

Chapter 7

GROWING BOYS IN THE HILLS

The boys include the twins, Roger (RB) and Rodney (RJ), Thurman (TG), Hubert (JH) and Hildred (HH). They usually addressed or spoke of each other by these initials.

Many of the following stories are from the unpublished “Autobiography” of James Hubert Warner. The original writing was done in late 1982 and early 1983 when the author was 78 years of age.

My Uncle Hubert’s stories stimulate my imagination. I visualize my father and uncles doing the many activities that he recorded for us. The time they were growing up was a good time.

It is easy for me to think of a late fall day with my Dad or his brothers making a trip to a favorite tree to gather chestnuts. Walnuts were another favorite, and they spent time in the winter cracking and picking out nutmeats both to eat and for their mother to use in baking.

Another story was about the watermelons that had been planted alongside the tobacco field. When these ripened many of them were busted open and eaten on the spot-- sometimes they only ate the heart. During the early mornings near the end of harvest when the temperature was cold they were at their very best. Everyday called for one or two trips to the melon patch.

One spring Thurman and Hubert were assigned the task of planting a bag of pumpkin seed. Thurman was to dig and cover a hole every four feet and Hubert was to drop three seeds. As the day warmed the holes got farther apart and then so did the rows. During a rest break they broke out the center of an old stump, and to shorten the job they put the rest of the seeds in this hole and covered them. A few weeks later MH called the boys over to see the amazing number of pumpkin vines growing out of the stump.

A winter project was building a sled. They wanted a bigger sled than the one MH had made for them. This meant going into the hay mow where they were not to go, using boards they were not to use and also the saw, brace and bit that were forbidden. Thurman wanted to build it wide



enough for a horse to
pull.

When it was finished it was
too big to go down the shoot
from the hay mow. They had

*Thurman began his love of horses very young
Hubert (on sled) was still growing into his hat*

to knock it apart and reassemble it on the barn floor. To pull the sled they used some of the forbidden twine normally used to tie up shocks of wheat or corn. On the trial run a rock turned the sled toward the steepest part of the hill. Hildred fell off first and then Hurbert. Thurman hit the rail fence at the bottom of the hill. The whipping was one they remembered even in later years.

Three young, precocious boys, like so many of us with creative imaginations, devised a plan to pull their small sled. Thurman, Hubert and Hildred tied two eight-month-old calves to the fence. After a struggle they finally had fastened a pole across their necks for a yoke. Thurman rigged some old horse harness to strap them together, but before the calves were untied Roger and Rodney came by and convinced them that they would be unable to hold them once they were untied.

The urge to have a team pull them around instead of just Ole Bill struck again. This time it would be a roan cow coupled with Bill. Bill was a gentle Morgan horse usually teamed up with "Ben" for field work. A horse collar does not fit a cow so Thurman improvised with an old one and rope. There was much adjusting of the harness and the crupper. A cow's mouth is not made to hold a bit like a horse. The cow's teeth hit the bit which held her mouth open. When this "team" was untied the cow began to thrash uncontrollably and broke some of the harness, fell over the creek bank and landed on her back in panic. Thurman had to cut a strap to free the cow. A piece of that strap was later used to administer the punishment.

Note: I don't know what it is about young Warner boys being on a farm. In the next generation it would be Thurman's sons, Pat and Jim and I, which on more than one occasion, would create situations calling for similar punishment. At a very young age the boys told me that you could see five miles to Sunbury from the top of the silo. We did. Aunt Jo administered the punishment. Cousin Ruth (Warner) Lees remembered that

some of us were tied to a tree so we would stay put. Cousin Harvey remembers the time

when Uncle Thurman came home and caught us on the roof of the cow barn. We carried

firewood from a distance across the road for a long time.

Another time my family arrived at the farm, having driven right from church. I was anxious to float a boat I had made in Bible School. Pat, Jim, and I proceeded to cross State Route 61 to the creek and it was on our return that Uncle Thurman became my favorite uncle. My Sunday clothes and new shoes did not fare very well in this adventure.

Uncle Thurman pointed out to my Dad that he had brought a boy with a toy boat to water.

I was grateful that he shifted the blame.

The summer following the cow-in-the-creek event, MH brought a pair of Shetland ponies to the farm. The boys were content for most of the summer, riding them bareback and devising ways to drive them as a team. Thurman found a way to hitch them together but soon complained they were too slow and again wanted his own horse.

It was about this time that Hildred, only six, convinced his mother that he could ride a pony to town for the thread she needed. The pony returned home shortly after leaving, followed by a boy on foot with a broken wrist.

Meanwhile, Rodney and Roger, now teenagers, announced they wanted to earn their own money. The only cash crop was tobacco. Other crops were usually used for feed. The twins negotiated with their Dad to raise their own crop. The plan involved planting double the usual acreage and combining their efforts to produce the larger crop.

Uncle Hubert described the procedure. Early the next spring Thurman and the twins hitched Ole Bill to the plow and MH began the preparations for an area to start the seedlings. The area was leveled, raked smooth and a huge fire was built to burn weed seed and fungus from the soil. All five of the boys gathered and added sticks and firewood.

Next a wooded frame about sixteen by twenty-four of eight-inch boards was built, tobacco seeds were planted inside the frame and it was covered with a loosely woven material made for that purpose. (Later in Xenia while I was still in elementary school my father built a smaller but similar frame for starting radish, lettuce and tomato plants.)

Setting the tobacco plants was a muddy event. MH plowed furrows just after a rain. Four barefoot boys set the plants about four feet apart. In one row Rodney punched a hole and Hubert dropped in a plant. Roger and Thurman did the same in the next row. It took two days to set all the plants. Later the younger boys were employed to take care of the worms during part of the summer. The older boys topped and suckered each plant.

One of the stories my Dad told was about a dog they had trained to grab and bite the worms off the tobacco plants. Hubert would later write that he and Thurman were paid ten cents a hundred to pull and kill tobacco worms, and some days they would get as many as five hundred worms. Dad told us that one reason that he did not smoke was because there were always worms in tobacco leaves.

In the early fall some of the relatives came to help when the lower leaves of each plant were removed and hauled to the drying area. Sometimes Louisa, her cousins Sirvy Carpenter and her sister were the stringers that ran a needle through a number of leaves to make bundles that were tied on alternating sides around a special stick about three feet

long. These were placed across drying racks for several days until they were ready to hang in the tobacco barn.

Thurman carried the bundles of leaves into the barn where MH handed each bundle up to Roger who passed them up to Rodney who hung them where they would continue to dry until spring. The barn was filled with smoke to aid the drying. This procedure was done three or four times during each season as the next layer of leaves matured in the middle of each tobacco stalk and then later when the top leaves matured. The bundled leaves were sold to a tobacco house in Calais in the spring.

Calais was the nearest town. About a hundred people lived there. It had four tobacco houses. There was a two-story school, a church, a blacksmith shop, a restaurant-store and a church. Dad told me that on Saturday night they hitched up the team and went to Barnesville and sometimes to the big town, Quaker City. That's where the action was.

Around 1895 a two-story schoolhouse with four rooms was built. Drinking water for the school came from a spring in the Atkinson's Woods. Each day, two students were appointed to fetch fresh water from this spring. They carried the three-gallon bucket to and from the spring, about two hundred yards from the school. The bucket was set on a table in the hallway where a dipper was used to fill a tin cup. Many shared the cup unless they had their own. You were not supposed to drink from the dipper that went into the bucket.



Calais School

RB wrote, "I started to a one-room country school (Calais, Seneca Township, Monroe County). We walked a mile in snow or over mud roads. Frozen ground with deep mud puddles meant being splashed with muddy water in the winter unless there was plenty of snow. Often we crawled through a barbed wire fence or climbed a rail fence and walked in the fields. Schools were eight months, later eight and one-half months. Teachers often gave prizes for perfect attendance. We did have the famous McGuffey Readers, the McGuffey Spelling Book, Overton's Physiology, Irish's Orthography, Harvey's Grammar (when we had a teacher who could teach it), Geography, Rays first, second and third arithmetic and a Spencerian writing tablet; also a bucket and dipper for water, a big coal stove in the center of the room. Outside were 'administration buildings,' one for boys and one for girls used even in below zero weather."

Uncle Hubert gave us a clear picture of his beginning school days:

On the first day all new students were asked to come up front and sit on recitation benches. The teacher, Tom McMullen, sat back of a desk and asked each one of us in turn to come up and stand back of him and while looking over his shoulder, name the letters of alphabet as he pointed to them. He used his knife as a pointer. It had an open blade, and smelled strong of tobacco. I was scared but managed to perform correctly. Some did not know any of the alphabet.

Right away I was to start spelling and to learn phonetics. At first our small group sat on the recitation bench, spelling out the word letter by letter and sounding out the phonics and identifying proper marking. A bit later we stood in a line up front and the words were pronounced. We pronounced each word, spelled it and then pronounced it again. It was no time before he had me reading, spelling well and writing sentences.

The arithmetic was easy by comparison. I could add and subtract and knew most of the multiplication tables pretty well the first day of school. After being drilled on addition and subtraction for some time we moved on to multiplying which seemed easy and then to short and long division. We had to do some writing each day. They called it penmanship. One of the marks of a good student was to master good penmanship.

The general idea was that each student could advance in each subject as fast as he could. You could advance to the fifth reader and still be in the second arithmetic or visa-versa. The teacher usually decided the level of operation but the student could move up on his own and prove he could do it. With RJ pushing me I nearly closed the gap between myself and TG by the time we left the hills. I must write that I enjoyed school.

All those that could not spell well regardless of age, stayed in the beginners class. All the others continued every day in the same class. McMullen had everyone line up in front. He pronounced the words rapidly and you had to respond at once. If you missed a word the person below you gave it a try. The first person below you that spelled the word correctly would move up above you. Who ever stood at the head of the class at the close of each day got a 'head ticket.' This was a little piece of cardboard about one by two inches with a bible verse on it. The next day the class would line up in the same order as they left off the previous day. The head ticket winner moved to the foot of the class. In 1914 I got the most "head tickets." ...JH Warner

To finish the eighth grade in that day was an accomplishment. The occasion called for this picture which includes cousin Roy Groves.

A Certificate of Examination and Participation in Township Commencement was issued to those who did. Harvey Warner has a copy of his Dad's certificate. This certificate states:

“Issued at Calais, Ohio June 15, 1912, to certify that Roger Warner of the Township of Seneca and Monroe having passed the examination required by Law, as evidenced by written notice filed with the clerk of the Board of Education of said Township, and thereby becoming a successful applicant, has taken part in the Township commencement held in said Township on the 15th of June 1912, by declamation in accordance with the provisions of the Law, and is therefore entitled to this certificate By order of the Board of Education of said Township.

Signed by the President of the Board and the Clerk.” The Clerk of the Board that signed



*Roger and Rodney Warner
and Cousin Roy Groves*



The Calais High School 1914-1915.

Rodney and Roger Warner are on either side of the center stove. The teacher is in the front row on the right side near the stove. Notice the bucket by the stove used to carry coal in and ashes out. Thurman and Hubert were in one of the classrooms downstairs. RJ had kept the pens that he used in school. Penmanship was very important. His pens are very similar to the pens that I used in grade school. The pen point was carefully dipped into a bottle of ink and would write for a few words. A part of the skill was to dip for just enough ink so it would not make a blot while writing.



Ethel wrote, “My father was very proud of his penmanship and he judged people by the way they wrote. I don’t know what he would have said to one of his grandsons that told me he never liked to write and for that reason he was going to be a doctor. I am sure that Dave Warner (17) is a fine doctor but I understand he still doesn’t like to write.”

Uncle Hubert wrote, “I remember the excitement concerning Haley's Comet in 1910. The family talked about it for days before the time it arrived. Some of it was scary talk. Apparently there were all kinds of predictions in the papers about what might happen. The advice was to prepare smoked glass to look through. We were all out in the front yard one night to watch. It was a beautiful night. All I saw was a wide strip of yellow light that looked like lightning standing still. I was disappointed.”



This covered bridge near Calais, Ohio, was crossed over many times by more than three generations of the Warner family and their relatives (picture from Betty Morris)