

Wrapped in a heavy, dark coat, a wool scarf and a felt cap with earflaps turned down, the old man sat alone on an overturned bushel basket near the far end of the tool and implement shed. At his side was a pile of old boards — boards which came from old or useless buildings we had torn down.

Picking up one board at a time with his calloused, wrinkled hands, he removed all the old nails from the wood — biting his lip slightly whenever the nail wouldn't come out very easily. Some nails seemed to put up a good fight and frequently there was a long "creaeek" sound as the old gentleman pryed them loose. He went at it with clock-like regularity. Picking up a board, removing the nails, placing them in a jar; and tossing the boards into another pile which would be sorted later for use in either future building projects or firewood.

Not being heated, the shed's windows were covered with frost and a person's breath formed little white clouds which were quickly swallowed up by the cold air.

A warm smile, surrounded by

LIFE on the farm

By

Dieter Krieg, Editor



healthy-looking, reddened cheeks, and accented by friendly, sparkling eyes, greeted me as I walked into the shed. I had known, loved, and admired this man for as long as I could remember and being with him was always a great pleasure. He was my grandfather — a man whose philosophy in life was to keep busy to avoid getting "rusty" like some of the nails he was extracting from the

boards. A farmer all his life, he knew all about keeping busy and wasn't the least bit interested in "taking it easy." He gladly helped out around the farm and many times even insisted on it, almost making the rest of us forget how old he was.

Removing nails from old boards, and then straightening the nails so that they could be used again — is one of the longest-lasting and most meaningful memories I have of my grandfather. Holding a nail between

his left index finger and thumb, he carefully examined it from several angles to determine where it would need a corrective blow from his hammer. Turning it slightly, and tapping gently, he shaped each one into something that could be used again.

"So wat mogt," he'd say in Low German, holding up a straightened nail to show me the results. For a moment my mind drifted back 15 years to our former home in East Germany where he had once showed me how to straighten a nail properly and without hitting my fingers.

Straightening those nails and saving them for future use was an act which was symbolic of my grandfather's frugality. It gave him something to do — which is what he wanted during all of his 95½ years — and in a small, but very meaningful way, it contributed something to the economy of the family's farming operation. More important, he unknowingly taught respect for our resources and work — rather than wasting materials, money and time.

A used, slightly bent nail may not be much — but it is symbolic of a valuable lesson I learned on the farm, and in my mind it stands as a memorial to my beloved grandfather.



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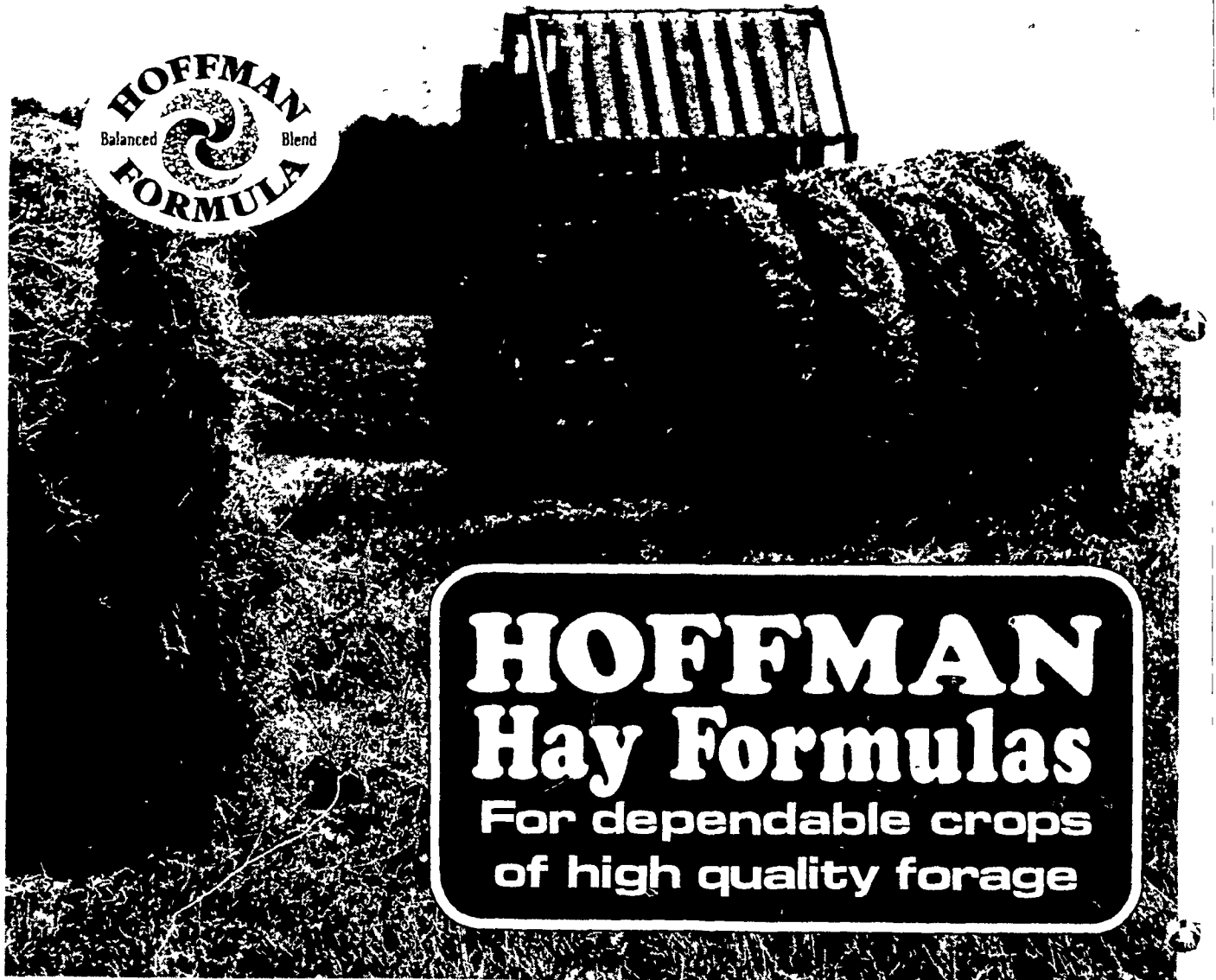
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