Hair-Raising Experience

By Virgil Lemke, Dows, Iowa

Boy's first home clipping was more wrestling than shaping up.

I WAS BORN July 6, 1923, with a heavy crop of bright-red hair, and as I grew older, it just became thicker and heavier. It felt like a big brush pile up there.

While I played and ran around, my hair just flew all over. I had long curls, just like a girl would. My parents thought this was cute until I got older and didn't look like a boy should.

When I was 3 or 4, my folks ordered a hair clipper and scissors out of the Montgomery Ward catalog and thought my first haircut would be a breeze. Dad was going to do the cutting, and Mom was to help entertain me.

After one round with the clipper on my hair, Dad had to "shingle it up," so to speak, with the comb and scissors. However, with the comb in one hand and the scissors in the other, Dad had nothing left to hold my head still. With my head turning every which way, Dad had made nicks all over.

Mom pushed down on the top of my head, but that will didn't stop all of the movement. After about 10 minutes, Mom grabbed a big handful of red hair on top, wrapped it around her fingers and told Dad to cut quickly.

This resulted in sort of a wrestling match, with me bawling loudly, Mom hanging on with her teeth gritted and Dad snipping whatever hair was loose and available.

After an hour of this, with everybody's energy nearly used up, my parents decided to quit.

Dad gave the final result a combing and, after close observation, decided that I could not go to church on Sunday. He thought if we waited a week, maybe the nicks wouldn't show so much. At least there was a good pile of red hair on the kitchen floor.

When Grandpa came over and saw me, his first comment was that it was good the weather was warm, or his grandson would have to wear his earflap cap.

The home haircutting continued for all of my early lifetime. Dad got better at it as I grew older and knew enough to hold still.

The home barbering became a learning experience, too. Dad found that his hand-operated clipper worked a lot better in shorter, new-grown hair.

One big problem was that Dad was not operating the clipper handles fast enough to get all of the hair cut before moving ahead. This sure didn't feel very good to the one receiving the haircut.

If I remember right, the town barbershop charged 25¢ for a haircut. But my folks didn't have a quarter and neither did I, so the home haircuts continued. Even Uncle Clarence, Dad's oldest brother, rode his bicycle over to our place to save a quarter.

I was about 13 before I had my first professional haircut, from town barber Clarence Litts. I was starting high school, and my parents thought I should look respectable. Clarence said I had very coarse hair—maybe that was the trouble Dad had, and he hadn't realized it.

My family decided I looked much better after the barbershop cut, so that was where I went for a hair trim from then on.

Today, I pay $11 to spend 5 minutes in the barber chair getting my thin fringe of hair trimmed. Unfortunately, there's no reduction in price, even though the barber has to hunt to find a few hairs to trim.