



Country Living

Returning to the Good Life

By Robin Mullet

As a boy, my husband Dick (shown in photo) liked to sneak away from his chores to walk the hills surrounding his home in eastern Ohio. He often took his homework into the woods to study. When he left for college and his engineering career, he was sure he had left the farm life in the hills for good. Little did he know that 30 years later he would find himself back in those same hills living a totally different “farming” lifestyle.

Dick and I married 17 years ago, blending a family of two working adults and three active middle- and high-school aged children. About the same time, Dick’s mom deeded him 80 acres of land that had been in his family for four generations. With the exception of dirt access roads to the two oil wells, it had reverted to aspen, cherry, and maple trees, some oaks, and lots of multiflora rose and grapevines. We lived almost three hours away, but managed to check it out once or twice a year. The “nature first” girl (me) and the former farm boy (Dick) had some lively discussions about what to do with the land someday, but then would go back to our busy lives.

Too quickly, our children grew up and out of the house, and began their own careers and families. We began to spend more time at the woods, just the two of us. Dick wanted to keep the property in the family, but we couldn’t decide what to do with it. We realized that many of the trees were maturing, but neither one of us wanted to have the property clear-cut. We were more concerned with keeping the habitat for wildlife. Clearing out the pesky multiflora and a few of the aspen on three of the 80 acres, we erected first a tool shed, then a covered deck supplied with bunk beds. We were soon enjoying family barbecues on a fire pit built of sandstone rocks we had collected on the property. A seed began to take root in our hearts, sowed years before in our respective rural childhoods long left behind. Returning to the country life, at least on weekends, was something we began to desire. For years I have espoused we all need to live a more sustainable lifestyle, and it was time to put my money where my mouth was. I began to envision a weekend place powered by solar energy. I soon had Dick (bless his little engineer’s heart) excited by the challenge as well, although I think our kids thought we were crazy!

Realizing how much we enjoyed it in the woods, and wanting to be closer to Dick’s mom who was now in her 70s, we took stock of our finances and decided we could take the early retirement and live there full-time.

It took us two years, a lot of sweat equity, some sore muscles and good problem-solving skills, but we finished our 1,400-square foot cabin with a separate barn for Dick’s tools and wood-working equipment, moved in, and have never regretted the decision. An oil well already on the property provides us with natural gas for our stove and hot water; we have an efficient wood stove for our heat, and the sun, through our solar cells and battery storage, provides our electricity.

With the help of a state forest service representative, we developed a forest management plan concentrating on sustainable harvesting and enhancing wildlife habitat. Mother Nature has even helped. An ice storm last year provided us with timber income from some substantial cherry and oak that came down with the weight of the ice. Dick and two of the neighbors have discovered the fun of beekeeping and we are looking forward to a great harvest of honey this year that we will sell in the local farmers’ market. We may raise free-range chickens someday, but have put that on hold for now as we still travel frequently to see family and friends.

We have the comforts of modern living—a computer, stereo and television (though watching the birds is more interesting). We are blessed with the company of deer, wild turkey, dozens of beautiful species of birds and an occasional raccoon, coyote or opossum. Our young grandchildren love to visit Nana and Papa in the woods, and we have gotten to know and appreciate the value of good neighbors. Each spring we put in a small garden, which provides us with homegrown vegetables to eat both fresh and canned for the winter pantry, and I am expanding my berry garden. Another bonus? Walking up and down the hills is great exercise!

Country living might not be for everyone, but for Dick and I, returning to the hills of his childhood, living in our cabin and doing our own brand of “farming” is life at its best.