but also that if he fell, they wouldn't stop for him. He skied behind the train 15 miles to the next town.

Randall became a dentist, but my dad, who is 79, must have liked farming, as he still helps my brother and me on the farm today.

We learned to work at a young age, as have our children. But when driving my air-conditioned tractor around the 3-1/2 miles of the field that they walked, I know my dad and his brother had to work a lot harder than do any farm kids of today.

But the way they talk, it seems like they always found ways to have fun. I find it hard ever to imagine filling their shoes. I guess that's why they'll always be my heroes!