



Points East

By:
Ike Adams

I knew it was going to happen sooner or later. But I thought they would wait until my hair was gray. I'll admit that I do have gray eyebrows and the hair that has suddenly started sprouting out of my ears is gray but I still have a pretty full head of brown hair and I don't use anything to keep it that way. For the most part my hair is pretty much the same as it was when I was 21 and that was 31 years ago.

But today I ran into the Berea Wally World to look for some of those hangers that collectors use to strap around dinner plates so they hang them on the wall. I was actually in the dog food section of the store because I have discovered that if you want to find something a bit out of the ordinary at Wally World, the best place to start looking is in the last place a sane person would expect to find it.

If you want black olives, for example, go to the cereal section and walk backwards. If you want fig newtons, don't even think about the cookie aisle. You will more likely find them among household detergents. Need one of those things that turn the water in your commode blue? Go to the soda aisle.

So anyway, I'm in the pet food aisle looking for plate hangers when

I noticed these two ladies about my age whispering to each other and taking sidelong glances to size me up. I figured they were looking for cat litter and was about to send them to men's underwear when one of them, her face like red, stepped forward and said, "Ahem. Pardon my forwardness, but could I ask you a personal question?"

"Surely," I thought to myself, "my fly is not unzipped again." And then it occurred to me that I was being approached by a devout and faithful reader who had recently seen my photo in the Richmond Register which has recently joined my little newspaper syndicate.

"Is your name, by any chance, Adams," she wanted to know.

I exhaled with a bit of pride and said, "Why yes it is," and my mouth was wide open to thank her for reading my column before she cut me off by turning to her more timid partner and exclaiming, "I told you so!"

Then she turned back around to mouth-gape me and this is a precise quote, "Your son writes for the *Mount Vernon Signal* doesn't he?" She nodded up and down with obvious satisfaction and by now the other lady was grinning ear to ear.

"He looks just like a younger ver-

sion of you and you must be so proud and I bet you taught him all those gardening and fishing tricks and he never gives you an ounce of credit."

She reached for my right hand, which was sort of helplessly dangling there and she grabbed me by the back of the arm and pumped it up and down. It never even occurred to me to do anything except squeeze back and grin.

She told me her name and introduced her friend and I was doing the glad to meet you routine because I had not yet been offered an opportunity to get a word in edgewise and we were all three grinning and nodding up and down there beside the stacks of 50 pound bags of Uncle Roy and then I said, "That's not my son who writes for the paper."

"It's a hush-hush thing," she said. "No Ma'am. That's me. It's an old picture that was taken—"

Her face is red again. Boiling beer. But this time it's as much anger as embarrassment.

"You should be ashamed of yourself. Are you so vain that you want people to believe you look the same way you did when you were a child? I never—"

"I've been writing for that paper 17 years and they've been running the same picture all this time and I guess I ought to get it updated and—"

The other woman cut her off and winked at me.

"Don't worry Ike. I've been reading your column forever and I knew it was you all along. Leave that picture alone."

So I don't know for sure what to make of this and before I know what is going on they disappear around the corner of the aisle before I could even yell, "If you're looking for flea collars, try the produce rack."

Uh-oh. I got off on another track, didn't I? Anyway, we continued to wade in that delightful clear stream of contaminated water till we were near grown and no one died from it. I still would like to go wading there if it still runs cold clear water over slick flat rocks behind Grandpa's house.

Since last week's edition about "Toilets, outhouses and the necessary room," I have had several calls about memories it brought back to others of my generation, and some of even a later one. I find they are not obsolete and the necessity for a "little house out back" is just as important as it was before the white stool in the corner of a back room took its place.

I was reminded of it being the place where chickens loved to plunder when there was an opening big enough for them to get under. Also, about others who loved to use it for privacy to get away from tormenting brothers and those same brothers would lock the door sometimes so the occupant couldn't get out. One such case was when two sisters were inside and managed to escape through a hole in the back and had so much fun doing so they continued to use it as a secret way of foiling their brothers' antics. Another was someone put a crooked stick on the floor to scare some women visitors by making them think it was a snake. Then they hid behind the house to laugh at the screams and watch the flurry of skirt tails being snatched out.

I have had some pretty scary experiences with snakes but never found one in the toilet. Yet that did not keep my visitors, especially one niece, from almost refusing to go there when she was visiting because of her fear. She was such a dear person I would have gladly gone with her but with her fists clinched tightly and head bowed so she could see the path, a giggle of half fear and half good nature would burst forth and she braved the inside as if she was entering a lion's den. She never complained about anything on the farm except the outhouse job. Marceline had inherited her mother's ability to giggle and laugh at anything then make the most of it. This was one of those things. Her mother, Polla, was the big sister who cuddled and sang me to sleep when I was a baby, taught me how to make a bed that left no wrinkles in the sheet that covered the bed, dry dishes and scrub the floors, when I was four. She was only four years older than me but was always the one I looked to for guidance and

love. She always had a ready laugh and song re- / to fit any occasion. Ballads could be sung from beginning to end that could bring tears to your eyes or a funny one, such as "Froggie Went a Courtin'", or the drunken one "Hiccup O Lordy," bring fits of laughter as she mimicked the drunk. "How Bad do I feel?" The

last days of being together in an outside toilet was when she visited us on the farm. We would still go together and sit for an hour, talking about our problems of which we both had our share but they somehow seemed smaller when we talked about them in the quiet of the "necessary room" with no interruptions by husbands or children.

A chamber for small children or an elderly person who couldn't go outside after dark was put in the room where they slept. It was simply called the slop jar and had to be emptied every morning. Woe be unto the person who forgot to empty it. For the rest of us, a lantern was lit to show us the way. Of course, there had to be a few that must have a flashlight. Mat had a big one that held six batteries and gave enough light to show up any snake or obstruction lying in wait for the trespasser. That was one time of the day no one wanted to linger for a last cigarette. Since I wasn't afraid of snakes, nor the dark, and didn't like to carry a lantern, the moon and stars lit my way.

Really, the moon and stars brought peace to the whole countryside that security and street lights have done away with. There is nothing more peaceful and comforting than lying on a stack of freshly cut lumber and gazing up at a million twinkling stars and a full moon casting shadows through tall oaks or maples onto a field of hay and listening to the yardies and/or frogs croaking their goodnight chorus.

Those were some of the good times on the farm.

Sweet and Sour

By Zi Graves



Continued

Well, it seems as though you all haven't heard enough of how it used to be before the convenience of something besides a little building out back, sitting over a deep hole. Or, on the bank of a stream of water, where the water could contaminate as well as wash away evidence of. Of course, those were the days before we realized the danger of contamination from nature's bodily functions of for that matter understood what contamination in the water ways was about. At least, I didn't know about it since it wasn't a popular topic of conversation in many areas of the country where I spent my youth. The little creek running behind granddad's place had a solid rock bottom we cousins loved to wade in and see which could stand up the longest for those weeks were slick under the clear rippling water from the nearby falls. We fell often and went back to grandpa's with wet and sore bottoms. I doubt if we would have known what it meant if we had

been told it was contaminated. In fact, we had probably never heard the word and, if it had been explained, some of us would have probably tasted it to see for ourselves what would happen. (Maybe if dope and cigarettes were ignored and kids weren't warned constantly of the danger if they so much as tried one, they wouldn't be tempted to do it). I think children, especially ones raised in an environment where aspirins and pills for every ache or pain, and bottles containing mixtures that only God knows what is inside fill every medicine cabinet and have been taught by thoughtless adults, not realizing they are all one form or another of dope, that it is okay if used to ease a headache or whatever excuse one wants to use as long as it gets a "dose" of medicine down the throat. Kids are mimics of what parents do and usually take them at their word as long as they don't tell them "NO, don't do that." "No" and "don't" seem to be a challenge so taking a pill now and then becomes a habit, etc.,

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