

Spring House Cleaning

House Cleaning Week was an event that our family faced each spring with mixed emotions. On the plus side of the ledger was the fact that it usually brought an invitation from Aunt Alma to have dinner with her the Sunday after the house was put in order. A dinner at Aunt Alma's was always an event, especially when Cousin Dory presided in the kitchen, but it took on added attraction the week of spring cleaning when meals at our house were meager and sketchy.

This week of weeks always heralded the fact that Iowa's warm weather had definitely arrived and that at last I would be allowed to discard my heavy, long winter underwear. For weeks before that moment arrived I would beg, "Isn't this the week I change?" But Mama was cautious and had to be certain that the weather was "settled" before stoves were removed and the house made ready for summer living.

When I would come skipping up Maxim's Lane from school to find the carpets on the clothes line, the carpet beater in action, the mattresses spread out on the lawn and general confusion in the house, then I would know that "The Day" had arrived. Now I could discard the hot, long woolens that reached to and were tucked into the tops of my shoes. What a relief that change was! It almost made up for the chaos downstairs—almost, but not quite.

To Papa and me spring house-cleaning meant a world turned topsy-turvy; but to Mama, I really believe, it was an orderly procedure. She was a General who planned her campaign weeks in advance and in her mind's eye she saw only the victory that was bound to follow her organized battle against dust and dirt. The exact date of the attack was settled by the Weather Man, yet when it arrived she was ready. Hired help had been arranged for and the whole household was immediately mobilized with the one exception of Papa. By supplying and paying for the extra help, he felt that he had provided an adequate substitute for himself. His business at the Photograph Gallery always seemed especially heavy on that week of household activity, but he didn't escape being drafted for special jobs.

With an apron belting down her faded "Mother Hubbard," her hair enveloped in a dust cap, Mama directed her campaign. Every bed had to be taken apart and every section thoroughly cleaned, storm windows replaced with screens, walls wiped down and some rooms repapered, the carpets taken up (the good tacks must be saved to be used again) and the floors swept and then scrubbed. Papa strung an extra clothes line between the apple trees and reinforced it with forked poles, for not only were room-size carpets hung out but every comforter and blanket as well. The windows, given an extra polish, exuded the strong, prickly smell of ammonia.

Last of all came the laundering of the delicate lace curtains with their elaborate borders. This task was accomplished under Mama's personal supervision, for the fragile lace had to be stretched carefully on narrow curtain frames while the material was still damp. When they were dry, the curtains were ready for the windows and no flatiron could possibly improve their starchy primness.

With the cleaning finished—the beds fresh and sweet-smelling from their day's airing in the sunshine, the well-beaten carpets laid over fresh straw and tacked securely to the floor with the aid of a carpet-stretcher, the crisp curtains all hung at the sparkling windows—then Mama rested on her laurels. The whole effort, even to Papa and me, did seem worthwhile.

The spring of 1900, house-cleaning had been especially thorough. Mama had been unusually painstaking, spurred on by the prospect of a new rag carpet for our parlor. All winter long we had worked, preparing mountains of rags. The material, torn into inch wide strips, was sewed end to end. The work of winding them into balls was mine. (A penny a pound was the going price for this job.) Mama's carpet that year was especially pretty for she had dyed all of her white cottons blue. Although it was woven "hit-or-miss" on a wide loom by old Mrs. Woodruff, yet the one color predominated and made the whole carpet look (as we thought) almost "store made".

Mrs. Woodruff had learned her trade when she was a girl in England. Her loom sat like a huge organ in a corner of

her parlor, and she sat before it like the artist that she was. No organist at her console ever brought forth harmonies or blended her tones with a surer touch. At her left stood a clothes basket filled to overflowing with the colored balls of wound carpet rags. How I loved to stand beside her as she worked—to hear the clatter of the loom and watch the colors change as the shuttles shifted from side to side.

One day soon after the house was put in order and the new carpet in place, Mrs. Woodruff dropped by to view the result of her handiwork. As she looked around at the spotless, shining house she shook her head in smiling disapproval.

“You’re much too pa’ticular with your ’ouse-cleaning, Miz Roe,” she said. “You’re much too pa’ticular. A little dirt is ’ealthy.”

Mama laughed. “Yes” she said, “I suppose I am. Thorough house-cleaning is a lot of work, but I think it has its compensations.”

Compensations! This long word was a new one to me and I said it over and over to myself. I had no idea what it meant, so after Mrs. Woodruff left I questioned Mama.

“Compensations are sort of a reward,” she said. “When you work hard in school and are rewarded by a good grade, that is compensation for your work.”

Just what the reward of house-cleaning week was I couldn’t possibly imagine, but I didn’t say so. I had added a new word to my limited vocabulary and that satisfied me for the moment.

Spring cleaning that year brought the usual welcome invitation from Aunt Alma and the information that Dory would be on hand to cook us a chicken dinner. Sunday noon found us attired in our very best clothes. Mama was again her stylish self with a pretty, flowered leghorn hat atop her dark hair. Papa, with his long mustache twirled just so, looked very handsome as he bowed and lifted his new straw hat to all the ladies we met on our way down town. I wore a cool, pink dimity dress and now there were no heavy woolens under my long, black stockings.

As we walked along Strawberry Point’s quiet Main Street on our way to Aunt Alma’s, visions of the coming feast float-

ed before my eyes. Suddenly I thought of my new word and knew how to use it. No heavy woollens! A chicken dinner! Of course, Spring House-Cleaning Week did have its compensations!

The Founding of Fort Atkinson

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The story of Fort Atkinson, Iowa, is an unusual one. First, the army built this fort to protect one tribe of Indians from neighboring tribes, whereas most frontier forts were built to control the Indians or to prevent Indian-white clashes. Second, this fort owed its location to the stubbornness of an army officer who, having promised the Indians to build it at one site for their protection, persuaded his superiors to change their plans for building it at another.

The establishment of Fort Atkinson resulted from a decision by the United States Government to move the Winnebago Indians from central and western Wisconsin Territory west across the Mississippi River into northern Iowa Territory. In 1837 the Winnebagoes, who had lived in Wisconsin for centuries, had been persuaded to cede their Wisconsin holdings to the United States. The treaty allowed the tribesmen the temporary use of their Wisconsin lands until eight months after ratification; then they were to move to Iowa. The Indians promptly forgot their promise to surrender their ceded lands; and by 1840, settlers in Wisconsin Territory angrily demanded that the tribe be removed. Governor Henry Dodge relayed the wishes of his constituents to Washington, and in the spring of 1840 the War Department decided that the Winnebagoes would be moved that summer.

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