

# Going with the flow, coming full circle

By Ginny Gregory

I remember the '70s when "going back to the land" meant building your own dwelling (yurts were very in), grinding your own flour, cooking by Adele Davis and getting warm with wood stoves. I was one of those folks. I had my adventure in Canada. I even cooked on a wood stove, had chickens, a pig, a garden that was really fabulous and I pumped my own water.

I was known throughout the village of Iris because I had a bathtub. Evidently it was an oddity. I had to pump water and heat it in 5 gallon buckets on the wood stove and then have a very modest but luxurious bath in my claw foot tub. I built a pole barn house. I bought the wood used from a very entrepreneurial local bootlegger. It was built perched on boulders collected by me and my neighbors the O'Neil's. Billy, the dad of 10 children, was from New Foundland. He helped me build the house he had built at home. Just as he was starting to move into his new house the state declared eminent domain. He was forced from his house and he watched it being bulldozed. Now that's a story, but true. So he and his children helped me keep my project moving. My house was 24' x 48'. Not a bad footprint. There were no interior walls so an Indian print bedspread was hung to partition off the bath tub. I stapled tar paper around the foundation in the winter and banked it with bales of straw to keep out the cold.

I suspect in many ways I was suspect. I wore overalls, cursed, worked like a man harvesting vegetables, cooked strange food (tossed salad?) and listened to BBC on the short-wave radio while sitting with my feet



propped up on the opened oven door. The cook stove heated that part of the house. With no interior walls keeping both fires going was essential.

When I think of my years in Canada what I remember the very most is water and my neighbors. Zelda, Billy's wife had electricity but no running water. With 10 children she was always pumping water to run her wringer washer. You can well imagine my awe at her daily routine. Keeping the household running was more than a full time job. I had to pump water to do dishes, to brush my teeth and take a bath. I was beat most of the time. Water was not a "taken for granted" commodity. Watering the garden was really unheard of and I did so very sparingly at night.

I would often go to Zelda's after work for a cup of hot black tea and meat or seafood spread sandwiches made on home baked bread. Zelda taught me many things that helped keep me alive. She also offered unending love, support and acceptance with-

out judgment. She was always one to look on the bright side and I think she knew how much I loved her and all of her kids. She took nothing for granted and taught me to do the same.

Those were the days of using 8 inches of straw as mulch and using manure and vegetable waste composted as the sole fertilizer. I worked in the spring for a vegetable farmer. We started plants inside in a greenhouse and then planted them in the fields while sitting on a tobacco planter. I started all of my veggies in the greenhouse so I had what most folks in Iris had never seen except in the grocery store ... red tomatoes. They knew how to make most anything out of green tomatoes, but red ones were very unfamiliar. Too short a season since they grew theirs from seed.

Well, one look at my life now and you would think that I had taken on a new journey, but it is just a continuation in that I am installing rain barrels for my clients now. I'm not planting grass (as it uses too much water) and using heat and drought tolerant plants are high on my list when designing gardens. You know about coming full circle? Well, I think the circle is getting smaller each time I come around. I am appreciating each element in my life more. These days when I finish work I often stop in for hot black tea with my friend

Vimala and have whatever "savory treat" as she calls it that she has cooking in her amazing kitchen. Coming from India she too takes nothing for granted. She shares her homemade delicacies with whoever comes in her side door along with unconditional love.

I have been very blessed in my time on this planet. May I always take nothing for granted and give more than I take. Remember ... water is a shared commodity. May a happy and prosperous spring be yours.

*Ginny Gregory is owner and creative energy behind "Beyond The Pail... Creating Gardens and Beyond". She is starting "Beyond The Crate," an organizing, de-cluttering, downsizing business. See www.beyondthepail.net*

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