Remember the House Out Back?

House on a Hill

WHEN I was a boy, in East Alton, Illinois, we had an outhouse. When I tell people it was a two-story outhouse, I receive some rather odd looks.

It was above the side of a hill with a boardwalk leading to it. When the wind blew, the entire structure would sway. I can assure you, there were no long and pleasant moments spent in that building.

I came home from school one day and the outhouse was gone, replaced by a new outhouse with a flush toilet. When you sat on the seat, a constant spray went down the drain. In winter, it was one miserable experience.

—Ernie Cobine, Eureka, California

Fascinating Discovery

IN 1966, when my daughter, Linda Lee, was about 5 years old, we attended a family reunion between Lakeland and Homerville, Georgia.

Linda Lee met many cousins she didn't even know she had. They were having a wonderful time when Linda Lee suddenly ran up to her grandmother, yelling, "Nana, Nana, you have to come with me right now! I have found a bathroom over there that you don't even have to flush!"

All the little Georgia cousins thought Linda Lee had surely lost her marbles, but she was just a city girl who didn't know what an outhouse was. —Marilyn Tomlinson, Jacksonville, Florida

Not-So-Brainy Brainstorm

BACK IN the early 1950s, when we lived on a farm in western Kansas, I was flipping my jackknife in the one-holer privy outside and the knife went down the hole.

I used a Model T coil for a magnet in trying to retrieve the knife but had no luck—too much Sears, Roebuck catalog paper down there.

Then, I had a brainstorm. I filled a pork-and-beans can with gas, poured it down the hole and lit it to burn away the paper. The flames got too big, and I tried to choke off the fire by sitting on the hole. Naturally, that turned out to be a bad idea.

I then filled a 5-gallon bucket with water from the stock tank and doused the blaze—what a stench! But, after long hours of magnet fishing, I finally got my knife back.

—Clay Engel, Hays, Kansas

Sailing a Pirate Privy

OUR FARMHOUSE in Illinois acquired indoor plumbing in 1956, and my mother was eager to have the outhouse removed from our yard.

My dad tipped the outhouse over and towed it into the pasture with his Ford 9N tractor. My 7-year-old brother, Randy, and I, a year younger, saw an opportunity to make our own fun. The discarded outhouse became our pirate ship.

We saw the outhouse, lying on its back, as a sailing schooner, its peaked bow cutting majestically through the waves. By pulling open the huge “hatch” door, hopping down into the “hold” and peering through the “portholes,” we’d plot our seafaring adventures. We even flew a skull-and-crossbones flag from atop the “deck.”

My brother and I enjoyed many hours sailing the side pasture until the fateful day my schoolmate (and first-grade crush) drove by with his family on their way to fish a local pond. I was mortified to be seen by Jeff’s family (his father was the town attorney) playing on an outhouse. I burned with embarrassment as I ducked back into the hold; how were they to know it was a fearsome pirate ship?

The encounter took the wind from my sails, but not enough to erase fond memories of our pirate ship.

—Rhonda Cox, West Palm Beach, Florida