



Memories of the Farm

by

Rich Orstad

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LaughingO Productions  
305 Penn Way,  
Los Gatos, CA 95032

954-305-0692  
richorstad@laughingo.com

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK (IN B/W)

Freshly harvested fields line both sides of this narrow dirt road which stretches straight ahead for miles.

The distinct CLOP CLOP CLOP sound of horseshoes in a steady rhythm. A repeated pattern. The slight SQUEAK of wheels.

SUPER: WALSH COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA. FALL, 1941.

Two hefty black draft horses, Doc and Don, pull an empty wagon eastward as the sun falls behind them, lighting the way ahead in hues of purple and black.

Holding the reins is LYLE (10, hazel-green eyes, scrawny) next to his dad, SIVERT (a hard 60, wrinkles chiseled into his hands and face), who stares ahead in silence. Beaten.

Closes his eyes and lowers his head a moment. Sighs.

Lyle looks over at him, then sings softly:

LYLE

*"On a hill far away  
stood an old rugged cross.  
The emblem of suffering and shame"*

Lyle looks over at his father, worried. The song in rhythm with the horseshoes and squeaky wheel.

LYLE (cont'd)

*"And I love that old cross  
where the dearest and best,  
For a world of lost sinners was  
slain"*

Sivert looks over, perks up, and joins in the harmony.

LYLE/SIVERT

*"So I'll cherish the old rugged cross  
(Sivert solo: Rugged cross)  
Till my trophies at last I lay down"*

SIVERT

*"I will cling to the old rugged cross  
And exchange it some day for a crown"*

With those last words, Sivert tussles Lyle's hair and looks across the empty fields. And his empty wagon. Jaw clenched.

Sets his eyes back on the road ahead as the sun sets lower behind them. Almost home.

EXT. FARM - LATER

Sivert takes the reins as they pull up a driveway, past a simple two-story box house with a covered porch, and stops aside a large barn, across from several other structures.

Sivert unhitches the horses from the wagon, and hands Lyle their leads.

SIVERT

Get Doc and Don set, then go wash up.

LYLE

Yes, Papa.

Lyle CLICKS through his teeth as he leads the two horses around the side of the barn.

Sivert pushes the empty wagon into the barn and closes the door behind him. Wipes his brow and looks across at the kerosene lamp as it burns outside the front door.

The light home.

Sivert crosses to the house and stops at the water pump outside the front door, as Lyle runs up beside him.

LYLE (cont'd)

Can I pump it?

SIVERT

Go on, then.

Lyle grabs the handle and yanks it up with all his might, then forces it down. A GURGLE and GASP from the spigot, as he repeats the motion, until a flow of water falls into a bucket below.

Sivert takes a handful of water and wipes his face good, then his hands as Lyle does the same, the water trickling slower out of the spout.

Lyle barely wipes his hands clean on a nearby cloth before he heads to the front door and rushes inside--

INT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

--where HILDA (54, fire-red hair, stout, strong) stirs a pot on the olive-green 1932 Kalamazoo wood-fired cook stove.

HILDA

Wipe your shoes! You all washed up?

LYLE

Yes, Mama.

HILDA

Dinner's ready. Go get your sister.

Lyle pivots one step toward the nearby stairs and yells up.

LYLE

DONNA! DINNER!

HILDA

For Pete's sake, Lyle, hush! I coulda done that. Help me set the table.

Sivert closes the door and puts the lamp on the table as he sits down, while Lyle sets bowls, spoons, and cups for four.

Hilda pours stew into each of the bowls, keeping a watchful eye on Sivert, while the POUNDING of footsteps down the stairs echoes from the next room.

DONNA (14, short blond hair, striking blue eyes, just on the other side of tomboy stage) storms into the room and kisses her dad on the cheek before she elbows Lyle out of the way.

DONNA

Welcome home, Papa.

(to Lyle)

You too, Cuckoo.

Lyle scoots beside her and elbows her right back.

Sivert snaps at them.

SIVERT

Cut it out, you two!

Hilda eyes him again, shoots the kids a look, then brings over a plate of flattened lefse potato bread with fresh butter and sits next to Sivert.

HILDA

Let's pray.

They all bow their heads.

SIVERT

Bless this food and all who prepared it, in Your name we pray. Amen.

HILDA/DONNA/LYLE

Amen.

Lyle reaches out and grabs a piece of lefse first, knocking Donna's hand out of the way.

DONNA

Hey!

SIVERT

Behave or you'll go to bed hungry!

Hilda registers his mood, looks over at the children while she eats. They look at her, concerned. She winks at them.

Lyle backs down and dips his bread into the stew before he takes a bite, as Donna hands her father the lefse plate.

DONNA

Here you go, Papa.

HILDA

Everything go alright in town? Prices better than last year?

Lyle glances at his dad, who eats hunkered over his bowl. Doesn't respond. Then he looks to his mom, brows furrowed.

Everyone eats in silence as Hilda tries to comfort them.

HILDA (cont'd)

We got food on the table and a roof over our heads. As long as we work hard, God will bless us.

Sivert takes another spoonful, speaks without looking up.

SIVERT

Can't work no harder.

They eat in silence for a few more moments while Lyle gobbles up the last of his stew, wiping the bowl with lefse.

HILDA

Lyle, why don't you clear the table and go listen to the radio a bit.

Both Lyle and Donna perk up. Look to their dad, anxious.

DONNA

Can we?

SIVERT

Just keep it down.

LYLE

Thank you!

DONNA

Thank you, Papa!

Lyle puts his bowl in the kitchen basin, as Donna follows close behind, then both leave into the--

LIVING ROOM

--toward the upright wooden Zenith radio in the corner. Lyle attaches the wire from the power cord to a car battery terminal on the floor next to it.

With the turn of the knob, it CRACKLES to life, as NEWS of the day streams into the room.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

--Empire Eland was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic by a German U-Boat--

Lyle reaches to change the channel and Donna stops him.

DONNA

Hold on a minute.

LYLE

But *The Lone Ranger's* on--

DONNA

--shh.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

--as Hitler continues his advance into Leningrad with no end in sight. Meanwhile fallout continues from Lindbergh's comments in Des Moines pointed at the Roosevelt Administ--

LYLE

Come on! It's starting!

Donna relents as Lyle turns the knob, tuning the radio until he hears the end notes of the William Tell Overture, then sits, ready for adventure, staring at the radio. Excited.

DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The muted sound of the Lone Ranger in the other room, Hilda takes Sivert's bowl and sets it in the basin, then returns with a kettle of hot coffee.

Pours two cups then sits across from him.

HILDA

How bad is it?

Sivert *slurps* from his enamel cup, looks up.

SIVERT

Another weak harvest with low prices.  
Still behind with the bank, but they  
extended the loans. Need a record  
harvest next year just to break even.

HILDA

We can sell the car.

SIVERT

Might have to. We'll see.

She pats his hand. Grips it hard.

HILDA

We can't lose the farm. Whatever it  
is, we'll face it together.

He looks across the table at the love of his life, squeezes  
her hand. Forces a smirk.

SIVERT

After all these years. All this work.  
I just wanted more for us.

She pats his hand, gets up and crosses the room and opens  
the oven warmer door, pulls out a simple sheet cake with the  
number '10' written on it.

HILDA

We have plenty. Come on.

She looks over her shoulder into the living room as Donna  
and Lyle stare at the radio, enthralled at the adventure  
streaming into the room.

HILDA (cont'd)

(sings)

*Happy Birthday, to you.*

At the sound of Hilda's voice, a spark in Sivert's eyes as  
he joins her at the living room entrance and sings along.

SIVERT

*Happy Birthday, to you.*

Donna joins in, as Lyle forgets all about the Lone Ranger,  
surrounded by his family in song.

And cake!

INT. DONNA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Lyle and Donna face each other on the floor with homemade playing cards made out of old potato sack labels.

A small oil lamp lights the area, a half-eaten piece of cake on a napkin between them.

LYLE  
Got any eights?

DONNA  
Go fish.

Donna pulls a label from the deck as Lyle takes a bite of the cake and offers it to her.

DONNA (cont'd)  
It's your birthday. You have it.

LYLE  
I know, but we share everything.

Donna takes it from him. Lyle giggles as she does.

LYLE (cont'd)  
Now I can say you take the cake.

Donna chuckles at the very bad joke and talks through a full mouth, shooting crumbs at him as she does.

DONNA  
Har har. Give me your fours.

Lyle grimaces. Hands her a card.

LYLE  
Nuts.

Donna takes it with smug satisfaction. Lays down her pair.

LYLE (cont'd)  
What's with that boat sinking? The one you wanted to listen to?

DONNA  
There's a war going on in Europe.

LYLE  
Where's that?

DONNA  
You need to pay better attention in Geography class. And history.



Lyle takes another bite of cake and waves her off.

LYLE

Yeah, yeah and math, I know. I don't need any of that stuff.

DONNA

Yes you do, Cuckoo!

LYLE

Do not. I'm going to be a farmer just like Papa. We're going to have the best farm east of Adams. You'll see.

DONNA

You can't even finish your chores.

LYLE

Yeah, well, give me your tens.

Donna smirks and hands over a card.

DONNA

Anyway, Papa will figure it out.

LYLE

We'll figure it out.

Lyle smiles and takes a big bite of cake, fills his mouth.

DONNA

Give me your twos.

LYLE

Ahhh, nutshhh.

Cake crumbs shoot out of his mouth as he hands over the card. Donna takes it, and places her last pair down.

DONNA

Ha! Old Maid. My prize!

She takes the last of cake from his hands and stuffs it in her mouth, laughing.

LYLE

Hey!

He tackles Donna and they laugh together, their playful shadows dancing on the wall behind them.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAYBREAK

Lyle rubs his eyes as he enters. Hilda hands him a slice of fresh bread with jam, while Donna stokes the wood stove.

HILDA  
Fetch me some milk and eggs and help  
Papa with the wagon.

LYLE  
Mama, the chicken coop is gonna make  
me stink before school.

HILDA  
Haven't bathed in a month, the coop  
will be an improvement. Hurry on.

Donna chuckles as Hilda shoos him out the door. He stuffs the bread in his mouth and grimaces.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He crosses the yard to the chicken coop, stops outside as he finishes his breakfast.

Looks over at his dad in the barn, then back at the coop.

LYLE  
Stupid chickens.

He grabs a basket outside the coop, unclasps the door, and steps in as chickens SQUAWK all about.

EXT. BARN - LATER

Sun a little further up on the horizon, the blue sky peeks behind white clouds overhead.

Lyle sits on a stool next to a milking cow, massaging its udder and squirting milk into a pail at a constant rhythm. Hums a tune in perfect pitch while he milks.

The pail fills as he eyes the two-piston, gas powered motor and flywheel, used to power the hay conveyor, against the wall of the stall.

He leaves the pail and walks over to it, curious, struggles to move the heavy flywheel to watch the piston rise.

Moves to the side to get more leverage, his right foot directly under the second piston head, as he puts all his weight against the flywheel, sending the piston firing...

LYLE

AAAHHHH!!!

---right onto his flimsy shoe, pressing onto his toe. Stuck.

In pain and panic, his face pallid, he tries to push the flywheel to get it off, but the piston flattens his toe, unable to budge.

He tries to yank his foot, but knocks over the pail of milk.

SIVERT (O.S.)

What is it!

LYLE

I'm stuck! Help!

Tears stream down Lyle's face as Sivert runs in.

SIVERT

What in tarnation--

Sees Lyle's toe flattened by the piston, then simply turns the flywheel in the opposite direction as the piston rises and Lyle falls backward to the ground, holding his foot.

SIVERT (cont'd)

What'd you do, for crying out loud?

Hilda and Donna run over from the house.

HILDA

What's all the rack...Egad! The milk!

Lyle wipes his tears and sees the empty pail, along with all the disappointed faces staring down at him.

LYLE

I was just trying to--

SIVERT

--to goof around like you always do.  
Maybe if you spent more time with  
your chores than playing you--

Lyle holds the tears back now, takes those words in.

Hilda's heard enough and kneels beside him, removes his shoe and exposes the black and blue toenail.

HILDA

That's enough of that. Donna, bring  
me a needle...hurry.

Donna disappears as Sivert stands and turns away, ashamed of his words, his anger. Turns and faces him, stern.

SIVERT

Get to the north field after school.  
I'll have it turned and you can ride  
the rake to level it.

LYLE

I...I will, Papa. I'm sorry.

Sivert walks off as Donna runs to her mother's side. Hands her the large sewing needle.

HILDA

Hold your brother.  
(to Lyle)  
Best bite down on something.

Lyle's eyes bulge as Donna grabs a leather strap from the stall and he bites down on it, his eyes squint shut as his mother holds his foot steady.

Hilda pushes the needle through the toenail as blood flows from the hole, pressure relieved.

Lyle's eyes go wide as he screams into the leather.

Hilda dips a cloth in the puddle of milk, applies it to Lyle's toe, then looks at Donna.

HILDA (cont'd)

Finish the chores and get ready for  
school. I'll take it from here.

Donna looks at her brother and squeezes his hand. Their eyes meet, the moment captured. *You got this.*

Donna hurries off as Hilda tends to Lyle.

HILDA (cont'd)

Come on, you. Let's get this cleaned  
and bandaged. You did good.

Hilda helps him up as Lyle gets to his feet. Wipes his eyes and hobbles forward.

LYLE

Thank you, Mama.

EXT. FARM ROAD - LATER

Donna turns from their driveway and heads up the main road, as Lyle trails behind, swinging his lunch pail around as he limps slowly along.

DONNA  
You're going to make us late again  
and I have to take roll call.

LYLE  
Who cares. Just go on.

DONNA  
I'll have to mark you tardy.

LYLE  
I'll throw a tardy party. Invitation  
says don't be late. Har har...

Lyle laughs at his bad joke, as Donna hurries ahead.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATER

Donna stands in front of the one-room class with a notebook as MRS. JOHNSON (40's, glasses, ruffled hair) sits at her desk grading a paper. Donna pauses before each name.

DONNA  
Ole Frovarp.

OLE  
Present.

DONNA  
Jon Madland.

JOHN  
Present.

DONNA  
Lyle Orstad.

Silence.

Mrs. Johnson looks toward the class as the front door opens wide and Lyle drags himself inside. Door SLAMS behind him.

A huge commotion. Everyone turns to see him there.

LYLE  
Here!

Mrs. Johnson smirks and points to his seat. *Sit down!*

Lyle plops down at his desk as Donna finishes up.

Ole (12) leans over to him. Winces and plugs his nose while nudging his desk partner, Jon (12).

OLE  
Ewww gross, you stink, Lyle.

JON  
Smells like chicken poop.

OLE  
Poop pile, Lyle.

Jon and Ole laugh it up, as Lyle slumps down in his seat, embarrassed.

A book SLAMS on the front desk. The class goes silent.

Mrs. Johnson stands and takes control.

MRS. JOHNSON  
That will be enough of that! Donna,  
please lead grades one through four  
with the story lesson at the back.

DONNA  
Yes, Mrs. Johnson.

MRS. JOHNSON  
Ole, you seem ready to contribute.  
Why don't you show us your  
multiplication tables up at the  
chalkboard. Come on, let's go.

Donna leads the younger kids toward the back corner of the schoolhouse, while the older kids shuffle to the front.

Jon pushes Ole as he heads to the board, while Lyle, smaller than the others, stays toward the back.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Start with sixes.

Lyle slinks into a desk, and looks over at Donna who catches his glance. She winks at him for encouragement.

He looks back up front as Ole finishes up his row of numbers on the chalkboard.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Very good. Lyle, come up and continue  
with sevens.

Lyle makes his way toward the front, passing Ole on the way, who nudges Lyle and knocks him off-balance. Lyle winces as he puts too much weight on his sore foot, almost falls.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Ole, stop that this instant or you'll  
be washing blackboards at recess.

OLE  
Sorry Mrs. Johnson, I slipped.

MRS. JOHNSON  
Yes, I'm sure. Now, sit!

The other kids chuckle as Ole sits next to Jon, while Lyle makes his way up to the board and takes the chalk.

Looks at the line of numbers and starts with the seven. Then pauses. Adds a thirteen to the next line.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Try again.

The class chuckles as Lyle corrects it to fourteen, then counts in his head, mumbling as he does. Writes down the next. And the next. Slow, but sure. Finishes the row.

Mrs. Johnson leans in, but recoils at the stench of chicken and body odor. Forces a smile.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Very good, Lyle. Go sit.

Lyle leaves the front as she tickles her nose to help rid the smell and opens the nearby window.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)  
Jon, come and continue with eights.

Donna looks from her book over to Lyle, nods. *Good job.*

Then over to Ole, who catches her in the corner of his eye. Her eyes *narrow* as he gulps. If looks could kill.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - LATER

Sivert works the plow and guides the workhorse across the field while his younger brother, MELVIN (56, fit, chiseled jaw) leads the other team next to him.

MELVIN  
How'd you fare with harvest?

SIVERT  
Same. Always barely enough to get by,  
never enough to get ahead.

MELVIN  
Maybe next year.

SIVERT  
It's always next year. There's no  
future in hoping for a future.

They straighten the line as soil turns over behind them in  
sync, breaking up the ground evenly at a solid pace.

Skilled at their work.

MELVIN  
I hear there's good work out west.  
Steady pay, building ships.

SIVERT  
Ships? Where?  
(points, weaves)  
Watch your line!

Melvin corrects his path.

MELVIN  
In Everett. Elmer told me about it.

SIVERT  
Elmer knows ships like you know  
farming. Which isn't saying much.

Sivert guides the plow along at a faster pace as Melvin  
follows suit, corrects the plow line behind him.

SIVERT (cont'd)  
Never mind that daydreaming, we got  
another field to finish so keep up.

Melvin snickers. Keeps his line. Steadies his pace.

MELVIN  
Right on your heels, big brother.

The two lead their plows side by side along the length of  
the field as the mid-afternoon sun beats down overhead.