

The Milk Wagon

On the very top of Little Mountain sits a 1950's milk wagon from the old Leatherwood Diary in Bluefield, WV. The story behind this milk wagon goes something like this;

In the early 1960s we acquired an old yellow milk wagon that the Leatherwood Diary was selling to "retire" it from service. This old truck served as a second "car" Mom would use for short trips to the store and church. We boys, often used it as a camper just below the farmhouse where Wiseman Branch flowed into Rock Camp Creek.

Our neighbor's oldest son, Harold, had a newer version of our old wagon and converted it into a "fancier" version of our camper. One night when both families were camping at our favorite spot, Dad became interested in the story of Harold's newest camper. Before long, Dad was asking Harold if he would sell this camper and just what he would ask for it if it was for sale. Harold thought a moment and responded that Dad had a LeFevre double barreled 12-gauge shotgun that he was interested in. By the time we were ready for bed, a deal had been struck and we had a new, improved camper.

We used this new milk wagon conversion for all of our short-ranged camping for several years until, like all things mechanical, it quit running and was beyond any affordable repair. About this time, Dad and his brother, Red, decided it would make a great hunting cabin to position at the top of the mountain as an escape from rain and/or snow while hunting. With that old D9 sitting there, nothing was impossible so the two of them pulled the old milk wagon to the top of the mountain and it still remains as a landmark to years past.

The Farm

When asked about growing up on a farm, many folks expect an answer that talks about large numbers of cattle, poultry, acres and acres of crop land and generally stories of large scale farm production. The real answer is that we ran a family farm where all production was used to supplement our food supply.

In the early fifties, we farmed with horses. Our first tractor was acquired in 1961 and hay crops were never "baled" until one of Dad's brothers, "Teet", purchased a rake and baler and took some of the labor out of putting-up-hay. Life we good, we had four – five cattle, one milk cow, raised two-three hogs and one beef for fall butchering, enough chickens for a regular egg supply and thought ourselves self-sufficient. Our large garden provided all our vegetables for our needs plus enough to "can" for winter use. We rarely purchased vegetables of any variety.

Aside from the innumerable chores associated with our "farm", growing up here was absolute heaven. Acres of woodland for roaming, hiking and hunting, over a mile of "creek" for splashing, chasing fish, hunting snakes and simply cooling-off after chores. We, my brother and I, were most often joined by numerous cousins and always had enough people for all of our games and contests.

Summers brought the influx of vacationing relatives and the farmhouse was always overflowing with sounds of laughter and smells of cooking food. Life was seldom boring and when we made the mistake of mentioning there was nothing to do, chores were always offered as the solution to our boredom. We learned quickly to stay outside and away from the house.

So, while life growing up was filled with fond memories, years of family activities and life's lessons, the time has come for us to offer this same opportunity to another family to enjoy. The land has been good to us but one never "owns-the-land", only enjoys it, preserves it and passes it along to future generations to create their own memories and legacies.

The Springhouse

Before electricity, refrigeration was simply a cool spring flowing around items you wanted to keep cool. The old concrete springhouse was simply built over the spring that flowed out of the hill there by the farmhouse. The springhouse was also used to store canned goods, vegetables, fruit and anything that needed stored in a cool place. From the early 1900s, little has changed except for the pump that was added in 1963 to supply water into the farmhouse and new bathroom. Since 1963 the only changes have been to replace broken shelves and a new pump as needed.

The spring flowing through the springhouse is totally separate from the spring flowing from the old Maple tree just a short distance away. The water from the springhouse is considered a limestone base and the spring at the Maple tree is considered freestone, meaning no noticeable mineral base. Flow rates are basically unchanged over the years and water quality is as pure as nature provides.

The "Treehouse"

After Dad and Mom relocated to an Assisted Living Facility of their choice, Shirley and I changed our schedules to include trips to WV almost every weekend, taking Dad and Mom to visits at the farm or working to keep Nature from overtaking our homeplace.

In 2009, we made the decision to start planning our retirement around moving back-to-the-farm and building our new home there. We excavated a house-site, drew our house plans and began the six-year process of relocating.

Our logic at that time was that we would need a storage facility during this transition period so we decided on a three-car garage as our multi-use building. During the early construction, we soon realized the challenge of keeping the farmhouse open during the winter months was overwhelming and "modified" our garage plans to include an upstairs apartment for year-round living space. Our logic then changed to think of the new apartment as a future "guesthouse" after our retirement house was complete.

Our thinking changed again a few years later as our attempts to sell our home in Rocky Mount were not working (wrong timing with the crash of the housing market) and we simply moved into our new “treehouse” for the first years of our retirement. Thinking we needed to re-create our memories, we built new fencing, a small barn and added a couple head of cattle to start our “new” farm. Not quite enough, we then added a garden for vegetables, chickens for the eggs and a small orchard for fresh fruit. Thinking we were on-our-way to knowing who we were going to be in retirement, life seemed good.

Fast forward to 2017 and we are still searching for our long-term retirement plans. We did decide, however, that “the farm” was not to be our final stop along that path. Both our sons have farms in Monroe county (with plenty of room for our visits), so we made the decision not to build our retirement home on-the-farm and to consider other opportunities.