

## **REMEMBER WHEN \$60 BOUGHT A BOY'S SCHOOL WARDROBE? January 20, 1998**

As I grow older everyday incidents cause me to hark back to the long forgotten past. An incident this past week swept me back to the summer of 1940 in a flash.

A local man was mailing a pair of athletic shoes, or what used to be called sneakers, back to the manufacturer. He insured them for \$135, their purchase price, and we remarked at how unbelievable it was that they cost that much. I then, as was once so eloquently pointed out by another writer, "began to stroll down memory lane".

It was the summer I turned 14 and I was toiling away at my first full-time job. Unable to obtain working papers until September, I was working for my Uncle Andrew Hurd. Uncle Andy was a no-nonsense businessman who owned a feed mill in our town. As the name implied, he was Scotsman by nature and birth. I received the magnanimous sum of \$5 a week. Since many grownups were only making a dollar a day in those days, it may sound like big money. The workweek was six days from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m.

My job was to mow the lawn at the mill and at my uncle's home, as well as weed Aunt Bessie's flower garden. I swept the floor in the mill (ever see the floor in a feed mill?) and sort and fold feed bags. Waiting on customers and mixing the various types of feeds rounded out the job. Barely able to lift a 100-pound bag of feed, I was able to jockey them around with a two-wheeled dolly.

I had two main incentives for sticking to the job for the whole summer. I wanted the freedom to buy my own clothes and to pay for my own haircuts. My mother made most of our clothes on an old Singer treadle sewing machine. The material came from three sources: new cloth, feed bags or recycled from old cut-down garments. I hated to wear them to school. I can still remember a beautiful hand-knit pullover sweater she made for me with the school colors and letter on the front. I am ashamed to say I never wore it to school.

Haircuts were also the bane of my life. Dad cut our hair with a pair of hand clippers that pulled at times. It was not that he was a bad barber or that the haircuts looked bad. It was the discipline you had to maintain while he cut it. Your head was held in a death grip with his left hand while the clippers made their torturous way around the sides of your head. Woe betide you if you ever twitched. If the clippers pulled or a wisp of hair teetering on your nose or eyelid itched unmercifully, you endured it.

As I look back at it all today, I realize I am one of the luckiest people who ever lived. There are untold millions yet today who would consider themselves lucky as well to live under the same circumstances.

To make a long story short, it does not take much to send me back down memory lane. I am proud to say that I can listen to Dolly Parton's song "The Coat Of Many Colors My Mommy Made For Me" and Loretta Lynn's "Coal Miner's Daughter" with empathy and understanding. We all also shared the one thing both songs emphasize – plenty of love.

But to get back to the point of this story: I made \$60 that summer and spent it on school clothes.