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Focus

The perspiration beaded like raindrops on the young teenager's forehead. It then rolled down to his nose and dripped off. When he wiped his brow with the back of his hand some perspiration seeped into his eyes and stung profusely. Who could have imagined how arduous it would be picking the first, fresh, fruit of the season with its enticing vibrant red colour and delightful pungent aroma and flavor? These succulent berries created glorious desserts like strawberry shortcake, and tantalizing extravagance when dipped in dark chocolate. Strawberry season was a sure sign of summer coming, and renewed hope.

Now, it was mid-June and strawberry season was ending. The sun was getting hotter and picking was becoming difficult with smaller, sparse berries. Consequently, the picking price increased to 10 cents per quart compared to 5 cents at the beginning of the season when berries were large and plentiful. The boy envied his older brothers who were stronger and could secure full-time summer jobs on farms. He couldn't sling hay bales or reach and hold down a tractor clutch pedal. He, therefore, undertook numerous summer jobs like berry picking, mowing lawns, and general yard work within the community. Earning \$5-\$6 a day during the summer secured him for the rest of the year. He could buy school supplies, a pair of jeans, two shirts, an occasional chocolate bar and skating tickets on Saturday nights throughout the winter.

Now, the boy was picking berries in the blistering sun, struggling to keep going. This was the first time he had worked for Mr. Libivicki. The patch where he started the season had stopped and Mr. Libivicki asked for help to finish the season. These last berries of the year commanded a high price, similar to the very first berries of the season. As the boy struggled along, three older teenage girls made things worse. Instead of picking they spent all their effort into talking, giggling and throwing berries at each other.

About mid-afternoon Mr. Libivicki came out to the patch and called the boy in. His house had been built four or five years previously yet was still unfinished. It was a

modest raised brick bungalow. The foundation was still largely exposed, but when completely backfilled, the house would stand high, providing a dry basement. In front and off to the right of the new house stood a small, unpainted, wooden clapboard shed, about the size of a single car garage. Two small windows with plain, sheet curtains flanked a doorway. A black stovepipe protruded through its roof. No doubt, the boy thought, it would have provided good shelter prior to the brick bungalow. The boy followed up makeshift cement block steps into the kitchen of the bungalow. The room was barren with unpainted walls of dull grey plasterboard. A crucifix and a clock hung on a wall and in the middle of the room stood an Arberite table and four chairs. The house was cool inside due to large, well-placed shade trees outside. The boy was offered a glass of ice-lemonade. It was refreshing. Mr. Libivicki began small talk in broken English, "You have brother, sister?" The boy replied he had three older brothers. "Ah" he said, "they show you good!" He then cut to the point. "You work good. You work hard. Don't worry about girls," as he gestured toward the strawberry patch, "they are foolish. You do good!" They both smiled. The boy finished the lemonade, thanked Mr. Libivicki and returned to the patch with renewed energy and purpose

He thought about his encounter for the rest of the day. This man immigrated with his wife seeking a better life. They may have escaped the ravages after WWII or were even refugees. They now lived modestly and honestly while providing opportunities for others. The boy was grateful for the guidance and example provided by his brothers and parents. He appreciated the message expressed by Mr. Libiviki to persevere, to focus on the task at hand and not be distracted. The boy wondered where this life lesson would take him.

Sincerely,
Tom Challen

*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*

