

There are several pictures of my father that I like, but the ones that look like Dad are the snapshots that show him doing some kind of work. If the photos had included more area, most of them would probably have shown the figure of a little girl in the background. I tagged along year round from an early age, and all summer later on when I was old enough to be required to spend the days of nine months of the year in school.

A picture I came across this afternoon was Dad splicing the hay rope. This photo was taken in the 1950s. We hauled loose hay in those days, and unloaded three sling loads per wagon load. The little Ford tractor pulled the hayrope that—with a system of pulleys—provided the means for hoisting each sling load of hay high into the barn above the mows.

Very rarely, that heavy rope would break. This usually happened after the rope was quite old, and had been subject to the stress of lifting hundreds of loads of hay into the mows. When the rope did break, it caused a lot of extra work and trouble. When there was still hay that was raked into windrows and ready to haul and storm clouds gathered in the west, it would not have been surprising if a man under pressure, warm, covered with chaff and sweat, would have been ornery or impatient, but I don't remember that it was ever that way.

I kind of suspect now that Dad liked to splice rope. There is a kind of craftsmanship that goes into making a good splice. There was a special pointed stick that stayed behind a post on the barn floor. Dad used it to pry apart the strands of the rope in order to insert the new piece, strand by strand.

The picture of my father, Einar Erickson, splicing the hay rope shows a man who is dirty and hot. He is sitting on a potato crate, legs stretched out in front of him. The bottoms of his work shoes look worn. He has looked up, presumably when the person with the camera got his attention, but he is still engaged in the process of splicing the rope. I know that he is not finished, because his tongue is sticking out of the corner of his mouth, a family trait that is noticeable when one is concentrating on some task that requires precision.

Dad is wearing a felt hat. Sometimes, he had a straw hat, but more often, his headgear was an old, worn out "dress" hat of wool felt. The men in our family of that generation needed large hats, so a grosgrain banded black or gray felt hat that had seen a lot of wear as a "good" hat became the one Dad wore on the farm. He was wearing denim overalls, not bibs, but the kind we just call "jeans" or "carpenter's pants" now. And, though the picture is black and white, I know that his shirt was faded blue chambray 100% cotton—made in the U.S.A. Sears or Montgomery Wards carried these shirts in their catalogs until the sixties or early seventies, and they were the shirt of choice for many farmers.

Dad is sitting just in the edge of the barn floor. His feet are stretched outside, and he probably was enjoying a little breeze on the hot summer day. His finished splice might not have looked pretty, but it was

strong and tight enough to go through the pulley.

I think, often, about our Amish neighbors who do not want photographs of themselves. While I understand their reasoning for this, it seems a shame—not that they don't have pictures of themselves— but that they don't have that visual documentation of their own family histories. We talk about it sometimes, and one young woman said, as she ruffled the hair of a charming and handsome little boy, that she wished, sometimes, that she had pictures of her children.

Even more, though, I think they would like to see the members of their family that had gone before them. We look at old pictures frequently, not just the ones of our parents and others of the generation we knew personally, but also the grandparents and great-grandparents that we don't remember well or whom we never saw. And, it is interesting, as well, to see my ancestors, both those who were in my lives when I was young and those that died before my time —as young women and men and as children.

It occurs to me, also, that it would have been interesting to have voice recordings of those in our families who have gone before us. I can hear, in my memory, the way my parents spoke, and the voices of other family members I knew “first hand.” But, I wonder how my grandfather Lars sounded. Reading his letters, both in Swedish and English, I can conjure up a voice in my mind, but I really don't know.

So, we are grateful for the old photographs of people in our families. And, it is also interesting to look at pictures of ourselves as young children and just wonder what is going on in those minds. I suppose we could look in the mirror and wonder the same thing today.

