

# Kid's Korner

## Farewell Mr. Blacksmith

Kids, here is the second part to our story about a real ol' time blacksmith. If you missed the first half, you may want to check last week's issue before reading this section.

The story, again, was written by Ralph Ratcliff and was submitted by his son Bruce Ratcliff of California. Ratcliff tells of his adventures as a blacksmith in the early 1900s in Indiana.

Smiths had many similarities. Among these are:

1. He was a workaholic, reliable, considerate and generally honest.
2. He did not imbibe or smoke but did chew tobacco.
3. He had a wife and family.
4. He was very quiet.
5. He did not choose to live in a large city.
6. He worked for somebody else before he worked for himself.
7. He started his own shop when he was over 30 and under 40 years old.
8. He enjoyed being his own boss.
9. He owned and operated a small farm.
10. He had a garden, chickens, milk cow, and raised enough hogs for meat for his family.
11. He was generally free of debt.
12. He was fiercely independent.

It is a general concept that black in blacksmith is an inference to the cleanliness of the profession. Some people thought being a smith was demeaning. No smith shared this opinion. It was disturbing to me that smiths seemed arrogant and conceited. This was a misconception. It was necessary for them to have confidence, dedication and pride. Every good smith thought he was the best that ever lived. It

took me six or seven years to realize I shared this opinion.

To advance his learning in the art he would travel two or three villages away to observe the methods and facilities of another smith. Sometimes they were old friends, but if they had not met previously, he would introduce himself and explain that since he was in the neighborhood he wanted to stop by. The host was flattered and pleased he came and knew why. He gladly answered questions and made suggestions. He had been in a few neighborhoods himself. Other than this, few smiths had any special training unless it was during previous employment.

In their curriculum, a number of schools offered laboratory and/or short courses pertaining to blacksmithing. These courses were mostly for students, farmers, or would be blacksmiths. The instructors and demonstrators were usually former smiths. The good, better or best in any field is directly related to dedication, discipline and practice. The smith had these.

There may be no faster way of learning than one smith observing another or his work. One smith, Amos Crowder, made an ear on the upper toe of a horse shoe. This firmed the shoe on the foot so the horse would be unlikely to throw (lose) the shoe. Another smith, George Spivey, made two shrinks opposite each other on a tire instead of one. This made a better job and saved time in spreading the shrink (smoothing the reduced area). All of them made special tools. When you saw one better than you had you would copy it. Many times you would see



Cowboys in the old west relied on the blacksmith to shoe their horses just like the farmers and the settlers in the eastern United States. Here some cowboys round up wild horses which later become trained, shod and used for work on the range.

something that was simple, good and effective and wonder why you had not thought of it yourself.

Few smiths could work together at a single forge while pointing a plowshare. When two could, they would easily point three or four times as many as one smith could alone. One smith at this job has to extend himself which necessitates a limited pace. Normally the farmer wanted his plowshares pointed promptly because he needed to use them right away. The ground could not be plowed too wet or too dry.

No smith ever set a full size wagon wheel tire by himself. To do this job four hands and one head is required. The two who do this job must complement each other. Both

must perform like two skilled dancers otherwise one or both will be severely burned. For this reason at least half the blacksmiths would not set wagon wheel tires. Regardless of care and skill some burns are unavoidable.

The most sickening smell to a human nose is the burning of human flesh, especially your own. The first bad burn for me was when a hot spark flew into my left shoe — no socks. Charlie pointed down to his shoes. His pant legs overlapped the top of his shoes. After that day mine did also. Too much sympathy can retard recovery.

It is a joy to be a friend of horses. It may have been a love and respect between us that caused me

to do corrective shoeing whenever it would benefit the horse. If a horse "paddled" or "interfered" it was easy to correct. If he "overstepped" you could help this situation but not correct it.

Horses paddled when they threw their front feet out while trotting. Horses interfered when their rear feet collided while walking. Horses overstepped when their front and back feet did not coordinate properly. This was normally caused by teaming a horse with another that was faster gaited. It is more important that a team be matched in gait than sex, size, conformation or color.

No smith charged for taking a "gravel" from a horse's foot. A

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## COLOR THIS!

1. PURPLE	6. PEACH
2. RED	7. GREEN
3. YELLOW	8. LT.BROWN
4. BLUE	9. LT.BLUE
5. BROWN	10. LT.GREEN

THE MOOSE IS THE LARGEST MEMBER OF THE DEER FAMILY. THE BIGGEST LIVE IN ALASKA. THEY GROW AS MUCH AS SEVEN AND ONE-HALF FEET HIGH AT THE SHOULDERS AND WEIGH BETWEEN 1500 AND 1800 LBS. THE ANTLES OF A BULL MOOSE HAVE A SPREAD OF OVER 6 FT. OR MORE. IT SHEDS ITS ANTLES EVERY YEAR AND THEN GROWS A NEW PAIR.

