

## **'TROMPING' TALES**

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'Writer's Corner'

By Bob Chaffin

We owned a pair of mules named Kit, a chestnut colored mule, and Lize, a grey mule. They were well-trained and Daddy always kept a good looking harness and gear for them with lots of brass brads, tassels, buttons and brass knob covers for the hames.

The barn stood 25 yards or so northeast of the house and had a large hay loft. Under the loft was a wide hallway which ran between the stables on either side. The hallway was large enough that a wagon and team could be driven through the barn and out the doors in the back. Loose hay was rakes by means of a team of mules and a "dump rake," then stacked in "shocks" in the field. This loose hay from the shocks was then pitched onto the wagon by Daddy and the other men using pitchforks. Walking around and around on the hay, called "tromping," was the work of little boys.

Upon reflection, I am unable to decide if it was real work or if it was a good way to ensure that a five year old boy got plenty of exercise and kept out of the way at the same time – I suspect both elements were involved. Before the horse drawn wagon was ready for "haying," the box sides were removed and "standards," long poles about five feet in height, were placed in the iron loops bolted all around the sides of the wagon. These standards allowed the hay to be pitched high onto the wagon, in a tall mound, at least as high as the standards. This load of hay would then be drawn by Kit and Liz to the barn and backed up into the hallway entrance.

Above the hall-way was a sort of peak roof affair which protruded out from the front of the barn about half a wagons length. Slung from the ridge pole of the barn, at the very peak of the rafters, was a C shaped iron track upon which the truckles and hay fork rode. The hay fork consisted of either a set of what looked like three giant iron ice tongs or a single gigantic iron "needle" with a set of wings which protruded out from the sides of the needle when a trigger was activated in the round handle or "eye" of the needle.

In either case the purpose of the needle or hay forks was to grab a large compacted bundle of hay from the wagon and lift it to the top of the barn by a series of block and tackle type pulleys. The truckles then rolled it along the metal over-head track to the proper place in the hay loft where the pull of the trip rope would drop the load of hay into place to await winter feeding.

The poser for this lifting came from one of the mules. Lize had been unhitched from the wagon and her trace chains hitched to a singletree that was hooked to a rope which ran from the hay forks or needle through an intricate set of pulleys on the truckles to the back of the barn. As the mule walked away from the barn, the hay was first hoisted up to the truckles and then pulled along the overhead track into the barn.

After the load of hay was dumped, the hay forks were pulled back to the front of the barn by the men in the loft, while the mules backed up on command. Although I am sure Liz understood the drill much better than I, my job was to hold a short rope which was clipped to Lize's bit ring and walk away from the barn when Daddy told her to "get up Lize," stop when he hollered "whoa" and then walk back toward the barn with the rope when he told Lize to "whoa back." All of which she obediently did on his command. My part was probably only busy work, but I do know it instilled a deep sense of responsibility and a feeling of contribution to the general effort of the family at a very young age.

I have often thought that it is somewhat like prayer; Daddy could have accomplished the task without me, but I could have done nothing without him. Even though he could have worked alone, he allowed me to take part in the accomplishment, to participate in his work and thereby gain a sense of oneness with him.

In the same sense, God can do his work without me, but by prayer, He allows me to take part, to participate, to become part of the general effort, and thereby gain a sense of oneness with Him, a sense of value. Thereby I am lifted up and "seated with him in heavenly places." Eph. 2:6.

Have a blessed day.

*"Writers Corner" welcomes any family-friendly poems, essays or narratives for possible publication. Send submittals with 700 words or fewer to [arts@heald-citizen.com](mailto:arts@heald-citizen.com). The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse submittals.*

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