

THAT GOOD OL' COUNTRY LIVIN': THIS & THAT

By Terri White

At first, when we moved to the country, we eased into our new lifestyle. The main adjustment was living 16 miles from town and only owning one car. That's right. One car. As a homeschool family living on one income, we chose to make sacrifices – none of which we regret.

We planned Friday weekly outings with friends and for shopping. Sometimes our friends visited us for a romp in the creek or hiking in the woods; other times, we attended field trips or other planned events. Either way, we kept our Fridays open for friends.

On other days, we took care of business: school and chores. In good weather, we spread out a blanket under the trees and schooled outside. Of course, with our dog nosing around, begging for attention.

Eventually, we chose to raise rabbits for food. We purchased rabbits, cages, food, and other paraphernalia. I warned the kids – and Steve – to not name them because I would one day serve them fried rabbit for dinner. No luck. Soon they named them Fluffy, Marshmallow, and the like. Didn't I say I warned them?

During hot weather, we froze the water bottles nightly so that the next day, the rabbits could sip on cold water. Winter proved challenging to keep the water thawed. Now, in addition to our kids' daily horse chores, they cared for the rabbits.

Breeding was dicey, but we managed to succeed. Until. Until we discovered that after giving birth, the mama freaks out if the daddy's cage butts up to hers. It upset mama so badly that she ate her newborn bunnies. Not a happy moment in the White family – especially for our children. Oh, the gruesome tales of country living!

Then the day arrived to slaughter the rabbits. My husband, a surprising softy, did not want to participate, so he left it to me. However, I lacked the upper body strength to kill the rabbits. Enter Steve. Although not pleased, he managed. I'll spare you the details. Poor Fluffy and his buddies.

Now for science class. The kids and I skinned and butchered them. Look! Here's the heart; there's the liver. Biology class at its best. It's no secret that I thoroughly enjoyed it. How did I, a science nerd, become an English teacher? Beats me!

With future rabbit dishes in store for us, all packed in our freezer, my husband announced, "I don't want to see any rabbit on my plate for six months." Aye, aye, captain.

Six months later, when I served rabbit for dinner, no one asked who they were eating. I didn't volunteer.

Rabbit poo makes perfect fertilizer for the garden. And garden we did. Steve provided the initial muscle by tilling up a large plot. We opted for the French intensive gardening method that greatly reduces the need for weeding. No regrets.

The kids helped plant and harvest. Joseph, our picky vegetable eater, soon grew fond of a fresh salad planted and picked by his own hands. Those black eye peas became a favorite, too. Our bumper crop of cucumbers produced a wheel barrel full that we shared with friends. In the winter, Steve built a cold frame for the lettuce and spinach, which I harvested all year. So many delights from our garden.

When not schooling or doing chores, the kids busied themselves. Climbing our massive pecan tree and gazing out, they felt like they were on top of the world. Our daughter gathered wildflowers and created a secret space in the woods where she played make-believe.

Bike riding on gravel roads, they waiting at the main road for truck traffic. As the trucks whizzed by, they tooted their horns while the kids tried to race them. They swung from the barn rafters to land in the piles of hay below. Horseback riding was always a hit. Of course, they built the proverbial fort. And the inevitable explorations at the creek.

With winter snows, they played fox and goose, made snow angels, built snowmen, pummeled each other with snowballs, and slid on the icy creek. In between, they relaxed by reading a good book. What a great life for our kids.

With numerous pecan trees scattered across the acreage, we harvested pecans by the sack-full. Then we froze them for future treats. To hear the kids reminisce, you'd think they peeled pecans daily by the gallon. Not. However, they did peel a couple of cups at a time when I planned a dessert with pecans. Not daily. Not weekly. But oh those tricky childhood memories will fool you!

Eventually, we gained a new neighbor. A jack-of-all-trades good ol' boy, Ernie was the real deal. He built potato guns, sandblasted pictures on mirrors, developed photos in a dark room, refinished guns, and zipped around the property on his dune-buggy. He mesmerized our boys while they gobbled up those new adventures. No complaints from Steve either.

Every spring the barn swallows returned to patch up their nest in our carport. Usually, two males followed the female, vying for her attention. After she chose her partner, they mated and she laid eggs. Once they hatched, we often climbed a ladder to watch them when the mama left. Finally, nearly bursting out of the nest, they flew out to explore the world. Sometimes the pair made two or three broods in one summer. That was exciting.

On summer evenings, we often lounged under our mimosa tree watching the hummingbirds flit in and out, sampling nectar from the blossoms and our feeder. Barn swallows and dragonflies swooped overhead feasting on gnats and mosquitos. Whip-o-wills called. Coyotes yipped. Soon the stars sparkled in the inky sky.

Country living at its best. Character-building experiences. Adventures of all kinds. Lots of hard work, but lots of fun, too. They are treasured memories of an idyllic season in our lives.