

THE COW-PIE CHRONICLES



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Attention teachers!

This free discussion guide for the *The Cow-Pie Chronicles* young reader chapter book is designed as an aid for teachers in helping students better understand the lives of farm kids in the 1960s. Thousands of families have lost their farms since the 1960s, often to big corporate farms.

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Chapter 1

Key Concept: Introducing the setting and characters

Life on a family dairy farm in the 1960s was very different from what most kids are familiar with today, even if they live on a modern-day farm. Farm children, including Tim and Dana, as they grew older had to help with more and more tasks needed to keep the farm going. They spent a lot of time without their parents nearby. And they did not have many other kids around to play with when there was free time. But some things were the same as today. Tim and Dana watched shows on TV, had heroes and dreamed of bigger things.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Dana opened Tim's birthday present last, thinking it was something stupid that she wouldn't like. What was Dana's reaction to Tim's gift? How would you react if you received that same gift?

A1: Dana was surprised that her brother picked out a real cowgirl gun and holster, a gift that she really liked.

Q2: In what ways do you think the chores Tim did on the farm were different from the chores performed by his city cousins?

A2: Most chores performed by Tim's city cousins were related to keeping their houses or rooms or yards clean so everything looked nice. Most chores performed by farm kids like Tim were related to producing the product that provided the family income.

Q3: The barn is described as the center of life on the family dairy farm. What building in a town or city would be most like a barn? What kind of supplies do you think you would find in the barn?

A3: A factory would be most like a barn. Both buildings are used to gather the supplies to make a product, then produce the product and sell it. The supplies in the barn include the feed, while the cows in the barn produce the product, which is milk. The farmer uses milk machines to extract the product, milk, which is sold to a store in the city.

Chapter 2

Key Concept: Teaching city cousins to throw cow chips

The games Tim's city cousins might have played in the 1960s were very different from the games Tim and Dana could play on the farm. Their cousins' ideas about what was clean, safe and proper were also different. Tim's city cousins often played with many other kids. They usually had a lot of toys and a wide variety of activities to choose from. Tim had to depend on his sister or farm animals for playmates, and toys were whatever he might have found around the farm.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Tim's city cousins got bored pretty quickly on the farm. Do you think farm kids would be just as bored visiting their cousins in town?

A3: (Get feedback from the kids first.) Farm kids like Tim did not have much free time to play as there is always work to do. If they stayed in town too long, they might get bored because they were not used to having so much free time.

Q2: How would you feel about throwing a dried piece of cow poop for fun?

A2: (Should be some interesting answers from the kids in class.)

Q3: Do you think there are real cow-chip tossing contests in the United States?

A3: Yes, there are! Cow-chip-tossing contests and a variation called buffalo-chip-tossing contests are popular in many rural areas. County fairs are the most common places to find them, but they are sometimes held at charity events or promotions on large dairy farms. The Wisconsin State Cow Chip Throw is one of the largest. Approximately 40,000 people attend the Wisconsin State Cow Chip Throw each year. The current Wisconsin Cow Chip Throw state record is 248 feet. That's almost the length of a football field!

Chapter 3

Key Concept: Role playing favorite TV Western heroes

Farm kids in the 1960s enjoyed imitating their TV Western heroes, plus they had a realistic playground to do so. But they had many real activities they enjoyed as well, like taking care of young farm animals so they could compete in judging contests at the county fair in the 4-H Club.

Questions and Answers

Q1: In the 1960s cable television didn't exist, so farm kids had very few channels to choose from. What was one of the Slinger kids' favorite television programs?

A1: They enjoyed watching Westerns and Western heroes such as Roy Rogers and Dale Evans and in Chapter 1 the kids were watching cartoons.

Q2: While Tim and Dana played cowboys in the barn, their dad was busy doing something else. Explain what their dad was doing. How often did he have to milk the cows?

A2: Their dad was milking the cows. He had to milk the cows two times each day, in the morning and the evening, with never a day off.

Q3: Who was Patsy? What was Tim going to do with her?

A3: Patsy was Tim's pet calf. He was going to enter her in the 4-H Club contest at the county fair.

Chapter 4

Key Concept: Tricking a kid sister into playing a risky game

On a family farm, even young children such as Tim and Dana spent a lot of unsupervised time together. They were on their own when it came to finding new ways to entertain themselves. Many of their potential activities were risky, even dangerous. Sometimes they understood the risk but decided to do it anyway. Other times they were unaware of the risk, a decision that sometimes got them into real trouble.

Questions and Answers

Q1: How do you know that Tim was aware that it might be dangerous lowering Dana to the ground with a rope?

A1: When he tied the rope around himself and looked down, his foot accidentally slipped, although he caught himself before falling. He then realized that the ground was a long way down.

Q2: What was Tim's main concern about Dana's safety when putting the rope around her?

A2: He was worried the rope would be too loose and Dana would fall out.

Q3: What was the problem Tim did not think about while preparing to lower Dana to the ground? What were the results?

A3: Tim did not think about Dana being too heavy for him to hold up with the rope. When the rope slipped through his hands, the friction burned his skin, so he had to let go. He hadn't thought about having another way of stopping Dana from falling to the ground.

Chapter 5

Key Concept: Taunting a dangerous animal and dealing with electric fences

It was not always Tim's little sister who was the object of his farm-boy inventiveness. Farm animals and occasionally even adults found themselves being manipulated by Tim's desire to have a little fun.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What safety feature prevented the Slingers' electric fence on their farm from causing serious injury to people or animals?

A1: It turned on and off every few seconds so a person or an animal could get away from it quickly before getting hurt.

Q2: Why did Tim decide it was a bad idea to pull out one of the posts so the fence would fall to the ground?

A2: Because there would have been nothing to protect him from the bull, which could charge at him if it became angry.

Q3: Why did Tim think it was fun to promote the feud between his father and the neighbor who owned the bull?

A3: Tim thought it was silly for the adults to be so concerned about such a small amount of corn being eaten by the bull when the cornfield was so large.

Chapter 6

Key Concept: What happens when injuries occur on a farm

Tim and Dana had to be aware of many hidden dangers on the farm. One lapse in attention or one poor decision could result in serious injury. Accidents often happened when all of a person's attention was focused on escaping a known danger, unaware they had created a new danger. When injuries did occur on a farm, clinics and hospitals were usually far away so parents knew how to perform first-aid until they get could get help or an ambulance could arrive.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What two things did Tim not check in his haste to escape from the bull?

A1: First, when running out of the field, Tim had not checked to see if his dad had changed the location of the gate for the electric fence. Second, when running between the buildings, Tim had not checked to see if new boards had been placed on top of the pile of boards he had run over before.

Q2: When did Tim realize his injury was really serious?

A2: Tim became truly afraid when his mom said she had to call the clinic. They only went to the clinic if an injury was very serious.

Q3: After the doctor took care of Tim's foot, his aunt gave him a Dilly Bar, which Tim loved. But Tim's cousin Roxy gave him some unwelcomed news. What was Roxy's news? Why do you think it upset Tim?

A3: Roxy said she was moving to Chicago because her dad got a new job. She also told Tim that he would be coming to visit them in the big city in a couple months. Tim hated the city.

Chapter 7

Key Concept: Taking big risks to make creative play things

One of the good things about kids having lots of work to do on a farm was that it gave them less time to get in trouble. When Tim didn't have to do any chores because of his injured foot, he was willing to attempt more dangerous activities to stay entertained. Some of the things he tried were so dangerous not even his father would have dared attempt them.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Do you think it was a good thing Tim fell out of his wagon right away or a bad thing? Why?

A1: It was a good thing. If he had remained in the wagon until his dad's truck was going faster and then hit the ruts in the lane, Tim would have been thrown out at high speed and would have been seriously injured.

Q2: What would have happened to Tim if he had fallen from the rafters in the barn?

A2: He was up so high, he would have broken many bones or maybe even died.

Q3: There were many risks involved in putting up the rope swing. Which one was Tim most worried about? Why?

A3: Tim was worried Dana would tell their mom what he was doing and she would have stopped him before he finished putting up the rope swing. He probably would have been punished for doing something so dangerous.

Chapter 8

Key Concept: Taking on sports activities on the farm

The competitive sports that city kids played usually required many kids, equipment, facilities, coaches and practice time. Large groups of kids and lots of free time were not available to kids growing up on a small family farm. However, farm kids did many things that were very athletic and enjoyed competition as much as city kids. Farm kids simply found different ways to exercise their competitive skills. Often farm games were something that most city kids would have found difficult to understand and even harder to quickly master.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What athletic talents did Tim have in common with city kids who trained for and played athletic games?

A1: Tim was in excellent physical condition. He ran a lot every day getting from one place to another on the farm, the same as a city athlete did in practice. He built strong muscles doing his chores such as lifting bales of hay, carrying pails of milk and climbing in buildings and on ropes. The city athletes built muscles doing weight training. Tim ate mostly healthy food they grew right on their farm, the same types of food serious city athletes would have eaten in a training diet.

Q2: What was the major problem Tim had when trying to play horseshoes for the first time?

A2: Tim did not realize how strong he was when he tossed the first horseshoe. Whenever he had to throw something on the farm, like a cow chip, he always threw it as hard as he could. That was the only way he knew how to throw.

Q3: We learned in the story that Tim's father was afraid Tim would get hurt cow skiing. What other concern do you think Tim's father might have had about this activity? Why?

A3: Tim's father was concerned about upsetting or perhaps causing injury to the cows. Cows were the primary source of income for the farm. Not being able to milk one of them would mean less money to pay the bills, and they did not have much money to start with.

Chapter 9

Key Concept: Explosive developments in clearing old stumps from the field

Kids are not the only people on a farm who engage in dangerous activities. Adults often do things that put themselves, their families or even their entire farm in danger. Using explosives was one of those dangers.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Did Tim's father understand how dangerous dynamite could be?

A1: Yes. He told Tim to stay away from it and keep his sister away from it.

Q2: What was the correct thing Tim's father did before trying to move the dynamite?

A2: Tim's dad found an expert who knew about explosives to assist him.

Q3: What were the two most unsafe decisions Tim's dad made?

A3: The first mistake was taking Tim with him and Uncle Jack on the tractor with the dynamite when he decided to blast stumps out of the orchard. The second mistake was using too much dynamite to blast a stump that was too close to the farm buildings, especially to their house.

Chapter 10

Key Concept: Preparing the children for a new addition to the family

With their new baby coming, it was a very happy time for Mr. and Mrs. Slinger. They also knew that a new baby sister or brother would change things for Tim and Dana. It was even harder for the Slingers because they had so little extra money and a new baby was going to add extra family expenses.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What were Tim and Dana most concerned about after hearing their mother's announcement that a baby was coming?

A1: The first thing they discussed after their mother left them alone was who would take care of the baby and who would take care of the work in the fields. They were children, but they already understood that the work on their farm must be done no matter what else happened in their lives.

Q2: How did Tim think the arrival of the baby would change his life?

A2: Tim thought he would take over some of his mother's duties on the farm by learning to operate the tractor and performing other heavy tasks while his mom took care of the baby.

Q3: Why do you think Tim's parents got a new puppy for Tim and Dana to care for?

A3: Tim and Dana's parents gave them the puppy to help the children understand and prepare for helping take care of a new baby brother or sister.

Chapter 11

Key Concept: The difficulties facing farm kids when visiting the city

For a child, living life in a city was much different than living on a farm. City kids often made fun of visiting farm kids or were mean to them because the farm kids did not understand all the customs and activities of city kids. And city kids did not understand that farm life, even for children, was filled with hard work and many responsibilities.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What were some of the first differences Tim noticed in the city compared with his farm?

A1: There was more traffic, there were lots of buildings and most of the kids wore nice clothes.

Q2: How did the strange surroundings affect Tim's relationship with his cousin, Roxy? Can you provide examples?

A2: Tim felt uncomfortable because he knew nothing about Roxy's life in the city. One example was not knowing who the Beatles were and the second was when Roxy asked Tim if he wanted to dance. He was terrified because he had never before danced.

Q3: What did Roxy do to try to make Tim feel more confident in her world? Did it work? Why or why not? Do you think what Tim did was smart? Why or why not?

A3: Roxy asked Tim to make a bully stop picking on her. She felt that Tim would feel good about being able to protect her like he would on the farm. It didn't work because the bully punched Tim in the nose and Roxy had to rescue him from getting beat up by the bully.

Chapter 12

Key Concept: The difficulties facing a city girl visiting the farm

City kids visiting a farm had no concept of the many dangers they might face or how to react to them. They were not prepared to handle the amount of time spent doing the many chores needed to keep the farm running so the family could make enough money to live.

Questions and Answers

Q1: When Tim first brought up animal safety on the farm, what did Roxy think he was worried about?

A1: She thought Tim was afraid she would hurt the farm animals.

Q2: What were Tim and Dana able to teach Roxy about animals in order to stay safe when working or playing in the fields?

A2: Tim and Dana told Roxy which animals were dangerous, why they were dangerous and how to avoid them and protect themselves when adults were not close enough to help.

Q3: What did Roxy think Tim and Dana were doing when they ran away from the pear tree? Why?

A3: Roxy thought Tim and Dana were playing a game with her. Roxy did not know what Tim and Dana knew that a blue racer was a snake and it could be dangerous.

Chapter 13

Key Concept: The challenges of riding a bus to school

Many kids who live in or near cities and towns ride buses to school or their parents drive them to school. For those who ride buses, the trip to and from school is usually nothing like the long rides that farm kids such as Tim and Dana must endure. Farm kids are on their buses longer, often traveling over bad roads and in poor weather conditions. And a farm kid's bus, especially in the 1960s, carried kids of all ages, in all grades, all together on the same bus.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Did the Slinger children have to walk to a bus stop to meet the school bus?

A1: No, the bus came right to their house to pick them up.

Q2: What trick did Tim use to get back at the kids who pushed him to the back of the bus? Do you think Tim's lying was a good idea?

A2: Tim made his nose bleed and told the bus driver that someone had hit him.

Q3: During their first day back in school Tim and Dana learned that after school they had to go to their grandmother's house instead of back to the farm. Why did this upset Tim and Dana so much?

A3: Both were worried about their mom being taken to the hospital. Tim was also worried about how the crops would get harvested and the cows milked twice each day if his mom couldn't help their dad with the work.

Chapter 14

Key Concept: The emotional impact of losing a way of life

When it became impossible for farm families, such as the Slinger family, to continue operating their farms, everything was sold in a big auction. Other farm owners purchased equipment they needed to replace old and broken equipment. The land was sold to nearby farmers who wanted to increase the size of their own farms or purchased by someone who wanted to replace the farmed land with houses or other businesses.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Before they had to auction their own family farm, how did Tim feel about the farm auctions his father had taken him to?

A1: Tim thought they were like a big party with a lot of things to do, kids to play with and food to eat.

Q2: How did Tim's opinion about farm auctions change when his own family's farm was being sold? What did Tim do and why?

A2: Tim realized that a farm auction meant that a family was losing its way of life. He went to his room because he did not want to see it happening to his own family's farm and their way of life.

Q3: What emotion did Tim feel after everything was sold? Why do you think he felt this way?

A3: Tim felt loneliness because with all the animals and equipment gone, the farm had become lifeless.

Chapter 15

Key Concept: Finding ways to stay entertained on a lifeless farm

Living on a farm that was no longer operating gave Tim and Dana a lot of free time. Combining the adventuresome, independent spirit of a farm kid like Tim with a lot of free time was asking for trouble. Not even the family home was safe from Tim's need to find something exciting to do.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What are some of the differences between the Slinger's 1960s farmhouse and your own house today, especially if you don't live on a farm?

A1: Most houses today are heated by furnaces that use oil, electricity or natural gas for fuel. Today the amount of heat the furnace produces is adjusted automatically by an electric thermostat and the heat is delivered to each room in the house through a metal tube called a duct. The Slinger's farmhouse was heated by coal and the amount of heat was determined by how much coal Tim or his father shoveled into the basement furnace. The heat from the Slinger's furnace only warmed the first floor, with little warm air moving through the floor grates to the upper floor. It is also easier to heat a modern city house because it is usually well insulated with tight fitting windows to keep the cold air out. The Slinger's farmhouse was made of boards and plaster with loose-fitting windows that allowed the cold winter wind to blow right into Tim's room.

Q2: Why did Tim investigate the iron grate in the floor of his bedroom?

A2: Tim was looking for a way to bring more warm air into his cold upstairs bedroom.

Q3: What were Dana's two main concerns when Tim explained his plan to drop through the hole in his bedroom floor and onto his parents' bed below?

A3: She was concerned they would get into trouble because their mother had told them not to jump on the bed. She also was concerned that Tim might be tricking her into doing another dangerous stunt like he did with the elevator game in the barn.

Chapter 16

Key Concept: Tensions build during the family's last Christmas on the farm

The competitive brother-sister spirit combined with their family's uncertain future created tensions during the holidays. Many of the family's traditional holiday activities continued, such as going hunting. When Christmas arrived, Tim and Dana were more concerned about who was getting the best gift, rather than getting a gift they really wanted. The Slinger parents struggled with the holidays as well, unsure of what they could do to prepare their children for their future lives.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What was the first Christmas gift that Dana unwrapped? Explain how she used it.

A1: It was a baton, used for twirling. Dana used it as a club to smash a box.

Q2: After he saw what Dana did with her first gift, what gift did Tim suddenly want instead of whatever it was that he had thought he was unwrapping? Why?

A2: Tim now wished for a sword. He thought he would need it to protect himself from his sister and her baton.

Q3: Was Tim trying to threaten Dana when he showed off his new BB gun?

A3: No. Tim was bragging that he got a better present than Dana.

Chapter 17

Key Concept: Facing the realities of moving into town

The Slinger kids are faced with the realities of moving from their farm with its wide open spaces and few rules to a town filled with tight boundaries and new, strict rules. Plus, Tim, more so than Dana who was younger, now had to deal with all the city kids who did not like and made fun of farm kids.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What were three things Tim saw that showed him life in their new house in town would be different from living on the farm?

A1: The first thing was the locked front door. The Slinger family had never locked the door on their farmhouse. The second was his baby brother's crib that was put in his room. He never had to share his room on the farm. The third was being restricted to the city block where he lived, which was not even as big as the barnyard on their farm.

Q2: On the day the Slinger family moved into town, how did Tim compare his own fate with what had happened to Skipper, the pet they had left on the farm?

A2: Just like Skipper had died on that last day, Tim felt that part of himself had also died having to leave the farm behind.

Q3: Who do you think was more worried about moving off the farm, Tim or Dana? Why?

A3: Tim expressed the most concern about the sudden changes in his life. He was older and had been involved every day in helping his mom and dad run the farm. Dana did not express any worry. She would be helping her mom with her baby brother just like she had been doing on the farm and being younger, she had not been nearly as involved in the farm activities as her brother. She had also wanted to have girls her own age to play with.

Chapter 18

Key Concept: Trying to adapt to city life

Tim's first encounter with city kids does not go well as he struggles to fit in. A neighbor girl about his age calls him "skunk perfume," which he knows isn't good. He joins the baseball team even though he's never had the opportunity to play the game back on the farm and runs into more trouble.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Even though the neighbor girls did not know Tim, they called him "skunk perfume." Do you think that was fair?

A1: (Kids should have some interesting answers.)

Q2: Tim's baseball teammates laughed at him because he had difficulty playing a sport that he had never before played. What farm games that Tim was good at do you think his teammates might have had trouble doing? Do you think Tim would have laughed at them? Why or why not?

A2: The town kids probably wouldn't have been very good at cow skiing or cow-pie throwing, especially if they knew what they were throwing. Tim may not have laughed because he thought throwing cow poop was a normal thing to do. Remember, in Chapter 2 the only person who laughed about the cow-pie throwing by Tim and Dana's cousins was their dad.

Q3: Do you think that with practice, good coaching and encouragement from friends and family Tim could have played baseball as well as most of his teammates? Why?

A3: Absolutely! Many of the things Tim did on the farm made him strong, tough, coordinated, a fast runner and courageous.

Chapter 19

Key Concept: Finding familiar ground

Tim and Dana respond to living in town in very different ways. Dana quickly begins to conform to her new surroundings while Tim rejects living in town and finds a way back to the farm life where he is more comfortable.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Where did Tim spend much of his summer? Why?

A1: Tim spent most of the summer at his grandfather's house. It had an apple orchard, a lot of brush and a swamp, plus his grandfather's dog named Bounce. All this made Tim feel like he was still back on the family farm.

Q2: Why do you think Dana was using her mom's perfume without asking permission?

A2: She used it because other girls her age in school were wearing perfume and she wanted to be like them. Dana probably knew that her mother would not give her permission to use the perfume—or perhaps she didn't think there was anything wrong using it because her friend Cindy used perfume.

Q3: Why was Tim suspicious when Niki was friendly toward him? Did Tim's suspicions come true? Explain what happened.

A3: Since other girls made fun of Tim being from a farm by calling him "skunk perfume," he thought Niki might be going to make fun of him. No, Tim's suspicions did not come true because Niki also lived on a farm and remembered Tim from the farm auction.

Chapter 20

Key Concept: A second chance at farm life

Tim learns that there are many differences between the East Dairy Farm #6 and the small family farm that his family once owned. But he still feels more at home on the corporate farm than at his new home in town.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What did Tim discover on Niki's East Dairy Farm #6 that made him realize that it was much different from his family's dairy farm?

A1: Tim discovered East Dairy Farm #6 was more like a big company. It had lots of equipment, more land and more than 400 cows to milk. It had a huge milking parlor with 40 milking machines, but best of all it had an automatic cow-poop washing machine so nobody had to sling cow poop.

Q2: Who was Frank? What surprise did Frank show Tim?

A2: Frank was Niki's older brother. He took Tim out to the barn to see Patsy who was once Tim's prize calf. It had grown by three times and had won a prize ribbon at the fair.

Q2: What is one of the first things Tim discovered both he and Frank loved doing that made Tim know he had found a good new friend?

A2: Both Tim and Frank loved to cow ski.

Chapter 21

Key Concept: First girlfriend misfortunes

Tim finds out how liking a girl can make life complicated and confusing especially since his little sister loves to tease him.

Questions and Answers

Q1: When Tim ran home after spending time at Niki and Frank's home, why was Tim so anxious for the weekend to end so he could get back to school?

A1: He had finally found two friends who loved living on a farm as much as he did. He wanted to get back to school so he could see them again.

Q2: In this 1960s' story, two boys, 11 and 12 years old, are riding a small motorcycle across bumpy fields with no adult supervision and no safety equipment. Do you think that was safe? What would you do to make riding a motorcycle safer?

A2: It was not safe, but in the 1960s most kids and adults did not wear helmets. Today everyone wears a helmet, or should, to ride a motorcycle and even a bicycle. Thousands of lives are saved and injuries prevented because of these modern safety practices and equipment.

Q3: How would you describe the relationship between Niki and Tim at this point in the story? What did Tim do to try and make Jerry feel out of place? Why didn't it work?

A3: (This should spark an interesting conversation with the kids.) Tim likes Niki and acts on his jealousy by skidding the motorcycle in front of Jerry, covering him with dirt. Tim then tells Jerry that he is at Niki's all the time and he's even going on a trip with Niki and her family. It didn't work because Niki liked Jerry and she used Tim to make Jerry jealous so Jerry would ask her to go roller skating with him.

Chapter 22

Key Concept: The final blow—moving far away

Already dealing with big changes in his life moving from his family farm and into town, Tim is now confronted with an even bigger change in his life.

Questions and Answers

Q1: What was the big news that Tim's dad had? Why do you think Tim was not happy about his dad's big news even though everyone else in the family was? How would you react if you were Tim?

A1: Tim's father got a job in the city of Chicago and they are moving from the small town where they now live. Tim was very unhappy because now he had to move again and he would lose his two new friends, Frank and Niki, and he would no longer be able to visit their farm.

Q2: How would you compare Dana's reaction to the news about moving to the city of Chicago with Tim's reaction?

A2: Dana had accepted that the farm was no longer part of her life and was willing to leave it behind completely, even pretending when around her new friends that she had never lived on a farm. Tim had completely rejected living in town and disliked even more having to move to the big city of Chicago. Now there would be no way for Tim to stay in the world he felt comfortable with at his friends' East Dairy Farm #6.

Q3: As they drove past East Dairy Farm #6 on their way out of town to their new home in Chicago, Tim referred to the farm fading back in the distance as his own childhood fading into the distance with it. What do you think he meant?

A3: Tim accepted that the life he knew growing up was over forever. He would no longer be a farm boy or a child. It was time to grow up and start over, all at the same time.

Chapter 23

Key Concept: Reflecting on a distant past and what has been lost

Now an adult and parent, Tim tries to explain to his young son Billy what life was like on the farm and why it was so important to how Tim lived his life after moving away. Tim's son, Billy, having grown up in the city, had difficulty understanding why an old, collapsing barn and the difficult life it represented were viewed as so good by his father. Still, Billy wanted to know more about it.

Questions and Answers

Q1: While they were driving through the country, did Billy Slinger have any idea his father Tim had grown up on a farm?

A1: None.

Q2: Why do you think Tim never mentioned to his son Billy that he had grown up on a farm?

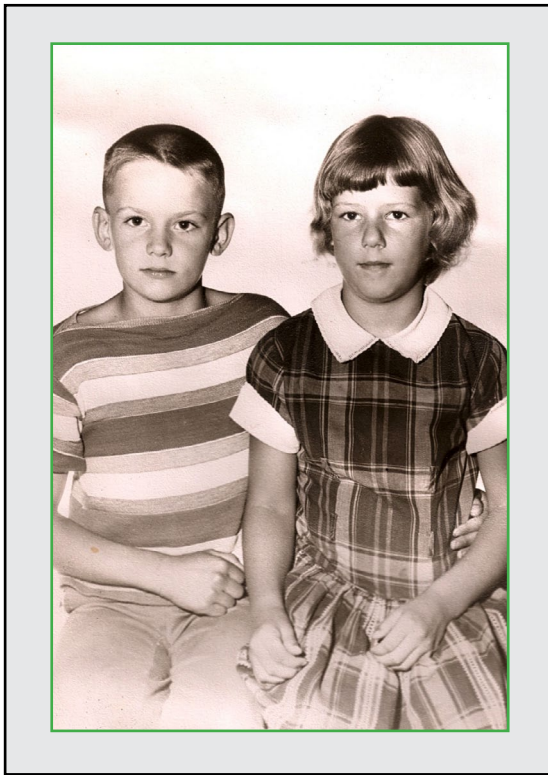
A2: As Tim grew older, he probably took Dana's advice and did not tell anyone in his new city life that he had grown up on a dairy farm. Even as an adult and a parent Tim chose not to share that information with his own young son, Billy, until the day he took Billy to see the old farm.

Q3: Why do you think it was so important now for Tim to share stories about his early life with his son, Billy?

A3: (Let the kids offer some ideas of their own first. Should be interesting.) Because Tim realized his entire life—all the things he had done, the values he held, and his success in life—were based on the first ten years of his life growing up on the family farm. Tim now wanted his own son to share those values, but knew that Billy wouldn't understand unless he knew about his father's life growing up on the family farm.

Story Background

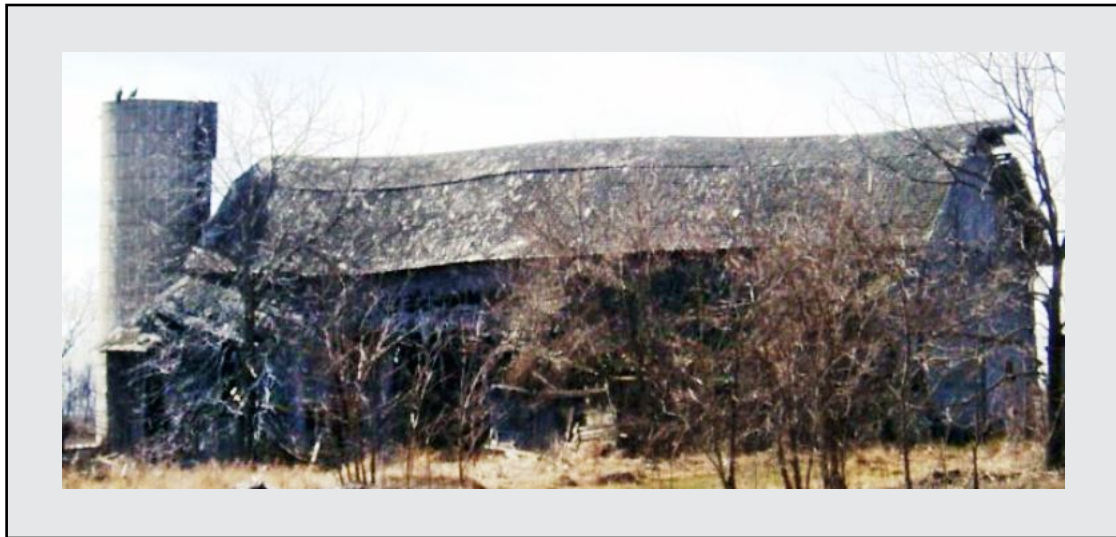
Author's Childhood



Jim & Amy Butler 1961, 9 years and 7 years old

The Cow-Pie Chronicles is closely based on the childhood life of James L. Butler, his sister Amy and many family members. James spent the first 11 years of his life with his family on a small family dairy farm in rural Michigan. They had 40 milking head of cows, a chicken coop full of chickens, cats, dogs and every type of wild animal known to inhabit the Midwest living on the farm with them. They grew all the food for the cattle as well as most of the food they ate themselves. That meant many long hours working in the fields planting and harvesting crops in addition to milking all 40 cows every morning and every evening, including holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays and anniversaries. It was not an easy life, but it was a proud life.

The center of life on their farm, and any family farm, was the big barn. It was where the cows were milked, fed, cared for, cleaned up after and sometimes died. It was also where almost everything was stored until needed, the hay for feed, the straw for bedding, the milk waiting for the milk truck pick-up, tools, tractors, grain and in a special, very strong pen, the bull. It was



The Butler farm circa March, 2012. The family moved off the farm in the spring of 1963

where hay forts were built, rope swings were hung, imaginary rustlers were chased, stray cats hung out, pigeons nested and sisters jumped out of the hay loft thinking their brothers would catch them. (Not!)



Amy waits for her brother Jim to finish feeding the calves. Patsy is on the right.



Playing cowboys at Grandpa's house. See who the 'bad guy' always is!

One of the first jobs a farm kid had to take on was caring for the newborn animals, especially the calves. A little calf is cute, but it eats a lot, poops a lot and does not know it is strong enough to knock over a child with a gentle nudge. And of course, when the child is knocked over, he falls right into the calf poop. Then the calf acts like it had no idea that was going to happen. Yeah, right!

One of the best benefits of being a child growing up on a farm was having the biggest playground of all time. There were no streets to cross, no bullies waiting around the next corner, no cars to run you over, no bad people to worry about, just hundreds of acres filled with endless mysteries

to explore, animals to spy on and places to get lost. (Trying to find your way out of a field full of five-foot corn when you are four-feet tall is a challenge!) That's not to say it was completely safe. Dangers lurked under every rock, over every fence and in every woodlot. But they were things you knew were there and could prepare for.



The "back 40: just one corner of the biggest playground ever!



Amy with our two dogs, Bell on the left and Skipper on the right.

freezing. Going inside meant you were able to take off a couple of layers of clothes, but never the long johns, not until spring. Boy did they love spring on the farm!

One thing a farm kid does not have around is other kids. But that never seemed to matter much. There were so many things to do, some fun, some work, that there was never enough time to be lonely. They did not have much use for regular toys or games but there was no lack of fun in their lives either. Playing cowboys with real cattle and pretend rustlers was pretty cool. Slamming against the side of the barn on a rope swing was exciting. Escaping a blue racer was great exercise. And, of course, they really did toss cow chips.

One thing farm kids always have around is family, tons of family. They happened to be the only ones in their family that lived on a farm but they had lots of relatives visiting them. (Not helping with the chores, but, hey, they would just mess things up anyway.) It was usually more fun to go in town to visit them anyway and a lot safer for them. It was hard enough to stay safe on the farm by themselves without the city kids putting them in danger. And Jim was not especially good at avoiding injuries even then. The story about running over a nail and ramming a piece of tennis shoe into his foot is completely true. Ouch! It still hurts when thinking about it. And the ice cream party after the trip to the clinic you ask? Check out the photo. Jim is on the far right. Then, right to left, cousin, sister Amy, cousin, cousin, cousin, cousin, cousin.

It has been 50 years since Jim lived on the farm, but he can still remember the smallest details about it and the life they had there. It makes him sad to see the barn is falling down and all the other farm buildings are gone. But he is sadder that the way of life that went with them is nearly gone as well.

Winter was especially hard on the farm. The only heat in the barn came from the cows when they were being milked and the bottomless coffee pot sitting on a ledge in the milk parlor. On the really cold days, the poop would freeze before it could be cleaned out of the barn and had to be chipped like ice. The tools and equipment, even the shovels were difficult to work with while wearing heavy gloves and multiple layers of clothing. Still, the house was not a lot better. It was drafty, heated by an old coal furnace in the basement and most of its heat was directed toward the water pipes in the kitchen and bathroom to keep them from



With Grandpa's new puppy, Bounce, in our living room on the farm



Want to Know More?

Do you want to know more or have a question about this book or others I have written? Check out my Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/raptorravine> or send me an email at raptorravine@comcast.net

If you grew up or spent any amount of time on a farm, I would love to hear about your exciting adventures. Send me an email at raptorravine@comcast.net or post messages on my Facebook page www.facebook.com/raptorravine so everyone can share in them.

And if you would like to try to get your own story(s) about farm life published, get moooving and check out Publishing Syndicate at www.publishingsyndicate.com.

Love the illustrations in Cow-Pie? I do! Check out some more of Lonnie's great work at www.facebook.com/LonnieMillsapCartoonist.