

Title: The Quality of Country Folks

I hope you are enjoying the cooler weather. I am.

For me, anything over 70 degrees is too hot. Anything over 80 degrees is stifling.

Fall weather suits me just fine.

This article is mostly about country values. Or at least one country value, trust.

Our postal address is Becker. We are also in the Becker school district but Becker is twelve miles from our farm. There is a smaller town that is closer. The small town I am writing about is at the crossing of two county highways. No doubt you know many such towns.

I bought this farm over 40 years ago. Back then the town had two cafes, a feed mill, a butcher shop, a bank, a post office, a hardware store, a creamery and a couple of filling stations.

After I wrote the word “filling” I got to wonder if that phrase is used any more. Well, for any of you who are too young to know, a convenience store used to be called a gas station and before that a gas station was a filling station.

Back to my story. Now the town has a small gas station with a few cash-only pumps, one uncommonly good restaurant, and a little repair garage. The repair garage is the topic of this story.

The garage is run by Dave and his son John. Those aren't their real names. I'm not sure why I am not naming them. I haven't talked to them about this story but I don't think they would mind. Anyway, Dave and John are not really Dave and John. Do what you want with that.

Dave is the father and John is the son. Let's say about 60 and 30 years of age, more or less.

They are both good, common sense mechanics. Let me give you an example.

The Air Conditioner in my 1999 Ford pickup was cutting out early in the summer. Apparently it was overheating and shutting itself down. I stopped at a Ford garage. They thought they might be able to fix it for a couple hundred bucks. I didn't think it was that serious or at least, I didn't want it to be that serious. Or, maybe I just wasn't ready to spend that much money on a beat-up pickup with 235,000 miles on it.

In any case, after a few more sweaty drives I happened to be in Dave's garage and mentioned the problem to him. Dave said that as old as my truck was and with as much pasture driving as I do, the radiator might just be plugged with seeds, dead bugs and such. John spent the next half hour blowing a decade's worth of stuff out of my radiator. That saved me \$200.

Most of the work that I have done at the garage is tire repair. I used to repair my tires myself but it is a lot easier to drop them off at the garage and pick them up a day or two later. Dave keeps a fair stock of tubes on hand. With the cost of driving these days, a trip to Fleet Farm costs more than the tube.

Dave and John have a decent attitude about work. They try to keep it to 40 hours a week. Of course, that limits their open hours. To make it easy for customers, when a tire is repaired their practice is to lean it on the outside wall of the building. That way, it can be picked up anytime. That type of handoff works well for me. I drive through town now and then. I pick up the tire when I need it and pay the bill when they are open.

Recently I stopped at the garage to settle up for a repair that had been done almost a month before. It was a hot day. Dave and John were both in the little office. Dave was sitting in his chair behind the counter. John who had been working was leaning on the counter, taking a break.

I told them I was there to pay my bill. Dave got a puzzled look on his face and said that he was not aware that I had an open bill. The work that I owed them for was on a 10 by 16 inch tire from my feed grinder. When I mentioned that fact, John said, yes, he did remember the tire. It was old and had a damaged side wall. New tires of that size cost nearly \$200. (There is that \$200 amount again. Maybe I just have a hard time spending that much money all at once. Gail W. often says that I am not really good for the economy.)

Dave happened to be running errands the day I brought the tire in. John and I had looked the tire over and agreed that since my grinder never goes on the road and probably travels less than five miles a year it would be ok to just put a couple of reinforcing boots into it.

As John and I recalled the work, two boots, a new tube and labor, Dave wrote up a bill.

I wrote a check and we were square.

Maybe these business practices explain why none of the three of us is ever going to be rich. Even so, it just feels good to do everyday business in such a relaxed way. I count this as one of the many blessings of living in the country. If hope you are fortunate enough to live in a similar community.

Enjoy the fall weather. Tom Barthel