

Legends of Freeborn County
Seniors - The Best Source of Historical Happenings - July 2000
by B. Jackson

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"Ya know, Bev, that was the day that my boss decided to help out pickin' corn. I'd been workin' for four cents a bushel and half my room and board and he was thinkin' that I was gettin' too much. Well, anyhow, there was three of us that day. I was on the outside row. I was usin' a palm shucker, not one like this. This here's a thumb shucker. It just doesn't feel right. Anyway, as I was sayin' I was workin' the outside row and we'd just finished the first row. We was at the other end of the field, and the boss said to me, he said, "Ya know, Bud, the way you're tossin' that corn, you're gonna hit somebody in the head, and it's gonna hurt." Well, I wasn't worried, and we started back. Wouldn't ya know, we no sooner got goin' and I threw an ear, and I hit him. I was aimin' for the bang-board, but his head got in the way. I hit my boss in the eye. Was he mad! He was purty cheap to work for and I didn't like him much, but I sure didn't mean to give him a black eye. (Here Bud started smiling.) I got fired right there. And I saw him again a couple of weeks later, and sure enough, he still had that black eye. We used to go the Terp dancin', me and my friends. That was '33, and I was 21. Anyway, I used to tell about givin' my boss a black eye, right there in the corn field. We sure laughed. I'll never forget..."

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It's Thursday night, I just returned from giving a program at a nursing home; and once again I'm wondering, and smiling and questioning. When I'm asked to share some museum happenings with a group of people, I never know exactly how the evening will turn out. Invariably, I come home thinking of the experiences that people have, of the stories that they can tell and of how these stories will all be lost unless we take the time to listen.

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When I first started doing these programs, I made a pioneer style dress. I knew it wasn't exactly authentic, but it would do. One day (at another rest home) a lady pointed out to me that:

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1. My skirt was too short. It should touch the ground.
2. I should be wearing two petticoats. I only wear one.
3. These petticoats should be starched. I toss the dress and petticoat into the washer and ~~dryer~~ dryer and ignore the few wrinkles.

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She had this on the best authority, her mother. I didn't have the heart to tell her that my dress was 40% polyester and that it had a zipper.

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I've had some chuckes over the stories that these people tell to me, and I am learning. Not only just how "Grandma used to heat her curling iron" or how "Mother used to keep just enough water in the wooden washing machine from one wash day (Monday) to the next, so that the wood wouldn't dry out and shrink...that kept the old washer from leaking;" but I'm learning how valuable these stories are to the teller and to the listener. These people are reliving days when their lives were hard, but they were happy and productive. I'm learning just how our lives may change, but people don't. I'm learning how important these stories are to share.

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When is the last time that you asked your favorite "old person" about his youth? You can bet there's a story there worth listening to.

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