

Email Letters from Marie

October 2002

The Story of “My Pa” and Store News

Dear Email friends,

We have a request for any of you on the email list who would like to participate! **We are getting ready to begin design of our 2005 Times and Seasons calendar and would like for you to send a photograph of a favorite old country church or covered bridge in your area (or someplace you have visited).** If we use your church or bridge in the 2005 quilt design you will receive a free 2005 calendar when it is published. Please remember to include your name and mailing address with the photograph, and a little story if you'd like. We look forward to hearing from you! **PHOTOGRAPHS MUST BE RECEIVED BY DECEMBER 15TH, THIS YEAR.** Send to: Piecemakers Country Store, 1720 Adams Avenue, Costa Mesa, CA, 92626, Attn: Production Department.

Quote of the Month: “In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.” (Aeschylus — quoted by Robert Kennedy when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, April 4, 1968)

Next, a true short story about my dad that I would like to share with you. We grew up during, what people call now, the bad times — but to us, they were the good times. It is a story of one man whose life was woven together with countless others to form that upright, noble fiber of our country.

My Pa

His name was Pa Raidy. He was a dairy farmer; born, raised and died in Wisconsin. His body lies on the shores of Lake Butte des Morts where he loved to fish. He went to school to the third grade and then worked on his parents' farm, became a blacksmith, married and then bought a farm of his own.

The farm was a small farm — eighty acres to be exact — about fifty acres tillable, the rest woods, wild hazelnuts, wild raspberries and roughage for the herd of cows which needed milking twice a day. Pheasants graced the fields in the fall of the year.

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He was Pa because he was my pa. I write all of this as a prelude of what I really want to write.

My pa was part of the fiber that made America become great. It was not the Roosevelts, the Hoovers, the Rockefellers — the rich and famous. It was the hard working farmers and factory workers, truck drivers who were the life blood flowing through the living entity called America.

Although he probably did not know or care who was the “father of our country,” or about the Constitution — which, by the way has never done anyone one hill of beans anyway — he knew what was right and what was wrong. He knew what it was to save enough money to buy a farm, work the soil and raise a family of six on the money he got from selling milk and raising and preserving fruits and vegetables for the winter.

What he learned, the soil taught him. He was a machinist, a veterinarian, a horticulturist, a weather forecaster, a carpenter. He had what all the schooling cannot teach one.

He had common sense, which all animals are born with, man being the only animal who educates it away.

Pa had little money but generously gave what he had. Money never seemed to be a problem with him. Nor was the lack of it. One day as I remember it I needed money for school. When I asked him, he put his big rough hand into his pocket and brought out all he had and said, “Take what you need.”

My pa never had smooth hands or clean fingernails. His hands were always rough, strong and tender. Never once did he need to use them to spank me for I had too much respect for him and he made so few laws there were none to break. It seemed love and caring for one another were enough to carry us from day to day through the storms of life.

When I was little I used to sit on Pa’s foot as he crossed his knees and I would go pony riding. I sat on his lap until I got too big for him to hold me. I think I was his favorite but I guess my sisters and brother thought the same. He cut our hair, soled our shoes. On cold winter nights we six would gather around the table and play our favorite card game called “Smear.” How proud he would be if we could outsmart him or play just the right card to win the game.

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Pa was respected in the community. He served on the school board. He had a huge threshing machine which he took from farm to farm at harvest time and threshed the grain. He owned a huge cattle truck which served the farming community. About once a month he would load the truck with cattle or pigs or sheep and take them to the Milwaukee stock yards. Several times in my life I had the good fortune to go along with him. We would rumble along the highway the cows bellowing and the sheep bleating. The time flew. The 100 miles there did not seem far. About one-half mile from the yards the odor of cattle, blood and guts would hit the nostrils, and if your stomach was finicky you were in trouble. However, when my pa would finish unloading we would go into the cafeteria and get the best food, including blueberry pie and ice cream. By that time our smeller was used to the odor of the cattle and the beef sandwiches were just the best ever. After this wonderful excursion I would cuddle up next to him and sleep all the way home.

Around Thanksgiving, with the first snowfall, Pa and his hunting buddies would head north to hunt deer. Whether he shot one did not matter. He loved to hunt — had a rifle and a double barreled shot gun. No gun control in those days.

The government in our small Wisconsin township was a false, almost unknown entity. There was a big-shot sheriff who had a government car and everyone looked upon him with disdain as a lazy good for nothing intruder, the last one we would think of calling if there were a problem to solve.

The Depression came and went and our life was no different than it was before the Depression as we lived in a depression. When the government tried to bribe my pa into taking subsidies for not producing milk, he just dumped it, ashamed that we would even think of accepting welfare of any kind and have someone else have to work to pay for our lack of wealth.

Sometimes I wonder what my pa would do if any government inspector would have intruded on his farm as the government inspectors so boldly walk into our places of business today. I saw one time my gentle pa take a pitchfork after an intruder who misbehaved on his property. I think he would do the same today to any inspector if he were to intrude into his way of life and threaten his livelihood with codes, fees and excess taxes.

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My pa, when he saw the corruption in the Catholic church, he left it and never set foot in it again nor had any of his family attend it. On his death bed I ask”d, "Pa, do you want to see a priest?"

He said, in his Irish, German accent, “Keep dem devils with the black robes away from me.” He entrusted his soul to the One who used him to help forge the country called America. He died as righteous as he lived.

Rare today is the likes of him and I do miss this great simple man called “my pa.”

Sincerely,

Marie