

The Wisdom of Eddie Bowles

“How can [a man] prove he is superior to something? He can’t prove that. A man like yourself cannot prove he is above you. Why? Because you’re a man like he is, you eat what he eats—the same kind of thing, you wear clothes like him. ... Make sure he respects you as a man. If he don’t, he’s not a man himself. Don’t care how small he is or how large he is. It don’t matter how high he get, he is only a man.”

During his time in Cedar Falls, Eddie Bowles was known for the way he extended respect to people and received it back, a skill gained through years of working out the teachings and sayings of his parents. Eddie learned to understand the importance of his father’s admonition to not be a “one-armed man,” but to instead learn many skills that could help a man earn his wages, so that he was never brought to destitution by the misfortunes of any one trade. His mother warned him about the dangers of falling in with troublemakers whose loyalty and friendship would vanish underneath the pressures of consequences.

After some years spent learning the hard way, he followed mother’s and father’s advice to value all life and get along with everybody. He became focused on staying out of “devilment,” working, and being at peace with his fellow man. He spent time reflecting on his own experiences, observing others’ lives and developing astute insights that affirmed the lessons of his youth. He happily shared his knowledge with other students of life.

His humility and contentment were the proof of his wisdom. An easy-going and natural storyteller, Eddie drew listeners into the tales of his life. Audio and video recordings captured his gravelly drawl repeating his parents’ lessons and adding his own wisdom.

On work ethics—learn many skills; on parenting—children can be trained through kindness; on love

and marriage—you aren’t a man until you find a wife, and most women can outthink a man; on formal education—it opens opportunities; and on personal responsibility—know right from wrong. Each of Eddie’s insights hinges on the importance of respect: respect others, respect yourself, and care to earn others’ respect. He spent his many years in the community sharing sentimental music and sentimental wisdom.

