

Washing Day and Pasche Egging

Anne Vance was born in 1905 and interviewed in the 1990s

The first thing that happened in a morning on wash day was to put on – by that I mean light the wood, you see there was no electricity then, - underneath a large copper tub boiler full of water. Then we took a bar of soap, it was called Watsons Matchless Cleanser I remember, grated it into the boiler.

We had a zinc bath where you washed your clothes first and then you waited until the water was hot enough to melt the soap then you started to put your clothes in.

In the first place you put in your whites, which were the sheets and the pillow cases and things like that. There was a sort of round lid with a handle on and you took that off every now and then how you to see washing was doing. Then when we felt it was done we would put the clothing into what we called a dolly tub. This was an aluminium tub about three foot tall. The dolly was a round platform, like a small stool with a stick at the top which we twisted from side to side for about ten minutes. Then you had another tub which you rinsed the clothes out of this cold water and you folded them and put them through a mangle – which was two heavy rollers you put the wet clothes between which squeezed the water out of the sheets / clothing.

So we had to do three or four loads of sheets and towels and such like with the coloured clothing always done next to last because after that were the men's keitels. A keitel is a sort of thin jacket the men wore in the summer. In the winter they wore thicker clothes. They were usually blue in colour. It wasn't a matter of fashion you just wore and wore it until it fell apart. The men also wore fustian trousers which were a sort of velvet corduroy. Made of a material very like denim but rather stronger

When they had gone through the mangle, the next thing you did you used to mix a great bowl of starch. Dad was a master butcher. He used to go all over, Underbarrow, Brigsteer, Helsington all these places with a horse and butchering cart. He always had to be spick and span. He always wore white shirts and on top of that a spotless white apron. Then there was a bib and then this large sort of skirt thing that covered his trousers. All those had to be starched.

You put these pieces of starch into the bowl and kept stirring and adding boiling water until it all dissolved into a thick cream. You then put your garment in one by one and squeezed it through the starch. You put them into another bowl and took them straight and hung them on the line as they were. If you started mangling your starch disappeared altogether.

We often used to put dolly blue into the starch when it was melted so the whole thing was blue and our clothes used to come out spotless white.

You then put them out to dry. There were four very thick posts and at the top of each post there were things like dolly legs jutting out. You tethered your clothes line very tight to these and hung out the washing. If it was raining outside we had a lot of clothes maidens. They were wooden racks which we would put into a room which wasn't being used at the time. It didn't have any windows and we children used to call it "The Black Hole of Calcutta." Dad also made some other racks in the living room with four or five long struts. At about seven or eight inches from the end he used to attach some sort of pulley and you could let it up or down. It was marvellous because all the heat went to the top.

We had what we called a box iron. It had a little lid on it into which your metal nugget among the cinders in the fire. When it was glowing it was pushed through a flap in the back. You probably had two or three irons because as soon as one got too cool the other was put in and

then you proceeded to iron. We got a better one which you kept putting lit pieces of charcoal into the iron through the front. It had an arm which you held while you were ironing. It used to make a hissing noise. We thought it was marvellous because we didn't have to get any nuggets out of the fire.

At Easter we had Pasche Egging. We used to boil the eggs for a long while. In the water we used to put onion peelings or apple peelings which used to colour and pattern the shells as though they were leaves. Onions tended to give a yellow colour and apple a brown colour. We put them in a special bowl and then waited for a dry night. Then we used to go to the top of Hill Field and we had a certain place we had to go to. One person would send his or her egg down the hill and there was a man at the bottom who used to stand by the farthest away then all of us, having marked our egg with our names, perhaps half a dozen at a time would roll one of our eggs to be measured as to whose had rolled nearest to the first egg. We used to keep doing that all night and then next day we would break and peel those that hadn't broken on the way down and we used to eat them. There was always a small prize for first, second and third. We would be quite proud if one of ours had won even if the prize was only a pencil or a rubber or something like that. We were thrilled to bits to get even that.

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