

Alf and Freeda

Alf and Freeda Lane had lived a lot of years before I entered the Stone Arabia scene. Their small and considerably run down farm abutted the Nellis farm partially on the north end. The Lanes were quiet and peaceable old folks. Their small squatty house was of a style that dated back to after the 1789 raid which destroyed most of our area. At some point it had become called the Wick place. Alf had a few cows that seemed to suffice to sustain them. In addition he picked up a little extra income as a self styled veterinarian. Through the years, much the same as most farmers, he learned to help treat the ills and ailments of farm animals. In fact Alf was credited by most as being special at it. By the late 1940s I doubt there were any sheep in the Town of Palatine beyond as children's pets. Some teams of horses still remained but tractors would soon replace them. Most farms still raised some pigs for family meat. Most of Alf's patients would then be horned cattle with an occasional saddle horse and still the pigs.

The day of loose hay to be hauled to Alf's old Dutch Barn was drawing to an end. The Nellis farm now had a field baler as did most of the other progressive farmers. The Nellis farm and Groff farm joined forces one day a year to make Alf's hay for him and put it into his barn. In going back over 60 years I still remember one of those days. There would be 10 or 12 people on hand to help. When it came lunch time Alf would get another elderly neighbor lady to help Freeda prepare a special chicken dinner for all to enjoy. I was less than 20 years old and Delos, who was a part time helper on the Nellis farm, was a few years younger. Thus we were the youngest in the crew. Let's relive that day. The sun is high in the sky. It is time for dinner. There by the back door under two small peach trees there is a wash bench with a tin wash dish, pail of water and soap in a soap dish. Also beside it is an old wooden rocking chair. One of the workers carefully hung a nearly new straw hat on the back of the chair. Unbeknown to him after entering the house one mischievous helper took a long head roofing nail and using a stone as a hammer tacked the hat fast to the chair. Considerable effort was made to place the nail in the hat so it would not be damaged by it.

We will just leave that straw hat there until it comes time to return to the field. We now sit down to the table. All except the two cooks and Alf. We knew he would come in to see all was tended and then get into his old car to go up the road a mile or so to Green's Hotel. Apparently it had been a long time ritual. Some of us had prepared a surprise for Alf. We jacked the back of his car up just clear of the ground. Shortly after he went out we heard the roar of the old engine. Alf came back in with a very disappointed look on his face. He said: "Boys, the rear end has gone out of my car." Everyone laughed and Alf knew we had tricked him. Then it was "Gol darn you fellers." The car was let down and Alf was off for Green's Hotel. That was the end of trick one. But there still remained the straw hat nailed to the rocking chair. The hats owner grabbed his new hat. The chair came along. Everyone laughed. About the third try without even looking for the problem he ripped the whole side from his new straw hat. So much for trying to be sure not to damage someone's property. Those days are gone now, except in my memory.

Skip Barshied

Stone Arabia

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