

# Farmer, Dish-Washer, Painter, Chauffeur

*Self-Help Student at University, Not Writing for Publication, Tells  
of Hardships Met in Financing His Education*

By A UNIVERSITY STUDENT

THIS essay is not intended to be an autobiography; merely the story of my financial experiences in school. I will write of most everything directly and indirectly related to my finances for the past six years that I have been in school.

I decided to go to school in the fall of 1924. My first problem was to get the money. In July I had finished working my cotton crop; then I went to Duncan, South Carolina, and worked for the Southern Power Company for \$2.75 per day. After working there for one month, I had saved enough money to start to school. I went to Haywood Institute at Clyde, North Carolina, which was about one hundred miles from my home in South Carolina.

The expenses per year were \$150. I spent all the money I had by the time my crop was ready to sell. From it I received nearly enough money to last me for the remainder of the year. At the end of the year I owed \$30. That I borrowed from the bank. I planted another cotton crop that year and paid the note after three months. I did not work very much the first two years I was in high school, as there was very little to do.

After I had finished two years of my high school work, I went home and my father let me have the land to plant another crop of cotton. It did not rain much that year; so my crop was worth very little. When I finished cultivating it, I thought it would not be worth \$25 on account of the drouth. Figuratively speaking everything seemed to be against me. One month before school opened I did not have a single dollar. I hunted several days for a job. Finally I found one working with a wheat thresher; the wages were \$1.50 a day.

The work was hard but I didn't mind it. We began work at daybreak and continued until dark. I have not yet forgotten the hum of that old thresher, the fog of rising dust, and the sweat as it dripped from my body. We had meals at nearly every place we threshed, for which we were glad. The ones who cooked always wanted to have something extra or new to eat, I suppose, but they all had fried chicken as the extra. We ate it, however, and joked about our growing feathers and crowing.

At night we slept in barns, on the grass, or anywhere that we found a pile of straw. The chaff stuck our sweaty bodies but we slept soundly. Shower baths and bath tubs were not even heard

*This essay was written, unsolicited by the professor, on one of the University composition courses. The story gives one an idea of sacrifices which University students are willing to endure to secure an education. The dramatic touch which this boy gives to his story makes it most interesting and entertaining.*

of in that whole country. That was the work I was doing for \$1.50 a day.

By the time school opened I had saved about \$35. That was my senior year in high school; I was only three years in completing the requirements for graduation. The principal of the school gave me a job firing a boiler; that paid \$50 of my expenses. That year the drouth was so long that my crop was worth very little; I sold it for \$50. It was a problem for me to know what to do, for my expenses at the school were \$150.

In addition to the work I did firing a boiler, I worked on a farm near the school every Saturday. This was another \$1.50 per day job, but not so disagreeable as threshing wheat. At the end of the year I graduated. My total indebtedness for the three years was then \$160, the interest on the notes being eight per cent.

I went home again and planted a small cotton crop. It made four bales, two of which I gave to my father for rent. Late in the summer I planned to go to college. My creditor said if I kept the interest paid on the notes he would be glad to give me longer to pay them. It was one month before time for school to begin when I finished cultivating my crop. But it was not worth any money at that time. I knew that I could not go without money. I had only one month in which to make it. I could find no job in that country for such a short period of time, and it was useless to go far away from home to find a job.

I asked about the thresher that I had worked with the year before; the owner said he was going to start threshing soon and wanted me to help him. One dollar and fifty cents a day seemed slow but it was my last chance. We threshed all the grain in that section of the country and then crossed over into North Carolina. I tried to buy grain from some of those farmers to sell near my home but they wouldn't sell it at the price I wanted to pay; so I couldn't speculate on that.

In the meantime I had learned the price of everything else they were marketing then, such as potatoes, cabbage, and apples. When I went back home for the week end I asked what the price of such produce was at nearby towns. I figured that by hauling produce from North Carolina across the line to our markets in South Carolina I could make fifty per cent profit on it. I immediately took orders for forty bushels of potatoes to be delivered within three days, of course selling them before I had even bought any. It was then only three days until school began.

My father told me that I could have his truck to use, but I figured that it would take one third of the profit if I used it. I wanted all profit and no expense. I decided if I would drive my father's horses and wagon I could accomplish my aim. I drove the team that forty-nine mile journey and back in two days. I delivered the potatoes, making the fifty per cent profit. My savings had increased to about sixty dollars by that time.

I entered college at Mars Hill, North Carolina. My total expense for the year was \$300. I paid \$45 at registration time. I began to work in the kitchen to pay the remainder. For cooking I was paid twenty cents an hour, seventeen for washing dishes. I worked three and one half hours per day at that work. That year I ranked as a first class cook under the direction of the dietitian; that meant a promotion the next year.

At the end of that year I owed the college only ten dollars. I was satisfied with my first year's work in college, having passed all courses with an average of "B." I then began work on the campus for twenty-five cents an hour. I thought that it would be best for me to stay for the summer school in order to have more time to work the next year.

During the summer school I worked four and one half hours cooking and washing dishes. The total expense for the summer school was seventy dollars. By working I paid it all but six or seven dollars. When school was out I began painting and made fifty dollars in about two weeks. One of my friends and I were left in charge of a house on the campus that two weeks; we did our own cooking, which was cheaper than paying board.

I registered my second year in college without paying anything. I worked four and one half hours a day that year; I

was chief of the breakfast cooks. I had to get up at four-thirty every morning to cook breakfast. That was disagreeable to me. There was no heat in the dormitory at that hour. When I had not slept enough, a dark brown taste never failed to be in my mouth. But I had to push the warm covers back and leap out of bed when the clock broke the morning silence.

At the end of the year, I graduated from junior college. My expenses were all paid and I had three dollars in cash. One of my friends, Carl Brown, and I went to Tennessee. He had one dollar more than I did. We went to the mines near Jefferson City and several other places hunting work. At the end of our third day's travel, we had not found a job. The fourth day we were offered a job in Knoxville at twenty-five cents an hour; board was seven dollars a week. We were almost forced to take it; my money had dwindled to fourteen cents and my partner's to one dollar.

That night we ate a loaf of bread and a can of beans in the rear end of a grocery store. Then we started bumming towards home. Before midnight we reached Jefferson City. We were lucky to find a friend I had once known; without much entreaty we stayed with him that night at Carson-Newman College. Of course we were his guests at breakfast. We started bumming towards home again, which was about three hundred miles. At twelve o'clock that night we reached home. I lightly crept into the house and hunted for something to eat. The fourteen cents was still jingling in my pocket.

After resting a day or two, I began work in a textile finishing plant at Taylors, South Carolina. I was paid twenty-five cents an hour for the work; after two and a half months I had saved \$125. I quit the job and went to the University of North Carolina. I did not find any work that I could get at the first of the year to help pay my expenses. Before many days I found a job delivering papers; I worked at that for three months. I had to quit the job because I got sick. Since that time I have been working at various jobs, such as: carpenter work, painting, mowing lawns, polishing floors, washing dishes, and driving cars. By doing such work I have been able to pay half of my expenses at the University.

The above is a general description of my extra work at the University. In order to make my financial condition vivid, I shall relate in detail two or three weeks of my experience. On April 27 I checked out from the infirmary; I had been there for twenty-two days. I did not have any money at all then, but I had some tickets to the Welcome In Cafeteria. After I had eaten there for three days, it was rumored that the cafeteria might close. The fourth day

after I had left the infirmary, I went to breakfast at the cafeteria and read the following sign in the window, "Closed Until Further Notice."

I gazed at the sign, looked at my useless ticket, and then walked on up the street. I borrowed a quarter from one of my friends to get some breakfast. I was too weak then to work. Later in the day I borrowed enough money to pay my board at Swain Hall for a week. After four or five days I was strong enough to do light work. I was lucky to get a job every day or two driving a car; that didn't require much strength. Before many more days I did carpenter work and painting. At such work I made enough money to pay that which I had borrowed, a bill for staying in the infirmary of ten dollars, and also enough to pay my board in advance.

Now I look back over the past six years of my life, I wonder sometimes just how I made "ends meet." Anyone who has never had such financial embarrassments can't understand what it means to have to pay their expenses at school. The first and most important step is to believe that I can do whatever I try. To keep from being "blue" has not been an easy task.

At times I have had great difficulty with this first step. Once during my high school years I used the last dollar I had; I then went home. For two or three days I thought it would be impossible for me to go to school any more for a year or more. I became "blue" and lost all confidence in myself. Before I could make any arrangements to return to school, I had to believe that I could go back and have confidence in myself. When I regained confidence in myself and believed that I could go back, it was an easy matter to do so.

The second step that confronted me was to get a job and work for the money. This was not so hard as the first step. For the last six years I have done all kinds of work — farming, construction work, cooking, washing dishes, painting, factory work, and numberless other jobs. That work was not as hard to do as to rid myself of the "blues" and pessimistic ideas.

I have often heard boys complain if they had to break a five, ten, or twenty dollar bill, saying that they would spend it if they had it changed. That has never bothered me. With me a dollar in change is the same as a bill. I don't mean by that I have been or am stingy, nor am I a spendthrift. But I have to be careful what I spend money for. I never let myself take up useless habits, such as smoking, chewing, drinking dopes, and seeing every new movie.

But I do not mean to imply that I never did those things, but I never could have paid my school expenses and have spent money for unnecessary habits.

## Auditoriums

THE University's new music building is nearing completion. The old library building, occupied by the School of Education while Peabody Building was being renovated, is now being remodeled for the music department.

Affixed to the rear of the old library building the new music auditorium, the gift of an alumnus to the University, is being built. The hall will house the \$30,000 Cassvante pipe organ, also a gift of the same alumnus. The auditorium will be used for only a limited class of entertainments and assemblies, and the nature of the limitation is described in the conditions of the gift. There are to be around 900 seats, all on one floor. The main entrance to the old library building will also be the main entrance to the music hall. However, side entrances are being constructed.

The cost of the new auditorium affixed to the back of the music building will be \$40,000, and this added to the cost of the pipe organ makes the total of the gift \$70,000.

The rest of the old library building is being remodeled with the \$44,000 that the State has made available. Practice rooms for orchestra, glee club, piano, etc., are being constructed so that sound will not be easily transmitted from one to another.

Professor Harold D. Dyer, head of the department of music, and his assistants have already begun to lay plans for a dedicatory celebration of the new building and the new organ with an autumn music festival.

Work was begun this month also on the new auditorium to take the place of Memorial Hall. This will be completed in time for use when the University opens following the Christmas holidays.

The new auditorium will be located on the site of Memorial Hall, and will seat 1800. There will be a balcony which will house 500 of the 1800 seats. The building will be of brick with trimmings of limestone, and in the Colonial style of architecture. The building will be rectangular rather than being of the "coffin" shape of the building which it replaces.

Many have regretted that the University will be forced to put up a building that seats only 1800, while the student body now numbers over a thousand students more than that number. But this building was the only one that would be available, and the necessity for an auditorium made necessary its building. The whole structure will cost in the neighborhood of \$200,000, \$150,000 of this amount coming from the emergency fund of the State. Another \$25,000 was available from the legislative appropriation of 1927, and the remainder is coming from gifts and other sources.