

Plain
REDEMPTION

— Amos Raber Jr. —

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This book so beautifully illustrates the covenant of redemption. Just when it seems the roots of a godly heritage are vain, Jesus hears the heart cry of a sin-sick soul. Our Savior then takes the *mess* of sin, applies His precious blood through the *miracle* of redemption and resurrects the reality of Amos's childhood dream. A *message* of hope and inspiration for readers of all ages and stages of life.

-Nelson and Sarah Coblentz,
Executive Director of Gospel Express Ministries

This is a book that will tug at your heartstrings. A story of how the Lord works and turns tragedy into redemption!

-Eduard & Christine Klassen

Amos Raber's journey through tragedy and pain is a story you will not want to miss. He speaks from the heart of his childhood, his love for music, and his struggles with God in the face of suffering. He bears testimony of the great grace which God gives a broken man or woman

Jerry Eicher,
Author of My Amish Childhood

What an excellent, inspiring read! Addiction, abuse, and the loss of loved ones leaves Amos trying to hold on to life! By the grace of God Amos chooses faith over fear, and love over bitterness. This story is a beautiful picture of what God can do if we allow Him to shine through us in spite of our circumstances! A highly recommended read!

Linda Miller
Faith View Books

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife and children for their uncommon patience and belief me.

Thank you for your love and support.

The stories and memories in this book are true to my best recollection. To protect the privacy of some people mentioned, a few names, places, and details have been changed without altering the integrity of the event's meaning.

If there are any inaccuracies or misunderstandings in these stories, they are the author's alone. After discussion and if necessary, the author will accept requests for corrections for the next printing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am ever grateful for the opportunity to write my story, or at least part of it. I am forever indebted to my Heavenly Father for His saving and sustaining grace in my life and without His Redemption, the story wouldn't be worth telling.

Margaret. Thank you for being my wife, you have been a bigger part of God's redemption in my life than you could ever imagine. Thank you for encouraging me to write my story and for helping to make the time to write in the midst of our busy schedule. I love you so much and I'm truly grateful for the privilege of doing life with you.

To our five children...

Cole, Logan, Brooklyn, Joshua and Brielle

I love you with all my heart and thank God for the privilege of walking beside you as you grow. I never knew I could love so deeply, and I will forever treasure in my heart all the memories and smiles you give me. My prayer is that you will always maintain a soft heart toward

your heavenly Father and His perfect will for your life. Therein is the only place of true peace and contentment.

I bless you, as your earthly father, with the words of our Heavenly Father,

“These are my beloved children, in whom I am well pleased!”

I would also like to thank everyone that helped me recall memories including my parents, Amanda’s family, several of Amanda’s friends and lots of my friends and relatives. People have encouraged me over the years to write a book, but I was never willing to take the time to go for a walk down memory lane. Now, I am so glad I did. Over the past one and half years of writing, I’ve responded in multiple ways.

Sometimes I was overwhelmed with warmth as I recalled precious moments from my childhood, other times I felt a chill in my spine when recalling something not so pleasant. I also laughed a lot. My family would come running to see what I was laughing about. Normally I would stop writing and share the story with them. I also wept. Sometimes memory lane seemed as dark and lonely as it did the day it happened. My chest burned with pain just like it did in that particular moment many years ago. Sometimes I wept freely as the tears flowed down my cheeks. They weren’t always tears of sadness, sometimes they were tears of solemn joy as I marveled at God’s sovereignty.

HOME SWEET HOME

*At five in the morning our house came alive
We were up and ready to meet the day
Milking cows by hand I couldn't understand
Why life had to be that way*

*It was Mama's good cooking and Daddy's hard whupping
That kept us on the straight and narrow way
We went church on Sunday, back to work on Monday
It was the only life this country boy had known
And it's stamped on my heart as home sweet home*

*BBQ burgers fresh off the grill
Mama sure knew how to do them well
Sitting on the front porch eating homemade ice cream
Now seems like a dream*

*There's a special place in my heart for that eighty-acre farm
Sitting up on a hill off the old dirt road
Where this little barefoot country boy thought he was a slave
Sometimes he'd do anything to go back to those days*

—Amos Raber Jr.

Chapter One

HELP! WE NEED HELP!

It was actually official: Amanda and I were married. The first half of our honeymoon was over, but we still had another week before going back to work. We planned to spend the first few days moving our belongings over to the Waky House, then the rest of the time just tidying up and making it our home.

It was Monday, December 30th, and we started our day around midmorning. We needed to go into Goshen for some supplies. I went out and started the car so my bride would have a warm ride into town.

"Hey, Sweets," I said as I came back into the apartment, "we're still on our honeymoon. After we pack, let's go and I'll treat you to a meal at Ponderosa."

"Sounds good," she replied with a smile.

We made the short drive into Goshen and within a few minutes, were seated at a table for two. Although our chit-chat flowed freely, we couldn't afford to lose track of time. It was moving day and we had lots to do!

Back at the apartment, we got busy packing her things: small bags, big bags, boxes of all sizes, all holding something valuable to her. We started carrying things out of the apartment and stacking them neatly in the back of the Ford SUV. Finally, it was full. The rest of her items and mine in Millersburg would have to be taken to our new house in another load.

“Mr. Raber,” she said with a sheepish grin, “Don’t you think you should let me drive? It is my SUV ya know.”

We had recently traded her car in for the larger vehicle, and she was excited to drive it. There was some snow on the ground along with heavy fog hovering in the air, but the temperature had risen a bit. Driving was a little dangerous because of the patchy mist, worse in some places than others.

With a wink, I took a seat behind the wheel instead.

We turned left onto US Highway 6 and headed west on the way to our new home.

“Hey, Sweets,” I said, “I’m going to take a slight detour and show you where my new boss lives.”

As we traveled through the soupy air, we got lost in conversation and, being new to the area, I wasn’t familiar with the roads.

Suddenly, the road I was looking for was upon us. As I attempted to slow down for the turn, I found an 18-wheeler in my rearview mirror bearing down on us. I couldn’t risk an accident, so I chose the next road and we would just have to backtrack a little.

We safely slowed and turned onto Elkhart County Road 9 heading north. The local country radio station was playing a new song by Patty Loveless called “How Can I Help You to Say Goodbye.” It was one of our favorites, and we sang along, not really paying that much attention to the meaning of it. And the fog persisted as I drove slowly, holding hands with Amanda across the center console.

It was a moment that I never wanted to end.

Just the two of us enjoying life together; just a couple of honeymooners in love.

Without warning, Amanda sat forward and screamed, "Stop sign!" but it was too late.

We were already entering the intersection when an oncoming pickup truck crashed into Amanda's side of the SUV. We spun in circles and came to rest in the field across the road.

I was knocked unconscious. When I woke up, my head hurt and my knee ached. I looked over and saw my new bride as she sat there with her hands in her lap, her head limp against the back of the seat.

What just happened? I thought. *What is that noise?*

I tried to open the door to get around the car as quickly as I could, but pain raced through my leg. I managed to get out and look in the direction of the noise. My brain was as foggy as the atmosphere.

Finally, I could see—people standing in a neighbor's yard across the road. *What are they doing?* I thought. But it didn't matter. I needed to help Amanda.

The door was dented, but I managed to pry it open.

"Amanda," I called weakly, but she didn't move as if she were sleeping. There was no sign of injury, not at first. But then I saw a gash and some blood on the side of her head just behind her eye, I grabbed her arm and shook her harder.

"Amanda!" I called. She still didn't move.

Panic gripped me and a tsunami of fear overwhelmed my senses. I tried one more time, but to no avail. Turning around, I fell to my knees and hit the dirt, crying out, "Oh God, please don't let her die!"

As the bleak outline of the sun tried to break through the low-lying clouds, I thought for a moment that perhaps God was punishing me for things I had done in my past. I begged God to forgive me, and there

on my knees in that field, I committed to follow God for the rest of my life no matter what.

Exhausted and still muddled, I started walking as fast as I could towards the people across the road.

“We need help!” I yelled. “We need help!”

Then I heard sirens in the distance.

Reeling with shock and exhaustion, I buried my head in my hands and wept. How was it possible that our world could change so drastically in mere seconds? Would this be the end to more than our honeymoon?

Chapter Two

HELLO LIFE!

It was a fair, sunny February day in Daviess County, Indiana. In many ways, I'm sure it was typical in that little Old Order Amish community, with the regular hustle and bustle of life going on. After the routine chores were all done, the three Raber children left with the pony and cart for the two-mile drive to the local Amish school.

Since it was a Monday, Dad would normally have been gone already. But on this day, he stayed home to care for his wife. Her labor had started during the night—her fifth pregnancy—and that dawn broke with new hope and expectancy.

The fact that Dad was even home undoubtedly created some curiosity among the older siblings as they left for school. Mom had no doubt been busy preparing the house for her absence with cleaning, baking, and mending clothes.

She did the laundry and hung it out on the wash line to dry behind the house. Dad did some work around the farm, perhaps mucking out

the stalls or mending a fence that a horse had kicked over. I wasn't there, not yet, but I write this based on our growing up days as well as Mom's recollections.

It was 4:00pm when Dad rushed to the neighbors to use the phone to call the taxi driver known in the community as "Doc Hill." After finishing the chores, he hurried the other four children off to Uncle Joe's house across the field then flew into the house to get dressed. When Doc arrived, Mom and Dad folded themselves into his shabby old car and raced off to the hospital in the nearby town.

Doctor Fraiser was our family physician, and immediately began caring for Mom. One hour later, it was official.

"It's a boy!" Doctor Fraiser announced.

On Monday, February 17th, at 6:30pm, I was born weighing in at seven pounds, one ounce.

Mom and Dad had the name chosen ever since they knew Mom was with child. If it was a girl, she would be Lydia, named after my Mom's mother. And if it was a boy, they would pass on the namesake of my father, Amos H. Raber.

A few days later, the three of us arrived back on our 80-acre farm to begin my life in Montgomery, Indiana. Mom, Dad, and me...

... Amos Raber Jr.

My parents now had five children: Marlin Ray, 10; Kenneth Lee, 9; Regina Rose, 6; Olen Jay, 4; and me.



As far as I was concerned, there was no greater place in all the world than Montgomery, Indiana. Our house sat up on a little knob off a back road with very little traffic. When someone did go by, we normally recognized the vehicle. Our property consisted of our house, a barn,

the grinding shed, a tool shop and milk house, the chicken house, the turkey barn, and a pig building we called the feeding floor.

One of my very first memories was when I was three years old. My parents decided to put a short brick wall around the front of the house. My dad was, and remains, a hard worker. It was a hot, sultry day in southern Indiana, and Dad was getting the bricks cut to size and placing them. He was using an old-fashioned barrel mixer with a little engine attached to mix up the mortar. I watched carefully as he walked back and forth, carting those heavy buckets of concrete. He would start the job after the morning chores then keep at it throughout the day, stopping only for lunch and maybe a few cold drink breaks.

We always had at least a dozen or so of the tall, sixteen-ounce glass bottles in the milk house. They stayed ice cold in the water tank where the milk cans were cooled after each milking and prepared for the milkman to pick up the next day. I was ever-fascinated by my dad's ability to get the job done. He had what seemed like an endless stream of energy and strength, but I'm sure he tired more often than I could see.

I admired him so much!

What was my role? I played with leftover pieces of bricks Dad had cut, and occupied myself quite well as I tried to build something of my own. You could say I had a very healthy imagination.

Meanwhile, my father set bricks until he ran out of mortar, and then it was time to pour a few more bags of dry powder into the mixer, add water, and start the engine. That old Wisconsin four-cycle motor was by no means new and it didn't have a self-winding starting rope. It always needed some additional coaxing before it would run the way it was supposed to, but that wasn't a problem since Dad was a mechanic.

I watched as he leaned over the engine and made some adjustments to the carburetor. I also remember seeing the starter rope dangling from his hand.

Dangling... dangling.

Suddenly, the rope caught in the crankshaft, spinning out of control, and rapidly tightened up. It slipped off his hand.

But not his little finger.

The next thing I saw was Dad jumping around, hunched over and clutching his hand as he moaned in pain. Adrenaline raced through me as I stood helplessly watching. A few hours later—due to some old-time story about faster and better healing—Dad's little finger got a proper burial just on the other side the lawn fence.

May it still rest in peace.

Chapter Three

IN THE HANDS OF MY FATHER

Eighty acres doesn't sound that big now, but as a young boy it seemed like half the universe.

A farm like ours held highlights for every season of the year, but spring was extra special. After a cold dreary winter, spring brought new life in every way imaginable.

The animals seemed to anticipate the change as much as we did. They had spent those last several frosty months eating hay and stored grain, but soon the pastures turned green and they enjoyed the fresh, luscious grass. The brown lawn developed a sage tint, and soon enough we'd get the push mowers out of the shop and take them to Dad. Then he performed his annual maintenance and sharpening of the blades before starting the mowing season.

After a few long pulls on the starter rope, the little Honda engine coughed out some white smoke and roared to life. Oh, the excitement

of that first mowing as we pushed that cranky cohort across the lawn as it chewed up and spit out all it could eat.

In those days, sleep seemed like an absolute waste of time, and morning couldn't come soon enough. My eyes opened as I awoke to the sound of birds chirping and Dad working outside. I'd hear him singing through the open window as I got ready, so I knew he was close by. Maybe he was mixing a batch of feed for the animals or getting the horses harnessed and hitched to the plow for a day of turning the sod, preparing it for seeding.

It took me mere seconds to jump out of bed, get dressed, and barely stop to say "hi" to Mom as I ran through the kitchen on my race outside to find Dad.

One morning, I sprinted to the barnyard where he had two horses hitched to the manure spreader. With one scoop at a time, he would load the spreader. And when he looked up and saw me hanging on the side of the gate, he stopped for a break and walked over to me.

With one hand on the gate and the other resting on the shovel, he stood there smiling, sweat dripping off his nose.

"Good morning, Son," he said cheerfully as he repeated his favorite sunrise dictum. "If every morning would be as nice as this morning, it would be a nice morning every morning. Why don't you run up to the milk house and grab a cold bottle of soda for me?"

It didn't take me long, especially since I was sure he would share some of it with me. I raced to the milk house and stuck my hand in the frigid water where the milk cans from that morning's milking cooled in preparation for the milk man. Finding one frosty bottle of suds, I gripped it tightly and dashed back to the barnyard gate where Dad waited. He'd reach for the bottle with one hand and into his pocket with the other, pulling out his pliers. With one quick motion, the sealed cap was gone.

Without any hesitation, he put the beverage to his lips and raised the bottom high into the air. I watched in awe as Dad's Adam's Apple bobbed in rhythm to the once-full container that was suddenly nearly empty. At some point, he paused for a breath.

"Wow, that's good!" he exclaimed.

Then, he'd hand it to me for a few swallows, but only a few since the temperature of the liquid was hard on my throat. He'd then lovingly tell me to return the empty bottle back to the milk house for recycling.

It felt like his hands could do anything.

MY DAD

*I'd get up in the morning, wipe the sleep from my eyes
I'd look out through the window at the early sunrise
That's when I'd hear his voice, across the air waves
It's a part of my memory that will never, never fade
He was a hard-working man from his head down to his toes
I loved to watch him work as the sweat dripped from his nose
He'd lean upon his shovel with a hearty "Good Morning,
If they'd all be this way it'd be a nice morning every morning!"*

Chorus

*And he'd sing "What a beautiful day for my Lord to come again
What a beautiful day for Him to take His children home"
I loved to watch him sing, he'd give it all he had
And I remind myself of him, he's the man I call my dad*

*He was good with a hammer, a chisel and a plow
No matter how it looked he could fix it somehow
He'd mend all the fences with a smile upon his face*

*There's not another man that could ever take his place
He chose to raise a family, some little girls and boys
And when he went to pick a wife he made the perfect choice
He never started something that he could not get done
That precious little woman is the one I call my mom*

*And he'd sing "What a beautiful day for my Lord to come again
What a beautiful day for Him to take His children home"
I loved to watch him sing, he'd give it all he had
And I remind myself of him, he's the man I call my dad*

—Amos Raber Jr.

I must have been around five years old when a few big trucks with massive drills pulled into our driveway. After they spoke with Dad for several minutes, the men in the trucks made their way out into the field where they started the drilling process, testing our land for veins of coal.

Sure enough, they found it!

The day finally arrived when you could see them coming from a distance—a convoy of big, yellow, heavy equipment leaving a cloud of dust as they rumbled across the gravel roads of Daviess County.

They were strip mining our property, and I was overly fascinated by the sight. I sat for hours and watched as the huge Drag Line bucket thundered to the ground, pulled forward by a huge cable—the bucket forced into the ground by its own weight. As the cable hoisted the overflowing bucket into the air, the driver rotated the machine to dump the earth onto the growing pile. The big diesel engine puffed clouds of black smoke as it struggled under the weight.

The bull dozers were slow but mighty as they chugged back and forth; the driver raising and lowering the massive blade. I could hardly

take it all in. The Coal Bowl Scrapers were similar to a tractor trailer combination. As they drove, they dropped the center of their machine, which appeared to be a big basin. As the bowl scraped the ground, the dirt would begin to fill the container.

It was amazing since they had the ability to create their own train. If the ground was especially hard or if it was muddy, each Bowl Scraper was equipped with a hook in the front and a heavy pin in the rear. They would simply hook on to each other and create a team, pulling all together in one accord.

They worked a long time to strip off the dirt. And what seemed to be without warning appeared a gigantic hole in the middle of our field. It was a huge pit when they had finally reached the coal and were ready for the trucks to haul it out.

The dump trucks and semi-trucks came and went in an endless parade, meeting each other as they shared our little gravel roads. They drove down into the pit and waited for their turn to be filled, the loader giving the maximum amount. Then, the horn would sound!

When the waiting driver heard the blast of noise, he immediately started the intense trek up the steep hill as the machine shuttered under the load, diesel engine belching black smoke.

One by one, they came and went.

We were strictly forbidden to play on the machinery, but in the evening when the cows were all milked and the mining workers had left, those big yellow machines were a welcoming sight. My siblings and I would sneak across the field and play on them as long as we could, until we heard the faint sound of Mom or Dad calling for us.

My favorite part of the coal mine was a dozer driver who went by the name of Randy Chicken Man. He was such a cheerful kind guy! With Mom's permission, my siblings and I would go and stand at a safe distance while we watched the miners, and when Randy Chicken Man

would see us coming across the field, he would wave and sound his horn. I think he loved the attention as much as we did.

During his break, he would bring his loud clanging dozer to a stop close by the fence where we stood. Even before he opened his door we could hear his laughter. Then the moment we waited for...

...he'd invite us into his dozer and offer each one of us a lollipop.

It's funny what you remember as a kid. Mounds of dirt, cold drinks and lollipops, and the hands of men that seemed so invincible.

Like the hands of my father.

Like my hands before the accident.

Now, I was standing in another field...

...my hands helpless as my new wife Amanda lay unconscious in the front seat.

Chapter Four

LIFE ON THE FARM

After the coal mine went through, it left us with two ponds that became my hangout when I wasn't working the farm. Catfish, bass, and bluegill were the daily catch.

One afternoon while fishing, I found a crippled Mallard duckling. I quickly rescued it and took it to the old chicken house that wasn't being used. I found a heater hood the perfect size. I filled it with water from the pond, hoping to make the duckling feel right at home, but I wasn't convinced it did.

I loved the little duck's company, and marveled at its elegant feathers. But no matter how much I tried, that little duckling never seemed to develop mutual feelings. Finally, I heeded Dad's advice and carried the bird to the pond, releasing it back into the wild.

I loved spending time at our two ponds fishing or swimming. But fishing always required bait, which meant I needed to find a shovel and a spot where I thought there might be earth worms. But in the spring,

that task was easier. All I needed to do was go out to the field where Dad was plowing with a team of horses and a single bottom plow. I could quickly fill my empty pork-and-beans container with worms as I trailed behind him and pulled them from the freshly turned sod.

Then off to the pond I went.

Other times, I would get one of my brothers to go to the woods and explore with me, maybe even build a tepee.

I also spent a lot of time at the sandbox. There on my knees playing with my toy semi, the world seemed within my grasp, and my imagination ran wild. In my mind, I drove halfway around creation.

Growing up on a farm had its own ways of charming a young lad. I remember walking to the far corner of the acreage with my older sister Regina and our dog Shep, kicking up the dust with our bare feet as we went to fetch the cows for milking time. Milking time was whatever we made it, filled with the normal sibling fussing and arguments or other times, the little milking parlor rang with laughter as we showed off, told stories from school, or passed on the latest gossip.

There was always lots of hard work to be done on an Amish farm, especially since our church wasn't allowed to have skid loaders. It meant that our hands were accustomed to a scoop shovel at a very early age.

One of our jobs included grinding and mixing feed for the animals. Sometimes that meant climbing into a dusty bin filled with oats or shoveling ear corn from an outside corn crib. Either way, it was a hard, loud job. The John Deere tractor roared as it turned the shaft that powered the Arts-Way grinder mixer.

We stayed busy shoveling the ear corn into the hopper until at last the grinder bin was full. There was a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment when the boisterous tractor was slowed to an idle and the mixer wound down to a stop. After a moment of rest and a cold

drink, the ringing in our ears would subside as we would move on to the barnyard where the hungry cows were eagerly awaiting the feast we had just prepared.



Dad worked for my uncle Roman in the horse collar manufacturing business. The shop was approximately four miles from our house, and since Dad enjoyed racehorses, he often had a horse he was training. The exciting part about driving the horse cart to work was that his cart was similar to those used in actual racing. It was very lightweight, had one seat, and didn't have a floor to rest your feet on.

Dad sat on the seat with me beside him on the frame. It was thrilling—the sparse seating and no floor was an adventure. But the highest excitement came when Dad clucked and signaled the young racehorse to take the speed up a notch or two. Oh, the freedom of watching the road speed by right under us while we raced down the road behind that magnificent animal!

In those days, the Daviess County Amish church districts were not allowed to use “Top Buggies”—buggies with roofs to shield riders from the rain or cold. They were normally constructed of light wood framing then wrapped in vinyl or painted. However, families with young children had what we called a “rumble”—a little vinyl cover over the back of the buggy that sheltered the seats where the children rode.

Riding in that little rumble holds some of my earliest memories of family singing. We were riding home from Grandpa Yoder's house (my mother's parents) on a cool, dark autumn evening. The physical comfort of being in the rumble was not to be outmatched by the deep satisfaction of hearing my parents and siblings singing together.

How I wish I could remember the song.

Top buggies were used in many other communities, but not in ours. Yet, as many had predicted, progress was inevitable. Sure enough, after some people got them anyway, and others continually suggested that it was time to move into the future, and the change finally came. This was a big deal, especially to the young folks since this would add real class to their Rumspringa. Ben E. Wagler was the officiating bishop that ushered in the new convenience, and as a young, red-blooded boy, I was particularly grateful.



As we worked hard throughout the year, we never lost sight of how special our community was. And just our way of life—living on a farm together.

Our milking parlor, located on the north end of the barn could hold five cows at a time. The number of cows we milked fluctuated with the time of year, and how many cows had given birth to baby calves. Sometimes as few as three and others times up to fourteen!

Oh, the baby calves. It was quite exhilarating to wake up in the morning and hear Dad announce that another cow had a baby during the night. Often, he would stay awake into the wee hours keeping watch for the health of the mama cow during her labor, and the new born calf was my responsibility! Teaching a baby calf to drink from a bottle could be entertaining as it wobbled and struggled to keep its balance, almost like it was on stilts.

As a general rule, we started the milking around 5:00am, then again at 4:30pm. My sister Regina was kind enough to let me milk my favorite cow, Blackie. Meanwhile, she tackled the hardest one.

The infamous Jane!

Milking cows by hand came with its own charms and heartaches.

My brother Olen found great joy in pointing the teat toward his mouth and drinking the warm milk.

"It can't get any fresher than this," he'd say with a sheepish grin.

The worst terror that any cow could bring the vulnerable milker was to start kicking its hind legs. I recall the sickening feeling of watching all the milk I had coerced with so much verve start rolling down the manure trough, which rendered the morning a complete waste.

The only thing worse that could happen was to have Dad walk in and see the spilled milk. It was a great loss to him since spilled milk was mislaid income and he needed it to clothe and feed his family.

My dad was convinced that hard work never killed anyone, but I wasn't so sure, and certainly not willing to take any risks.

There's something about the weather in the valley of southern Indiana in July that has a way of dragging a body down. Without fail, just when we had 800 bales of hay that needed to be put into the barn, it would turn out to be the hottest day of the year. We would tell our uncles and cousins that we were going to have hay ready to start loading at a certain time, and they would always come and help, no matter how hot it got.

And the saying, "Many hands make light work" rings true.

We had multiple crews throwing the bales on, wagon after wagon. The higher the stack got, the more the young men could show off their strength. The wagon creaked and groaned under the weight as the team of horses pulled it toward the barn. Yes, it was hot out in the field, but that couldn't be compared to the sweltering heat of the haymow as we neatly stacked the hundreds of bails.

It seemed like it couldn't be too soon before Mama brought a nice treat for the toasty, tired crew. My favorite was egg sandwiches along with ice cold chocolate milk.

One would think that as exhausted as everyone was, it would be a

time of quiet and rest. But that certainly wasn't the case, and notably if Uncle Fred was around. He seemed to have an endless line of dry comments that would have the rest of us laughing in a matter of seconds.

Life on the farm!

While hard work was as common as the air we breathed, it was also accompanied by the richness of our heritage.

Somehow, stories from our family's past always seemed to find their way into our discussions. Like where and how music became such an important part of the Raber family's life. I loved it when Dad and some of his brothers got that distant look in their eyes as they began recalling the memories. As the music history unfolded, we realized it had all started with my dad's older brother, Uncle David.

Little did I know how much he would influence the man I would eventually become.