

After nine hectic months of high school, most teens soak up the sweet serenities of summer by enjoying every possible moment with their friends, staying out till wee hours of the morning simply because they can, and spending countless hours soaking up the sun to get that perfect golden tan. Believe it or not, as a crewmember on our family's harvest operation, that is actually a rather accurate rundown of my summer. Although, spending consecutive weeks living, working, and breathing with my immediate family was stressful at times, I was always kept entertained. Without a doubt I saw my fair share of sunrises; exceptionally late nights seemed to be in high demand too. I even had the honor to bask in the sun on top of the combine cab while waiting for trucks in the field. I'm almost positive all the guys in my school were jealous of the amazing farmer's tan I attained.

Harvest is a truly unique experience that has greatly influenced my life, and given me several opportunities starting at an exceptionally young age. Throughout early childhood my mother, siblings, and I spent countless hours and incalculable miles journeying to podunk towns across Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska to visit our dearly missed dad. As I entered my preteen years, I transitioned from my carefree world, where playing with G.I. Joes in the back of the pickup was a priority, to an adult reality, where I was expected to contribute my efforts to our business. Although my tasks were minor, I took them very seriously. In my eyes, washing filthy windshields, sweeping out dusty cabs, fueling up combines, and making sloppy joe's for lunch was almost like playing "house"; to me, this did not seem like work. Most of all, I simply enjoyed the feeling of being needed. After I turned fourteen and obtained my Learner's Permit, I was thrilled to finally be able to drive (with an adult passenger, of course) to and from various locations on harvest. At first, I began driving pickups with trailers and then graduated to the service truck. Within two years, I was enduring extreme "truck training" sessions with my dad, in preparation to attain my Class A CDL after I turn eighteen.

Not much has changed over the years, as I still thoroughly enjoy every season of harvest to the fullest. I find it quite exhilarating to work in an environment where each day is unpredictable in one way or another. Furthermore, growing up in a small community, harvest is an excellent escape from my hometown and has allowed me to travel across several states. In fact, thanks to harvest I have found the new love of my life: traveling. Spending June, July and part of August driving thousands of miles across Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Idaho with my family may sound overwhelming, but I wouldn't trade it for the world. On harvest, I have enjoyed many breathtaking sunsets that radiant over the precious waves of wheat. In a way, harvesters are the last inhabitants of the frontier. Following in our ancestors footsteps, we continually move with the land in an attempt to make a living. It's amazing to think we are one of the final generations to live in this manner.

Harvest has taught me countless skills that I will never forget. After chatting with a multi-millionaire employer in Texas, I found I can now discuss matters with anyone I may run across. Quick thinking is also a necessity when a combine tire begins to slide off the trailer while being unloaded. Patience is critical when the combine header becomes plugged on the last round at 2 A.M. Furthermore, humor is essential in the aftermath of missing the turn to a new field and an eighty mile detour is taken instead. Respect is vital when dealing with various cultures in unfamiliar areas. Confidence is crucial when pulling a wide load of two headers down a rough, narrow highway with no shoulder on Memorial Day weekend. Responsibility is imperative when a pitch black wall cloud is rapidly headed for a field and there is still standing wheat. Imagination is a must during eight hour drives across barren country to move all the equipment to a new destination.

These unique characteristics I have gained from harvest throughout the years will continue to assist me in all my future endeavors. As high school graduation quickly approaches my lifetime goal of attending college is beginning to become a reality. I plan to major in pre-medicine and become a physician, and although health sciences are not directly related to harvesting, almost everything I have learned from my experiences with harvest will help me succeed in college. From my harvest endeavors, I have gained confidence and work ethic, which is the key to victory in life, no matter what one does. I am incredibly thankful my summers are not wasted, but rather invested in preparation for real life!