Father, son walk same path in their lives

The Pfliger Homestead

BY JACKIE LONG

Young boys grow up every day admiring their fathers and wanting to follow them to work each day. Dad leaves the house kissing mom goodbye and giving his son or daughter a farewell wave. While looking out the window at dad with his work boots on and his lunchbox in tow, his son imagines walking away from home in the exact same manner when he’s all grown up.

One man takes the same steps his dad did when he walked out of the farm-house each day and off into the field. Now he gets to share the tradition of harvesting the same fields his dad, grandpa-ther and great-grandfather worked on for over 100 years.

I rode with him for whatever he was doing, pretty much. That’s probably why I started liking this because you always want to do what your dad does.

Joel Pfliger

Like many families in the early 1900s Paul and Matilda had a large family of nine children. Joe, the oldest boy, worked on the farm when Paul moved into Hazen in the late 30s. Both Paul and Joe were extremely strong men, Joe said. The men were built to fix machines and work from sunrise to sunset.

“Everybody worked harder than hell, everybody ate a lot but nobody was fat,” Joe said.

Joe’s son, Clem was the same in physical stature. But Clem wasn’t only interested in cutting the wheat and milking the cows. He was built for riding horses in the rodeo. It was through the rodeo that Betty met her future husband. She said she enjoyed watching rodeos that her husband participated in.

Most of the memories Joel’s sister, Kari Huber, remembers of her dad when she was young is of the rodeo. But Joel pictures his dad working hard on the farm. Clem was a regular cowboy entering the calf-roping and team-roping competitions in the rodeos until he hurt his knee in the early 70s. He continued to be a part of the rodeo lifestyle though in the 1990s when you win was entering in the Old Timers Rodeo, Joel said.

Clem was confident in his skills on a horse so much that once in awhile he would bet money on himself to win in his division. One rodeo at the South Dakota State Fair Clem had decided he was good enough to beat the rest of the cowboys. So he decided to bet most of his money in the bank on himself.

“He left that morning and I said to him, ‘Call me when you win,’” Betty said. “And he called me that night! So I told him to call me when he won again and he called me the next night.’

Clem shared many stories about life on the farm for his father with his son as a boy. Even at the young age of 5 Joe was helping out his mom and dad gathering eggs from the chicken coop.

“He had to take his dad lunch when he was about 4 or 5 years old and he had to walk about two miles across country and the crick,” Joel said about Clem. “That’s a long ways for a 4 or 5-year-old.

During the winter months it was common for the family of nine children to be snowed in for a month or six weeks. But enough food was stocked up for the family to live on. Most of the food was from their own farm and garden such as canned tomatoes and beef from the cow they had butchered.

Every Monday night a softball game was played north of the farmhouse. Neighbors and their children would drive or walk to the game field and play late into the night.

But the rural life wasn’t only about having a baseball field in the backyard. Joel helped out his dad as much as he could by starting out when he was about 8 picking rocks in the fields.

“I really started working in the fields when
I was 10,” Joel said. “I liked working with machinery."

Once he reached 10, Joel was old enough to drive a dirt bike on the farm. Instead of riding a horse to herd cattle, he would drive his dirt bike around the farm to check on the cows.

Not all chores were fun but they were still completed because they had to be done somehow. It was the way of life and the work ethic at the time, Betty said.

The work was shared among everyone who lived on the farm. One of Joel’s earliest memories was of him and his mom checking cattle on a tractor. Even though Joel was only 1 year old and wrapped in a quilt, he sat on his mom’s lap while she drove the tractor through the pasture.

Family has always been an important part of farm life for almost every person who has lived on a farm. Driving with his dad in the grain truck and sitting on the porch at the end of a long day is something father and son will remember for a lifetime.

“I rode with him for whatever he was doing, pretty much,” Joel said. “That’s probably why I started liking this because you always want to do what your dad does.”

Clem died in 2006 but his work ethic and love of the farm carries on in his son. Joel is able to walk out of the house like his dad did many years ago and grow crops on the same land. The bond between father and son will remain as long as the love of the land lingers in Joel’s heart.