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Detasseling, simply defined, is the removal of the tassel from a cornstalk so that pollination of the plant can occur and hybrid seed corn can grow. Among Midwestern high school students detasseling is infamous because it requires extremely long hours in the July heat, tolerance of "corn rash" and bugs, and a lot of physical strength. I signed up in response to a dare from someone who believed that I would not be able to last the full six weeks. Perhaps it was the growing recognition of my own strength, my pride in being one of twelve detasselers (out of the original seventy) who were asked to work the entire detasseling season, or the antagonistic nature of the dare that propelled me through all six weeks, but what I learned from that experience has changed me as a person.

Detasseling helped me to look beyond the surface of people who are different kinds of achievers from those I encounter every day. Attending University High School, I have learned to respect academic accomplishments above other types of achievement. Yet many of my fellow detasselers had completely different sets of values and goals that I came to admire. Many of them were working in order to eat, or to buy essential books and supplies for school. Being singled out as a "brain" from the first day because of the stereotype some of them held of students from my high school was difficult. Yet I earned the respect of my crew by working hard, and we developed a friendly, working relationship.

My partner, Josh, told me that the money he was making that summer would be his only money for the rest of the year and would enable him to finish high school; college for him was an impossibility. Yet he never lost his sense of humor. Walking the three-quarters of a mile down each row, he would "rap," "I don't like to pick this corn, but I'm still glad that I was born." He gave me a true sense of what it means to make the most out of very little.

Speaking little English and understanding even less, two Thai girls who detasseled that summer never complained; together they could outwork the strongest and most experienced of the detasselers. Their determination

to adjust to new surroundings and to work hard earned the respect of us all.

The dynamics of the crew reflected the responsibility most of us felt toward the job and the farmer whose corn we detasseled. There were days when we stayed after dark working by flashlight to finish a field so that it would not have to be plowed under, which would have meant a significant monetary loss for the farmer as well as a waste of three acres of good corn. Only after we finished did I realize that we had worked since 5:00 a.m. Since detasseling, I have not been a part of a group that requires every member to be as responsible as each crew member had to be then.

While discovering the strengths of so many different kinds of people, I also discovered some of my own strengths. I discovered my ability to respond to physical as well as academic challenges. I realized that I am able to depend on my own inner resources. This discovery of my own physical strength and my ability to endure came as a revelation to me.

Learning to judge people by different standards carried over into the school year when I realized that I did not have a date to the Junior Prom. Not used to staying home, I considered my options and discovered someone who was also dateless. A gifted math student, a PLATO programmer, and someone who always carried a calculator, he seemed to have little in common with me. Even so, I asked him to the Prom. Detasseling had proved to me that different types of people can learn from each other, and we did. A very special friendship evolved after the Prom, perhaps partly because of our differences and partly because we took the time and effort to discover that beneath the surface we have many things in common.

The concept of detasseling and what it requires is understood by few; yet those who have experienced it share a special bond. After detasseling we did not see each other again as a group, but we parted with respect for one another. I left valuing new things about myself and other people. And I also won the dare.

