

Spring Cleaning  
*06-30-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach*

Springtime brought the fresh breeze, first warmth of summer, new life everywhere in their village on the ridge east of the Beaver River in western Pennsylvania. This was a time for renewal in spirit and fact. The clearing away of winter.

Then that moment when his mother and neighbors chose to clear their homes of the dust and grime of winter.

Those heavy coats of winter were mended and aired; boots were cleaned of mud one last time, maybe shined, then all fresh reminders of the past snow and freezing days were neatly stored. For these chores, Mothers relied on children for some lifting, providing them one more training moment for their tomorrow, plus bonding as family.

Then the really heavy lifting. Take the rugs from the house one at a time to the metal clothesline in the back yard, pinning each rug securely for its spring beatings.

Then the first swat at the accepting carpet. The beater often held a broom broadside, or if available a woven cane piece made into a serial of circles, it too absolutely flat. Whatever, that slap enveloped the beater in an ugly brown cloud of the rug's surface, defied the keeping of eyes open.

And you better not be taking a breath. Not only ugly; probably this dust of ages contaminated with every noxious item from miles around. It was as if the rug had attacked in retribution for the insults of the past year. Veterans of early cleanings would

not stop to clear the dust from their face and other exposed body parts, but this would be the first of a many minutes of vigorous smashes, each assuming the rug had not moved, for the rug was not visible after those first hits.

A rule of thumb; hit for five minutes; get a sip of water; wash out the mouth. Turn the rug to the other side. Continue the unpleasantness. Then begin anew. Swat those areas more travelled, until Mom said the air had all the house dirt it needed.

Someone else had washed the floors on hand and knees, added a liquid wax; now that wood shining clean. On replacing the subdued rug, all agreed; that room was a definitely improved; and whatever pattern had been in the original rug was revealed, maybe less bright than when new.

As so spring cleaning went until each store-bought or braided rug was certified by Mom as fit to be in the house another year.

There were two exceptions. Inside the front and rear door there was always a throw rug, which in our home, was always the victim when any entered, Mom saying without lifting her head, "Wipe your feet" in a tone that was both friendly and accusing. Those two rugs, had been taken outside regularly by Mom, given a good shake. These favorites were never beaten.

At the end of rug Spring cleaning, the beaters were allowed to wash in a pan of hot water, helped in a soap washing of their head, exposed body parts. Tossing that filthy water concluded the annual spring cleaning where he was raised.

