

Ever' Day Things

by Tom McBeth



Spring has sprung

I always know spring is here when the leaves on the hedge trees come out. In our part of the world, Osage orange or *bois d'arc* trees are called hedges.

Cattle trucks have been running for a while, taking cattle to pastures. There is a kind of fresh smell in the air that's only there in the spring. People start to mow their lawns, plant gardens and paint stuff. They start wearin' short sleeves and get their straw hats out.

There are some particular things I look forward to when it's spring. I like the smell of horse sweat, hot cattle, diesel fuel on big trucks, fresh-turned dirt, the sound of tractors running in the distance (though I miss the sound of a two-cylinder John Deere) and the smell of the first cuttin' of alfalfa.

Rites of spring

My dad used to tell about one of his rites of spring. He thought it was real funny to put a snake in Granddad's tractor toolbox.

The only thing Granddad would come plumb unglued about was a snake. I can tell you he did *not* like them. He *would* stampede when he came across one.

Pop was in high school when the fun finally ended one spring. Dad said he was greasin' some machinery when he heard the lid of the toolbox slam shut. He knew something was up but was actin' like he didn't notice anything.

Pop said it was all he could do to keep from laughin' his rear off, until he was picked up off the ground by the muscles that ran from his neck to his shoulders. I think Granddad really got Dad's attention

by carrying him over to the front of the toolbox and telling Dad, very calmly, to remove the snake. Pop said it was real hard to concentrate on the snake with Granddad puttin' the clamp on his shoulder-neck muscles. Granddad got his point across 'bout the snakes.

The union suit

Granddad McBeth wore long underwear — what they used to call a union suit — all winter. I don't remember seein' him wearin' anything but bib overalls except for a few times. When he was at home he wore a denim work shirt and lace-up work shoes. If he went to town he'd wear a white shirt, starched and pressed; new-lookin' bib overalls and his black polished lace-up ankle shoes with either a straw or felt fedora-type hat. When he went to church, it was a suit.

I knew it was spring when he stopped wearin' the long underwear. I could tell 'cause it stuck out a little at the sleeves of the shirt, and at mealtimes he'd roll up his shirtsleeves and pull up the long-underwear sleeves to wash his hands.

In the spring and summer, Granddad was not a briefs or boxers man; he was a bib-overalls man.

He was also a modest man. It had to get real hot before Granddad left that top button unbuttoned. When he went to town or out in public, the top button was always buttoned. Through all the good times and bad times, Granddad dressed the same way.

Grandma and Granddad got married in 1912 after Grandma graduated from high

school. She was valedictorian; Granddad didn't get to go to high school. He had to take care of his mother and some younger brothers by runnin' the farm. I think Grandma loved him so much 'cause, with Granddad, the top button was always buttoned when he was out in front of people.

Mouse tracks

A friend of mine tells the story of a couple of brothers who lived in the Flint Hills. He knew them when he was a kid. Neither of the brothers ever married. They looked after a lot of cattle ever' season. Only one of them ever did the cookin'.

They did not like the idea of haulin' horses to a pasture. They couldn't figure out how a horse would work if you didn't ride 'em. So what if it took two or three hours to get to the pasture and you had to ride out at 4 a.m.?

My friend said he would go spend time with them in the summer when he was pretty small. When they got up in the mornin' to go start breakfast, the fryin' pan they had used to cook supper with the night before had hardened grease in it. The grease usually had mouse tracks imprinted. Friend Jim asked the brother who did the cookin' about those mouse tracks, and the brother replied that after the grease got hot you couldn't see 'em anymore. Why worry?

Hot grease must kill mouse germs 'cause that was more than 40 years ago, and Jim is pretty healthy. The two brothers lived into their 80s; it must not have hurt them too much either.

Jim acts like he misses mouse tracks in the fryin' pan grease in the spring, and he acts like he misses the two brothers, too. I think they looked after him when he was a kid 'cause they thought quite a bit of him and his family. I think Jim must have learned a little about bein' a cowboy and doin' things right from those two ol' boys.

