

Kid's KOrner

Farewell Mr. Blacksmith

"Under the spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands the smith a mighty man is he with large and sinewy hands."

If you've ever had to memorize this poem in school, you've probably wondered just what it is a blacksmith of yesteryear did besides hammer metal over hot coals.

Kids, just for you, we are featuring the true story of a genuine ol' time blacksmith.

The story will run several weeks, so watch future issues for more looks inside a blacksmith shop.

This story was written by Ralph Ratcliff and was submitted by his

son Bruce Ratcliff of California. Ratcliff tells us his father graduated from Purdue in 1932 in mechanical engineering, and pioneered in the design of many improvements of today including the chisel plow, deep tillage mold-board plow and the lay-over disk plow.

Now on with the story: I think the blacksmith shop is an integral part of United States history. This is a review concerning some of my experiences, observations and conclusions during my blacksmith years in Kingman, Indiana. The personal concepts are more to give a clearer perspective of the time than to write an autobiography. In

relating this, the smith (blacksmith), his shop and the draft horse are inseparable.

In 1920, when I was 10 years old, I became a smith's helper. Some of my first work consisted of preparing (dressing) the horses' hooves to receive the shoe. This consisted of cleaning, snipping, rasping and shaping. Horses loved this.

One day in the spring of 1922, Charlie, the man I worked for had more horses to be shod than he could do that day. Rather than have some people leave and come back later, he asked me if I wanted to try and shoe one horse's hind feet while he shod the teammate's front feet. It would have been easy to decline but harder to tell Mama I was afraid to try. Before dark we completed the work.

Walking home the one mile through the fields that evening I realized I was a smith. Mama was pleased but not surprised. We three children, Ross, then I, and Doris, may have relied more on Mama than did children who had both parents; our father died the day I was 20 months old. Ross was the only one of us who had the pleasure of remembering him.

It may have been a month before I shod all fours on a horse. Charlie had been giving me a big advantage. It is much easier to shoe the back than front feet of a horse. You and the horse are in a bind while shoeing a front foot. With the back foot, it is free wheeling.

Charlie was so quiet he was considered anti-social, never using two words when one would suffice. He would reduce a long speech to a short sentence and always spoke in a soft monotone, never raising his voice. In teaching, he was a pantomime artist. He kept liniment,

medicated salve and an antiseptic for horses. Our customers frequently made personal use of these. Horses liked Charlie. So did I.

Children were never permitted to roam in a blacksmith shop. The chances of getting hurt were too great. One time when Charlie needed two more hands, I offered to assist. What seemed like a kindness was the beginning of a career. He never did hire me or discuss an agreement. We just seemed to complement each other.

A blacksmith shop was always tidy and clean. There was a place for everything and everything was in place. The bulk of a smith's work involved the forge. Hot iron gets cold rather suddenly. The smith could not waste time selecting or hunting for a tool. His heat treating facilities consisted of his forge and two wooden tubs. One tub was filled with water, the other with oil. Some steels were quenched in water and others in oil.

Among the first things I made in the blacksmith shop were horseshoe nail finger rings and screw drivers to be carried on a key ring. The screw drivers were suggested by my brother. The finger rings are probably nearly as old as horseshoe nails. Boys could select their ring size from the assortment I had. Some of the rings were tailored for a few special girls. This seemed to make good sense at the time. Mama wore the one I made for her for a few weeks just to please me. When she passed away at 90 in 1970 we found her ring in a box among other things she chose to keep. She had kept it for fifty years.

The last time I saw my honored friend and relative Dr. Eldo E. Ewbank, we were visiting with some friends and he took from his pocket his key ring and keys and called our attention to a shiny screw driver on the key ring and remarked that little boy made it for him nearly fifty years ago and



that he had probably used it a few thousand times. Many things are long remembered, and popular among these are simple kindnesses. On the basis that "You have it made if you can count five friends who would risk their lives to save yours if the chance of saving yours was equal to losing their own." Doc was in my five as long as he lived.

When I started working with Charlie we did not have electricity in our town. It was major improvement when we acquired a sickle sharpener and steel saw powered with gas engines. Electric power came to our town in the early 1920's. The pole truck used by the construction people had two-horse power. A bay and a gray. We shod them and repaired the equipment for the construction company.

The price for shoeing horses regardless of shoe size was \$4 for a team, \$2 for a single horse and \$1 for the front feet only on one horse. The work consisted of about 25% each for shoeing draft horses, setting steel tires on wagon wheels, pointing plow-shares and miscellaneous.

Setting tires consisted of removing the tire from the rim of the wheel, heating a section of it and reducing its circumference in a tire bender (also called a shrinker or upsetter), then expanding the tire with heat and placing it over the rim and shrinking it by applying water as fast as possible. Pointing a plowshare consisted of replacing and shaping the point after it had been worn away by plowing.

Unscramble some safety measures

Kids, it's National Farm Safety Week, and it's time to do your share. You can help Mom and Dad observe this special week by obeying their orders, reminding them to be safe, and by staying away from the following potentially harmful farming necessities. You'll have to unscramble them.

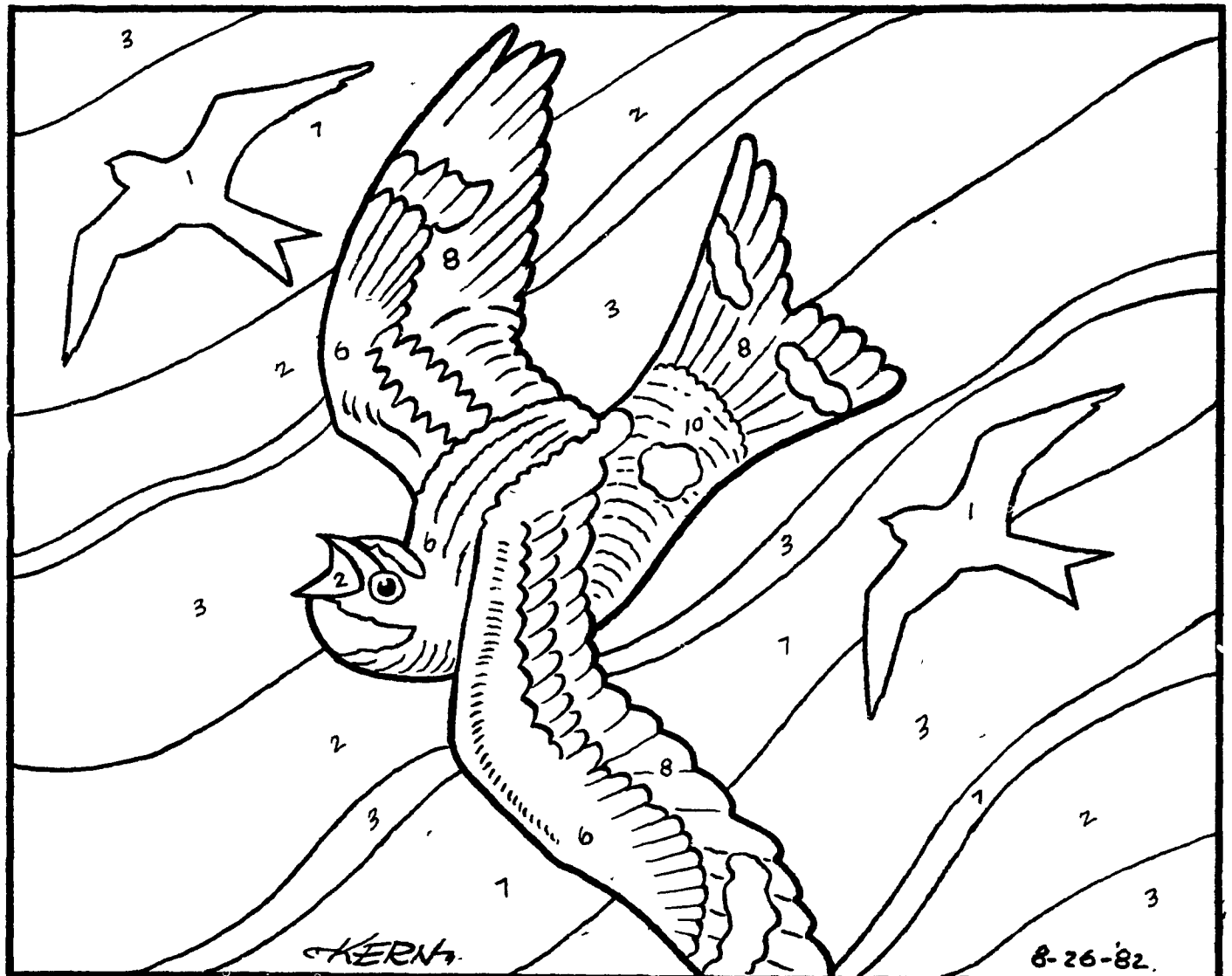
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Answers: matches, chemicals, fertilizer, wild animals, machinery, chain saws, silos.

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. LT. GREY |
| 2. RED | 7. PINK |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. DK. GREY |

NIGHT HAWK - THIS BIRD IS AS MUCH AT HOME IN THE CROWDED CITIES AS IT IS IN THE FAR OFF WILDERNESS. THE NIGHT HAWK IS OFTEN CALLED "BULLBAT." IT IS NOT A HAWK DESPITE ITS SUPERFICIAL RESEMBLANCE, BUT IS RELATED TO THE WHIPPOORWILL. THIS BIRD PERFORMS AN INVALUABLE SERVICE TO MANKIND IN DESTROYING LARGE INSECTS.



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