

## **Life on a Desert Farm**

by John Skeen

My first recollection of our farm 10 miles outside of Roll, AZ (50 miles east of Yuma) with Dad, Mom, and all four of us kids — **Calvin, Jerry, John and Joan** — was living in a one room building.

### **A One-Room House for Six**

This building served as a bedroom, living room, kitchen and dining room. A small wood burning stove was used for cooking and heat. We burned mesquite wood. This was in the 1940s during World War II.

The roof was corrugated sheet metal, without any insulation, or other material attached to deaden the sound of rain. Lying in bed, you could view the corrugated sheet metal above your head. The only door to the house opened on the north end of the house.

### **Screened Walls and Canvas Flaps**

The walls on both sides of the house had a full length screen, without any glass. Mounted on each side of the building, a short distance above the screens, were canvas flaps. During inclement weather, the canvas flaps could be lowered to cover the screens.

### **A Diet of Flour and Beans**

I recall the infrequent times the family went grocery shopping. A very large sack of flour was purchased, along with a goodly supply of dried beans. Some potatoes and onions would be purchased, along with some other supplies. Pinto beans were usually bought, but occasionally other varieties of beans were included.

### **Sifting Weevils from Flour**

Each time preparations were being made to cook beans, the beans were poured on the table, and very carefully checked through to ensure the cooked beans would not be crunchy when biting down on a small rock. The flour was always sifted before use. Little insects, called weevils, would invariably appear in the flour, and to minimize human consumption of these creatures, sifting was required.

### **Boiled Beans for Dinner**

The usual fare for each day consisted of the following: pancakes for breakfast, dried boiled beans for dinner, and another serving of beans for supper. Once in a while, Mom would cook potatoes and chicken. Salted pork was another possible change to the diet. Salted pork was also used as flavoring for the beans.

Blackie, our dog, ate people food, not dog food. Apparently one evening he became tired of eating beans, and went out for a time. When he returned he brought his own supper. Blackie had fresh rabbit for supper that night.

### **Un-pasteurized Milk**

When I first started to school, a left over pancake with peanut butter was taken for lunch. Later, the school had a hot lunch program. As part of the payment towards the hot lunch, milk from one of our cows was taken to school in a gallon jar. The milk came from a freshly milked cow. It was not pasteurized, homogenized, or otherwise processed. The school cook would use the milk for cooking applications, not drinking.

### **A Missing Pet Rooster**

On the farm we had a small flock of chickens. A chicken was butchered now and then. I recall coming home from school one day and found we had a couple of visitors for the evening meal. Uncle “**Bud**” **Francis Orville** and Aunt **Irene Henry** had come to visit. That evening we had a delicious fried chicken dinner, enjoyed by all. Sometime later, I went to locate my pet rooster, and he was nowhere to be found.

We had one unusual hen. This particular hen would lay double-yolked eggs, about every other day. This hen did not lay an egg daily. After laying her egg, this hen would announce to the world how proud she was to have produced a double-yolked egg. After laying her egg, the hen would go from the nest, jump up on a fence post and crow.

### **Getting A Cow’s Attention**

We had a Holstein cow that gave me a hard time when trying to milk her. She would kick, step in the bucket, anything to cause me to give up trying to milk her. I had observed that when my older brother, Calvin, milked her that she remained still. I asked him what to do. He picked up a wooden pole, swung it and hit the cow across the head. That day she allowed me to milk her without flinching.

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