

## INTROSPECTION

*by Mike Harris*

Not happy with the suggested topic I have chosen Potpourri. My title for this piece and the choice of subject matter are influenced by Father's Day. I am going to talk briefly about important moments in my growing up.

The first was my first paying job. I was five years old, we were living on a farm and my father hired me and paid me every day that I did the job. One penny at my plate at breakfast time after the job was done.

The second big moment was when the family went to town for shopping and I stood in front of the candy counter in the General Store. My father said, "It is your money – spend it any way you want. I will not say anything about how you spend *your* money." With that he walked away and left me to make my own independent choice.

The third incident came when I was nine and my brother was six. We had just moved off the farm because Mr. VanEtten, from whom my father was renting on shares, would not renew the agreement for an extended time. We got to the city, my father and mother found a place to live on a Thursday, and on Friday my brother and I were taken to the public school. My father enrolled us and we were told to wait for him to pick us up after school. We were both still wearing farm clothes, bib overalls, heavy farm shoes, etc. We really stuck out, which caused hazing from the city children and led to fights right as school closed for the weekend. My brother and I fought back-to-back and though we gave a good account of ourselves, the numbers were against us. When my father showed up he sternly commented, "You were fighting." My brother, trying very hard not to cry, I answered, "It is all your fault!" "My fault?" "Yes, we came in farm clothes, the kids picked on us and we had to fight back." My father looked stunned and then said one of the most important things that have stayed with me my whole life, "Mike and Teddy, I want to apologize. I never meant for this to happen. I just was not thinking straight. We will take care of this tomorrow." On Monday, dressed in city clothes we looked like everyone else, period.

The fourth incident that helped set the pattern of my life was when I was eighteen and got my first job in the real world. My father gave me an ad from the Sunday paper: "Shipping clerk. Address on Nineteenth Street between Sixth and Fifth Avenues." His instructions, "Be there before seven in the morning. Be first in line." I answered, "O.K." I was there at six forty-five Monday morning. I had to hold off some aggressive kids who tried to make me leave, but I was still first in line when a man approached and said, "Who was here first?" I spoke up, "I was here first. I have been here since a quarter to seven." He looked at me and said, "Everybody go home, you come with me." I did not at the time realize that the elevator man told him that I had been there since six forty-five. He took me into the factory and told me to go into the office and sit down. Not long after he came in and got behind the desk. The nameplate said "ROSENZWEIG". He looked at me and said, "You look like you really need this job. What is your name?" "Meyer Harris, and yes I need this job, but Mr. Rosenzweig, I have a proposition for you." With a look of surprise and raised eyebrows he replied, "You have a proposition for me? This I have to hear." "Mr. Rosenzweig, I am a quick learner. If you will pay me six dollars for my carfare and lunch the first week and what I am worth after that, you will have a good deal." "Who decides what you are worth?" "You are an honest man. You would not cheat me. You will decide what I am

worth.” He sat quietly for a moment, then extended his hand across the desk. We shook hands and said, “Go to the elevators in the back of the factory. You are hired, and a young man will show you what to do.”

The next big event that took place was when my mother kicked me out of the house for not living in her house by her rules over two years later. By this time I had become a fully accredited cutter in the firm with a union card and \$90 a week pay, living at home. I owned a car, and was giving my mother half my salary. One day, on a Wednesday, I came home late. The door was latched. I banged on the door. My mom opened the door, gave me a suitcase and said, “You will not be a bum under my roof. So long!” With that she started to close the door.” I stuck my foot in the way and said, “Mom, you can not get along without my \$45 a week.” “I got along without before and I can get along without again. You will not obey my rules. Here is your suitcase. You can get the rest over the weekend. Good night.” And she shut the door. Angry, I slept that night in the car.

This brings us to about 500 word limit. I will only explain Mom’s house rules, and that will suffice for this piece. “You will be in the house by 10:30 P.M., Sunday through Thursday, all week. You cannot give an honest day’s work if you do not get a night’s sleep. That is dishonest and cheating. I will not be a partner to this kind of action. My house, my rules.” Upon appealing to my father he said, “Her house. Her rules, period.” That was that. Further explanations of these incidents would make this a novel or a short story, way beyond 500 words.