

Country neighbors:

# Life is good on their plot of Canadian paradise

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**H**ello fellow homesteaders. How wonderful to know that I am not the only one out there still canning, collecting water in rain barrels and growing my own food. I live with my husband and two daughters in Ontario, Canada, in the Georgian Bay region of Lake Huron. We have one acre of land, which is clearly not enough, but we have to start somewhere. One day while browsing through a magazine stand, I happened across *COUNTRYSIDE* and the rest, as they say, is history.

That was three years ago and I have recommended it to all my friends. Most people only borrow one issue before they're ordering their own. Thanks to all of you who take time out to write about your adventures. It feels like home in the pages of the magazine.

I'm afraid I am a hopeless back to the lander. I came from a small town in Poland, where life may not have been easy, but it sure was simple. Thirty years in Toronto, one of the largest cities in Canada, did not bury my longing for going back to a simple life. Have you noticed that when you mention simple life to someone in the city they think you mean that you're not aware of the hardships of life? Immediately this city person feels it

necessary to inform you of the downside of the dream you carry. I must admit that the downside, the part that is the greatest struggle, is what makes us appreciate the incredible blessing of a country life.

Right now we are just beginning to live the life I've dreamed of. I say "I've" dreamed of because my husband had to be converted. He played hockey in Europe for a while, lived in

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a condo with a pool and tennis courts and thought that "roughing it" meant not having an espresso machine. Am I ever glad that he loves me, or the country life may have killed him. As it is, he claims that he could never go back to city life, but is still not sure why we need goats.

We have 11 laying hens which made it through a brutally cold winter without a heat lamp and still gave an egg a day each, a black lab, four cats and a horse. Mickey the horse lives across the road because he needs a bit

more room. I have wonderful friends in the area who share their cow milk, their ideas and a shoulder to cry on. Our garden is expanding and I am trying to grow as many heirloom vegetables, flowers and herbs as possible. We grow everything organically, and since I am studying to be a holistic nutritionist, we don't vaccinate or medicate but use God's bounty for our healing.

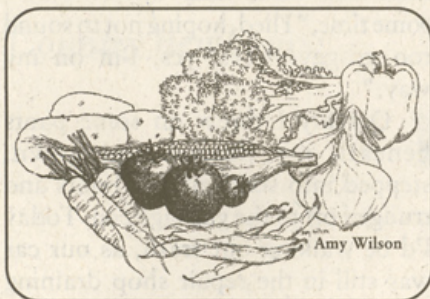
Before we got to this small patch of paradise, we lived in our cottage for a year as an intensive lesson in country survival. No running water, no indoor plumbing, no insulation. It was one of the best years of my life. I kept a diary when we were there, and I would like to share with you one journal entry. I have not included the plagues of flying ants, bats in the living room, flash flooding and composting toilet horrors in this entry. I hope you enjoy a look into a day of our lives.

### A country day remembered

I had a dream that one day I would live in the country. My earliest years were spent in a small European village. Later on, circumstances brought many years of big city life. I longed for some solitude, some unhurried days. Remembering my childhood, I envisioned my move to the country as a sort of going home.

Each season that passed brought an ever increasing determination that no more than two years would go by before we made the move. Discussing





Amy Wilson

this with one of my good friends one day I realized that it was the proverbial two years keeping me at arms length from my dream. Yet I never gave up hope. My daughters have listened to endless stories of cobblestone streets, horse-drawn wagons and gypsy caravans on the edge of town. On sunny days I would drag them through pioneer village museums, each time exclaiming that I once had used a wood burning cookstove, and yes, we used an outhouse, even on winter days.

They grew to yearn for a simpler life just like I did. In the fall, we baked pumpkin pies and talked of growing vegetables of our own. Someday, I would promise, you will have a country life, take walks in the moonlight, and fall asleep to the hooting of a great horned owl. We hunted for a harvest table, and enlisted a Mennonite carpenter to build some chairs. I had faith that my country treasures would have a proper home some day.

No one, therefore, was surprised when my husband and I decided to head north. It seemed a matter of course that our road was called Pioneer Village Lane. Nestled in the forest, on a slow and winding river, we had found our bit of paradise, rustic though it was.

We planned our garden and Steve tilled the soil on days thick with bugs. I waved my arms in the direction of where the goats would graze, and talked of chickens and bees. Our friends smiled and rejoiced with us, though dubious about the state of the house.

One day, as I stood on the edge of the river, I heard the lonely cry of a loon. My eyes filled with tears and I knew that I was home.

Our cabin is still a few paychecks away from completion, but we've

learned that in the country, that's all right. Our daughters, who once were glued to the monster in the living room, now sit by the bonfire, exploring the night sky. This year will mark our first full winter up north. I've wrestled with worrisome thoughts about freezing temperatures and our lack of sufficient insulation. Folks around here lend an eager ear as I ponder the struggles ahead. Must we get running water? Should we insulate the floors?

I have been met with grunts and nods, but no acceptable answers. I've heard stories of flash freezes and cabin fever. Unable to elicit any sympathy, I announced one day that I thought we could make it through the winter without modern conveniences. Immediately I realized that a commitment to succeed had been made, and alas, in public. When next spring rolls around, the questions will too, and the curious will gather to see how we have fared. But on a hot day in July, the challenges of a Canadian winter seem far away.

The last three weeks have been unrelentingly hot, the sun baking us with premeditated vigor. In such a heat, one dreams of escape, of cool nights, every window flung open with an invitation to the passing breeze. On such days, cool mornings are a blessing. I didn't mind the chill in the floor because I was sure that the day would be another heat-smothering sensation. However I didn't think of the cool floor as I quickly leapt out of bed. I should already have been awake, as this was Wednesday morning.

On Wednesday mornings the garbage truck comes rumbling down the road somewhere close to 8:00 a.m. Since we are back from the road, I drive our garbage out at 7:15 a.m. in case the truck comes early. It never does. Mornings have never been easy for me, so this is my least favorite chore. I resent those forest animals who grocery shop at the garbage pile, thus preventing me from driving my garbage around at night. This particular Wednesday, I was happy to have a neighbor who thought to call me, in case I forgot.

"Hello?" I mumbled into the phone. "Oh, yes, I've been up for

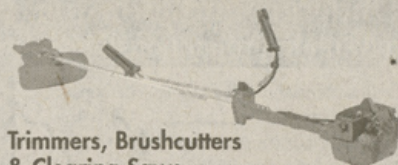
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## FOREST & HOME



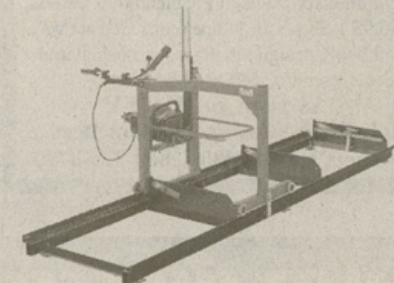
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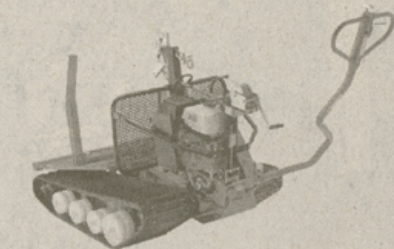
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some time," I lied, hoping not to sound too groggy. "Yes, yes, I'm on my way."

Quickly I threw on some pants beneath my flannel nightgown, stepped into some rubber boots and trudged off to the garbage can. Today I'd be walking our trash, as our car was still in the repair shop draining our bank account. Great, I thought to myself. This will take two trips, with no help from the two dogs running in circles around my feet. I hardly noticed the mist rising on the river or the dappled sunshine already spilling into my garden. For now, the sun was still a gentle caress, but later it would grip with an iron fist.

I cut through the forest and across my neighbor's yard. "I've got to build a garbage shelter," I muttered to myself, and contemplated the luxury of my husband taking over this chore. Lost in thought I turned back for the last bag.

"Hey! Looking good with your eyes closed!" I heard my neighbor's voice through his window. His commentary on my zombie like walk could only be answered with a disgruntled look. I wave my arm at him as if to say, "Ah, forget about it." He's amused and laughs, and I will, too, but not on Wednesday.

I wandered toward my vegetable patch to pull some weeds and trim a wandering squash. A thousand thoughts run through my mind. Yes, some things have been downright uncomfortable, like using an outhouse at night. But I could never leave here, although my dream came with its price.

I pressed the warmth of this summer day in my thoughts, to unravel later when the days are short and the nights are cold. This will have been a country day to remember.

