

Spring Chores - Sixties Style

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"Don't make plans for this morning" my dad said, early one April Saturday.

Really?" said my most disappointed voice. "I did have plans to go shopping with Judy and Karen."

"I need you to help with some chores around the house first" Dad said firmly. "We're taking off the storm windows, putting up the screens and cleaning the basement."

"Can't we do that tomorrow?" I said hopefully.

"Tomorrow's Sunday, a day of rest and we're going to Aunt Violet's for dinner."

We were invited to Aunt Violet's over on Northwestern Ave frequently. She lived alone and loved company. Dinner consisted of wonderful food followed by a stretch of boring adult conversation. The good side was an entire shelf of Nancy Drew mysteries in my grown-up cousin's old room, where I would bury myself in adventure. I was halfway through "The Ghost of Blackwood Hall" from our last visit.

So out came the step ladder, rags, newspaper and pails of vinegar and water, and the project began. When the downstairs windows were finished, we brought the long extension ladder out of the garage and propped it against the wall.

"Go ahead, you can do the front windows," Dad suggested.

"No thanks," I said quickly. "I'd rather hold the ladder and pass up the rags. It's too high for me." My dad worked for Ottawa Hydro street lighting and thought nothing of climbing ladders, or telephone poles for that matter, so all of the upstairs windows were sparkling in no time.

Then it was time to clean the basement. We moved all the furniture and brought down the brooms, dustpans and more rags. The best part was when he brought out the Dustbane sweeping compound in its signature green box ("absorbs germ-laden dust") and sprinkled it all over the cement floor.

The heavenly odour filled the room. I always volunteered for the sweeping part of this job. We vacuumed the ratty old carpet and polished the basement windows, and when we were done the unfinished basement looked like a party room.

“Is there anything else we have to do?” I asked with crossed fingers. I was afraid he would suggest that we wash the car next, but he said we were done for the day.

Quickly I dialed Karen's number. Judy was there and they were ready to hit the stores. Beamish's on Wellington Street was closer, but if we chose Kresge's at Westgate we could also check out the record department at Freiman's and pick up a cream puff at Fenton's Bakery. Of course for this trip, Westgate was the unanimous choice.

As we walked along the wet sidewalk with our running shoes getting soaked, Judy said “Remember when we were kids and we had to wear those embarrassing rainettes?”

Rainettes were very uncool clear plastic rainboots worn over your shoes. “I used to sneak to the side of our garage and hide them in the hedge before school, and then put them on again before going back in the house after school .” I told them. “Never got caught.”

We laughed and chattered on the long walk, never once interrupted by a cell phone, enjoying the April sun's tentative warmth, dodging the few remaining snowbanks and anticipating summer, still far off in the distance.