

### Mother's new screens



By Mary Cook

Father was getting tired of Mother's constant lamenting about the heat in the old log house in the summer time, and the flies that much preferred indoors than being out in the open air. Even though she covered the windows with blankets on the east side of the house when the sun was the hottest, she liked the light inside, so every noon, down came the blankets, and the windows lifted to let in what little breeze there might be.

Father said for generations the women of the house put up with heat and the flies, and there wasn't much he could do about either. The windows, ill fitting, and no longer closing tightly, were nonetheless raised every day. Father had made screens years before from screening he bought at the hardware store in Renfrew. They weren't really screens at all, but simply big squares nailed to narrow slats, and then lightly tacked in place on the outside of each window. They were supposed to let the air in, and keep anything with wings out. But after years of being tacked up and taken down, the screens were full of holes, rusty, and in some places had left the slats entirely.

Because they were so ill fitting, the flies managed to crawl in the cracks all around them, and Mother's constant battle to rid the house of what she considered the greatest carrier of germs, came to a head one hot day late in the summer. She had put up with the screening long enough she said. She was looking at the Renfrew Mercury when she saw the ad from the Stedman's Store: mosquito netting, in either white or green for 9 cents a yard! She immediately wrote it down on her list to take into town on her very next trip.

I was with her that Saturday when she went into the store with egg money from the blue sugar bowl. The netting was in huge fat bolts, and I was glad Mother decided on the green instead of the white. In fact, I thought the new netting would add a touch of class to the old log house. Certainly it would be better than the broken screens we had put up with as long as I could remember.

Father thought the big roll of green netting was a waste of money. Mother paid him no heed but sent Everett and Emerson out to make narrow slats so that she could

get right at the job of making new screens for the windows.

“This is a bigger job than I thought it would be,” she said,” as she worked on the old table in the grape arbour. She had measured the window perfectly, and put four slats out in a square and laid the green netting over the top. I had to hold one end secure as she snipped away to get the shape of the window in place. Then came the job of tacking the mesh to the slats. Each time she pulled the mesh over a slat, it curled up at the other end. The perspiration was pouring off Mother’s face, as she fought with the mesh screening to get it lined up with the slats.

Finally, she had it tacked all around, and she carried it over to the kitchen window. I handed her the nails and the hammer, and it didn’t take her long to nail the square to the frame of the window. It didn’t look right to me, but I didn’t have the nerve to say anything to Mother.

The mesh had stretched and what almost looked like a pleat went from one corner to the other.

“I think I’ll just wait a bit before tackling another window,” she said wisely.

At suppertime when Father took his place at the head of the table, he glanced up at the window that Mother had operated on. He said nothing, but I saw the corners of his mouth working into a grin. We heard a slight “pop,” and saw the new screen leave a corner of the window. It didn’t take long for a few flies to come into the kitchen attracted by the smells of fresh food on the table.

“Get the swatter, Audrey,” Mother ordered. Then she went to the rag bag hanging at the back door and drew out the remains of a pair of bloomers, and crammed the remnant into the corner of the window which now sported a space about six inches long where the mesh should have been.

After supper Father went to the side of the house and retrieved the old screen, hammered in a few new nails, put small wads of cloth into a few of the holes, and re-attached it to the old window frame.

The remainder of the green mesh was wrapped in copies of the Renfrew Mercury, some of it was used that year for a Halloween costume, and the rest was put in the trunk at the top of the stairs for what Mother called a rainy day. Father, when he saw that Mother had spent good egg money on something she couldn’t use, gave his usual comment when money was wasted: “come easy, go easy,” he said adding a few words in German that I was sure were cuss words.

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