At the age of fourteen, you think you’re a man,
When you go on the harvest with a pitchfork in your hands,
With your own stook rack, and a good quiet team,
To pitch all those bundles into the threshing machine.

When it’s your turn in the lineup, to the feeder you pull,
Toss your bundles on the chain, up the feeder they go;
As they hit the bandcutters, there’s a steady moan,
When the concaves start to grind the sheaves down.

At four in the morning you’re out of your bedroll,
Feed and harness your horses to be ready to go,
Then right after five, shadows move through the night,
In the fields you’re loading before morning light.

Around about four, when lunch comes around,
It’s the taste of a sandwich as you squat on the ground,
The smell of coffee from the old coffee pot;
It’s a break in the routine, but the thresher don’t stop.

As you watch the sun rise and you’re waiting your turn,
With your back ‘gainst the tractor to warm up your bones,
The threshing machine makes a steady moan,
Which lulls you like to a lullaby song.

The blower is set to blow straw to the east,
But the wind it switches and it’s back in your face;
By the time you’re finished unloading your load,
Your’re covered with chaff all through your clothes.

About the third day the blisters piled high,
There’s an ache in the wrists and chaff in the eyes,
With the wind blowing hard, lifting dust from the ground,
You put one bundle up and two would come down.

At seven at night it’s time to shut down,
Unhitch your team and head for the barn,
Water, unharness, and feed your team,
Then go for supper in the gaslight’s gleam.

The stubble bit your ankles till they’re all red and sore,
A mouse up the pantleg could even cause more,
Shivering frost in the morning, afternoon it’s the heat,
Keep your turn in the lineup to unload your sheaves.

Now each fall, when I step out the door,
I can smell all the harvest and frost in the air;
Those many years seem just a dream,
Of the times I pitched bundles into the threshing machine.

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During the Second World War there was a manpower shortage on the farms, and sometimes boys too young to join the military had to help out on the threshing crews. Joe Adams was one of these, and he put together the song from his memories at least 45 years later.

I suppose there’ll be some readers too young or too urban to know how the process worked. The “binder” was the machine which cut the wheat and tied it into “bundles” or “sheaves.” Several sheaves were stacked on end to form a “stook;” a field would be dotted with stooks, waiting for threshing. When the threshing machine came around, it would be served by a number of men, each with a team of horses, a wagon and a pitchfork, whose job was to go around the field, load the wagon with sheaves, then convey the wagon to the threshing machine and, when their turn came, pitch the sheaves one by one onto the feeder. As the song relates, it’s long hours (because they couldn’t waste the good weather) and backbreaking work. Joe’s writing conveys the spirit of the situation.