



Cappers Farmer

Work-Ethic: Growing Up on the Family Farm

A Colorado woman talks about how playing and doing chores on her family farm developed her work ethic and character

Dorothy Klahn, Denver, Colorado

I wouldn't take a million for my childhood farm experiences. All that fun, the work ethic, the home-grown food and the time for meditation and dreams. What an opportunity for character building!

We tested our imaginations as we played on tire swings or roller-skated on ground hard packed by cloudbursts or hail. We climbed trees and sheds and haymows; we jumped down into wheat bins; we built nests in straw piles. We looked for bird feathers and wild flowers, the first ripe fruit, or fresh vegetables to pull.

In winter, games were the things to enjoy. Sometimes uncles stayed with us to help harvest corn. They gave us competition at Monopoly, dominoes, checkers and various card games. As she baked bread or crocheted, Mother laughed along with the rest of us.

My older sister and I dressed paper dolls for hours. Sometimes we cut models from catalogs and created fashions for them. Shoe boxes were decorated for rooms, and matchboxes held their clothes. As farm children we were capable of entertaining ourselves.

We owned cars, but if they didn't start, or if the dirt roads were impassable, we were hauled to school in the grain wagon, pulled by a team of faithful horses. Neighbor children were picked up on the way. The bottom of the wagon was covered with straw. Mother provided quilts for warmth. Dad sang songs such as "Tiptoe Through the Tulips." These were fun times.

Farming wasn't all fun and games. There were frantic dashes to the cellar when a tornado was sighted. Droughts kept the grain bins empty, and the animals subsequently suffered from a lack of food. At times the heat would be almost too much to bear. Grasshoppers ate everything in sight. Cloudbursts washed out the corn. Some how we farmers always found the strength to start anew, helping each other through all types of emergencies, including the time our coal shed caught fire. Neighbors gathered and poured buckets of water on the fire to save the shed. Claire and I watched from a tree branch where we were picking mulberries for supper.

Sometimes, when I'm in a dreamy or melancholy mood, I get flashbacks of childhood happenings: finding a nest of pheasant eggs; sneaking May baskets to a neighbor's porch; admiring a string of ducks shot by an uncle for a yummy dinner; being startled to see my little brother halfway up the windmill tower; Mother soaking my nail-punctured foot in her magic potion; the fresh smell of corn ears, just picked; winning a box of chocolates and a valentine word game in third grade... These and many other memories make me proud of my rural heritage.

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Back in 1955 a call went out from the editors of the then Capper's Weekly asking for readers to send in articles on true pioneers. Hundreds of letters came pouring in from early settlers and their children, many now in their 80s and 90s, and from grandchildren of settlers, all with tales to tell. So many articles were received that a decision was made to create a book, and in 1956, the first My Folks title – My Folks Came in a Covered Wagon – hit the shelves. Nine other books have since been published in the My Folks series, all filled to the brim with true tales from Capper's readers, and we are proud to make those stories available to our growing online community.