

The Sauter Boys and Chickens The Creameries and Saturday night in Tuttle

During a “Cousin Zoom” recently Jim and Vern shared stories of their family having chickens and, therefore, a chicken coop in their yard while they were growing up. Two stories emerged.

Jim had a pet chicken. Likely he had come to know that chicken when the family got their annual addition of baby chicks in the spring (see story below re baby chicks). At some point that pet chicken got stuck in the fence around the coop. A very upset little Vern couldn’t free the chicken. He went to Lydia for help. Lydia got the chicken free, and she sewed up the cut in the chick’s neck! Vern remembers that water leaked from that pet’s neck for the rest of his days in the coop. Presumably until that chick was a part of a delicious family meal.

I think this story has stories in itself. It tells the love of a mother, the passion of a child, and another part of the family food supply. It also tells a reality of life in a small town and being raised on a farm, in that “doing what needs to be done” and “trying anything you can think to try” and “helping wherever you can” were a way of life. It’s kind of the “farm kid/small town” mentality. Lydia’s stitching skills (and she was a terrific seamstress) stretching to veterinary skills when one of her sons needed help exemplifies the readiness and ability to help our mothers. LS

A second “chicken” story from Vern and Jim related the teasing Jim did when little Vern was late for supper one night. Imagination can put together Burt and Vern playing in the schoolyard and forgetting the time. Jim told Vern that he was in big trouble for being late. Vern decided he’d better hide out. He hid in the chicken coop for hours while many people searched for him. Vern says, “If anyone wonders why they didn’t look in the chicken coop while they looked for me. It was because I figured out a way for it to look like the coop was locked from the outside. I remember them calling my name within feet of me, but I was determined not to be found.” When Vern finally appeared (did he get hungry?!), he was covered with feathers from a day in the coop. Lydia was more worried about the chicken lice on Vern than the feathers. It’s easy to imagine the scrubbing Vern got as well as the good feeding. The end of the story has to include that it was Jim who got in trouble for teasing Vern.

Hearing of chickens in Walter and Lydia’s family brought memories of baby chicks as part of Spring in Tuttle:

Vern:

Speaking of the baby chickens’ sounds coming out of the Creamery, I remember the post office having those same sounds every spring from all the baby chicks that had been ordered from catalogs. In my generation the Creamery was operated by the Schielkes.

Linda:

Each spring when farmers, usually farm wives, were ready to start the annual chicken-raising part of life, boxes of baby chicks would arrive in Tuttle. For years there was a store on the west side of main street called The Creamery. I think Russel Elliott and then Walter Krein were in charge of that store. It was where farmers would sell their cream cans full of rich, wonderful cream that resulted in lots of cows being milked and lots of time using and cleaning the separator. The Creamery was also where baby chicks would be picked up in the spring. The creamery closed in the early 1960s when the Tuttle Cheese Plant opened. Mr. Krein was then given a job at the cheese plant.

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Baby chicks would also be ordered and come to the post office. The scent of those chicks in that building is a memory in itself. Farms would have chickens so their family would have eggs and also to be butchered as they were needed for meals. The scent of chicken frying, the taste of fried chicken and the mashed potatoes and gravy which usually accompanied fried chicken are more good memories. The number of chickens on a farm depleted as the months went along, so the baby chicks were always a welcome part of spring. Another memory that surfaced was the "candling" of eggs that occupied Vern, Burt and Alan on Saturday nights in Riskedah's Store. Ruby also candled eggs and was known to hold three eggs in each hand at one time. Farmers would bring crates of eggs to the store where the eggs would be candled to see that they were healthy eggs. "Egg money" was a part of many farm wives' budgets.

Jim's memories of the Creameries in Tuttle, and the Saturday nights that found them busy places.

At one time there were three creameries in Tuttle. One was across the street from Roy Benson's home and telephone center. It was the largest creamery of the three but went out of business before the other two.

The third creamery was located on the northeast corner of the old Post Office block. It was run by Mr. Scheilke, Ervin's dad. I worked there on Wednesday and Saturday nights for several summers with spring and fall overlaps during the early 1950s. Mr. Scheilke had difficulty walking so my job was to bring the cream cans into the store, open the cans, stir the cream and take out a sample for Mr. Scheilke to use for grading the cream. I also poured the cream into a big tank in the back. The cans were five and ten gallons in size, mostly five gallons fortunately since the ten-gallon cans were very heavy. One time I opened a can with a dead rat floating on top of the cream. When the man came to get his cream can and check, Mr. Scheilke took him to the back door, and we showed him the rat that had been in the full cream can. The man was a little upset but took his can and left. I always hoped he didn't take the cream to the other creamery and sold it to them.

Tuttle was filled with cars on Wednesday and Saturday nights as all the farmers and their families were in town to sell their cream and eggs, buy their groceries and visit with friends and neighbors. Many townspeople would also do some shopping on those nights. There were three grocery stores at that time. Main street was filled with parked cars and the grocery stores, restaurants and bars were all filled up. One thing I remember is that Prof Peterson and his wife would often drive downtown and park on main street those nights. Often someone would stop and visit them.

Jim