

**Written, Enjoyed
& Loved
by Family**



The
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Articles - 1978

Never can I remember a holiday season to top the one just past. Beginning Christmas Eve relatives and friends, invited and otherwise, stopped by both day and night for coffee, holiday goodies, or a full fledged meal, ^{they went on for} for 10 days straight without missing a single day. It was almost unbelievable.

With only a few exceptions, wife ~~and I have~~ fed nearly everyone we know or are related to ^{over the holiday season.} in the past 10 days. The groceries ~~just~~ evaporated like a kettle full of water on a hot stove.

On the "10th Day of Christmas" with some help from relatives, we polished off a 20 pound turkey and all the trimmings. That feast left the cupboards so bare that the next morning breakfast consisted exclusively of toasted bread scraps, a few stray eggs and a ~~few~~ ^{small} crumbs of dry cereal gleaned from a halfdozen ^{cupful} boxes returned by kids to the cupboard ~~scarcely empty~~ the previous morning.

Supplies of Cookies, Christmas breads and other assorted goodies that ~~it~~ took ~~the~~ wife most ~~of the~~ ^{making} month of December to produce and store up during evening ~~in the kitchen~~ sessions ran out about the seventh day. Somehow she found time between visits to quickly turn out more, at least enough to last through the rest of the holidays.

"Why do you invite all these people and put on all these feasts when the holiday season is such a rat race in the first place?" I ask ~~her~~ ^{as} as she drops ^d near exhaustion into bed ^{one} ~~about~~ night.

She shrugs ^d weakly and mumbled something that sounds ^d like, "I don't know," and drops ^d quickly off to sleep.

But I knew the answer without waiting for her reply. She likes to be with friends and relatives during this season, ^{and} ~~she~~ enjoys cooking more than eating, ~~and~~ so the obvious solution is to throw a feed and invite everyone. It's the way she was raised. If everyone had enough to eat and good conversation filled the after dinner hours, she rates the ^{event} ~~it~~ a success and quietly begins planning the next.

I grew up an only child and ^{my} ~~the~~ first memories of big, noisy family get togethers came after I met and began courting the wife. It was customary in her family to set out a feast for every birthday, ^{wedding} anniversary, confirmation and graduation that occurred ~~it~~ to the 11 children or their parents. While somewhat strange to me at first, I quickly became a regular participant in ~~part of~~ the festivities.

There's nothing quite like being part of a large family!

I can think of few things more neglected than the rural mailbox. I've been pulling substitute carrier duty for the past several weeks while the regular mailman vacations in sunny California. During this time I've had my fingers pinched, cut and slammed by defective box doors and flaps. It's gotten so I'm almost afraid to reach out the window to open a box.

There are other surprises on the "trail", too. One ~~box~~ large rusted box teeters on an axle threatening to tip into the car ~~with me~~ each time I pull ~~up~~ the door latch. Another box takes to take it out on my car. As soon as I close ~~the door~~ and begin driving away, the door falls open against the car deeply scratching the paint. I've tried each time so far to ~~close~~ ^{slam} it so the door stays shut, and it does, until I start driving away. Then it falls open.

One box towers so high above the car roof on a long fence post that I've never seen the inside of it. I can just reach the latch to open it and am able to reach inside with my finger to feel for any outgoing mail.

One should always be careful ^{thought} when reaching inside ~~the~~ mailboxes. Last summer I opened the door to a box and a huge black spider literally sailed into my lap. There was some fast scrambling while I juggled for position. During the ensuing struggle the spider somehow wound up back in the box. That's where I left him. After all, it might ~~have~~ have been a pet of the owner or something.

Next morning I had forgotten ~~about~~ ^{about} the incident and when I ~~pulled~~ ^{drove} up to the box again I pulled the door open without a second thought. Out popped that danged spider again and landed in my lap ~~again~~ just like the first time. This time the story had a different ending. I squashed the critter with my bare hand so fast I didn't have time to think of what I was doing.

Lucky I had tissues in the glove compartment.

On another occasion a ~~boxful~~ ^{host} of empty beer cans greeted me as I opened a box. I've also found boxes that contained rocks, well rotted fruit and a pumpkin. There is never a dull moment.

Getting back to my opening complaint, it seems people can have a neat place and down at the end of the driveway leans a rusted, shotgunned mailbox that wouldn't attract a family of wrens. I wonder why people don't take more pride in their mailbox. It's the first impression a visitor gets. ~~It's a first impression.~~

But then there is the other side of the coin, too. Last year I was on the route for a couple of weeks, filling in, when vandals went on a spree. One night a total of 25 boxes were damaged or completely destroyed on my route alone. So maybe some people just figure what's the use. But few things make a person look more successful than a neat country mailbox.

^{was in} I suited up for church last Sunday morning, and as I pulled up my trousers I could sense there was something wrong. I gripped the the open top of my pants and attempted to pull them together. The button reached its hole, but only while I held my breathe. With pants closed I let go of my breathe fully expecting the button to fly across the room. But it held, ~~so~~

So much for the pants. ~~Nothing jacket, xxxxxxxx~~ The jacket fit alright as long as I didn't cross my arms in front of me and if I didn't try to button it.

"This is getting ridiculous!" I ^{complained} ~~complained~~ ~~to her~~ to life. She was putting the final touches on her Sunday hairdo. "Last week this thing didn't fit worth a darn, but this week it's almost impossible. At this rate I can stay home from church next week because I won't have anything to wear!"

I was so discouraged that I decided ^{right then and there} to do something drastic.

"I'm going on a strict diet starting right now," I informed wife. "This has got to stop

"We've got beef roast and lemon pie for dinner today," she teased. "You sure you ^{don't} want to start tomorrow instead?"

But I was serious about this diet. ~~xxxxxxx~~ I'd threatened to go on a diet at least once a week since before Thanksgiving but always ^{conveniently} forgot about it at mealtime. But this time was going to be different.

And it was. Today, a week later, I've lost 10 pounds and all my ~~old~~ clothes are comfortably loose. My goal for next week is another five pounds. And I'll do it, too.

How did I do it? Simple. I just ate less, a lot less than usual. Breakfast was usually a bowl of cereal and a fruit such as grapefruit or an orange. Noon lunch consisted of a mere snack or maybe a bowl of soup. For my evening ^{fare it was} ~~meal~~ ~~was~~ a full meal ~~like~~ ~~before~~ ~~except~~ the ~~size~~ ^{were} of my portions ~~was~~ smaller.

Of course a full meal doesn't include dessert, of any kind. I deeply love cake, cookies, bars and ice cream. I could live on ice cream alone. But there is no room on my diet for ice cream or any ^{kind} other ~~type~~ ~~of~~ sweets. ^{Twenty years ago} I've lost a lot of weight in my day on two other supervised diets. ~~I~~ I managed to drop 45 pounds ~~by~~ ^{using} ~~using~~ an appetite suppressant ~~this happened 20 years ago during my army days. The drug is no longer used. I've been told.~~

The second time was about 5 years ago when I ~~drizzled~~ peeled off 60 pounds on a popular weight loss program.

I hope to keep ^{this time} going until I've lost another 40 pounds. Then I'm going to take a break before I go for the final 20. ~~79's~~ ^{79's} is a big order but dieting is always is.

Golden' 1922 not so small as 1911

You can almost get to know someone without ever meeting them face to face. This very thing has been happening to me as I research for material for a special centennial edition of a newspaper in an area town. I've been talking to people in the town, reading old newspaper files and just generally digging in dark corners for ~~g~~ hints to the town's past. This material will be used in stories in hopes of ~~shing~~ shining a little light on the town's history, ~~and~~ how and why it got started and what has happened during the past century to ~~help~~ make the community what it is today.

This can be an almost impossible undertaking especially for someone who has no personal knowledge of the early days. None of my ancestors settled in that community so I have no clues of my own to go on. But through the kind assistance of town residents who have such knowledge the job becomes much easier and indeed a pleasure.

Some very good material was provided me the other day by a lady who has lived in the town most of her life. It came in the form of letters to her from a former resident of the town, which I have been allowed to read. The lady who wrote these letters was born in the town but left in 1918. She is now in her nineties but has a very vivid memory of the town's early days.

In the letters she wrote to her friend she often devotes entire pages to reminiscing about events that took place almost a century ago. Since she now lives in a distant part of the country a live interview is out of the question, but her letters tell me more than I could uncover in an interview.

While the letters contain a wealth of invaluable information which I can use in my stories, the greater share of the material will not be used due to its personal aspects.

When the letters were written several years ago the lady lived in another part of the country alone. Because of her advanced age, she has outlived all her friends and immediate family. Her nearest relatives, nephews and nieces, are scattered around the country and she seldom sees any of them.

Her letters seem to hint that living to such an age might not be the blessing it is made out to be. She appears to be a lonely old lady who has found herself cast aside by a new society of which she feels no part.

My grandmother who lived to the late eighties told me of much the same feeling. Although all 10 of her children were living and mostly nearby, she still complained of feeling like excess baggage. "I just don't fit in their world," she lamented.

I often wonder about the people who wind up in ~~the~~ the nursing homes. I hope *I never do.*

It was that time of week again to sit down and compose another column. Problem was the kids were home from school because of parent-teacher conferences and there was no way I could possibly concentrate while the TV was blaring and the boys were fighting on the living room floor.

So I retired to the basement recreation room. It seems that since I finished remodeling the room last winter hardly anyone ever goes down there anymore. The kids claim they're down there all the time, but if that's true, I wonder what is causing all that noise and commotion ^{in upstairs} when I try to ~~relax~~ relax with a book or magazine.

Well anyway, I got set up with my typewriter on a card table in a corner behind the pool table and began to let my mind roam for a topic.

Suddenly the sound of thundering "hoofbeats"! The kids were coming down the stairs! ~~awkward~~ The two little boys had decided to match wits on the blackboard. The smallest had given himself a huge map of the United States for Christmas and he quickly spread it out of the pool table.

"What are you guys up to now?" I asked realizing that my peace and quiet was about to vanish.

"We're gonna play a game with the states," explained the biggest. "I'm gonna draw a state on the board and he is supposed to try to figure out which one it is."

"Tell you what," I volunteered. "I'll draw the state and you two guys figure out which one it is."

"OK," they both agreed quickly, and I set to work sketching an outline of Colorado.

"Colorado!" they chimed almost in unison before I had even finished. They let me finish an outline of Maine before guessing it correctly on the first try. South Carolina, Connecticut, Nevada and New Mexico quickly fell to their ^{apparently} superior knowledge of US geography. Even a reasonably accurate sketch of the state of Washington failed to stump them.

But I finally got both of them and it was then only time. They could not guess Rhode Island.

Our youngest, a 10-year-old, likes maps. His Christmas map is getting dogeared and dirty from heavy use. Many of his mornings while waiting for the school bus are spent looking at that map. He carefully pronounces names of towns and when he makes a discovery that fascinates him, he shares his find with the person nearest him and with anyone else that cares.

"You and you're dumb old map," one of the kids complained to him one day. "You're always looking at that map. You're not going anywhere anyhow so why waste your time with that?"

"Yes I am!" he shot back. "When I'm big I'm going to see all the places on this map. Now I'm just trying to figure out which ones to see first."

I couldn't help smiling a little to myself when I overheard his answer. I once felt the same way myself.

A major portion of this area's "cedar forest" is being removed by unconventional "loggers".

Ma Bell's "boys" have been busy pulling up poles and rolling miles of wire as the company carries out the last step of conversion to an underground wire system.

Somewhere over a year ago a big yellow caterpillar tractor pulling a strange looking contraption crawled snail-like up our driveway plowing in the new underground cable that was to replace the old unsightly overhead wires.

After completing the job we didn't see any Bell trucks around for the longest time and I began to worry that they had forgotten to finish what they had begun.

The old phone system around here was bad, to say the least. Every time a raindrop fell, something would short out and take the phone service with it. Sometimes it took literally days before the servicement got the situation remedied. That's when you really find out how much you depend on a phone and you learn to appreciate it just a little more.

Then one day last fall a man in one of those little service vans came up to our door and announced that he was here to hook our phone to the new underground system. The job only took a few minutes and the result has been a good dependable telephone connection with the outside world.

So the next and final step was the removal of the poles and wires. One day a couple of weeks ago the big truck equipped with a boom came and began pulling the poles in our neighborhood.

If you have ever tried to pull anything out of frozen ground you know what a backache is. But with the boom truck the job was easy.

I stopped along the road to watch. With the truck parked crossways on the road, two stabilizing "feet" were hydraulically lowered to the road surface and the boom extended to reach across the ditch and to the pole. With a hook and cable wrapped around the pole, pressure was applied upward and coupled with a rocking back and forth motion, the pole slipped easily out of the frozen ground. Goes to show that if you have the right equipment no job is impossible.

The other day I came home from town and something wavery unusual caught my eye, or rather the lack of something.

All the poles were gone from the south side of the road. And their absence left a definite void. While I had never really noticed them before, now that they were gone the empty space stuck out like a sore thumb. It somehow seemed more difficult to keep the pickup on the road like the poles had been unconsciously used as a guide, or something.

And I've heard others make similar observations. Many are the times in past winters when those poles were almost the only means of finding the road ahead while driving in heavy blowing and drifting snow.

But there still are the high line poles on the other side of the road, at least for the present.

I suppose, though, that most farmers will be glad to see the poles removed as they can be somewhat troublesome especially with the large equipment in use today. And often the low hanging wires became entangled in combine augers and other high equipment.

I remember several years ago, a neighbor set fire to a pile of brush near a phone pole and while unattended, the fire crept over to the base of the pole and went to work. By morning the bottom half of the pole was gone and the top swung in the breeze suspended only by the wires.

An underground system should put an end to a lot of those servicemen's headaches.

* * * * *

I HAPPENED TO view a recent segment of television's "Hawaii Five O" and was disgusted by what I saw.

Normally I'm pretty opened minded by most of the tube's offerings and regard them only as entertainment of one form or another. But the obvious attack on the lowly handgun riled me.

This story revolved around a particular handgun, a "Saturday night special", and how it possessed an unseen evil power, the gun supposedly caused its possessor to either commit a heinous crime or inflict injuries to someone.

I've owned a fair number of handguns in my day and never have I felt this strange power.

I'm not a hunter, target shooter or gun hobbyist, and guns of any kind play no part at all in my daily life.

But there are a lot of good people who find much good clean and wholesome enjoyment in the shooting sport and I simply feel their rights and desires should be of some consequence.

The show's assertion that guns themselves are an uncontrollable evil insulted me, and I hope, others.

I heard voices and looked up just as the ~~shop~~ ^{door} shop opened. The kids were home from school.

"What are ya making, Dad?" questioned one of the smaller boys as he stomped over to where I was bent over the turning lathe, his heavy ^{snowmobile} boots ~~clanking~~ making distinct tracks in the sawdust scattered around the float.

"A chess set," I answered without taking my eyes off the spinning piece of wood.

Back in my army days I had been stationed on the Mexican border and on a shopping jaunt across the border one day, I acquired a hand carved wooden chess set for what I considered to be a bargain price.

It was on this board that all my kids became somewhat proficient in the age old game. I had learned to play during ^{my} school days and have always immensely enjoyed the competitive challenge the game provides. But this past ^{fall} ~~year~~ it seems our chess set disappeared. So one day I asked one of the older boys if he had seen ^{it} ~~the chess set~~ lately.

"Yah, it's in school," was his reply.

"In school!" I shot back, surprised. "What's it doing there?"

"A bunch of ^{us} ~~the kids~~ decided to have a chess tournament and we needed a set, so I took ours to school," he explained.

"How's the tournament going?" I asked sincerely interested.

"Oh we haven't started yet," he replied. "We have to finish our ping pong tournament first."

It was plain the old family chess set would be out of my reach for a while, ^{so} I decided to make a new one. I had always wanted to make a set ~~of my own~~ with large pieces, six or eight inches high. It looked like this was the perfect time to start.

I went to the wood pile and picked out several pieces of very hard, white wood out from our wood lot in the Minnesota River Valley. I am not sure what kind of wood it is, but it ^{seems} ~~looks like~~ ^{to} ~~it might~~ be in the elm family and ~~is~~ ~~as~~ ~~hard~~ ~~as~~ ~~iron~~.

No matter what kind ~~it is~~, it turns beautifully on the lathe. One set of pieces will be made from this ~~wood~~ white wood and the other from dark walnut, ^{also cut from our woods} ~~the~~ The two ~~woods~~ ^{woods} should offer ^{the} ~~a~~ fine ~~contrast~~ ^{contrast} ~~necessary~~ ^{desirable} in a chess set.

The board ^{is made first} ~~is made~~ comes from pieces of walnut and hackberry, another light colored ^{and hard} wood.

The chess set ~~will be~~ ^{is} the ~~second~~ ^{second} projects to come out of a new ~~wood~~ shop building the boys and I put up last fall just as cold weather hit. The first ~~was a kitchen cabinet installed in~~

And if life has her way it won't be the last. She has ~~not~~ ^{placed enough} orders in ^{to keep the factory} for a host of ~~other~~ ^{other} projects.

"Dad, look what I caught!" our youngest fairly shouted as he came stomping into the house brandishing a small jump trap that held a ^{tiny} ~~small~~ white ball of fur in its cold steely grip.

"Why, it's a weasel," I said more than a little surprised. I hadn't seen one of those little critters in years. It was pure white with an inch of black at the end of its tail.

I couldn't help feeling sorry for the poor little thing as it hung so piteously ~~in~~ from the jaws of the trap. Thank goodness it was dead and apparently had been for some time as it was frozen solid.

I wondered aloud why the little animal had ~~strayed~~ ^{strayed} into an unbailed trap. Weasels are supposed to be smarter than that. I looked more closely at the trap and found the answer. The trap had previously caught a cottontail rabbit and bits of fur and frozen blood still adorned the trap's jaws. Weasels thrive on a diet of blood and its sensitive nose had apparently led it to its doom.

The nosy little fellow had been caught by a front leg and must have suffered undescribably ^{tiny} before death relieved it, judging from the twisted posture of its ~~frozen~~ ^{frozen} carcass. When I was a kid a friend and I used to run a trap line every fall. We caught numerous muskrats, an occasional mink, a pheasant now and then, and once in a while a neighbor's cat. Often it was necessary to dispatch our catch with a ^{gun} club as it fought ^{valiantly} for its life. This never bothered me at the time, but I could get no pleasure from running a trap line today. I don't even dare for hunting. I guess I'm just turning into an old softie.

My feelings of pity for the weasel were probably as strong as the pleasure derived from my son's success as a trapper. But trapping seems to be the only reliable method of protecting our berries and young trees from the wild bunnies that seem to have taken over the place this year.

For years a cottontail rabbit was a rare sight on our place. I could count the times I had spotted one in the past five years, on one hand. ~~But this year the things are different and out of hand.~~ The only thing I can think of ~~that's~~ ^{this} different ~~from other years~~ ^{year around} is that the guinea fowl are penned up ~~this winter~~. Other years they have been allowed to run loose ~~and~~ ^{through} the winter. And it just could be that their shrill screeching has kept the bunnies at bay.

And it's a fact. The last big infestation of rats on this place ended soon after ~~that~~ we brought the guineas home and turned them loose.

On the minus side guineas are murder on the strawberry patch. They seem to like nothing better than plump, ripe strawberries. Every ^{summer} morning at the crack of dawn the entire flock can be found feasting on strawberries.

It's really not a fair choice. Bunnies in the raspberry or strawberry patch...

"Back to the Wall" sought by some ^{bars} kids have a strange sense of values. At least one of ~~the~~ does.

2-17-8

One day last week the seventh and eighth grade in the small country school ^{out}met of ~~the~~ kids attend spent the day on a field trip and were ~~xxxxxx~~ absent from ^{all} ~~the~~ school. This meant the sixth graders would be the only ones in the ~~the~~ classroom that day.

"Boy, Dad, we're gonna have it made today," piped my sixth grader that morning as he made ready for the bus.

"Why?" I ^{asked} ~~asked~~.

"We get to sit in the eighth grade seats today," he continued, his enthusiasm mounting.

"What's so great about that?" I ~~asked~~ wanted to know.

"Well, their desks are along the wall and they get to lean against it," he explained all ~~enthusiastic~~ *excited*.

Now there's a big deal if I ever heard one!

* * *

TODAY IS THE 67th ^{consecutive} day ~~the~~ temperatures have not risen above the freezing mark, weather experts ~~tell us~~ who keep records of such things tell us. In recent years this is not the only "coldest" record set in these parts by the fickle weather. Last winter all kinds of cold records were ~~even~~ literally and figuratively shattered by newer and colder temps.

What I've been wondering for some time now is when are we going to set some "warmest" records? For example, instead of 67 days of below freezing temps, how about ^{consecutive winter} 67 days when it did not freeze at all. More realistically I'd settle for 67 days ^{in a row} during mid-winter when ^{Fahrenheit} the mercury did not dip below zero degrees. Would'nt that make for a perfect winter?

If you are an above zero person like me then you, like me, have no time at all for this silly new temperature scale they are trying to force on us. On the Celsius scale water does not freeze until it hits zero degrees. Sounds warmer at first. But it's also true that all wintertime temps below freezing are ~~always~~ below zero. And there is something infinitely colder about that kind of reading.

In that respect Fahrenheit gets my undisputed vote. Even if the ice isn't melting, at least temperatures aren't always below zero either. And there's some warmth in that.

* * *

IT SEEMS EVERYONE has his problems. There was this fellow who had skunks under his front porch. The smell was more than he could bear and he had tried countless methods of getting them to move. Finally his neighbor suggested he throw a hunk of lutefisk under the porch. Sure enough it worked, all the skunks left, pronto. But now he's wondering how to get rid of all the Norwegians.

I sat down at the typewriter about two hours ago thinking I'd bang out a quick column for this week. But I've pretty near got blisters on my behind and still nothing has happened. Usually a few minutes of ~~intense~~ deep concentration and a topic ~~is~~ ^{pops in to} mind, but it's different today. I've done nothing but draw a blank.

Disk jockey on the radio said he is going to play something called "The Farmer's Prayer". I'll have to take a minute to listen to that.

Neighbor just left after he and I emptied the coffee pot and cleaned out the last of a pan of bars. Wife is going to be mad when she gets home this afternoon. Those bars were supposed to last a while, she ~~informed~~ ^{warned} me as she took them from the oven last night.

But I think she knows better than that. bars in this house don't have a chance and ~~neither~~ neither do cookies or cakes.

As I sat here staring out the window, ~~my~~ ^{gaze} eyes began ~~to~~ ^{to} focus on the wife's giant Christmas cactus that lives in a big yellow pot on a small table in front of the window. Here it is two months after Christmas and the ~~thing~~ ^{crazy} thing is blooming again. It erupted in a shower of ~~red~~ crimson blooms a couple of weeks before the holidays and quit again in mid-January. Now it's ~~starting~~ ^{starting} again.

That plant has quite a history. I got it some years ago from an elderly lady who felt she could no longer take care of her housefull of plants. So ~~after exacting a promise that it would have a good home, she gave it to me free of charge.~~ ^{from me} I knew wife would be thrilled to get it.

^{explained} The lady ~~said~~ the cactus had been planted by her mother ~~when she was~~ ^{as} a young girl. Since the lady was in her early eighties, a little simple arithmetic showed the plant was more than 100 years old. It measured almost four feet across the top and to this day is still the largest plant of its kind wife or I have ever seen.

Each year we have had it, the entire plant has been covered with blooms during the winter months and has been the topic of many conversations.

But last summer something unfortunate happened to the oldtimer. It was involved in a car accident. During the summer months wife sets it out in the patio where it gets a good deal of light, but no direct sunlight. Here it does the best.

Until one day when I came home from somewhere and ~~prepared to park~~ ^{headed} the car in its normal spot right behind the patio. But this time the brakes failed and the car ~~crashed~~ ^{crashed} through the patio ~~screen~~ ^{screen} and knocked a couple of boards loose ~~from inside the room.~~ ^{from} One of these ~~is~~ the cactus. It has never been the same since.
 ^{directly across} ~~breaking~~ ^{breaking} ~~all a number~~ ^{all a number} ~~large~~ ^{large} ~~boards.~~ ^{boards.}

5-3-77

Now that the grade school basketball tournament in which some of our boys participated ~~is~~ at least as well ~~is~~ is history, it appears ~~xxxxxx~~ the non-participants scored ~~better~~ better than the players.

"What do you mean by that statement?" inquired my 13-year-old daughter suspiciously as she peered over my shoulder at the paper in the typewriter.

"Well, look at your brothers," I explained. "The three big boys all came out of the tourney with new girlfriends or at least with some hot leads." And the way it looked you sure had a good time."

The tourney was held last weekend in New Ulj and involved grade schools from three states. ~~Ruxixgx~~ It was similar to the state high school basketball tourneys in the way it was set up and it also provided an excellent opportunity for the young people to meet new friends, both male and female. And our kids did as much meeting as anyone else, maybe more.

Each day evening on the way home after the days activities our gang ~~xxxxxx~~ snuggled down in the back seat of the car and compared notes. Since mother has a sharper ear than I she caught most of the discussion and now knows who is the cutest, the ickiest, the best and the worst, etc.

Our second and third oldest boys found some new interests during the three day event but nothing of a lasting nature, I hope anyway considering their still tender ages. The fourth oldest boy, also a member of the team is still at the tender age when all ~~six~~ ^{under} members of the opposite sex are categorized ~~as~~ "Yuk".

The oldest, ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{a high school junior,} finds girls, at least certain ones, quite interesting. The first day of the tourney he met a girl through a mutual friend that caught his interest and apparent admiration. He spent the next two days at the tourney ~~wixxxxx~~ in her company and has been getting a considerable amount of mail from her since.

~~xxxxxxx~~ He has been taking a lot of heat from his brothers and sister here at home, but he just ~~sxxxx~~ ^{grins} and bears it.

During one the games wife and I ~~wxxx~~ watched as our son and his new friend sat down nearby to watch the game.

"It gives you a funny feeling to see one of your own kids boys with a girlfriend," wife observed thoughtfully. "It makes you feel kind of old. It seems like they were just babies yesterday and now look at them."

I didn't argue. "Yeah, but it's kind of fun to watch them mature and see ~~what they~~ ~~become~~ how they turn out."

#

Our home has a worm. It wiggles its way into every kitchen cupboard and refrigerator self in the house.

Its trail has been found leading from a previously unopened box of graham crackers to a nearby ^{pack} box of soda crackers, and from an also previously unopened bag of prunes to the cookie jar once filled with delicious chocolate chip cookies. Bags of chocolate chips stashed next to the graham crackers ^{are} were left untouched because, ~~rightfully so~~, ^{the creature} the worm is known to fear an outbreak of complexion problems if it tangles with chocolate and other sweets.

^{And} The worm seems to be smart enough to realize the danger in eating too many prunes at one time.

"I wish he would eat the whole bagful once and maybe that would cure him," wife observed ^{sarcastically} as she discovered ~~his~~ ^{occasionally} latest invasion of her private feed cache.

Wife ^{saves} a cupful of ~~ya~~ ^{small} fruit flavored yogurt after an evening meal as on her last shopping jaunt ^{she} picked up four ^{small} containers with as many different ^{flavors} kinds. Last night when she decided to ~~finish~~ ^{ing} top off her evening meal with a serving, she discovered ^{yet another theft.} ~~the worm had been~~ ^{no doubt,} there first. There were only two containers left, the others were gone, emptied by our mysterious intruder.

Wife blew her top and immediately sought out the teenage boy who is the prime suspect, confronting him with the evidence. He stared blankly at her while she raved about how this had gone on long enough and it was time to put a stop to all this thievery.

"Gee, I wish I could help you," he replied ^{with} just the hint of a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"You know darn well what I'm talking about!" she shot back shaking ^a the newly opened ~~bag~~ cup of yogurt in his face.

I sat at the supper table sipping my coffee, amused by the proceedings.

"This isn't funny," she said turning her attention to me. "You know what he does?"

She then launched ^{into} a lengthy explanation about how "The Worm" ~~xxxxxxx~~ invades her kitchen domain each day as soon as he gets home from school.

"I've seen him!" she insisted. "It's nothing for him to start with a couple of pieces of peanut butter bread, followed by a pack of graham crackers, a handful of prunes or raisins, a handful of cookies and then top it off with an orange or a banana just in time for supper."

"The minute I step out of the kitchen he's in there stealing something."

The worm just smiled as he sidled over to the cupboard and snatched a handful of potato chips from an open bag.

#

As winter drags on into March, we are finding it necessary to head for the woods again to replenish our wood pile. This is the second time ~~the~~ our supply of firewood has been depleted by the persistent cold weather.

Last fall I had high hopes for the huge pile of wood we had cut and ~~split~~ split. But in the back of my mind I figured it might get all used up somewhere around the beginning of spring, making it necessary to cut ~~xxxx~~ ^{a little} more to finish the heating season. But the pile was gone in the middle of January. I still can't understand how I could have underestimated our wood needs by such a large margin. After all, this wasn't the first year we had heated with wood.

So back then I and the boys spent several weekends hustling dead trees and cutting them up into useable fire wood. With our supply replenished I breathed a sigh of relief and reveled in the secure feeling the new wood pile gave me.

But now it's gone too, and it's back to the woods for more fuel. The deeper snow down there isn't going to make our work any easier.

True, our heating system doesn't cost much ^{cash} to support, but it sure takes a "heap of sweat".

* * *

Backache! I doubt if modern man has ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{any} ~~xxxxxxxing~~ ailment that causes more pain, ~~and~~ discomfort, and just plain misery.

"If you think that's bad you should try childbirth sometime," wife comments as she listens to my grunts and groans as I grope with ~~my~~ ^{the} latest siege from this constantly recurring tormentor.

"That's not in the same category," I argue. "I'm talking about a constantly recurring ailment. That leaves childbirth out, or at least it should."

"I'm not so sure it does," wife replies. "Just look at the housefull we have." I'd call pregnancy around here a constantly recurring ailment."

I don't think that's funny and tell her so.

My latest attack came about three days ago and grew progressively worse each passing day. It finally got to the point where I couldn't lay without pain, sitting did not work at all, and to stand with any degree of relief at all it was necessary to hunch forward to the point where I almost fell on my face.

"Instead of ^{all this} grumbling and complaining," wife suggested with a frown, "why don't you go and get a treatment."

Doctors, like dentists, are not my favorite people, so I had been postponing a visit sure in my mind that the thing would get tired of me and go away on its own accord. But apparently this was not to be. Yesterday I finally sought professional help. And I should have had my butt kicked for not going sooner. Today I feel like a new person and wife sneered, "I told you."

I've had attacks of backache for years, some severe and others more in the nuisance category. Years ago when I was still farming, my doctor used to ~~make~~ blame it on field work astride the tractor. He said nobody's back was could take all that bumping and grinding without some kind of trouble.

But now that I spend only a few hours a year on the tractor, I still get all these aches and pains. But the doctor has a new line now.

"When you consider all that extra weight your spine has to support what can you expect?" is his know-it-all diagnosis.

I refer to point the ~~fix~~ accusing finger at a different culprit, work. Heisting heavy hay bales into the cattle feeder and bucking logs with the heavy old McCulloch doesn't do a thing for my posture.

Anyway, my excuse sounds better.

Now that the winter snows have departed, finally, it's surprising how many tools and other odds and ends have reappeared. A hammer I've been looking for all winter turned up at the base of a tree near the house, dropped there last fall by one of the kids who, no doubt, was too pressed for time to return it to the shop.

Our assortment of forks and shovels seemingly always in short supply anyway, has grown by several pieces since the snow left. I'm certain they suffered the same fate last fall as the hammer. But try and get a confession out of the kids. You never saw so many blank looks in your life.

No sooner had the snow gone from the garden and the tulips were poking green feelers up from the still frosty soil. It always amazes me that any plant life can grow under such conditions.

But not all the news was good. The departing snow revealed a number of other ^{more} unsightly items such as windblown waste paper, ~~xxxx~~ empty tin cans and twigs and branches blown from the trees in the winter storms. If I didn't know better I'd blame it on a dog, but we don't have one anymore.

Nothing can dirty up a lawn and yard quicker than a puppy. I can still remember all the bones, cans and other junk our last dog carried up the the house. What we ~~xxxx~~ missed in spring cleanup, the rotary lawnmower found later.

Spring cleanup, already under way during the kids' Easter vacation, had better be very thorough this year. It seems that during the past winter one of our heifers, the one with the long horns, developed the bad habit of jumping the yard fence and running loose around the yard. One of the first times she got loose she somehow got those "antlers" of hers ~~xxxx~~ ^{discarded} ~~xxxx~~ into a pile of ~~xxxx~~ ^{discarded} twine. When we tried to chase her back in she took off running dropping strands of twine all over the yard. I've just given the cleanup crew explicit instructions to get all the twine. ~~xxxx~~ ^{I didn't have to remind them twice} ~~xxxx~~ of the unpleasant task of unraveling string wrapped into the lawnmower blades.

Spring cleaning is one of the most rewarding tasks of the year. The results are so apparent and it completes the changover from a season of cold and snowstorms to one of sunshine and green things.

The two little boys just came running in ~~their~~ ~~eyes~~ ~~xxxx~~ wide eyed and excited. "There's a BIG flock of honkers flying right over the yard!" they chimed almost in unison. I ran out to look and sure enough. The flock wasn't quite as big as they thought. ~~xxxx~~ they were heading north.

The Rabbit 4-1-78
It all started Easter morning when our youngest son rediscovered his big white rabbit. Up at the crack of dawn he brought the bunny into the house and set it on the kitchen floor.

smiling broadly
"Look what I found," he announced to the rest of the family, "the Easter bunny."

The poor rabbit huddled close to the floor scared half out of his wits and hardly moved a muscle.

"I think he's confused by ~~his~~ all the attention he's getting," I speculated.

The bunny spent the entire winter cooped up in a cage on the barn floor and although he had plenty to eat and had a comfortable home, he saw little of human activity during these long cold months. His young master spent only enough time each day to feed and water the creature. Now all of a sudden he was the center of attention.

The bunny lost much of his fear when presented with a stalk of ~~the~~ celery and made himself right at home when the boys laid a carrot on the floor under his nose.

But that Easter morning episode with the rabbit caused such a stir that the rabbit's young master and his older brother decided to go into the rabbit business, right then and there.

"What do you mean 'the rabbit business'?" I wondered when they announced their decision.

"Well, we are going to get a female and raise rabbits," they answered. "We already moved a couple of cages outside in the sun and we know where we can get a female already bred."

"What are you going to do with all the bunnies you raise?" I asked. They looked at each other and shrugged, then looked turned to me. "We'll keep em, I guess," replied the oldest.

"What about eating them?" I asked. They made horrible faces and insisted they ~~can~~ just couldn't eat their pets. Although I've been told more than once that rabbit is a tasty fare, I didn't push that issue any further. The idea reeked of cannibalism, somehow.

The boys had their hearts set on a rabbit from a fellow in town who was charging them \$3 for a bred female. I felt they could do better than that since I had just seen an ad in the giveaway column offering two rabbits and a hutch for free. So, having been caught up by their enthusiasm myself, I offered to contact the party with the free rabbits to see what I could get.

The heat has been on since I allowed myself to be placed "under the gun", so I guess today will have to be the day when I see about the free bunnies. With a little luck maybe someone else has already beaten me to the punch and taken them. But then the boys will still be on my back, I suppose.

known by the rest of the family
Since going bananas over rabbits, the two boys have become ~~known~~ as the "Rabbit Brothers" around the house. *Ben and Peter.*

4-8-78
"Breakfast is over in 15 minutes!" wife yelled up the stairway to our habitual late rise Saturday morning. "If you aren't down here by then I'm clearing ~~the~~ off the table and you can go without!"

Her patience had been worn thin by repeated calls for the kids to get up. One by one the stumbled down the stairway wiping sleepy eyes and yawning.

Saturday morning it's normal for the entire family to "sleep in". But sometimes I think a late riser would skip Saturday all together if someone didn't ~~in~~ rouse him out. A half hour after wife's last call he finally eased down the stairway, hair standing in all directions and squinted at ~~us~~ the empty table through sleep swollen eyes. The discovery that ~~wife~~ his mother wasn't bluffing about clearing the table apparently helped awaken him fully and he shuffled off toward the bathroom mumbling to himself.

A short while later I spotted him lurking in the kitchen near the refrigerator, but not daring to open it fearing his mother's wrath.

"Maybe if he misses breakfast once that'll teach him to get ^{up} when the rest do," she reassured still sticking to her guns.

Wife is a stern believer in ~~the~~ family togetherness at mealtime and she seldom fails to scold stragglers claiming they cause extra work and bether that she can do without. Saturday is her main wash day and weekly housecleaning is also part of the days program, so she likes to get underway as soon as possible.

I heard no grumbling or complaining from our unfed son all morning and he showed up right on time for the noon meal. But I suspect that he practiced his highly developed skill in snitching from the cupboards from time to time during the forenoon which provided ^{enough} enough fare to tide him over until the next meal.

All the kids have become expert snitchers and evidence of their clandestine visits can be found in every corner of the kitchen where food is stored. One has been caught in the kitchen after midnight leading up on cookies and bars to carry back to his "lair" upstairs. The idea was to stash this booty in his room for snacking during days when wife was unusually observant and visits to the kitchen ~~were~~ would be too risky.

Saturday mornings are usually filled with a flurry of activity at our house. Kids are under direct orders from their mother to clean their rooms and deposit their dirty clothes in the back room for washing. Afternoons wife and her appointed kitchen assistant bake goodies to refill all the previously emptied containers while the rest dart in and out of the kitchen snitching samples as they pass.

Spring following in valley

4-17-78

The cloudy skies, cool temperatures and seeggy conditions that have held spring at bay the past few weeks haven't had the same effect down in the Minnesota River Valley. Several days ago I drove down to our woodland in the valley to get a little exercise with the chain saw and was astonished, to say the least, at the sight that greeted me.

The surrounding hills and ravines were literally covered with three petaled white flowers. Like a soft ~~white~~ snowy blanket they adorned the slopes everywhere. I've been told by those who profess to know that these "earlybirds" of the wild flower world are bleedroots. When their roots are pulled and broken apart a red, bloody juice ^{exudes} comes from the breaks. It's a very fitting name.

I headed up a gradual ravine with head down to see what other wonders I might find on the forest floor. A short way up the ravine I came across a scattering of dark red blotches pushing up from the carpet of leaves. I ~~looked~~ stooped down to get a closer look. It turned out these were the blooms of another wild member of the flower world, the peace pipe. Each bloom nestled in the leaves with no other sign of the plant visible.

Numerous other plants were awakening from their winter slumber under a heavy blanket of snow. I've always been fascinated by the many varied forms of plant life that thrive in the woods. And not one of these plants can be found here in the grove around our farm. It's a totally different environment.

I heard the snarl of a chain saw just over the hill so I climbed to the top to see what was happening. Down in the next ravine a neighboring "woodsman" was making short work of a couple old boxelders. I half walked and half slid down the other side and we spent a pleasant hour or so visiting in the warm sunshine and serenaded by a flock of red cardinals. It was a storybook setting and an afternoon that I shall not soon forget.

It will probably be my last visit to the woods for a while at least as the river nearby has risen to the point where it is already on the county road that abuts our property. I drove through several inches of water as I left and the other day I heard that the road has been closed.

Spring and fall are the best times to visit the woods, as in summer swarms of starving mosquitoes feast on any soul ~~xxx~~ foolhardy enough to venture into the dark, damp stillness.

Winter is ~~xxx~~ a beautiful time of year ~~in~~ in the woods. Due to the topography of our property there is never wind of any consequence and as a result the snow falls lightly and ~~lies~~ quietly settles softly through the tree tops and blankets everything with a coat of fluffy down. It is a veritable winter wonderland.

4-28-72
"Anybody ~~was~~ in the field out your way?" I asked a friend the other day in town after two days of sunshine and warm temps.

"Yah, one guy was out planting," he replied, a grin spreading across his face. "He planted his tractor."

Everyone in our booth in the coffee shop laughed.

"A fellow over east of town planted his maure spreader," another fellow volunteered.

The farmers in our group agreed that although the land appears dry in some places it's still foolhardy to venture out with any kind of equipment. Some farmers south of town where the soil is lighter have managed to get some small grain in the ground, but around here the black heavy soil has yielded to noone.

I tilled a small part of the garden before the last rains, but that ~~has~~ proved to be a mistake. The soil ~~is~~ dried hard and lumpy on top while an inch or two down there is still mud. I guess I just got an attack of spring fever that couldn't be controlled. The idea was to tear up a little piece of the garden for some early onions and radishes, but ~~as~~ persistent rains ~~followed~~ followed and kept me out of the garden since.

Thinking it was about time to try it again, I walked out to the garden ^{today} with a shovel and tried a test dig. The soil still stuck to the shovel in sticky gobs. Guess I'll have to wait a little longer. But it's not going to be easy with the red stalks of rhubarb already a foot long and asparagus shoots half that tall. Even ~~my~~ my wife's rose bushes are beginning to leaf out. ~~xxxxxx~~

And one of these ^{first} days that old nemesis, the lawn mower will have to be dragged out of the shed where it's been in ~~xxxxxx~~ exile since late last summer. I kind of hate to think of all the problems ^{to which} a lawnmower can expose a person. It seems to make no difference whether the machine is old or new (I have both), it still seems to take wicked delight in causing problems.

I firmly believe that the person who came up with Murphy's Law had a lawnmower in mind. You've heard of Murphy's Law, it's the one that says that if something ~~can~~ (a lawnmower) can go wrong, it will and at the ~~xxxx~~ worst possible time. This is a lawnmower, no doubt about it.

Not to change the subject, but just the other day I heard a discussion on the radio concerning variations of the law. There seems to be literally dozens of applications. I can think of a couple of my own like, if a tractor can run out of gas, it will pick the ^{most distant} point from the yard.

And did you ever notice that when you are working under the hood of a car and drop a wrench, it comes to rest ~~xxxxxx~~ far out of reach as possible?

That's one law I'd like to see amended.

Early in the morning

I was sitting in the auditorium, part of the crowd that was awaiting the drawing. I had numbered about a dozen tickets in hand all alined so the numbers could be quickly checked as the man up on the stage called ~~th~~axout, the winners.

A hush fell over the crowd as the man called out the first number, 55. I looked over my tickets and the last one bore the ^{lucky} number. ~~55~~ I jumped to my feet waving the magic ticket and yelled so the whole auditorium could hear, "I got it!"

I hurried up to the front and at the foot of the stage ~~as~~ presented my winner.

"What did I win?" I wondered breathlessly.

"Well, it's a cash prize, but I don't know how much," the man answered. "I'll have to sit down at the table and figure it out."

I waited impatiently shifting from foot to foot, as he wrote numbers on a pad in front of h

Finally he looked up and spoke, "It looks like you just won \$20."

"Only twenty dollars?" I ~~s~~asked complained. "Oh well, it's better than nothing. I'll take it."

Just as I reached for my prize, I woke up. It was all a dream.

I personally know people who have won new cars in drawings and large cash prizes at county fair drawings giveaways, but just as I was about to claim my share of the free cash, however sma I wake up. What rotten luck.

I'm one of those gullible people who never fails to return my "lucky" numbers to see if I "may have already won a prize". And I always wipe those darkened spots with a moist fingertip in hopes that my lucky number will show up. But it never does. So here I finally get my big chance, my number has finally turned up and it's all a dream. A bad one, as it turns out.

Wife had no sympathy for my predicament when I told her how close I had come to striking it rich.

"You and your goofy dreams," she laughed.

I LOOKED UP from my typewriter and into the newly opened eyes of a baby kitten. My son j^t brought it in from the barn to show the family. Old Velvet, our snow white cat, delivered sⁿ of the little critters in the bottom of the feed tank in the barn. Three look like their m snow white, one is a milky gray, and the other three are the common gray tiger striped vari^d

Old Velvet has given us such a delightful gift

They all count

5-19-77

with ten fingers you wouldn't think one more or less would make much difference. But when one is out of commission, especially the right index finger, you're almost an invalid. And it's considerably more serious if you are right handed as I am.

Up until the day before yesterday all ten of my fingers were healthy and happy. Then I ^{and} slammed one in the car door. ~~Then~~ there were nine.

I was going to a neighboring town to get a part for the sprayer. So I laid the old part in the back ~~area~~ on the floor and with my left hand slammed the door, right on my finger.

There was no pain only a feeling of surprise as the finger was held fast by the tightly closed door. ~~My~~ My first reaction was to pull it ~~away~~ out of the quarter inch wide crack between the door and the car body. But no luck. What a weird feeling to see your own finger stuck in such a narrow crack.

I yanked on the door handle and the door opened releasing the imprisoned digit. The sight that greeted me nearly turned my stomach. There was an ugly deep cut slightly over an inch long and it looked to be almost as deep. Since my hand were still full of grease and dirt from taking the part off the sprayer, this too, was pushed into the gaping wound making it all the uglier.

I'm not one to go running to the doctor every time I cut my self, but this time I knew without a doubt it was a ~~serious~~ case for the family physician and his needle and thread.

So I rounded up the wife and we headed for the clinic with me gripping my injured hand with the other as the ~~initial~~ initial shock wore off and the pain set in. As wife can and will readily agree, I'm not a silent sufferer. When something hurts, I holler.

"Listening to all that moaning and groaning and seeing all that blood all over kind of made me sick to my stomach," wife told me after the visit to the doctor.

When we got to the clinic the receptionist coolly informed us that there were no doctors in just then and that we had better get over to the hospital emergency room.

"All this just to get a finger sewed up?" I complained.

"Quit your grumbling and let's get over there," wife scolded as she pulled me toward the door.

"Do you think he'll have to sew it up?" I wondered as wife drove over to the hospital. "Maybe they'll just bandage it and let it go at that." The thought of someone sewing my flesh together made me sick.

"Do you think they'll freeze it before sewing?" I questioned wife once again.

"They'll freeze it," she assured me.

The thought of a needle terrified me.

(over)

"What's for supper?" I asked walking into the kitchen the other evening. Wife had just gotten home from her town job and I figured she was at supper like usual.

"I'm not making supper tonight," she announced confidently. "We're going out to eat."

"Well, then, what's cooking on the stove," I wondered suspecting a plot.

"This is for the kids. We're going out."

I could tell by the tone of her voice that there was little hope in changing her mind. But I tried anyway.

"I've been out in the field all day and I'm tired," I pleaded. "I just don't feel like going anywhere. Why don't we postpone it till next week?"

But my attempt to persuade her was futile. She was bound and determined to eat out.

"Well if it has to be," I surrendered, "where are we going?"

"I've had a craving for pizza all day," she explained. "Why don't we go to that place ^{it} has that good pizza and if we go early enough we can do some shopping before the stores close. ^{a little irritated.}

"Shopping," I wondered, "what ~~kind~~ kind of shopping do you have to do now again?" It seems every time you go shopping I wind up broke."

"Well, if you and your kids wouldn't eat so much every day," she shot back. "And you need underwear. You're always hollering that you can't find any underwear!"

Boy, going out shopping for underwear sure wasn't my idea of a night out with my girl. But that's my wife. Always being practical.

So we had our pizza and I have to admit, it was delicious. But by the time we finished and got to the store, it was closed. So no underwear.

"You'll have to shower with your underwear ^{from now on,}" wife laughed.

I didn't appreciate her crack.

* * *

SLAMMING MY finger in the car door last week was an expensive as well as painful incident. Since no doctors were at the clinic when I came in, they sent me to the hospital emergency room. An itemized bill came today from the hospital. It included such goodies as two sets of surgeons gloves for \$2.50; a stitch set for \$6 and another \$2 for the strings; and the nurse that cleaned the dirt and grease out of the wound got another \$6. Considering the pain she caused me, I should have gotten paid.

Total bill for the hospital was \$16.50

One morning last week I was awakened abruptly by a foghorn toot and followed by loud cries of "help". The cries were coming from the pole barn. Wife who was awake, heard them too.

"The peacock is saying ~~gax~~ 'Good ~~Morning~~ Morning'" she explained noting the puzzled expression on my face.

"That's right," I remembered. "We have pea fowl again."

We had located a pair a few days earlier and brought them home locking them in the ~~map~~ vacant pole barn till they got used to their new home.

Wife's sister and her husband stopped in one evening and told us of a farmer they knew who had pea fowl for sale and at a reasonable price. We had been looking for replacements since our original pair had died two winters back. The entire family had missed the bold strutting and loud cries the cock made as he circled the yard on his regular daily rounds. By having a pair we had always hoped to raise our own replacements and maybe a few to sell, but our hens had a bad habit of dying just as they were reaching laying age. We had four different hens for our cock, but all died.

Wife had mixed feelings about our new pea fowl, but she finally gave her approval. Although she hated to admit it, she missed them as much as the rest of the family did.

Our old peacock had a ~~he~~ nasty habit of eating the early spring flowers in wife's garden. And then when strawberries began ripening he switched to them furthering invoking wife's wrath.

Although he was quite tame, when wife took after him with the groom to save her strawberries old peacock would beat a hasty retreat often seeking refuge on the house top. Once he tried perching on the TV aerial but found it too flimsy to support his bulk and came crashing down off the roof in a flurry of feathers and noise.

He was a real character. He had undisputed rule of the yard. At first the banty roosters, always feisty and full of fight anyway, tried to dispute his claim to their domain, but had to retreat when he flexed his muscle against them.

Even the guinea fowl who are always quick to defend their rights from all feathered challenge challengers, gave way to his demands.

He loved humans and quickly became a family pet. While no one could walk right up to him and touch, he would follow people around the yard ~~through~~ just to satisfy his ~~ness~~ness. He always had to know what was going on in his kingdom.

His new ~~successor~~ successor to the throne will have big tracks to fill.

"You drove right over that son-of-a-bitch!" wife exclaimed suddenly, turning to look out the back window of the car.

I thought so too, and opened the door to look back behind the car as it glowly rolled to ~~thax~~ a stop.

We were driving back from New Ulm one day and were crossing the Minnesota River Valley on a well traveled road. ~~As~~ Only problem was that about half-way across the valley the ~~max~~ rainswollen river had begun to creep across the road in front of us. Water about two inches deep was flowing lazily across the road for about a 50 foot stretch and a car ahead of us had stopped ~~taxsuxxy~~ while the driver surveyed the situation. Hesitant to cross through the water, the driver pulled his car over to the side to allow me to pass if I wished.

Always one ~~faxx~~ with a flair for adventure I headed the car into the water while wife stiffened in the seat beside me. The water was clear and it was apparent the road was still safe.

As the car moved slowly through the flowing water I spotted about a half dozen large carp vigorously paddling across the road ^{just} ahead of the car. ^{All} Most had succeeded in crossing in the shallow water except ~~omxxx~~ for one straggler. It had managed to reach the center of the road just as ~~ixxxx~~ we came by and I felt a thump as the front wheel hit the big fish.

As we looked back to see ^{what it did} whether or not we had hit it, we saw the moving water carry the injured carp back to the side of the road and into deeper water. It was splashing and flapping as it disappeared into the deep dark water.

In the years I've been driving I've managed to hit skunks, gophers, rabbits, doogs, cats, chickens and even a goose or two. But never have I driven over a fish!

"Well, what do you expect to run over when you drive through the river," wife laughed.

A COUPLE OF WEEKS BACK we acquired a pair of peafowl and had locked them in the pole barn to give them a chance to get used to their new home. But one morning they managed to break out and the last we saw of them they were flying across the field toward the neighbor's grove. The kids and I searched all over the neighborhood but never caught a glimpse of them.

Then one evening last week one of the kids came running into the house wide-eyed, "The peacocks are in the brooder house roosting with the chickens."

And sure enough, somehow they had found their way back home after a weeks absence. And now they have taken up residence in the thick cover of the grove and are seldom seen. But at least they are back.

The forecast for the week was clear skies and mild weather. Perfect time to cut the alfalfa. I got the mower on the tractor, and greased it up and sharpened the sickle. The morning sky was still bright and clear and held the promise of a perfect hay day.

So I went to work and by noon I had the thick stuff down. It was going to be a heck of a crop and I sure the weatherman knew what he was talking about as the sun glowed brightly in the noonday sky.

But by late afternoon clouds had begun to form in the west and by evening the skies were threatening. I went to bed that night with my fingers crossed. At about 3 ~~pm~~ am I was jolted awake by a loud crash. It was thundering and a minute later I could hear rain splashing against the window. My hay crop was getting its annual bath.

Next day I was bemoaning my bad luck to a neighbor.

"Look at it this way," he smiled. "At least you'll have clean hay now."

THEY CALLED IT a "slumber" party. I looked the word up in the dictionary and found the definition of the word "slumber". "To sleep lightly" it said.

Well, the six girls up in our daughter's room the other night did just that. I doubt if anyone ever slept more lightly than they. There was ^{muffled} giggling past midnight. I finally fell asleep only to awake again at about 3:30 a.m.

The party was still going on with laughing and giggling. I nudged wife who was also awake.

"When are they going to quit and go to sleep," I mumbled sleepily. ~~xxxxxxx~~

She leaned up on one elbow ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ facing the stairway next to our bedroom door and yelled as loud as she could, "If you girls don't be quiet and go to sleep, you're all coming down here right now and clean strawberries!" The kids had just picked a couple of large bowlsful the evening before and they still needed cleaning and washing.

Wife's threat resulted in dead silence and we didn't hear another peep the rest of the night. But by 6 a.m. when we got up, they were at it again.

Midmorning when the girls had all been taken back to their respective homes I asked our daughter if her party had been a success.

"Oh, we had lots of fun and we're planning another one for next week," she bubbled.

"At someone else's house I hope," I added.

"Oh, Dad, it wasn't ~~xxxxxxx~~ she laughed

It was one of those weeks. I could see it coming late last week. The hay was down, the
our seven acres of
thistles were threatening to take over a sizeable portion of the cucumbers field, and the cattle
were seeking greener pastures in the neighboring fields.

Early Monday morning we decided that the weed problem in the cucumber field was the most
critical and should be dealt with first. So I began cultivating and the kids took out after the
thistles with hoes. So far so good.

Later that day we headed for the hay field hoping to bale and stash the first cutting from
of brome and mixed grasses
a neighbor's vacant pasture. It was a beautiful crop that had stood head high in places and now
sweet
gave off a scent of a sun cured meadow.

But the baler ~~xxxx~~ seemed to have other ideas. Chains broke, belts tore and bearings gave
out to the point that it took until Tuesday evening before we got what should have been only one
day's work accomplished.

Wednesday morning I and the kids began construction of a new fence around a new area of
pasture in hopes the cattle would be satisfied with a new spot in which to graze. It really
wasn't new to them as they had been jumping the fence every day anyway and grazing here.

But Wednesday afternoon the fencing project got sidetracked when a representative of the
cucumber processing firm for which we grow under contract, came out to check out crop. He was
even more disappointed with the fields than I had been. The stand had been severely thinned by
outworms, beetles and whatever else hates cucumbers to the point where our hopes for a good crop
were all but gone. He recommended that we get right to work and replant the entire seven acres.

"Your're chances of a good crop are better if you replant than if you go with this planting,"
he advised shaking his head.

I had just finished spraying the field for bugs not an hour before he drove onto the place.

"That spraying isn't a total loss," he added as if to console me, "at least these bugs won't
be around to bother the new crop."

I sent one of the boys to the field with the tractor and disk while I lined up the planter
and got ready to put in another crop. By Thursday afternoon the ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ second crop (our last
chance at the big money) was in. And it was time to bale some more hay.

The baler pounded out 11 bales just like clockwork and then ~~ixxx~~ broke down. A chain had
broken. Two hours later with the chain repaired we set out again. This time it ~~xx~~ made one bale
before the chain broke again. By the time repairs were made, it was dark.

Next morning just as we were ready to head for the field it started to rain.

"What are you gonna do now day?" one of the little boys asked as ~~he~~ *he* ~~headed~~ *headed* ~~the~~ *the* ~~hay~~ *hay* ~~to~~ *to* ~~the~~ *the* ~~house~~ *house*.

write my column," I mumbled.

It was one of those weeks. I could see it coming late last week. The day was down, the
cattle were hesitating to take over a sizable portion of the surrounding fields, and the cattle
were seeking greener pastures in the neighboring fields.

Early Monday morning we decided that the weed problem in the cucumber field was the most
critical and should be dealt with first. So I began cultivating and the kids took out after the
cucumber with hoses. So far so good.

Later that day we headed for the hay field hoping to take and clear the first cutting from
a neighbor's vacant pasture. It was a beautiful crop that had stood high in places and now
gave off a scent of a sun-cured meadow.

But the pair next seemed to have other ideas. Cattle prods, blots for and bearings gave
out to the point that it took until Tuesday evening before we got what should have been only one
day's work accomplished.

Wednesday morning I and the kids began construction of a new fence around a new area of
pasture in hopes the cattle would be satisfied with a new spot in which to graze. It really
wasn't new to them as they had been jumping the fence every day anyway and grazing here.

But Wednesday afternoon the fencing project got sidetracked when a representative of the
cucumber processing firm for which we grow under contract came out to check out crop. He was
even more disappointed with the fields than I had been. The stand had been severely thinned by
out-arms, beetles and whatever else hates cucumbers to the point where our hopes for a good crop
were all but gone. He recommended that we get right to work and replant the entire seven acres.

"Your're chances of a good crop are better if you replant than if you go with this planting,"
he advised making his head.

I had just finished spraying the field for bugs not an hour before he drove onto the place.
"That spraying isn't a total loss," he added as if to console me, "at least there won't
be around to bother the new crop."

I sent one of the boys to the field with the tractor and disk while I lined up the planter
and got ready to put in another crop. By Thursday afternoon the cucumber second crop (our last
chance at the big money) was in. And it was time to take home more hay.

The pair bounded out in pairs just like clockwork and then they broke down. A chain had
broken. Two hours later with the chain repaired we set out again. This time if we made one pass
before the chain broke again. By the time repairs were made, it was dark.

Next morning just as we were ready to head for the field it started to rain.
"What are you gonna do now boys?" one of the little boys asked.

Saturday morning. The beginning of the weekend. The way I see it Saturday should be a kind of special day. A day to do some of the smaller jobs around the place that have been pushed off all week, gradually winding down as the day wears on. The end result should be a lieisurely end to the week. Then the next day, Sunday, can be spent just taking it easy.

But this past Saturday started out all wrong to be such a day. First catastrophe to strike involved the oldest son. He had just walked out of the house, jumped in his car and headed to town ~~to~~ to his job.

I was startled when he walked into the house a few minutes later grumbling.

"What's the matter?" I asked shoving another forkful of pancakes into my mouth. "How come you're back?"

"The wheel broke off that darn car!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I had just turned off the driveway and on the road and all of a sudden the front of the car fell down on the road. The wheel broke right off!"

"Well, you better get going so you won't be late for work," I advised. "Take our car and get going. I'll see what I can do about your's."

Quickly gulping down the rest of my pancakes and nearly drowning in my cup of coffee, I hurried down the road to survey the damage. The wheel was off alright and jammed up under the fender and the bumper lay on the road.

I headed over ~~to~~ to the neighbor and borrowed a tractor with a three point hitch. ~~We~~ Using a chain we hooked the front of the car to the hitch and rised it up off the road. The rest was easy. I hauled the car up on the place and dro ped it off near the shop for the repair job/ that would follow.

A call to town insured that parts were available so I sent wife to town to pick them up so we could work on the car as soon as we had a chance.

With that problem all solved, youngest son came to me with a long face.

"I got my fish line tangled in the high lines by t e yardlight post," he moaned. He had just gotten a new rod and reel the day before and was practicing his casting. After picking around for a while I finally retrieved the line. With a nylon line there was no danger of shock.

Havi g unhooked the line I figured it was time to give the young fellow some pointers on how to cast. I stretched back and whip ed the rod forward, ~~at the~~ at the same time calling his attention to the proper method I was demonstrating. The line snaked out high and far and wrapped

itself snugly around the high line again. I heard snickers from the spectators gallery as

I cussed softly to myself.

It wasn't 8 a.m. and already the day was turning sour.

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OPERATION

Misc:

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Customer

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Starter

Production Order

I'm not exactly sure how it happened, but our farm is ~~now~~ turning into a "labor depot". Beginning at 6:30 a.m. cars, pickups and motorcycles turn into our driveway as parents, grandparents and big brothers bring their young~~er~~ charges to our farmyard for assignments in area farmers' bean fields.

It's called ~~bean~~ "beanwalking" and until the seedcorn companies begin calling workers into their fields, it offers the biggest ~~and~~ and often only work opportunity for local youth. And the pay isn't bad either. This year ~~for~~ many of the farmers have been offering \$2.50 an hour to good crews. Not bad money for ~~for~~ kids who haven't reached their teens yet.

Our involvement started a couple of years back when our family reached the age and physical size where they could successfully ~~pick~~ ^{wrest stubborn} a cocklebur plant from the soil. We first used the free services of a "mini employment" office in our local town run by the state to help coordinate available workers and jobs. But our kids became restless if they didn't get called every day, so wife placed an ad in the local paper for more jobs ~~to fill the idle days~~. The ad worked and the kids stayed even a little busier than they wanted to be. As each succeeding season came many farmers called back and wanted out ^{er} crew again. As job offers came in and the work piled up, our kids began inviting their friends along. And ~~this~~ is the way the thing grew.

This morning for example, we sent a crew of 14 out to a farmer's ^{Some} ~~usual~~ ^{the} of our regulars didn't show ~~this morning~~ for various reasons or else there could have been almost two dozen ready to go.

And the kids seem to love it. They work together with all their friends and ~~they~~ seem to have a good time inspite of the hot humid weather. At least they show up every day. And ~~ix~~ we haven't heard any complaints from the farmers about the kids' work. It's hard to believe that a project involving ^{so} ~~so~~ many kids can work ~~so~~ smoothly.

Sometimes there are little annoyances like, for example, the other day. The kids came back from a muddy field and tracked into wife's ~~freshly~~ scrubbed kitchen to call their parents. She handed them a broom and invited them to remove their shoes from now on before coming into the house. But they took it all in stride and cleaned up the floor before leaving.

But all this beanwalking has been causing me problems. I don't have any help around here anymore. ~~ixixix~~ We have seven acres of cucumbers that need hoeing, bad. The kids started one evening and did an acre and a half, but haven't been able to get back. And after a day in the beanfields I haven't the heart to send them out to hoe pickles. But it'll work out somehow.

Wife and I feel a chance to earn, and spend, their own money will play an important part in ~~their~~ growing up.

Spring is the usual season for young to be born or hatched on the farm. But around here spring came a little later than usual.

In fact just the other day ~~the~~ ^{several} guinea hens hatched out broods of young. The kids had been watching the nests for weeks wondering when the old girls would settle down and take care of the hatching. Nests were literally running over with eggs but still the hens wouldn't set.

Finally one day, it must have been the weather or something, most of the hens disappeared from their usual rounds on the yard. Kids went out to check the many nests scattered around in the grove and found most covered by a brooding hen.

Yesterday our youngest son went out to the garden to dig a couple of hills of potatoes for supper and ~~xxxxxxx~~ was promptly and forcefully driven out of the garden by an irate guinea hen leading a brood of keats.

"She flew right at me and I wasn't gonna stay around there and get scratched up," he ~~xxxxxxx~~ explained after making a beeline for the safety of the house. We looked out the window toward the garden and watched for a while as the hen walked around nervously chattering in her shrill voice. The keats had all vanished from sight no doubt warned to seek cover when our son stumbled accidentally into her domain.

It took a good five minutes before she dounded the "all clear" and ~~xxx~~ from nowhere her brood reassembled ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ and began catching garden bugs.

This morning I saw him carrying a long stick around the yard and when I inquired he explained that it was for protection. He had just been attacked by three guineas as he walked through the pasture.

Another newborn family appeared on the yard several weeks ago. Oldest son has a pair of tiny white call ducks and the hen ~~xxxx~~ had just produced a new family of goldne ducklings. The family has been roaming the yard since hatching and the young now are feathered out and resemble their snow white parents only in miniature. Their antics as they bathe in a ~~dirty~~ ^{almost hourly} pool of dirty water left by the recent rains has amused ~~the~~ ^{our} entire family.

Several clucks have left their nests, now empty of eggs, but no one has seen the results yet. A feisty old crested polish rooster has been taking care of most of the hens around here so we're all wondering what the offspring will look like.

Two ducks are still sitting on nests in wife's flower bed along the house and as far as anyone can tell, they will be the last to hatch. So with August on our doorstep spring has finally departed our farm.

Fall 2011 in the air 2-3-78
"Only three more weeks and school starts again," our 13-year-old daughter observed the other day.

"You sound glad," I commented noting the anticipation in her voice.

"I am!" she returned. "It's so boring around here. There's nothing to do since detasseling is done and bean-walking is over."

"I think there is plenty to do," I remarked listing a number of jobs that I had hoped to finish, with the kids' help, before school started.

"~~That's~~ Your jobs are no fun," she added. "I mean like detasseling with a bunch of kids. We have a good time out in the fields."

Fun or no fun, I pointed out that shingling, painting and picking pickles were necessary "evils" and that I didn't particularly like them either but they still had to be done.

Daughter gave me one of her disgusted looks and stalked off into the kitchen to begin one of her "fun" jobs, washing dishes.

As a kid I can't remember ever wanting summer vacation to end so I could get back to school. There always were plenty of things to do in those days and they weren't all fun either, but never so bad that I wished school would start!

The summers of my boyhood seemed so long and now summer passes so quickly and it is the winters that seem to last forever. Icy roads, snowstorms, cold mornings when cars don't start, and frozen water pipes in the barn, who needs them?

But like it or not, you can tell summer is passing. There are the usual signs. Those little bugs that chirp in the stubble fields and along the roadside in the evening, "harvest bugs" we call them, are a sure sign that summer is waning; birds are seen in flocks sitting on the high line lines or swarming over a tasseled field of corn; sweet corn in the garden is ready and potatoes are being dug regularly for meals; and the cool evenings lately all give warning that fall is on the way.

Fall is a lovely time of year around here but it is so short lived!

Winter, in spite of its faults, is not all bad. It provides a respite from the many hassles of summer on the farm. It's a time to reflect and plan next year's activities. And it always is a good time to catch up on reading, if you're so inclined.

Maybe that's why winter seems so long. Because it is a period of inactivity compared to the summer months.

But maybe the variety provided by the ever changing seasons is what makes Minnesota such a nice place to live.

7/7 = 2010/06/25 1:40 PM
- 12 - 78

There was a line a mile long and I ~~was~~ warned the wife that I had no intention of ~~standing~~
~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ baking in the sun for an hour just to get a ride on the roller coaster. She
smiled mischievously and grabbed my arm. "Your'e not going to chicken out. If I can take it
so can you."

My daughter had me by the other arm and so where could I run? I decided to humor them for
a little while longer.

For the past week all I had heard was "Dad, you're going to take a ride on the roller
coaster with us when we go to Valley Fair."

And I had gone along with their plot, ^{this says} not sure whether or not I was ^{actually} going to let them drag
me to my doom.

But there we stood at the end of a line of some 200 people and each time it moved ahead, wife
would pull on my arm to make sure I wasn't thinking of running. About 45 minutes went by and we
had advanced up the ramp to a point near where the cars loaded. I could see the "victims" board
the cars, their faces clouded with apprehension.

One of the older boys who had been to the amusement park two days earlier and gotten his
fill of wild rides, advised me manfully that there was nothing to fear. "It's really fun," he
laughed. "But don't sit in the back seat," he cautioned, "you really get a wild ride there."

It came time to board and the attendant motioned wife and I to the second last car. At
least it wasn't the very last one, but ~~just~~ it proved to be just as bad.

"When you go over those hills," our son said motioning toward the high spots, ^{on the front} "the back
cars jump right off the tracks, so hang on tight."

Oh boy, that's all I had to hear. We were all seated and the attendant had snapped the bar
down in front of us locking it and I was trapped.

"Well, there's no chickening out now," laughed my son from the seat behind me.

I tried to ignore the smart aleck.

Then it was time. The cars began to roll. ~~xxxx~~ Down hill, and around the bend and then we
were heading upward to the top of the highest point on the track. About halfway up I turned to
the wife who was laughing beside me and remarked, "If I could get this bar up, I'd bail out right
now." And I think I really meant it. This was going to be awful, I just knew it. How did I
ever get talked into doing something so stupid, I wondered as the cars neared the top. I ventured
a glance over the edge and down and my stomach turned over.

~~When~~ we reached the top, the cars leveled and we started down. I couldn't believe what was happening. Although the actual angle of descent was only about 45 degrees it seemed more like 90 and for a moment I thought we would all be thrown ^{forward} from our seats and dashed to pieces ~~at the~~ on the ground.

But down we flew at a sickening pace with wind in our faces and a ~~deafening~~ deafening roar in our ears. We bottomed out and suddenly we were skyward bound again ascending the next rise at a fearful pace. I was sure we would go right into orbit when we hit the top.

~~My~~ wife ~~stayed screaming~~ ^{interrupted her screams} just long enough to laugh hysterically as I moaned, "I want my mama."

Suddenly we were downward bound again and up, then around the corner at a pace that would have rolled any car over on a highway.

"If there's anymore of this, I'm getting out," I vowed aloud.

I caught a ~~short~~ ^{se} brief glimpse of the track ahead just before ^{we} dropping out of sight for the third time and it reminded me of the back of a sea serpent I had seen on TV once.

Our son had advised before the ride that when we went down it would help if we let out a yell

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OPERATION

or something. It seemed to relieve the pressure. I did, ~~scream~~ ^{with a worried look} so loud that the fellow in the car ahead turned back to see if I had expired.

Finally we rounded the last corner and ground to a stop at the loading station. It was over. I climbed out of the car on rubber legs and nearly collapsed. It took 15 minutes to get ^{my} "land legs" back.

My wife, who until now had reserved any comments, admitted that it was the wildest thing she had ever taken in her life.

But ~~today~~ ^{in the safety of our own home,} now, a day later ^{we both agreed that if the opportunity ever presented itself} again, we just might be persuaded to try it one more time.

Production Order

8-19-78
The tire was flat on the pickup again. This was getting to be a habit lately. It seemed everytime I wanted the pickup for something, first I had to pump up the tire. So this time I changed the wheel and put the spare on. Tomorrow ~~it figured~~ I'd take the rest apart and patch the hole that must be in the tube.

The next day it was time to start loading pickles ~~again~~ for the long haul to the grading station and guess what? The other rear tire on the pickup was flat.

So I started fixing the first flat tire like I had planned to do earlier in the day but had never gotten around to. Sure enough, the tube had a hole which I patched. I blew the tube up and checked for leaks over in the water tank. A row of tiny bubbles oozed from the place I had just patched.

Irritated, I pulled the patch off and replaced it with another new one. Then I retested again. This time the patch job held, but another leak showed up on the opposite side of the tube. Mumbling to myself I tramped back over to the shed and patched this hole then returned to the water tank. The tube passed the test and I put the whole mess back together and on the truck confident that everything was in order, except for the ^{second} other flat tire which I intended to fix the next day.

The boys helped me load the pickles and I parked the truck near the back door of the house intending to head for the station right after supper. As I washed up for supper I happened glance out the window toward the truckload of pickles. Darned if that stupid tire wasn't flat again!

With no spare available and a load to haul I did the only thing I could think of, blew up the tire and ^{hastened to} headed for the pickle station about 15 miles away. Before leaving I made sure the wife had the CB base station turned on in the house so in case I had a problem on the road, help was within reach. But I got lucky and made it in with my load. Right after the boys and I finished unloading, the tire went flat again. Lucky the station operator had an air tank filled and handy.

Meanwhile wife called the station and asked us to meet her in the next town as she was running some errands that had been neglected for a while. The tire held on the trip over to meet ^{the} wife and I parked the truck next to ^a gas station with a long air hose, just in case.

Sure enough, when we got back a couple of hours ~~later~~ after dark, the tire was flat. But the hose was handy and in no time I was ready to roll for home. Only trouble was the headlights wouldn't go on. So I drove home ^{in the dark}, mumbling, with wife following me closely with the car.

5/11 a. first day school
V-2-11
Mother was grinding away ~~from~~ furiously at the pencil sharpener putting fine points on up and down the stairs and a dozen or so pencils while kids ran back and forth ~~and~~ through the house locating lost books, notebooks and related items necessary for the first day of school.

Most of these same articles were tossed into a far corner after the last day of school in ~~the~~ May and hadn't been seen or heard from since.

I distinctly remember urging the kids to put their school stuff away for the summer in a safe place preferably in their rooms, so it could be found when school started again. But it was the same old ratrace this year that it's been since the first of our brood left for school a dozen or so years ago.

~~After~~ After the kids had left wife and I sat down for a relaxing cup and reminisced a bit. This was the last ~~time~~ ^{year} all six of our brood headed for school. Our oldest will graduate next spring and one after another the rest will follow until in just a few more years ^{short} will all have their school days behind them. College is not in the plans of our oldest. Still undecided about his future, he has been considering going on to a vocational school or maybe a hitch in the service.

Our daughter still talks about becoming a teacher although she still has her high school years ahead and her older brother has expressed some interest in studying law.

The other day he came to me with a surprising statement. "Dad, you know what I've been doing before I go to sleep at night? Reading some of your old law books. Boy, is there some complicated stuff in there!"

"Do you understand anything of what you're reading?" I asked.

"I don't know, but I think so," he answered.

We talked about careers in the legal profession and how many years of college and law school lay ahead if he should decide on that route. But the possibility of years of hard study didn't seem to bother him. He has always enjoyed a challenge. In fact ~~he~~ ^{just before starting} ~~before~~ ^{there} school he was worried that ~~he~~ wouldn't have enough to do because ~~he~~ ^{his older} brother had told him how easy it was to get through with a minimum of effort.

One of the older boys still talks about driving a diesel truck ~~and~~ while the two little boys think farming would be the greatest. Driving tractors holds a special appeal for both of them.

The kids in this country are truly fortunate when you consider the endless career opportunities open to them. Trouble is how do you pick one?

Life suggested the other day that I go into the appliance repair business.

"You've certainly gotten enough experience here at home," she quipped trying hard to suppress a grin. "And think of all the money you could make."

Well, I don't know about the money end of it, but she is right about the experience especially with laundry appliances.

After about 12 years of washing for a family of eight, our old automatic washer was showing signs of giving up the ghost. Hoses and belts were rotting and breaking, switches had to be replaced from time to time and the motor burned out ~~about~~ ^{while} a ~~few~~ ago making another \$40 expenditure necessary.

So one day wife came home from town with the announcement that she had managed to acquire a matched washer and dryer from a private party. Oh yes, ~~it~~ they were in good shape, she assured me. And the price certainly sounded reasonable enough. So much so, in fact, that I became just a little suspicious.

So I hooked up the two wheeled trailer one evening and went in to pick up wife's treasures. The units appeared to be in very good condition and the previous owner assured me that they had been in use until the present. The purchase of a new washer and dryer had brought about the sale of the old units.

So we hauled them home and installed them in the laundry room thinking we could now discard our old washer and dryer. But it was not to be.

The washer promptly blew a fuse and ~~so~~ then another. After several hours of tinkering I suggested that my wife use her old machine for a little while longer until I had more time to look at the new arrival. So there they stood side by side with the old washing ^{by} doing all the work and the replacement looking on and taking up space.

Months went by and ^{one} day the old machine simply gave up and refused to agitate and spin again. The time had come to make the replacement work.

After several more hours of tinkering, the replacement began ^{to} operate ^{smoothly} enough ~~to~~ to wash a load of clothes and then another and another.

Next day the picture changed. Wife announced that the agitator was broken and water was running out under the machine. A quick examination confirmed her allegations and also revealed the sources of the problems.

On xx a subsequent trip to the Twin Cities I managed to track down parts for the ~~machine~~ upon arrival that I installed them. Well the machine washed and spun the loads but it still leaked water.

Another examination revealed that still another gasket was needed. I had already anticipated the need for this gasket and had it on hand but had not installed it the first time. But in order to install it about a dozen screws had to be removed and they were seated firmly in rust.

No matter how hard I worked at it, the screws would not come loose. ~~xxix~~ The only way to remove them was with an impact tool. Using such a tool and a hammer it was possible to break the screws loose from their rusty grip. So I purchased such a tool.

Success came within my reach and the gasket was replaced and the water leak stopped. The machine ~~xxxx~~ washed and spun happily and wife caught up with her washing. Then the clutch began slipping.

Another examination showed it needed new linings. On another trip to the cities I secured the necessary parts ~~xx~~ and installed them. Machine again washed properly for a short time.

Then another part in the clutch broke and the machine stopped dead. I called the by now familiar parts firm in the cities and had them ~~xx~~ mail out the necessary part. Again the stubborn machine took off and washed as it should. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Next day wife somewhat hesitantly informed me the machine was making funny noises. I blew my cool. "What's wrong with the blankety blank thing now?" I yelled. Down to the laundry room and with flashlight in hand I peered up into the inner workings of the by now hated machine. Diagnosis turned out to be a bad bearing in the clutch.

I had sworn that I would not make another city trip for that blasted machine. So the only ~~xxxxxxxx~~ alternative was to find a new bearing locally. I finally succeeded at a local farm implement store. The partman laughed when he handed me the bearing, "That's from a manure spreader," he

"That has to be more than mere coincidence," I mumbled.

Well, the machine is working again and no doubt cooking up some foul scheme to test my patience. But ~~xx~~ *The clunk is not so bad during the spin cycle.*

One of the most demanding periods in the history of our family has just passed. And the kids as well as their mother and myself are quite relieved.

~~xxxx~~ This "unhappy" tale began last spring about the middle of May when I worked up ~~an~~ seven acres of land for the planting of our cucumber crop. We had expanded our operation from an acre in past years to seven this year in hopes we could secure the services of a ~~six~~ half dozen or so migrant workers who were experienced in cucumber picking. I had toyed around with the idea of expanding the year before, but ~~xxxx~~ somehow lost my nerve and stayed with the usual acre.

But this year I decided to jump off the deep end. We were assured by the cucumber company representative that help would be plentiful and we would have no ^{problems} ~~worry~~ about getting plenty of ~~help~~ so I planted.

But in the back of my mind there was always this nagging doubt about what would happen if the help would quit. I tried not to think about it.

"Don't look at us!" the kids all chimed. "We're not going to pick all those cucumbers!"

The first problem came in mid June when the beetles appeared. They ate about half the crop. The company man came out to look and said, "You had better replant or you'll never get any help for picking. They want a good stand so they can make some money."

That made sense, so I replanted. A month later I was sorry about the replanting. While the new plants were growing vigourously and looked for all the world as though they would be the best crop I'd ever had, they just did not bloom and set cucumbers. They just kept growing vines and meanwhile all the other growers were hauling their ~~xxxx~~ cucumbers to the buying station.

Then one day a family of migrant workers drove up on the place and said they were interested in picking cucumbers. They had been directed out to our place by the local employment office where I had left an order the day before. Together we looked the field over and they agreed to take the job. Only problem was there were no cucumbers yet. Although there were some flowers now, they were still growing vines.

By the middle of August the first cucumbers were reaching picking size so the workers went into the field. The first picking only netted them \$3.50 from the entire seven acres, but I explained that each successive picking would be better as once the vines started it would challenge ^{even} the best pickers to keep up with them.

We started picking every day soon after that and the crop kept getting bigger to the point

where I was hauling a truckload a day to the station.

The kids were happy that they didn't have to even step into the field this year and all agreed the cucumbers were a pretty good drop after all.

Then a week after they started, the migrants drove up on the yard one morning looking sad and dejected.

"Sir," a youth who spoke English addressed me, "We are very sorry, but our grandfather in Mexico is very sick and we have to go home today. We cannot pick any longer. We are very sorry for you."

The fear I had harbored
what I had ~~expected~~ ^{reality} was in the back of my mind all along was now ~~happening~~. The help was quitting and I was left with seven acres of cucumbers that were yielding more every day.

I thanked them for their help and turned back to the house. The kids were watching TV and I walked into the room, turned off the set and asked them to pay attention for a minute as I had something important to discuss with them.

"Our pickers just quit," I began, "and we have to decide what can be done about it. Do you think we could handle the job?" I explained that there had only been six pickers before and there were seven of us since my wife worked in town and wasn't available for this project.

The room was as silent as death as the kids looked ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ at each other. I could tell what they were thinking. But then I was surprised.

"I think we could handle it," one of the older boys said, confidently, "at least for a while."

So we headed for the field and began what would become a three week job. There were only two days that we didn't pick during that time. There were many days we picked more than four tons each day. And the money was good, too, so good in fact, that I contacted the kids's schools and arranged for them to be absent until the picking season was over. It turned out they missed two weeks of school but were able to keep up pretty well at home.

Although there were countless moans and groans from morning to evening as the kids labored at a snail's pace through the fields a row at a time, they kept at it and we saw the project through to the end. And I think they understood ~~xxx~~ when I tried explaining to them that they had learned something about themselves. They had ~~xxxxxxx~~ taken on an almost insurmountable challenge and ~~emerged victorious~~. I could detect the pride in their faces as they listened.

I tried to point out to them that in their future they should never turn away from any job just because it looked too big to handle.

"Just remember what you did here in the cucumber field this summer and that will bolster your self-confidence," I concluded.

There is more to come for 1978, soon.

Watch for upcoming years to be put together
and posted.