

THE FARM

by Joe Barella's

In 1941, when I was four, I lived on my parents farm in Bakersville with my four sisters and three brothers. It was a very unique farm having originally been the estate of James Watson (son of Royal who had made his fortune sailing merchandise around "The Horn" to California during the gold rush years).

There were two houses, "The Big House" as we called the mansion that had eleven rooms, twelve foot ceilings, a huge fieldstone fireplace, mahogany banisters, French doors that led to a very long wrap-around L-shaped veranda, and beautiful, ornate corbels supporting very wide eaves. The roofs were almost flat on both the main roof and cupola. The inside of the cupola room was walled entirely with cedar to prevent moths and was originally designed to store clothing. There was a very large wood stove in the kitchen and a huge wood burning furnace in the cellar with ducts leading to floor and wall registers to all the rooms. One other feature it had was a tunnel that led to the servants house, but my father had boarded it up very sturdily because it was unstable.

The servants house had a main building and an annex attached and probably had as much square footage as the mansion but the rooms, except for one, were smaller. Starting at the north end of the annex was the carriage room with its wide door. My brothers used this room to repair their cars. There was a loft over it that my father used as an office. His entry to it was from the next room that was completely open to the roof line. This room was cavernous, probably 30 feet square. On the end connecting the main house was a large brick fireplace with a long wrought iron arm with a large pot hanging from it that could swing in or out of the fireplace. We called this "the back room" and my Father stored grain, maple syrup, etc. in it. The main building was 10 feet wider with two floors and a walk-in attic. It also had a full cellar but no furnace and was heated with woodstoves. Opposite the "back room" was the kitchen and a bathroom. At the other end of the kitchen were the stairs and entry to the sitting room which was good size, extending the width of that end of the house. There was one bedroom behind the stairs and part of the kitchen. Upstairs was a master bedroom and two smaller ones. One of our woodstoves was in the sitting room where I often dressed on cold winter mornings. The cook stove in the kitchen also served this purpose.

Both houses were supplied with running water by a spring on what is now Winchester Road. It was an abandoned part of Winchester Turnpike that had pretty much reverted to woodland. The water was all gravity fed and in my ten years there, never failed. We did however, have a drought in 1941 and hauled all the water for the animals and washing from the brook to preserve the spring water for drinking and cooking. I particularly enjoyed that year because my siblings and I would get on Hammerhead (a very large workhorse) and ride to the brook to water him. I also got to ride in the Model B pickup with my brother Ritchie when he would fill up fifty gallon drums for the animals and washing.

The main barn has two levels, the carrying beams for the loft are high enough from the concrete floor and over seven feet to allow plenty of headroom on the bottom floor. The approximate dimensions are 54 feet in length, 32 in width and a height of 40 feet at center of the top of the ridge from the loft floor. The sliding door of the lower level is about 12 feet wide but the doors for the earthen ramped loft are massive. Each door is 16 feet by 16 feet so with both opened, the doorway is around 30 feet. It was very easy to back a hay wagon or truck in to unload. The earthen ramp was gradual, also making things easy. The upper floor or loft is completely open, supported by "church trusses" and absolutely cavernous. There is a good sized cupola on the middle of the ridge and one end of the roof juts out five feet with a profile of two cow heads carved in the fascia board. These are both louvered to allow for ventilation for the whole barn. The roof is covered with 1 ½ foot square metal "shingles".

There was also an adjoining one-floor barn next to the main barn having open sides. I remember its massive 1 ½ foot beams, bolted together with 1 ½ inch diameter by 8 foot long threaded rods supporting the trusses.

The farm had a total of 380 acres, most of it wooded. Across from the end of the driveway that accesses Shady Brook Road, is a very wide stone wall that once held a sluice and water wheel at a mill. The foundation of the mill and the splash block are still intact but the foundation has been filled with debris. The splash box measures 3 feet by 8 feet by 6 inches thick which is one hell of a stone. Part of the canal that fed this sluice has been covered by Shady Brook Road but soon runs just to the right of the road for a third of a mile to where it started at a dam. My father destroyed the dam to reduce his property taxes shortly after he purchased the estate. Erosion over the years has reduced the height of the canal walls and filled the bottom.

My older sisters spoke of a Mrs. Watson that lived in the Cupola House in the center of Bakersville who told of carding wool in this mill when she was young. She also told of having a son who attended Annapolis.

There was a small orchard on the northwest side of the main barn, a rabbit coop on the east side, and chicken coops on the southwest. There were fields on all sides and on the Shady Brook Road side, they extended to it. These fields, along with the ball field, totaled around 60 acres.

As you can imagine, my father was in constant motion, between his tavern in Torrington and the farm. My mother was also extremely busy cooking for clambakes and other functions on the huge woodstove in the mansion. Naturally, the whole family pitched in. I remember her roasting 90 chickens for one outing. She could roast a dozen at a time in that big oven. My dad also worked on the preparations but during the actual events, he had to participate. There was soft-ball, bocci, and horse shoes at the ball field. At the grove nearby, long rows of tables with tapped kegs of beer on them. Others had barrels of clams, large pots of sweet corn, large trays heaped with chicken, jars of hot peppers, pickled eggs, and pig hocks, etc. The sound of Moto, a kind of Italian odds and evens, number adding game played by throw-

ing out different numbers of fingers and guessing the total rang out in the grove and the edges of the ball field. There were card games at the tables and the roar of a happy and sometimes a little tipsy crowd.

I'm sure it was an extremely long day for my parents, but the excitement was intoxicating for a young boy. I was allowed to be there and my dad would put me in bocci matches against some of the guys and bet on me. "I used to spend hours at the bocci court all by myself using all the balls and going from end to end so I was quite proficient." It always got a big laugh when I won which was more often than not.

The day after may have even been better for me. There would always be iced raw clams left at a couple of tables and at that age I absolutely loved them. There would sometimes be a few pickled eggs or ham hocks left at the bottom of the jars which I also thought were great. I ate good food every day at home but this was what men ate and I wanted to be like them.

When I finished sampling the food, I would scour the ball field and the grove for lost change. Both places produced their share, the grove from the card games and the ball field from running participants. Mostly it would be nickels and dimes, but also a fair amount of quarters and occasionally the bonanza of a half dollar. I can remember coming up with just short of \$4 on one occasion and this in the days of nickel ice cream cones. A couple bakes like this would give me enough to last a whole year at the candy counters of the two service stations in town.

Woodwell's Uncle Ed (Mrs. Woodwell's uncle), got most of my business because they had a better assortment of penny candy: Mary Janes, wax lips, little bowling pins filled with sugar water, etc. However, my fortune was large enough to spread around so occasionally I'd go to Kimberly's and Uncle Harry, Mr. Kimberly's father. Now both Uncle Ed and Uncle Harry had a lot in common. They were both very old, wheezed with emphesema, and shuffled rather than walked. They were also both a little crabby and impatient when I made my candy, pop, or ice cream selection. They must not have been very threatening because the seven or eight dollars I found in a year was more than enough to last a year. I was always frugal enough to have a few coins stashed away.

Like my brothers and sisters, I had a few chores but thought differently than most kids about them. I wanted to be like my brothers so much, I almost relished doing them even when it was shoveling a little dirt while we were doing the bocci court. Dad didn't give me a specific amount, just asked that I do a little every day. Wanting to be like my brothers and kind of pretending I was grown, I actually did enough to surprise him. When autumn came, there were a whole new set of priorities. Apples had to be harvested from our own little orchard, plus Covey's in Burlington, and we also went across the border into New York for some. I remember it because on the return trip going over Bunker Hill in Goshen, the truck would heat up and one of my sisters ran behind with a chock to throw under the back wheel so the truck wouldn't roll backwards when my father stopped the truck to cool off. After 5 or 10 minutes, the truck would be ready to lug its heavy load once more. The process was pretty slow so the kids who had to walk weren't too far behind at the top.

Our cider press was simplicity itself, just a large wooden square on the end of a long, thick wooden screw. A long stout rod was inserted in it and one brother would walk around the press pushing the bar and squeezing the apples that were on "the table" that was tapered toward the edges. The juice would run to the lower corners and out a gap into a container. This somewhat crude rig produced 400 gallons of cider mostly for hard cider but some for Apple Jack. I used to wonder why we would have barrel-shaped pieces of ice broken open in back of the barn in springtime. I was grown up before I found out they took the barrels apart to get at the Jack which would form in the center. These barrel shaped pieces of ice were only one of the mysteries I grew up with.

While we did harvest potatoes, the bigger and more important task was cord wood. All through the year, when time allowed, both Dad and my brothers would cut trees in the woods across Shady Brook. The trees cut were usually around 10 inches at the butt end, hauled back whole with a work horse by my brother Ernie. He left these trees in back of the barn where they would be limbed and cut into 5 foot lengths with a cross-cut saw for the mill. The mill was simply a platform with a four foot carriage that slid back and forth, a large saw on one end of a shaft and a pulley on the other. This in turn hooked to the rear wheel of an old car we had. The belt that connected was crossed in the middle. This was another riddle for a four-year-old but eventually I figured it was to change rotation direction. I didn't want my brothers or my dad to think I was stupid so I wouldn't ask. Sawing cordwood is always dangerous but our mill had one extra quirk. We called that old car that powered the mill "the crank eater" because the crank often got caught in the slot and spun crazily around until inertia would fling it at least a hundred feet. We would be at these times peeking out from behind the rabbit coop or an apple tree. Over the years, I've won some awards for running, my speed I attribute to that crank. When we sawed the small or medium size logs, the saw blade would "sing" at a very high pitch, but when we ran a butt log, it would kind of groan and they'd have to ease the table very carefully in, keeping the RPM's up. I was just a spectator on this part of the operation, but when a large pile of cord wood had formed that had to be loaded on the truck, I was to grab any pieces I could handle and toss them in. Also, when we unloaded it into the cellar of the mansion, I tossed manageable pieces down the hatch. Even at this tender age, I believe I contributed.

We had some pretty severe winters in those years; one when we lived in the servant's house stands out in my mind as having many below zero days. In very early morning I'd watch my father go out to his 1937 grey Ford sedan that was always parked along a row of hemlocks between the houses. He would crawl under it and place a bundle of twigs under the oil pan, light it, then come inside and have his oatmeal and coffee. When he'd finished breakfast, he would easily start his car and the little fire was reduced to ashes and he'd be off to do errands buying feed, etc. and readying his tavern for business. He would be back before noon, the whole back of his car filled with bags of grain. (I remember seeing oats sprouting from the dirt on the back floormat). At noon he would come in for a bowl of my mother's French onion or chicken soup with stale, hard homemade bread to dunk in it. My mother made her version of French onion with a large chunk of soup meat with the bone in it and my dad loved the marrow. His

lunches were never more than 20 minutes so he was soon doing chores around the farm. When 4:30 came, he was back to the tavern until closing at one a.m. Being a kid, I never realized what a phenomena I was witnessing but as I grew up I often wondered how he kept up that pace.

Spring would bring one more task, but the boys handled the collecting and boiling of the sap for maple syrup themselves. They would set up a tripod of 12 foot poles and hang a large black cauldron from it, heating it over an open fire. The cauldron had a kind of tab with a hole in it on one side of the bottom and when the syrup was ready, they would stick a rod with a bent end into the hole and dump the syrup into a smaller pot. As near as I can remember, they got a gallon or so per batch, so it was an all day affair. The syrup, when cooled, was poured into one gallon jugs and they were stored in the back room just for the family. I never remember them getting more than five or six gallons, but it lasted all year. When it was needed, the mold was removed from the surface and it was poured into smaller containers. At maple syrup time, the family was always happy; winter was over. The other harbingers of spring were the trailing arbutus that blossomed on the banks of the south branch of our brook. One or the other of my sisters would walk to where they grew to see if they had bloomed. When they did, my mother and sisters would go for a walk there and pick one or two to smell aroma then hang them in a prominent place to enjoy. These tiny wonders would often bloom surrounded by snow.

On June 19, 1941, my brothers Ritchie and Ernie had friends over to listen to the Joe Lewis vs. Billy Conn heavy weight boxing match. As usual, I managed to insert myself into the group. Buddy Sedgewick, Johnny and Eddie Muckle, and Mike Fusco were there along with my brother Frank. They were making bets with each other and wanting to be like them, I too made a bet. Not wanting to lose a nickel (it would buy an ice cream cone), I bet a nickel on each fighter. When the guys found out what I had done, it got a big laugh and I was embarrassed but being out there with the big guys was worth it. The fight was great, very competitive until Conn was KO'd in the 10th. When the fight was over the talk turned to impending war and possible enlistment.

In the spring of 1942 we moved from the servants house to the mansion. It had been vacant since the Buckleys left. The servants house then was vacant for a year when it was rented to Gerard Lewis and his children Margie 10, Mickey 9, Jojo 5 (same as me), and Judy a year younger. They stayed only a year and a half but it was great for both families. Being a son of a trapper, Mickey was into guns and I remember my brother Ernie letting him shoot our 12 gauge shot gun. Mickey was small for his age but handled the kick well. I was a little bit jealous because at only 5 years old, I thought I could handle a 12 gauge. Anyway, I had Jojo and Judy (she tagged along with us) to play with. Margie was kind of a mother to her siblings because Mr. Lewis was divorced. The kids all took care of each other but naturally Margie did most of the cooking. She would still have time to play games with us but liked to spend time with my sister Rose better because they were closer in age. Mr. Lewis would stretch his pelts over frames and put them into the attic to cure. I was fascinated by them and Mr. Lewis, seeing my interest, took Jojo and I on part of his trap line. It was only for 3 or 4 miles but it was difficult in the deep snow in spite of Mr. Lewis

breaking trail in his snowshoes. Both Jojo and I kept up, not wanting to wimp out. Mr. Lewis was happy catching one mink for that day as they were quite valuable at that time.

I was definitely sad when Mr. Lewis's sister asked them to come and live with her but there was so much going on at the farm, I soon got over it.

In the spring of 1943 my sister Rose had to have her appendix removed. Four days after she returned from the hospital it was my mother's turn for the same operation. After my mother's return there was a 2 week lull before I went too. I'd been having pains for quite some time so it wasn't unexpected. My parents took it in stride. After all these years, I still remember being strapped to the operating table and calling Mama, Mama, Ma as they put the ether cup over my mouth. I sure was one scarred puppy. I awoke to a blurred image of color that turned out to be a vase of flowers. In those days you were usually kept 2 weeks after an appendectomy but it was shortened to ten days thanks to my roommate. He was a boy of about 12 and his arm was hanging in traction so he couldn't move about. He was, however, a devilish sort and on the day after my operation talked me into getting out of bed to retrieve some chocolates he had dropped. I very gingerly got out of bed that day and retrieved the candy and was quickly back into bed without getting caught by the nurses. Having success the first day emboldened me to get up pretty much whenever I wanted. The first couple of times I was caught, I was scolded but the nurses soon gave up. It wasn't long before I was out in the hallways and even on the terrace. Since they couldn't keep me in bed I guess they figured they might as well send me home.

Frank at this time had a girlfriend who he married and he also enlisted in the Army Air Corp. The marriage came before the enlistment but I don't really remember the dates of either. Ritchie entered the Marines on his 17th birthday, September 14th, 1943. Shortly after Ritchie left for boot camp and South Carolina, a rather unique incident occurred. One day while I was playing on the veranda I heard a loud crash coming from the bridge. Knowing the bridge was rickety, it didn't take a Rhodes Scholar to figure somebody had gone through it. I took off like a shot and was soon witnessing an incredible scene. A 5-yard dump truck (large for the time) had tried to cross the three ton load limit bridge. The load limit sign had been shot and split so only the bottom of the three on the three ton load limit showed. The front end of the truck made it over but the rear was now in the brook. The hood had flown off and the carburetor was ablaze. It was a sight to behold sitting there in the brook at a steep angle. As I turned to go get my mother she arrived and told me she'd already called and reported it. By this time neighbors from Maple Hollow were arriving on the opposite side. The next incident is strange considering my father and mother visited Ritchie when he finished boot camp in South Carolina, but evidently they never told him about the bridge collapse. After advanced infantry training, he was given leave before shipping out to the Pacific. When he came home, he arrived in Bakerville at midnight and walked down Maple Hollow Hill and into Winchester Road. Although they had barriers just before the bridge he told us he almost walked over the abutment. Luckily, there was a little moonlight so he walked around the bridge and waded through the brook. It was a wonderful homecoming but little did we know that his life would be over in a few months.

Ritchie was killed March 11th, 1944, the recipient of The Silver Star. At 74 years old, my eyes still tear up when I think of him. I have read many depictions of the battle for Iwo Jima and can't help thinking about the hell he spent his last days in.

Within a few months, tragedy struck again when my father suffered a stroke. Afterward, my mother pushed him very hard in hopes of rehabilitation but to no avail. He would drag one foot and one hand was frozen in a curled position for the rest of his life. He fought it with everything he had, putting a ball in the curled hand and working it with the other. He also walked miles and miles dragging that foot, hoping for a miracle. Eventually, we sold the farm but not before he dragged that foot around the entire 380 acres to put blazes on the border. I know! I was the one who helped him over fallen trees, up steep banks, and through the brook. I also blazed the trees where he told me to. When we did sell, we moved to the south end of Torrington. At this point Catherine, Rose, Ernie, and I were still living with Mom and Dad. Both Theresa and Emma were working and living in Hartford and Frank now married was in the Air Force. The house we purchased was fairly large with a small front lawn but had a large back yard with a small barn in it. For the south end, Elton Street on which it was located was quite nice. It was tree-lined and most of the houses were well kept but old. All in all, it wasn't too bad but didn't in any way compare with the farm. Shortly after we arrived I got my first omen of things to come. While I hated leaving the farm, I was excited about being in a new place and the prospect of having kids my own age nearby. Anyway, I was thirsty and filled a glass from the tap and took a big swallow but quickly spit it back. I had been drinking spring water from our well my whole life and had never tasted chlorinated water. To me it was vile and I have to say, in spite of drinking many gallons of it through the years, I still find it vile and am very grateful for our well water here on part of the old farm. Rose was a senior at Torrington High at that time and I went into 6th grade. I had come from Bakerville School that was only two years old when I started. For its time it was modern with desks and chairs that were moveable to allow students flexibility for different projects. We often worked in small groups. The teaching methods there were up to date. South school, on the other hand, was old and ugly. Unlike Bakerville, it was three floors instead of one. The ceilings were 12 feet high with hanging globes for light. I'm sure 50 years prior they were the latest thing but the lighting at best was poor. But the real shocker were the seats and desks that were securely bolted to the floor. They looked like something from medieval times. That first day as I sat at my desk, my heart beating in panic, the girl in front of me turned and smiled. She then did little things to attract my attention in spite of the teacher scolding her. One of the things she did was rock from side to side in her seat, pulling the screws holding it out of the floor, then ripped the pencil ledge off the desk. I knew I had nothing to fear from her; she liked me. But what kind of kids lived in the city? The next shock was at recess when I got to see the 8th graders, some of who were 16 years old. I was around 5 feet tall; there were at least a half dozen kids well over 6 feet tall. While there were kids my size, they weren't the ones that caught my eye.

Somehow I survived that first day and eventually made a few friends. I was doing fine in a quiet way in spite of witnessing quite a few fights including one brutal, bloody beating that resulted in the beaters removal to go to reform school. I loved music and I was picked to be a soloist in a group that got to sing on our local radio station just before Christmas. Christmas itself brought a big surprise. Knowing my family's resources were strapped, I didn't expect a lot but on Christmas morning there was a freshly painted blue bicycle near the tree. I don't believe there was a happier kid in the world. The fact that it was used didn't bother me one bit. I rode that bicycle to the school yard (which was only a block away from my house) every day after school to play curb ball, a game played by bouncing a lively pink rubber ball off a curb or brick building.

One day as I ventured further a larger boy just took my cherished bike and wouldn't give it back. It was just too much for me. I ran to catch him, pulling him off the bike and proceeded to beat the living daylights out of him. When my rage subsided and I stopped punching, I almost couldn't believe what I had done. By this time there were on-looking neighborhood kids who also couldn't believe this little kid could wipe out big man on the block. News got around quick, with both positive and negative results. The positive part was that no one messed with my bicycle again. The negative part was there was kind of a hierarchy in that area and in a months time I had to fight a half dozen more times. Finally I was accepted as someone not to mess with. Some of it was those over 6 foot 16-year-olds kind of adopted me. I even got picked to play basketball at recess by the big guys. By the next year I was just one of the neighborhood kids. It wasn't until I grew up that I realized my fighting successes were because of the heavy chores I had done on the farm. Those city kids had never hefted a bag of grain. Among the many things that have been omitted from this diary is the birth of Sandra Lee Barella, my brother Frank's daughter, on January 4th, 1945.

THE POOL

The pool as we called it was known as Barella's swimming hole to neighbors. This magical place was reached by a path from the back of the barn, through the apple orchard and fields, across Shady Brook Road, into and out of the steep-walled canal and then steeply down to a large ledge that sloped gently into the brook. Erosion and time have lowered the tops and partially filled the bottom of the canal. The pool is still there without the dam so it isn't quite as deep and is now called Summa's pool. Just getting to the pool was both an adventure and a delight. The adventure part was negotiating those steep canal walls by either holding onto saplings as you descended or just running like hell and inertia would carry you to the top of the other side, but you had to grab trees or branches as you descended the steep trail down to the pool. There were lots of skinned knees and elbows from the gravelly path when you failed to execute this maneuver properly. The delight part was as the path wove its way through the fields, there were wild strawberries for keen eyed kids. Anybody who has ever eaten them knows there is no comparison between them and their cultivated cousins. The other delights were twigs from sweet or black birch trees as they're sometimes called that grew along Shady Brook Road where the path crossed it. I

still chew these twigs in early summer when I happen by. I can remember being taken to this Eden when I was as young as three and spent many happy hours there even after we had to move when I was ten. At the pool, the ledge extended both upstream and downstream from the end of the path and the above water part was irregular but around 16 feet by 8 feet, depending on how high the brook was at any given time. The shallow upper end was a foot to 18 inches deep ending by jutting up a few inches before sloping off to deep water. This was a life saver to me because the current was strong and I could reach down and stop myself before going over my head. From that point, the ledge dropped to around 5 feet deep, quite sharply, for 20 feet and the last 40 feet rose to 2 ½ feet deep. On the middle of the dam my brothers constructed, there was a large metal coca cola sign they'd scavenged somewhere. The width of the pool was around 35 feet.

When I was three, my brother Ritchie put a fishing pole in my hands and told me to fish. Of course he or brother Ernie had already hooked one. Naturally, I soon had a bite and excitedly reeled in a small pumpkin seed. They both cheered me on and it became an unforgettable moment of my life.

During the summer when I turned four, I would stay in the shallows pretending to swim and at the same time observing nature. There were many things of interest there both at a point at brook side where grapevines drooped into the water and also on the ledge bottom. I learned more about nature there than in all my years of school. One of my favorite things was an aquanaught spider I observed for long periods under water, eventually catching a minnow. I could see the beads of air it carried on hairs along its body. It was a little creepy seeing the drained dead body of the minnow hanging from the spider's web until a storm and high water washed it away. I also enjoyed watching Damsel flies laying their eggs on submerged grape vines. Occasionally a dragon fly would land on my shoulder and I would stay very still so I could observe its beautiful delicate colors. The tinting of the wings would change with even the slightest breeze. My siblings and I would laugh when a neighborhood kid would yell "sewing needle" with fright in their voice. We knew what bit because we all been bitten by the many horse and deer flies that often bit us at the pool. We had also been bitten by the many yellow jackets and white-faced hornets around the farm and occasionally by a mud or spider wasp or honeybee, but a dragon fly---never. It's amazing but I find so many adults from rural areas that still have a bias against these beautiful and beneficial dragon flies. On these same grape vines at water's edge perched butterflies and moths of every description to peak my interest while I lay there in the water with stripped minnows nibbling at the dead skin on my feet. There were darters (small fish) that would lie very still on the bottom until you tried to catch them and then as the name implies, dart away. I would persist and finally catch one or two putting them in a natural depression in the ledge above the water line that I had filled with fresh water. After admiring my catch for a while, I would scoop them up and put them back in the brook. I was also fascinated by the caddis worms in their armor of pebbles or sticks and the empty shells of hellgrammites stuck to exposed ledge or rocks. Looking back 70 years, I realize I had my own little nature observatory. The deep part of the pool always had a dozen or so of trout along with lots of suckers, dace, pumpkin seeds, and an occasional pickerel

that had washed over the dam at Marsh's pond. There would also be trout just before the dam at the end of the pool. On the upper south side of the pool was an eddy that collected silt to a depth of 2 ½ feet. That was the only part of the pool we avoided because of its muck.

Early one thaw my friend Joe Woodwell made the mistake of walking on the icy edge which was slanted towards the middle where he slid into the pool which was very deep with melt water at the time. Luckily, I had spent so much of my life in icy water, I was able to jump in, grabbing him by his jacket and swam to shore. Now we were in big trouble being soaked and cold. Fortunately I had a stash of matches hidden in the stone wall for just such occasions (I fell in the brook often) so I built a small fire to dry us and our clothes. We knew if we went home wet we would be punished.

During my last year on the farm, before moving to Torrington, I spent much of my summer with Franny Dings. He was a year younger, but being the son of a teacher and his father being an avid fisherman, he knew more about nature than I did but our interests were the same. His dad had a long net with cork floats on the top for some reason, giving us the idea of netting the trout in the pool. Well, we dragged that net from the dam up to the other end, filling it with all kinds of fish. When we had started, the idea was to bring the trout home but when we saw them flapping there after catching them so easily, all the fun was gone so we just tossed them back.

Franny and I also spent time in Maple hollow. His grandmother owned what is now Krimmel's house and kept a few milking cows in a field across the street where we had milk fights squirting each other from their udders. In front of her house were lots of flowers including Holly Hocks and other belled flowers that attracted many hummingbirds and butterflies. It was so beautiful, mental images have stayed with me all these years. Only once in my life have I witnessed anything comparable and that was when I lazed outside the little store in Caratunk, Maine, during my 1985 thru-hike. They also had Holly Hocks leaning on an arbor next to the building that were alive with hummingbirds and butterflies.

As summer progressed, we scouted the brook all the way from Marsh's pond on one branch and Weingart's farm on the other all the way to Nepaug where it became the Nepaug River. On one of our forays, while going through Golbeck's pasture, in between the two bridges in the Hollow, we discovered the largest trout either of us had ever seen. I had caught a 17-inch trout when I was five and this one dwarfed it. It was in a treeless grassy area with steep dirt banks on both sides and the very long, almost shallow pool he was in was almost impossible to approach undetected. The spotting of this trout started a month-long quest for us. It was already mid summer when we started so the current was slow and weak. Franny's father, being an avid fisherman himself, gave us advice and the latest in leaders and an assortment of small trout hooks and encouragement. The two of us started by crawling the last 40 feet to the banks edge and casting worms from a lying position. Gradually, we went through our repertoire of baits---caddis worms, grubs, caterpillars, crickets and grasshoppers of assorted sizes, fish eyes, and three sizes of crawfish. We approached from all sides. From downstream the pool was too long to reach with a cast unless you entered the pool but even with bare feet and great stealth the trout was spooked. After being

bitten by a horse fly one day I thought I had the answer because they would be very lively, even when pierced by one of our tiny hooks. We drifted one down on the end of some floating fly line with a foot leader but a dace would always grab the fly first. Our next ploy was to float different baits down on a little board, then yank it off when it was in the right place. All of it was to no avail, but I have to say we had a great time trying in spite of our frustration. Each and every time we got another idea, we were almost as excited as we would have been had we caught that trout and as wary as that fish was, it deserved to live.

Later that year, my time in Eden ended when we moved to Torrington.

BIG JIM

The events I am about describe occurred over a number of years starting when I was 3 or 4 years old. The mental images I have of them are quite clear because of the nature of these events.

My father had arrived home after attending an auction of some type. I never had all the details at that young age but it most likely was a livestock or farm auction. Anyway, the family was gathered near the driveway on the north side of the mansion in anticipation of Ritchie who was riding a work horse home after my father had purchased it. I don't know how far away the auction was but as near as I can remember, my father had arrived a couple hours before Ritchie and the horse "Big Jim" appeared so I'm sure they came a fair distance. It was an awe inspiring sight to me, Ritchie sitting bareback on this beautiful, giant dapple grey horse so easily as it loped up the driveway and to the edge of the field next to it. Then there was an even more spectacular sight as Big Jim reared up as high as I ever seen a horse rear, dumping Ritchie unceremoniously on the ground. Of course my mother was screaming but Ritchie, while rubbing his sore cheek of his "behind," smiled and said he was o.k. There was some discussion about Big Jim having some sort of problem with his wind but the consensus was that he'd work out fine. For a few years he did exactly that and more. My brothers Ritchie and Ernie bragged about him being born to pull and him being so smart, he almost drove himself. One thing my brothers never attempted after the day Ritchie rode him home was riding him but he was gentle and easy to handle when pulling. Several years later, one afternoon when I happened to be standing in the barn door, I heard a commotion coming from below the crest of the hill towards Shady Brook Road. Then over the crest came Big Jim at full gallop dragging a tree with Ernie on it, with the reins in his hands and holding onto a branch, trying to rein him in. When Ernie saw me standing in the door, he waved frantically with a free hand for me to move knowing Jim was headed there. I was out of there quickly and watched as Big Jim galloped that last hundred yards into the barn and then there was a loud crash as he fell down dead, crushing a wheelbarrow there. The tree was now at the doorway with the butt end just inside and Ernie now off the tree babbling something about him being unable to stop Jim from drinking as they crossed the brook. It was a very hot afternoon and Jim was lathered up from pulling the tree, literally killed himself by drinking deeply while being very hot. At that point, we believed instinct took over and knowing he was going to die, he headed for his stall. After the initial shock, "the whole family was now present." My father hurried back to the

house to call a company that bought dead livestock and arranged for them to pick up the body next morning. It all sounds heartless but in those days it was an accepted and practical thing. We all loved Big Jim but life just had to go on.

THE OUTHOUSE

I must admit I'm somewhat hesitant to write on this subject but it was an important part of farm life. Our

outhouse was located about 300 feet due west of the northwest corner of the servants house, making it within the same distance of the chicken coop and also the barn, making it accessible to all three locations. It was a three-holer, kind of Papa bear, Mama bear, Baby bear style with the traditional half-moon cutout in the door. It had the usual ambiance, spiders, their webs, wasps, and an occasional yellow jacket but for all that was actually a pretty comfortable place at least in spring, summer, and fall. In spite of having running water in the servant's house, (we let the water run slowly to prevent freeze-ups), it became impossible to use our inside flush toilets in the coldest weather. The sinks always had a layer of ice where the thin stream of water splashed. All this meant it was necessary to use the outhouse at those times which may seem almost intolerable, but keep in mind we slept in flannel nightshirts and heavy sox and there were always robes to throw on and boots to go over our heavy sox. We had grown up that way but I imagine it was tough for my mother. During the night it probably wasn't much warmer in our rooms because the kitchen and the sitting room stoves would be down to embers when Dad or Mom would go down and stoke them up.

Getting back to the outhouse, there was always reading material there, including the Sears catalogue which had dual uses. There were also small soft-cover books like Mandrake the Magician and Red Ryder that had small pictures in the upper right hand corners that you could fan through with your thumb, creating a kind of movie.

EASTER

The Easter before my fourth birthday stands out very vividly in my memory because of a very pleasant and unusual trick my sisters played on me. I often tagged along with my sisters when they gathered eggs, but that morning they seemed to be fussing over me instead of just allowing me to tag along. When we got to the coop, I started to gather eggs as usual, being careful not to get pecked by sitting hens protecting their eggs, when my sister Rose called me to come quick to see something. When I got to the nest site that she was pointing at, I couldn't believe my eyes. There in the nest were the most beautiful eggs I'd even see. The one that stands out in my mind had a sunrise with pinky-orange rays around it and there was one with a cross and a couple with beautiful ornate bands. Of course my sisters told me that the hen had laid these special eggs that way. For a while I bought it since I had never seen anyone

coloring eggs. Looking back, these eggs had to be dyed with special decals and I haven't seen any eggs dyed this beautifully in the last 70 years.

THE GRASSHOPPER

When I was around four, I had a very unusual experience. It happened while I was playing on the southwest corner of the lawn at the servant's house. At this time, there was a ditch there that drained a spring across what is now Winchester Road. In fact, there is a perpetually wet area still there today. Anyway, I was playing in this ditch roiling it up with a stick and watching the mosquito larvae wiggle around and whatever else little kids do with water and mud when I heard a strange sound. The only thing I could equate it with were the large flying grasshoppers of which we had hundreds of on the farm at the time. To this day it's very hard to describe other than a loud whirring sound and to me at the time seemed similar to flying grasshoppers. When I looked up, I saw a man in a sitting position inside a strange contraption that looked to me kind of like the framework of one of these grasshoppers, only larger. I could see the man's face clearly and was just transfixed by the sight. Wanting to share my experience with my family, I ran into the house and found my mother and father in the kitchen. The only way I could describe what I had seen and heard was a man flying while sitting in something that sounded and looked like something like a giant grasshopper. Naturally, they thought it was something my mind had created but finally gave in and went to the door where I was leading them. Of course, by this time, there was nothing out there. There wasn't much point in telling anyone else my story, but I knew what I had seen. It was probably 10 years later when I saw a picture of Igor Sikorsky's helicopters that I felt vindicated. By that time, so much had happened in my parent's life, there was no way they would remember the incident. I've tried to research helicopter flights from that time and they match up pretty well, but I couldn't find one documented to be in this area.

KING

During the summer after the pet show, a large somewhat gaunt dog showed up at our doorstep and of course we fed him. Without me even asking, my dad came to me and said the dog could stay if he wanted but reminded me of a dog we had when I was four that turned out to be a chicken killer and eventually had to be put down. He didn't even have to remind me because I had asked to be present when that dog was put down and he allowed me to stay. It had been done very humanely by putting the dog in a large container with a bone to gnaw on and put him to sleep with carbon monoxide but the memory of it has stuck with me even after all these years. I accepted it because this dog had killed 30 valuable chickens, 3 the first time and after he was given a second chance and 27 the second and last time. Anyway, I

knew if this dog was any problem around the farm, he was history. One other thing my dad told me was not to tie him; if he stayed, it had to be of his own free will. Even at 7 years old it made sense to me. This dog had been free and he might just prefer freedom to life with us. When I went inside at dusk that first day, I wasn't sure I'd see him again, even though he had followed me around the whole afternoon. When I woke up the next morning, I went right downstairs and out the door and there next to the steps lay the dog. Naturally, I hugged him and he licked my face and in that moment I knew he was not only going to stay, but he'd shown no interest in the chickens on the previous afternoon. Now it may have been wishful thinking, but he turned out to be perfect in every way. After he was with us for about a week, my dad brought out an old dog house that was stored in the barn and put it near the carriage room of our house for him. He filled the bottom with hay. By this time I had walked many miles with the dog and given him the name King. One day while lying near his new dog house, one of our ducks just walked over and started grooming him. At first I think he was a little uneasy but after a few minutes he relaxed and enjoyed it. It was the beginning of a very close, if a little strange, friendship. Whenever King wasn't off in the fields and woods with me, that duck was by his side. They even slept together in the dog house. One day a strange dog wandered into the yard, growling as he neared King. Before King could rise to the challenge, the duck launched herself like a feathered missile and was soon firmly attached to the back of the dog's neck. The dog, fleeing in terror down the driveway at a full gallop, after which the duck let loose and waddled triumphantly back up the driveway. After that day, I called her Waddles because I figured she deserved a name. While King really didn't need protection, he dispatched any attackers quite easily. I think he enjoyed just standing there and observing.

UNCLE BOB BOLSTER

Uncle Bob, as we called him, was the father of Ritchie Bolster, one of my second grade classmates. He volunteered his time to the school often and in different ways. One of his talents was as a projectionist and he ran many movies for us at the school, endearing him to all of us. He was a very educated man and he motivated us with stories and lectures, but his biggest project was organizing and chaperoning a school class trip to New York City. It was an unheard of wonderful thing for a school full of kids, who most of hadn't been past Hartford, Connecticut, and a few who had not been that far.

For me the day started by rising very early for breakfast and getting in the car with Mom and Dad after hugging my dog King goodbye. As we drove up Barella Road, my father noticed King following close behind so he sped up but it was of no use. King stayed just behind all the way to the school where four busses waited. I was kind of proud having the kids see my dog had followed me and hugged him again before boarding the bus. It was so exciting seeing new places all the way but got even better when we got to the Hudson River. Back in 1944, the Hudson was a beautiful blue on that gorgeous, sunny day. There were boats and ships of every description and we were all enraptured by the many beautiful

scenes. We neared the Bronx Zoo on tree-lined, litter free streets, with well-kept houses on the sides. The zoo itself was also very clean and it was interesting seeing unusual animals. By the time we finished viewing the animals, it was lunch time so the busses took us to the automat which was fairly new at the time. It was great fun putting your coins in and getting anything you wanted like roast beef with potatoes and gravy or sandwiches, pie, etc. The food was excellent and we all enjoyed our lunch. Next on our agenda was the Empire State building. I think we went up as far as the 50th floor and onto some sort of observation deck. While this was still very exciting, we were tiring at this point, and when we got back to the ground floor we were ready to go home. The beginning of the trip home was still great, especially along the Hudson but it was soon dark and I slept through most of the trip home. It seems to me we arrived at the school somewhere around midnight. As I groggily stepped off the bus, I was thrown to the ground by King who had waited there since we left that morning. Standing over me licking my face, he let me know how much he loved me. I hugged and petted him before getting into my dad's car. As we drove towards home, King bounded along, this time just ahead of us in the beam of the headlights. He knew we were going home.

Several months later, Uncle Bob Bolster died. He had spent that last year with us knowing that he was terminal. Not one of us kids ever suspected, in fact I don't even know if any of the teachers knew but it seems more likely than not that they did. Mrs. Bolster sold their house and moved away and I never saw Ritchie again.

TOJO

During the summer that I turned six, I often observed the rooster we had doing what I thought, at least at the time, was unusual. Our chickens during the day always free ranged, going to their coop only for the night. They went pretty much wherever they wanted, scratching up bugs and worms from the grassy areas around the barn and in between the houses. One summer day, as I sat on the stoop of the servant's house facing the row of hemlocks in between the houses, I watched as our rooster lined up a dozen or so of his hens and naturally then bred them. It wasn't the breeding part that amazed me; it was his putting them in a perfectly straight rank. This took him a while but before he mounted any of them they were in this rank and standing at attention. Not being an expert on poultry behavior, I don't really know how unusual this behavior was but it reminded me of Gen. Tojo of Japan whose discipline was legendary. We sang a little ditty about him as follows:

Whistle while you work,
Hitler is a jerk,
Mussolini is a weenie,
And Tojo is worse.

Anyway, I started calling the rooster Tojo after the General.

Later that year, I entered first grade at Bakersville Elementary. About a month before the school year was over, there was an announcement that there was to be a pet show for the students there on the Saturday before summer vacation. It was an exciting thing to look forward to, especially for the youngest of us kids. For a while I felt left out because in spite of having a large work horse and lots of chickens, there was nothing resembling a pet on the farm. I wanted to enter that pet show really bad and after a couple of days I got the idea of entering Tojo in it. I'm sure my mother thought it was insane, but I made sure my dad heard about it. Eventually, after lots of discussion, they reluctantly said I could enter Tojo. I spent time getting him used to being picked up and would hold him on my lap and gently pet him while sitting on the stoop. He seemed to like all this attention and even started following me around.

On the day of the pet show he didn't even mind riding in the car while sitting on my lap. When we arrived at the pet show it was already crowded with kids and animals. Tojo became a little edgy so I stayed in the car with him keeping him calm until it became time to bring him into the ring with all the other animals. When I did carry him in, everything went fine until a couple of dogs broke away and started towards us barking loudly. I then found out just how strong Tojo was the moment when he burst out of my arms in attack mode. There was fur and feathers flying and dogs and cats fleeing in every direction. In the center of that ring at the end was one victorious rooster as he let out a very loud crow. There was a lot of laughing among the adults and the judges brought over a blue ribbon for Tojo. I was as proud of Tojo as any kid there was of their pet.

FAMILY STORIES

My mother told me many times how Dad had annoyed the Buckleys (his tenants in the mansion) by selling booze to their colored cook, but her favorite story was his still in the cellar clogging up and him sending the family outside because an explosion was imminent. I never got an ending for that story but I know the house didn't blow so I assume he got control of his runaway still.

Another story involved a blind work horse we had that was part of a team. As I hear it he was an excellent pulling partner even after this incident. It seems he was grazing on the front lawn when he wandered into the side yard and then into the cellar hatchway. Whether it was open or he fell through the door, I never asked. Anyway, we ended up with a 9 foot horse in an 8 foot cellar. Naturally, when they tried to get him up the steps to get out, his neck would hit the cellar ceiling. My father tried different things for two days to get him out. When everything he tried failed, his one last resort was to hook another team of horses to him and pull him up in whatever condition he would be in. As it turned out, the horse survived it well with just some bruises and abrasions and was soon pulling as part of a team again, but the odor in the house was another matter.

DAD

My father told me of coming to this country at 8 years old as a member of the second Italian family in Torrington. He even told of Irish kids throwing rocks at him and excluding him in the beginning but he was a fairly gifted athlete and by the time he became a teenager, the barriers came down for him. He never forgot about being excluded and when I was four, walking with him on a street in Hartford when I saw a black man for the first time. My reaction was to run and when my dad caught me, he brought me over to the man and had me shake his hand. Later, when we walked away, he gave me a lecture on being left out and how painful it was. Anyway, because of his athletic ability, he was accepted and at some point got a job delivering beer by wagon for Toillion brothers, who were local brewers. I don't know how long he did this but he eventually moved on and became manager of the Farmington House, a hotel on the bridge in the center of Torrington. There were buildings right over the river on both sides of the road at that time. Eventually, he met my mother there, who he employed as a chamber maid before they got married.

His next venture was the Palace Tavern which was a half block away and it was successful enough to enable him to buy a house on the Harwinton Road. By this time there were children and disaster in the form of prohibition was right around the corner. When it hit in 1924, putting him out of a thriving business, he tried to support his growing family by doing carpentry and stone work but just wasn't able to make enough to survive. Like many others of this era, he knew he had to find a way to support his family so he became a bootlegger. If all the older people in Torrington knew what they were talking about, he was a damn good bootlegger too. I can't count the people that came up to me when I lived in Torrington and talked to me like my dad was a God or something and said he made the best booze around. He made enough money to buy the farm with its mansion, servant's house, two large barns on 68 acres and eventually buy up another 222 acres. He built a speakeasy on Shady Brook Road where he sold some of his wares. During some of these years, the mansion was rented to the Buckleys but when they left, the mansion also became a speakeasy at times.

HAYING

The cutting of the hay was done with a horse powered sickle bar mower, its wheels cleated to get traction for the power to turn the blades. I saw either my dad or Ernie operate it most of the time. It cut about a 7 foot swath, so it took some time to do the 15 acres we mowed for hay. The days after mowing they'd come in with the horse drawn hay rake and fluff it up loosely in rows for drying a couple times. If there was no rain, the hay would then be ready to be pitched onto my father's doodle bug. With sideboards, they could stack the hay about 8 feet high. My dad used to let me ride on top of this mound and on one trip up the driveway, the top 3 feet of hay, with me on it, slipped off. It was a nice soft landing with all that hay under me but I was afraid my dad might not let me ride the load any more, but he just laughed and added one more sideboard. After the last haying of the season there would be hay 25 feet high from the loft entry door, all the way across the east end of the barn. Rose and I would pack the hay as it was thrown on the top by walking on it. As soon as the hay was around 8 feet deep it would be time to climb

the trusses and leap off into the hay. It was the most wonderful sensation just after you jumped. Once in a while you'd land on the thorns from dew berry or even goldenrod stalks that were scratchy but it never slowed us down too much. As the haying progressed and the hay got deeper, we climbed higher and higher up the trusses until we could bury ourselves up to the armpits in hay. Mostly it was just Rosie and I, but Ernie was still young enough to enjoy it once in a while. He was a real dare devil and climbed the highest but I would always rise to his level after a few days of experimenting to get to his level. While we are on the subject of jumping, there was another place we jumped. The foundation of the old mill was about 16 feet deep and during the winter the snow would often drift in over 8 feet deep. Jumping into the soft snow was wonderful, but getting out of 8 feet of soft snow was quite strenuous so I would tire of it quickly.

Often when mowing hay, they'd come across wild rabbit nests. They would then bring the baby rabbits home to put in the rabbit coop. With a little care and nursing, they usually lived. Rose would feed them with an eyedropper for a while and then they'd have the best of feed including grain. When they matured they would disappear, a couple at a time. I'm sure they were delicious but were never butchered where I could see and always disguised at dinner, probably as cacciatore.

THE WAY IT WAS

In the early '40's, the only radiator coolant available was alcohol which boiled off very quickly if overheated. Cars also didn't have thermostats and the only means to regulate coolant temperature was a heavy cloth jacket that covered the radiators. In very cold weather, the jacket was kept snapped up until the engine reached the proper temperature by cutting the flow of air to the radiator, then adjusted by un-snapping sections of the jacket when the temperature rose too high. It was a cumbersome and tricky way to regulate temperature but it was all they had at the time.

During the war years, the tops of the sealed beam headlights on vehicles were painted black to prevent them from being seen from above. Since there were never any air raids except for the submarine based Japanese aircraft that did some strafing in California, I guess it was all wasted effort.

We did have four cows when I was very young and I can remember very clearly my dad putting me on the back of one and holding onto me as she ambled around the back lawn. I don't know whether we ate them or sold them, but by the time I was four, we had a milkman and no cows. On very cold mornings, the milk bottles on the stoop would have cream popping out of the top which Rose and I loved to break off and eat like ice cream. When it snowed the milk was delivered by sleigh pulled by a team of horses with bells attached to their harnesses. The result was a beautiful, rhythmic chiming in the still winter air.

