

The Summer of '44

By Frank Mattison

It was the year 1944 and I was going to spend the summer at "Grand-Pap Spades." My Grand-Pap Spade and Grandma Spade lived in Fulton County, Pennsylvania in the valley between Sidling Hill and Tuscorora Mountain on a three hundred acre farm. Their first names were Frank and Martha and so you can tell for whom I was named or was it Roosevelt?

This was a thrilling and maybe a little scary experience for me, a ten year old kid, who had never spent a night away from home, much less the whole summer with people I only got to see maybe once a year during my somewhat limited life span. I really didn't know what to expect, although I expected that I would have to work pretty hard to "earn my keep," so to speak, because my Grandma Spade always said they worked pretty hard on the farm and I believed what she said, believe me!

In 1944 the journey to "Fulton County" was just that, a journey. We planned far ahead and we had to get the old Chevy car ready several days ahead of departure time. Don't forget this was during the big war, World War Two or WWII as many referred to it. This was the time of rationing by the government to conserve materials for the war effort. We

were given savings stamps which we had to exchange in order to purchase a number of commodities such as gasoline, sugar, tires and some other items. My dad had to save up his "A" stamps in order to get enough gasoline to get there. My dad owned an automobile repair shop and therefore had some "unconventional" ways of getting more of those gasoline- rationing stamps. I will never forget the big "A" we had to stick in the rear window of the car that told everyone how much gasoline we could use per week. Because of the war, all of the people in the country were subject to a rationing program that was designed to allow people to have absolutely no more gasoline for their cars than was necessary to get to work and to the store for food and nothing much more.

Well, the day finally came to get all our suitcases packed and load up the car. My mother had equipped me with several new sets of overalls and work shirts and packed them for me. The suitcases had to go on the running board of the car because there were no trunks on cars in those days. We had little accordion like fences that we used to hold the suitcases on the running boards. Of course they blocked the doors so we had to leave one door unlocked so we could get in and out of the car. If we had too much luggage and all the doors were blocked we would have to crawl out of the windows. Dad would have to crawl out of the window and move a suitcase to let the rest of us out of the car. The journey started very early in the morning. Of course I

didn't get much sleep the night before we left due to all the anticipation of the trip and the anxiety I had building up inside of me.

We started our trip early Saturday morning the day after I got out of school. I recall it was early June because the harvesting had already begun and I wanted to hurry because I didn't want to miss any of it. (I didn't know what I was getting into as far as hard work was concerned. I would have been happy to miss more of the harvesting because it was really hard work.) So away we went!!!!

The road systems back in 1944 were vastly different from those we see today except that there was only one significant four-lane highway across the country at that time. That was the Pennsylvania Turnpike that ran from Carlisle to Irwin, Pennsylvania. It had been finished in 1941 and was touted the "Super Highway." It was a thrill for a young boy to ride on a four-lane highway at a legal speed of sixty miles per hour. There were many thrilling things to be seen along the way. There were seven tunnels dug under the mountains that we passed through. All of the tunnels were only two lanes wide and we had to turn our lights on because they were dark inside even though they had some small lights. We came out of one tunnel and there was pyramid point, a mountain that rose to the sky like a pyramid. There was also the thirteen-mile straight stretch with only the up and down of the rolling hills to change the turnpikes' arrow like course to the west. The only places to

stop for fuel or to eat or go to the bathroom were Howard Johnson's Restaurants sparsely placed along the highway. You had to properly time your needs or pay the consequences.

We got off the Turnpike at Fort Littleton and followed the road over Tuscorora Mountain to McConnellsburg and then along Scrub Ridge Mountain to Saluvia where we made the turn down toward Sipes Mill. After we passed the Christian Church we came to a road that a left turn would take you to Ebenezer Methodist Church and a right turn would take you to Grand-Pap Spades. This was a dirt road and the dust flew as we bounced along the road. I knew we were approaching one of the real highlights of the entire trip for me and the anticipation was welling up inside of me and before I knew it, there it was, right around the bend----The CREEK!!!! There was no bridge and we had to drive the car right through the water. What a thrill. (At least I thought it was a thrill at the time.)

We followed the winding road and finally came upon Uncle Veryl's house. We went past his house down over the bridge and up the hill to Grand-Pap Spades' house. We had finally arrived after some ten hours of traveling.

Uncle Veryl and Aunt Adrian lived just across the meadow from my grand parents. In the meadow stood an icehouse next to an ice pond. The icehouse was used to save the ice that was all tucked in sawdust that was used as insulation. An ice pond stood adjacent to the ice-

house. Each winter after the pond froze over my grand pap would get out his old ice saw and cut the ice into blocks which could be put in the ice house. Then the ice was used for refrigeration purposes as long as it would last, and sometimes it didn't last for the entire length of the summer. A small creek meandered down through that meadow and under the bridge just below my uncles' house. It was a great place to play and escape from the hot dusty days that we endured while farming. There was a spring out behind the wood shop and the water from it was piped to the spring kitchen in the house. From there it had to be hand pumped to the sink where we washed our dirty bodies before every meal. This spring's runoff also provided the water used to fill the ice pond.

Well, at last we had arrived. We all visited for a while before it was time to settle in for a long summer of work. My room was upstairs in the two-story farmhouse with the long porch that wrapped around the front. We stored all my work clothes in the dresser and closet as well as some Sunday "go-to-meeting clothes" (just a new set of jeans) and I was ready to go to work. Since we had arrived on Saturday, I got to play and look around the farm the rest of the day. We all went to bed early (usually when the sun went down) because we didn't have any electricity and we had to get up with the chickens at 5:00am to milk the cows.

At about 5AM the next day I heard this loud Cock-a-Doodle-Do. The chickens were awake indicating it was time to

get up. I jumped out of bed, quickly got dressed in my new work clothes and went downstairs. My Grandfather was already up and at 'em, and he wasted no time telling me "Lets get to the barn, Boy!!" and away we went.

The first order of the morning was to get the cows. We went up to the meadow gate that was up the road just beyond the wood shop. We found all the cows standing waiting to come to the barn to get milked. If the cows had still been down in the meadow, my grand-pap would have called them by yelling "Come-boss, Come-boss, Come-boss" repeatedly until they came. We then let the cows out of the pasture and I helped to drive them down the road to the barnyard. We then went in the barn and opened the door from the barnyard to let the cows in. This is a time when you want to make yourself scarce and get out of the way. The cows make a B-line for their stantions and you better not be in the way. I was amazed that each cow had its own stantion or stall in the barn to which it would always go. They knew exactly which stall they belonged. The main reason the cows moved so quickly to their stalls was that while my Grand-Pap and I were at the pasture my Uncle Veryl was putting grain in the manger in front of each cow, and they were sure hungry.

We had a herd of about twenty-five cows back then and they were all milked by hand. I had to learn to milk so my Grand-Pap assigned me to old Cherry. I guess he thought she was gentle enough

and old enough that I couldn't ruin her, so for whatever reason I got to milk old Cherry. I searched around the barn until I found a three-legged stool on which to sit while milking. You had to hold the stainless steel milk bucket between your knees. The bucket had indents in each side into which you could place your knees so the bucket wouldn't slip down to the floor. I sat down on her right side [you always milk cows from the right side] at least that is how I was trained when I started milking. My Grand-Pap and Uncle Veryl would milk the other 25 or 30 cows during the time it would take me to milk old Cherry. Once you were finished milking the cow or had a filled bucket you had to take the bucket to the milk house. The bucket was then dumped into the strainer that sat on top of the milk can. The strainer strained out all the straw and cow dirt, etc. that got into the bucket so the milk would be clean in the can. When the can was filled, it was then lifted into the milk cooler where it was stored until the milkman came the next morning. The milk man came in his big tank truck every day to pick up the milk from all the farmers in the valley and the milk was taken to the creamery where it was processed and pasteurized and turned into butter, cream, cheese, etc.

I'll never forget the time I was milking old Cherry and it was getting hot in the barn so I decided to take off my jacket to cool down a bit. I took the jacket off and what to do with it? OOOOhh, just throw it up on old Cherry's back and pick it up

later. Well, when I tossed the jacket up on her back all of a sudden, all heck broke loose, she started kicking and carrying on like a crazy cow. I found myself in the gutter all beshit (a word coined by my Grand-Pap) and wet while watching those big cow legs kicking out over my head just missing me with each kick. My grandfather heard me yelling like a stuck pig and ran over to see what was happening. When he saw me lying in the gutter all covered with cow dung and that cow kicking out over me he just burst out in a roar of laughter. He got a real kick [no pun intended] out of my plight. I finally crawled out of the gutter and slowly went into the house to face the wrath of my grandmother who I thought should clean me up. Well, I was mistaken because she had decided that I was old enough to clean myself, so that is what I did--a real experience scraping all the cow dung off my clothes and me, before she would accept them for her washing machine. Believe me a lesson was learned well. Never use a cow for a coat rack!!!

After we finished milking each morning we would then go into the house, wash up and get breakfast. Grandma had also gotten up with us at 5:30AM and had been working in the kitchen cooking the day's meals. Breakfast every day consisted of all of the following foods: Coffee, cocoa, milk from the cows, country ham, eggs, homemade bread, cherry, blackberry and strawberry jam and sometimes peach. We also had buckwheat and regular wheat flour pan-

cakes. We had a pudding we put on them which was made from hog's heads, jaws, feet, head meat, etc. The pudding was hot (heated) and very good. We also could have jams and syrup on the pancakes. All these goodies were cooked on my grandmother's wood stove. This stove had about four or six lids on the top through which you would put the wood which was used as fuel and upon which you would place your cooking pans. On the left side of the stove was a tank into which water was placed and was heated by the wood fire. This hot water was used for washing dishes and filling other needs for hot water such as washing up for meals and taking our weekly bath—yes weekly. You see, we used a lot of washcloths to clean our bodies in those days because water was limited and hot water was hard to come by.

After breakfast we headed for the fields. June was the month we made hay. First the hay had to be cut in the fields and then it had to cure in the sun for several days to dry it out. We all hoped for good weather with plenty of sun so the hay would cure. If the hay got rained on after it was cut, the hay was ruined because it would dry out and the cows wouldn't eat it. As soon as the hay was dry enough we would get out the hay rake to rake it into windrows. Then the hay loader could be pulled over the windrow behind a hay wagon and tractor that loaded the hay unto the wagon. I got to drive the tractor while my uncle and grandfather used pitchforks to pitch the hay into the

wagon as the hay was discharged from the hay loader. Driving the tractor, a FarmAll F14 with steel wheels that had these big steel spikes bolted to the wheels, was very hairy for me, as I had never driven anything before, let alone a tractor. The land on the farm was very hilly and there was always the chance of upsetting the tractor. Many times I had to learn to apply the brakes on one side or the other when one wheel would start spinning due to a side hill pull. We had to be very careful that we didn't venture onto any side hills that could upset the rig.

After the wagon was loaded we would head for the barn to put the hay up in the mow to store it for winter. We would use a hayfork to unload the wagons.

This hayfork was suspended from the peak of the barn roof with a pulley and rope apparatus. One end of the rope was attached to a tractor or a horse and when the hayfork was driven into the hay piled on the wagon the horse would pull the load of hay up to the top of the barn. There someone would use a pitchfork to put it in its proper place in the haymow.

This was before the days of baled hay. All of this hay was placed in the mow loose and during the winter it was thrown down through a hole in the floor of the haymow with a pitchfork to the manger area down below where it was fed to the cows.

In addition to the tractor, my grandfather had horses that were used to work the farm. As a matter of fact, the horses

were there long before the tractor and they had been the only method of getting the chores done with the exception of manual labor. The horses had their own stalls in the barn and I was always impressed as to how large the horses were and how strong they appeared. There was always a certain "smell" in the horse barn that was a good smell. All of the horses' harness was hanging all over the walls of the barn and this was very impressive to me as a small boy. I had difficulty understanding how my Grand-pap could remember where all the harness belonged on the horse. This was amazing to me.

We were through harvesting hay for the day so we went into the house for supper. I'll always remember my grandmother's windows being filled up with these big red geraniums in each and every window. You couldn't even see out. We always had big meals and this supper wasn't any different. My Grand-Pap would always say the same grace for the supper meal and I can still remember most of it to this day because I heard it so often. This is how it goes "Dear Lord, accept our thanks for this food now before us, bless it to its good and intended use, feed our souls through the richness of thine grace, pardon us of all our sins and finally save us through Christ, Amen." I think that was right! Believe me, we would then chow down because everyone was starved after a hard days work in the fields.

After dinner, we would sometimes take a walk out beside the house to the cider

barrel. Now this cider barrel held the cider that was made the last fall and all was not consumed. It had set in the barrel all winter and was now getting well fermented and an increasing amount of alcohol was developing. My Grand-Pap would like a nip of the cider now and then. I wasn't allowed much so I had to sneak a nip when he wasn't looking. I never really drank much of it because I was sure it would kill me or at least do something very undesirable to me.

Now when night came at the farm we would all go to bed. This was mainly because we didn't have any electricity in those days and all of the light we could get was from the hurricane or oil lamps, which were designed to burn kerosene. Some of them just had wicks but later someone invented the mantle and these lamps would glow much brighter and you could even read by them for a short while. Sometime during the early 1940s my grand parents had another way of making light and that was to use water and carbide to generate acetylene gas which would burn bright when it was piped to the upstairs rooms. This was very dangerous and many houses burned down because the chemical reaction of the water and carbide would get out of hand and explode. The next step in the lighting development was the installation of a "Light Plant." This consisted of a gasoline engine driving a generator which would charge huge banks of batteries and the electric was the piped through wires to light bulbs which would light our rooms. This was a much

safer system and gave us better light to boot. Part of President Roosevelt's new deal in the late 1930's was to establish the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), which gave people jobs to get electricity to the farm areas of the United States. This finally reached Fulton County in the early 1940s and from then on we had regular electricity, as we know it today.

Harvest time was a very big occasion on the farm. Harvest time was when we would harvest the wheat, barley and oats. This occurred during the month of July and was a community effort. Each farmer could not afford to own his own thrashing machine so one person would buy the machine and use it to thrash the grain at each farm in the valley in succession. A thrasher is a machine that is used to separate the grains of wheat, oats, or barley from the chaff and the straw. The machine bags the grain and spews the chaff and straw out the back in a big pile or it can be blown directly into the barn or straw mow from which it is used to bed down the animals during the winter.

It didn't seem that anyone knew precisely the day that the thresher would arrive at our farm. You have to remember that there were no telephones in this area and no easy means of communication. However, this was a very large machine that was pulled by a very big and noisy tractor.

One day my Grand-Pap and Uncle Veryl were scurrying around and obviously getting ready for something. I didn't know what was going on, so I asked. They explained that I should listen closely and I would hear the thrasher coming down along the mountain. I listened intently, and sure enough, there was this loud clanging noise way over along the mountain. Well, in about two hours this monstrous machine rolled into our barnyard. It was the biggest machine I ever saw. It stood fully ten to fifteen feet high and had to be thirty feet long. Maybe it just looked so big, because I was not so big yet either.

The thrasher didn't have a engine on it to power the machinery, instead, like so many other machines during this period it was powered by a big belt hooked up to the tractor. The tractor had a pulley about a foot in diameter, which protruded from its side to which the belt was connected. It took the thrasher man quite a long time to get the thrasher and the tractor level and properly hooked up so the belt would run true and stay on the pulleys. The thrasher and the tractor each had to be perfectly level or the belt wouldn't stay on the pulleys.

As I mentioned earlier, we could hear very well in the valley. Sounds carried many miles and were easily distinguishable. The thrasher coming down the mountain could be heard easily. I'll always remember a sound that couldn't be mistaken was that of Cledus DeKnee's old John Deere tractor. That was because John Deere was the only tractor manu-

facturer that built a two-cylinder engine to power a tractor. That Put-Put-Put could be heard all over the valley and as a result everyone knew exactly when Cledus Deneen was out working. He took a lot of ribbing about that two-cylinder tractor, but let me tell you there wasn't many other tractors built that had any more power than that tractor.

With all the work that we had to do on the farm, it was very easy to keep in shape. It was all I could do to keep up with my Grand-Pap when we walked back and forth from farm to farm or to the fields in the back "40". My Grand-Pap had a strange habit of putting his hands on his knees when he walked up a hill. I quickly learned that he used his hands and arms to push down on his knees in order to assist his legs. I tried it and to this day my legs get an assist from my arms when I walk up a hill. Try it!! It works.

Every Sunday morning we would go to the Christian Church for Sunday School that was along the road back to Saluvia toward Sidling Hill Mountain. Lottie Mellott was my Sunday school teacher and I thought she was wonderful. She also had a daughter much older than me at 16 who I thought was the "cats meow" as far as girls were concerned. It is but a vague pleasant memory now. We would leave Sunday school at The Christian Church and go to Ebenezer Methodist Church for Worship.

There is more to this story yet to be written.

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