

The Reel Lawn Mower

Tina Fehr

The Fehr Family Series - Book 6



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In Loving Memory

of my father and father-in-law.

Dedicated

to my brothers Abe, John, Jake, and Peter.

Your encouragement, prayers, and advice have
blessed me many a time.

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Chapter 1

Tapping Trees

Brrzzzz-zz! Brrzzzz-zz! The sound of the power drill echoed through the winter woods. A late February sun shone through the bare trees as Joshua leaned in to watch Daddy drill into the trunk of a maple tree.

Last spring, the Fehr family had moved two hours north of their previous home. When they discovered sugar maples growing on their new property, they decided to try tapping trees and making their own maple syrup.

“See how I drill at a slightly upward angle?” Daddy asked. He brushed away bits of bark. “This way, the sap will flow downward and right into the bucket.” He stuck a spile into the hole and gently hammered it in place. He pressed down on it to make sure it was secure.

“Look, Daddy, the sap is already running!” Joshua exclaimed. He let a drop of the clear liquid drip onto his finger. “It doesn’t taste like anything.”

Daddy tasted it too. "Sap has a very small amount of sugar in it," he said. "Okay, hang up the bucket, please, so it can begin collecting sap."

Joshua hung the blue plastic bucket onto the hook and closed the lid. "May I drill the next hole?" he asked. It would be fun to use the new drill. Joshua had used Daddy's old power drill



many times while working on his wood projects. He knew how. After all, he would be nine years old next month.

“Yes, you may,” Daddy said. “This tree is large enough to be tapped twice.” He measured six inches around the trunk. “Right here,” he instructed, handing Joshua the power tool.

Joshua rested the drill bit against the bark and pressed the trigger with all his might. *Brrizzzz-zz!* The drill pushed back in his hand, and he fumbled to keep hold of it, but Daddy steadied it for him.

“I didn’t expect the bark to be so hard,” Joshua said.

Daddy chuckled. “It’s okay, Joshua,” he said.

Daddy placed his hands over Joshua’s, and they drilled the hole together.

At the next tree, Joshua steadied the drill bit against the bark, braced himself, and pulled the trigger. *Brrizzzz-zz!* The bit chewed smoothly into the wood.

“Is it deep enough?” he asked.

“Yes, it is. Good job!” Daddy said.

Together they tapped thirty-two maple trees.

They were at the far end of the woods by now, so they retraced their steps back through the woods, following the path of blue sap buckets hanging from the trees.

"I can't wait to taste the maple syrup!" Joshua exclaimed.

"Me too," Daddy said. "We need freezing temperatures at night and mild temperatures during the day so the sap will run."

"How long does sap season last?" Joshua asked.

"About four to six weeks. From now until spring weather starts."

The mention of spring made Joshua think of his new plan. "Daddy, I want to start my own lawn care business this spring," he said. He knew Daddy would understand. Daddy had a business installing windows and doors.

"That's very ambitious of you." Daddy straightened a bucket hanging crookedly on a tree.

"You're going to need a lawn mower. Your legs aren't long enough yet to use a riding lawn mower, and I don't have a push mower."

"I know," Joshua said. "That's why I'm saving up to buy my own push mower. Then I'll make lots of money."

"Having your own business is a lot of work," Daddy warned. "Do you have customers already?"

"I'm going to ask Grandma and Grandpa," Joshua said. "And our neighbors across the road."

"Sounds like you have a good plan," Daddy said. "I wish you the best."

Chapter 2

How to Earn Money

Indoors, Joshua hung up his coat and set his snowy boots in the boot tray. He went straight to his school desk. It was Saturday, so he had no schoolwork to do. But he wanted to count his savings. The coins clinked and clunked onto the desktop as he dumped out his money jar.

Mom peeked around the doorway from the kitchen. “Please be quiet,” she whispered. “Katrina is sleeping.”

Joshua nodded. His two-year-old sister was full of energy. She made many messes and got into almost everything, including Joshua’s things. He was glad that Katrina took long afternoon naps.

As quietly as he could, he slid the coins across the smooth desktop, sorting them into piles—toonies, loonies, quarters, dimes, and nickels. He also had a five- and a ten-dollar bill.

“Twenty-nine dollars and eighty cents,” he said aloud. His savings were growing.

“Are you counting your money *again*?” his twelve-year-old sister Sharilyn asked suddenly from behind him.



“If you must know,” Joshua said, “I’m saving to buy a lawn mower.”

He flipped through the catalog that had come in the mail, admiring the glossy photos of lawn tractors, push mowers, and trimmers. Someday he hoped to own many of these machines for his lawn care business.

He pointed to a picture of a red self-propelled push mower. “This is the one I want to buy.”

Sharilyn picked up the catalog. “Look at the price—\$299.99!” she hooted. “That’s a lot of money!”

Joshua snatched back the catalog.

“What’s a lot of money?” Christopher asked. He had just come in from outdoors.

“The lawn mower he wants to buy for his business,” Sharilyn explained.

Christopher picked up the catalog and read aloud. “This mower provides a twenty-one-inch cutting path and mulching capability. Its powerful four-stroke gasoline engine provides all you need to maintain a beautiful lawn every season.”

He dropped the catalog onto Joshua’s desk. “It looks like a good mower. How much have you saved?”

“Almost thirty dollars,” Joshua said, trying to sound pleased with how much he’d saved.

“You have a lo-o-ng way to go!” Sharilyn said.

Joshua frowned at his sister. "I know that," he snapped.

"Too bad Daddy doesn't have a push mower," Christopher said. "Then you could just use his."

"I want my own equipment!" Joshua retorted. "Daddy doesn't use someone else's truck and trailer and tools to run his business. He has his own equipment."

He punched numbers on the calculator: \$29.80 subtracted from \$299.99 was \$270.19. That *was* a lot of money! He put his head in his hands. "How will I earn enough by spring?"

"You have a good start," Sharilyn said kindly. She picked up a coin and clinked it into the money jar.

"You'll just have to find ways to earn more money." Christopher slid coins across the desk into his open hand. "You should get a bank account."

"Mom made an appointment," Joshua said, feeling more optimistic.

Christopher was right—he'd just have to find ways to earn more money. And fast. Soon the snow would melt, spring would come, and people's lawns would need cutting.

After the money was back in the jar, Joshua got out his notebook. On a clean page, he wrote,

“Ways to Earn Money.” Underneath, he wrote “#1. Mow lawns.” He erased it. He didn’t have a lawn mower to mow with. Besides, it was still winter—the lawns were all covered with snow.

He laid his pencil on his notebook. How could he earn money? It wasn’t that he didn’t work. He looked at his chore chart. There were a lot of chores. And hadn’t he spent most of the morning working in the cold helping tap maple trees? Surely, he should be paid for that.

At the supper table, Joshua asked, “May I start getting paid to do my chores?”

“You know our policy, Joshua,” Daddy answered. “We all live here, and we all need to pitch in to keep up the place.”

Joshua swallowed a bite of mashed potatoes. “What about tapping trees? Am I getting paid for that?”

“Yes, you are,” Mom answered with a grin. “You’ll get paid with maple syrup.”

“Oh, Mom,” he groaned. “I need to make money so I can start my own business. I need to buy a lawn mower.”

“I’ll pay you for doing extra jobs,” Daddy said. “The shop needs to be swept. You can also muck out the chicken coop.”

Joshua grinned. “How much will you pay me?”