

What makes life endlessly fascinating is our ability--even necessity--for being lifelong learners. Not a day goes by without one's acquiring some new knowledge, insight, or viewpoint. Life is not static, and it never seems to reach a plateau where one can truly say, "Been there, done that."

Some of what we learn comes from other people. The examples of skills and ideas I have gained from association with the people around me are indeed numerous.

My father taught me--by example, for as far as I remember, he never said anything about this--that work is not unpleasant. Even jobs that aren't one's favorites can be made much more agreeable by both attitude and some creative thinking.

Dad milked cows--by hand--for many years. Now I know that he never liked to milk. I learned this only after those days when the Milking Shorthorn cattle had been bred over to a beef shorthorn type. But, since he sat and milked twice a day for years, Dad became a fast milker and one who devised ways to make the task more interesting.

In his case, the fact that he was a "kid magnet" helped. The neighborhood youngsters were very likely to appear at milking time and sit in the barn while Dad stripped the milk from the roan and red cows. He would often tell a story or instigate a game of Twenty Questions. The milking time went very quickly.

The young can teach us a lot in a very straightforward manner. Once, many years ago, I was picking up potatoes in the garden. I had a bushel crate and was rapidly moving down the row, filling the crate that became heavier and heavier to move.

My nephew was with me in the garden. He could not have been more than seven or eight years old. As I struggled with the weight of the potato crate, he said, "Why don't you start at the other end of the row so you are filling the crate on your way to the edge of the garden, and you won't have to carry it back full?" Of course, it made perfect sense, and I have repeated that advice to others on occasion, most recently in the sap woods where I saw other family members filling heavy pails, going from tree to tree--away from the direction where the

tank was parked. How much easier it is to carry that empty pail to the farthest tree and work back toward the tank.

For years, when we sheared sheep, I would get blisters on my fourth finger and the space between my thumb and forefinger. Finally, this year, I applied a bit of logic I learned from my niece.

When she was playing a lot of racquetball several years ago, she would have pain in a shoulder or knee--I don't remember just which, but she would have a lot of discomfort after playing. Then, she decided to use "an ounce of prevention." She took a tylenol pill before playing instead of afterwards when she was sore.

Why didn't it occur to me sooner to use a little prevention with my shearing hand? So, the last couple of years, I have wrapped a band-aid on the vulnerable finger and a large adhesive bandage between my thumb and forefinger before we began to shear. Not a blister appears with this bit of cautionary action.

Of course, we learn some other tricks and behaviors that would be best left unlearned. My brother taught me to swallow air and burp at will. He also taught me to say an unacceptable word and then told me to repeat it over and over to our mother. I did that, and I learned that Ivory soap doesn't taste all that good. My language has never been a bit salty since that day. So, maybe I learned both negative and positive actions that time.

I have learned from Runo the importance of innovative thinking and acting. After months of silently thinking about it, he built me a rug loom from scratch. Years ago, he built a dual-purpose hay barn/lambing barn, including the system of lamb jugs and mixing pens that are in full use right now. He made a sheep squeeze for hoof trimming primarily from an old hay rake, and he built an "unroller" for round hay bales that works like a toilet paper holder. The ideas he has put into practice over the years are at work all over the farm.

So, has he learned anything from me? Well, yes, I taught him English. So, we all make our contributions.

In every interaction with another human being, in every book we read, embodied in every skill we learn, our lives and our minds expand.

Every day is brand new experience, and we are sure to reach evening with the acquisition of something that had never occurred to us before.