Cookstove Added to Family Warmth

I grew up in Ohio during the early 1930s. Our big kitchen had a cookstove, a dry sink with a rainwater pitcher pump, and a bucket for drinking water.

Most of our life centered around the cookstove. Grandma prepared three meals a day, and all six of us sat down at the big, round pedestal oak table to eat together.

There was always warm water in the stove reservoir, a steaming kettle and Dad's coffeepot. My dad, Joe Stradling, got up every morning and started the fire.

I thought he was so brave to get dressed in the cold and get the kitchen warm for all of us—Grandma Wilhelm; my mom, Ada; my three sisters, Frances, Vi and Linda; and me.

Weekly Routine

Every Monday morning, the copper boiler was heating on the stove for the laundry. One of my sisters and I filled the boiler and rinse tubs on Sunday evening.

Behind the boiler sat a pot of beans and ham. They cooked all day, and when we saw Dad coming from the barn for supper, Grandma dropped dumplings in the boiling pot. That was a favorite meal.

Tuesday morning, the stove had flatirons heating on it. School days, we didn't have to help, but during the summer, every Tuesday found us ironing.

The flatirons lost their heat much too quickly. Grandma would spit on her finger and touch the iron to see if it was ready. I tried that a few times, but only burned my finger.

We had a big garden, and every summer, Mom and Grandma would can over 100 glass jars of fruit and vegetables using that stove. They also cold-packed pork and chicken.

The hot bath was done in the copper tub boiling away on the cookstove. To cold-pack, they would heat lard to boiling, then pour it over the tenderloin, pork chops and sausage packed in tin cans. Metal lids were sealed with red wax.

My sister loved to parch corn by dropping hard kernels on top of the hot stove and to watch them brown. Sometimes, the kernels would open. Scraped off into a
pan and salted, they made a good snack. We also popped a lot of corn in winter.

The warming closet hung over the stove and held great treasures. Grandma put pieces of toast, biscuits and pastries there to dry out. When I got home from school, I always checked the closet for crispy bread.

If anyone had to miss a meal, Grandma put that person's plate in the warming closet.
Her favorite cold remedy was thinly sliced onions in an enamel pie pan, sprinkled with sugar and left to blend. This made a sweet, syrupy onion juice that soothed our throats and helped get rid of colds. It tasted great, too.

A little door at the bottom of the stove opened so we could scoop out ashes that Dad scattered on icy steps for traction. We also used the ashes to make laundry soap.

Fit for Man and Beast

Dad often brought in a baby pig he called a runt. It was too small at birth to survive alone. Mom would wrap it in a warm rag and place it in a box under the stove. She let us help feed it with a bottle until it was big enough to return to its mother.

Sometimes, when little chicks got caught in the rain, they'd go in the box to snuggle in a warm rag.

Every morning before school, we ate fried mush and bacon before heading down the lane to catch our bus.

Few people use a cookstove now. There isn't a teakettle singing all day, and Mom and Grandma aren't singing hymns as they cook and can.

But I can close my eyes and bring those happy days back.

—Phyllis Stradling Folsom, Chelan, Washington