

Down By The Berry Patch

"The Cider Press"

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The year was 1988. Grandson Alex was born in March; my brother Andy died of a heart attack in June causing a resurface of the anguish of brother Bruce's death just 5 years prior; I received my doctorate degree in Education Leadership from Western Michigan University in June; my husband was experiencing health problems that necessitated a trip to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota; Mother was in and out of the hospital with congestive heart failure and had spent many months living with us before being admitted for a temporary stay in a nursing home; we moved to Michriste Manor in Rose City and drove back and forth the 150 mile round trip to work in Bay City each day; and many changes in the National and State regulations for special needs students was presenting some pressure in my administrative job at work. I was feeling "a bit" stressed.



One day, Mother asked, "What is something you would really like, Judy? I would like to get it for you". She explained that she was so appreciative of all we were doing for her and she thought it had been a stressful year for me. I explained that we did things for her because we wanted to--she was the "world's best mother" and I loved her dearly. She had modeled caring for parents when our grandfathers lived with us in Unionville. That was what you did. You loved and cared for your own family members--including your parents.

Without hesitation, I responded, "I have always wanted a cider press." It was a true response, but I was not sure how that just seemed to pop out of my mouth. We had made apple pies, apple crisp, apple bread, apple cookies, apple sauce, and apple leather. But I wanted cider. Maybe it was because of the fall season. The trees in the woods in Rose City were vibrant orange, yellow, gold and red; the apples in the orchard were plentiful. I had always thought it would be fun to make our own cider. I could just picture the merriment and good times of having friends over to press apples, eat powdered sugar frosted donuts and donut holes, and drink hot, spiced cider. Little did I imagine that this vivid picture would become a reality over and over again.

The Jaffrey Cider Press was ordered from a catalog. It arrived in two huge boxes, ready for the final assembly. The parts consisted of the stand, the crank, the bucket, the press, and the hopper. The maple wood had a lovely varnished finish. The assembly was simple; the process of using it was easy and

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Photo Caption: Lorain Berg and his grandson Alex making apple cider.

primitive--just select the apples, wash them, throw them into the hopper and let them drop into the bucket, turn the crank to press the juice out of the apples, and catch the juice in buckets.

When we purchased the 80 acre piece of property in Rose City, we had to decide on a name and called it Michriste--for Michael, Christopher, and Steven, our three sons. It was 20 acres of open fields with rolling hills. There were a number of swamp holes surrounded by yards and yards of barbed wire which indicated to us that the land was probably used as a pasture. The fenced off areas were to keep the cows out of the swamp areas so they would not get stuck in the muck. Sixty acres was beautiful forest land with a variety of trees ranging from the soft woods of white birch, poplar and hard woods of maple and oak. There were many varieties of pine to add the varied colors of green to the ever changing deciduous trees.

One of the first things we did was plant 3000 evergreens around the south border of the property along the quarter mile stretch of road. Then we planted an orchard with apple, pear, peach, plum, and cherry trees near the woods. During the winter months, the deer ate the branches off the trees and they all died. We planted again the next year and the same thing happened. We were not fast learners and the deer were enjoying the gourmet brunch we planted for them each year. Finally, we were smart enough to change the location so the orchard was not near the woods, it was on the side of a hill, and each tree was surrounded with wire so the deer could not get to the young branches.

There are a variety of apples--McIntosh, Jonathan, Strawberry, Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, one similar to Spy apples, and two with red apples that we cannot name. Then there are two trees that we refer to as farm apples--one green and one red. Altogether, there are about a dozen apple trees with one tree alone producing 14 bushels this year. When making cider, we find it is best to use a variety of apples in each batch. Consequently, no two batches taste the same, but they are all delicious. Of course, we put a lot of cider in the freezer for winter use. Hot apple cider with cinnamon sticks is absolutely wonderful on a cold day following cross country skiing, snow shoeing, or just a walk in the woods.

This year is 2005. Over the years, the trees have grown, the fruit has become more plentiful, and more and more friends come to make apple cider in the fall. We have had three groups here to make cider so far this fall — about 35 friends in all. They arrive with their empty jugs to hold cider, with smiles and laughter, and a willingness to have a good time.

One change has been made to the cider press over the years. Lorain and Mike attached an electric motor to turn the grinder that chops the apples in the hopper. It saves a lot of muscle power and it particularly helpful as our friends add years. However, usually, when we are making the cider, there is a varied age group participating. They could range from five to eighty plus. It is a great activity for everyone.

Each time we make cider, I tell the story of the “gift of the cider press from mother”. And each time we use it, I look heavenward and say, “Thanks, Mom! We miss you and Dad; we love you dearly!”

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