

Many years ago, we were paid for some task that I can't recall, and we used the money—I don't remember exactly how much it was, either—for a pair of binoculars. They aren't fancy, and I was not even sure what the magnification strength was until I looked at them today. The brand name, Nikon, is familiar, of course, and 8X25, I suppose, tells how strong they are. Thinking back about it a little more, I think the binoculars were priced at about a hundred dollars.

They have turned out to be one of the handiest and most used tools in the cabin. I don't think many days go by without my picking up those field glasses, as we used to call them, and checking out something that is too far away for me to identify with only the help of my eyeglasses.

How many deer are pasturing the field across the road? I pick up the binoculars and count. And those four deer that were standing so still? They turned into sandhill cranes when I looked at them with the help of the binoculars.

We have spotted a lot of new calves over the years with these field glasses. Why is Black Effie standing there all alone? What is that little red spot on the Speicher Hill? How many calves in that bunch today? All of these questions and many more have been answered by picking up the binoculars and taking a closer look.

They lie on the table this time of year, handy to pick up and look at a bird in the marsh or at one sitting on the power line. We get closer looks at eagles and hawks flying over or perched in the trees at the edge of the field. Baby killdeers, camouflaged by their coloring, are easy to spot with the help of the binoculars. And that pair of geese—how many goslings are they herding between them on the way to the water?

Uncle Albert had a pair of field glasses that lay on his south window sill as far back as I can remember. We didn't have any binoculars at home at that time, and it was a big treat when Aunt Mabel and Uncle Albert let us look through them. We turned toward our own barn down the road—so near it was through the glasses!

Albert kept track of the area around him with those field glasses. In another age and with an opportunity for more education, he might well have become a biologist or botanist. All of Nature interested him.

He also had some ideas about what people were doing to waste their time. My uncles who farmed together had a rotobaler at that time—it made small round bales that were deposited on the field and could be left for later hauling, as the rain didn't damage them like the square bales most people had. But, when they had been lying in the field for a couple of weeks, it was good to kick them over so the undersides would be dry before they were hauled.

Two of my cousins had been assigned this task. They were in the field, moving down the row of bales, bending over a little at each bale. Albert spotted them and immediately took a closer look with his field glasses.

My dad happened to be there talking to his brother at that time, and when Albert, assuming the boys were picking up night crawlers to go fishing, began to berate them from afar, my father began to try to explain what they

were doing. Albert didn't let him get out more than two words before he interrupted: "You aren't doing a hell of a lot either!" Dad laughed about that the rest of his life.