

Harold Paul Wright's Boyhood Stories From the Mill Grove and Princeton Areas

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Keeping Cool

One summer, *Paul* and other boys in the area cleaned out a neighbor's cow pond. It had to rest for a full year before it was considered clean and safe for them to use. This swimming hole became a favored spot of these young lads to spend many a summer's afternoon cooling off in playful shenanigans together...swinging off a rope to see who could land the farthest out, dunking each other, racing from one side to the other, or seeing who could hold his breath the longest. Of course, they were known to attempt cutting school and we caught.



Halloween

Dad loved to recount the only time each year the boys of the area were excused from pulling pranks on the local citizens. That one day a year was Halloween. The many exploits that he told were amazing and are as follows.

One brave lad would sneak ever so quiet onto a neighbor's front porch to slide a butter knife with a long string attached into the siding of a home at its front door. The boys would then hide in the darkness behind bushes, fences, or cars. With giggles and hushes, they would pull the string and release, pull and release to make it appear that someone was knocking on the door. Usually the man of the house would open the door to find nobody there and close it. Obviously, one time wasn't enough for the boys and they did it again. The door would open a second time with the man of the house giving a

good shout at the boys to get out of there. If that weren't enough, occasionally they would ignite paper bags of cow manure prior to the rapping of the butter knife. They got a bigger kick out of this as they laughingly ran away leaving the man of the house stomping his feet to put out the fire only then realizing into what he stepped.

Other pranks that they loved to perform was to trade wagons from farm to farm and found it exceedingly hilarious that for the following week the farmers were going about either in town or among themselves searching out and trading their wagons back and forth to the original owner. They even took a wagon all the way up to the roof of the school house and left it there. Apparently, that had the whole town talking that year.

They also enjoyed lassoing ropes around outhouses and using the ponies to topple them. On a rare occasion it would be to the chagrin of an occupant who was left helplessly yelling at them.

The worse prank that they perpetuated but was one that the boys relished the most was when Halloween was on a Saturday night. One of the boys had the brainy idea to place a cow in the church. They had successfully subverted the next morning's church service and allowed them to sleep in. However, the consequence of their actions was to clean the resulting mess within.

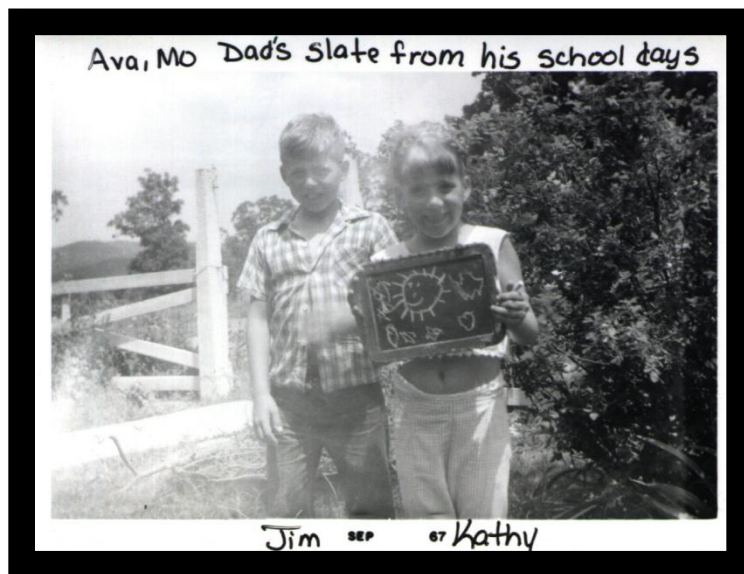


School Days

The one room school house did not have central heat and air conditioning from which comforts us today. Rather, there was a single pot bellied stove usually in the center of the room. The children who sat nearest broke out into sweat because it was so hot sitting beside it; conversely, those on the far side of the room were cold. The boys were assigned the task of maintaining the firewood and stoking the embers to keep the fire going.

While the teacher prepared for the next lesson or graded the work of students, the older youths taught the younger ones. The marm would take breaks from her work and circle around the room to check for understanding.

Slates were carted back and forth to and from school upon which to write as paper was precious and not as readily available compared to our childhood. Studying at home was conducted at the kitchen table by the dim light of a single oil lamp.



Of course, the favorite competitive pastime for recess among the boys was playing marbles. According to my grandma, *Paul* was a sharp shooter knuckling down with his Bubblebee shooter and nearly always cleaned up the circle by knocking his opponent out and collecting that marble. She fondly mentioned many a days he came home with his pockets full of all different sizes and colors of marbles. At some point she said she had many jars full.

The students who rode ponies to school kept them tied to a post or nearby tree. During recess and lunch breaks, they had time to feed and water the ponies. Later before leaving, they would tend to cleaning up after their animals.

Dad acknowledge the familiar scene many of us saw on Westerns of a child using a stick to chase a metal hoop around which usually was the band of a large barrel. Games of tag and keep away were no different than today. One other toy that was made which seems primitive compared to toys of today was threading a button (holes) with a piece of string tied so it was a loop. Then with a finger grasping at each end, twirl the string until it was taut; and then release one end in order for it to dangle and twirl thereby migrating down the string to the bottom. He showed this to Jim and I when we were little but appeared a little disappointed when we both simultaneously asked, "Is that all there is?" His response was that they didn't have all the toys that we had and Grandma had to make do with what they had.