

[Tape 1, side 2]

If you told a person you would do something on a certain day, or if you told him you borrowed ten dollars from him, which was equal to five hundred now in some cases, you paid it back. If you didn't, your name was mud all over that country. And, you paid it back. You just paid it back, I mean you had to pay it back. Something inside of you made you pay it back. He had a bigness of his heart, you didn't pay any interest for that ten dollars you borrowed from him. So, you felt obligated to pay it back.

One farmer run out of corn, he didn't have enough corn the year before to feed his mules on, while he was raising the crop for the next year. So, he'd go to a neighbor's house, and get and borrow a wagon load of corn. So, he goes over to his crib, and he loads up a wagon load of corn. He comes over and raises a crop that fall, but he shucks it out and takes him another load of corn back and scatters it in his crib where he got it. I mean this sort of thing, all figured in the picture.

Everything now, seems to be on a dollar and cent basis. If I've got a tractor here, and you're hung up in a mud hole down here, you want to come and get me to take my tractor and pull it out of the mud hole. "How much you going to charge me?" "I'm not going to charge you anything." "Well, you've got to charge me something, you can't do that for nothing."

When we were, the period that I'm talking about, the mules didn't need gasoline. Somebody hang his car up in a mud hole, you'd come and you'd take your mule and someone would bring a log chain down, and snatch him out. And he'd tell you thank you, thats all he wanted, and you didn't charge him for doing it. If you did, your Daddy and your neighbors would have blackballed you. You just take him, if he was having some trouble you'd help him out. It was not a dollar and cents situation; we're living now in a dollar situation; everything is measured, all favors so to speak, there's a dollar and cents behind it. And this is pitiful. It hurts the kids that's born in that society.

When Abraham Lincoln left Breckinridge County, in 1816 as a nine year old boy, they was on a trip from Hodgenville to Indiana, and they stopped in Hardinsburg; Mrs. Lincoln was sick. And they stayed there, right up where the FFA Camp is now. And for about a week or ten days, while she was getting better, the food was the problem. They were hungry. You talk about poor people, we don't know what poor people is in this country. They was poor. She was hungry. And old man Thies Miller gave them a calf. We have documented evidence to this. He gave them a calf. Well, he butchered the calf, and there was no nothing except "Thank you Sir" went on between them. He shook hands with him and thanked him ever so much and he'd return the favor if he ever got the chance, see. Fortunately Abe had the chance.

And nowadays, all relief was done, there was no social security, medicare, all this kind of stuff, no stamps, food stamps, unheard of. If a person was poor and got, was hungry, the neighbors fed him. You give then a bushel of corn, eggs, and milk and grind it for him, he had a meal. And you'd loan him a cow. If he didn't have no milk, we loaned him a cow. "Yea I got a cow and I don't need the milk, take her over there and milk her til you get til you get where your cow comes fresher, and you can get you one. The same people did pay the bill for relief then as does now. Course, everybody, they take it out of your salary, and taxes, and then the Government feeds it to them, But they, people now seem to, who are on welfare, they earn it, by just being a people. I don't know whether this is good or whether its bad. But the thing that went

on between Tom Lincoln and the man who gave him that calf, doesn't go on now. Because you don't see the guy who gives it to you. You don't shake his hand and say, "Thank you Sir." Nobody starved to death back then, but the neighbors who had gave to those who didn't have. And it was a different sort of deal. And a heck of a sight better too, in my opinion.

Belcher: What was going to school like back then?

Thompson: Well, going to school then was a far cry different, for darn sure we didn't have no school buses. We walked, and some of them had as far as three miles to walk. But every six miles there was another school; about three miles is far as any of them had to walk.

And they didn't have any lunchrooms; they brought their dinner in a bucket. In the fall of the year they had sweet potatoes, and sargum and molasses, and corn bread. You know they'd bring sargum and molasses, some corn bread and sweet potatoes, and you name it, they had it. And we ate it, biscuits and jam. Now, they have a lunch room, go in the lunch room and set down and eat a sloppy Joe or a hamburger, and it ain't half as good food as we had, course you didn't have to bring it.

And so many things are different. I know the first six or seven years, we went to a little one-room school house. Last year they moved, hauled us into, that was the first consolidated school in Breckinridge County consolidated. And they hauled us into Kingswood, where we had a four-room school house, then. And I was in the seventh grade. But there was about six or eight that came from this old school, boys over there. And we didn't associate with them city dudes. And we'd go, ashamed about our dinners you know, we brought our dinner wrapped up in a newspaper, or a sack, or a bucket, or however we brought it. And they'd have fancy lunch boxes and they would have light bread, and crackers with peanut butter on it. And Lord how I'd love to had a cracker and peanut butter. And all we had were some old biscuits, and ham, or sausage, and that kind of stuff. And didn't know we had the best food in the world, but it just didn't look like what they was eating. And we'd go out behind the darn smoke house, cold shed, and eat out there when it wasn't raining. Because we was kind of ashamed of our food. And once a day, I found out that one of them guys would swap a peanut butter and cracker sandwich for a ham sandwich, and I said, "Boy how dum can he be?" We had things going our way after that. They'd come out and eat with us just to come out and get to trade a sausage and biscuit, and for a real fine peanut butter and cracker. And it took me a long time before I realized how stupid I was.

But now, things are different. And another thing, now days you go in the school, they either sit you alphabetically or however they want to seat you, or you just pick out your own seat. Back then buddy, you did no such thing. Boys sat on one side of the school house. And the little boys in the front, and then the next biggest boys would be behind them, and so forth, 'til the eighth grade set in the back of the school house, all eight grades in one room. Girls on the other side, and an aisle right down through the middle. And I don't know why they had to put the girls on one side and the boys on the other, that's just the way they do. You talking about, you asked me about morals. That's another reason why morals were better then, if you got close to a girl you was in trouble. And another thing, if she can say you did something and you did it, whether you did or whether you didn't. And you learned to stay away from them.

One ole girl, for example, in that school. Poor ole man, I won't call his name, but he was a booger with a switch. And she would sit over there and get kind of bored, eighth grade and had them old long yellow curls going down her back, never forget her, kind of fat. And she would jump, when he was at the board, working with his back towards the room. She'd jump and holler just as loud as she could holler and he'd look around and she'd be holding her side. He thought somebody had done throwed something and hit her. And he'd grab a hickory and said, "Who throwed that?" Nobody threw it so nobody confessed, and he'd whip every boy on that side of the darn aisle, from the second grade back to make sure he got the right one. Of course, when recess come, we worked her over right outside, and then she'd tell him what we did, and we earned that so we didn't mind it so much.

This is what schools, this type of thing, now in certain, we have teachers much more capable of teaching. I don't know that they're as dedicated as the old teachers were, because, for the simple reason, they didn't make but from thirty to forty dollars a month. And they had to have been dedicated or they wouldn't have done it. And I know they were good teachers even though they didn't understand all about girls. I don't think I do yet after teaching thirty years but, anybody says he understands them ain't telling the truth or else he's stupid; you ain't supposed to understand them. But, don't you tell nobody this, but girls caused me 90% of all the problems I had in the school house.

We, another thing that had it's advantage in the old school, I'm not saying we don't have better schools now, we do, far better schools, but I don't think that an air condition and carpet on the floor, makes for better learning. Just like one old prophet out at Bowling Green College, while we were in college there said, "An ideal set up for an education is a boy on one end of a log and a teacher on the other." I mean your equipment had nothing to do with an education. If you have got a boy that wants to learn on one end of a log and a teacher that knows how to teach on the other end, that's the ideal set up for an education.

Well, we were all in the same room. When I was in the second grade, I listened to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade spell. And I listened to them read, and I listened to their history, and I watched her teach geography to them, and I didn't have to study. You couldn't keep from learning, you'd learn it accidentally just sitting in the school house. It would just rub off on you. You learned to spell by spelling or hearing spell it, and if a person'd keep his ears open, you couldn't keep from learning in those old schools.

Furthermore, you learned a lot of reasons why certain things were as they were, because you'd hear these explained over and over and over to you again. And they'll tell you rote is a poor way, I tell you its the best way. This thing of reading something once and forgetting it, you will forget it. By ginney, you go over it a time or so and it'll, the more times you go over it, the better it sticks with you. And so for this reason, I think the old one room country schools had its advantage over the schools as we know them today.

Another thing, we was all one class. There wasn't any smart bunch, and a middle, medium size class and a bunch of dummies in the other room. Boy, they was all in the same category. And any time you divide a room according to their learning abilities, they know which one's in the dummy, and when you put him in that bunch he knows he's a dummy and he don't try to learn cause he ain't, he knows he's a dummy and can't. You kill him deader than a door-nail right there. Just about like knocking him in the head when you put him

in a dummy class. It's like sending a boy to a psychiatrist, boy if you really want him to go nuts, you just take him to a psychiatrist. Maybe he's perfectly sane, but he knows he's nuts when you take him.

I don't know, I liked a lot of things that come out of the old schools. I like the gymnasium, that we've got now, and I like to see the boys practice basketball. They learn team play, course they learned it then, but not like they do now. And they have coaches that teach them. And, they become fabulous in lots of ways that they couldn't under the old school because one teacher can't do everything. He can't be a, teach all the subjects like one who is trained to teach one particular subject.

Not sure they didn't come up with a better rounded student though. That's all.

Belcher: Who were the greatest influences in a child's life back then?

Thompson: Do you want to know who, you want me to answer that personally or my opinion about everybody that lived during that period? I think the same answer would go though. Yea, nobody had more influence on me than my Mother, and anybody that says they did ain't telling the truth, or else his Mother wasn't there, or something wrong. And his Daddy, and your sisters and your brother have a profound influence on your life. Life, if you have sisters and brothers. In my case, I had six sisters and I was the only boy in the outfit, and they was older than I was, and I was impact. I guaran-done told you, I learned to wash clothes on a scubboard. I learned a lot of things. But my Mother was a terrific influence, the Preacher was a terrific influence on me. I had to go to church every Sunday in the world. I know one time, we had a preacher that preached so loud he scared me. And I was just, maybe first or second grade, so I was six maybe seven years old and I had a pair of Sunday shoes and I hid them so I wouldn't have to go to church, cause I just, I mean it scared me he preached so loud. And Mom would always get down pretty close to the front you know and, so I hid my shoes. And she, I didn't pull no wool over her eyes, she knowed that I done hid them shoes. Course, I denied it. But, so she, it didn't do me a bit of good, so she got a rag and wrapped that rag around my big toe and tied with a pretty bow knot and so it looked like I had a sore toe, was the reason I wasn't wearing any shoes. So, I went to church barefooted anyhow, with a big ribbon tied around my toe. Well now, she was willing to go along with the rules there to save face for me, even though it brought, caused her to be, deviate from complete honesty to slight deception, for my benefit. I had to go to church though, so the next morning I found my shoes, but no getting around it. And the preachers, the church had a big influence on my life. I've tried to live a Christian life and it's been worth more than anything, I guess, my church has, and still is.

But John Locke, I think was the early philosopher, he said, "We are a product of our total associations with other people, your environment." When you meet a person, you're not the same person you were before you met him. Just talking to you will make a different person than I was before I met you sir. So, we are a product of our total environment.

Now, who can say which one had the greatest influence on you, unless it would be those that you were with the most. Are those, you've seen I'm sure, you and every other boy, get find yourself in a little jam sometimes, and you had to go tell somebody or you'd have busted. But, the last person on the world that you could tell it to was the one you ought to go to, your Dad, but he's the last fellow you would go to. But, there was one person in your

community, and there's one person in every boy's community that you have ultimate confidence in, that you could go talk to with your problems. Well now, who could say how much influence he had on you? Maybe you didn't realize he was having an influence on you right at that time, but you'll fill his role for some other boy, because of it. The people that you are with the most, perhaps, have the greater influence.

But your own family is the best, because like Papa like son.

Belcher: What about peer groups, you hear a lot about that today, was it as much back then?

Thompson: Yea, yea, of all the dumb things in the world, that's it. But you, this, at the same time, has a terrific influence upon a boy. He will do what the group does. If you're out with a bunch and they want to go get drunk, what are you going to do, drink it or let them call you a sissy or whatever? Are you going to taste it, or make out like you do, and just pour it on the ground and make them think you're drinking it anyhow. Or, are you going to have guts enough to say, "Go on and get yourself drunk and get in jail if you want to. I ain't touching the darn stuff." Which way you going to go? Peer groups, they have a terrific influence.

Some boys are big enough to stand up and be who they are. And most of them are not. It's the reason why you hear things go off in Universities and fraternities. Two or three guys who are self-styled or otherwise, leaders of the fraternity will do certain things, and the rest of them go along to keep from losing face. My account of, they didn't have a face, when you follow the guy that's doing that. To have a face, is to be who you are. But, this peer pressure, boy it's terrific, it's terrible, it's the most difficult thing for a boy to understand, you can't go with them, you have to be you. Now, if they're doing what you want to do, fine, joining them.

But it's peer pressure, has a terrific influence on any boy, more so, I think, than it does girls. Maybe that's cause I was a boy. I don't know how much effect it has on girls, maybe equally. But, I never did want to drink, therefore I didn't. Now, I've been called a sissy a many times because I didn't drink the darn stuff, and I'd wind up taking them home. When they'd sober up they'd tell me, they'd thank me, and tell me, "Boy, how could I have been so stupid?", but they'd do it again. Somebody'd come around and call them sissy and have a snort with us, so they'd take a snort and first thing you know, they was snorted out again. I felt terrible for not doing a lot of things when the whole group was going along, and doing them things. But, and times I went with them too, got so stiff I couldn't handle it. But, I did try to be who I am. And maybe it was a mistake, if I'd been like others, I would have amounted to something. Alright, that's my honest opinion sir, peer pressure is terrific but there has, you have to be yourself. And peer pressure or any pressure you, in order to be yourself, you have to figure what you are, and what you want, and then, lay with it boy. You look like you're big enough to do it.

Belcher: How was the farm equipment different back then?

Thompson: Boy that's a good one. It's as much different as it was daylight and dark. Believe it or not, I cradled a crop of wheat, just like farmer Abraham did. There wasn't a lot of difference from the way people farmed in the early part of the century and the way farmer Abraham did. We did it with mules, there was no farm power other than darn hardtail mule, horses, or you

do it with a grubbing hoe yourself. And, I remember the first binder I ever saw and the first hay baler I ever saw, and they was the kind you pulled with mules. Even the hay baler, stationary, and you hook them on to it and they go around and around and around with an old mule and bale up the hay. And then they came up with more modern stuff, this is a miracle. Boy, if you have to have something, somebody in this darn country will make it. And finally they came up with a tractor, and I knew right then I didn't ever need another mule, were the first tractor I ever saw. So, in place of breaking two acres of ground a day, and that was a long hard day with a team of mules and break two acres of ground. Now you can take a, I saw a fellow last year, went into a 40 acre field one morning, year before he planted it, disced it and planted corn before it, got done before night. There ain't no way one man could farm forty acres of corn, hardly a year, that was more than one team of mules could do, and then you didn't do a halfway job. And back then we'd make 25 to 30 bushels of corn to the acre and now you've got a hundred and forty bushels of corn to the acre. Figure out the difference, one man can raise a thousand acres of corn, plant it, shuck it, shell it, and put it in the elevator by himself. Back then when I was a kid it took all the mules and horses in the county to put out that much corn.

Do you know what a cradle is, I was talking about a cradle a minute ago.

Belcher: No

Thompson: Well, confound, maybe I'm talking out of my hat. It was a briar size, you know what a briar size is? Big old thing with a long blade you swing it and cut weeds.

Belcher: Yea, yea

Thompson: Alright, it had fingers on it up here and when you cut it off and it would, these fingers would catch it. You could cut it up and lay it down as a straight row of wheat all cut out. Then you had to pick it up and tie it by hand. Haul it, and shuck it, and run it through a thrashing machine. One a good cradle man could cut two or three acres a day, two acres a day. And it was hard work, guarantee you.