

The Hired Hand

When I was a child, I was always asking my parents for money. Money for what? Candy, of course. On our weekly trips to town, I constantly asked if we could go to the candy section of Woolworths 5 and 10. There, for twenty-five cents I could get enough candy to last me through the week. Chocolate-covered almonds for one cent each. Yum!

My parents' usual answer was no. I was told I would have to earn money if I wanted to purchase some candy at the store. That brought up a profoundly serious problem. How was I going to earn money? What skills did I possess? I could operate a can opener, turn on the television, and sing along to the radio. These skills would not earn me the finances needed for candy.

Dad came up with one idea for me to earn money. Every night I could walk out to the pasture and coax the milk cows to the barn for milking. Each time I did this chore, I would be paid five cents. Let me see. Seven nights a week times five cents equaled a whopping thirty-five cents. I will be rich! Yes, Dad. I will help you out with this chore.

As I grew older, Dad made the chores a little harder. My next job was pushing fifteen small rectangle hay bales out of the hay loft into the bed of the truck. I would receive one dollar each time I did this job. With no pay increase, sometimes Dad would add another part onto this job. I would drive the truck out to the cow pasture so Dad could throw the haybales off the back of the truck to the cow herd. I didn't complain. A dollar was a dollar.

By this time candy was not the number one item on my list. Buying records became especially important to this young teenager. Every time we went to town, I dragged Mom to the record store to look at the latest 45's that had been released. Seventy-five cents was a lot of money for one record, so I chose carefully from the selection on the wall.

One summer my brothers were not around to help with the dirty job of hay baling the small rectangle bales. Dad asked me if I wanted to drive the tractor, making sure the hay rows went into the hay baler evenly. He would be standing on the hay rake waiting for the bales to come out the other end of the machine, and he would then stack the bales on the rack. He reminded me of three things. First, always watch for his hand signals. Second, don't accidentally throw him off the hayrack. Third, when turning corners, be careful not to break the cotter pin in the hay baler. In other words, no sharp turns to the right. For helping Dad in the hay field, I would be paid minimum wage, \$1.50 an hour. I kept track of my daily hours on the kitchen calendar, and on Saturday night, Dad would write me a check. I thought, I am making money now!

Throughout high school and college when I was home, I continued to help around the farm. Dad paid me minimum wage of \$1.60 an hour. I wasn't getting rich, but at least I could purchase a few school supplies and record albums without asking Mom and Dad for money.

In December of 1976, I returned home from Australia. It was the middle of the school year, and I knew finding a teaching job was going to be difficult. Over coffee one morning, Dad asked me if I was interested in working for him. In other words, I'd be the hired hand, again. After some pay negotiations, I said yes. This time I was hired every day for four hours in the morning and five hours in the afternoon. For the most part, I sat on my Allis-Chalmers tractor operating a

harrow, which broke up dirt clods so Dad could plant crops. Of course, the tractor had a radio, which was cranked up to its loudest setting. Sometimes Dad would come out of the house, listen for the radio, and know which field I was working.

It's been many years since I was a hired hand, but the lessons learned are still engrained in my memory. If you want something, you must work for it. You must also put in a full day's work if you want to be paid. Lessons that are still true today!