

It's East

By: Ike Adams

On Friday, August 15, 2001, I bought a gallon of 2% milk off the dairy rack at Wal-Mart and never thought much about it until I got home.

I don't know about you all, but I'm not one of those people who pays much attention to expiration dates on food stuff because I figure it, wouldn't be on the rack if it wasn't still good and I also know, from long experience, that a loaf of gallets of anything is going to disappear within three or four hours of the time I bring it home. So why worry?

Hot dog buns are the exception. Every once in awhile I'll buy one of those two-dozen-to-the-package-of hot dog buns and only get a dozen wieners and in a day or two I'll look at the bun bag still lying there on the kitchen table and it will be blue instead of toasty brown and I'll grin my teeth cause I know I should have broken down and gotten another 12-pack of Oscar Meyers.

Mold sets in fast here on Charlie Brown Road and Ole Blue; my main dog, likes moldy buns better than fifty dollar dog food so I toss them out to him.

I figure that eating so much penicillin is the main reason Blue has never called in sick and that the folks at Kerm's, and name your favorite packaged bread company, are missing out on a killing by not recycling their stale buns as dog food. Blue would take all they have and Blue has friends.

Anyway, I got home with my milk on the 15th of August and started to put it in the fridge when I noticed the expiration

label in fairly bold print right there on top of the handle.

"Guaranteed Fresh Until Sept. 7,"

And I thought to myself, "Surely this is a misprint." Surely they don't expect me to put this milk in the refrigerator and still be drinking it in three weeks because I've been around milk all my life and it normally goes bad in three days in which case I feed it to Blue and my dog loves bad milk even better than he loves moldy buns. In fact, Blue's ideal gourmet meal is moldy buns marinated in bad milk and he has even suggested that as a flavor to the folks at Purina but so far we haven't seen it advertised.

So I called the store and inquired about the date and was informed that a series of textbooks could be written about the procedure(s) required to get information about milk that included the various steps that milk goes through to get to you from cow to you. Suffice to say that you will be referred to various law firms if you dig deep enough.

"How," I asked, "can you still call call milk 'fresh' after it's been on the shelf three weeks?"

"Our attorneys know the answer to that," I was asked three different times and upon calling the referred-to legal counsel I was asked if I had bought any bad milk.

"Actually, No. I have not," I answered. "Does it taste fresh?" (The woman at this time was pinning me down)

"I actually don't know. It's been in the

fridge for 10 days and I'd rather not taste it but the label says its good for another 8 days and I was just wondering if my estate could sue you if I pour some of it on corn flakes and die."

"Corn flakes may kill you but I wouldn't blame it on milk until I sued them first," she said and hung up.

Folks, when I was growing up milk-kept for three days, max, if properly refrigerated, and then it went blanky in which case it developed a taste that would stop you from drinking it by gagging you and making your tongue swell into the size of a beef liver. Nowadays milk stays "fresh" for three weeks? (And at the end of three weeks you flush it down the toilet to clean the drains.) (Or feed it to Blue.)

Bread is guaranteed "fresh" for two weeks minimum after they put it on the rack.

Ground beef is out there on the rack with you choice steaks guaranteed "fresh" for eight or ten days.

But still!

What the heck are they putting in it? The local funeral home can't keep a corpse fresh enough to open the casket after three or four days and yet the meat and poultry and dairy industry is keep-

ing stuff on the food racks looking and tasting like it just came out of the hen or cow or oven for weeks on end.

You would think that these preservation types would get together. If a man dies and his family is overseas or what not, or let's say, the family just wants to postpone the ceremony and open the casket for a couple or three weeks, why is it that the funeral home people and the milk people don't get together?

If they are not using embalming fluid and formaldehyde to make milk keep for weeks on end, then maybe the funeral homes ought to see what the milk people are doing and incorporate it into their own business.

Most of my organs are shot, according to the doctors, but I'd more than make up for it if they could put what ever is left of my corpse on the dairy rack and keep it fresh for 21 days.

38 degrees and prop me right up there behind the milk and butter case and when my eyes start glancing over they ought to admit that the milk is no longer fresh if it was dated on the same day they put me in the case.

Then they ought to have a sanitary and proper way of disposing of the spilt-

office. He would visit awhile, talk to the kids, sell us our choice of chewing gum and perhaps sing a tune. Polly was his pet and the song was usually "Polly went a-courting." For Christmas one year, when Polly was four or five, he made a bedroom set for her dolls. He had measured and whittled every piece of wood to make it to correct size and shape from odds and ends of rough lumber, nailed it with tiny nails that held it fast without having a sharp edge that could possibly injure her. It was a full three piece set. It included a dresser and chest with drawers that slid in and out perfectly. That gift, from Blind George, was a special treasure to Polly. She had received a gift with words that could hear the voice of a child and make music from a banjo he loved.

Later in life, he bought a little plot of ground next to the river in Livingston and built, by himself, a two room cabin with plenty of cupboard and closet space where he could organize, and keep organized, his clothes and supply of food he could cook for himself. A few years later, when Mat and I visited him, the cabin was as clean as if a pernickety housewife was taking care of it. Missed Blind George after he moved to Livingston where he lived along until he died several years later.

The good things happening taught me there was more to learn about the other side of life where happiness was found in the heart of others and hardships were taken as a matter to be dealt with as part of life and a little music and laughter could chase it away. I was still homesick for the life I had lived in town where street lights were on every corner and music was hymns sung in church or at home with the family joining in around the piano. We were a family of singers where

a good duet, trio or quartet could appear at a moment's notice. When two or three of us got together, music would be in our midst. Put six or eight together and you had a choir. Harmony meant voices that blended into a pleasant sound. I missed this so I began to wish for a way we could live in town. It didn't matter where, as long as it had sidewalks and street lights.

That prayer wasn't answered for several years although we did spend the war years in Cincinnati. We didn't live on a street with a white picket fence around a cottage and sidewalks with a corner light that flicked shadows on the sidewalk from the trees that lined it.

Another problem with living on the isolated farm began to bother me after being enveloped with trees everywhere I looked. Over the years, they had grown into a dense forest. I couldn't see through nor around. Now, I still love trees and the shade beneath where a person can sit and enjoy the squirrels chattering overhead, or watch the birds tending their young in a nest high above. Out of the dining room window, I watched apple trees in the orchard, from the time they put buds into the spring till the first apple was made into applebutter in the fall, then all winter when snow took the place of leaves. Across the front lawn and highway was a hedge of dark blocking the rising sun till noon. Second growth timber crowded for a place at the fence out back. Oh, yes, they are pretty. The big oak in the back yard that held the swing my mother and I swung on so preciously. The dogwoods I set out and the one in memory of Mat are not for sale at any price. The memory of the glowing maples surrounding the home place are indelibly stamped in the recess of my mind. Yet, I wanted a change of scenery. So, I finally moved to Tevis Street in Mt. Vernon.

(Cont. to A4)

Sweet and Sour

By Zi Graves



Wishes Granted

Almost anything can be overdone, including the answers to our wishes and dreams. Therefore, be careful what you ask for, you may get more than you want, or your wishes may come in a different shape or form than expected. Wishes and dreams are for the future, so the planning and preparing for them is done at a time in life when they may collide with the dreams and plans of others who may not be ready to accept.

Most of those who have read "Sweet and Sour" since I began writing should remember the rough time I had, being what I thought I was, "a pioneer in the wilds of Appalachia." That phrase didn't last forever. Then, I came a time when the buckets of water carried from the spring weren't as heavy, nor the distance as far. A washing machine was found with a motor that used white gas for power that took the place of a washboard powered by strong arms and worn-out hands. The motor that powered the washing machine was also used to charge the battery for a radio, the first in our neighborhood. Listening to the Grand Old Opry

on Saturday night soon became a habit and the social gathering place for a few neighbors. To save fuel needed to keep the cycle going, the washing machine had to be used more often so the battery could be hooked up the same time if it was to be charged and ready for Saturday night entertainment. Reece and Lulu Mize, with their two little boys, Calvin and Conley, were the most frequent visitors. Alice Mize, Reece's mother, and her brother, Blind George Jones, often accompanied them. Blind George couldn't see, of course, but didn't need to since music was what he wanted to hear. Sometimes, he would bring his five string banjo along to fill in the time when the battery died. He really could make music on the banjo that would start other feet to tapping to match his own that by then would be stomping on the bare wood floor beneath them. He often would break into a song. Pretty Polly was his favorite. George lived with Alice and her husband, Harry, along the grown boys of the family. He tried to pay his way by selling packages of chewing gum to neighbors and friends. He named me Teaberry because that was what I bought the most of. Blind George, the name everyone knew him by, was able to go anywhere he wanted to, using his cane instead of eyes to find the rocks, deep ruts, or mud puddles in the path or knock the overhanging brush out of the way. He often brought our mail the couple miles over the hill between our house and the post

office. He would visit awhile, talk to the kids, sell us our choice of chewing gum and perhaps sing a tune. Polly was his pet and the song was usually "Polly went a-courting." For Christmas one year, when Polly was four or five, he made a bedroom set for her dolls. He had measured and whittled every piece of wood to make it to correct size and shape from odds and ends of rough lumber, nailed it with tiny nails that held it fast without having a sharp edge that could possibly injure her. It was a full three piece set. It included a dresser and chest with drawers that slid in and out perfectly. That gift, from Blind George, was a special treasure to Polly. She had received a gift with words that could hear the voice of a child and make music from a banjo he loved.

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