

On Christmas Eve, after we had eaten and sat and talked, three of the young women in the family gathered by the sink. I had to chase them away. I told them that I LIKE washing dishes, and that they should just spend the evening visiting with each other.

I was not telling an untruth. I do like to wash dishes and find it no burden at all. I realize that this is not the case with many—perhaps, even most—people, but it is one of the jobs that I do with no complaints, not even internal ones.

Forty minutes after all of our guests had gone home, the dishes were back in their places in cupboards and on shelves. The sink was cleaned, the dish towels I'd used were in the laundry basket, and clean towels were hung up.

We do not have a dishwasher. We wash—or “do,” as is most often said in our area—our dishes by hand in a sink of hot water and dishwashing liquid, rinse them in hot water and drain them in a wire basket in the other part of the kitchen sink. Then, I take a clean dishtowel from the oven handle where it resides, and dry the dishes and put them away.

I can't understand the necessity or desire for a dishwashing machine. It would be one more thing to take care of, to malfunction, to take up space. It is probably the last “labor-saving” device I'd select for our convenience.

When I wash dishes, I look at what I am handling, sometimes think about the various plates, cups, saucers, and silverware, and come nearly to a meditative state. I can't think of a better job for putting myself into a relaxed, pleasant mindset.

Those dark blue mugs that I handle carefully were made by our local, very talented potter. The little plates we use in at breakfast time I bought in the 1980s in Norway. The small blue plaid cup and saucer that I use for midmorning coffee is the last of a set I nearly destroyed in the 1990s. I had borrowed this set of small plates, cups, and saucers from my mother, as we had guests from Sweden that day. When everyone had gone home, I washed the dishes and prepared to take them back down the lane to my mother. Unfortunately, I did not pack them in a box. I carried them in my hands.

This would have not been a problem if I had not had to pass the barn on my way to her house. As I came close to the barn door, I remembered that Runo had told me there was a new litter of kittens in the manger. I went in to look at them, although my hands were full of china.

I dropped the dishes on the concrete floor. Only a cup, several saucers, and a couple of plates survived. The next time we were in Sweden, we bought a new set for my mother, and I keep the few blue plaid ones in the cupboard, both as a reminder of my foolishness and because I like to drink coffee out of that cup.

I also like dish towels. Many of the ones I use are the products of

the little loom that sits next to the kitchen. I wove them of a cotton/linen blend of threads, and I use them every day. Others are all linen, gifts from friends and family in Sweden. They were not woven to just sit in a drawer or adorn tables as runners. They were made to use, and I use them every day. I also iron them, not a job many people will admit to these days. I am not good at this task, but the pleasure of unfolding a shiny, smooth linen towel and drying dishes with it makes up for my lack of competence with the iron. After all, even a less than careful ironer can make a flat, plain towel smooth.

So, a dishwashing machine is not in the plans for our cabin. And, no guests here have to feel guilty if they don't ask if they can help with the dishes. Thanks, but no thanks. Sit and talk instead.

