

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 10 - Homemaking Then and Now

Welcome to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. Thanks for stopping by! Grab a glass of Lemonade, pull up a rocker and join me for conversations about living the Simple Life. Go ahead. Get comfortable and settle in for a good visit. It's time to relax and enjoy!

How many of you have ever heard of a woman named 'Betty Crocker'? I'm willing to bet most of you have. But did you also know she was believed to be one of the utmost homemakers of all times? Well, at least in the kitchen – the ideal of her in other aspects of a homemaker are largely assumed.

She was so popular in this homemaking and cooking role, in 1945 she won 2nd place in a contest called 'First Lady of Food', and was only beaten out by Eleanor Roosevelt, who was none other than the actual First Lady of the United States. Ms. Crocker sounds like the perfect homemaker, right?

Well, guess what. Not only does the perfect homemaker not exist, but Mrs. Crocker didn't, either. She is the result of one of the most successful advertising campaigns that ever existed.

Betty Crocker may be the figment of an advertising executive's imagination, but homemaking is not. From as far back as Eve, homemaking has been alive and practiced by women everywhere. But despite the ideal that homemaking is and always has been 'women's work', that, too isn't the case.

Originally, homemaking chores were done by both the husband and the wife. There was no division of chores. 'Women's' work was the same as 'Men's' work, as both pulled together to take care of their home, livestock, and daily chores. And it had to be.

Homemaking wasn't just about growing food and keeping a clean home. If they couldn't produce it themselves, they would need to barter or trade with neighbors and storekeepers. And some things they were able to produce, ended up being long, arduous tasks.

Remember the old poem 'The House That Jack Built'? It is a cumulative tale that starts literally with 'This is the House that Jack Built'. Each line brings in a new aspect and adds to the previous sentence. 'This is the Malt that lays in the house that Jack built.'

Many aspects of homemaking in the early years could apply the same way. 'This is the farm where Mary lives. These are the sheep that graze in the pasture on the farm where Mary lives. This is the wool that is sheared from the sheep that graze in the pasture on the farm where Mary lives.' I can carry that through to the yarn and thread that was spun to make the fabrics that were sewn into clothes for the members of the family.

Anything that was necessary for survival, food, shelter, warmth, clothing, and bedding, was created by hand. In that case, every member of the family – from the husband to the youngest child, were considered homemakers.

The term we now know as 'homemaker' or 'housewife' loosely came about during the Industrial Revolution, when men left their farms and took on jobs to earn money. The bulk of the homework was then left to the women and children to do. This included taking on the work that the man did prior to working outside the home.

In today's age, when we imagine a 'traditional' homemaker, we may have mental pictures of June Cleaver (from Leave it to Beaver), Donna Reed (from The Donna Reed Show), and even Lucy and Ethel (from I Love Lucy). These women stayed at home, cleaned house, did the 'marketing', cared for the children, and prepared the meals.

Homemakers also stopped their household chores in time to freshen up and have the newspaper (and a pipe, if required) ready for the moment her husband walked through the door after a busy day at 'the office'. How those women did it, I am not sure. I'm more like Lucy trying to clean up the mess before Ricky got home. But it was customary and considered the 'norm'.

And not all women could stay at home, yet were still expected to uphold the role of the homemaker. Let's step back a moment to the early 40s, during World War II. Many of the men volunteered for the Military and were shipped off to war. In order to pay the bills, women entered the workforce. When the war was over, the men returned and, in many cases, the women were expected to step back into the role of homemaker.

Despite what you would see on the television programs, the homemaker's role in the 40s and 50s wasn't easy. This was a gender-oriented era where the men were in control of the wife, children, and household. To be a 'good' housewife, you were required to keep your home spotless, your appearance appealing and designed for your husband's appreciation – not your comfort, prepare nutritious meals, help support war efforts, and make it all look effortless.

Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on how you look at it), June Cleaver and Donna Reed were about as real as Betty Crocker. The program only showed the beautiful parts of life in the fifties. Yes, it was considered a requirement to look appealing for their husbands. But prior to delivering the paper and pipe, they made a mad dash to change out of their housedress that was probably littered with evidence of doing the hard work required for that immaculate home and children.

Let's speed forward. In the 1960's, women began to search outside the home for employment. They became a part of the corporate world yet, to some degree, were still expected to maintain the home. Some were in a financial position to hire housekeepers and nannies. Others did it themselves.

Women spent most of their days at work. The art of homemaking was set aside for the pursuit of more money, bigger houses, better clothes, and ultimately, trying to 'keep up with the Jones'. The problem with that is, once you met or superseded the goal to keep up with one Jones family, another Jones family would come along, with bigger, better, nicer things. Then that hamster wheel would start all over again.

At some point, the idea of being a homemaker took on a negative connotation. It was unspoken but considered as a bad thing. It was as if society believed homemakers were not skilled enough to get employment elsewhere. And Heaven, Forbid! The very idea of a man becoming a 'househusband' was not only unheard of, but it was also frowned upon. It. Just. Isn't. Done! (I'm sorry, I just have to add my two-cents worth here... Hogwash!)

Where bartering or trading was enough to survive at one time, we are now required to have a minimum of 2.5 to 3 jobs just to pay the bills. The idea of homemaking isn't even a consideration, as it would remove a significant amount of income. That loss of income means less material 'things'.

And I get it. The cost of living today is higher than the average paycheck. It isn't easy to make ends meet. But even with the lack of income, surprisingly, homemaking is making a comeback. For some, it is a necessity due to the recent pandemics. Some find it a moral purpose, and others are reacting to the food scarcity and prices.

And some of us just like the job and find it their calling. My young friend Abby explained her decision to become a homemaker this way:

“When growing up, I watched my mom take care of her home and family, and knew from an early age I wanted to do the same. Part of my decision was faith-based, part was a decision made with my husband. There was even an element of consideration for the type of education of my children received. But primarily, I knew, in my heart of hearts, it was what I was created to do. I never felt the desire to have a career outside my home, and even though it gets tough some days with three children, I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

For Abby and others like her, homemaking is a passion. We love the hands-on care we give to our faith, family, and home. Our creative nature is engaged in many ways – from our cleaning methods and decorating our homes, to pursuing crafts to use as gifts and items we can use in our homes. Our creativity is also engaged when it comes to learning how to manage our finances to make ends meet.

Knowing we can produce at least a portion of the food we eat and then can it and preserve it is satisfying. Creating healthy meals is a source of comfort. And spending time with our families and friends, creating strong bonds, and offering a home that says welcome gives us a deep level of contentment.

Homemaking can also provide a sense of self-satisfaction of knowing we have done it ourselves, rather than depending on outside sources.

In reality, homemaking is an art form. It can also be a balancing act. You no longer have to keep an immaculate house that is clean enough for surgery. But you can keep it clean and neat with a little effort. Putting a cleaning schedule into place can help with that, and still allow you time to other things.

And the role of homemaker does include other things. In some cases, homemakers extend their homes to the garden, and grow at least some of the food they feed their family. It may also mean taking an active role in the education of their children, either through homeschooling or volunteering at school. Spending more and better-quality time with family is one of the more important aspects of homemaking.

Some homemakers take an active role in their communities, or serve others by taking care of elderly neighbors, or pitching in to help others within their communities. A few homemakers also participate in faith-based activities, act as mentors, or actively pursue other social obligations.

How you define your role as a homemaker depends solely on you. Your passions, dreams, and desires are what will help you to create the definition. And once you have defined what being a homemaker means to you, then you can actively find ways to engage in the profession.

Just because your financial situation requires you to work outside the home doesn't mean you can't become a homemaker as well. It does take a little extra work to juggle your schedule to fit it all in, but it is possible.

One way is to take a hard look at your schedule, and apply the foundation of living a Simple Life, which is learning to slow down. This means paring down the extra activities in your life that are no longer considered a priority, or those that you no longer enjoy doing.

It may also mean getting the rest of your family actively engaged in the homemaking duties. Just make a list of all the things which need to be accomplished to keep the home clean, then divide them up into age-appropriate chore lists. If this is a new concept in your household, it may take some encouragement and a few reminders, but with time, it can be done.

And if one of the items on your Simple Life Dream List is becoming a full-time homemaker, then start working on ways to adapt your budget, pare down your expenses and build your savings.

In next week's episode, we will talk about your finances, with a few tips on how to get them organized.

But for now, just know that you don't have to be a remake of June Cleaver. You don't have to wear a vintage apron, dress to the nines at the end of the day, wait by the door with a pipe and slippers in hand. Instead, you just have to be you, and create your own style of homemaking.

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at www.thefarmwife.com/podcast. That is the Resource page for this podcast and I have it set up by episodes to make things easier to find. To help you out, this is Episode 10.

If you have questions or want visit more about homemaking, you can stop by for an email visit at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie