

Some thoughts about my wood cookstove

By *Dynah Geissal*

I had just finished reading a short article of nostalgia about the Model T. It was written by two elderly gentlemen born in the last century. I closed the book and got up to take a shower. Checking the fire in the cookstove on the way, I mused that for a person born after World War II, there really isn't much that elicits such reminiscences.

A minute later I had to laugh at myself. What was I thinking? True, folks in town may not have much fondness for the thermostat on the wall, the furnace in the basement, or the kitchen range that heats food with a flip of a switch. To them, those things are taken for granted as necessities, and paying the power company is just another bill they must earn money to pay.

But a woodstove, now that's a different animal. It's almost a part of the family. I need ten cords of wood a year for our stoves and there are five months in which to get them. Stocking up on wood is like stacking the hay for the livestock for the long winter ahead. It's just a part of life—hard work, but a labor of love.

The cookstove provides heat for the kitchen as well as for cooking all our meals. Our summers are short and all our mornings are cool, so even in midsummer the cookstove heat is welcome. In those few weeks of heat I do all the day's cooking in the morning when it's possible.

I was given an electric pot, but I've never used it. Starting up the cookstove is the first morning chore and is as much a part of the early routine as brushing teeth and feed-

ing baby chicks. By the time the first livestock chores of feeding and watering are finished, the water is boiling for tea and the kitchen is warm.

The cookstove is also our only source of hot water. In lieu of an electric or gas water heater, the pipes travel through the firebox and by convection fill the tank with hot water. There's plenty of hot water for dishes, laundry, and showers. I have to admit, though, that when three adolescents were trying to shower before school it was a bit difficult—but that's been a while back.

The water jacket burned out many years ago and we replaced it with black pipe. We've replaced the grates several times, as well as the handle for the oven. But that old baby still works as well as when it was first made.

When the stove was given to me 20 years ago, the top had been sold for scrap metal. I had no trouble finding tops, but I could not find one with the correct dimensions. In the end, I used my saber saw with a metal cutting blade and fashioned one to fit (and ruined the saw in the process).

No other type of stove could be a part of my life like that wood cookstove is. Something is always cooking: soups or stews, of course, but also other things that would seem pretty weird on another kind of stove. Today, sap from our box elder is cooking down on the cool side of the stove, and bread is rising above it. In the fall, a huge cauldron cooks the pig heads. Most days find a large pot of water with a two-gal-

lon bucket of milk inside, turning the day's goat milk into cheese.

In the late summer there is almost daily canning and blanching of vegetables for freezing. Huge pots of tomatoes that are being converted into tomato sauce, hot sauce, chili sauce, and catsup are nearly permanent fixtures during that season. And there's always a pot of water boiling, just waiting to make someone a cup of tea.

No, I never had a Model T, but that Monarch cookstove...I could write a book about that sweetheart. With a few minor replacement parts fashioned at home, that stove will last a lifetime. I like that. I could write a similar paean about wood heat stoves, but I'll save that for another time.

The point is that those of us who choose a simple country life surround ourselves with the things that are simple, functional, and meaningful in our lives. Δ