

*The Water Bucket*

*06-10-2013 by harry zirkelbach*

*When does childhood end?*

*For each a different course. Not surprisingly, for most who ever lived, it was an early age - the onset of taking or being given responsibility for survival. The change can be trivial - passage of time; or brutal - replacing a dead parent.*

*For this family a change began in the summer of 1929 when the parents bought their first house, moved from the city, its conveniences and bustle, to a country plot of land without niceties like plumbing and electricity.*

*The children were too young to share the parents preference of house payments over rent. They did welcome the expanded view from every room, to sky, trees, great distances, not just the yard/house next door. And they marveled at ever changing sunrises to the east, the colors on that elevated straight line to the west at sunset, summer and winter. Two events, defining every day.*

*The kitchen sink had faucets, attached to nothing. Water now came from a pump 20 paces outside the back door. The children quickly learned that this hand pump, somehow connected to an invisible underground pool, would provide cool clear water day and night, summer and winter. Unlike in the city where brown liquid was taken from the beaver River, treated, fed into homes, then flushed back to the River, often looking clearer than when removed.*

*Here, pull down of the pump handle and after a few full pulls - whoosh, clear water gushes from the pump, below and opposite the handle. To the children, a magic machine requiring nothing but arm and back muscle to take water from the ground. Then carry the pail to the kitchen.*

*There, that bucket of water was equipped with a cup (sometimes a ladle) from which the family, neighbors, relatives, school chums, strangers helped themselves to a drink this cool refreshment. All share the same cup which never needed rinsing. And Mom used that water bucket for her meals, carefully measuring the amount she remembered or read from a recipe.*

*Then that need for many water pails for two larger tasks, the laundry Monday morning, the weekly Saturday bath evening. Not only was a dozen buckets needed for each, but the water was poured into a tub, then heated over the wood-and-coal burning kitchen stove.*

*In time the pumping of water for both drinking and major tasks became a routine, each family member slipping into their time slot. For the boy, this was Saturday afternoon and Sunday evening, carrying needed water to the kitchen, dumping each full pail into the clean tub. A routine without demand each completion acknowledged by Mom who owned the kitchen.*

*The boy was still a child. But the mother recognized, did not comment upon for years into the future, some faction of his childhood had ended, his childhood abruptly ended. She prayed her daughter would sidle into an adult as accepting as this first recognized step by her oldest child.*

