



Our grandparents weren't so dumb. In lots of ways they were smarter than we are. They managed to get along remarkably well, live to ripe old ages, raise passels of young ones, put by enough money to leave a bit of inheritance to their loved ones, in spite of lacking much we consider necessities.

Medical care, such as it was, Grandpa considered a luxury to be sought only at times of birth or imminent death. Dentists there were none, in this neck of the woods. If you had a tooth ache, you went to the doctor's house, sat on a hard wooden kitchen chair and held on for dear life while the doctor pried out the offending tooth with a pair of pliers. Anaesthesia was a new rinctom.

Gramp didn't often hurry since he'd discovered at an early age it wasn't productive. The horse taking him from place to place could cover only so much ground in a given length of time.

If the horse galloped half the distance, he exhausted himself and had to be walked the rest of the way. It worked out better to proceed at a steady comfortable trot.

Grampa took a lesson from the horse, applied it to himself, and went at a gallop only in real emergencies. If the house was afire, he ran for help; on less urgent errands, a walk was fast enough.

As a result, he wasn't troubled by heart disease and celebrated his eightieth birthday long after younger men, men who'd grown up with the wonderful horseless carriage as an example of how efficient machinery can be, had dropped off in their middle years.

Grampa understood horses. He was a blacksmith by trade. He also understood machinery and automobiles. He switched from shoeing horses to repairing automobiles when the horse became obsolete as a mode of transportation.

Gramp understood that men are a lot more like horses than they are like cars. There's just so much energy available to man or beast, and when it's used up, you can't go out and buy a replacement part to get an animal going again.

So Gramp didn't push himself.

In grandfather's youth there was no iside plumbing, no electricity, no central heat in houses or other buildings. There were only two kinds of fuel: coal and wood. Coal was expensive; wood was cheap.

Since coal wasn't mined locally and had to be brought into the village aboard coasting vessels, unloaded at the coal dock at the foot of Osterville's Bay Street, and carted by horse-drawn wagon to a storage point, wood was the fuel of choice for the man of moderate means.

And try as he might, Gramp was always of moderate means.

Like others in the same boat then, he acquired woodland as some people today acquire credit cards.

Whenever a bit of acreage came on the market at a reasonable price (and in those days a reasonable price for Cape Cod woodland might have been in the neighborhood of \$5 an acre) he'd buy it. Sometimes he'd take a parcel of woodland in trade, in payment of an outstanding bill, since he knew its owner would probably never have cash-in-hand to pay what he owed.

In 1975, as in 1875, the old year waned and died like a sputtering candle stub guttering to its flickering end. Outdoor temperatures hovered in the low numbers.

Snow lay like a white quilt over the blanket of oak leaves and pine needles so lately blown from trees to ground. Winds whistled and moaned at the eaves. Inside the house it was warm.

Inside the house, in 1975, the oil burner hummed, gulping precious No. 2 fuel oil that's taken the place of wood and coal.

But not as much as you might think.

It's not so long ago that Gramp depended upon his wood lots, his

woodpile, his woodburning stoves, that we've forgotten them. While the oil burner still makes the difference between seeing your breath in bedrooms and being able to sit quietly and read in a chair placed more than two feet from a roaring fireplace, it's no longer necessary to keep the thermostat set at 70° to be comfortable.

Mine's set at 60° and except for 20 minutes each morning (when I turn it smartly up and let the oil burn to warm up the house before setting it back again) that's where it'll stay most of the winter. And I won't feel frosty around the edges either.

The thing that's changed our whole way of life is the wood-burning stove hooked up to the chimney, just like Grandfather's.

You wouldn't believe the difference it's made in our lifestyle unless you've got one of your own.

First of all, let me confess, I'm sensitive to the cold. When the house isn't warm, I'm actively miserable. Last winter I shivered and shook throughout December, January and March, conserving oil. (In February I went to Florida.)

I invested in woolen wear of various kinds and faithfully kept the heat back to 68° while at home and down to 65° while away or while sleeping. I was rewarded by the sensation of virtue — and by feeling cold most of the time.

This winter, still dedicated to conservation of energy and spurred by the price of fuel oil, I'm still willing to wear the woolies, but I'm rejoicing the warmth.

Grandfather wasn't so dumb; a page from his book of neat tricks is keeping me warm.

When I come home in the late afternoon, the first thing I do (after turning on the oven to start the potatoes baking for supper) is build a fire in the woodstove. The house, at 60°, feels like a barn.

Within minutes after I light the woodstove, the kitchen and dining room end of the house is toasty and I'm enjoying a pre-energy-crunch temperature in the mid-70s.

I wouldn't be honest if I promised a woodstove can totally substitute for an oil burner. It can't — at least the size I've got can't. It's incapable of accepting a log more than a foot long. It's small and requires frequent attention; but it takes the chill off in a hurry, and the thermostat stays at 60° while the stove provides supplementary heat.

Once again I look about the neighborhood and question the wisdom of my neighbors from the city who've brought suburbia with them. They've had most of their trees removed; those remaining are trimmed of all deadwood; their lawns are pristine swaths of green grass all spring, summer and fall.

My own property boasts no lawn, no grass; only woods and trees. On the ground after each storm I find my kindling. The wind blows down small branches and dead limbs just the right size for fire-starting.

And on the stump there's a dozen trees, seasoning, waiting to become foot-long logs to feed my woodstove all winter.

No, grandfather wasn't so dumb. Just as he understood horses, he understood heat. To save a horse, he'd ride with a gentle rein. To save the price of coal, he'd use wood in his stoves.

If J.M. (that's what everyone called my grandfather) were around, he'd smile to see me burning wood as he did, and for the same reason. And I'm happy he showed me the way; it makes me feel close to him to be using one of his methods of "making do" with what I've got, to meet my needs for warmth in this fashion. Come in and warm up by the fire. It's a treat!