

When I was seven we moved into a new house that Dad built. My sister, Julie and brother Harry worked hard ever since they were very young. When we moved into the new house the work seemed to increase, but maybe I was just old enough to notice. Yes, we had an electric stove and central heat came from a Kirk Coal furnace but Harry, on top of the chores he did outside, had to fill it with coal and take out the ashes every night. Having hot water from the electric hot water tank and running water was new for us.

Mom was a teacher, so she had to catch up on the housework on Saturday. It started with all of us around the little yellow chrome table eating porridge for breakfast while we listened to the news and weather announcements from a small radio that sat on the top of the fridge. There were floors to wash, clothes to wash and iron, bedding to change, general cleaning, and meals to prepare. This had to be done all in one day because Sunday was the day we drove 12 miles to Clive to attend the Anglican Church by 10:00 am.

Julie spent the morning downstairs with the washing machine. I wanted to help, but I was more in her way, or so I thought. I think she liked the company. Julie sorted the clothes while the water filled the machine and a rinsing tub. The not-so-dirty whites went in first such as sheets, pillowcases and towels. As the washing machine agitated, an increasing amount of suds expanded to fall over the top of the tub. It looked like the washer meant business, the water tossed and turned the clothes, and the air was filled with the moist clean fragrance of soap.

Once the clothes were considered clean enough, Julie fed the sheets through the wringer being careful not to put her fingers near it. I suppose she remembered when we were at Grandpa's after Grandma Archibald passed away. Mom and Julie were doing Grandpa's wash when I got my arm stuck in the wringer. Mom quickly unplugged the machine and it released my arm.

The sheets dropped down into the rinse water tub and Julie swirled them around. She fed these through the wringer again, this time I caught them and put them into the dry tub. Then Julie put another load into the washing machine. Julie and I hauled the tub of sheets up the stairs to hang on the clothesline. I handed Julie the sheets so they wouldn't touch the ground while she used the clothespins to put them on the line. We didn't have a clothesline with a pulley and it was not elevated off the ground by a set of stairs and a landing. Our line was attached to a pole at either end so we walked along the side of a hill as we put the clothes on the line. The process of washing and putting on the line repeated itself with shirts, underwear, socks, pants, and dresses going from the cleanest to Dad and Harry's chore clothes.

For me, it was fun helping Julie, but Julie had the responsibility of getting the work done. I didn't hear her complain. Every time I hear the Country and Western Song "She left the suds in the bucket and the clothes hanging on the line," I think of Julie.

Within a year Mom's wages from teaching enabled her to purchase a washer and dryer. This freed Julie up to be able to do more household chores. I was also getting a little older, so I was becoming a little more productive, but not necessarily as willing.

Mom was dressed for the day, but she didn't have the usual bounce in her step.

Julie must have been gone this particular Saturday. I was all set to go feed my rabbits and spend the warm spring day outside.

When I rounded the corner Mom stood in the middle of the kitchen, she seemed like she was waiting for me and thinking.

Nancy, I want you to wash the kitchen floor, then get the pledge and polish the furniture, then wash the dining room floor, then..... I didn't hear anything else.

“But Mom,” I retaliated. “We need a mop. The blood runs to my head when I get on my hands and knees and I get dizzy.”

“We don’t have a mop and we are not getting one.” Mom said in a stern voice, without further explanation. That was that. I protested further, but I did not win.

I was on my hands and knees cleaning the tiled floor of the kitchen, dining room, living room, hallway and bathroom. The blood did run to my head, and I did feel dizzy, but I got over it as the morning drudgery droned on. I didn’t know why Mom was so averse to using a mop, maybe it had to do with how she did housework when she was young, or maybe it was the lack of baseboards Dad hadn’t finished.

Luckily we only swept the bedrooms with a dust mop. Later, I tried to explain to Mom that I didn’t like to be told to do so many things at once. It was overwhelming. She could make a list, or tell me one job at a time. She mumbled something to herself, but I would see the realization in her eyes that I was much different than Julie, who had grown up helping Mom and gradually knew what to do without being told.

But to my parent’s surprise, teenagers didn’t always do as they were told and in 1965 times were changing. Julie was in Grade 10 in Lacombe Senior High School. She took the bus early, so it was easy to sneak to school with a pair of Harry’s fly-front jeans. Dad was not up with the styles and was not aware that fly fronts had been worn by movie stars and young girls since the late 50’s. Dad was not going to let this go unpunished. He ordered Julie to dig potatoes after school for a week. She protested the punishment, but it didn’t help. I wanted to help her, but Dad would not hear of it. I watched her in the large garden with her shovel and pail on a cold

September day digging. Once the pail was full she carried it downstairs to the cold room and dumped the potatoes in a bin to be stored for the winter and went out to get another pail full.