

Signs of fall signal trek to Fair

By LISA PULLEN

Along about this time every year, as the leaves gradually creep up on more and more ground and nighttime comes earlier each day, folks get a hankering to pack up the car and head for the State Fair.

When I was a little thing, I impatiently awaited the days when I would have to wear knee socks to school. Wearing knee socks meant it was getting colder outside, and chilly weather meant it was time for the Fair.

Sure enough, it would be a misty evening on the chosen night for "The Visit," and mama and daddy would look doubtfully out the window and shake their heads. But a short spell of baby brother and me playing fair inside the house was enough to dispel any such thought as staying at home. Bundled up in layers of jackets and three pairs of socks, off we'd go to the Fair.

And the fun that we'd have! After dreaming of floating pink clouds of cotton candy all week long, it took only a few mouthfuls of the stuff and a terrifying "rolley coaster" ride to plant my feet firmly back on the ground. So off we'd go to try our luck at winnin' one of those big brown-eyed teddy bears. Two dollars worth of quarters would convince my daddy that a little intervention was in order. So he'd hand the man behind the counter another quarter, and stand close behind me and grab ahold of my arm when it wound up for the throw and push my hand forward and there that ball would go right in the little hoop and I'd jump up and down with uncontrollable joy, too excited to point out which teddy I wanted.

When baby brother would catch sight of the barn, he'd grab my wrist and off we'd go runnin' to see the wide-eyed cows. Sneakin' in between them, those cows looked bigger than life. We'd tiptoe around one until it snorted and swished its tail and then we'd hightail it out of there for cover, squealing with a mixture of fear and delight.

Selecting a foe a little closer to our own size, we'd spot the chickens, safely tucked away in their cages. We'd hold one-day conversations with them through the wires, trying to get Mr. Rooster to squawk "please" in return for a fistful of seed.

Along about this time, mama would decide our noses were a little too runny, and she would march us towards the big exhibition hall, where it was warm and dry inside. Once inside, we'd soon forget the animals and wander around tak-

ing in all the sights. Homemade quilts with bright patches of color vaguely resembling someone's outgrown dress would be hangin' on the walls, and crinkly-faced women with big laps like granny's would be rockin' away the time while adding the finishing touches to yet another one.

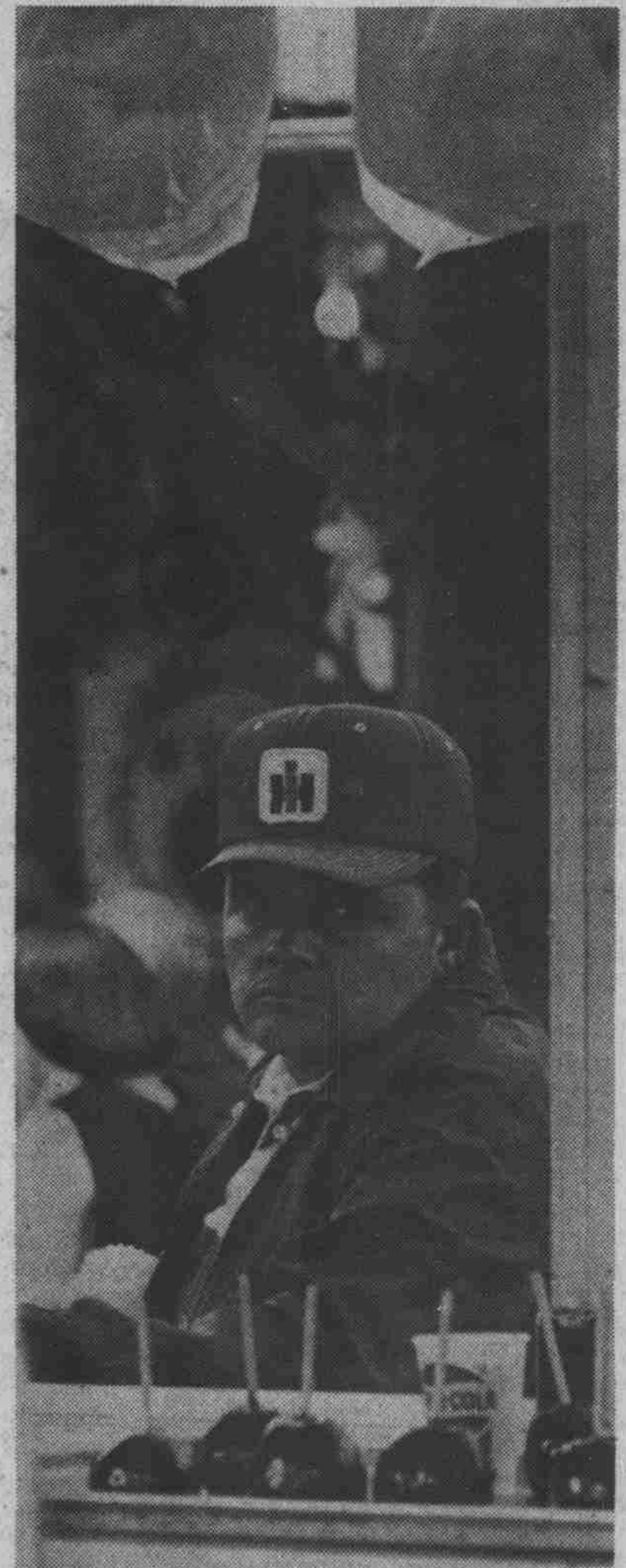
Baby brother 'n' me would play hide and seek among rows of tables weighted down with homemade cakes and canned jelly, and always some smilin' granny would gather us up on her lap and tempt us with a piece of her made-from-scratch pound cake. Over the whole hall hung the smell of just-shelled peanuts and as we ran around our shoes would crunch the hulls scattered on the floor.

When we tired of dodgin' all the grown-ups, we'd wander back and find mama, who would always be at the jelly table. She and a gaggle of other women would be millin' around the jars of proudly displayed jelly trying not to look anxious while awaiting the judges' final word. We'd watch too while a judge spread a dab of bright green jelly on a biscuit because we knew that that was mama's Special Pepper Jelly, handed down from her mama, who handed it down to her mama. And one time, mama won! The bright blue ribbon matched her bright green jelly. We hugged her knees as the other ladies clucked over her and say "weell, Louisa Nell, I guess you know something that we don't." At home, we'd eat bright green pepper jelly for weeks afterwards trying to put all the experimental batches to good use.

Soon our eyelids would get heavy and our ears cold and it would be time to head for the warmth of the car, but couldn't we pleeeaaassse take a ride on the ponies before we left? So a little hesitantly, we'd climb up on the horses' backs and carefully lead (we thought) the pony around the sawdust-covered ring. I would pretend I was Pocahontas bein' received by the Indian chief on her jet black stallion. Baby brother would fall fast asleep as daddy held him on the pony. After carefully handing him down to mama, daddy would make a foothold with his hands for the Indian princess to dismount into.

So we'd trudge off towards the car and all climb into the front, smelling of sawdust and farmyards with our faces covered with red sticky goo from the candy apple we'd shared but only licked the candy off of. Baby brother and I would squeeze in between mama and daddy and happily declare wasn't that the best time and how long is it until next year?

Lisa Pullen is a staff writer for The Daily Tar Heel.



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Fairgoer takes in sights at a booth ... he gazed at the refreshments

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