

"Oh, Sparky, what can I do?" she cried frantically.

"Just take a bite of the candy cane and everything will be as it was before," he told her.

She could hardly wait for the transformation. She was even more anxious than she had been to take the first bite. Her eyes closed, she took a bite, and swallowed.

"Jerry, Jerry, aren't you coming to supper?" she heard a voice beside her ask.

She opened her eyes quickly and saw Susan standing beside her chair. "Susan!" she cried in amazement.

"Whom did you expect?" Susan asked with a perplexed expression.

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I must have been dreaming. Yes, that's what it was. Just a dream."

When she sat down at the table, she looked around and felt warm inside. "It's great to be alive," she said.

"Then you got the part in the school play. How nice," her mother concluded.

"Oh, no. I'm not even in it," she said with sincere gaiety. "But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all."

She smiled as she fingered the tiny piece of peppermint cane in her pocket.

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Simple Living

Bruce Hamman

There is in each of us, to some degree, a desire to recapture a simple way of life. When complexities and confusions become oppressive, many of us escape to a memory we cherish of natural living. My favorite place of remembrance is a lake cottage which I am allowed the use of by a generous uncle.

My uncle's cottage is not large. The rafters underneath are uncovered and there are only four windows. The windows are hinged to swing open toward the inside of the cottage; were they to open to the outside, they might be broken by falling branches. Built into one wall of the cottage is a fireplace which draws well, except when the wind blows from the

northeast. The utensils within the cottage include a double-burner kerosene stove, a small cupboard filled with cooking pans and dishes, an army cot heaped with olive-colored blankets, and an ax.

Each day spent at the cottage is filled with varied and exciting adventures. The first of these adventures is the preparation of breakfast, which consists of hot pan bread and steaming black coffee. The care taken in making the coffee often determines whether the day will be successful. After the correct amount of coffee is apportioned to a half-gallon can, the can is filled with water, and the mixture is placed on the fire to boil. While the coffee is being heated, the pan bread is mixed in the broken-handled skillet and placed on the burner not occupied by the coffee. With breakfast on the fire, there is time to count the ducks on the lake or time to try to predict the weather for the day. When the coffee has boiled long enough, a cup of cold water is poured around the inside of the can to settle the grounds. Hot pan bread eaten from the skillet and invigorating boiled coffee offer the needed impetus for a morning of serious fishing.

The only staples permitted at the cottage are corn meal, flour, potatoes, eggs, sugar, salt, and possibly a piece of bacon; therefore, it is necessary to fish earnestly to insure a supply of meat. Pan fish are fairly easy to catch from the lake; and field corn, watermelons, and muskmelons are easily pilfered from the fields surrounding the lake. The meals are, therefore, as abundant as the cook wishes them to be.

The noon meal usually consists of cold fish left from the previous evening meal, cold pan bread left from the breakfast meal, coffee or water, and a muskmelon or watermelon half. The dishes are not washed until the end of the day. They are, however, scraped and neatly stacked after each meal.

In the afternoon, one may fish for bass, those vicious gaping-mouthed fish that chew quietly on the frog bait until they feel the hook and then try to tear the pole from the fisherman's hands. One may decide to walk around the lake, or seine one of the inlet streams for minnows, or catch the small painted turtles that sun on the logs and rocks along the shore of the lake. There is a colony of ugly, fat muskrats that do not mind being watched if the visitor is quiet, or, by rowing slowly, one can get close enough to a large S-necked crane to watch it catch frogs. It is during the serene, sun-filled afternoons that man is most deeply impressed by the inviolate plan of God. One may feel horror as he sees a

duckling dragged under the water by a large turtle, but this too is part of the plan. Before returning to the cottage to prepare the evening meal, one may gather water cress, with which to make a salad, from one of the clear, fast-moving streams flowing into the lake.

The evening meal is quickly prepared and leisurely eaten. It includes fried potatoes, corn, fish, water cress, coffee, and pan bread and honey, or melon. The evening meal is necessarily large to supplement the meager breakfast and lunch. It must also span the nearly twelve hours between supper and breakfast, during which time nothing is eaten.

Washing the dishes at the end of the day is a surprisingly pleasant task. Since the water heats slowly, there is time to watch the evening fishermen on the lake or to reread some of the old magazines stacked by the fireplace. The fishermen are heard calling out their degree of success as they recognize friends in other boats. Lake etiquette does not allow a fisherman to leave a poor spot and move to a more favorable one unless the person catching fish there asks him to. This code is recognized in the even dispersal of boats on the lake.

When the dishwater is heated, the plates are stacked in the pan to be covered by the cups and silverware. The dishes must soak until the water cools enough not to burn the washer's hands. If a plate is dropped during the washing, it makes no difference; they have been dropped so often before that only the most sturdy survive, and these seem to be unbreakable. If a cup is dropped, it is no matter, because the handles have been chipped off long before. The previously scraped pans are the last to be washed. By the time they are finished, dusk has settled over the lake.

The quietness of evening creates a loneliness which, although beautiful, must be assuaged by being near others. A short walk into town will take one to the small, friendly tavern where farmers sit and talk about things of common interest. There is no frenzied excitement here. The feeling is rather an acceptance of struggle as a necessary part of life. The evenings offer the chance for these men to quit the struggle for a time and to drink and talk with each other. The entrance of a stranger into the room causes a non-committal quietness to descend on the group. The intruder must stay apart from the group until the strangeness is overcome. When he is accepted, his contributions are treated matter-of-factly as part of the communion between men.

If one tarries too long at the tavern, he will miss the

return of the late fishermen from the lake and the songs of the youth which belong to the nights at the lake. A wise person will probably take two or three beers to drink on the way back to the lake. During the journey, he may even feel a strong kinship with the poet's old man who drank from his demijohn and was "secure with only two moons listening."

Back at the lake, the crippled youth, who is a field worker during the day, will have started his songs of love and planting. If he feels gay, he will dance his odd, bouncing jig as he sings. One must not laugh too loudly at his antics because he is sensitive and will stop his songs and merely sit by the fire. Soon afterwards he will leave.

The night is the time to relive the pleasant happenings of the day. Night is the time for the songs of the boy, the damp earth warmed by the fire, the clean night air, and the water making gentle noises against the shore.

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Babel

The planets whirled and whispered,
Like the wind spoke not a word
But winking their single eye
Made fearful prayer to Him.

While He, playing the croupier,
Plucked one and threw it to the vortex
Then turned His head contemptuous
Of the never-ending game.

Then those that stacked the chips
Chanted wildly for red, red, red,
But unseeing He raked the table clear
And planets whispered black, black, black.

—Basil J. Raymond