

The Ice House

*A Report by the Always-Right Reverend
Doctor Isaiah J. Trin (Doc Trin, for short)*

The ice box needed support. In other words, there was no need of an ice box if there was no ice. An ice box did not *make* ice - it *used* ice. There it sat in the back pantry, keeping things cold. I was fascinated by the ice box. We didn't have electricity. That meant no nintendo games, electric trains, or television. Come to think of it, that might not be so bad. But we had most modern conveniences of the time - a wash tub that could be heated on the stove, a dipper for the water pump (everyone used the same one - a subject for another report), central heat and air (it heated the center of the house and let the air in from outside), and an ice box. The ice box was a summer convenience. In the winter, we just threw the stuff out in the snow bank.

Things had to be stored in the ice box in a certain fashion. The things that needed to be coldest must be placed nearest the ice. Ah, yes, I didn't mention the ice yet. The ice was not in cubes. It was in a huge block. Carrying those ice blocks was one of those things that we always wished we could do - until we got big enough to do it. Kind of like washing dishes. It was a real art form to stock the ice box. One didn't want the butter to get too hard or too soft. The cow's milk mustn't spoil, but mustn't freeze, either. And the flies must be kept off the raspberry pie without becoming lethargic from the cold and finding a resting place in the cream.

All things considered, it was best to keep flying things out of the ice box.

We haven't gotten to the most important part yet, so hang on.

The ice would gradually melt, and the resulting water would flow out of the ice box through the drain made just for that purpose. There was a bucket under the drain to catch the water. Some up-town folks had drains that went through the floor, but common folks (that was us) had a bucket, because if we cut a hole in the floor, something would probably crawl up through it. We had to keep an eye on the bucket and empty it out in the flower bed before it overflowed on the pantry floor and got into the flour barrel. Otherwise, there would be no biscuits for breakfast - and the kids wouldn't be able to sit down to eat, anyway (that was known as discipline).

There were those occasions when, from lack of attention or from lack of an ice supply, the ice box failed to keep things cold. It didn't take long to notice if the ice box wasn't working. Things besides water started coming out the drain, and the flowers would wilt. Anyone with courage enough to open the ice box when it was in such a condition was greeted with *parfume de rot*. It only took one such occasion to convince everyone that a properly maintained ice box was necessary for family harmony. It did not take motivational speeches from Zig Ziglar, or a SUCCESS DAY seminar.

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This brings us to the ice supply. If things were to be kept cold in the summer, preparation would start in the winter. That's when the lakes and ponds froze over. The ice would get three feet thick or so. Hardy souls in cold-weather gear would go to the ponds to cut ice. It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, and it was hard to get motivated to cut ice when the Fahrenheit was below zero. There was plenty around. Who needed it? But a little foresight by the proper authority would convince us that we needed to get the ice cut. The horse needed something to do, and we were providing it. So we cut the ice into blocks - about twenty-five pounds to a block. We didn't have scales, but after you've cut a couple of hundred of them, you get pretty good at it. The ice blocks were loaded on the wagon using those big ice tongs you may have seen in old movies. Then we would head home.

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When we got home, the real work began. The ice had to be stored in the ice house. The ice house was a small shed (about the size of that other useful outdoor house) where the ice was stored. You couldn't just sit the ice down in the field and expect it to last all summer. It had a tendency to disappear along about June. That wouldn't help things stay cold in the ice box. The ice had to be stacked very carefully in the ice house. One layer at a time, separated by enough sawdust to keep two thousand blocks from becoming one big block. Fifty thousand pounds of ice in one block is not much use unless you're on the *Titanic*. There had to be enough sawdust between the outer ice and the wall of the ice house to provide good insulation, so the ice would last until we could cut more next winter. We stacked and shoveled, stacked and shoveled, and then stacked and shoveled. Finally, the ice house was full, the sawdust was packed, and the door was closed. A job well done

- and a job it was. Some men made their living cutting, hauling, selling, and stacking ice in the winter. That's a tough way to make a living - almost as tough as being a President's lawyer.

Hang on, now, we're getting to the important part.

But you know what? We sure were glad, in the middle of August, that we had cut the ice in February. When the ice block in the ice box started getting small, and the cream had bubbles on it, we would get the tongs and go to the ice house. Opening the door, one could feel the cool air coming right off the sawdust. I'm not sure there's ever been a better feeling - well, maybe. We would take the ice pick and dig around in the sawdust until the next ice block was free. Then we'd carry it (it helped if there were two folks, one on each side - kept your knee from freezing) to the pantry and, after removing all the sawdust so as not to plug the drain, place it in the ice box.

We had to do that about every three days in the summer. And you know what? It worked. It worked because we worked. Just stop for a minute and think about all the effort it took to have fresh, cold milk back then. Building and lining the ice box, getting out in the cold with axes, shovels, and saws. Carrying, cleaning, storing, packing. Lots and lots of work. And it was a repetitive process. If you wanted it to work, you had to do it over and over again. But evidently, folks thought it was worth it.

Now here is the key!! They thought - actually they were convinced - actually they KNEW - that it was worth it. We knew it worked because we SAW it work. We SAW it work because those who knew it worked TOLD us we had to do it so it would work. We labored not in vain. We cast our bread upon the waters and it returned - and it was cold. If a man will not work, neither shall he eat anything cool.

I happened to flip by a TV channel the other day, and there was a show on there where these "Reverends" were telling people to claim freedom from their financial problems by sending all their money to this ministry. They were tossing the pledges into some sort of firey container (pretty good symbolism there) to represent burning up their financial obligations, I suppose. They guaranteed that God would give the pledgers their money back in ninety days, and everything would be hunky-dorey. Now I could be wrong, but I venture a guess that anyone who ever had to stock an ice house

didn't send them a cent. Ninety days is a long time for an ice house. It's a whole summer. It could be a whole life. It's a lot of melting down the drain. It's like giving away all your ice in September, when there isn't any, and expecting God to provide it back in January, when there is plenty.

Now when you look at an ice house, you see sawdust, but you know there's ice in there. You accept it by faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for - the evidence of things *not seen*. But it is not the evidence of things that are *not there*. It took a lot of work - i.e., preparation, labor, and sweat, to stock an ice house. But it was worth it. The benefits were great! Spiritual benefits are great, too, but I think God expects us to put in as much work to get spiritual results as he did for us to get ice in the summer. Some would call that a miracle - and it was, when you stop and think about it. It's a bigger miracle than taking someone else's money and tempting God to repay it.

Then, of course, there are those who are just a few loads of sawdust short of an ice house. Those are the ones drinking warm Orange Nehi's in June. Better work hard while the resources are available, pack it well for future need, and thank God for the opportunity.

Doc Trin
doc_trin@hotmail.com