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2005 NHN&WR letter/story #17)

**Vermont Gets Snow?**

**A**rticles in last Sunday’s paper provided fuel for thought. A local school district was considering going to a four day school week in order to economize on their gasoline costs. Busing costs dictating education schedules? Gee whiz. We walked to school, ... could well have been over a mile one way. Long time NHN&WR readers can verify this. Art Ward and Arthur Peterson went to the same schools and walked even further, sister Beth Brock also. (Ken has been guilty of embellishing this discipline as follows, *"You kids have it easy. I walked to school, and in winter my mother would get up and bake two potatoes. I’d carry one in each hand to keep my hands warm and then eat the cold potatoes for lunch.")* End of confession, ... but walk we did. And hey, we think Art’s spouse Addie walked across the Brooklyn Bridge to get to school.

Next the price of home heating fuel. Having just paid $2.315/gal we mused over an oil article. On Long Island in the early thirties, we didn’t give the price of fuel oil a second thought. Being recent immigrants from the Pennsylvania anthracite region, we burned coal, ... and coal is burned in our memory. The coal truck would pull in the drive, a shute was put through the cellar window and down the coal would go. Sounded like a freight train going through the middle of the house! And the dust, ... wow! Burning coal also required a modicum of expertise, usually provided by the man of the house. The chore was never-ending: building, feeding, banking, adjusting flue/draft and countless up and down trips to the cellar. I remember one night the fire in the furnace went out. I remember because father’s running commentary from the basement woke every one in the house.  Didn’t know there were words like that! Things improved when we got a contraption called an *"Iron Fireman"* . Basically a moving belt which conveyed coal from the bin to the firebox in controllable amounts. Wasn’t too long after when the furnace was converted to oil and the coal bin converted to Ping Pong. The coal age was passing. We still burned coal in the fireplace though. Big huge chunks of anthracite called cannel coal. Pre-diesel, trains burned coal. The coal would be bituminous or anthracite. The smoke from anthracite would be white, from bituminous black. Whenever we saw a train emitting white smoke we all cheered. Ken’s last experience with coal came in 1948. Ken and Velma had an apartment in Stewart Manor, L.I., which had been the chauffeurs quarters. It had its own small coal furnace right under the living room/bed room combo. They drilled two small holes in the floor and put strings thru to the furnace. Upon awakening string #1 was pulled, it closed the firebox door. Then string #2 was pulled, it opened the draft under the fire. Ha, almost as good as a thermostat!

Another oil alternative is wood. We’ve plenty of wood here in Vermont. Amazingly, the cost of a cord of wood seems pegged to the price of oil. Oil goes up, wood goes up. Oh well, not our problem, we cut and split our own. Even own half a new toy this year, a log-splitter! It will get plenty of use, ‘Woodsmens Weekend’ is coming up. The sound, smell and warmth of a wood fire on a cold night is hard to beat. Love it. Keeping the fire going is not difficult. Throw a log on once and a while. Poke it now and then. Not in the same league as the old coal furnace. However, if you had seen Susie Cleveland cook breakfast on a wood stove, you would instantly realize that you were watching a maestro perform. Sixty minutes of constant controlled movement: Check the fire, jiggle the grate, add a stick, check oven temp, bread OK?, flip floating donuts, swap lids, move pots, adjust draft, check the fire, geez ... and simultaneously carrying on a conversation with "Mickey" her pet canary! Unbelievable. A Mozart Symphony would have gone well with this performance. To any of you who have cooked a full course meal on a wood stove, my hat is off to you.

Lastly, the paper was full of "*storm*" stories. Those gulf coast people were having a terrible time of it, but we confess a bit of ambivalence here. Prior to spending the winter of 1998 way out in the woods of northern Vermont, we had conversations like this.

*"You know it snows here. We might be snowbound."*

*(What a novel thought, ... snow in Vermont?)*

*"What if the electricity goes out?"*

*"How about water?"*

*"How much food should we store up?"*

*"What if trees block the lane out to the town road?"*

*"We’ll need batteries, propane for the barbecue, extra gasoline for the generator ..."*

*"Better pile up some wood closer to the cabin."*

*"Good heavens, one of us will have to learn how to use the cell phone."*

And on and on ....

(Well, for those who don’t remember, 1998 was the winter of "The Ice Storm." Lucile and Ken were isolated for 13 days with power cut off, 400 trees down and had to chainsaw their way out to the town road. They survived, they were prepared.)

Back to the Sunday paper.

Hurricanes. Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico? What a novel thought. We could easily fill up the rest of this page with our opinion of the abysmal response to these recent hurricanes, however we think we have made our point. Even Dorothy had a tornado cellar to run to. She didn’t quite make it, and we ended up with the "Wizard of Oz", but Auntie Em and the rest were prepared.

Golly, it is going to be in the eighties here today. The leaves haven’t started to turn yet. Maybe it’s global warming. Maybe it won’t get cold in Vermont this winter. Why should we even bother to prepare? Our wonderful government will rescue us from any self-inflicted hazardous situations.

Natural disasters permitting, we’ll talk to you next month.

Lucile & Ken.

Re. Dist.