

Springtime in the Ozarks,  
Dinner'll Soon Be Ready. Lillie Edens Preston

"High on a bluff in a crevice where no one could climb, there in the Ozarks planted the Columbine. We called it Maybells because it bloomed so beautifully in the month of May. The Sarvis trees in the spring were always so tantalizing. There they were away on a precipice of the bluff, a mass of snowy white blossoms and later laden with delicious fruit and most unattainable and so dangerously balanced. We could stand high on a hill and see below our precipice the most beautiful, most peaceful valley. It lay for miles around. We spent hours feasting our eyes on the beauty of those hills. Those hours we lived with God! Behind each hill we found a valley and the March winds kept them dusted.

Sister Arlie and I were privileged one year to go to the carding machine at Roaring River with Grandpa Ford when he took the wool to be carded. We drove up leisurely taking the day for it as Grandpa was not to be rushed on any occasion. Coming back next day we had a load of fluffy rolls of creamy colored wool ready to spin. While there, we camped on the bank of the river near the carding machine which was just below the dam that furnished the waterpower to operate the machinery, and someone was always ready with the legend about the deer that had been chased over the hill by a pack of dogs and was so closely pursued, that it could not stop and leaped over the bluff and down into the hole that was bottomless. The water that boiled forth from this hole was so abundant it created the Roaring River. We girls stood and gazed in wonderment and horror a miraculous mental picture of the deer with no other choice but to go over the bluff into the river.

When visiting Grandma we had to help with the chores but we were never given so much work that we did not have time to enjoy taking a wagon tire and rolling it as a hoop down the lane for almost a quarter of a mile and back, running after it all the while and keeping it rolling by tapping it occasionally with a stick, to keep up with the tire was a running endurance test. This took place between sundown and dusk while the older children did the milking, hunting the eggs and feeding the chickens. There never seemed to be a shortage of wagon tires.

We also had to water the ash-hopper in late winter and early spring. Grandma was particular what kind of wood was burned in the fireplace during that time for not all wood made strong lye ashes. She preferred oak wood ashes for lye. We set a flat gallon stone crock under the drip to catch the lye as it dripped from the ashes and then put a board over the crock to keep the chickens and dogs from sticking their noses in lye. We also used the lye for making hominy. When the big grains of corn were boiled in oakwood lye until the husk would slip off then, cooked in an iron pot until the grains could be crushed with your tongue when tasting, then it was ready to put in an iron skillet, with plenty of bacon grease, pestled with a wooden pestle until musky and seasoned thorough with salt and pepper. My, that sure was good eatin.'

Soap making always took place during the dark of the moon in March. It was made out in the yard at the wash place in an iron kettle set upon rocks so a woodfire could be built under it. This place was not far from the spring. This was a job dedicated strictly to grownups After we children got the lye to running by watering the ashopper, soap making was an art, and the supply for the whole year was made in March.

