Jim Casada Outdoors

February 2016 Newsleter

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Jim's Doings

In truth, I've done precious little in recent weeks except stick close to hearth and home, try to get some thoughts into written form on a daily basis, go for walks on all but a few days (some nasty weather interfered a couple of times and some oral surgery connected to a problematic root canal, followed by blood drainage that presently has me looking like I came out on the short end of a bout of fisticuffs, did the same); and endeavoring to bring some semblance of order to chronic disorder have occupied most of my time.

The biggest news, without question, focuses on my next book, an anthology of Archibald Rutledge material on hunting dogs and upland hunting entitled *Bird Dog Days; Wingshooting Ways.* I completed reading of the final proofs yesterday, and the book is scheduled to be out in early July. If you would like to be included on a "to be notified" list once the book appears, just drop me an e-mail. I don't know the cost yet but it will be a hardbound book in the $30-$35 range.

February and Grandpa Joe

Those of you who have been gracious enough to read these scribblings for any length of time must surely realize that I had a wonderful relationship with my paternal grandfather, Joseph Hillberry Casada. He was an eccentric old fellow and some might have even suggested he was a tad "tetched." I didn't see it that way although there's no arguing he could be contrary, argumentative, and had more than a healthy dose of paranoia. One of his favorite sayings in answer to my constant probing and not infrequent questions about certain of his attitudes was simple: "You'll learn." In many instances I have learned, and I now realize that Grandpa Joe had ample reason to be distrustful of the government. Likewise, I can fully appreciate his insistence that he be his own master in everything. He was as hardworking a fellow as you'll ever see, but there was no way on God's green earth he was going to work with someone else supervising him. Give him a job and let him have at it and the work would get done in good order. Stand looking over his

shoulder and you might as well start seeking someone else to handle the task.

Some of our best times together, and there was an abundance of them, came in February. By that time I had pretty well killed out all the small game within walking distance of home or else left the few remaining squirrels and the half dozen coveys of quail I knew about so wild that dealing with them was purt nigh impossible. As a result I spent considerable time with him, just listening to tales, hearing him grouse about his "miseries" (although he was too ebullient to let the mullygrubs lay hold of him for long), and delighting in the "dreamin' and schemin'" he loved to indulge in at this season of the year.

With Grandpa Joe in mind, I'm going to devote this newsletter to his memory and in doing so publish the current draft of a chapter in my next book. The book, part of what I hope will eventually be a trilogy with the overarching title of "Portals of Paradise," will be a collection of profiles of mountain characters. The thirty-odd people to be covered range widely in renown, although most are just common mountain folks whom I either knew or have come to know a good deal about. The link between them is that all exemplify, in one way or another, distinguishing mountain traits. Here's my profile of Grandpa Joe, and if you like this, let me know and I'll be sure you are notified when the book eventually appears.

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Joseph Hillberry Casada (1878-1967)

Joe Casada was my paternal grandfather. In many senses my halcyon days of youth and the countless hours spent in his company as a boy served as the foundation underlying this entire book, and that is why the first chapter deals with his life. In his inimitable fashion Grandpa Joe introduced me to storytelling, provided hands-on exposure to the traditional mountain way of life, and was a walking encyclopedia of high country folkways. A man I idolized, he was most certainly a character—at times exasperating to his wife and children, more than a bit out of touch with mainstream thinking, and mule-headed as only the most stubborn of mountain folks can be.

He lived within shank's mare of our house, about a mile-and-a-half walk, and as a boy I spent a world of time with him and Grandma Minnie. Grandpa was a peculiar fellow, what mountain folks call "quair," but we were buddies in the special fashion only possible between those of appreciable age and the quite young. In truth Grandpa was in many ways just a youngster trapped in an old man's body, but he enjoyed the advantage of being blessed with a lifetime of experience to go with his youthful enthusiasm and zest for life.

Having now reached the age he was when my first recollections of Grandpa Joe begin, I realize just how fortunate I was to spend so much time with him. He was a man of infinite patience, at least with me, although he had no tolerance whatsoever for a fair portion of the adult world. Grandpa probably had some mental problems, and there's no question that he was obstreperous, distrustful of most of mankind, highly individualistic, perfectly comfortable in his own skin, religious after his own fashion, incredibly hardworking, self-sufficient, and as full of tricks as a pet 'coon.

Thanks to his tutelage I know how to make a slingshot and select the right type of wood for the task; have a solid understanding of down-to-earth subjects ranging from pulling weeds for pigs to dealing with free-range chickens; can find fishing worms and know how to store pumpkins, turnips, cabbage, apples, and other foodstuffs so they will keep for months; hold an advanced education in the finer points of fishing for knottyheads; have solid grounding in many elements of storytelling; realize that formal education is by no means

the only measure of a man's intellect or his worth as a human being; am deeply imbued in traditional mountain culture; and most of all have a deep, abiding appreciation of the meaning of closeness to the good earth. To my way of thinking, in leaving me those qualities as well as many more, Grandpa Joe provided me with a mighty fine legacy.

Famed Tar Heel writer Robert Ruark, in reminiscing about his own "Old Man," wrote that when his maternal grandfather died, impoverished by medical bills and the toll taken by the Great Depression, "all he left me was the world." Pleas of poverty notwithstanding, his grandfather left him far more in terms of tangible things than Grandpa Joe did me. I have the rocking chair where he held storytelling court situated four feet from where these words are being written, a single photograph of him by himself, a few family snapshots where he is part of the group, and nothing else you can hold in your hands or look upon with your eyes. That doesn't matter. I have a storehouse of memories filled with riches far beyond the measure of material things.

One of the great regrets of my life, and like anyone who has lived as many years as I have there are plenty of regrets along with even more fond recollections, was that I was unable to attend Grandpa Joe's funeral. He died in 1967, just short of his 90th year. I was 25 at the time and under different circumstances would have joined other grandsons as a pallbearer at his memorial service, which took place on a bitterly cold winter's day. By unhappy coincidence the day of his service and burial coincided with the date I was scheduled to take the Graduate Record Examination. I was teaching school and coaching in Virginia at the time and hoped to begin graduate school studies once the spring semester ended. This was the last opportunity to sit the required examination if I hoped to start my graduate education that summer. Thus Grandpa's passing left me with a conundrum—miss his funeral or play fast and loose with my plans for the future.

Fortunately I had in effect already said my goodbyes, not once but several times as we talked during his final years, so the decision was easier than it might otherwise have been. That was the first time I truly realized the truth inherent in the old adage which suggests funerals are for the living. Looking back, it may have been a blessing in some ways, because absence from the funeral enabled me to remember the man and all he meant to me privately as opposed to being part of a gathering of mourners. Always a bit of a misanthrope, and I have no doubt whatsoever Grandpa would have understood, indeed appreciated, my perspective in preferring to be alone with memories.

His death came in late February, which seems to me somehow appropriate, because in our countless sessions of rocking chair relaxation during the heart of winter, as he eased close to the fire and muttered about what he simply styled "the miseries," Grandpa often philosophized about the month. "It's fittin' February is so short," he would say, "because 28 days of it is about as much as a body can stand." He would then opine that the best of winter's hunting was over, "and besides, these gloomy days of rain and snow are a time for a spry young colt like you, not an old man, to be out and about."

I was often tempted to remind him that he had been "out and about" on just such a day when he slipped in snow while squirrel hunting and shattered his hip, but I knew better. I would have gotten a gentle but biting dose of verbal tea concluding with something to the effect that while I didn't know what I was talking about, "you'll learn." I reckon I'm still in the process of learning all those life's lessons which Grandpa figured ought to be part of a mountain youngster's upbringing.

For all that he groused about weather, mistrusted mankind, and clung to his independence with ferocious tenacity, it wasn't in Grandpa's character to remain pessimistic for long. He'd shake off bouts of arthritis, "rheumatiz," or associated other miseries linked to old age. Possibly he might mention whatever ailment plagued him at the moment but then hasten to add: "I reckon an old man's got a right to ache a bit, but it don't do to dwell on it."

Thereby dismissing the subject, he would take a sip of "Rooshian" (Russian) tea so hot it would burn the lips of most mortals and then turn to sharing his particular brand of homespun wisdom. His thinking ranged widely and might involve anything from reliving his boyhood to practical matters such as how he planned to lay out the garden come spring or what the signs foretold regarding weather in the coming weeks. Grandpa was a mighty

believer in signs, from planting by them to reading what the skies, smoke, animal behavior, and a host of other things portended.

More than anything, never mind that he had known poverty all his years and should have had reasons aplenty to be pessimistic or feel downtrodden, Grandpa was a dreamer. In some senses he spent his whole life dreaming, although his visions and wanderings in realms of wishful thinking lay outside normal approaches. If financial affairs meant much to him I never saw any real indication of it, although whenever the subject came up he always referred to "cash money." He had so little of it the redundancy was richly deserved.

Grandpa could outwork men half his age and never shied from doing so, although he was constitutionally incapable of following orders if they involved so much as a hint of supervision or oversight. You could tell him a field needed hoeing, a lawn needed mowing, or an orchard needed pruning; just hire him to have at it and all would be fine. Look over his shoulder though or make suggestions on how to perform the job, and it was time to seek someone else to handle the chores at hand. He was so completely his own man no one, with the possible exception of Grandma Minnie, could tell him anything.

Grandpa's dreams focused not on money but on matters such as the American chestnut's return, the significance of planting black walnuts (he called them "grandchildren's trees," knowing it would take that long for the slow-growing species to reach maturity), olden times when he often heard the scream of a "painter" and even killed one as a young man, hunting pheasants (his word for grouse) when they existed in large numbers, and indeed sport of any kind. He lived a life cast in the past or looking to the future rather than being overly occupied with the present.

His reminiscences frequently involved hunting, but he also ventured into romantic realms on the fishing side of the sporting equation. My favorite among his many angling tales involved him reminiscing about speckled trout so plentiful you could easily catch a hundred in an afternoon of fishing. Similarly, every time he recounted an epic battle with a giant jackfish (muskellunge) I listened in enchantment. Despite hearing that tale times without number it never grew old. That's a hallmark of a masterful weaver of words.

Sooner or later, and especially during the depths of winter when outside activities were limited by inclement weather, he would turn to a subject which provided me endless delight. Grandpa would abruptly switch from musing about matters dating back to the late 19th century and focus on the future. "I've always liked figurin'," he'd opine, "and it's high time the two of us got busy on that front." Or maybe he would suggest we needed to do some "dreamin' and schemin'." Whatever his choice of words, the point of it all was quite clear. He had decided to quit reflecting on the past and would start musing on the near future. He reckoned a good dose of planning about events to come offered an ideal antidote for anything from cabin fever to Grandma being vexed with the two of us.

Grandpa would launch into a detailed plan of what we needed to do to get ready for spring fishing, or maybe decide it wasn't too late to make one more rabbit gum and set it in a likely spot. We might peruse that year's Sears & Roebuck catalog to compare mail order prices of essential items such as snelled fish hooks or the new-fangled monofilament line with what they cost locally at Cope's Hardware. Often Grandpa talked of trying a new fishing spot on the river or a journey up nearby Deep Creek, and if it was wintertime we would get several cane poles rigged and ready for our fishing forays come spring's greening-up days. Year after wonderful year Grandpa showed me that dreaming is by no means the exclusive preserve of the young. You just had to be young at heart. That was one of his most enduring and endearing qualities.

Grandpa Joe never saw the ocean, but he fished in pristine mountain streams and drank sweet spring water so icy it set your teeth on edge. He never drove a car but he handled teams of horses and understood meaningful application of the words gee, haw, and whoa. If he ever left the state of North Carolina it was just to venture a few miles into north Georgia, but he lived a full life in the Smokies, mountains so lovely they make the soul soar. To my knowledge he never once ate in a restaurant, but he dined on sumptuous fare—pot likker, backbones and ribs, fried squirrel with sweet potatoes, country hams he cured from hogs he had raised and butchered, cathead biscuits with sausage gravy, cracklin' cornbread, and other fixin's the likes of which no high profile chef ever prepared. I can still hear him, as he returned thanks, offering a simple prayer which always ended:

"You'uns see what's before you; eat hearty." A trencherman for the ages, he would then eagerly consume one of Grandma Minnie's scrumptious suppers before raring back and pronouncing, "My that was fine, weren't it." Those words were more expressive and conveyed greater appreciation than polished literary comments from a food critic could possibly provide.

Grandpa never drank a soda pop, but he sassered, sipped, and savored pepper tea he prepared from parched red pepper pods like a connoisseur of the finest wines. He never tasted seafood, but he dined on speckled trout battered with stone-ground corn meal fried so perfectly you could eat them bones and all. He never ate papayas or pomegranates, but he grew cannonball watermelons so sweet they'd leave you sticky all over and raised muskmelons so juicy you drooled despite yourself when one was sliced. He never had crepes suzette, but he enjoyed buckwheat pancakes made with flour milled from grain he had grown, adorned with butter his wife churned, and covered with molasses made from cane he raised. He never ate eggs Benedict, but he dined daily on "cackleberries" from free-range chickens with yolks yellow as the summer sun. He was marginally literate, having completed six grades in a country school where sessions were only held for a few months each year, but he faithfully read the Bible every day. He seldom went to church, at least in the years I knew him, but he was an intensely religious man.

In short, Grandpa Joe was not, in the grander scheme of things, an individual who garnered fame or fortune, accolades or grand achievements. His life was one of limitations in many ways—geographically, technologically, economically, in breadth of vision, and at least in the eyes of some, accomplishments. To my way of thinking though, he epitomized love; the magic of mentoring; liberal dispensation of that most precious of gifts, time; and sharing of down-to-earth lore redolent of the wisdom inherent in singer/songwriter John Prine's suggestion that "it don't make much sense that common sense don't make no sense no more." He was, in my small world, the most unforgettable character I've ever known or likely will ever know.

I don't quite think, to echo a refrain from a poignant Randy Travis song about his grandfather, Grandpa Joe walked on water. Yet seldom has there been a day since his death, now encompassing the passage of almost half a century, I haven't thought about him. Invariably those thoughts bring a wry smile to my face even as they produce a hitch in my throat. He blessed me with treasure beyond all measure, not the least of which was providing me an endless fund of anecdotes and tidbits of information to use in my writing. For that I owe him a debt of gratitude which can never be paid.

We shared countless escapades, raised Grandma Minnie's ire time and again (when she got her dander up Grandpa would mutter something like "I reckon I know when I'm not wanted underfoot" and we'd head outside), and through it all we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. To my recollection never once did he raise his voice to me or do anything to curb my rambunctiousness beyond the gentlest of chiding to the effect of "next time you might try it this way." He left me tales filling my memory's storehouse to overflowing, and perhaps the most fitting way to conclude this tribute to a man I so dearly loved and admired is through sharing a couple of stories connected to our time together.

As I have suggested, Grandpa Joe offered a study in character contrasts. Though easygoing and soft-spoken, he was mule stubborn. Similarly, while tough as a well-seasoned hickory shaft and seldom given to shows of emotion, he could be wonderfully patient and tenderhearted with his adoring grandson.

One constant in his life was an admirable work ethic comprised of pure grit, keen understanding of the wisdom inherent in "make do with what you've got," and sharply-honed survival skills developed over a lifetime of living in close harmony with the land. Grandpa also had a quirky sense of humor. One sunny September afternoon when I was 11 or 12 all these qualities coalesced in unforgettable fashion.

We were in the corn field of his tiny farm along the banks of the Tuckaseigee River near Bryson City pulling red-rooted pigweed and gathering inferior pumpkins scattered amidst rows of towering Hickory Cane corn. The corn had already "made" and awaited storage of ears in cribs and fodder in shocks. It was hard, dirty work, made even tougher by the possibility of stings from packsaddles and certainty of encounters with razor-sharp edges of dry corn leaves. To me, none of that mattered.

There were ripe ground cherries for a snack, samples from Grandpa's rich store of tales to nurture the mind, ripe passion flower fruit to provide a tasty sweet-sour treat, and treasure from his memory to stir the soul. We were gathering the weeds and pumpkins to feed hogs, part of a fattening-up process which would conclude with killing day come the first strong cold snap in November. Then the whole extended family—my grandparents, mother and father, aunts and uncles, along with any cousins old enough to help—would put in an extended day of labor devoted to processing from six to eight hogs, using, as Grandpa put it, "everything but the squeal."

As was often the case in such settings, Grandpa started reminiscing about the days when hogs roamed free and fattened to perfection on chestnut mast. The subject was a deeply moving one for him. Invariably he became a bit misty-eyed and had a catch in his voice as he looked back in forlorn longing to the demise of the American chestnut. He would recall how it was a staff of life providing cash money from sale of acid wood, shakes for roofing, rails for fences, lumber for barns, nuts to sell to city markets, and, of course, food for humans and for hogs. Troubled by the visible sorrow his recollections had brought to the surface, I abruptly changed the subject with mention of one of my fondest ambitions. "Grandpa," I said, "I sure do wish I could throw a rock all the way across the river."

Shedding his mantle of painful nostalgia, he chuckled and responded: "Why that's easy. I can throw one all the way over to the mouth of Deep Creek" (which entered the river across from his home).

With youth's endless enthusiasm and woeful lack of insight, I seized on that seemingly ludicrous statement. After all, Grandpa was bent with age, had never completely recovered from a hip shattered while out hunting in the snow, and to my knowledge possessed no throwing ability whatsoever. Impulsively I stated, without even thinking about a *quid pro quo* should he fail: "Grandpa, I'll pull pigweed, shell corn, and slop hogs all by myself for a week if you throw a rock across the river."

Having duly offered the bait and suckered his grandson into taking it, the family's grand sire muttered a favorite phrase. "You'll learn," he said, as he opened his Barlow knife to cut down a particularly long corn stalk from the "made" patch of Hickory Cane. After stripping the fodder he trimmed the stalk to about eight feet and carefully carved a notch near its small end.

We then walked to river's edge and, after considerable scrutiny, Grandpa selected a stone. Fitting it into the notch, he drew back the corn stalk, now a sort of atlatl, and launched his donnick. The rock was still rising when it reached the opposite side of the river. Turning to me with that sly grin I had seen so many times before, Grandpa said: "Son, things ain't always what they seem. I reckon you best get to pulling pigweed."

He left me in my crestfallen misery for what seemed an eternity then chuckled: "Go ahead and get busy now, but I'll help you. Next time though, you might want to remember to pause and ponder before you open your pie hole."

On another occasion our shared love for fishing got both of us into a passel of trouble. Never mind the physical limitations imposed by age, Grandpa always possessed an unflagging sense of adventure when it came to outdoor pursuits such as hunting or fishing. On many of these sporting outings I had the good fortune to be his sidekick. He had an uncanny knack of turning something such as a simple afternoon of fishing in the Tuckaseigee River or a day spent in pursuit of squirrels into grand enterprises involving the two of us as a dauntless duo. Alas, our escapades didn't always work out as planned. Certainly that was the case one late spring day at Devil's Dip.

Named because its powerful hydraulics and a strong backwater gave it the foreboding appearance of a whirlpool, Devil's Dip lay just a short walk downstream from Grandpa's house. We had fished it countless times, but on this particular day the two of us ventured into uncharted territory. Hopping from one rock to another, we went farther out on the shoals adjacent to the turbulent water, flush from spring freshets, than ever before. At one point, scared a bit by the nearby torrent, I commented to Grandpa: "If we aren't careful we'll fall in."

He nodded in agreement before giving a response which settled matters as far as both of us were concerned. "You might be right, but every time we move we catch more knottyheads."

Unfortunately my prophecy came true. I'm not sure whether I slipped and grabbed Grandpa or if he fell and reached out to me. Whatever the case, both of us were unceremoniously baptized in the frigid waters of Devil's Dip. We scrambled out, shaken and chilled but no worse for wear other than the fact that Grandpa had lost his new straw hat. Purchased just the day before with hard-earned cash money, the hat made four complete circles in the backwater with my erstwhile mentor trying unsuccessfully to snag it with his long cane pole at each passage. The fifth time around it caught the current and headed downriver towards Fontana Lake, never to be seen again.

By that time both of us were shivering and dreading the coming confrontation with Grandma Minnie. My paternal grandmother was a tiny woman, weighing no more than 100 pounds, but she had a 300-pound temper and a tongue when she was angry that could flay the hide off a razorback hog. The family in general, and Grandpa Joe in particular, stood in a constant state of awe at her wrath and did their level best to avoid being the focus of one of her periodic eruptions.

We both knew that showing up on the doorstep of their home looking like a pair of drowned muskrats was going to earn us a tongue lashing of the first order. Grandpa acknowledged the inevitable by muttering: "They ain't going to like this one bit."

Grandma Minnie

The "they" to whom he referred was Grandma Minnie. Somehow in situations such as this, Grandpa always found it more comforting to use the impersonal pronoun rather than her name. Over the years there were a number of occasions where the two of us got into a predicament when the use of "they" came into play.

I silently nodded agreement with Grandpa's ominous forecast and followed close on his heels. Grandma had seen us coming, recognized something was amiss, and met us at the door. What I now realize was a millisecond of relief on her part instantaneously gave way to rage. For some reason she directed her initial verbal sally towards me. Punctuating each word by poking me in the solar plexus with her gnarled index finger, she said: "The only thing worse than a young fool is an old fool," and, having switched to prodding her spouse in mid-sentence she quickly added, "Here stands a matched pair."

At that moment I ventured a sideways glance to see how Grandpa was reacting, only to discover he was, while never breaking eye contact with Grandma, in slow retreat. I wasn't about to be left alone to face her choler and

forthwith moved to join him. As we backed through the doorway and around the corner into another room, Grandpa winked at me and whispered softly: “I reckon they won’t be cooking any fish tonight.”

We had leftover cornbread and milk for supper.

When Grandpa died I wasn’t able to attend the funeral or serve as one of the grandsons who were pallbearers. His funeral service came on a Saturday when I was scheduled to take the Graduate Record Examination in Richmond, VA as I prepared to begin my graduate education. I’ve agonized over my absence ever since, but in truth our goodbyes had already been said and I’m confident Grandpa Joe would have been quite happy with my doing my mourning in private. After all, he was never comfortable in crowds or much of one for a lot of folderol. His advice would likely have been to do what I pretty much did—take a long walk and look back lovingly to all those grand times we shared together. Today, almost a half century after his passing, I still do both on a regular basis.

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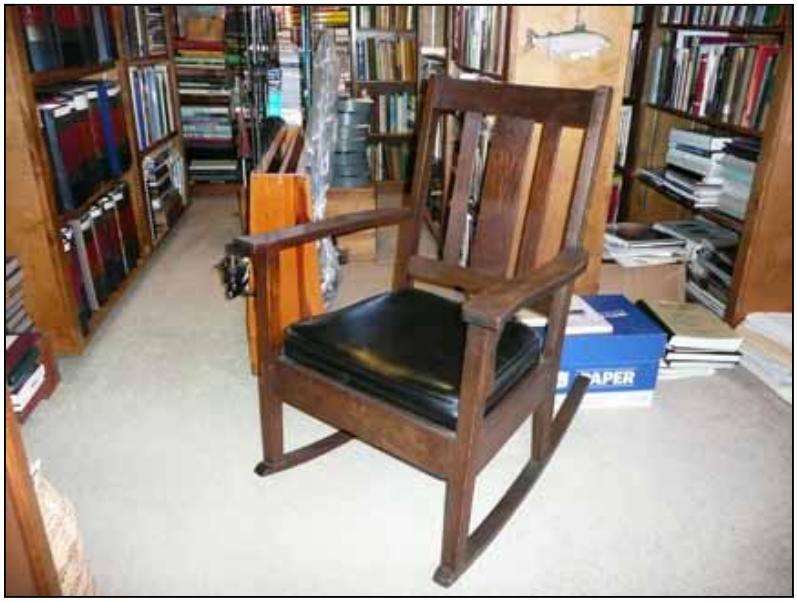
Thoughts on an Old Rocking Chair



Virtually all of Grandpa’s ruminating and reminiscing, no matter what the season, occurred in one of two settings. The first would be an outdoor situation where we were sharing treasured hours together, and for me they were treasured whether something as mundane as hoeing corn or feeding the chickens was involved or if we were off fishing or just piddling around. The second focal point for his telling of tales came when Grandpa was comfortably seated in a rocking chair. He actually had two of these storytelling thrones—one with a wicker bottom on the front porch where he could gaze out at the flow of the Tuckaseigee River while listening to its soothing murmurs and whispers; the second a more substantial piece of furniture in the living room.

Today the latter rocking chair rests two steps from where these words are being typed. I seldom sit in it, although its locust frame (to my knowledge locust is a wood seldom used in furniture but it’s tough and wonderfully durable) and cushioned seat are more than inviting. Instead, I just gaze on it and call back memories of the old man who used it as a perch on so many wonderful days. It’s a comfort and a companion; an inspiration in my work and a constant invitation to revisit yesteryear. I reckon, all things except monetary worth being duly considered, that the old rocking chair is the finest thing I own.

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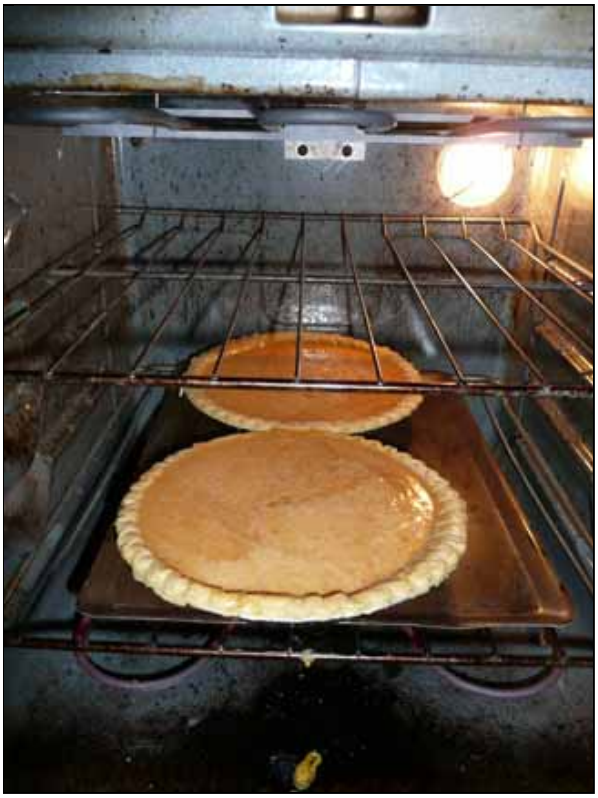
February Recipes

In recent weeks, after being unusually warm throughout most of December and on into early January, we’ve had some colder weather. With its arrival, along with a compelling need to clean out the freezers a bit, my cooking efforts have focused in large measure on venison. However, I also finally got around to working up a mountain

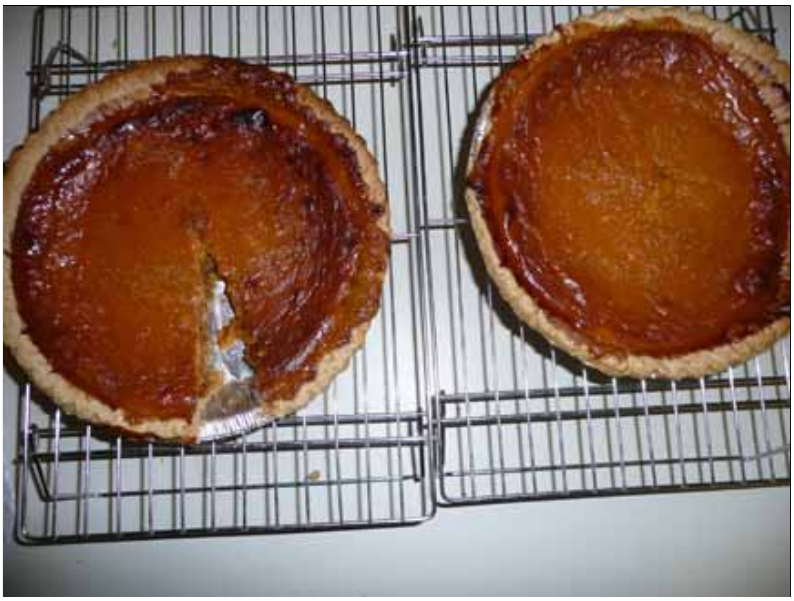
"pie pumpkin" my brother grew in the garden soil Daddy faithfully worked and improved for well over half a century. It came from seed a friend gave him, and she has raised the pumpkins for decades. So there are a couple of pumpkin-related recipes thrown in for good measure along with the basics of how to "work up" a pumpkin. Incidentally, in case you didn't know it, most of the decorative pumpkins available around Halloween are inferior for table use, and the same hold true of those giants folks raise for county fair competitions.

PUMPKIN PIE



My granddaughter loves pumpkin pie, something which is a bit unusual in kids, and that consideration, along with the fact her father is also fond of the dessert, as is yours truly, offers reason enough to make a pie from time to time. Here's my recipe:

¾ cup sugar
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon or pumpkin spice
2 large eggs
3 tablespoons maple syrup (use the real McCoy if you have it; if not, pancake syrup or even molasses will do)
1 cup processed pumpkin
1 can evaporated milk
1 deep-dish pie shell (make your own or buy the 9-inch size at the grocery store)



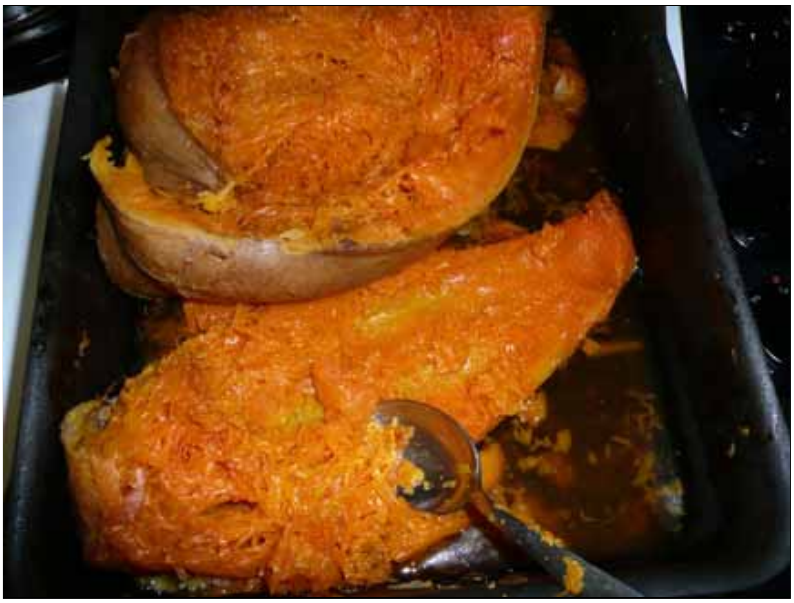
Blend in the dry ingredients then, in a separate bowl, beat eggs before mixing syrup and pumpkin with them. Then gradually stir in the dry ingredients with a whisk until everything is thoroughly mixed. Bake in a preheated oven at 425 degrees for 12 minutes and then reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake until done (40-50 minutes). The pie is done when a knife or toothpick pulls away cleanly. The crust will have a tendency to get overly brown where exposed. This can be avoided by covering it with tin foil. Cool on a pie rack before refrigerating or serving.

TIP: You can substitute candy roaster for pumpkin and have equally satisfactory results.

WORKING UP A PUMPKIN

I've tried various ways of processing pumpkin, but after due trial-and-error I

think the way Momma and Grandma Minnie did it (with a bit of help from modern appliances in the wrap-up) is best. Begin by washing the outside of the pumpkin and then cutting it in half and using a large, sturdy spoon to remove the seeds and loose fiber holding them. Save the seeds (see below). Next cut the halves into more workable sections (four or six pieces work best for me). Place the sections, rind side down, in a large dripping or roasting pan and then put in a 350 degree oven. Cook until the rind readily pulls away with a fork. You will find quite a bit of moisture accumulates in the pan. Just pour it off once you remove the pan from the oven.



Allow to cool until you can work with the pumpkin. Then pull or peel away the rind, which is easily removable if the pumpkin has been cooked thoroughly. Throw the rinds away, put them in your compost pile, or if you are fortunate enough to raise your own hogs, add them to the slop bucket. The pumpkin flesh can be placed in a blender and mixed just like you would prepare your morning smoothie (I can only imagine what Grandma Minnie would have had to say about contraptions such as blenders, much the less about a concoction known as a "smoothie"). The pumpkin is then ready for pie making or freezing in appropriate portions.

ROASTED PUMPKIN SEEDS

Having been raised by parents who reached early adulthood in the depths of the Depression and for whom frugality was a byword, I've always been a staunch adherent to the "waste not, want not" school of thinking. That certainly applies to saving seeds rather than buying them and to utilizing garden bounty to its fullest. The material above deals with pumpkins, but it's a mistake to overlook the tasty seeds inside these members of the winter squash family. They are tasty, nutritious, and make a fine snack.

To prepare pumpkin seeds, put them aside when you work up the pumpkin, and while it is roasting in the oven separate the seeds from the stringy fiber to which they are attached. Save plenty for pumpkin planting in the next garden cycle (putting them in a small bag and storing them in the freezer assures viability) and then toast the rest. To do this, lightly coat the cleaned seeds in cooking oil, spread them out atop a cookie sheet, sprinkle with salt, and place in a 375-degree oven. Toast until they begin to show a hint of brown and remove. The seeds can be eaten whole or, if you have the patience, cracked and the kernel removed. I eat them whole and figure that along with the fine taste I'm getting some fiber.

VENISON QUICHE

Easily prepared and fine for a hearty breakfast or an evening meal, this egg-and-venison dish is as good warmed over as it is hot out of the oven.

1 unbaked 9-inch pastry shell
½ pound ground venison
½ cup mayonnaise
½ cup milk
2 large eggs
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 ½ cups shred cheddar cheese
1/3 cup sliced green onions

Brown the venison in a skillet over medium heat. Drain, if necessary, and set aside. Blend mayonnaise, milk, eggs, and cornstarch until smooth. Stir in venison, cheese, and onion. Turn into pastry shell. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 45 minutes until brown and a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Makes six servings.

CHEESEBURGER VENISON PIZZA

¼ to ½ pound ground venison
¼ cup chopped onion
3 slices bacon
1 pizza kit
8 ounces light mozzarella cheese in addition to cheese in kit

Brown venison and onion in a frying pan. Cook bacon in a microwave on paper towels. Place sauce on crust and top with pizza kit cheese. Spread venison on top and then crumble bacon atop this and spread evenly. Top with additional eight-ounce package of light mozzarella.

Bake at 425 degrees for eight to ten minutes or until crisp and cheese is melted and golden.

VENISON TAMALE PIE

1 ½-2 pounds ground venison
1 package taco seasoning
1 small can (eight ounce) tomato sauce
1 or 2 cans sliced black olives (use two if you really like olives)
1 package (eight ounce) grated cheddar cheese
1 package (eight ounce) grated Monterey jack or mozzarella cheese
1 package small flour tortillas

Brown venison in a skillet and once it is brown add taco seasoning and tomato sauce.

Place tortilla in bottom of a round baking dish and sprinkle it with meat, cheese, and olives. Repeat this process until you have three or four layers of tortillas, and be sure to end with cheese.

Bake in a pre-heated 350 degree oven for 30 minutes or until hot and cheese is slightly brown.

OPTION: Onions can be added to ground venison and if you like things quite spicy add chili powder as well. Additional options are green chilies or fresh jalapeno pepper.

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