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clothes·line 'klōTHzln/

{-noun- a strong, narrow rope, cord, wire, etc., usually stretched between two poles, posts or buildings on which clean laundry is hung to dry.}

Being a born and bred (*and still living in the*) country southern belle, I have always traveled the back roads to and fro whenever possible, my preferred line to connect the dots of my life adventures. I'd much rather meander down roads lined with weary old barns, each with a story of their own to tell, dandelion dotted fields and the colors of rural North Carolina, than hurried obnoxious billboard lined highways with cookie cutter pre-fab structures lacking personality. I'm a truck-driving "windows-rolled-down" kinda gal who likes to tickle my senses with smells of freshly cut pastures in spring... and roasty toasty curing tobacco in late summer. Heck, I'll even admit that I find the fragrance of a cow pasture to be somewhat delightful.

I long for nostalgic things... "stuff" that takes me back to my childhood, and such simpler, unbusy times. A scavenger by nature, I get all giddy with most anything old... used as is, or repurposed into something new... and such treasures are found when taking those roads less traveled.

Something that always captures my eye when moseying from here to there is a clothesline! Now that's something you won't likely see when flitting down an interstate. I remember long ago watching movies and television shows of folks in tall buildings... somewhere like New York City I imagined, where folks would have clotheslines strung from one building to the other across the way... and would hang their clothes on pulley-type lines. As they hung their clothes, neighbor ladies would chat across the way with one another while carefully pinning their clothes out to dry... aprons, dish towels, their husband's work breeches and other pieces of their daily lives. Over these lines, I suppose many a lifetime friendship was made and many a dilemma pondered, be it privately, or with the family matriarch at the other end of that line. I wanted one of those. A nifty rolling clothesline, but maybe too, somebody across the way to chit chat with as that was my ideal of what "neighborly" was about. But... there was no tall building from whence to do this.

To me, reeling clothes out like that was just dandy. Nowadays, as absurd as it seems, many homeowners' associations (*and even my little RV park*) forbid clotheslines! *How can this be?* The prohibition of such a simplistic thing seems so wrong. I guess they consider them ugly and unsightly. But I tell you, with all the ugliness around us every which way we turn in the world these days, for me, a clothesline is the least of our worries and is a pleasantry.

If you don't want to see your neighbor's under-drawers flapping in the wind, *just don't look!* No wonder this world is in such a mess... and neighbors are strangers... when you're an outlaw because you want your clothes to be hung out to dry by the breeze of God's hand.

Side yard, back yard, balcony or strung across the front porch, a simple cording, decorated with the family's garments makes me smile. There is one small old house on a path I frequent where I look forward to passing by each time. There must be dozens of folk, farm workers, living in this one small home, bordering on the definition of "shack." And some worn out lady must do nothing but wash clothes all day, because the clothesline strung across this small porch and off the side is *always* full... of an ever-changing canvas of its occupants clothes and bed clothing that paints a colorful picture of rural Americana... like a quilted curtain around this porch. I can almost smell "fresh" when driving by and see all these garments flapping in the wind and want to photograph them, but don't, for it feels somewhat intrusive to do so.

So I simply take a snapshot in my mind, a different one each time I go by. But I do always slow down, sometimes stopping on the side of the road to take a "life break" in my busy day to simply enjoy what I see.

This takes me back... if only for that moment, to my grandmas' yards, where I loved helping them hang clothes. Each had their own cloth bag for pins. Such a simple contraption but so functional and purposeful. I have one myself now, and smile when I see one in antique stores for sale... looking a bit lonely and usually frayed and tattered, but having been tied around some sweet lady's waist for decades having assisted her in hanging out thousands of washed pieces of her family's life. I love old clothespins too! The new ones fall apart in no time, while the old ones I manage to find here and there have lasted for decades... sturdy through wind and rain, and continue their intended functionality. My old clothespins are like found treasures and are scattered about my world... from bag closings to hanging Christmas tree ornaments.

I remember Ma Hocutt's line most vividly. My Daddy Hocutt had mounted two T-shaped pipe poles firmly into the ground out by their grapevine and cherry tree they planted when I was born. There were three lines from pole to pole, made of some sort of heavy wire covered with a green plastic coating I'm sure he got from the local town hardware store. Every now and then, those lines would start to sag a bit, and Ma Hocutt would get my granddaddy Clarence to tighten them up. My job was helping her carry the pin bag out and hang on the line to slide it down as we hung things. There was a wiping rag tucked into the bag she would wet before taking outside for me to clean the lines. *I felt SO important.* She would tote the heavy wet basket of fresh-smelling just-washed clothes and wait as I did my job. I would then be her assistant... following her instructions to "*shake it out good,*" then handing her piece by piece and helping pin them to the green line up above my head. My favorite pieces were her mint green bed sheets. Ma Hocutt would toss them across all 3 lines, make sure they didn't touch the ground below, and I would help her spread them out nice and straight so they wouldn't need to be ironed... my most "*unfavorite*" childhood chore. *(For you young'uns, yes, we did used to have to do that!)* I could hardly wait to get under them to dance about. It was shady and cool on a summer's day, and smelled soooo good and clean.

That was a half century ago, and I don't remember our specific conversations. But I do remember this as 'our' time... before our world's changed. For you see, when I was just eight, my Ma and Daddy Hocutt had a terrible car accident. He had a massive heart attack causing them to plunge off the side of a mountain deep in rural Virginia, where they too, were taking the back roads, meandering home from a vacation in Washington, D.C. She was left "crippled"

for life, so there were never anymore clothes-hanging times together after that day. And had it not been for a mountain lady, herself out hanging clothes up the hill and hearing my Ma Hocutt's calls for "help," she would probably not have survived being thrown from the car with both legs broken in multiple places and folded back up under her. How ironic... a clothesline played a part in saving her life. After this tragedy in my young life when my hero, my Daddy Hocutt, was taken from me in an instant, me and mama became "*keepers of the clothesline*" and took care of washing and hanging out Ma Hocutt's clothes for her.

My own clothesline now is my dog pen. I'm guilty of not hanging out clothes as I should, but perhaps I shall put down my pen right now and throw my bed clothes in the washer so I can hang them out... because there are few small pleasures in life as refreshing as crawling into a bed of crisp clean bed sheets that dried naturally by God's own clothes dryer. Now, as for my mama making me iron them long ago on Saturday mornings before I could go out to play, that would NOT be something I long for anymore.

God blessed me to live in the country where I CAN hang my clothes, undies and outies, out to dry... and my neighbors won't give a doodly squat... *because theirs are blowing in the wind too!*

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