

country leisure

Often, when asking about leisure issues, people frequently assume the word "leisure" equals urbanity, ignoring those of us who perfected the art of country-time leisure.

Adolescent summers on a working farm on the plains of central Kansas afforded me countless opportunities to witness (and practice) a handful of activities mostly overlooked by urban sophisticates who believe blue cocktails make a bold statement.

Country revel begins with the simple pastime of porch sitting. The first step — placing one's backside on a chair and doing absolutely nothing — should present little challenge for most. The degree of difficulty, though, comes with choosing the proper equipment.

"Cussin' Paul Rohrer," as my grandmother called him, lived down the road piece. On our visits to our grandparents, we'd see him clad in overalls, plopped in a rusty kitchen chair with a spectacular array of items in front of him. By turns, Cussin' Paul would have within reach a transistor radio, farm implement magazines, Coors, a pocket knife, a pellet gun, a listless canine, slinky felines and a pile of weathered sticks.

Cussin' Paul, it must be stated, was a professional, and beginners should log plenty of practice time before attempting his breathtaking eight-item approach.

Whittling, a largely forgotten pas-

LEISURE IS NOT A PRIVILEGE FOR CITY DWELLERS ONLY. WE COUNTRY FOLK HAVE A FEW PASTIMES OF OUR OWN **BY MARK LUCE**



PHOTO: JISC

time, routinely shaves away several hours, as well as giving adding artistry to your downtime. Ol' Jess, another neighbor who was as wizened as Cussin' Paul was foul-mouthed, constantly carried his whittling into Nickerson Farms for the daily morning and afternoon coffee klatsches hosted by my grandfather. Jess, a wizard with his knife, sculpted figures that eerily captured the angst of Norwegian painter and woodcarver Eduard Munch, whose paintings (including his most famous, *The Scream*) often dealt with issues like death and melancholia.

Despite the joys of whittling, no activity combines practicality with leisure quite as much as watching weather. Grandpa was the master of keeping his eye keen and his tongue ready with a witty weather aphorism.

Besides the classic, "Evening red and morning gray help the farmer on his

way; evening gray and morning red bring down rain upon his head," grandpa was particularly partial to the truism, "Ring around the moon, rain by noon. Ring around the sun, rain before night is done."

While the science behind such home-spun wisdom may be shaky, grandpa was often correct. Weather, my grandfather used to explain, will always be the great equalizer.

As a subject, weather remains the sure-fire entree into conversation with a stranger. Moreover, rapt attention to the weather encourages individuals to be prepared.

Most importantly, however, thorough knowledge of weather, and the ability to blather incessantly about it, serves as a shimmering shield in those social occasions when boorish souls verbally assault you.

So for those of you misguided souls who believe leisure can only be found in cities, I recommend you try some of our country-time leisure activities. You may find them a nice break from your frenzied city life.

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