

Ten years in the city, says Frank Peebles, can make you forget the joy (and pain) of getting the crops in.

Celebrating the real harvest

To some people, harvest moon is just an album by Neil Young. It's a very good album, styled on his breakthrough album 'Harvest' from his early days in music, not far removed from his youth on the Canadian prairies. No doubt the smell of freshly reaped grain led to his songs like 'Thrasher'.

I myself have never seen a real thrasher working, and it wasn't until I moved to the city that I learned what the harvest moon really was (the full moon closest the autumn equinox). Growing up I was far too busy with the harvest to care about what the moon was doing. The only ethereal condition that meant anything to anyone on the farm was the clouds. Everyone tried to out-think the rain.

This is the tenth year I have lived apart from the harvest. Ten years ago moving to the city was an emancipation. Local phone calls replaced letters to friends from far away, now just across the urban sprawl. They could see me in the flesh instead of reading my scrawl on dusty, greasy paper I pinned on between loads of silage. The name Frank means "free

man" in Greek and I lived up to it that graduation summer and I have never gone back for more than a holiday.

It shows. My stomach no longer has a six-pack the envy of any brewery. When I throw 700 bales these days, I ache and moan. But it feels good like it never did before. Back in my teen years I wanted nothing to do with it, or farming at all. I grew up on 5,000 acres, surrounded by cattle and their smells, by manure on my shoes and country music on the 8-track player. My clothes were never as crisp and trendy as all the kids in town, and I didn't know anything about traveling in a pack the way teenagers do.

But I was a social young guy, and I was desperate for attention and approval. Being just like them meant ducking my reality. I was a farm boy. That's what they called me. "Farmer Frank." And I hated it with a murderous passion, because it stuck. So on the farm I didn't.

I had to go back to the ranch a lot this past summer. The family was a little short-staffed, so I made the weekend trip to help out a few times. None of those trips hurt like this last one, the weekend before the equinox. Bale hauling is the most physically

demanding job the farm has. It is also the most invigorating, being outside inching across the rolling fields with a hay wagon, tossing 60-pound bales one by one onto the load.

There is a precise way to pick the bales up, an ultra-efficient way to throw them, a way to stack them so they don't fall apart on the road, and a lot of considerations for putting them into the barn. They can't be too wet or they might spontaneously combust and burn your barns down. The best hay is put in the barn nearest the calves because they need the extra nutrition in winter. The soft and broken bales go off to the side for the milk cow because she only gets fed a few flakes at a time. Etc., etc., etc.

Nobody I have ever met in 10 years of various cities has finished their working day with the satisfaction of a farmer at harvest time. Wiping the sweat off your face and stretching your back, pouring a huge jug of water down your parched throat as the last rays of the day's sun put a golden glint on the last bales newly stacked in the barn - it feels like a rare accomplishment. It is a feeling I had no idea I missed so much until I was standing there at the end of one of those days again. Me, a tight knot of loved ones, and the harvest moon.



Frank
Peebles

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- *Handmaid's Tale_Margaret Atwood
 - *The Colour Purple_Alice Walker
 - *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings_Maya Angelou
 - *Snow Falling on Cedars_David Guterson
 - *The Chocolate War_Robert Cormier
 - *To Kill a Mockingbird_Harper Lee
 - *Final Exit_Derek Humphrey
 - *Kaffir Boy_Mark Mathabane
 - *Harry Potter (Series)_J.K. Rowling
 - *The Witches_Roald Dahl
 - *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret_Judy Blume
 - *Pillars of the Earth_Ken Follett
 - *A Light in the Attic_Shel Silverstein
 - *The House of Spirits_Isabel Allende
 - *Native Son_Richard Wright
- (Source: www.ala.org)

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