

*The following story is an excerpt from a book I wrote several years ago called *Life on the Edge of the Slashings*. The book is a collection of stories and happenings in our neighborhood, the area that lies next to what is now the Manistee National Forest. The land was cutover pine until replanting in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, one of the very successful programs of the Roosevelt administration during the great Depression. The area is known by local residents--even now when reforested--as the "choppings" or "slashings."*

The young bachelor brothers up the road were a good-natured pair. Forrest and Wally liked to join their neighbors in social activities. They played cards, visited from house to house, and listened to the radio. Like the other young fellows nearby, they sometimes tried to court whichever girl was teaching in the one-room school on the corner.

Their own lifestyle was a bit different that most people knew. For one thing, neither trusted the other's cooking. It wasn't that they had different tastes or preferences in cuisine; they both depended on pancakes for their main sustenance. But each made his own. It might have made more dishwashing if they'd varied their menu very much.

They didn't have a real problem with dishwashing anyway, because they kept their batter bowls going indefinitely, just adding ingredients too their supply when the pancake makings got low. There were those who described the batter bowls as art objects, with their various adornments of dried batter. It didn't seem to bother the boys. They flourished on their limited diet.

Entertainment being sometimes hard to come by, the brothers often produced their own. In some cases, they lived enough humorous events to overflow to the good of the whole neighborhood. Like many farmers, when milking cows by hand began to get boring, Forrest and Wally amused themselves by squirting milk into the barn cats' faces. As the cats learned that this tasted good, they obliged by opening their mouths to receive the offerings. This didn't hurt anything as long as the practice was limited to cats.

These two fellows, though, had a young pig that was not in a pen. It wandered into the barn at milking time, and the boys began aiming streams of warm milk toward his mouth, as well. He was a quick study

and soon discovered that he had entered a kind of earthly pig heaven. It wasn't long before he learned how to improve his lot in life even more.

One morning, the farmers went to the barn to milk. They called the cows in from the barnyard where the animals stayed during the night, and they prepared to milk. Wally sat down to his first cow. She was as dry as if she'd already been milked! He stared at her, puzzled, but just then, the pet pig walked in.

That pig was as plump and satisfied as any they'd ever seen, and he even looked a little bit guilty. Furthermore, he wasn't squealing for those squirts of warm milk. He'd already eaten his breakfast earlier that morning, enlisting the aid of a willing cow. She'd lain there, placidly chewing her cud, while the pig filled his belly with the warm Jersey milk.

After they finished their barn chores that morning, the boys spent the rest of the day building a sturdy, escape-proof pen for the porker that had learned how to milk.