

I was digging a little home-rendered lard from a quart Mason jar today when the old table knife I was using made me think about how much I have appreciated knives of many kinds over the years. This particular knife is from a set of silverware that was probably gone long before I was born. It is, I suppose, steel underneath with a thin layer of silver on top. Or, maybe something else with a silvery finish and a pattern that is nearly gone. Anyway, it is a very useful kitchen tool.

This knife has a long, broad, blunt blade. It is quite different from any other knife we have in the house. My mother employed it for the same purpose as it serves here now, and I brought it home to use when we sorted out her kitchen goods.

In Sweden I became accustomed to using *kniven*. (pronounced approximately like khneeven). This, too, had begun its usefulness as a knife that belonged with a set of table silverware, but that was long before I made its acquaintance. I understood, though, from the stories I heard there, that Runo's *mormor* had used it at the table, and, in fact, was most comfortable eating with her knife, a custom that was common in that time and place. By the time I entered the picture, *kniven* was used to peel potatoes. It had a sharp, thin, worn blade that was perfect for removing the skins of vegetables. I wonder what ever became of that knife?

When I was in school, probably all of the boys and many of the girls, had pocket knives with them. At least once that I know about, a high school boy's knife was more than just handy. The big room at our school that served as a study hall was not always filled with teenagers who were studying. Some were known to sleep in study hall, others sat and fiddled around with pencils, paper, paper airplanes, etc. It depended on which teacher was in charge during a particular hour. There were tall windows on the west side of the study hall, making it a light, pleasant room. Someone had fashioned one of the shade cords into a hangman's noose. Fooling around, a boy had it around his neck. Of course, he was sitting tipped back on two legs of his chair. Another boy came along and kicked the chair out from under him. He was slowly strangling when a big kid with a sharp knife cut the knot.

Another time, a boy's knife would have been better left at home. This was a very rural school with mostly farm kids. But, one year, a family in the neighborhood had taken on a nephew for the year, a boy who had been on the verge of trouble in the nation's capital. During class, for some reason that is lost in the mists of time, he slightly stabbed another boy in the leg. This was not a usual happening in our country school. Surprisingly, I don't recall that it resulted in anything much. Certainly, all of us continued to carry our jackknives.

On the farm, of course, pocket knives are always useful. Unfortunately, I am presently without one. I have lost a few over the years, the most distressing of which was a nice, red-handled Swiss army knife. I used that knife for a long time. One winter, cutting bale twine while we were feeding sheep, it slipped out of my hand. There was a lot of snow, and I could find no trace of the knife. I did know where I had dropped it, though, and when the

snow melted, I went to the spot and there it lay. I used it for another few years, but lost it one more time. That time, we were feeding after dark. The next morning, I walked to the feeding ground and located my knife. One cannot expect to be that lucky three times in a row, and the last time my red handled knife disappeared, I had no idea where I had lost it. I looked everywhere, but it didn't turn up. Perhaps two years later, I did find it, but it is corroded and unusable. I still did not throw it away. I have hopes of dissolving the rust with some magical formula, but the knife will probably remain where it came to rest—in the kitchen cupboard junk drawer.

I have three paring knives. One I do not like and use only if the other two are not within my sight. Chefs with expensive sets of knives probably wouldn't agree with me, but my favorite paring knives are always cheap and thin-bladed. My one "good" paring knife is the one I avoid.

I have been asked why the paring knives I have all have blunted tips. If one did not use them for all kinds of jobs where a screwdriver, an icepick, or a pair of scissors would do the task more efficiently, the paring knives might be in their original condition.

Someday, I am going to invest in a made in U.S.A. pocket knife, and I'm not going to lose it!