

## A Different Dessert

By Martha Tolles

During the nineteen twenties and thirties we thought we were living very comfortably.

Nevertheless, one morning our mother said to my brothers and me, “When you come home from school today, there will be something new. We are going to upgrade.” So of course as we hustled off to school, we were eagerly looking forward to returning. But what could she possibly mean by upgrade?

We seemed to have everything we needed. What could possibly be added to our household that would make things any better?

We had a big radio in the living room which we gathered around every evening. After the news we listened to Amos n’ Andy. How we chuckled and enjoyed that program.

Our house was cozy. The radiators were warm all day, thanks to the coal burning away down in the furnace. Every so often a big truck arrived and disgorged a noisy stream of coal into our cellar and later my older brother would shovel more coal into the furnace. Sometimes I would furtively slip a potato inside the little door of the furnace and let it bake until it was soft and delicious. Then, I ‘d smother it with fresh butter and savor it.

Our mornings started off nicely because the horse drawn milk cart would arrive early each day and leave bottles of milk at our back door. Since it was not homogenized in those days, Grandma skimmed off the cream at the top for our oatmeal. and the rest we drank with gusto. Sometimes on my way to school I had to pass the horse and cart parked at the curb and this required a bit of daring on my part. I regarded the horse with some trepidation but I decided if I ran fast enough past him he might not see me. So off I sprinted and was safely beyond him.

But what could we possibly upgrade to? I wondered about it all day at school. Even our ice box was just right with its big chunk of ice sitting in it. It was regularly deposited there by the ice man who came often and kept the ice box chilled.

Also a gardener sometimes helped our grandma prepare her garden for new plantings. There she grew all the vegetables we devoured which no doubt added more years to our lives.

Also, while we were away at school our grandma swished our dirty clothes in a washing machine, so easy, it seemed. But each piece did have to be put through the wringer before it could be hung outdoors on the clothesline. One time Grandma's hand got squeezed in the wringer. Oh ouch! But she pulled her hand out and she did recover.

Other times she or our mother would use our sewing machine. By pumping the foot pedal steadily, the needle in the machine would go up and down, sewing away. I had several nice homemade dresses.

Finally, the school day ended and of course I rushed home, as did my brothers. Well, when we were all together our mother led us into the kitchen and there sat a larger, whiter icebox but this one made a low humming noise. Mother flung open the door to its gleaming interior. "You see," she smiled, "it's electric. No more big blocks of ice, so hard to move them around, And as they melted they dripped water all over the place and of course, they got smaller and the box grew warmer. But now, it's just cold all the time." She waved a triumphant hand toward the refrigerator. "And tonight, guess what?" She leaned toward us with excitement on her face. "You'll have a different kind of dessert."

Of course we hoped for ice cream. But no, at the end of dinner we were each given a bowl....you guessed it...a bowl of ice cubes, sparkling, cool cubes. Such a treat. Perhaps they were a precursor of the many changes that were sure to come in the future.