

## HARVESTING: MY LIFE

Every summer, I pack as much as I can into my little room in our trailer. I leave all my friends, my house, and the rest of my family behind. I look back as we pull out and feel sad, but then I look forward and remember all the good times that harvest brings. Traveling day is the best, all the trucks lined up with their tractors and combines behind them, our huge trailers, and then there is my family all packed up in our vehicle. Everybody is all lined up ready to leave this "life" behind and start our "harvest life". Over these several years, harvest has become a part of me, a way of life.

My dad, wanted to work in agriculture all of his life. His dad wasn't in an agricultural field so it wasn't going to be an easy task. After graduating college, in 1983, he decided that harvesting was the life he would pursue. I was born in February of 1990 and went on harvest in May of that year. I have grown up in a vehicle riding in a car seat. I even learned how to work my way out of one by the time I was 3. By the age of eight, my dad had taught me how to drive the pick-up and I thought I was tough stuff. By twelve years of age I learned to drive the combine with my dad right beside me. I wasn't heavy enough to hold the seat down, so I had to sit on a phone book to keep the combine on. Then I started helping my mother with all of the cooking for seventeen to twenty hired men. It was a full time job. In the past few seasons I have learned many different aspects of harvest from the cooking, billing, to running machinery, map making, permit books and several other small things to make the business run smoother. Now I do whatever is needed. We can be spread up to seventy-five miles apart so I will take meals to the field so dad doesn't have to come pick them up. If we're short a guy, I will jump in the combine and put a full day of work in. I go from day to day and each day there is a new hurdle to jump.

I feel blessed to have the opportunity to go on harvest. Over the years I have developed some long lasting friendships. We have cut for the same farmers for years so we continue to go to the same town over and over. In each town we go to there's sure to be a friend I wait to see each year. As a family, we have a lot of social outings with the farmers and their family's when there is time during the harvest run. Also, being around hired men from varying cultures has been a learning experience. We have guys who come from Australia, Ireland, Denmark, England, and many other countries around the world and also from New York to Oregon. Getting to know these guys and about their cultures has been very interesting. Usually, these guys are very fun to work with and even hang around and have some fun with.

Harvesting has taught me many life lessons. One that applies to everyday life would be that what you put into something is what you get out of it. When my dad started harvesting, he knew that if he outworked people he could be successful and he was willing to put the time in. I think this applies to everything we do. I run track and nobody but yourself can make you better. If I outwork my opponents I have the opportunity to be successful. Another lesson that I find harvesting is a great example of is communication skills. Communication has become very important within harvesting having to communicate with a wide range of people: family, employees, clients, and businesses. What I personally have learned is the words a person uses to communicate and the tone a person uses makes all the difference. Conflicts arise in a variety of ways throughout the season. Learning how to resolve these conflicts in a positive way is a lesson I have observed over and over again. One of the best lessons I have learned is the importance of family. I get to spend a whole summer working with my family, for harvest truly is a family business. It takes all of us to keep the business going. There are many challenges that God puts in front of us as a family and as a business. Weather is one of the major issues harvesters have to deal with, but we are always reminded that it is God's will, not ours.

What does the future hold for me? This fall I plan on attending Oklahoma Christian University. For now, I plan to major in psychology. I have a passion for helping people and want to make a difference. Also, being around guys from other countries has made me really interested in traveling. I went to Italy last year and definitely want to go back. I plan on spending a year studying in Europe. I hope to visit some of the guys that have helped me grow up and they are more than just a former employee, they are friends. Overall, harvest has been a great experience, and even though I'm leaving for college I still plan to be a part of the harvest, for years to come. Harvest isn't something you can just drop; you would miss it way too much.