



More to the Journey

In the first month of 1940, E.B. White wrote, “I enjoy living among pedestrians who have an instinctive and habitual realization that there is more to a journey than the mere fact of arrival.” He was laminating the fact that school busses were extending their routes for the children in his village in Maine thus eliminating their long winter walks to the halls of learning. Having walked a couple of miles myself in my elementary years a decade later, I understood precisely the nub of his argument. How else would I have learned to make screeching noises with the wings of maple seeds or enjoyed the adventuring conversations with my fellow walking friends or carried books for a pretty girl or enjoyed a rousing fight with autumn leaves. Those pleasure accompanied my treks to and from Newby Elementary. E.B. White warm-lit that memory. Yes, there is more to the journey than the mere fact of arrival—in all of our life’s journeys illuminated by the genius of E. B. White.

One such journey has been relived vividly this Spring of 2019. And it happened unexpectedly as I drove by the rain-soaked fields of Indiana. Due the nearly daily delivering of rain, this Spring has been one of the most difficult in memory for farmers to plant their crops. Wherever I drove this soggy Spring, I eagerly sought to see the rain delayed emergence of the crops. I witnessed the first corn emerging on my way to dine with friends at the Clayton café in the third week of May. The dark moist brown soil was a perfect stage for the entry of long rows of the verdant green emerging blades. Instantly I returned to the start of my own farming journey that began in the first field of corn I planted. It was 1972 in a small eight acre creek bottom field my grandfather called the McDill bottoms. My grandfather, Jim Davee, had farmed that field since the middle of the Great Depression after moving his family to a small farm on the south edge of Brooklyn, Indiana. Upon his return from “Over There” in WWI, he taught school and farmed at various locations around Morgan County. That Brooklyn farm was the final settling spot in his farmer/teacher and later County Auditor career. There he and my grandmother raised their three boys and two daughters along with sweet corn, field corn, soybeans, seed corn and tomatoes for the cannery. He hand milked a dozen or so cows and raised enough chickens to supplement the meager teachers pay of the era. With age begging he had given up the cropping and had rented the ground out in the early 1970’s. The winter of 1972 he stopped by for what I believe was not an accidental visit. He inquired if I knew of a farmer that might do a better job than the one who had been renting his 40 acres. That was

the reason for the inquiry. However, the motive hiding was an invitation to take a journey-- as it turned out a life changing life long journey.

I grew up a city kid but learned either by gene or exposure to love the smell of soil and the intrinsic rewards of growing things. Gardening was not just to fill the dinner plates and canning jars. My dad grew up on a farm but his life's vocation was a machinist. He worked in the city and commuted daily from our small town of Mooresville. His garden was a masterpiece of vegetables. His love of soil and growing was absorbed by me. In fact, shortly after my marriage in 1967, even though my wife and I lived in a small bungalow in town, I purchased a used 23 horse Ford 9N tractor with a plow and a disk and jumped into the after work garden plowing business. Many folks had small gardens in those days and business was brisk. That venture did not escape the wily eye of Jim Davee. Thus his visit and the inquiry. A week or so later after following possibilities with pencil work, I returned the visit. It began with a "How about me, Grandpa...?"

That winter he and I planned our new farming journey. We considered what to crops to plant, what varieties to plant where to purchase the seed and fertilizer, and who we might employ to do our harvesting. The following Spring with plans in place, I began the journey. I had no problem with the plowing and disking but I learned the simple lesson that there is more to farming than preparing the soil. I had purchased at a bargain price, a larger tractor, an Allis Chalmers WD45 with a plow and disc and planter. The planter was a two row, John Deere model 294. I found a 4-row model for only \$125 and traded up. On sunny Spring Saturday I was off to the fields- planter in tow. I had the John Deere 494 Planter Operator manual in the toolbox. It had charts with what chain sprockets to place at what location to obtain the desired seed population per acre. Then there were charts that matched appropriate seed plates that went in the inside the seed boxes to ensure the seed size of the corn or soybeans would not be damaged. Other charts described what sprockets on the fertilizer boxes would place the right amount of fertilizer next to the rows and how to set the planting depth just right. Yep, planting required more than plowing and disking gardens. The first I field planted that Spring was the "McDill Bottoms"—a deep soiled eight acre crooked field. One morning a week or so after planting and a welcomed shower of rain, I visited the field. An exhilarating sight greeted me — one that will ever be fondly, nearly reverently recalled every Spring—the one that came to mind on the drive to the Clayton Café — there they were.... those rows of green blades of corn— emerging and nestling in the dark moist earth.

The crop was certainly the intent-- the plan—and the goal of arrival, but oh how much more was the journey. It has been a wonderfully fulfilling excursion—one that has not always met with the pleasant success. But it ever has provided more --more challenge—more satisfaction —more appreciation of the smell of fresh worked earth -- more love of the beauty of growing things and ideas. And then, enjoying all the while the associations and sharing with those on the same journey. Jim Davee knew that journey. I consider it possible-- even likely he had read same wisdom pregnant words of E.B.White as well--more to the journey indeed.

Don Adams

Bethel Pond, early June, 2019