

Mother Earth

I was fascinated to learn last week that a new acquaintance and myself may have shared the same pipedreams in the 1970's when we bought our copies of "The Mother Earth News Handbook of Homemade Power." My heart flip-flopped when he mentioned the book and I wondered if I still had my copy. After a climb up the ladder to the top book shelf, I was able to verify I still owned the book. It's full of useful ideas for homestead items one can build for very little money and with only a few simple tools. I have sometimes wondered if any of the projects were ever "field tested," tried out in real life. "Will it work in the cornfield?" as my 84 year old neighbor Willard always says. Willard always has a witticism handy.

Mother Earth also sponsored radio spots in the 1970's. In my favorite, the narrator attempted in 30 seconds, and of course without pictures, to tell you how to build a backyard grill from an old washing machine. Not intending to be funny, he rocketed through a set of instructions. "Bend the pump motor bracket back to the cam arm," and "raise the bar with your right hand while holding down the frame with your left foot." I wish I had recorded it. You would need to play it back slowly to follow all the directions.

The homey little Homemade Power book is adorned with pen and ink artwork. I love the illustrations of handsome young families sitting around their wood stoves, baking bread as they casually throw another log on the fire. Winter's end and the coming sap season will bring the opening of their road up from Hooeten Holler, so they can drive out to the hospital, fifty miles away. Dad is out of antibiotics, used up when the chain saw sliced his knee. Both parents have been worried about running out of firewood since Ground Hog Day, and they're craving store bought canned goods after a winter of living off the canned produce from their garden. The kids just want to get to Best Buy.

I purchased my copy of the Homemade Power book shortly after buying the remnants of an old farm in 1977, having convinced my wife we could live just like the characters in the television show, "Green Acres." She could keep her city conveniences while I grew everything we would need for a satisfying life. She

never believed it would work out like that, but she's been kind enough to only occasionally tell me I'm crazy.

After arriving home each night from a large corporation in the next town, I jumped out of my suit and into bib overalls, then got busy with the chores. Some jobs couldn't wait for a change of clothing.. I'd find hay in my suit coat pocket when I gave an executive presentation the next day. Putting my feet up on a colleague's desk one morning, he watched in horror as a gob of manure plopped off my wing tips on to his calendar. After that, he called me Mr. Douglas.

"I'm going to build the Homemade Perpetual Motion Hydraulic Ram Pump on page 110 of the book," I told my wife one morning at breakfast, after the kids had left for school.

"Hmmm?" she said.

"It will pump water from the creek in the woods into the pond," I said.

"We don't have a pond."

"Not yet, but Willard said he can dig us one with his digger-thingy."

"The thingy that never works?"

"The best part is I won't have to pay him, because we're making a trade."

At this, her radar lit up and I got her full attention.

"Willard digs our pond," I continued, "and we'll keep the pigs he's going to buy."

The what ... ?"

"Pigs," I said, as innocently as possible. "There's plenty of room for them down behind the old chicken coop. And, as a bonus, we'll get meat from any pigs that finish out over 200 pounds. I drove a hard bargain."

"But," she said, "pigs stink!"

"Not if you do it right,"

"You said that about goat's milk. And your children still refuse to speak to you after you forced them to drink it."

"Only for a week," I said.

"Right you couldn't take any more of it."

I never built the Perpetual Motion Pump and Willard never dug the pond or bought the pigs. The idea sort of evaporated. He accused my wife of "queering the deal." But I denied this could happen, since I maintain such good control over the woman.

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