

Bees and Jumping Chickens

One day when I was about ten years old, my father and I headed out to the barn to catch and kill a chicken for dinner. The routine was always the same...catch a chicken, cut off its head, put it in a bucket of boiling water, pull out all of the feathers and turn the carcass over to Mom to prepare for dinner.

On this particular summer afternoon, Dad asked me to catch the chicken that was to be eaten that evening. I caught one and gave it to Dad, who with hatchet in hand, placed the chicken's neck between two nails that were affixed to a large stump located between our granary and a tool shed. The head was cut off with one chop and the body was cast aside for the old saying, "He/she is running around like a chicken with its head cut off" has real meaning because the reflexes take over and the chicken with its head cut off jumps around for twenty-five or thirty seconds in an unpredictable pattern.

They sometimes even fly around five or ten feet off of the ground before finally collapsing and dying. On this occasion, the chicken flew around and bounced right up into my Dad's face, nicking the edge of his eye lid with one of its claws. Mom put some Hydrogen Peroxide on the wound and then proceeded to prepare dinner.

Before Mom could prepare dinner, Dad's eye had swollen shut and looked quite discolored. In those days, we never went to a doctor for simple things like eye injuries, so we had

dinner and after listening to the radio for a while, went to bed.

The next morning, Dad's eye looked even worse, but after milking the cows, feeding the chickens and pigs, gathering the eggs and eating breakfast, Dad headed to the field to mow the grasses to make hay. On this particular day, I rode along to "help." I would often sit on Dad's lap and steer the tractor but on this day I was sitting in the seat Dad had fixed for me right behind his larger seat.

I usually sat there with a double strand of heavy chain across my lap which was hooked to each side of the seat to insure that I would not fall off if I got sleepy. About an hour into the mowing, Dad let out a cry and stopped the tractor! He had his hands over his face and was shaking his head. I asked what had happened and he said he thought he had been stung by a bee. I unhitched myself from my seat and moved closer to look at his face.

It was a bee sting alright and was right on the lid of his eye...the open eye! It was very red at the exact location of the sting and starting to swell up. He had me drive the tractor to the barn yard and he quickly went into the house for some ice to put on the site of the sting. By the time he removed the ice from the sting location the eye was already puffed up and closed! Dad sat there in the kitchen and Mom and I started to laugh. Dad didn't think it was very funny, but he was quite a sight....both eyes swollen shut...swollen shut so tight that he had to lift the lid of one of his eyes to see anything.

It took almost a day before the swelling had gone down enough for Dad to go back to mowing again. Work, nor life, doesn't stop on a farm because of small inconveniences...like blindness. Mom and I did the evening and morning chores and Dad took it easy until after lunch the next day. He looked like he had been in a boxing match with those two black eyes and took lots of kidding from his brother and several men at church as he got to keep the black eyes for over a week.

Mom always had a subtle type of humor and she served chicken and rolls with honey, for dinner the first night when Dad still couldn't see. Dad laughed pretty hard at her meal selection. Dad never killed another chicken and assigned that job to me from that day forward. That was just another rite of passage into adulthood for a young farm boy.

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