

There are those who look at our lives from the outside and see a routine that doesn't change a whole lot from year to year, and I am sure that many observers perceive only boredom. To those folks who roared down our dirt road all weekend with their ATVs at full throttle, excitement has a different definition than it does for us.

Here, in the quiet of Coe Creek, satisfaction comes from other sources than speed, noise, and dust. In the ever-changing, yet comfortingly same rhythm of the days, we see the good life.

This morning, the evidence of this has just been moved from the little digital scales to the refrigerator. And this is all thanks to Black Effie and Halvan.

We usually milk a cow or two during the spring and summer, and sometimes late into the fall, to provide cream for butter making. Neither of us is a milk drinker, and I admit that I haven't ever, since I was weaned as a baby, drunk a glass of milk. However, I don't have a lot against whipped cream, butter, or cream for baking. And, occasionally, I bring to the house a jar of milk to make custard, pudding, or some other treat. We also make some soft cheeses from time to time.

This morning, butter was on my mind. The butter dish was nearly empty, and I refuse to take butter from the freezer during our milking season. Hopefully, by fall, there will be enough packages of frozen butter to last until the next spring.

But, there is no butter if there is no cream, and there is no cream to use unless we milk the cows. So, this morning, as usual, we headed for the barn after breakfast to confront Black Effie and Halvan.

Black Effie had been bellowing in the pasture since dawn. Their calves are in the barn, and they nurse after we have milked. We leave them enough for their daytime ration, and in the evening, we do not milk the cows. The calves take care of the job themselves.

Halvan is quiet; Black Effie is not. Her name came about step by step. Her red, white-faced mother was originally known as "The Horned Heifer." Then, we dehorned her, and she became "The Heifer." That evolved into "Heffy," and finally, to Effie. Effie is now 17 years old, an age few bovines are lucky enough to experience.

About four years ago, Effie had a heifer calf that looked just like her, except that the calf was black. So, Black Effie she is.

Since these two cows also have calves that suckle, they are not always one hundred per cent happy about us sitting down with milk pails and extracting part of the goodness. Halvan is better than Black Effie, though. She is naturally a quiet, good-natured cow, and she is pretty easy to deal with as long as there is something good in her manger to nibble on. Black Effie has other ideas. But, eventually, both cows produce a gallon and a half of milk each for our pails plus enough for their calves.

Then comes the separating. We have a little hand-turned cream separator, and with some effort, we come home each morning with a pint and a half of cream.

Every few days, I empty these jars into the mixer bowl and let it do the churning. When the cream has separated into bright yellow nuggets of butter and pale buttermilk, the pig pail gets the buttermilk, and I work the residue out of the butter with cold water and a wooden paddle.

It was that paddle I had begun thinking about when I sat down to write. It isn't a fancy tool, but it is very effective. It is hardwood, probably maple, though it is so impregnated with butterfat that it is difficult to know for sure. The handle—something I never used—broke off the paddle years ago. I was not distressed because of any change in the implement's usefulness, but it is a venerable antique, and it would be nice if it were intact.

My mother brought home this paddle after her aunt Della passed away. Della was well into her nineties, and she had used the paddle all her life, and it had not been new when she acquired it, as it was handed down from her mother. So, my butter paddle is well over a century old, and it is still as useful as it was at the time some long-forgotten ancestor used a pocket knife to make it.

After working the butter, I salted it, formed it into a roll with the paddle, and weighed it before storing it in the refrigerator. More than a pound of firm, bright yellow "summer butter" is on the shelf there now. And, cooling beside it is this morning's cream. In a few days, it will meet the whisking of the mixer and become the next batch of butter.