

The Nineteen Forties

The decade of the 1940s began with German armies continuing their march across Europe. The fall of France took place in May 1940, the month I turned seven. While the war in Europe and Japan's actions in the Pacific produced daily headlines, one of the major stories of the year in North Carolina was the Great Yadkin Flood of 1940.

The source of the Yadkin River lies at an elevation of 3,600 feet in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Blowing Rock, where today my wife Paula and I own a home. A week of prolonged heavy rains over the mountains early in August 1940 sent cascades of water into the Yadkin, and the ensuing flood swept downstream on the thirteenth, inundating communities the length of the river. Businesses, homes, bridges, and factories, many of them rebuilt after a 1916 flood, were heavily damaged or destroyed. Most of the stores in Elkin were flooded out, but the floodwaters spared Chatham Mill. The flood took many lives along the river, and the damage was in excess of \$5 million.

Our home in Arlington was never threatened, since it was a couple of miles from the river, but I saw plenty of the floodwaters and gained an appreciation of the power of rushing water. Even though the bridge over the Yadkin at Elkin was closed and in danger of washing out, I walked out on it and found the water was just inches below the bridge floor. Occasionally it washed over, wetting my feet.

I also remember that once the floodwaters receded, I went with Dad and Uncle Frank Clanton, Mom's sister's husband, down to the draining bottomlands where there were still large pools of water. In the pools were scores of landlocked fish which we scooped up and dumped into burlap bags. Although our catch enabled us to eat well there were far more fish than our families could use, so Dad and Uncle Frank passed out the rest to friends and neighbors.

It was about a month after the flood that President Roosevelt took time out from war preparations for a brief visit to North Carolina. He was not there to inspect damage but

to formally dedicate an American treasure, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The park was created in 1934 during the Great Depression, and the CCC, WPA, and others had been working on facilities ever since. Today the park is the most visited national park in the country.



Me and my dog Nicky at our home in Arlington, about four miles south of Elkin. One day our house burned down. The only thing I recall that was left was a little ceramic house with a slot in the top to be used as a bank. It was partly melted with a coin inside when I found it.

In 1940, Dad was a traveling salesman and was rarely at home. One time while he was away for an extended period, my mother got sick and was unable to get out of bed to cook our meals. That's when I started learning how to cook. Mom, lying in bed, told me how to light our kerosene stove. The meal? Boiled potatoes.

A few months later, while Ken and I were at school and Mom was at the mill, our Arlington house burned to the ground. We lost everything. I sifted through the charred remains and found my little house-shaped coin bank. It was disfigured and melted shut, but I was able to crack it open and reclaim a nickel. Later in life, Mom told me Dad had burned down the house for the insurance money.

After the fire we were able to rent a house down the street and buy new furniture. A few weeks later, when I was eight, Dad took off without a word to Mom, Ken, or me. He was gone for good. A few days after his departure, a crew from the store where Dad had bought the furniture came and repossessed every piece for nonpayment. Mom thought he had paid cash for the furniture out of the proceeds from the insurance check. He hadn't.

The next day we were on the move again. My grandfather, Papa Hurt, picked us up and took us to his 120-acre farm located near the small township of Eagle Mills about twenty miles north of Statesville. At a water-powered gristmill on the banks of nearby Hunting Creek, farmers brought their grain to have it ground into livestock feed, flour,



This is a photo of the back side of Hunting Creek Mill, owned by Dash Gaither and operated by his brother Reese. In the foreground is a bit of Hunting Creek shown flowing down to the deep hole where we swam many times during the summer. From the level of Hunting Creek shown in this picture, it drops 15 to 20 feet rapidly for the next 150 feet into the deep hole.

and cornmeal. Also in the township was a small country store owned by Dash Gaither, and clustered around it were his home and those of his brother, Reese, and a gentleman named Henry Templeton.



Papa with Ken and me. We were, as usual, all dressed up to go to Sunday morning services at Wesley Chapel Methodist Church. The bandage on my forehead covers four stitches as a result of being hit by a bat while playing baseball.

I suppose, for some, moving from town to the farm would have been a major shock. But Ken and I took to farm life right away. I loved it. Almost immediately, Papa, my namesake, became a towering father figure to me. I respected him and, because he was a stern man, I also feared him. I called him Papa, and he usually called me Boy. He was a plasterer by trade and was considered to be one of the best around. Plastered walls and ceilings had become the in thing, and Papa even traveled to Florida to learn how to apply a textured finish as opposed to the smooth finish common in North Carolina. Papa rose very early every day to attend to farm chores before going off to work as a plasterer. He did more farm work when he returned home in the evening.

Whiskey drinking was very much frowned upon by the womenfolk, including my grandmother, and Papa didn't openly drink. However, I soon figured out that his pre-supper trips to the hay barn where we kept the mules and a cow gave him an opportunity to swig a few ounces of white lightning to ease the pressure of his twelve- to fourteen-hour days.

Grandma Hurt was a wonderfully sweet woman who could also be a stern disciplinarian when a situation warranted. One time I did something unacceptable, now long forgotten, but I certainly remember running away from Grandma. She calmly called,

"You don't have to run so fast, I'm not going to try to catch you. I'll see you at suppertime."

She did, with a switch in her hand and a smile on her face.

Moving to the farm, which was located in Iredell County, meant a change of schools. I had finished second grade at Jonesville and would be entering third grade at Union Grove School five miles northwest of the farm. The school took its name from the small community of Union Grove, which had a post office, a church, two gas stations, a cotton gin, a feed mill, and eleven homes. One of the two main school buildings housed grades one through eight, the other, grades nine through twelve. The brick buildings were steam heated in winter. Open windows provided some cool breezes in spring and fall. The school grounds were dotted with red and white oaks and maple trees, a baseball diamond, a volleyball court, and a clapboard basketball gym.



School days at Jonesville Elementary.

Ken and I were excited about our first day at Union Grove until we boarded the school bus an hour before the start of classes. Mom was already at work, and she had told Grandma Hurt to dress us in our finest. That meant shorts, short-sleeved shirts, and sandals, which were not typical farm-boy attire. The boys on the bus were dressed in jeans and overalls, and they started teasing us immediately. Much of the teasing was mean-spirited, and it turned into outright bullying that spilled over to the school grounds. Ken and I took some beatings because of our dress. When we were completely fed up with the bullying, we solved the problem through teamwork. We went two on one with a couple of older boys and gave them enough of a beating that we were never bothered again. It took a little longer to get rid of the city clothes.

At the end of the first day of school, I begged my grandmother to buy us more appropriate clothes to wear the next day. That didn't happen, because the nearest clothing store was miles away and, more importantly, there wasn't enough money to

spend foolishly on new clothes just to make us fit in. We got blue denim shirts, overalls, and brogans only when our finest finally wore out. A country boy at last! Of course, Mom insisted we wear our finest to church on Sundays, and she didn't give up on that



Brother Ken and me dressed for church in our hideous short pants and sandals which all of our newfound country friends kidded us about. They were leftovers from when we lived in Arlington, near Elkin. Mom finally allowed us to quit wearing this “get-up” after I cried all the way home from church one Sunday. As usual, she tried to dress us as twins.

until we came home one Sunday and I spent the rest of the afternoon crying.

On that first day of school, I fell in love with my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Van Hoy. I thought she must be the prettiest lady in the whole world, and I appreciated her efforts to protect me from the teasing about my clothes. Mrs. Van Hoy's husband, Pierce, ran the Union Grove Fiddler's Convention, which in those days was held every Easter weekend in the school auditorium and gym. The convention, a competition among musicians and bands that played bluegrass and country music, would grow to Woodstock proportions. Union Grove may have barely been a dot on the map, but the Fiddler's Convention made the tiny community famous throughout North Carolina and much of the South. I remember tagging along with my mother, who was a fan of the convention, and I'm sure I must have done some toe tapping as I got an early

introduction to the music of the mountains.

While I loved life on the farm, I had a medical problem that curtailed some of my activities. I suffered from asthma, which was a serious problem when tobacco was being harvested and cured and during haying season. I had several attacks and wound up in a coma on a couple of occasions. Doctors tried several medicines and treatments, including penicillin, the “miracle medicine.” It gave me no relief. When I was fifteen, my

mother took me to the hospital in Winston-Salem for a series of tests, which consisted of pricking the skin on my back and infecting it with extracts from many sources to determine what allergies triggered the asthma attacks. As it turned out, I was allergic to many, many things, including tobacco dust, hay dust, feathers, molds, dogs, and cats. I then took a series of shots during the next twelve months to help me build up immunity to each allergy. It worked. I wasn't bothered again with asthma until much later in life, when the attacks suddenly came back but not as severely. Today I take Singulair daily, which wards off even the mild attacks.

The year I entered Union Grove School, 1941, was quite a year. President Roosevelt was starting his third term. The Germans were occupying most of Europe, and Great Britain was the victim of constant bombing raids on London and other cities. The news was better in North Carolina, which had mostly recovered from the depression. Cotton and tobacco prices made harvesting worthwhile again. The state was tops in the nation in furniture manufacturing, and textile mills were operating at capacity because of the demand for goods by our military and our allies.

North Carolina's economy was boosted in no small part by federal government spending. Military facilities were being built or expanded, and these included the Army's Fort Bragg, where a huge project added 2,739 buildings to the post. The daily payroll reached \$174,000 as contractors hired 31,544 workers from all over the state. The huge demand for wood required the services of seven hundred lumber mills. Work was also started on Camp Lejeune, which would become the biggest Marine base on the East Coast. The year 1941 also saw the launch of the *Zebulon B. Vance*, the first of two hundred forty-three Liberty and Victory troop ships that would be built by North Carolina Shipbuilding Company in Wilmington.

I'm sure there have been times when I've referred to myself as a poor farm boy, and I've been asked if I really grew up poor. The answer is yes and no. Yes, we were poor according to today's standards, and so were our friends and neighbors in our little

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section of the world. No, we were not suffering poor. We always had food, clothing, shelter, and the occasional gift or treat. We never thought of ourselves as poor. When we first moved to the farm, we had no electricity and no telephone. The rural electrification program had not extended power lines to our part of the county and there were no phone lines. Ken and I did our homework by the light of a kerosene lamp while Papa read the Winston-Salem Journal, which he received daily via the

U.S. Postal Service.



Ken and me with my great aunt Roxie DeEtte Greenwood, who helped raise us. She lived with my Papa and Grandma Hurt. She never dated anyone after her first love died when she was in her early twenties.

Many of my early years were spent in a purely functional house. Typical of the area, our home was an eastward-facing, two-story, wood-frame clapboard-style structure with a galvanized-tin roof. A porch that stretched across the front of the house held chairs from one end to the other and a swing on the south end. At the center was a huge entrance door and, if you walked inside, there was a bedroom with its own fireplace on the left. Straight ahead of you, stairs led to the second floor, where to the right was a large bedroom with two full-sized beds and a fireplace. A left turn at the top of the stairs led you to two smaller bedrooms that were without heat. In winter, my grandma and Aunt Greenwood, who was called Auntie, would heat flatirons on the kitchen stove, wrap them in towels, and place them under the

covers at the foot of the beds to warm our feet.

Back on the first floor, just inside the entrance on the right was the living room with a fireplace that would later be closed off when we installed a more efficient room heater; a pot-bellied, wood-burning stove. There were rocking chairs on either side of the fireplace and the stove, a couch along the front wall, and three upholstered chairs in front of the stove. Papa always sat in a rocker on one side of the fireplace and stove.



Our home in the country near Eagle Mills Township where I grew up. Dad left us when I was eight and we moved to the farm to live with Papa and Grandma Hurt and Auntie.

A dining room was located behind the living room and beyond that, the kitchen, with a large wood-burning stove. The stove was hooked up to a fifty-five-gallon copper barrel, which provided an ample supply of hot water when there was a fire in the stove. On the left wall of the kitchen was a door leading to a screened-in back porch, and beyond that, a door leading outside.

At the back of the kitchen, a door led to a washroom and storage area. We had a washing machine that would be unusual by today's standards because it was powered by a gasoline engine. That's right, a gas engine with a kick-starter and an exhaust hose running outside so nobody would be overcome by carbon monoxide. The water from the washer was flushed through a hole in the floor into the space under the house. Wood-frame houses were always built above ground and supported by pillars of rocks. A door at the rear of the washroom led to the well house, which was not a separate structure but another room. The well was a rock-lined, four-foot-diameter round hole in the ground, thirty-five to forty feet deep. Using a windlass with a crank on one side, you lowered a bucket on a half-inch-thick rope into the well and cranked it back up filled with water. One of my early chores was drawing water from the well.

No electricity meant no refrigerator, so our milk, butter, and any other items that required cooling were stored in a spring box located at the bottom of a gently sloping hill about 125 yards behind the house. A section of terracotta pipe thirty-six inches across was set three feet deep in a spring that bubbled up from the ground, supplying plenty of cold, great-tasting fresh water. About eight inches beneath the surface of the spring, a hole had been drilled into one side of the terracotta to accommodate a pipe that ran to the spring box. The box was two feet by four feet and twelve inches deep, with a hole at one end that allowed water to flow out to a watering trough we used to water our mules when we brought them in from the fields at dinnertime. Then the water flowed out of the trough, creating a small branch that collected rainwater before it flowed into a one-acre fish pond 150 yards downstream.

It was about a year after we moved to the farm that we got electricity, which meant we could pump water from the spring to the house. With electricity also came a

refrigerator, lights and a radio, welcome improvements. But we still had no phone and no indoor toilet facilities. Our outhouse, located about forty yards from the back of the house, made for some chilly adventures in the dead of winter. We had a two-holer, but I don't recall two of us ever using the outhouse at the same time. There were people who had three-and four-holers, which I never understood. The toilet paper was an out-of-date Sears catalog. Sears published two editions a year, one for spring and summer and the other for fall and winter.

On the pathway to the spring was the pack house, a three-story building, basement included, where we stored fertilizer and tobacco waiting to be processed. The tobacco was stored on the top two floors, and when we were ready to prepare it for market we passed it through a hole in the first floor to the basement, which remained damp and cool even during hot summers. There, the dry tobacco leaves would pick up moisture and become pliable enough to pack for the trip to the Winston-Salem market. Farther downhill on the left and right were log tobacco barns in which we cured the green tobacco leaves harvested from the fields. After the tobacco was cured it took on a yellowish, almost brown color. Yellow brought top prices, brown much less.

The pathway down to the spring ran through a large oak grove. If you walked down the path from the house, on the left was a woodshed where we stored firewood for the kitchen and living room stoves. Behind the woodshed was our garden and a small vineyard. In front of it and on the left side of the house was a small orchard where we grew peaches and cherries.

Huge oak trees framed the house in front and on the sides. If you faced the house from the front, you could see three more buildings. On the right, looking north, was a hay barn that included stables for two mules and a cow. Another large stable was used to store farm implements. The other two buildings, to the west of the barn, were granaries where we stored corn, wheat, oats, and rye. In one of the granaries we also stored meat from the pigs we raised and slaughtered. Slaughtering usually took place when the weather grew cold, after we'd had frosts for a week or so.

The farm was situated on a curve on a dirt road. A driveway ran up from the road

to our place and over to the tenant farmer's house. If you took a left coming out of our driveway, the road drifted in a northerly direction down to Eagle Mills where Dash Gaither's store was located and over to the church where we regularly attended Sunday services. Past Wesley Chapel, the dirt road meandered on to join Highway 21, which we referred to as "the blacktop." A left turn on 21 took you north to Arlington, Jonesville, and Elkin.

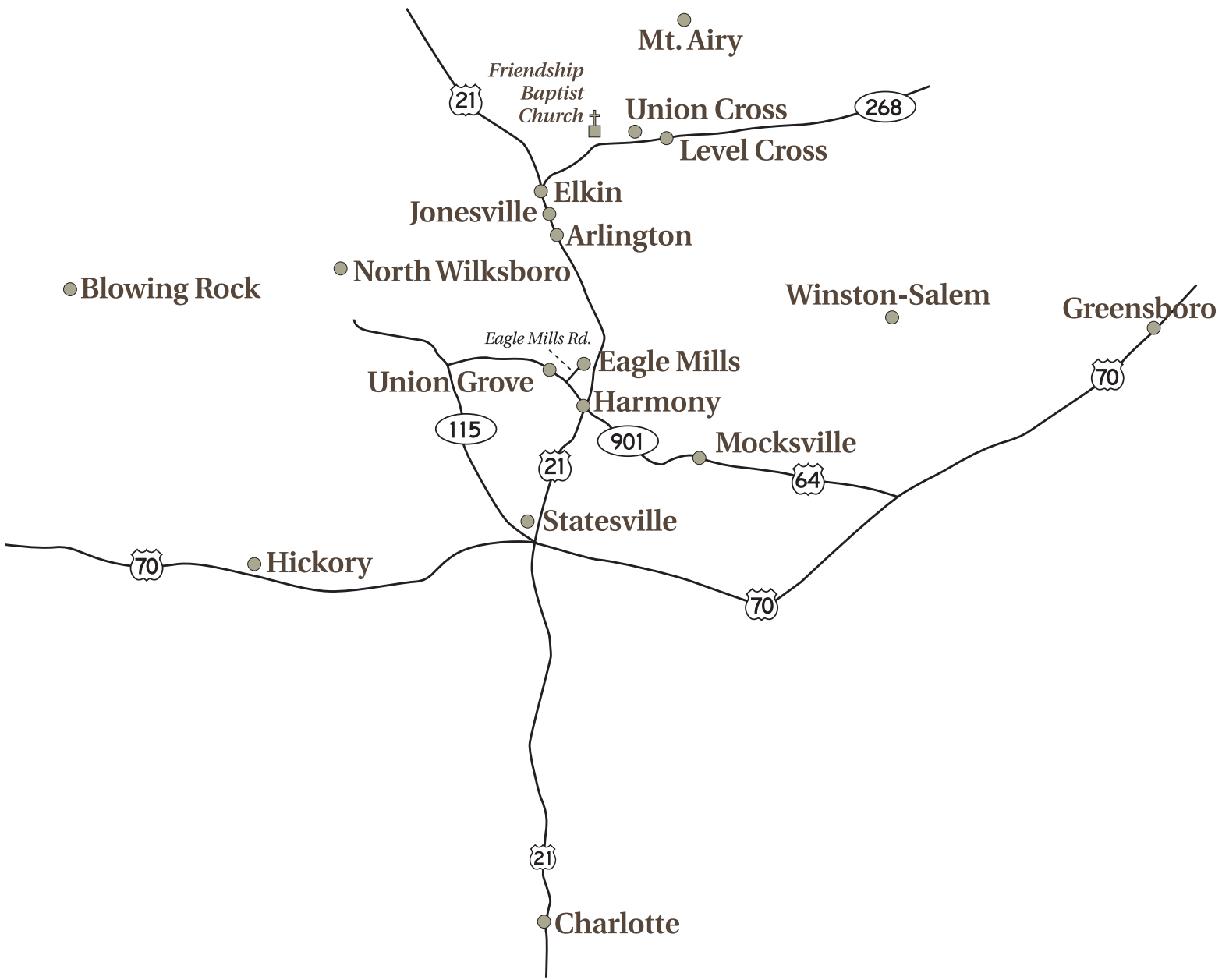
If you took a right on the dirt road leaving our house, you headed west and soon came to Highway 901, another blacktop. A left on 901 took you south to Harmony, a small community somewhat larger than Union Grove. Harmony had a general merchandise store, an auto garage, a doctor's office, a funeral home, and a small restaurant. Saturday evenings we would walk the five miles from home to Harmony and back, because on Saturday nights the restaurant owner strung a white sheet between two poles and showed movies on this makeshift screen using a 16mm projector. Since it was out in the open, there was no way to charge admission, so he would pass through the audience seeking donations, usually a nickel or dime per person.

At Harmony, Highways 21 and 901 intersect. A left on 21 led to Elkin, a right to Statesville and on to Charlotte. Continuing on 901 would lead to Mocksville and an intersection with Highway 64. From there we could take a left headed northeast to Winston-Salem or a right to Statesville. A right turn on 901 after leaving home would take us to Union Grove and over to Highway 115. At 115, a right turn led northwest to North Wilkesboro and a left led to Statesville.

On December 7, 1941, a few weeks after we arrived at the farm, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and we were suddenly neck deep in World War II. Because of the threat of

war, the government had started a military draft just over a year earlier, and around the time war began, Grandma Dockery wrote to tell us that my dad had gone into the U.S. Marine Corps. His training took place at the Parris Island Marine boot camp in South Carolina. I have a dim memory of visiting him in boot camp. It didn't seem very strange then, but today it does. Because most of the real rifles were being given to

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combat troops, he used a wooden mock-up for much of his training but ultimately was issued a 22-caliber rifle for live fire. A popular song of the era was *I'll be Back In a Year Little Darling, Uncle Sam Has Called and I Must Go*. Unfortunately, those who came back in less than a year came home wounded or in a box.

The dual wars in Europe and the Pacific would profoundly affect our lives for the next four years. War news dominated the radio airwaves and most adult conversations. With the war came rationing of gasoline, tires, batteries, metals, and many foods critical to the war effort. Mom was working at Chatham's and, since she didn't have a car, was riding to Elkin with coworkers or catching a bus over on Highway 21. When the lack of gasoline ration coupons curtailed the carpooling, Mother found a place to live in Elkin. For more than a year she stayed in Elkin all week and returned to the farm on weekends.

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Food rationing had only a minor effect on us. Since we owned a farm, we were very self-sufficient in terms of fruit, eggs, beans, potatoes, milk, butter, flour, cornmeal, and pork. One of the things I remember about the World War II era was the absence of young and middle-aged men. Every able-bodied male not classified physically unfit for military service, 4F, was drafted for the war or volunteered in advance of the draft. A few adult males who were considered essential to the war effort in a civilian capacity were exempted from service. Early on, farming qualified some young men for exemption, but that didn't last long. Uncle Frank Clanton, who introduced Dad to Mom, was one of those exempt for a time. Frank worked at the mill with Mom. All the production facilities at Chatham's were devoted to making blankets and other items for the military. That also exempted him for a while, but eventually he was drafted.

The war was brought to North Carolina shores in more dangerous ways. Wolf packs of German U-Boats started attacking ships off the Eastern Seaboard. In the six months beginning in mid-January 1942, they torpedoed and sank more than seventy ships off the North Carolina coast. A U.S. Coast Guard ship managed to sink one sub off the Outer Banks and rescue some of the crew, who would form the vanguard of scores

of German prisoners ultimately held in seventeen POW camps in North Carolina.

It's hard to remember exactly when I was first assigned chores to help out on the farm. Probably my first chores, in addition to drawing well water, were milking our cow and splitting wood for the stoves and fireplaces. Before long, my chores would include helping with the planting and harvesting of crops. Some jobs were assigned to me because they had to be done. Others I took on for our tenant farmer and neighbors in order to make a little extra money.

Working with the neighbors often included helping with the grain harvest. Today's farmers use giant combines that cut the grain stalks and spit out the straw and grain husks in their wake. The grain itself is delivered to an on-board bagging station or hopper that is off-loaded onto a truck. We owned a small combine that cut a four-foot swath and delivered the grain to an attached platform, where it was bagged and dropped into a chute that carried the bags to the ground. We came behind the combine with a team of mules and a wagon to load up the bags and take them to one of the granary buildings for storage. Oats went into storage bins, feed for the mules and the cows. Wheat and corn went into other bins. We used these grains to make our own flour, cornmeal, and livestock feed. Another bin was for rye, which we sold.

One of the neighbors I worked for was not fortunate enough to have a combine, so his wheat fields were harvested by hand. The men used scythes to cut the grain stalks. Young boys, including Ken and me, picked up the grain stalks and tied them with other stalks of grain into bundles eight to ten inches in diameter. The bundles would then be stacked in the field, fifteen or twenty to a stack, and other bundles would be placed on top as a cap to shed water in the event of rain. As soon as possible, the bundles were hauled to a barn, where a giant thrashing machine separated the grain from the chaff and stalks.

Adults were paid three to four dollars a day for grain harvesting. Youngsters like me

Here's a bit of trivia.

Where was the Rose Bowl Game played on January 1, 1942?

Because of fears of a Japanese attack on the West Coast, the game was moved out of Pasadena, California, and was played in Durham, North Carolina. Oregon State beat Duke 20-16.

got 75 cents to a dollar a day. For harvesting tobacco, kids were paid 15 cents an hour and adults, 30 to 40 cents per hour. By the time I was sixteen, my pay had risen to 20 to 25 cents an hour, and adults were earning as much as 50 cents an hour. Obviously the pay was trifling by today's standards, but there was no minimum wage on the farm and there were no child labor laws to limit the hours or the work children could do.

Late in 1942, my second year on the farm, Papa introduced me to rabbit hunting.



Showing off our rabbit dogs on the farm. That's Papa Hurt in the background.

We went out early on the first day of hunting season, Thanksgiving Day, with four or five dogs that were trained to hunt rabbits. We walked through fields and woods and along creek banks "jumping" rabbits, which were plentiful. When we jumped one, the dogs would take off on a chase in a frenzy of barking and yelping. They were short-legged beagles not fast enough to catch one, but they kept a rabbit on the move. Usually the rabbit would travel in a quarter to half-mile circle, sometimes backtracking and crisscrossing the trail several times to try to throw the dogs off the scent, and often it worked. When it didn't, the dogs would ultimately force the rabbit back to where we had jumped it.

Papa's way of introducing me to hunting was to let me carry an over/under unloaded 410-gauge, 22-caliber rifle/shotgun as I followed the adult hunters. I didn't question his method, since it was a lot of fun and I considered it an honor to be asked to go along on the hunt. When Thanksgiving rolled around the following year, I picked up my empty gun, eagerly looking forward to another season of rabbit hunting. We had just begun the hunt when Papa looked down at me and asked, "You got any bullets, Boy?" I replied, "No, sir." "Well, how do you think you're going to kill a rabbit without any bullets?" he asked. When he turned over a handful of shells to me, he created a smile on my face

a mile wide. I stuffed them in my pocket, a very happy boy to be trusted by this wonderful father figure. And, yes, I was fortunate enough to kill a rabbit that day.

Little did I know it was the start of a lifelong love of hunting that would later include all kinds of game—quail, pheasant, duck, deer, elk, squirrels, and the plains game of Africa. My passion for hunting would take me to Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Spain, Mexico, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. Thanks, Papa.

Papa had just a few rules when it came to hunting. He was firm in impressing upon me that we killed only animals that we intended to eat or that were destroying crops. In North Carolina, the state paid a five-cent bounty for each crow killed, because the birds were a real menace to newly planted corn crops. The bounty could be claimed by presenting a state official with crows' heads. Some farmers soaked seed corn in croton oil before planting, because it had the same effect on crows that castor oil has on humans. Croton oil was an extremely strong laxative and would kill the crows.

One day my grandfather saw me kill a robin and he asked, "Why did you kill that robin? Do you intend to eat it?" I replied, "No sir, Papa, I intend to use it to bait a hook to catch that big turtle down in the fish pond which we'll eat." He smiled and said okay.

Turtles were a treat for us on the farm. The ones we chose to eat were called mud turtles or snapping turtles. In Florida that species is called the alligator turtle. Papa was very fond of fried turtle and turtle stew. He had even built a special turtle-cooking shed down near the spring. The shed held a furnace three feet wide by ten feet long with a chimney at the rear that extended up through the shed's tin roof. The top of the front of the furnace was covered with a quarter-inch steel plate on which we would place frying pans to fry the turtle.

A large hole with sloping sides at the rear of the furnace near the chimney put out enough heat to bring a seven to eight-gallon iron pot of water to the boil. The men would go out and spend about a week catching turtles, which would be cleaned, eight to ten at a time, on the day of the big cookout. The turtles' shells would be thoroughly cleaned by peeling off the covering of tough scales, then the meat would

be separated from the shells. Both the shells and the cut-up meat were dumped into the water-filled stewpot. After boiling for an hour or more, the choice leg and thigh pieces would be taken out, battered, and fried.



This is what is left of the special turtle cooking shed built by Papa Hurt. Ken was surprised to find the shed and the tobacco barn on a visit to the farm shortly before he died in 2003. The surrounding area has been developed.

Potatoes, onions, and a few tomatoes would then be added to the pot to make turtle stew. When they were thoroughly cooked, Papa added a mixture of flour and milk a bit at a time and stirred vigorously to prevent curdling. This would thicken the stew. When it came to a bubbling boil, the pot was quickly removed from the heat and the feast began.

Ken and I usually chopped the firewood for the stove and carried it to the cooking shed, which earned us each a bowl of stew. We were then shooed away as the menfolk, sometimes fifteen or twenty strong, busied themselves with a snort or two of white lightning. The cookouts were usually

held on Saturday afternoons and lasted for hours.

When it came to fishing, I pretty much taught myself. I learned to catch sunfish, bluegills, bass, knotty heads, and catfish in our pond or at the mill down on Hunting Creek. Grandma was always happy to have a mess of fish to fry up.

That second hunt with Papa, when I got to load my gun, was our last hunt together. By the time Thanksgiving 1943 heralded the start of the rabbit-hunting season, Papa had been diagnosed with hardening of the arteries of the brain at Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina.

We first learned Papa was sick one night at supper early in November, when from his chair at the head of the table, he pointed across the table and said, "Give me some of that." Mom said, "Daddy, what do you want?" He pointed again and said, "That." She said, "Yes, but what is that?" He was pointing at the pinto beans. He looked at Mom and

said, "Honey, I know you're my daughter, but sometimes I can't say your name. I can't remember what your name is right now." Silence descended on the table as we sat stunned. Shortly after that, Mom took Papa to Duke where the diagnosis was made. I guess we'd call it Alzheimer's today.

As Papa lay near death in the big bedroom on the south side of the house, he'd quit talking altogether. My brother and I, on a moonlit night, took our possum dog, a bluetick hound, out on a hunt. The strategy we had worked out was this: The dog would strike the trail of a possum and streak off with an uproar of barking. Since the possum couldn't run very fast, the dog would soon tree it. With Ken holding the flashlight, I would climb the tree, grab the possum by the tail, and bring it down. Occasionally I had to drop the possum, and my brother would catch it as soon as it hit the ground.

On this night we caught a large possum—probably ten or eleven pounds—brought it home, and put it in a cage we'd been using to raise pet rabbits. We planned to keep the possum for a couple of weeks, feeding it cornbread and buttermilk, before killing it and having Grandma and Auntie bake it for supper.

The morning after that hunt Ken and I took the possum from the cage and carried it by its tail to Papa's room. As we held the possum high, he opened his eyes, turned his head toward us, and gave us a big smile. A few days later, on December 22, 1943, Papa died. He would have been only fifty-seven years old had he lived another week. It was hard to believe the major male influence in my life was gone forever.

Papa was buried December 24, Christmas Eve, at the Friendship Baptist Church east of Elkin. The funeral was preached at Wesley Chapel Church and we drove in a procession of many cars to the burial site. When we got back to the farm, we sat around in the living room as dusk approached, not saying much, the silence broken only by the sounds of soft sobbing. Mr. Gooding, an older gentleman who had been helping with chores during Papa's last days, suddenly stood up and said, "We don't have a Christmas tree. Mr. Hurt would want us to have one." With that he got up and went out into a drizzle of raindrops that were turning into snowflakes.

In about forty minutes he returned from a nearby patch of woods with a young

cedar tree. We brought it in, set it up in the living room, and decorated it. There were no Christmas presents that year, just some nuts, raisins, and oranges from Florida. We managed to catch a little bit of the Christmas spirit as we broke into a rendition of *Silent Night*.

It was an extremely sad Christmas. Grandma's birthday was on Christmas Day—a hell of a way to remember a birthday. She loved Papa so very much, as we all did.

Grandpa Dockery had died eight months earlier from colon cancer, on April 26,



Grandparents Charles W. Dockery and Ellen Conley Dockery in front of their farm home at Union Cross, NC.

1942, at age sixty-two. I was not very close to Grandpa Doc and was not around him enough to have very many memories of him. One thing I do remember, though, is Grandpa Doc at mealtime. He said the blessing at every meal, and sometimes his blessings lasted long enough to qualify as honest-to-goodness Sunday sermons. This would prompt Grandma Dockery, who had spent many hours cooking, to interrupt him with “Charlie, the food is getting cold.” Shortly thereafter the blessing would end with the customary amen.

The summer I was ten years old, Mom drove Ken and me to Union Cross to visit with Grandma Dockery for about a week. Her house was considerably larger than the one on the farm. It had to be to accommodate my dad, his brothers, Herbert and Charles, and his sisters, Josephine, Irene, Mary-Ellen, and Bernice. The Dockerys had a smokehouse where they smoke-cured beef, something we didn't have on the farm. Both sets of grandparents cured their pork by completely covering it with salt and storing it in a huge box. Back then, it was simply called “ham.” Today it is on the menu of many Southern restaurants as “country ham.”

Being on the Dockery farm that summer was a lot of fun. My dad's cousin, Alvin

Dockery, had a farm nearby, and blackberries were ripening. Cousin Alvin supplemented his farm income by canning wild blackberries in summer. He paid Ken and me and other kids from the surrounding area to pick the berries. At about the same time, wild huckleberries were also ripening and we picked those for Grandma Dockery, who used them fresh to bake delicious pies. She also made huckleberry preserves to be served with pancakes in the winter months.

Harvesting the blackberries and huckleberries was fun because we were usually with other kids. What wasn't so much fun was coming home from a day in the woods and fields with chigger bites. Some folks called them "red bugs." There were no aerosol cans of repellent back then, so we wore long-sleeved shirts and full-length pants and ringed our wrists and ankles with lard to keep the chiggers from crawling up our arms and legs. It wasn't a foolproof method, but it helped. Chiggers are so tiny you can barely see them, and once one bites you it burrows under the skin. The itchy red bumps that follow are certainly easy to spot. Once chiggers got under our skin, it was best to try to seal them there with a dab of nail polish provided by Grandma and Cousin Alvin's wife.

*“Chiggers so
tiny you
can barely
see them.”*

After Papa Hurt died, the lack of a father figure on the farm made me feel empty for a long time. I started spending more time with our tenant family and the head of that household, a colored man named Tanus Carson. He knew all about planting, tending, and harvesting crops.

Still, life on the farm was great for a boy. We continued having the *Winston-Salem Journal* delivered, and I found myself paying more attention to the newspaper and its reports on World War II and the continuing shortages of goods being diverted to the war effort. For example, in addition to gasoline and tires, shoes were rationed. We could buy only one pair for each person each year. That was okay with me, since I rarely wore shoes during the summer except for church on Sunday and the occasional visit to town. When school resumed in the fall, my feet were almost tough enough to walk through briar patches.

In addition to keeping up with world events via the newspaper, I visited a fantasyland of novels and short stories during the summers. A bookmobile drove past our house on a regular schedule every two weeks. I especially enjoyed books about the Northwest. I must have read everything that James Fenimore Cooper and Jack London had written and, of course, the famous novels by Mark Twain, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. When school was in, and if I wasn't playing volleyball, basketball, or baseball, I was in the library, not only reading teacher assignments but also books for pure pleasure.

Summers were so much fun for a country boy. We usually quit work at noon on Saturdays and headed off for a swim in the deep hole by the mill in Hunting Creek. There was a huge cliff-like rock, fifteen feet high, that jutted out to the edge of the creek. We would climb up the back side of the rock, which was about four feet above the ground, get a running start across the flat top, and dive off into the water.

Some of our favorite weekend activities were severely curtailed by the devastating polio epidemic that hit the nation near the end of World War II and lasted into the 1950s. At its peak the epidemic was producing an average of twenty thousand new cases per year. Polio was a scary paralytic disease that claimed many lives and left thousands on crutches, in wheelchairs, or confined to iron lungs because of their inability to breathe on their own.

Before the epidemic, Ken and I sometimes got a special treat on Saturdays. After Papa died, Mom got his car, which enabled her to commute to her job rather than stay in town all week. Sometimes she took us into Elkin, where we spent all Saturday morning swimming in the YMCA pool. She gave us enough money for lunch—a Carolina hot dog dressed with chili, slaw, and mustard, and a Coca-Cola. In the afternoon we took in two movies, one at the Reeves Theater and one at the Capitol Theater. Almost all the Saturday matinee movies were cowboy flicks. After the second movie we would walk from downtown to Chatham's parking lot to meet Mom when she got off work for the ride back to the farm.

In 1944, the fear of polio resulted in the closing of the YMCA pool to children, who

were especially susceptible to the disease. Movie theaters and other public places were also closed, and large gatherings of people were curtailed. The same thing was happening all over North Carolina. Nearby Hickory and Catawba County were hard hit. With preventative vaccines still years away, public health authorities believed that limiting contact with people and possibly contaminated places was the best way of slowing the epidemic. The closings actually had little effect on those of us who lived out in the country. The deep hole continued to be our refuge from the summer heat every Saturday and most Sundays after church and the big family dinner.

Up Hunting Creek about two miles from the deep hole was Pickney Bend, a swimming hole we visited once a year in winter. I don't believe we'd ever heard of a Polar Bear Club, but we were one. On New Year's Day, Ken and I, with six or eight of our buddies, would slip off to the creek, pull off our clothes, swim across, scramble up on the bank, hop back in the water, and swim back. It was always cold, and a few times ice extended from two feet to eight feet out into the water. It was never very thick, so we would use a stick to break up enough ice to allow us to get in and out of the frigid water. Shivering, and with no towel to dry off with, we hurriedly put on our clothes, shoes, and winter coats and headed home.

Winters on the farm could be almost as much fun as summers. We usually had at least one snowfall, sometimes three or four. When there was enough snow to prevent the school buses from running, we'd spend the day sledding down the hills on the farm and tracking rabbits without our dogs. A rabbit would spend the night looking for food and, just before sunrise, dig a bed where it would sleep during the day. Our objective was to track a rabbit until we found the bed. We didn't always find our prey, but when we did we shot it in the head with a .22. We didn't want to be picking dozens of shotgun pellets out of the body when we dressed it for supper that evening. If we were lucky enough to get more than the four or five needed for the family meal, we field dressed them and took them to Cartwright's General Store a mile west of the house. Depending on the market, we got fifteen to twenty cents for each rabbit. At that time it was not illegal to sell wild game in stores and meat markets.

I also trapped rabbits in wintertime, as did most farm boys. It was something we could do early in the morning without interfering with our chores. We didn't use store-bought traps; we made our own, and they worked very well. The traps were called "rabbit gums" because we made them from sections of black gum trees that had been hollowed out by heart rot. Close one end and fit the other with a triggered sliding door and you've got a trap. We placed bait—an apple or sweet potato—behind the trigger stick, and the trap was set. When a rabbit entered the gum and headed to the back to

“4:30 a.m....

*check the rabbit
traps.”*

get the bait, it bumped into the notched stick, which made the stick flip up through the hole in the top of the gum, which dropped the door behind the rabbit, trapping it.

Like deer and many other animals, rabbits create paths through the woods that they consistently follow. I would find the paths and, after rabbit season opened on Thanksgiving Day, I would set a half-dozen gums scattered through the wooded acres of the farm. I would get up about 4:30 each morning, grab a kerosene lantern, and head out to check the traps. Sometimes I came home empty-handed and disappointed, but many mornings I returned with three or four rabbits. I would field dress them, do my morning chores, have breakfast, and take the rabbits to Cartwright's store, then catch the school bus from there.

Cartwright's also bought specialty items that I harvested in the summer. I skinned wild cherry bark off the trees and set it out in the sun for a week to dry out. Flavorings for beverages and medicines could be made from the bark. I also made spending money from pokeberry roots, which I dug up and then sliced into small pieces for drying. I'm not sure if I knew then that pokeberry was poisonous, but I was interested in selling it, not eating it. Star root was the most profitable item to gather. It usually grew on the wooded southern and eastern slopes of the hills dotting many farms in the area. Each plant had at its base three or four roots the size of my thumb. These I also sliced up for drying. Pokeberry and star roots were both used in medicinal applications. Mr. Cartwright would pay me the going price, and star root always brought me considerably more than pokeberry root or cherry bark. Periodically, a buyer visited the store to pick

up the roots and bark. In winter, rabbits were picked up daily.

Meanwhile, year after year Hitler's military had ravaged Europe until finally the Allied forces were closing in on Berlin. It was only a matter of time before Hitler was defeated, but he refused to be taken alive. On April 30, 1945, Adolph Hitler committed suicide in his bunker. A week later Germany surrendered. The war in Europe was finally over and many of our troops would be heading home. Others would stay in Germany as part of the Occupation Army, and some would be headed for the Pacific to join the fight against the Japanese.

On May 8, 1945, two days after my twelfth birthday, our radio blared the good news that the war in Europe had come to an end. In the midst of the joyous celebrations, I recall being somewhat disappointed that the war had ended before I was old enough to get into the fight. I very much wanted to be a tail gunner on one of the big bombers I had seen in newsreels as they struck at the heart of Germany's war-making industries.

Gasoline was still rationed so it was a big decision on Mom's part to frivolously burn a few gallons that evening to drive to Statesville to join the celebration. Grandma and Auntie stayed home, so Mom filled the car with Ken's and my friends. We were surprised to find the streets of the small North Carolina town jammed with traffic. People were shouting, blowing their horns, and many, like us, had tied tin cans to their cars to make as much noise as possible. Where people found so many cans remains a mystery, since during the war everyone flattened their empty cans and took them to a collection point to be shipped off to factories to aid the war effort. The term "recycling" hadn't been coined yet, and the practice wouldn't take hold again on such a scale for many years.

While the fighting in World War II lasted just under four years, it seemed like forever. To those with loved ones fighting at sea, in the air, and on the battlefields of two fronts, it was an eternity. Japan had been preparing for war for years, but the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, had come as an enormous shock. The United States was not prepared to wage war across the vast expanse of the Pacific, and with a significant portion of the fleet sunk or damaged by Japanese bombs and torpedoes,

we had entered the conflict at a huge disadvantage. Nonetheless, one day after Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war on Japan, and four days later, Hitler declared war on us. Suddenly we were fully involved in the war we had hoped to avoid.

My Uncle Frank had arrived in Europe only a few weeks before the war ended and was fortunate to have missed the last days of fighting. Now his wife, my Aunt Hilda, who had been living with us since Uncle Frank entered the service, received a letter from him saying he would soon be on his way home. Not long afterward, he arrived at the farm, which caused a flood of tears of happiness from Aunt Hilda, Mom, Grandma, and Auntie. Ken and I were just all smiles.

A few days later, Uncle Frank learned that he would be leaving for the Pacific to join the fight against the Japanese. The women were crying again, now with grief. Tears of joy one day, tears of sadness the next. The news on the radio and headline

“*Atomic bomb
dropped...
the Japanese
surrender on
Aug. 14, 1945.*”

in the *Winston-Salem Journal* didn't raise anyone's spirits—hundreds of thousands of our troops were being prepared for an invasion of Japan.

Harry Truman, our 33rd president, who assumed the office after the death of Roosevelt, faced a choice: lose thousands of Americans to the fanatical Japanese defenders in an invasion, or use the atomic bomb. He chose the bomb, and the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in the Japanese surrender on August 14, 1945.

Uncle Frank got lucky again. While he was being processed and trained in California for the Pacific battles, the atomic bombs dropped on Japan essentially ended World War II. Plans to ship additional American troops to that area were abandoned. Uncle Frank would be discharged and back home in a few months.

After boot camp training at Parris Island, South Carolina, Dad was sent to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. According to Marine records I obtained, he was stationed on Tutuila, American Samoa, until the end of February 1942. He then embarked aboard the USS Rixey on March 1 and was on Noumea, New Caledonia, from March 10 until the unit

was disbanded on March 20. The records indicate that he arrived back in the U.S. on March 28, 1943, and spent some time in the Army hospital in San Diego. The records do not indicate the he was in any battles with the Japanese. I do remember him complaining about “foot rot” and malaria. Perhaps this is what sent him to the hospital. He was discharged from the Marines on June 10, 1943. His efficiency reports ranging from military efficiency to neatness and military bearing, intelligence, obedience and sobriety earned him grade points from 4.3 to 5s, the top rating.

My Uncle Charles Conley Dockery was not as fortunate. He was in an Army Air Corps rescue unit on Saipan in the Pacific. An American bomber had crash-landed on the island and Charles was carrying a pilot whom he had rescued from the plane, the last of the crew, when the plane exploded, killing them both. After the war his body was flown from Saipan to Hawaii for burial at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

Chance and timing had a lot to do with who survived the war. Another lucky GI was Carl York, who would become my stepfather. He served in Europe as a military policeman, an MP, in France and Germany. He was one of the support troops for General Patton as he rolled across Belgium and France into Germany. Carl told me that Patton was always dangerously close to getting too far out in front of the support units that supplied his troops with ammunition, food, clothing, and MPs busy directing traffic to the front lines.

Carl also told me we were lucky that we won the war in one respect. The Allies advanced so fast that many German prisoners never made it to the rear. Bluntly, many of them were machine-gunned as they marched westward toward the rear lines. So we might have been war criminals had we not won the war.

Carl and my mother had met before the war. He worked at the cotton gin in Houstonville and also at a nearby general merchandise store run by the gin owner. Occasionally, when Mom could not carpool with two of her friends who also worked at Chatham’s, she caught a ride over to Houstonville, about eight miles from the farm, where she could catch a bus for Eklin and her job. She’d wait at the bus stop outside the merchandise store where Carl worked. On Fridays, at the end of her workweek, she



My uncle, Charles Conley Dockery, who died in Saipan during World War II while serving as a fire/rescue airman. He died while carrying a wounded pilot, the last person to be removed from a bomber which had crash landed just before it exploded in a ball of fire on Saipan 19 January 1945. After the war in the Pacific ended he was moved to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, also known as the Punchbowl National Cemetery. He's also remembered with a headstone in the Dockery Cemetery near Union Cross, North Carolina.



caught the bus back to Houstonville. It was her good fortune that she used that bus stop, as that's how she and Carl met.

Mom and Carl dated a few times before he was drafted into the Army and sent off to Europe. They wrote to each other while he was away, and about two years after he returned they got married, in the spring of 1947. I was almost fourteen. I was very, very happy for my mom and for my new friend Carl. Ken did not get along with Carl as well as I did, and he was disappointed when Mom and Carl announced that they were getting married. Later in life Ken would come to love and respect him as much as I did, and years later, Carl would become Papa York to our children.

Carl was never a father figure for me but a very close, dear, older friend whom I respected very much. It was Carl who taught me quail hunting. He was not a rabbit hunter. His family were farmers. Before he and Mom got married, he would come and pick up Mom in the early evening and drop me off where he had been plowing with a John Deere Tractor Tricycle, much larger than our little Farmall A four-wheeler. His tractor was equipped with lights, and I would plow while Carl and Mom were off sparking. I probably would have worked for nothing just to get to drive the big John Deere tractor, but Carl paid me very well.

After the marriage, Carl moved in with Mom, Ken, Grandma, Auntie, and me. Grandma allowed him a few acres to farm while he continued work on his family farm about four miles away.

Following the death of Papa, I had gradually gotten more involved in learning about the planting and harvesting of our crops under the tutelage of Tanus. Some of the work was assigned by my grandmother, but mostly I was anxious to learn as much as I could, since I figured I would be spending much of my life on a farm.

The long days began in early spring as we planted cotton, tobacco, oats, corn, wheat, and rye, as well as the vegetable garden behind our house. My days started before dawn with milking the cow, then feeding it and the mules before heading back for a breakfast prepared by Grandma and Auntie. After breakfast I met up with Tanus, who would have hitched the mules to the wagon for our trip to the fields. Once there,

the mules were unhitched from the wagon and hooked up to whatever implement we were using at the time, plows for turning the soil, planters, or row plows. As the row crops—cotton, corn, and tobacco—started growing, I was assigned the job of hoeing them. That meant removing the weeds growing up between the plants. The weeds growing between the rows were plowed under by Tanus—that was grown-up work, which I graduated to later on, and when I was paid, I made a little more for plowing than for hoeing.

We broke for dinner sometime close to noon. We hitched the mules to the wagon and rode to the barns, where we unhitched them and took them to the watering trough just below the spring. The hard morning work had left them incredibly thirsty, and sometimes it seemed they needed ten to fifteen minutes to drink their fill. After that we took the mules to the barn, removed their harnesses, and put them in their stalls and fed them. After dinner, I often went out in the backyard to lie down in the shade of a huge oak tree.

Occasionally, I would hear a plane, maybe once every week or two. I would jump up, leave the cover of the tree, and run out to peer into the sky. Seeing the airplane would set me to daydreaming about the world beyond the farm. Where is that plane going? Who might be on it? Where did it come from? My daydreaming continued with thoughts about what I could be doing if I wasn't a farmer. The war was over, so I could forget about becoming a tail gunner. But planes fascinated me and I wondered if it was possible to go to college and become an aeronautical engineer.

*“You’re
dreaming
too big...”*

Sometimes I talked with Mom about life beyond the farm—things to do, places to see, people to meet. Mom had been disappointed that she had never realized her dreams, since she had two children to support with no help from their dad. She used to tell me, “You’re dreaming too big. You’re going to be disappointed.” My replies would go something like this. “You know, Mom, I don’t think I’ll fail to make my dreams come true. If I do, so what? I mean, if you don’t dream, you’re locked into where you are and what you are.” By this time I had read enough books to know that there was a

big world out there just waiting for me to explore, and while I loved the farm, I didn't want to be locked into farming for the rest of my life. Mom wanted me to become a foreman at Chatham's. She believed this would represent huge success, since she reported to a foreman every day. But being a foreman was not part of my dreams.

Conversations with Mom notwithstanding, there was always work to be done. After a noon break of almost two hours, we headed back to the fields, where we worked until just before sundown. Then we hitched the mules to the wagon and drove back to the barn, freed them of their harnesses, and took them to the watering trough, then back to the barn, where we fed them and put them away for the night. After that there was a big supper for us, reading the *Winston-Salem Journal*, and listening to the radio. Popular radio programs, in addition to the news, were *The Lone Ranger*, *The Green Hornet*, and *The Creaking Door*. After the last radio program, it was time to go to the back porch and wash our feet before we climbed into bed. A full body wash came on Saturdays.

During the harvest season, the days were even longer especially when it came to harvesting the tobacco. We got up an hour or two before sunrise to go to the tobacco barns, where, by the light of kerosene lanterns, we took the cured tobacco out, loaded the wagon, and drove it to the pack house for storage. The tobacco leaves were strung out on four-foot-long sticks. Then I would milk the cow and have breakfast. While the sun was still low in the east, we would start the tobacco harvest.

We had two tobacco sleds made of boards and split burlap bags. Each sled was about twelve feet long with sides four feet high that could be folded down halfway so that the harvested tobacco leaves could be bunched. We handed the leaves off to a stringer, who tied them, three or four to a bunch, onto the stick. This work took place on both sides of the sled.

While one sled was being processed at the tobacco barn, the other was in the field, where two to four men would be priming the tobacco leaves. I don't know where the term "priming" came from, but what we were actually doing was picking the leaves off the tobacco stalks as they ripened, starting at the bottom. The primers wore long-

sleeved shirts in the hot sun to keep their arms from getting covered with tobacco tar. They stripped the leaves off with one hand and tucked them under their other arm from armpit to wrist before they loaded the tobacco into the sleds. Usually the leaves ripened in cycles of three to four at a time. The bottom leaves were called “lugs.” They brought the least money at the market. We were helped in the harvest by neighboring farmers, whom we would repay by helping with their harvests.

The hired help—Ken and me and a few others—were paid by the hour. At the bottom of the pay rung were those who handed the tobacco to the stringers, me and Ken. The stringers were on the next rung, and they were paid on a par with the sled drivers. Primers were at the top of the pay scale. As the stringers completed filling each tobacco stick, one of the handlers stacked it next to the barn. Once the day’s fieldwork was done, we would all gather to pass the stacked sticks from one to another into the barn and up to a man straddling the poles. He hung the tobacco sticks across the poles. One of our barns, which was considered to be very large, held eleven hundred sticks of tobacco. The smaller barn could hold eight hundred fifty sticks.

After the barn was full and we were ready to call it a day, it was time to wash the sticky, greenish-black tobacco tar off our arms and hands, first with kerosene oil and then with lye soap and water to get rid of the kerosene. After another large supper, we ended

the day in the usual fashion, cooling off on the porch and listening to the radio before washing our feet and heading to bed.

“After the tobacco crop... the corn crop... and the cotton crop.”

After the tobacco crop was harvested the corn crop would come in, and after that, the cotton crop. There was always a crop being planted, tended, or harvested. However, sometimes when we had a break between harvesting the crops, I would go to work for Dash Gaither cutting timber or working at his sawmill.

The sawmill would be moved from one timber tract to the next. The pay was good, a little more than I was making harvesting tobacco crops. Usually, we would have three teams of two men felling the trees with heavy gasoline powered “crosscut” chainsaws, one on each end of the chainsaw. My job was to use a



Ken is standing in front of one of the tobacco barns which was used to cure the green tobacco leaves. The leaves would be strung on sticks and hung on horizontal poles stacked about three feet apart from about six feet from the floor of the barn to the top. On each side were furnaces in which we would burn hardwood trees to heat the barn, starting out with a low temperature of about 120 degrees Fahrenheit and gradually increasing the temperature over about three days and nights to about 200 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat would turn the green leaves to a bright yellow or light brown. These furnaces are not the original ones. Repairs seem to have been made for other purposes.

measuring stick to mark where the men would come back with their chainsaws to cut up the logs. I would mark the spots with an axe, chipping out a small piece of wood. I would also use the axe to trim up the felled tree, cutting the limbs flush with the trunk unless they were very large. In that instance, the men with chainsaws would trim off the large limbs.

We started early, around 8:00 A.M., and would break at noon for lunch, or dinner as we say in North Carolina. Then it was back to work until 5:30 or 6:00 P.M. It was during a dinner break that I was accepted as a “man” at age fifteen. Before emptying out our dinner buckets, usually filled with ham biscuit, pinto beans, Vienna sausage and sardines, the men would pass around a half gallon fruit jar filled with moonshine whiskey,

*“I was
recognized as
a man...”*

sometimes called white lightning or sugarhead if it was distilled from sugar, or corn “likker” if corn mash was used. Each would take a few swigs before passing it on to the next man.

One day it was passed by me, as usual, but the old timer on my left said to the group, “Croffard is working just as hard as the rest of us. He’s good at what he does. He’s a man.” He then passed the jar back to me and said, “Here, have a drink.” It was one of those defining moments in my life. I was recognized as a man, an equal, among a tough timber crew.

When I was growing up, the cornstalks were much taller than they are now, perhaps as tall as six to seven feet, each with two to three ears of corn on it. Today’s stalks are about five feet tall. The harvest started with us cutting off the upper portion of the stalk just above the topmost ear of corn and dropping it on the ground. Someone would come behind the cutter and collect the stalks, tying them in a bundle about fifteen to twenty inches in diameter. Several of these bundles would be stacked upright until they were dried out. The bundles would then be collected and taken to the barn for storage. During the winter these stalks and the leaves, which we called fodder, were fed to the mules.

Two or three weeks later we would go through the cornfields stripping the lower portion of the stalk of the corn ears. We threw them into piles about twenty to twenty-

five feet apart. Later, we would come through with the team of mules and a wagon on which we had placed three-foot-high sides and ends. We picked up the ears of corn from the piles and tossed them into the wagon. Then we took each load to an area near the barn and dumped it in a pile that would eventually measure about five feet high, ten to fifteen feet wide and fifty to sixty feet long, depending on the size of the crop. Sometime within the next three or four weeks, everyone on the farm, adults and kids, shucked the ears of corn, tossing the shucks to one side and the corn into a wagon, then moving it to one of our three barns and a barn near the tenant farmer's house. Shucks were fed to the livestock.

I don't recall how the corn crop was divvied up, but the landowner probably got three bushels of corn to every one bushel the tenant got. The tenant farmer and his family furnished the labor. The landowner, my grandmother, furnished the land, the fertilizer, the seeds, the farm equipment, and the mules. The grain crops were divided up in the same manner. After the cotton and tobacco crops were sold, they were divvied up in dollars. Grandma set aside eight to ten acres of pastureland for the tenant family and provided them living quarters. Tanus and his family had a three-bedroom house with a living room and kitchen-dining area.

The last crop harvested was the cotton, usually after one or two frosts in late fall or early winter frost killed the leaves of the plants, which sometimes grew as tall as four feet or higher. Without the leaves, the cotton bolls were much easier to get to and pick.

There's a lot of meaning in the line of an old country song: "When those cotton bolls get rotten, you can't pick very much cotton." So we couldn't wait too long to pick them. You may have heard the expression, often used in rural North Carolina, "He's in high cotton." More cotton could be picked faster from five-foot-high stalks than from those closer to the ground, and the "high cotton" reference simply meant that someone was doing well.

The going rate for picking cotton by the time I left the farm at age seventeen was three to four cents a pound. I wasn't very good at picking, only managing about 150 to 175 pounds a day. One colored man who worked the fields routinely picked

500 pounds a day. It helped to get out very, very early in the morning while the dew was still on the cotton, which made it weigh a little more. We picked the bolls with both hands, stuffing them into a six-foot-long bag that we dragged behind us hung over one shoulder. The pickers had their cotton weighed at the end of the day, when they would be paid.

One year, when I was probably about fifteen years old, Grandma told me and Ken that she would set aside three acres for us to plant our own cotton crop. She would even provide the seeds and fertilizer. I was thrilled at the thought of making some “big” money. We had a good crop of cotton and took it to Houstonville to sell it at the cotton gin. I don’t remember the amount we received for our crop but it was a lot for two young boys. Mom let us keep a small amount of it but insisted that we open a savings account in Elkin at the Savings and Loan Bank. We did, and deposited the balance of the cash from our crop there.

The following summer, one of our neighbors who had a truck was planning a trip to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and invited about fifteen or twenty of us to join him and his two kids for the trip. He would be our chaperone. He would put a bunch of straw in the truck which would serve as our sleeping quarters on the way down, at the beach, and on the way back. Each of us would chip in to pay expenses and maybe a little bit more for him to make a profit. Mom agreed that I could go and that I could draw some money out of my savings account to pay for the trip.

For whatever reason, about a week before we were to depart, Mom changed her mind and said I couldn’t go. But somehow, I decided that I would make the trip. On the day the truck left I wasn’t on it but I had come up with a plan to go to the beach and

“Scared that Mom had alerted the sheriff to look for me.”

meet my friends there. I hitched a ride to Elkin, drew some money out of my savings account and bought a bus ticket from Elkin to Myrtle Beach.

I had asked my stepfather to tell Mom what I was doing after I was gone. However, the folks at the savings and loan office called Mom at Chatham’s to let her know that I’d drawn

out some money.

During the overnight trip from Elkin to Myrtle Beach, my bus was stopped and boarded by a sheriff who came by and questioned each one of us about where we were headed. I was really scared that Mom had alerted the sheriff to look for me and that I would be taken off the bus. It didn't happen. The next morning we rolled into Myrtle Beach where I started looking for my friends and the truck. It wasn't long before I found them. After four or five glorious days of swimming, sunning, flirting with the girls and drinking illegal beers, we hopped into the back of the truck and came home.

Mom didn't speak to me for two or three weeks. Carl said she was very angry and that I shouldn't have done it and I said, "Well, I probably shouldn't have done it but I had worked hard all summer and wanted to go to the beach with my friends and by golly, I was going." Ken was delighted to see me get out of the back of the truck and came running to meet me saying, "My brother's home! My brother's home!"

With most of the crops in, the pace on the farm slackened off except for maintenance work and woodcutting in winter, and we were back in school at Union Grove. Like all public schools in the South then, Union Grove was segregated. Colored folk, as blacks were referred to back then—or Negroes, in more formal references—went to separate schools. The colored folk who lived near the farm where I grew up, including Tanus's family, went to school in Houstonville.

Segregation didn't just affect schools. It was prevalent throughout society in the South. Movie theatres, restaurants, and entire urban communities were segregated, as well as the waiting rooms at the Greyhound bus station. On the buses, colored folk were obliged to sit in the back. There wasn't much talk of integrating schools until the mid 1950s.

In rural areas, segregation was by distance only, as colored farmers and white farmers were scattered pretty evenly over the landscape. At school I don't remember there being any discussions about the segregation of the races. It was just a fact of life.

Discipline in the schools was straightforward. If you misbehaved, you usually got a spanking from the teacher or the principal. I remember one teacher bringing in a new

wooden paddle about three feet long with holes drilled in the business end. She displayed it on her desk and commented that she hoped she didn't have to use it. I made some sort of silly comment about her remarks, which I intended only for the ears of the classmate seated in front of me. My whisper wasn't low enough, because the teacher heard it and invited me to the front of the room. She had me bend over and she applied several whacks to my butt then told me to go back to my desk and sit down. Thanks to the effectiveness of the new paddle, my rear was stinging so much that it was too painful to sit. I was forced to raise my hand and ask if I could go stand outside for a few minutes. She replied, "Yes, of course. Come back in when you think you can sit back down."

The only other paddling I got was from the principal. On our school buses the seating consisted of long bleacher-type seats, one on each side of the bus and two more down the center, running from the front to the rear. Students sat back-to-back on the center rows of seats. One morning on the way to school, the student sitting beside me pushed an older girl behind him onto the floor. The girl thought I had done the pushing and she started kicking and hitting me in the face and chest. She was a tall, good-looking redhead who was probably two or three grades ahead of me and was very strong. (Later, I would date one of her younger sisters.) I stood up and bloodied her nose with one punch, which brought the fighting to an end. When we arrived at school, she went directly to the principal's office, still bleeding. I was called in and tried to explain that I didn't start the fight and that I was just trying to protect myself. I also protested that she shouldn't have been beating up on me since she was so much older. The principal simply replied, "Bend over." He got his paddle and I had a sore butt again for an hour or so.

Discipline was really not much of a problem at the school. I'm sure the certainty of swift punishment had plenty to do with it.

Between the third and eighth grade at Union Grove, going to school became pretty much a routine for me—getting up early, catching the bus, eating the dinner that Grandma had packed for me. It was usually a piece of ham and a biscuit. Our school

*“Discipline...
not much of
a problem...
at school.”*

had no cafeteria and there were no vending machines filled with snacks and drinks. If we had money, we were allowed to go to the little country store near the school to buy something to eat or drink. We spent most of our forty-five-minute break for dinner playing volleyball outside or basketball in the gym. When I was in the eighth grade, the school added a cafeteria.

Once we entered the ninth grade, we were in high school. Until then, we had spent the day in one classroom with one teacher who taught everything. Now we were moving from classroom to classroom with different teachers for each subject. This made the school day a lot more interesting. We spent one hour a day in the library, where we worked on special projects. I did a lot of reading and prepared book reports that I submitted to various teachers. Some of us, especially the boys, took advantage of the opportunity to look up words we'd heard but never seen in print—naughty, naughty.

My favorite subjects were math and algebra. Actually, the only subject I didn't like was biology. As part of our English classes, some of us were required to participate in the school plays staged two or three times a year in the school auditorium. Although I enjoyed acting, in my final year I tried to opt out of the lead part because the script called for me to kiss a gal I didn't particularly like who always had a bad case of halitosis. My English teacher would have none of it and threatened to fail me for the entire year if I didn't take the part. I did. It wasn't a very long kiss!

Because our only transportation to and from school was the regularly scheduled school bus, we usually had time built into the day's schedule for practicing baseball, volleyball, or basketball.

By the time I was promoted to the ninth grade, the number of students in my class had dwindled to about twenty-one. Many of the boys were taken out of school by their parents to work full-time on their farms. It was about this time, when I was fifteen, that I started thinking about quitting school. I wanted to leave the farm, spread my wings, and discover the adventures of traveling and being on my own. However, Mom, Grandma, and Auntie made it abundantly clear that my quitting school was out of the question.

One of my teachers told me that if I worked very hard it might be possible for me to finish high school in three years rather than the traditional four. Two of my classmates whose parents were teachers had decided to finish in three years because they wanted to get into college as soon as possible. The idea of going to college held great appeal for me, since I had decided I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. I had no idea where the money for college would come from, but that didn't prevent me from thinking about it. With that goal in mind, I spent the next couple of years working to get out of high school early.

After the regular school term at Union Grove ended, I talked my mother into letting me enroll at Reynolds High School's summer session in Winston-Salem, about forty miles from Union Grove. My dad's oldest sister had a married daughter—Celia, one of my favorite cousins—living in Winston-Salem. Mom paid a small weekly amount to Cousin Celia to let me live with her. My best friend, Rudolph Cass, decided he also wanted to get out a year early. Two other students from my class managed to finish high school in three years without having to attend summer school as Rudolph and I did. We needed two more credit hours each.

I accumulated enough high school credits to officially become a 1950 graduate, although Rudolph and I missed the graduation ceremony. We received our diplomas by mail after turning in our summer school records. Our original class, now down to seventeen students, would graduate in 1951. In subsequent years I attended several reunions of the Union Grove Class of 1950.

*“I was now
on my own.”*

I was now on my own a few weeks after my seventeenth birthday and ready to sink or swim somewhere away from home. Growing up on the farm was great and I loved the place very much, but I needed to get away from working with tobacco, hay, and the other allergen-producing crops that were causing my frequent asthma attacks.

The bouts with asthma sometimes lasted just two or three days and were not too severe, but, while I was able to continue going to school, they limited my physical activity and kept me out of basketball practice and games. Often the attacks lasted longer and

sleep was difficult because the wheezing kept me awake. At times I was allowed to sleep with a small boxlike radio, measuring about 8 x 4 x 6 inches, which I placed beside one ear to try to drown out the sound of my wheezing. The more severe attacks sent me to bed for four to six days. There was little in the way of medication to prevent or control asthma. My country doctor, who made house calls as was the custom back then, tried treating me with penicillin when it first came out. No good. A shot of adrenaline helped, but it had no lasting effect.

It was during one of my asthma attacks that I heard on the radio about what many historians say was the greatest election upset in American history. That night in November 1948 and into the wee hours of the next morning, I had the radio to my ear, listening to the election coverage. President Harry S Truman of Missouri, who had taken office when President Roosevelt died, defeated Republican Thomas E. Dewey of New York. None of the pundits had given Truman a chance, and Dewey was the odds-on favorite to win the three-way race for the presidency. The other candidate was Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, who would become the oldest senator ever to serve. He died in 2003, while still in office, at age one hundred.

In those days there were no instant election results and no computers, and ballots had to be hand counted. That meant the winners weren't proclaimed until late on the night of Election Day or sometimes the following day. I told my family the morning after the election that Truman had won, but in their early editions that day, many of the nation's newspapers proclaimed a victory for Dewey. Our own Winston-Salem Journal, which we received by mail that morning, carried a banner headline announcing Dewey as the winner. My family began to have doubts. Was I sure I had heard that Truman won? He had indeed. And he was my choice.

My very worst asthma attack put me in bed for more than a week and was so severe that I kept slipping in and out of consciousness. This attack produced what I can only describe as an out-of-body experience. I slipped into unconsciousness and found myself drifting over the bed in which my body lay. My grandma was sitting beside the bed praying for me. I kept drifting higher and higher as I looked down on

myself, free of wheezing and the struggle to get air into my lungs. I was not afraid. I drifted still higher, as though there was no ceiling in the room. The image of my body on the bed and Grandma beside it grew smaller. Then suddenly I started drifting back toward the bed, until I merged with my body. Grandma was crying and holding my hand when she realized I was awake, and she wiped away the tears as her face broke into a huge smile.

As the fifties approached, I had grown from a very young boy to what I felt was a young man, six-foot one-inch tall, and acquired enough knowledge and curiosity to set me on a course to discover the world.



This is a page from my high school year book published for the 1950 graduating class. I am shown here with my eighteen other classmates. Rudolph Case and I took summer school classes to get enough credit hours to graduate in 1950. The other seventeen classmates became the class of 1951. Kathlenn Shumaker, our class president, and I dated occasionally.

Sociology Class 12
Union Grove High School, NC
1950

My Philosophy

By
Charles Croffard Dockery

This paper received a B+ with the following note from the teacher: *"This paper shows that you have done some real thinking – I'm wishing for you every good thing – I've enjoyed you. K.H."*

Philosophy

Franklin D. Roosevelt, who I think is and should be considered one of the greatest men of all time, had one of the most cherished philosophies of all. From what I have read about him, heard about him and from the works he has done, I have summed up his philosophy to have been, “To leave my country and the world in better shape than I found it.” I think that he did that very thing and I believe that every citizen of the United States will agree with me.

The philosophy of my best friend, I think, would be, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This is the philosophy of my grandmother.

The philosophy of the person I dislike most is, “Make what you can, no matter what the cost may be to other people.” That very philosophy could, and is, about to throw the whole world into another war.

My mother’s philosophy is, “Don’t depend on other people, do your own work and thinking but don’t disregard other people in doing so.” My father’s philosophy is, “You are never down and out until you admit it.”

I think and hope that by reading the following topics which I have chosen to write about, you, the reader, will be able, when you get through, to form my philosophy in your mind.

My Philosophy

“Nature,” yes, that’s a good topic to start my philosophy on because as your probably know, all life is centered around nature. As a matter of fact, all the topics I have chosen to write about has something to do with, or is in some way connected, with nature. Love, courtship, and death, I think, would be more closely related to nature than the other topics which I have chosen to write about in, “My Philosophy.”

To get better acquainted with nature, let’s take a look at the person who really enjoys and observes nature. He probably sits in the park and watches the birds and other animals make their homes in the trees, ground or many other places that Mother Nature so freely provides for them. Nature can be seen so easily; just stop and look at the many trees that stretch forth their branches for the birds to build nests in them, look at how nature opens up the fresh soil of the earth for the mice and other rodents that make their homes underground, and how she provides the clean fresh water or the salty water for the hundreds of plants and animals that live in water. In all those ways, nature provides the things which we need to survive and be comfortable.

Now we come to the people who take nature for granted. They enjoy the many things which nature provides but they probably never stop to think that Mother Nature had to give up some member of her family to make life enjoyable for them. They are the sort of people that don’t take care of what nature has provided for them. They destroy forests, run down land, and destroy all the game that is wild, then some have the nerve enough to call it sport. People like that aren’t fit to live in this free country of ours.

Nature will teach us many things if we will only observe and think just a little about her.

Health is another thing which plays an important part in our lives. Good and bad health determines how almost all of our activities are carried out. Good health is something to be desired by all people, but a great many people, who don’t have good health, have made themselves a name which I think many of us would desire. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was one great man who wouldn’t let his bad health keep him from rendering his many services to the people who loved and respected him so very much. People should and must learn to adjust themselves to what their health will permit them to do. We should choose our jobs and activities to suit our mental and physical abilities. If we don’t, we probably won’t like our jobs, they will make us worry which will lower mental abilities and will make us tired, cranky and will finally weaken us to the point that we will have to

quit work. In some cases, it may even cause marriages to go on the rocks. So you can see how large a part our health can play in our lives which is all the more reason why we should all strive for better health.

Character is something which plays an important part in our social life. Our character, if good, can help us in many ways. Good character comes in handy if you want to borrow money, if you are ever in any trouble, and in many other cases. Character isn't born over night, that is, good character. Good character can only be acquired by years of truthfulness and honesty. But bad character can be born over night. One thing which can give you a bad character very quickly is to rob someone. Other things, which take a little more time, are not paying debts, by lying, cheating, and not being a good neighbor in general. Character plays an important role in getting any kind of a job, the employer will probably ask for references, your school record, and many other things which help to determine your character.

Education, like our character, starts at home. Most of our parents try to educate us as to what is right and what is wrong. Remember how you were always told to thank people for things, to be thoughtful to fellow men? Well, I do. That is probably the first and most important step in education. When boys and girls don't get any education at home before they start to school, they are the ones who are likely to become problem children. School is the next step in education; however, when a child starts to school, his education at home shouldn't stop. School would most certainly be an important step in education but sometimes people think that school is the only place which provides education. You are the one who is to decide if your education will stop at school or not. But, let's get back to the steps of education in school. The first few years, you are taught to read, write, work arithmetic problems and the first steps of good citizenship. As you advance, you are taught to think through things without so much help from your teacher. By then, you should be thinking enough to write short stories of maybe a page or two long. Then comes the day when you enter high school; when you are expected to really work, you write longer papers, think more, and you get more assignments. You learn more about the affairs of the world and you are taught the points of good citizenship and many other things which requires more and deeper thinking.

Education doesn't or shouldn't stop when you get out of school. The more ambitious types continue their education in school by going to college or by taking special business courses. You can also educate yourself by listening to the radio, reading, and by listening to people talk. People should try to educate themselves until they draw their last breath.

Religion is something we all need when we draw our last breath. But when you say that's what we need, all kinds of questions come up; i.e., What kind of religion do we need? How do we get it? Why do we need it? Well, I will try to answer a few of the questions that might arise. First of all, what does the word "Religion" really mean? In my opinion, it is any form of worship that we believe in and make a daily part of our lives. The kind I think we need is Christian Religion. The first question would probably be, why do we need it? We need it to rest assured that we will go to a land of paradise when we die. Then the question, how do you know that there is such a place? Well, I believe that there is, and you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by accepting it.

"Courtship," I think everyone knows what that is but some people might be a little mixed up about what the purpose of courtship is. I think the main purpose of courting is to find the one person you want to marry. I think boys and girls should go with different friends until they find one they like, or should I say love, then go with that person until they find out if they really do love each other. They should find out what each other like, what habits they have, and many other things which should enter into marriage. Then if they think they could get along together for the rest of their lives, let them get married.

Then there is the unhappy and painful side of courtship, unwed mothers, unhappy marriages, broken hearts, and many other unpleasant things. That is the side I don't think I know enough about to try to explain, so I leave that part out even though it is very important.

Love usually follows courtship and so it will in this Philosophy. But love for the opposite sex isn't the only kind of love there is. For instance, there is motherly and fatherly love, which I suppose is the truest and strongest kind of love there is. Then there is brotherly love, sisterly love, and Christian love which we should all have for our fellow man.

Getting back to the love of the opposite sex and a few things that I think about it. Sometimes we may think we are in love when we really aren't. Naturally, if you go with only one girl for a long time, you will develop some affection for her or you might get to the place that you don't like her at all. If the preceding path is the one you follow, you may make the mistake of thinking you are in love when the thing is, you haven't been with other girls or boys to really test your love for the other one. As a result, you may get married and later in life find the girl or boy you really love after it is too late. "No," you say, it isn't too late, I can get a divorce. Did you ever stop to think what this will probably do to the girl or boy you married and gave maybe five or six years

of happiness? For which, she or he will have to pay for by probably spending the rest of their life in misery.

There is another thing we shouldn't mistake for love and that is lust, which is the very reason for many young people's marriages breaking up so soon after they get married.

The effects of love can either be a happy marriage or broken hearts that will never understand why the person they loved, couldn't love them. I think the next few lines that I am going to write will explain how many of those people feel. From a poem I once read, "I can't see why a God so good and understanding as ours made me to love you so, and forgot to make you love me."

The next thing after love, I suppose, would be marriage. Before men get married, they should be financially able to take care of their wives to be or if it is the girl, she should be thinking about the things she will have to do after she gets married. If she doesn't know how to cook, that is one thing she will surely have to learn. But the most important thing is to be sure you have chosen the right one to be your mate. Marriage can and should be an everlasting companionship.

Happiness means many different things to different people. For some people, it means plenty of money, places to go, and plenty of excitement. To other people, it means a wife or husband, a home and just enough money to be secure and safe enough to take care of the unexpected bills which are bound to come up in any family. My idea of happiness is to have a small home, a good job, a car and enough money to take one or two trips a year.

Death, the next thing on my list of topics, has its dark side for all of us...the thought of leaving our loved ones behind and never again seeing them. Then there is the brighter side for some of us. The ones who have prepared to go may look for a better home than could ever be acquired here on earth. I wish that all the people in the world could rest assured that they will have that home when they die. So you can see death has its two sides, just like everything else does.

I sincerely hope that anyone who might read this paper, "My Philosophy," will enjoy doing so even if my opinions and thoughts don't quite agree with theirs. And, I might add, that I have enjoyed writing it much more than I thought I would.

Scrapbook From The Forties



*Papa Hurt, a man I admired very, very much and still do.
He always referred to me as "Boy." He was up before daylight
farming then off to a construction site for plastering work.
Once back home he would resume farming until dark.
I was with him for only two years, from age 8 until 10 but
he remains my father-figure for life.*

*Ken and me on the Farmall
A tractor. Driving the
tractor was fun but most of
the time I was relegated to
using one of our two mules
for farm work.*



*Mom with my loving friend, Rover.
He may have been the only dog that never
learned how to swim properly. He held his
head high in the water flailing his front paws
upward with his hindquarters straight down.
Sometimes we'd cross Hunting Creek
where it was shallow enough to walk across on the
rocks. Once on the other side we would
cross back over where the water was 4-12 feet deep.
I would have to swim with one arm, dragging
Rover beside me with the other arm.*



*Grandma and Papa Hurt ready for
Sunday school. That's Ken making faces
from inside the car.*



Ken and me with Grandma Hurt. The barn in the background housed our two mules and a milk cow. The loft where you see the second story openings was used to store hay. One of my chores was to milk the cow. The milk provided us with a daily fresh supply to drink and cream for churning into butter.



My new bicycle which I received for Christmas. Later I wrecked it racing downhill on a winding dirt road leading from Dash Gaither's store to Hunting Creek and severely skinned up both legs and one arm.



My first girlfriend, Mary Blanche Gaither, and I sit on a rock bordering Hunting Creek. In the background is the Hunting Creek Bridge. We dated off and on through much of high school. Mary Blanche was one year ahead of me in school. Her dad was Dash Gaither, the best friend of Papa Hurt.

Enjoying homegrown watermelon with my stepfather Carl and Ken in the late 1940s.

