

Daddy Taught Me to Fish

Written by Raymond Hill

My name is Raymond Hill and I was born on July 20, 1943. I lived and grew up in Grundy County Tennessee. I am the youngest of three children.

In the summer of 1954 at eleven-years-old, I began to think of some way I could make some spending money. Our Father did not give us children an allowance like some children get. He always told us that if we wanted some money for something that He would create a job and we could work for the money. He once told me and my brother that if he could not find anything for us to do that he would have us go into the backyard in the morning and dig a hole until noon. We could come in and eat lunch and then go out in the afternoon and fill the hole up. For that, he would give us a little money that we were asking for. Things like getting in firewood for Mother's old wood burning cook stove and coal for the "Warm Morning" heating stove and drawing water from the well was expected of my older brother and me. These were not paying jobs. This was about families getting by. My sister helped our mother iron the clothes and cook the family meals. This was expected of her, and she received no compensation for that either.

About this time, power lawn mowers had come out on the market, and I had my eye on one at the Western Auto in McMinnville. The price of the mower was \$49.95. A light bulb lit up above my head; if I could talk enough neighbors into letting me mow their yards, then I could buy the mower on credit and pay for it mowing yards.

Early the next morning I jumped on my bike, and with a pencil and paper in my hip pocket, I began knocking on doors and inquiring about mowing their yards on a regular two-week basis. I would look at the size of the yard, and if it appeared to be of a normal size, I would contract to mow it for the princely sum of \$1.00. If it looked pretty large, I would charge \$1.50. By the end of the day I had 27 names on my piece of paper, and the amount agreed upon to the side.

Armed with this list of customers, Dad and I drove to McMinnville on Saturday morning and to the Western Auto where that beautiful bright red lawnmower with a Clinton Engine was displayed. I walked in at 11 years of age and informed the man at Western Auto that I had come to buy the shiny red lawn mower in the window on credit and that I proposed to put down \$5.00 that I had saved up and put the remainder on payments.

What I did not know and would not find out until many years later was that Dad was a personal friend of the manager and had told him that he would stand good for the debt but that he wanted me to gain the experience of buying something and then having to buckle down and

meet the payments. Again, I was only eleven-years-old.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says: "Give a man a fish, and he can eat one day. Teach the man to fish, and he can eat for the rest of his life." Daddy had decided it was time for me to learn how to fish.

The Western Auto manager went along with my Dad's plan and told me that even with my large down payment of \$5.00, a huge balance of \$45 would remain, and how did I propose to pay that. I was more than ready for him. I pulled the paper from my hip pocket and showed him all the customers I now had and that I would come in each Saturday morning and pay him a payment of \$5.00. I told him that doing it that way I could have it paid off in nine weeks and maybe even sooner as I figured there would be weeks I could double up on the payments. The manager scratched his head and said, "Well, seems like you have a good game plan, so I'm going to take a chance on you, but don't let me down." Of course, I told him I would not let him down and I didn't.

That summer of 1954 I had Beersheba Springs looking better than it had ever looked. I picked up a few more lawns to mow as the summer wore on and had the mower paid for in six weeks. It was all profit from that point on except for a little money for gas and oil. I could be seen on any given day rolling my mower down the side of the road with my right hand and carrying a gas and oil can in my left hand.

As I mentioned before, it was many years later before Dad told me about the plan he and the manager agreed on. I thanked my Dad many times later in life before he died that instead of giving me the fish (lawn mower) he loved me enough to teach me how to fish.

And that was what it was like from a young person's perspective of growing up in rural Grundy County in the late forties and early fifties.