The Bean Family Battles the Great Depression
By Donald Bean

It was an exciting time to live and grow up in the tiny village of Northfield, Ohio during the Great Depression. It was exciting and depressing. We lived from hand to mouth and from payday to payday when there was a payday, which was seldom. I remember times when there wasn't a dime to be had in the house. But never do I recall a time when there wasn't food and damn good food in the house.

There was the seven of us in the Bean family: Mom (Myrtle Mae Bean), dad (Henry L.), John Robert (the oldest), Claude James (called Jim), Floyd Henry, me (Donald Lee), and the baby of the family, Richard Paul.

John was the brainy one in the family, the one with the good looks, and very athletic in baseball and football. Jim and Floyd were red-haired like our very attractive mom. Jim was gregarious and extroverted and always ready and willing to try new things. Floyd was the shortest in the family, barely five feet tall. A beloved uncle would say of him, "He's so short he has to stand on a stool to kick a duck in the ass." Although short, Floyd had the upper body strength of a circus strong man and more than once came to my rescue when village bullies were picking on me. When they saw that little, fiery redhead heading their way they quickly left off pummeling me.

Paul and I were tow headed blondes. Dad would call us his gold dust twins. We liked that. Paul was a quick study and had a phenomenal memory just as dad did. Paul was also the jokester in the family. Paul loved excitement and risk taking and was an excellent athlete.

The three older boys, as mom and dad, were all born in W.VA. Paul and I were born in Northfield, both delivered at home, after dad quit the mines and moved to Northfield in 1927. Paul made us all laugh when he came home from third grade and announced that everyone in the family were foreigners except himself and me because we were born in Ohio.

I unfortunately was neither as humorous nor diplomatic as Paul. My unfeeling social slurs and blunders deeply hurt the feelings of my dad. For example one evening at the supper table I said, "I am glad Paul and I were born in Ohio because we're not hillbillies." The most stricken, painful look crossed my fathers face as he turned to mom and said, "Do I have to listen to my own son call me a hillbilly?" Mom just sadly shook her head at me.

Another time, I must have been eight or nine years old, I came home from a U. S. Calvary-American Indian shoot'em up movie--movies then was shown at the Northfield Center Town Hall-- all fearful that the Indians were going to scalp all of us in our beds. Again at the supper table I said to dad, "Too bad we didn't have machine guns in those

days." Dad's jaw dropped along with his fork that clattered to the floor. In a voice filled with sorrow he asked, "Don't you think we killed enough of them?"

I'll always be grateful to dad for being proud of his heritage and caring about the rights of others. Dad and mom both drilled into all of us that we didn't bring shame on the family name, you worked for what you got and you didn't take what didn't belong to you. And you always stuck together and defended the family. Dad, who was lean and trim and very strong had about 160 pounds on his five foot, eight inch frame, fiercely defended his boys and when they were hurt or wronged in any way he went after the perpetrators' sometimes verbally and oft times physically.

There was the time when some neighborhood toughs rubbed red-hot chili peppers on Jim's lips to the point where his lips blistered. We later found out they used jalapeño peppers. Dad was furious and one by one he went to the homes of the three bullies and thrashed them, and while he did so he told the on looking parents why he was doing so.

Another time during a baseball game one of the opposing players was called safe on a very close play at home plate. Dad was on the umpire in a heartbeat shouting and cursing that the runner was out. One of the runner's teammates, a strong, well built 17 year old was face to face with dad screaming equally as loud, "He (the catcher) never touched him, never touched him."

With that dad moved his strong open palm right hand; it didn't travel more than three inches. The slap knocked the husky, young boy to the ground. "I touched you, didn't I?" dad said to the prone youth. The argument was over, but the play stood as called.

Dad really got his dander up when in 1940 John was suspended from the basketball team for breaking some rules. John, not a great round ball player, was with one of the star players when the infraction occurred. The star player was not suspended. This really aroused dad's sense of fairness and with fire in his eyes and physical hurt on his mind he went looking for the coach. The coach, wisely, hid from dad not because of cowardice, but to avoid trouble.

Dad's pride and teachings were a code to live by and it taught me to care, to learn, and as a consequence I became reader and a dreamer. I could lose myself for hours in whatever book I was reading. At that time it was the "Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott" series or the "Bobbsey Twins."

Thanks to these lessons I was a people pleaser and always fearful of doing the wrong thing or hurting somebody's feelings. I was especially worried about rousing the ire of dad. Although there was a lot to be liked about him there was an equal lot to be fearful of. And we quickly learned when to shut up and listen to his commands and if we didn't obey his wishes we faced immediate consequences. Mom most times could sooth our pain from his physical punishment and was able to coax a smile or a laugh from us.

We especially loved it when mom would tell about our childhood hopes and dreams such as the time Jim, when he was seven years old, would say, "I'm going to pick a peck of berries (eight quarts of blackberries) and buy myself an 'Oscar." He meant an Austin, a tiny, costly British-built car.

The village was known as the North End, Stop 35, at Kamilovic's grocery store located at Route 8 and Haughton Rd. for the Interurban Line stop that ran through the village until mid-1930 when it disappeared just like money and any jobs of any permanence or good wages.

The village was also sometimes known as sheep country because of some unkind louts from the Hungry Hill (Hungary Hill) section of the big city of Bedford, a city of well over 5,000 souls, while we boasted about 700 people. The Hungry Hill name derived from the high number of men out of work and their hungry families. The Hungary Hill name came from the many Hungarians living there.

In any event some of these big city oafs derisively called us sheepherders when we visited to buy ice cream suckers at the M&M Dairy or buy some rare store bought clothes from Sammons Department Store on Broadway or go to a very rare movie at the Bedford Theater.

Getting back to berry picking, it was an important part of our livelihood and food chain. Our Uncle, Ike Spindler, related to us through marrying Aunt Cora King, mom's maiden name, was King, the champion of berry pickers. He would hang a small washtub around his neck and pick it full as he cleaned out a patch of blackberry bushes it seemed in minutes.

We picked all kinds of berries beginning with strawberries in June at Kitson's huge farm on Alexander Rd. in Valley View. Our entire families, Mom, John, Jim Floyd, me, known as "Duck" for Donald, and Paul, nicknamed "Mooney" for his red-sunburned face, were the pickers. It seemed most of the village gathered by Frank Kamilovic's grocery store at the crack of dawn on Haughton Rd. awaiting the arrival of Kitson' s smelly dump truck which he used to haul used mash from the Bedford whiskey distillery to feed his hogs. They were very contented, happy hogs as was my dad when mom, who later worked at the distillery, would steal whiskey for him that he would drink and become a very different person. Kitson washed down the truck bed with just a lick and a promise prior to hauling us to the farm.

The truck stank to high heaven as we clambered and crawled and pushed and shoved for space behind the truck cab where some refreshing breeze helped diminish the stench. There never seemed to be a shortage of willing field hands to do the back-breaking, stoop-labor of plucking the lush, ripe berries with a payment of four cents a quart. Small hands such as Paul's and mine, we were, all of 7 and 8 years old, might pick four quarts by noon hour which amounted to 32 cents for five hours labor.

As the day wore on the June sun climbed higher into the sky searing us with its heat. The sweat flies were biting as sweat was running into our eyes and every once in awhile a huge horse fly would take what felt like a pound of flesh from our hides. My Ked tennis shoes were wet from the morning dew. I was fantasizing about the cooling waters of nearby BAB", bare ass beach—for we had no swim trunks—when I heard the shout of a savior. "Everyone get out of the field! Out onto the road! We're striking for seven cents a quart." Archie Milani, a star athlete senior at Northfield High School was yelling.

We gratefully left the field and gathered under the shade of a huge Elm tree on the north side of Alexander Road. We laughed and talked and some of us napped awhile Archie and Hilda Horsfall negotiated with Kitson, who was not a mean man and he was not a foolish man. The berries were ripe and had to be picked. The strike was brief. It wasn't long enough for me. We returned to what I called the salt mines for the princely sum of five cents a quart. Big deal!

But wait, my deliverance was yet at hand. As I stooped to the heat of the rich, loamy soil and amid the tasty berries, for they were good eating, picking and slowly, oh so slowly, filling my basket I heard another shout. This was a shout of anger and it came from a red-faced Mr. Kitson and he was yelling at my baby brother, Paul. "You're fired,' he told Paul. "You can't pick berries the right way with the stem on them."
I thought to myself "I have been delivered." "If you fire my brother, you have to fire me too," I defiantly yelled at the boss man (this defiance of authority surfaced early and often in my life and cost me dearly over the years). The boss man responded quickly and said, "Well, what are you waiting for, get out of here. You're not much good anyway."

Paul and I headed for that soothing, cooling "BAB" which was a little nearby creek; we called Boulder Dam, on Cyrus Eaton's Arrow Cottage property on Haughton Road.

As for Archie and Hilda they did well. Archie went on to star in football and baseball at Northfield High School with the potential for the major leagues for his batting talent. Unfortunately a major world conflict, World War 11, ensued and he, as many others, answered his country's call to duty. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps where he was a sergeant tail gunner aboard a B-25 when part of his foot was shot away while flying a mission over Germany.

Archie went on to many achievements: marriage, raising a family working on and later managing a newspaper, working public relations for the American Heart Association serving his community as councilman and many terms as mayor of Northfield Village.

Hilda? She became marble champion of the village. She took great glee in beating all the boys and taking their marbles home with her. She also served as a sergeant in the

U.S. Army WACS during WW-II and was a physical therapist at Hawthornden State Hospital in Sagamore Hills for many years.

Strawberries weren't our only crop. There were raspberries, blackberries, elderberries, blueberries, and currants. Plus all kinds of tree fruit such as cherries, peaches, pears, plums, grapes too and apples. All of them we picked in season. My mother Myrtle was fearless as she climbed high into a tree and gathered the fruits into her basket. She picked from trees on the old Firestone Estate on Valley View Road in Macedonia, in trees on the Eaton Estate in Northfield and at Lydia Kofron's farm where she also did housework for a pittance per day.

Mom would tell us that she had done housework from the time she could walk. Her mother, my snuff-dipping grandma, Addie King, would hire out my mother to neighbors around Kings Run in Calcutta, W.Va., just south of St. Mary's W.Va., on the Ohio River, where mom was born in 1902.

The Great Depression was time of economic hardship. It was a time of men selling apples from pushcarts. A time of long lines of men searching and begging for and failing to find work. A time of jalopies, filled with hungry, proud people evicted from their Oklahoma farms by corporate farms where they had share cropped for generations. John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" pictured it and told the story of the Dust Bowl and America's shame the best.

It was a time of cash shortage of material things. A great period of a lack of brand new things such as cars, clothes, radios, baseballs, footballs and even new baseball bats.

Everything we owned, it seemed, was second hand. Just like Barbara Streisand's haunting, unforgettable rendition of "Second Hand Rose." Everything was taped with black friction tape, bats, baseball gloves, and baseballs. Or else patched such as stockings, overalls—later to have big holes in the knees and be called in style blue jeans.

I can still see my mother's hands holding a huge darning needle with heavy, cord-like thread sewing the cover back onto a baseball or softball so we could continue our ball game at fields either on Birch Avenue or Maple or Chestnut or Electric Blvd. There were fields all over Northfield and they were always in use.

There was a shortage of new things, but there was seldom a shortage of good food, clean, but patched, clothes and certainly no shortage of lots of fun and games and teams.

There were such fun teams as the 'Bloomer Girls' where my pretty mommy was the catcher on the softball team. She had team mates like athletic, talented, tom boyish, Gerty Porter, whose husband Al would become a good family friend and take time to read us the Sunday comics, and Edna Gallagher and many others. Loveable Gerty would later pitch horseshoes with us and teach many of us how to smoke those dreaded cigarettes.

There was dad's team, the WPA Warriors where dad played second base. There was the hilarious time my dad played a benefit game—I think the benefit was a keg of beer for the winning team. It was called "Donkey Baseball" and was played at the old Northfield High School baseball field on Leonard Ave. The object of the game was to sit on a donkey at your position in the field. When the ball was hit the position player would dismount and attempt to throw the runner out.

At one point in the game Henry was at bat and as he hit the ball he had to pickup a baby donkey in his arms and run to first base before being thrown out. By golly! He did it and he was safe. Sure wish I had a picture of him scampering down the baseline with that long-eared baby in his arms. I still have that picture in my mind's eye.

After the games and after the fun came the work of feeding and caring for the family. Mom's work was just starting after she climbed down from whatever tree she might be working in that day. And she continued climbing and picking well into her 70s.

How she did all this work is a mystery. How she did it without indoor running water, without a washing machine and a husband and five, active boys to feed and keep clean with a wood-fired or kerosene cook stove is a miracle.

I can still see two white leghorn chickens flopping and flapping and gasping their last breath after she had severed their heads with a butcher knife, honed to razor-sharpness by my dad on an ancient whetstone. She picked up the lifeless chickens and plunged them unto scalding hot water. Water usually heated over a wood fire in the yard of whatever home we were renting. She plucked the feathers, gutted, cleaned them and cut the chickens into pieces. She then would flour them, bread them and you never tasted better southern fried chicken.

She would then turn to just picked strawberries, or blackberries, or cherries or apples or peaches, whatever was at hand and in season and cleaned them. She then would roll out her just mixed pie dough and fill it with the cleaned and pitted fruit. She then put the pies into baking. Then she turned her attention to cleaning and peeling potatoes, raised in our own garden, usually. Dad was a talented gardener, first because he liked it but mostly it was a necessity to help feed a hungry family. We all hoed and weeded in the garden and plucked orange colored potato bugs off the plants. To this day I dislike gardening.

After mom got the mashed potatoes ready she prepared the green beans, the carrots and the salad and then she mixed a huge pitcher of cold lemonade from freshly sliced lemons. Elapsed time from the chickens, from our own chicken coop—everyone raised chickens in those days--death was one hour and a half.

In addition to these entire tasks mom was the queen of baking in the village. She was famed for her butter frosting lighter than air sponge cake and chocolate cake. It was

a rare baby or wedding shower that a ma-Bean baked cake did not appear. Her fudge her tollhouse and peanut butter cookies were sought after deserts at every function.

Along with preparing three meals a day mom also packed six lunches one for dad and one each for us during the school term, as there was no cafeteria at the elementary school. And what scrumptious, tasty lunches they were. There were few complaints about what was packed for us. That is, until Jim came home one day and announced to mom that, "I don't want anymore of that WPA chicken in my lunch." Apparently some of his more affluent classmates noticed and commented on the bologna sandwiches that were frequent in all our lunches.

A large and tasty and necessary part of our menu was the rabbits, squirrels and pheasants that were numerous in our rural village. Dad and sometimes our older brothers, John and Jim would bag these critters on their frequent hunting trips. Our mom gutted and cleaned and plucked it and fried it or baked and made it lip-smacking meal fit for a king. Dad would often brag that mom could cook a shingle and make it taste good.

Speaking of making things taste good mom in the spring of the year would harvest dandelions from the cindered sidewalks and the sides of the dirt roads throughout the village. They had to be harvested before the yellow blossom appeared otherwise they became tough and stringy. She would pick about a peck basket full clean and wash them and pour warm bacon dripping over them. Now that's a tasty salad.

Getting back to hunting, I was not a good one. The last time I ventured into the field was a disaster. I had been out most of the day without seeing any prey suddenly a pheasant, flushed from brush, flew in front of me. I lifted the 12-guage shotgun. I aimed. I fired and the kick of the gun almost took my head off. Foolishly I had put the butt of the gun under my chin not against my shoulder in the approved manner. I figured, rightfully, that anybody that dumb did not belong in the hunting field.

Washdays and canning days were a chore but at the same time a marvel of how mom knew how to can and preserve the fruits and vegetables to feed us through the cold, hard long winter.

Paul and I had the job of washing last years mason jars. We washed what seemed like a thousand jars but realistically were only hundreds and hundreds of them. Really, just a small task compared to mom's job of filling those jars with the earth's bounty. And she did it well. Into those jars would go jellies of such purity and color and taste that the owners of the Smucker plant in nearby Orrville would be envious.

Into other jars would go green beans, lima beans, corn, carrots and vegetable beef soup, when mom opened a jar of that soup and served it to us as we gathered on a cold winter's day around the kitchen table, the only place we ever ate was the best tasting eating anyone could imagine.

Speaking of cold winters our only source of heat was the wood and coal burning potbelly stove in the living room of our wood frame, rented house. Winter mornings we could see our hoary breath and see ice formed on the inside of our windows. As we got out of bed and our bare feet hit the icy floor, there were no such luxuries as slippers; we made a mad dash to warm ourselves and our backsides around its cozy heat.

And on washday Ma Bean heated her wash water over wood-fueled fires in the yard, weather permitting. Mind there was no washing machine. Just two work worn hands, a bar of brown Fells Naphtha soap, a scrub brush, several wash tubs, a wash board, a galvanized, ribbed board on which to rub vigorously deeply stained soiled work and play clothes. We had precious few, Sunday-go-to-Meeting clothes as we seldom went to church. If we did it was at Christmas time to get that bag of candy the preacher man and his wife gave away in that church on Birch Avenue.

In later years as she looked back on her life, her girlhood as a hired girl, her toiling for her family, working outside the home at Ben Venue in Bedford during WWII, all her labor, she would tell Paul, “No one should have had to work as hard as I did.”

Dad was also a hard worker when he could find work. Steady work, however was not a reality. That is, until the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. It was FDR who founded the Works Project Administration, hence the ball team, the WPA Warriors in later years. It meant of course that schools, bridges, roads, parks, all manner of things would be constructed and men would receive wages for their labor. Not much money and to hear some people tell it, not much labor.

Dad was a cement finisher on many high-rise bridges in this area. Bridges such as the Rocky River span overlooking the Cleveland Metro Parks in Fairview Park, the Bedford Bridge on Northfield Rd in Bedford, the Brecksville Bridge on Route 82 in Brecksville. It was from the Rocky River Bridge site that we would watch the Cleveland Air Races at nearby Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, for free.

Prior to WPA, dad would work pickup jobs, later to be called day, or spot labor. One of these jobs was laying flagstone walks at millionaire, industrialist and railroad owner Cyrus Eaton’s estate in Northfield. From this estate he would later steal a fat goose that fed a hungry family. Two of his fellow-fowl thieves were caught. Fortunately, they did not blow the whistle on dad.

Paul and I would add to the thievery from Cyrus when in 1939 dad announced, “No money, and no Christmas tree this year.” I, all of 11 years old, rebelled and said to Paul, nine, “Let’s take our hatchet and go down to Eaton’s and get a tree.” He was all for it. The night was brilliantly lit with a full moon to light our way from our home on Chestnut Avenue to Eaton’s about a mile away. We came upon a clearing amidst the forest of beautiful scotch, blue spruce and mixed pine trees. From the many tracks surrounding a magnificent Christmas tree already cut and lying on the ground, it was

obvious a struggle and hot pursuit had ensued shortly before our arrival. Paul and I looked at each other. There was no one in sight. We loaded the tree onto our sled and pulled it home to a joyous Christmas season. The statute of limitations has lapsed and thank you the late, Cyrus where ever you may be.

Years later Cyrus got even. He hired me straight out of graduation from Northfield High School in 1946 to work on his estate for 32 cents an hour. My tasks included hoeing in the flower gardens, mucking out the stables and spreading the manure on the many acres of the estate. Many say I'm still spreading manure.

Even more years later, almost to prove their point, I became newspaper reporter at all three Cleveland newspapers, The Cleveland Press, The Cleveland News, both now defunct, and The Plain Dealer, at varying times during a 40-year career from 1954 to 1994. As a consequence of my employment I belonged to the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) that was often invited to the Eaton estate for family picnics.

Mom and dad accompanied me and my wife Olga and our three children, Nadine, Matthew, and Scott, to one of these outings in the mid-nineteen sixties. As it happened, we were standing on one of those flagstone walks dad had laid in 1931 when Mr. Eaton approached us and I introduced him to mom and dad. Dad said to Cyrus, "I laid this walk many years ago." "You did a good job, young man, replied Mr. Eaton". Dad just beamed and I marveled, "Mr. Eaton called my dad a 'young man." It was a magic moment.

As mom and dad worked and toiled to house and feed us, we boys tried to do our part. All five of us at one time or another caddied at Boston Hills Country Club where we earned 85-cents carrying a heavy golf bag for four hours around the course. And if, and it wasn't always forthcoming, we received a 15 cent tip, our labor amounted to 25 cents an hour. But, hey we were out in the fresh air and we played free golf on Mondays.

I began my caddying and golfing at age 12 and with my limited eyesight it wasn't easy following the flight of the ball. I was born with multiple vision problems. Astigmatism, nystagmustism (the eyes would flutter and not stay still) and I was cross eyed. Dad was extremely concerned about my sight, or lack of. As we gathered in the living room he would give me an eye test. "Donny," he would say, "how many fingers am I holding up?" I tired of the game and would reply, "Six or seven." The answer made him very angry. "Damn it. I only have one hand up. Mommy is he making fun of me," he would ask.

Following my completion of first grade in 1935 two Summit County social workers, which were there to send me away to a school for the blind, in Niagara Falls, N.Y. arrived at our house. I was out playing. Paul came running up to me, "Donny, they are talking about sending you away to school." I was scared to death at the thought of being separated from my family. I ran into the house just in time to hear dad angrily shouting, "What are you talking about? Donald Lee (I was called Donald Lee well into high school) passed first grade. Get the hell out of my house." The well-intentioned

social workers left, never to reappear. I am still grateful dad kept me home. I did however, get eyeglasses after first grade and to my chagrin was called four eyes for a time.

It was it wasn't all toil and strife keeping body and soul together during the hard times in the tiny village. Oh no indeed there was time for fun and games. Baseball and football and kick the can, Run Sheep Run, Buckety Buck, Hide the Belt and Halloween Trick or Treating, mostly tricking such as tipping over outhouses. Where this tradition originated from I have no idea but we did it often and there was no lack of ready privies in the rural village as our targets. My dad bragged that he sent his sons out with the insensitive uncaring hooligans on Halloween as insurance that the Bean privy would remain upright.

One full moon, cool October night as the Capt. Gooses Troopers gathered at Tommy Pearse's Texaco gas station plotting our course for the night in drove likeable friendly Homer Malone. Now Homer was a hard working father of a brood of young'uns and we never intended to do him any harm. Spotting us, and knowing what we were up to, Homer said, "You boys better not come near my place tonight. I got me a double barreled shotgun waiting for you."

As we looked at each other we instinctively knew all bets were off. After all a dare is a dare and not to be ignored by any red-blooded country boy. After Homer left we walked slowly to his home on the east end of Heights Ave. Up on our arrival, to our dismay, we saw Homer sitting at the kitchen window guarding his privy. Further, the kitchen light was illuminating the outhouse along with the full moon, presented us with a very serious logistic problem that could only be solved with patient waiting. So we did.

Our patience was rewarded for shortly Homer placed his vision-impaired, nine-year-old daughter on sentinel duty. We all knew she could hardly see beyond the end of her nose. So we silently, softly, tiptoed to the privy. Gently, quietly we lowered the two-seater to the ground and then retreated to the safety of the darkness of a nearby copse of trees. And we waited. Despite having her nose against the window the guard girl could not see our handy work of which we were most proud. That is a tipped privy.

She soon abandoned her post so we began shouting and yelling to Homer. "Hey, Homer. Your s--- house is tipped over." He gave one look and came running out of the house with shotgun in hand and both barrels firing harmlessly into the trees we had just vacated. One member of our troop set a speed record running back to Pearse's.

You have to remember there wasn't any organized Little League or Pee Wee football. There were no sponsors to pay expenses. It was all neighborhood pickup and sandlot games. And our folks paid for our equipment what precious little of it there was.

There was, however baseball fields on almost every street including the one on Chestnut Ave. where we were living in 1939. One sunny day I, my brother Paul, Harvey "Buck" King and Leo McGee wanted to play ball and there were two older boys, Milan

Kapusta and Paul Steele playing catch on our field and they refused to give it up. With determination and grit and not being overly bright I stepped into the batter's box.

Milan, would later have a tryout with the Cleveland Indians and even become their bullpen catcher for a brief time, was on the mound. Paul Steele, who would be killed in the South Pacific serving in the U., S. Navy during WW11, was behind the plate catching.

Milan wound up I stood my ground. Milan hurled the ball. Wham! It hit me right between the eyes. I was dazed and knocked to the ground. The game was over. I was never much of a hitter after that.

After the heat of summer and after the baseball and football were over came the games of winter. Like sled riding on Haughton Rd. hill. We'd wait until some uninitiated newcomer showed up and took a running belly flop and go speeding down the hill. It was then we would go chasing him or her, we had no respect for gender, in effort to catch get close enough to grab the rear runner of the sled we were chasing and ditch 'em. That is, flip them over and off the sled. Then there was bobsledding. Harold "Boyd" Needs had a bobsled that seated six or seven and he would attach it to his car and pull a bunch of us, screaming with laughter, throughout the village. Dangerous, you bet, but it was a great deal of fun.

We also ice skating and hockey games on Steve Trubicza's frozen farm pond and on the Eaton estate lake. We played by the light of day and the light of a bonfire. We played long and late. And some of the players, such as the Spindler brothers, Rupert Albert--known as "Ras"--, Frank and Don, all gifted athletes took it more serious than others. During a heated game when the blood got hot and tempers hotter it was not unusual to see all fighting each other and occasionally breaking a hockey stick over the back of the other and sometimes they were on the same team.

One unforgettable game for me was on Eaton's Lake in the winter of 1939 when I was about 12 years old. Six or seven players were in a wild melee, a scrum if you will, for the puck. It flew free and I swiftly, skillfully guided it down the ice toward the opponent's goal only to be tripped up with the goal in sight. I looked around to see who had tripped me and there was no one near. I looked down at my skate to find my under shorts wrapped around the blade. The shorts were a pair of hand me downs from my big brother and entirely too big for me and somehow split and traveled down my pant leg. It was an extremely cold day, but the game continued.

Christmas, no matter what little money we had, was always special and exciting. Money or no money we always got at least one toy. Most times, of necessity our gifts consisted of school clothes, overalls, today's jeans, socks shirts and underwear.

It must have been 1937 when I was nine years old that I finally received a longed for, treasured gift. That was high-top, leather boots with a pocket on the side for a jackknife. Wearing those hi-tops was almost a coming of age thing.

We didn't mind, too much, about lack of material things. Heck we didn't even know we were poor. After all everyone was in the same boat and it seemed we all tried to help each other.

All our fun and games were not outside the house. There were countless card games, pinochle, poker and kid's games of War and Old Maid. Dad was an avid and talented pinochle player as well as playing an enthusiastic close-to-your-vest brand of poker.

All of us enjoyed pinochle that is unless you happened to get dad as your partner. It seemed he knew every card in your hand and if you should play the wrong suit or bid incorrectly he would fill the air with oaths and shouts of disapproval. Sometimes even with a slap upside the head. One played with dad at one's peril.

We also had jigsaw puzzles and of course our beloved radio where mom would listen to "Queen for a Day" and dream about being on the show and becoming a queen.

She never realized that particular dream but to us Bean boys she was a queen with royal, regal hands that fed us and sewed our initials on our belongings. She would giggle and laugh aloud when little Paul would plead, "Put 'P' on my shirt, mom." Those same, magical hands, when money was not available for a doctor visit, would heal an aching ear with a poultice of warm water and black pepper.

A fever was lowered with a wondrous potion called niter. Those magical hands, and sometimes a kiss, would also heal a bloody, skinned knee or a stubbed toe, a frequent summer happening. Another dream of mom's was to own her own home with an indoor bathroom. She finally achieved that dream in1946.

In the meantime we all listened to our beloved radio shows. We gathered rapturously about the radio conjuring in our minds the pictures of the particular comedy or drama being portrayed by the actors. Mom would listen to her soap operas and her beloved Cleveland Indians and broadcasters Jack Graney and Pinky Hunter.

Dad would listen to Lowell Thomas and the news and also listen to Gabriel Heater, a commentator. Another joke making the rounds then was why wouldn't Mrs. Sweet Potato let her daughter marry Gabriel Heater?" "She didn't want her marrying a common tater."

We loved Fibber McGee and Molly, Edgar Bergen and Charley McCarthy imagine a ventriloquist on radio. We adored Bob Hope and Jack Benny and Mr. District Attorney. I can still hear the resonant tones of the announcer introducing the show, "And it shall not only be the duty of the district attorney to prosecute to the fullest extent of the law all those accused of crimes perpetrated within the confines of this county, but to defend with equal vigor the rights and privileges of all its people."

What a wonderful principle to live by I thought. Every person equal and every person treated equal in the eyes of justice

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We loved Tom Mix and the Ralston Straight Shooters, Dick Tracy, The Green Hornet and Little Orphan Annie. We sent our dimes and our box tops in for magic tricks detective kits and secret decoder rings and impatiently haunted the mailbox until they arrived.

I learned a lot from our close-knit family and from the radio but I learned so much more at school. I loved school I wasn't however an honor role pupil. I am fond of telling my six grand daughters that the only 'A' I ever got in school was when I was absent. Truth is I was rarely absent especially in high school where I had four years of perfect attendance and received a small medal from Superintendent J.P. McDowell at graduation.

I really couldn't wait to get to school especially for gym classes where we got to shower afterwards. A luxury we did not have at home. We all took our turn on Saturday night in the old washtub while dad bathed us. And the younger you were the colder and dirtier the water got. I also remember most fondly our seventh and eighth grade teacher Mrs. Mary Maillard who instilled in most of us a love and desire to learn.

I was not good in math, but acquired life-long a love for words and reading. In third grade after a frustrating day with addition I ran into our house, then on Heights Ave., and shouted, "What's five and six?" Paul, 18 months my junior, was playing under the kitchen table. "Eleven, you dummy," he responded. I was mortified.

There were times of achievement, however no matter how tiny and fleeting. I came home another time from second grade and boasted to mom, "I was the only one in class who could pronounce a two-syllable word." "What's a two-silly word?" she asked. I giggled and said, "Not two silly two- syllable." "What's the word," mom asked. I proudly said "Rainbow."

Another time my love for reading got me in trouble in the fourth grade at Christmas gift exchange. The limit for a gift was a dime. Sylvia Kofron, daughter of Lydia for whom mom did housework and washing, drew my name and spent over the limit for a popular game. I exchanged it with a classmate who had received the book, "Burn 'Em up Barnes" about a racecar driver and I wanted it. My mom was very unhappy with me.

As I said during my schooling I was less than an ideal scholar. In fact calling me a scholar was probably a stretch. I was dependable, punctual and cheerful. However I was defiant of authority and mischievous. I was not mechanically inclined and not at all good at carpentry.

One time in wood shop (industrial arts as it was called) I took a pitted, scarred, wobbly looking foot stool to our teacher Bill Boliantz and asked him if I should coat it with shellac or varnish. Bill, still living in Northfield Center, would later become a revered coach and superintendent, is endowed with a love of all and a great sense of humor.

Bill looked around to assure no one overheard him and with a gleam in his eye and a grin in his voice, said, “Do me a favor.” “What’s that?” I said. “Take it home and hide it in the attic.” And I did. It hurt my feelings not one whit nor did it scar my psyche.

I seldom escaped detection when pulling one of my pranks. Take the time I had a wet shellac brush in my hand and thought it would be great fun to put shellac all over the door handle of the shop door. A window was broken out and we, in the know, opened the door without using the handle. I was busy shellacking a pair of ratty looking bookends, when I heard a very angry voice ask, “Who in here has a shellac brush?” It was the principal J. P. McDowell. Of course I was the only one with shellac. I was suspended from class and received an “F” for the grading period a low mark I could little afford with my bad grades.

Out of school we occasionally got work with local tradesmen or farmers. I recall two such days when I performed, or tried, manual labor and I did not like it one bit. One was on a hot, muggy, humid summer day when I worked with Lee Thaxton. Lee was a roofer and a good one. He was a handsome, mustachioed, family man and a WW11 vet with a great sense of humor.

We were putting a gravel roof on a manufacturing plant located on busy Northfield Rd, our Main St. I was sweating and aching and struggling with every fiber of my puny muscles to pull buckets of gravel up to spread over the hot, steaming, tar beneath our feet. As I labored I kept glancing at the nearby passing traffic. Lee, working three times more than I, exasperatingly asked, “What the hell are you looking at?” I replied, “Oh, Lee I don’t want anyone I know seeing me working.” Lee scoffed, “For as little work as you’re doing don’t worry about it.” Strange he never again asked me to work with him.

Another day I helped the manager of the old Ice Farm, where City Ice & Fuel of Cleveland stored their horses, to thrash. An exhausting full day of work of pitchforking bundled hay onto a horse-drawn wagon and then pitching it into a barn. Eight hours later I received $3. With that enormous sum I took two buddies into Cleveland where I paid our way into the Palace Theater to hear Betty Hutton sing. She had a sore throat and feebly sang one song. No. I did not get the money back.

Speaking of the Ice Farm and money it was there during a carnival in 1935 that Archie Milani paid Paul and me 25 cents each to put on a boxing match. I was five and Paul three. It was a no decision.

Dad we learned many years later was making $32 a month working for the WPA. From this rent of $7 a month was paid. The remainder of the money was spent on riotous living such as bologna and beans and wieners and fat back. One-year dad raised a hog in our backyard on Birch Ave. before the days of zoning laws. That fall we all pitched in to butcher the huge animal. We feasted on pork tenderloin, pork chops and sausage for quite some time.

Many times during those hard times our food and clothing needs were supplemented by the dole. It was known as public relief. I can remember going to the relief office in Akron with my mom to pick up unbleached flour from which she baked the tastiest, crustiest wheat bread. We also toted home navy beans, powdered milk and powdered eggs and dried apples, that tasted darn good on cold winters day.

At rare times we received clothing such as winter coats. One splendid day, I was probably in the sixth grade, I was given a manila-colored mackinaw with brilliant yellow, red and brown stripes. It was warm and I was proud of it. Unfortunately, I let my foolish pride get in the way of warmth and comfort. The first day I wore my coat to school I saw a classmate, a foster child whom we thought was the poorest boy in school, with the identical mackinaw on. I never wore the coat again.

While we were getting our supplies my dad, a proud man, waited for us in a nearby saloon or in our ancient car. And I can recall thinking there's something wrong with a country that can not provide decent jobs for men such as my dad and millions of others.

Our parents worked their hearts and bodies to the bone to provide for us. It's been said that man "works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." Well that was true of both mom and dad.

When my dad, Henry's (his given name was Leffel and he did not like it) workday ended and he arrived home, his labors were not ended. A tired, weary father had many chores to perform. There was the hair on the head of five boys to be cut and he did a fine job. He cut our hair well into our high school years.

Then there was dozens of shoes to be repaired. I can still see him with a black cast iron last between his knees. His mouth was full of tacks and he tapped, tapped a sole onto a shoe and made it wearable again. Sometimes he would heat a foul smelling concoction and glue the sole on.

One time he even turned his hand to dentistry. I must have been eight or nine years old and had two ugly looking projecting eyeteeth. We had no money for a dentist. With pliers in hand dad offered me twenty-five cents for each tooth I would let him pull. "Pull away," I said. "It didn't hurt all that much and fifty cents was a lot of money."

Where dad learned his many skills I do not know. But I do know he was a survivor. He had to be to survive what he went through. He was born in Gassaway, W.Va. in 1898. His mother died when he was six years old. His formal education was sparse; he barely—if at all—finished the fourth grade. Dad did lack education but he never lacked intelligence. He had a phenomenal memory for statistics.

His father Robert, nicked-named "Bad Bob" Bean was not a good role model. Dad told us of his father abandoning himself, his brother, Carl and their three sisters in Oklahoma in the midst of a bitter winter around 1910. The way dad told us his father had been selling whiskey to Native American Indians, that was a Federal crime at that time, and "Bad Bob" fled just ahead of U.S. Marshals.

Dad not only told us of him surviving a coalmine cave in he also showed us the scars. In about 1934 we were living on Rosewood Ave. There was no electricity. President FDR's REP (Rural Electrical Program) had not yet reached our tiny community and we all gathered around the kitchen table, where every family activity took place, in the feeble glow of a kerosene lamp. Dad, a bit tipsy, would roll up the sleeve of a well-worn, blue work shirt to display a ropey, ugly scar on the upper part of his muscular arm.

The four-inch, raised scar was from a coalmine cave in around 1919 at Shinnston W.Va. where dad was trapped under tons of rocks and coal. Rescue workers, dad told us, had to use wedges and sledge hammers to break the slate and free him. It was shortly after that he quit the mines.

In 1996, after I had retired from news reporting, I toured the Exhibition Coal Mine at Beckley, W.Va. just to try to get a small sense of what dad went through while he labored deep in the earth. In small coal cars they took us deep into the mountain. While there the tour guide warned us the lights would be turned off. As the lights went off I never experienced darkness such as that. Totally pitch black. A suffocating feeling and a foreboding feeling of claustrophobia overcame me.

As we left the mineshaft that day and re-surfaced I wrote these words, "Out of the dark, out of the night and into the light. Sunshine never looked so bright."

After dad finished his story about the cave in he rolled up the other sleeve of his shirt to display an equally ugly scar that he said he got from a pool hall owner who stabbed dad for dallying with the owner's wife about 1920 near Fairmont, W.Va. He quickly looked at my mom and hastily added, "That was before I met you."

Dad never told us where his given name Leffel derived. My brother Paul researched it and said it was spoon in Yiddish. In any event dad said his friends called him Lech while he lived in Gassaway. He adopted the name of Henry L. and was called Hank.

Money in those days, to coin a down-home phrase of my sainted Mother, Myrtle, “was as scarce as hen’s teeth.” “Mister, Can You Spare a Dime?” was a popular song and phrase. There was two incidents where a ten cent piece loomed large in my life and made a great impression on my later in my tight-fisted life style.

In the 1930s we always looked forward to the appearance of the papa-rags man or the iceman. In the heat of the summer we begged ice chips to soothe our parched throats. Most times the friendly iceman was generous and when he wasn’t we filched the bits of ice as he was toting his heavy load to the kitchen iceboxes.

However, it was the cry of the papa-rags man, or the junkman as we called him that we looked forward to the most for he was a source of pocket change. I believe he came from the big city of Cleveland. A smallish, thin man who wore dark clothing and drove, in the early 1930s it was a horse and wagon, later a rickety jalopy-type truck through the village shouting “Papa, rags,” He would buy all manner of junk, rags and paper, and old metal and aluminum just everything.

I had acquired a huge pile of rags and sold the whole bunch for a dime. For some reason I put the dime in my mouth. Perhaps for safekeeping, who knows? Running to the house to tell mom I tripped and swallowed the dime. The rest of this story is family lore. A dime could purchase many things in those hard scrabble times, such as a pound of baloney or two or three loaves of day-old bread and even a dozen eggs. Well suffice to say I did my outhouse business on newspaper for the next two days until nature ran its course and the dime reappeared.

The next time a dime had a big part in teaching me the value of money was in 1939 on the banks of the Ohio River at St. Mary’s W.Va. where mom and I and Paul were visiting mom’s mother, Addie King, a widow whose husband John King was killed in an oil field well drilling accident—he was crushed by falling machinery—in the early 1930s.

Grandma was a wiry, tiny mountain woman whose snuff-dipping habit left traces of the tobacco juice on both sides of her mouth and when I was urged many times, to “kiss grandma” I declined.

She lived in a white cottage on a tree-shaded street. There was no insurance, no workman’s compensation and no widow’s pension for my grandmother. In fact she did people’s laundry to make ends meet. One wonderful day she gave Paul and I a dime each to go see the movie, “Destry Rides Again” with Jimmy Stewart and Marlene Dietrich.

We scampered from the house and had some time before the movie began so we went down by the Ohio to play and during the playtime I lost my dime. I was devastated. I was crestfallen. Dejected we walked back to grandmas where I tearfully told mom what happened. Mom was very angry with me and impressed upon me just how many piles of dirty clothes grandma had to wash to get that dime. She finally relented and gave me

another dime. It was a great movie but a greater life lesson.

Despite lack of money, we all got fed and stayed relatively healthy. One remarkable year ma Bean was lauded with a front page story and picture in our local weekly newspaper for her unusual feat of sending all five of us through the entire school year without us missing a day.

Coincidentally it was the son of the editor of that very newspaper that got me paddled on my very first day of school in 1934 at the elementary school still located on Olde 8 Rd. in Northfield Center. Keith Veale was his name. Keith's mother had a job. Keith had money that he showed me during recess. We had been warned not to cross the highway to the inviting Tittles' Drug Store or the Great Atlantic and Pacific (the A&P) we would snicker at a joke going around that Kroger's' had to install rest rooms because all the ladies were going to the A&P.

Did I defy authority? I sure did just as soon as I saw that money I knew I was going with Keith to buy candy. And of course Mrs. Marion W. Bray, fifth grade teacher and principal of the school caught us candy-handed upon our return with our mouths full of the sweet stuff. Our punishment, "You've heard of 'spare the rod and spoil the child?" Well she did not spare the rod, justice, in the form of a wooden paddle, was swift and it was painful and it was five swaps each on our backsides.

And punishment was equally painful at home where the rod, in the form of a 'switch' we had to cut ourselves, was never spared. As we headed for the woods to cut the instrument of our whipping with the sharp pocket knife dad provided we heard him shout, "Don't cut one that will break quick fer" I'll just send you back for a bigger one."

Sad to say the demon rum sometimes turned our father into a brute who beat mom and on occasion who beat us when we tried to intervene. He would also verbally assault her and accuse her of all sorts of wrongdoing in a very loud voice that terrified and scarred us.

Sometimes when we were not around and she would suffer his blows we would, the following day, see the bruises and we would ask what happened and she would protect him and say she had fallen. We knew it was a lie and cry along with our mom. Dad, when he sobered up, would be apologetic and attempt to make amends and said he didn't mean what he did and said.

Mom, having heard the same sad song before would say, "Don't give me that malarkey. A drunken man's tongue speaks a sober man's heart."

Shortly before dad died of prostate cancer in 1971 in Dells Zel, a hill-locked tiny hamlet in Washington County north of Marietta, where mom and dad bought an 80 acre farm upon their retirement in 1961, and dad was sitting at the kitchen table and said to mom, "No matter what happens, mommy. Don't ever forget I always loved you," this after 49 years of marriage. Mom despite her years of toil and back breaking labor would outlive dad by 25 years and pass away in 1996 at the age of 92.

Despite his shortcomings dad loved to laugh and was possessed of a raunchy sense of humor. When John, the oldest, would be getting ready for a date, a rare occurrence given the lack of money and lack of car—and in my case a great case of shyness around girls—John would yell "Ma, I need a clean pair of underwear. To our delight dad would ask, "Is she going to see your underwear?" We'd all laugh and giggle.

Dad, not gifted with a melodious voice, nevertheless, loved to sing. One of his favorites was the "Old Crawdad Hole" and the other was a one-line song that made all of us giggle. It was "I like to go swimming with bow legged women and dive between their legs." I never heard that song again until the shark movie "Jaws" came out.

Yep during the Great Depression we never had much and I lived in a fantasy world. I never felt deprived or left out of things or shunned by my classmates. That is until the ninth grade when the most popular girl in school had a birthday party to which everyone was invited but my self. I felt shattered and lonely.

However I survived and managed to graduate high school, serve three years in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Get married and have three children. I received the G.I. Bill and obtained a journalism degree from Kent State University and have a 40-year newspaper career.

I didn't accomplish this alone. I had help from a loving family and learning the value of a dime. It's true we never had much, but we had love and we had family and we had much laughter and rich, rich memories.

And I always said, "Ain't life beautiful?"