

## COUNTRY ROADS

BY ARVID HUISMAN

# Old stuff is worth keeping

As a youngster I noticed that many older folks were still using old things. My paternal grandparents, for instance, still used an ancient oscillating fan that had a minimal guard around the blades. Our parents warned us boys to not get our fingers in the way of the blades. Curious little brother Dave did and suffered the painful consequences, though he did keep all his fingers.



Opa and Oma also had an early 20th century Victrola Talking Machine complete with a collection of quarter-inch thick platters. We kids had fun playing the thick records on the hand-cranked Victrola.

Though she had a refrigerator in her kitchen, my maternal grandmother still used a dumbwaiter by which she could lower butter, jelly and other items she wanted to keep cool into her cellar.

Uncle Dick had an ancient console radio in his shop that sounded better than all the new radios of the '50s and '60s.

As a youngster, I was for all things modern and wondered why people kept this old stuff around.

I thought of this again a couple of weeks ago when I put away a portable radio that had served me for three-quarters of my life.

I remember purchasing the radio in 1968 for around 50 bucks — a lot of money at the time and probably why it worked so well for so long. The radio had excellent selectivity, able to pick up distant stations and had great sound reproduction on both AM and FM stations.

When family members were hospitalized they took it along because it worked so well amidst all the electronic interference in the hospital.

The cabinet is held together with hot glue, black vinyl tape and a tiny bolt I found in the junk drawer. It was tough.

The old radio didn't stand up straight — it needed to lean against a wall or something. Until a few years ago, however, it was the best performing radio in the house.

In recent months its performance has deteriorated. I couldn't throw it out, however, so I stuck it in a box with other old electronic stuff I just can't throw away.

Many radios today are built for appearance... period. A few years back a local store advertised an attractive under-the-counter radio with a built-in CD player. I took advantage of the sale and was about to install it under a kitchen counter. Before doing so, I plugged it in to test the sound and reception. The radio was a piece of junk.

Distant reception isn't a big deal when you live in a metro area, but this new radio couldn't separate signals — one station came in over another. I took it back to the store that same evening and got a refund.

Now I understand why older folks kept their older things. The old stuff was often better built than newer things.

Many appliances today are disposable. When a 5-year-old television set breaks down, it isn't worth repairing if, in fact, it can be repaired. An appliance salesman told me that modern laundry equipment is made to last about seven years, which makes me nervous because our current laundry pair is six-years-old.

I thought of the old Maytag wringer style washing machine my mother used when I was a kid. It had to be at least 20 years old at the time.

In our lust for more and fancier things these days, we have accepted more junk. It seems everything is disposable.

Is it possible that we have done the same with people and relationships?

With Facebook, Twitter and the other social media these days we have more acquaintances and "friends" than ever, but do we have as many real friends as our parents had?

I read recently that the average price of a wedding nowadays is more than \$20,000. In too many cases, the marriages that result from these expensive weddings lack the integrity and sustainability of Grandpa and Grandma's marriage which started with a \$20 wedding.

There's a reason the old folks kept their old things: they worked well.

In our zeal for all things new and exciting, it is good to remember that many of the things tried and true — including Grandpa and Grandma's values — are worth keeping.

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FROM THE EDITOR BY LAURA DRUMMY

## The harvest of gold

Since I was old enough to remember, the place I admired the most during autumn is the middle of a cornfield.



Sounds corny, but when I was a child, combine rides were the golden ticket every day after school and on the weekends during corn harvest. My brother and I would beg our mom to take us to the field the moment we got off the bus, and we would have to take turns riding with dad.

In recent years, I have taken into account every moment we start harvesting, and I still get excited every time I get to ride with my dad and spend time with him. I thought I would share this special place with you this week through a piece I wrote a few years ago.

*The chilly weather's breath gently travels down my spine as I wait impatiently for the bulky, dirty, green machine to come to the end of the golden corn rows. The stalks stand straight as an arrow, the ears of corn droop low as partly peeled open and roots like claws, anchored in the rich dry soil.*

*A gentle October breeze gently ruffles the leaves of the decaying vegetation, and floating husks dance around on the ground. A haze of fine dirt hangs lazily in the air with the smell of autumn, crisp, damp and earthy.*

*The soft sound of a large piece of equipment draws near, interrupting the stillness as I can hear the blades slashing back in forth with a swish, swish and the crinkling of vegetation. The hopper is only seen as the forest of the*

*corn crop camouflage the rest. A large mound of gold in the hopper grows as it comes closer and closer to me. Suddenly the last eight rows begin to sway from side to side with the combine approaching the end. The massive machine header eats the whole stock, and the useless meal is discharged out the back as the scraps lay there for eternity.*

*The machine comes to a squealing stop as the blades stop moving, and the sound of spinning belts slows to a halt. The thick dirt flies in my eyes as it stings, making them water. The left-over stalks scrape against my ankles with every step. The all-glass door pops open from the cab as I climb the tall, wobbly ladder up to the skywalk to the warm, welcoming place. With the hard slam of the door, dirt follows me in, and we are off.*

*The tractor's buddy seat is for a child and small for an adult visitor as the operator sits on a throne as screens and buttons face him waiting for their master to tell them what to do next. The smell of the new car mixed with bread, sandwiches and oil fills the cabin.*

*With the operator's right hand, he places the massive machine in gear as we jerk forward. He turns the steering wheel as we line back in position for the next pass. Inches close to the stalks, a button tap causes the bulky machine header to drop to the ground. Auto-steer is activated, picking the bountiful harvest while the operator sits back on his throne and relaxes while his thousands of dollars machine does all the tedious and laborious work.*

*The operator makes a radio call to the grain cart for aid to take the gold kernels to a semi. A large green tractor with a blue wagon comes and syncs with*

*the combine. A beeping alarm goes off. The rattling of gold comes racing out of the auger as a giant pile begins to mound in the cart. The window behind us lets light in once the large hopper is empty, and the tractor is dismissed back to the semi to unload.*

*I turn my attention back to the harvesting of the grain, but more like it's being eaten alive. Row after row, the grain swiftly shimmies down as the blades move faster than the eye can catch, and the stalks are gone in a blink. The machine's hum is relaxing, like listening to soft white noise with the general unique beep every so often.*

*The window behind us begins to have tiny gold pieces hit the fiberglass with a tap, tap, tap, making a blackout curtain in a matter of minutes. The outside driving mirror shows a dust bowl as it feels like we are going a hundred miles an hour, but only a few yards a minute.*

*The sound of gold swishes back and forth in front of us as my eyes watch a fully-grown dry field dwindle down to emptiness as the gold will turn into practical, productive needs of food, fiber and fuel.*

*This place some people call the middle of nowhere, with nothing to do, is the center of my life as I can sincerely feel at peace. What my family's legacy has been for 100 years, I know, is benefiting my community, state and the globe along with every farmer this harvest season.*

I wish every producer a happy, safe, prosperous harvest for you and your family.

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