ED ON HIS FATHER

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A friend once asked me “Whose nature have you inherited, your father’s or your mother’s.” Without further thought, “my mother’s,” I replied for we were alike in many ways.

I pondered this question and remembered my father who had a closeness to his children. I was 13 when my father died. Using today’s standards, he was at the prime of life.

I remember how we were sad at his illness and hoped for a full recovery. We were all sorry for mother for she was sad to witness his pain.

I remember how we waited for father to come home when he went to Tampere to sell produce. We young ones were on our knees on the bench, our noses touching the window. In the winter we had to

keep the glass clear with our tongues so that we could see him approaching. His arrival meant we got some sweets.

I was probably about 10 when father took me with him to Tampere. That was an exciting adventure, not to be forgotten. The first wonder was the roar and the sight of the Nokia falls. I had never seen anything like it.

Then father drove the horse into the yard of a store whose sign showed a pretzel which advertised a bakery and a café. Father bought a piece of coffee bread and we shared it and then we drove off towards Tampere.

When we reached Pispala, there above the road was a long arched structure made of logs and you could hear a great noise within. Father said that anyone going over that bridge for the first time must remove his hat and I did so. I did notice that father was smiling knowingly.

Later I learned that the building was a so-called log flume through which pulpwood was moved into Lake Pyhäjärvi and then onward to the Nokia paper mills. That was the reason for all the noise.

The adventure continued as we shared shop keeper Helkavaara’s arrangements for overnight lodgers. There were men from many villages who were waiting for dawn to break and the market to open.

Father took a horse blanket from the wagon to cover me as we prepared to sleep. It gave off a

homey odor that I had smelled before. Others slept on bare benches. I don’t know if father slept or not.

In the morning we went to the market place and that was exciting too.

As far as I can remember, father was the only one in our home village who went to meetings of

the local citizens, of the church and of the farmer’s organization. He also was on a committee that determined who could borrow seed in the spring from the village magazine and the condition of the product when it was returned in the autumn.

In the evening when father returned from a meeting, the other farmers of the town would come to hear of the decisions. This was the only part of the evening that my mother did not enjoy.

It was a part of local consideration that if you always spat on the floor at home, you could also do so at the neighbor’s house. When the old guys had gone, mother would begin to clean, muttering the whole time. “Why don’t they go to the meetings themselves instead of coming here to spit all over my floors!”

My father was probably the only crofter in town who ordered a newspaper. We received the

“Aamulehti” and the Pellervo magazine which had instructions on farming.

Father was honest and fair in all things and demanded the same from everyone, including the children. If the neighbor biddies had complained to him of some mischief, we were invited to a conversation. If your explanation of facts tended to run on the borders of credulity, he noticed it at once and said: “Start over from the beginning and tell me exactly what happened.” Truth could not be avoided.

Above father’s carpentry bench, between two logs in the wall, there was a birch branch proclaiming the presence of law and order. I do not remember that father ever used it. The procedure for the one who was to be punished included going out and bringing in a branch and not a mere twig and then dropping his trousers. This was the hardest part. The punishment itself was short and did not really hurt although there were a lot of tears and a lot of moaning.

We understood each other well. I remember the following incident. The farmer’s society was putting on a program that evening. I prepared the chaff for the horse. When father came home, I unharnessed the horse in the shed and took him into the barn. When I entered the house, father asked if I wanted to go to the entertainment and gave me a 25 penny coin along with a request that I spend it for the admission ticket. We youngsters often tried to slip in along with the adults and then used the money to buy a fizzy drink. Father further instructed me to be home by ten o’clock for after that the hook would be placed on the door.

Now in my twilight years, when I remember and notice the lawlessness which prevails among the young today, it occurs to me that the teachings of the parents in the past was first rate. Would there be some control it the modern parents would try it?

Ed Helander