

FARM CHORES

By Nancy Hamma Nichols

Chores were a part of life on the Illinois farm in the 1930's and everyone pitched in with his or her part of the work. Lee, my brother was born nearly four years before me. We both attended a one-room school where all eight grades were taught by one teacher. Lee spent eight years there and I did as well. Four years of those eight we were in attendance together. During those years we found that if we walked that mile really fast at four o'clock when school closed for the day we could listen to our favorite radio shows "The Shadow Knows" and "Terry and the Pirates". Each commercial break we ran to the woodshed where we loaded our arms with firewood to stack on the back porch. In those days we heated our house with a tall square stove in the living room, where we could find a cozy corner to dress on cold mornings. A blue porcelain cook stove in the kitchen helped warm our space while providing heat to cook our food and warm our water. We continued scrambling to do our chores and returning to the radio all through at least those two shows. Often we found time to munch on a crispy apple from storage in our cave.

My most time-consuming job each afternoon was to gather corn from the corncrib and carry it to the woodshed where the corn sheller was kept. It was a simple process of putting the corn that was still on the cob nose down into the holder and turning a crank until all the kernels were removed and fell into a bucket. I then removed the cob and began the process over again and again until there was enough corn to feed the chickens that day. One day while I was hard at my work, Lee slammed the door closed and locked me in by turning the little board on the outside so the door would not open! I was locked in with no other way out. This made me really mad! Yelling, kicking and hitting the door, I managed to knock the door off at the hinges. The ruckus brought our Dad who let us know he felt less than happy with both of us. Lee was in the most trouble though. After all, I was innocent and Lee was the bad guy!

Another of our chores was washing the dishes after the evening meal. Lee washed and I dried. Unfortunately he wasn't careful enough for my finicky opinion as to how clean the

dishes needed to be. Lee seemed to think it was the drier's responsibility to remove anything that the washer left behind! We squabbled often and eventually my parents told me that it was now my job TO WASH AND DRY THE DISHES ALONE! Lee was excused! I guess I must have finally accepted it as "girl's work" as eventually the memory faded away into the corner of my mind. In fact the dishwashing chore grew into a pleasant mother-daughter time to discuss all kinds of topics.

Lee died in 2004, before my memory of the evening dishwashing chores resurfaced so I can't discuss it with him, at least in this world. Remembering that evening, after all these years, makes me think that he knew very well he could make me react to his teasing. Being a good sister, I always did. He had figured a way to remove himself from the nightly chore of dishwashing and that is what he did.

In spite of all the teasing and squabbling we were always good friends. Lee was six feet tall with a slim build, blue eyes, and a full head of light brown hair that remained with him to turn gray. He never married and liked to spend holidays with us whenever he wasn't off in some foreign country. He worked with flight simulators and traveled to many military bases around the world. He liked kids and enjoyed ours immensely and they adored him. Once as a joke (unknown to me until later) the boys offered him candy, which he ate, sending them into peals of laughter. We all had a good laugh when we learned that the boys had fed Uncle Lee the dog's candy.

At times while growing up on the farm, I envied the kids in town who could enjoy the fun of being together with their friends daily. We didn't see other children on a day to day basis and were sometimes lonesome for kids our own age and perhaps that is why Lee and I were such good friends. Farm life, including the chores, gave us a more practical view of life than is evident today. I was very fortunate to have many acres containing pastures, creeks, hills and woods to call my playground. And, yes, chores to do with a fun loving brother. I miss him.