Kitchen's Warmth Was Much More than the Stove

We had a large kitchen, and its big black cookstove, which burned corncobs and wood, was our only source of heat for the room in our home in Union, Nebraska. It stood away from the wall.

Behind it were the sink and pump. Dad would come in after doing the farm chores, wash and change clothes behind the stove, calling out, "Look-look-look the other way."

Rural electrification was yet to come; our only source of light was a kerosene lamp.

At one of the kitchen windows, we looked out onto the back porch where a wood box was filled with split wood every day.

For a while, we had to pile the wood on the floor because our cat had kittens in the box. A mother hen took residence with the kittens, wanting to be their mother. She tried to push them under herself, with her wing, as she did with her own chicks.

When my mother was "in a family way," her friends would gather around the dining table, making a quilt for her expected baby. Each one brought a scrap of material and made a block in the Sunbonnet Sue pattern, then put the blocks together and did hand quilting.

Early one morning, my dad called the doctor, who arrived before I left for school. All day, I sat on needles and pins, wondering what was happening at home.

As soon as school was out, I ran home the full three-fourths of a mile and burst breathlessly into the house, and there was the beautiful Sunbonnet quilt draped cozily over a basket and covering a shiny mound with a fluff of pinkish red hair—my new sister!

I grew up during the droughts and the Great Depression, but my dad managed to hide a dollar under our breakfast plates on our birthdays. Each time, I was afraid to look, lest the dollar wouldn't be there, but it always was.

After more than 70 years, I can still visualize Dad standing at the back door of the kitchen with the green furniture and black stove, watching the clouds and silently praying for rain. Mom would touch his arm, saying, "I think it will rain this time."

—Betty Ann T., Bellevue, Nebraska