

The Song of the Harvest

The giant corporate farm had been all but devastated by the hail storm. The former drought had already damaged the small farms so their yearly yield was gone anyway and bankruptcy was now a possibility for many of the rural neighbors. They needed precipitation, but not the frozen kind. The only bountiful crop was the square miles of well irrigated corporate crops, but even they had been struck hard. A formal offer has now been passed down from corporate headquarters that a lucrative remuneration would be given to those who could come to the aid of the giant. Due to the damage done by the hail, only a hand harvest could accomplish the task.

A curious group of young farmers crowded into Paul Felding's house after church the following Sunday night. There was promise of ice cream, but more importantly the fellowship and one or two more casual comments on the Word of God from the band director/Sunday School teacher. On this Sunday evening, Felding stoked their interest even more than usual by telling his class of mostly farmers that he had an idea of how square miles of wheat could be harvested by hand.

With a generous portion of ice cream and the normal joking over, the young farmers seated themselves as close to the band director as they could crowd. Just a few years ago they were happy-go-lucky teen-agers without a care in the world. Now with the responsibilities of marriage, kids to rear, and the prospects of futures on the family farm looking dim, an idea that could save them for at least one more year sounded great, if not miraculous.

"Do you remember what happened in 1982?" At first there was silence to the band director's question.

Then the murmuring turned into rumbling until a few spoke up, "That's the year our football team went all the way to State!"

"Yeah, that was also the year our band won the national championship."

"And do you remember what brought us there?"

One said, "Our football team outweighed our opponents!" Everyone laughed because nearly every team they played made them look like Davids in the midst of Goliaths.

"Our band was made up of child prodigies!"

Rippling laughter resounded as Mr. Felding placed his hands on his hips with a feigned, but humored sign of disgust. The band director would often say to his students, "God may not have made you prodigies, but He did make you so that if you practice, you can sound better than a prodigy who never practiced." And that's exactly how the band took the national, number one position. Practice, practice, practice.

"But there was something beyond the football and band practice, Kids." You could tell the young marrieds like to hear a voice from their not too distant youth call them kids again. In animated form, Felding answered his own question, "Spirit! You know, 'esprit de corps.' Spirit! That's what turns an Army enlistee into a soldier. Spirit! That's what turns a house into a home! Spirit! That's what brought our doomed-to-average football team to State and our band of farmers into a band of renown."

"Listen to this," Paul Felding said as he clicked the remote control for his CD player. The house was filled with *Stars and Stripes Forever*, the John Philip Sousa classic. Former band members stood and while marching in place they pretended they were playing their instruments again. Three former football players stood shoulder to shoulder with their "fighting faces" on and marched through a narrow

aisle up to Mr. Felding and back to the wall. An aura of excitement was in the air as the Sunday School teacher made his applications. "What we just experienced was the result of spirit! That was my personal favorite rendition of *Stars and Stripes*, the first cut off our CD from the '82 band recorded in State competition. It was also our theme song during our winning season when we walked on and off the field and part of the best half-time show we ever maneuvered.

"Here's my plan. We need a song of the harvest. A theme song to carry us through. And we are going to actually have two songs. You know how the foreman of the cereal giant told us the hail had broken much of the wheat clean off and into the rows and the other half was left partially attached to the stalk, but dangling? The wheat is still harvestable, but only by hand. You have already expressed your fears that the most you could muster would be approximately two hundred harvesters and you don't have time or energy and time is of the essence. I am asking you to let our songs be part of our driving force, our catalyst that helps birth our esprit de corps, or should I say, esprit de 'crops.' Our first theme song will be *Stars and Stripes Forever* and the second theme song is a surprise, a song that means a lot to me that carried me through my spiritual journey. The Psalmist said, "*And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD*" (Psalm 40:3). Then he also said, "*Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life*" (Psalm 42:8). The song will be a faith builder that reminds you of past victories and present possibilities. The song will lift you when your spirit begins to fail. *Stars and Stripes* will create a cadence that will help you harvest the in-between-row break-offs which much be harvested first. During this process, speed will be important and Sousa will keep you busy and happy while you are doing it. The second song will be a slower cadence that will keep you steady while you are harvesting the broken, but not severed stalks that remain. I want to leave a verse with you before we pray and dismiss. These are words that described the kind of ministry Jesus would have as prophesied by Isaiah and repeated in Matthew, "*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory*" (Matthew 12:20). This is an encouraging passage that tells us that our Lord will know how to handle and cope with people who will be like the broken, dangling reed which looks much like our broken wheat that will become for us a re-birth of farm dreams. One more thing, we are planning a pep rally. Get two-hundred field hands and their families together and let me know who wants a cassette or who wants a CD."

With the permission and blessing of the high school principal, five days later at the pep rally, Mr. Felding marched the present high school band out to the middle of the gym with *Stars and Stripes* just before a couple of rousing speeches: one to raise the enthusiasm and the other to explain the details for the way they would rotate the harvesters in eight hour increments. Felding announced, "Harvesters, come pick up your CD or cassette from the front table. Play it in your car. Put it on your portable players, walk-mans or down load it on your MP3s. Listen to it while you work, while you're resting or anytime you find your spirit waning. On the way out today we'll have the band play the second song we'll be giving you one week from today at our second pep rally."

As the crowd dismissed, the haunting beauty of the second song permeated the air. A few said, "I know that song, but I haven't heard it in a long time."

That was the most exciting week the small farming community had ever experienced, even more exciting than the winning season of '82. There was a sense of togetherness that everyone found contagious. And there was an atmosphere of hope that served like a medicine. Who would have thought phase one would have been accomplished so thoroughly and joyfully? The rows between the remaining stalks were hand gathered clean. The sheaving machines were humming as bundles of promise were being made!

The second pep rally was twice as fun as the first. For one thing, there was a frame of reference now. The kids (as Paul Felding called them) had a belief factor that had just been nourished by a week of wonder. Pat was asked by Felding to open the gathering with the first speech to "rally the troops" for one

more week of victory. Pat was nervous, but as he got into his speech, the ease came as his voice began to rise, much in the same fashion as when he was calling plays as the quarterback in '82. Then Felding himself took the podium and explained the second song which would be the spirit song that would, God willing, lead them to final victory and the saving of their personal farms as well as helping the corporate cereal maker keep their heads afloat.

Paul Felding, a man who always showed great composure and control, started speaking, but it was difficult with the lump in his throat and tears in his eyes. He couldn't see his notes and when he spoke, his voice cracked. Paul bit his lip as he managed to make it past his congratulations to the faithful 200. With strength of conviction, his voice became stronger and his message went forth, "I cannot begin to tell you how proud I am of the work you have done in one short week! Your care for one another is nothing short of magnanimous. Your next week is going to be even better. The song I have selected is a song that was the theme of my greatest personal victory. I don't think any of you know what I am about to tell you. We, as mid-westerners, are good at keeping personal matters to ourselves. I met my wife just like many of you met yours. She and I were born and reared right here. She was always the only one for me and I was the one and only for her. The only thing we were missing was the really only thing that we needed to make our love a lasting love and our life have any possible semblance of meaning. Our church was holding its annual revival and every night there was a certain song that we sang. This song is on the CD or tape I am going to be giving to you 200 devoted harvesters as your spirit song for phase two of the harvest. You will have to be even gentler with the bruised and half-broken stalks, so the cadence of our song of the final phase of harvest is a slower and beautifully melodic piece. This song became the spirit song that saved my life, my soul, and my marriage. It became the seed of the greatest harvest of blessing my life has reaped."

(To be continued)

- Pastor Pope -

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