

Tennison

I have always marveled at the changes that took place during my parent's and grandparent's times on this earth. I always liked listening to the stories told by them of the old days. It was far simpler then, though I didn't know that at the time. I'm very aware today; I've always been a fan of things that are simple.

My folks and your folks saw some mighty big changes in their lifetime; changes in medicine, life expectancy, radio, trains, planes and automobiles, the depression, the dust bowl, the telephone, TV, Tiny Tim, Flip Wilson and the Super Bowl, computers, men on the moon, the internet, cell phones, digital everything and TV's in homes with nearly as big a screen as once watched at Saturday afternoon matinees.

Most of the stories told of the old days by my folks many times involved farm animals, mules, horses and dogs; many times told with as much compassion as stories told of family, friends and neighbors gone on. A favorite hunting dog, favorite teams of mules and horses, riding horses, finicky mules, horses, cows and people they had known.

I have discovered a boy born in the early 50's has seen a lot of changes, too. Forty acres and a mule weren't cutting it anymore in the 50's. Jobs in town were taken to take up the income slack; though I was small, I remember Dad going to work at the MFA (Missouri Farmers Association), a job to supplement the farm income. My brother, four years older than me, will tell you I was in the way mostly working on the farm, doing things Dad once did. I say, older brother would have never seen adulthood had he not had a little brother being the voice of reason and common sense; I saved his life numerous times. If we had been beer drinkers it probably would have sounded something like this, "Here, hold my beer and watch this".

Dad milked the cows of a morning, we milked the cows in the evening was how it started; we moved to first and second shift somewhere down the road. Oh, the stories that came out of that milk barn; good dogs, rabid cats, milk fights, Camel cigarettes, Beach Nut chewing tobacco, BB guns, bullet dodging Coots, pet birds, colder than a Mackerel, and hotter than a haired-up Orangutan just to name a few.

The tractor had come along and replaced the



mules and horses; Dad had sold them when I was just a baby. But, Tom Flanery who lived up the road still had a work horse, John Hanford still had his big grey mare and John had her hooked to a sled about every day. The Gilmore's still had a grey work horse; Grandpa Gilmore used her some, they did have a tractor, can't remember Grandpa Gilmore ever on that tractor. Dutch Snyder had a pair of mules, but the pair he had weren't broke to work at the time. Many up the road in any direction still had a work horse or mule or two.

Dad had a John Deer tractor we used on the farm (I learned to drive on that tractor) but Dad didn't like using the tractor to put in the truck patch. He would send me and my brother up to Tom Flanery's (we walked) to get Tom's big black horse (Percheron) to work the garden. We would ride him home, dang I loved doing that, the ride never lasted long enough. It was the beginning of my love for equines. Dad bought a big jenny to work the garden; "Puddin" was her name, they said she was broke to harness. She kicked Dad in the shoulder while trying to hook her; I learned some cuss words that day. She had never seen a harness in her life I suspect. She did plow the garden that day, like it or not. Dad and that jenny didn't like each other. Two strong wills don't make for a pleasant match. Dad took her back to the sale barn and said, (if you knew him you knew he was mad) "She was represented to work, she knows nothing about it, there she is, help yourself." A few weeks later there was "Puddin" back in the sale ring. When asked, "Anybody got something to say about this here jenny?" A man stood up and said loudly for all

to hear, (I didn't know him and I knew he was mad) "Yeah, she'll chew through a damn woven wire fence to kill a calf." (Thought you might like that one, Deb Kidwell.) When Dad found something to plow the garden it was a mule, a red dun mule... "One Eyed Jim" was his name; Jim spent way less time in the garden and way more time under my saddle. One Eyed Jim was a young boy's dream come true. One Eyed Jim brought me to a dream job I've had for over twenty-five years.

I come from the days of "Willie has a jack just down the road, we'll breed him to this mare, this mare has never raised a good horse colt". The mare produced pretty poor mules too. It wasn't all her fault, the jack was just a jack down the road and for \$10 dollars you could use him... hell, for \$40 you could've owned him.

It's the breeding season and we've seen great changes come to the mule industry. Today, with a phone call, (and no longer do long distance charges apply) you can use a "PROVEN" jack, a jack you like from one coast to the other coast. A well bred mare ups the odds greatly in producing a great mule; as a matter of fact it is widely believed the mare is the most important part of producing that good mule. The jack matters, I've seen it proven time and time again.

Willie still has a jack some where in America, but now we know why we don't want to use Willie's jack... like we know why we shouldn't smoke Camel cigarettes.

Take a deep seat, sit back and enjoy *Western Mule Magazine*. Your comments are always welcome.

May God Bless!