

A GRASSHOPPER SUMMER

During the 1930's, there was widespread drought in the Midwest. The dry, parched soil of our Iowa farm constantly blew into the house, settling on everything. Dusting became an everyday chore that seemed so futile. For a bit of fun we often traced designs in the dust, then swiped them clean with a feather duster.

That absence of rain was hard enough, but in 1935 the drought brought hordes of grasshoppers to our doorstep. They were everywhere stripping the wheat and oats in the fields. Some found their way into the house. Much to Mom's dismay, they began chewing the dining room curtains. She had chosen pongee to create those curtains; a raw silk fabric that the grasshoppers found to be very tasty. We kids were expected to capture those unwelcome creatures and get rid of them. This was a most disgusting job. When grasshoppers feel threatened, they have a nasty habit of spitting something akin to tobacco juice. When our cousin Maurice caught grasshoppers and squeezed

them, they spit ugly brown spittle toward us. We screeched and quickly backed away, yet we stayed close enough to watch him make them spit. When we would finally catch one, its rough legs would scratch our skin, jumping away free on outstretched wings.

The yearly family reunion was held in the nearby park. The ladies hung their straw bonnets on tree limbs. Later they were surprised to find that grasshoppers had chewed holes in them. At first Grandma was angry, but then she began to laugh, and asked the men folk if their straw hats ever got chewed on. There was more laughter as Dad held up his straw hat: the brim in tatters.

Another insect that threatened crops that summer was the Chinch bug; a very small insect that sucked the juice from plant leaves, causing



them to wither and die. Dad heard that these bugs were on the move and had devastated crops just west of us. He was told that they would not crawl across tankage, a smelly sludge made up of mostly dried blood and refuse from slaughter houses. As Dad handed us cotton gloves he designated us kids to be lifesavers of the crops. He told us to put handfuls of this tankage along the fence rows, hoping the chinch bugs would not cross the vile stuff. After we had worked several hours in the heat, Dad drove to town and brought back an ice cold bottle of pop for each of us. Thankfully, the tankage treatment seemed to work.

During the drought Dad and Grandpa came in from the fields disheartened, yet with hopeful outlooks for the year. They were thankful for our healthy chickens and the eggs they laid; for the pails of frothy milk from our cows; and for last year's grain, even though that supply had dwindled. Our cistern's water supply got lower and lower until it was bone dry, but the hope that rain was sure to come kept them optimistic and in good spirits. When the rain finally came, we raced outdoors to welcome it with hearty cheers, and were happy to discover the grasshoppers had left.

TURKEY TALES

Throughout November, school days in the Redding Consolidated School focused on Thanksgiving: pilgrims, Indians, and thankfulness for the beauty and richness of our country.

We heard stories of the Indian Squanto's friendship and helpfulness to the Pilgrims. We celebrated a feast of popcorn while wearing paper pilgrim bonnets and feathered headdresses. We were given mimeographed outlines of turkeys to color, then we hung them up as classroom decorations.

Once we visited a turkey farm and giggled at their gobbling. However, our usual Thanksgiving dinner featured a plump, roasted hen.

In the early 1930s, Dad and Grandpa decided to raise a few turkeys. We kids were jumping with excitement when the first carton of twenty-five noisy, newly hatched turkey poults was delivered.