

## Notes To Dad

by

**Nancy Yergin**

Forest County  
Extension Agent

Dad remembered wearing his mother's apron and sunbonnet in order to milk the family cow without being kicked (the cow was partial to my grandmother).

Other memories included leaving school after sixth grade to help on the family farm and livery stable where teams of draft horses were rented out to loggers and oil producers.

He'd sigh and tell me that every animal had to be unharmed, cleaned, brushed, and fed before the dinner bell rang at 6 p.m.

When my father died in 1991 at age 81, I wrote down as much as I could remember about this family history before it was lost to me, the Baby Boomer, and my own son who belongs to Generation X. Time, after all, has a way of erasing memories.

Are you a "Boomer?"

According to Penn State professor Matt Kaplan, last year marked a milestone in American history that many people missed. The first of the 76 million Americans born between the years 1946 and 1964, the well-known "baby boomer" generation have reached the age of 55. This landmark occurrence signals some interesting changes in the enterprise of grand-parenting.

Dr. Kaplan says that first, we will see a surge in the numbers of grandparents and that by the year 2005, there will be an estimated 80 million grandparents. Of those, nearly half will be baby boomers, and they are likely to be quite different from the grandparents of previous eras.

They probably will be more liberal (after all, this is the Woodstock generation), healthier (thanks to dietary and medical advances), more active, and wealthier. In addition, they will identify with different historical events, have different ideas about work and play, and have different heroes.

A surefire way to help grandchildren and grandparents appreciate family stories and memories is the "oral history" interview. The interview can be focused on the grandparent's life experiences either in a general way, or with an emphasis on a

particular theme (such as how people dressed) or historical event (such as Woodstock).

Any tape-recording or written record of the interview should be treated as a valuable family keepsake. Whether it is through travel, discussion, or other activities, shared experiences are gratifying for both, grandchild and grandparent. These experiences also help lay the groundwork for strengthening family, a benefit to be enjoyed by future generations.

Each family has its own identity, traditions and rituals for celebrating family. It's never too late to start a new family tradition.

**Connecting the Generations**  
My father worked in the natural gas fields of western Pennsylvania and New York from the Depression years until I was born in 1948.

When Dad was feeling talkative, he'd tell me about his life in the years before World War II. His stories were full of accounts of working in bear-infested blackberry brambles, of run-away drilling rigs hurtling down hillsides, and draft mules that left lasting impressions on backsides.

My favorite story was about his getting almost to California (Land of Opportunity) before his Model A broke down in Utah, resulting in a six-week long trek back to Pennsylvania by foot and boxcar. When asked about this

Depression experience, he remembered that the roads were full of "tramps and bums" all looking for work and handouts (and he was one of them).

Curious about recollections from his childhood, I asked about his memories from the 'teens.'

Dad recalled hurrying to get on his pony to go tell the midwife that his mother was in labor with her 11th child. Another memory was of two great-uncles who had fought on different sides during the Civil War. These brothers survived to spend their twilight years together side by side in rocking chairs on a Jefferson County farmhouse porch, arguing about battles they'd fought in and taking occasional slashes at each other with their canes.

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