



### Text Version of Audio Story: TJ

The buyer from the feed mill would go out and buy corn from the farmers and haul it to the mill and wagons, and then they would shell it from the cobs. Sometimes, they would grind it into meal, and other times they would leave the kernels whole. The whole kernels came out of a chute along the side of the building and would load into trucks and then off for livestock feed. Sometimes, a little would spill out of the chute.

The kids from next door stood over a pile of the spilled corn. One said, *“Oh, that’s perfect, just perfect! We’ll use the kernels of corn as play money in our play store.”*

Maybe an old bottle cap costs three kernels. Perhaps you could buy a pet caterpillar for four kernels. Maybe, if you were good at bartering, you could get yourself a spent soup can for five kernels.

It was the Great Depression, and the kids made do playing with whatever they could find and using their imaginations. Their home was a toolshed behind the gas station, there next to the feed mill.

The gas station man had it better than most during the Depression, and when the father with a wife and six children were without a home, the gas station man showed the toolshed to the father and said, *“Here, it’s not much, but it’s a roof over your head. And you know, I have an old kerosene stove we could probably put in it.”*

The family was elated to know that they would have shelter. The father was slowly collecting old cast-off lumber from discarded railroad boxcars. He was saving the lumber. If he could just get enough, and if he could save a dollar or two with each pay ... maybe, just maybe, with a lot of work and sweat, he could pull all the nails out of the lumber and buy a little piece of land and build a house on it. A house where he and his family could live, so they wouldn’t have to live in a toolshed anymore.

Mr. Gas Station Man would help, too. He and his wife had no children, and all these kids running around must have given them a sense of joy in a life that seemed so sad without children. When the gas station owner’s wife would cook, she would try to cook extras so that she could share it with the toolshed family.

During the Great Depression, it was small deeds such as this that got so many families through. And most families who remember those hard times also remember the kindness of people who made the going just a bit easier.

After a good bit of collecting lumber and scraping and saving, the father finally had just enough for the simplest little house. But to the kids, it seemed like a mansion, with a separate room just for sleeping. Day by day would march on, and the family would have their ups and downs — fun times, sad times — living there in their new mansion with a stream nearby and, fish, that if you put bread on the end of a safety pin and tied it to a string, you could catch and then throw back for maybe another day.

The toolshed kids would eventually grow up, all except for Bobby, who was hit and killed by a truck at age six. Three of the girls, Janet, Mamie and Mary, would all stay close by and — to this day — live only a short distance from that little house. TJ, the other little girl, the fiery redhead, would meet a farm boy, home from the war. They would get married, and she would move to where he was from. A little place called Juniata County, deep in the rural mountainous interior of Pennsylvania. Her husband would become the local oilman, and they would have three children: Diane, Craig and me.

I'm the American Storyteller.