



IRON MAN!

Families are getting back to the basics, and if you want to join the movement, there's one essential tool you'll need.

Denise opens her eyes to a growing light outside her bedroom window, and within seconds the scents fill her nostrils: first, freshly brewed coffee. And then, the unmistakably delicious aroma of bacon that began sizzling just moments ago.

It is her husband in the kitchen, Doug, preparing a surprise breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast and strawberries. Along with the sizzling, she hears the voices of their young children, one setting the breakfast table, the other watching his *father* intently, hoping to catch glimpse of a secret trick to flipping eggs.

Denise pulls on her robe, steps out and gives her husband a warm kiss. It's right out of a Folgers commercial or a Better Homes & Gardens photo spread. But what in the world got Doug in the kitchen? Denise knows and smiles.

SLOW DOWN!

You've had that feeling for some time: that you need to slow down. That the bustle of modern life and work is best checked at your door, but yet it prevails.

You work and struggle with the hope of one day being able to relax and enjoy the experiences you've earned. But what are those experiences? Are they as unattainable right now as you think? Why *must* you wait until you have only 20 to 30 years left in your life? And the children have grown up?

You think back to your childhood. You have so many memories that shaped you. And your parents were there, carefully crafting who you would become... what you would come to value. What if your *own* children will know nothing like that?

You're not alone, and you've probably heard a little about the new homesteading movement: urban gardening, backyard chickens, primitive skills. Survivalists. Hipsters. Home schoolers. It's huge, and it represents a rejection of the mass market, big box, plastic, 9 to 5 rat race society.

But maybe you're not up for such an extreme departure from modern trappings. Maybe you'll start small - in the kitchen. For back-to-basics cooking, the tool of choice is *cast iron*.

ANCIENT WISDOM

The creation and use of cast iron *cookware* can be traced back to the Iron Age, appropriately.

After examination, you get the sense that our ancient ancestors had an uncanny subconscious understanding of health, nutrition and practicality.

For example, whether they knew it or not, iron is an essential nutrient in the production of blood in our bodies, and using iron cookware actually provides a dose when it comes into contact with the food we use it to prepare.

And those ancestors would have laughed at the idea of Tufflon - a toxic substance that, if the surface

is scratched, you are warned not to use anymore for cooking.

Or laboriously soaking and scraping pots and pans after meal preparation. A little cooking oil and a few wipes with a clean cloth (no soap!) is all it takes. When you heat the pan up next time, that heat sterilizes the seasoned iron.

IRON MAN IN THE KITCHEN?

The previous evening, Doug had been working to properly season his new set of cast iron skillets. In order to achieve its non-stick properties, new iron cookware needs to be wiped down with high quality cooking oil and baked in the oven at about 350° F for three hours.

Now, instead of a dark gray metallic finish of raw iron, a shiny black patina covers the entire set.

He's got an 8" skillet, a 10" skillet and this morning, cooking for four, Doug's using the ample surface of the 14" skillet of the set.

Truth be told, Doug was a little concerned about food sticking to the pans. How would this centuries-old technology stack up against modern Tufflon?

Once seasoned, it worked beautifully. Even his over easy eggs came out without a single broken yolk. And the more you use your cast iron skillets, the better they get.

It takes a little longer to heat up three pounds of solid iron than it does a thin, stamped disc of stainless steel. But that gives Doug enough time to witness the new cursive letters his daughter learned in school that week. All part of slowing down.

Once the skillet was heated, the bacon cooked nice and evenly. And when it was done - and time for eggs - Doug turns off the stove range. You see, the thick cast iron retains its heat for much longer than modern cookware. Long enough, in fact, to cook those four eggs over easy!

MORE THAN JUST BACON AND EGGS

There are the traditional foods associated with cast iron cooking: hash, pancakes, corn bread. You already know the delight of these authentic, home-spun comfort foods.

But the modern man is getting more adventurous in the kitchen. Just because the cookware's design is centuries old doesn't mean that it can't handle modern culinary experimentation. Try a pan for a soufflé or bottom-up cooked pizza. Veal Scallopini. Experience how the heat from cast iron brings out the fragrance of certain herbs.

Professional chefs might claim that only a steel pan with conductive aluminum or copper plating on the bottom will give you the heat control you need for more sophisticated dishes. But the goals of these chefs is not to "slow down" and create cooking experiences for themselves and others in the kitchen. With a little practice, you can get an intimate sense of each cast iron skillet's heating characteristics. Pro chefs, on the other hand, don't have that luxury of a cookware learning curve. Though you'd actually be surprised at how many pros are integrating cast iron into their arsenals.

THE SECRET TO BUYING AN HEIRLOOM

Cast iron cookware, unless transported from cold to extreme heat too quickly - in which case it can crack - lasts forever. If you accidentally use soap on it and ruin the seasoning, simply put your oven on "clean" mode and put your cast iron in there upside down with a common pan underneath to catch the contaminated seasoning as it melts off. Then, you're starting off with fresh, raw iron again and can season it anew.

So know this: *no matter how rusted or grungy or disgusting looking a cast iron pot or pan may be, it can easily be totally restored.* This is the secret knowledge you can use to grab cast iron items that others might pass up, or strike one hell of a deal with an indifferent seller.

And what you're buying will last for generations. Imagine the delight of your heirs when you put in their hands several items of simple cast iron cookware that they grew up with... the objects of fond memories, and the vessels of future ones.

BUT THEY'RE DISAPPEARING FAST

Here's the problem. Cast iron is *hot* right now. We mean *popular*. We mean *good luck getting your hands on any* in the near future.

The last cast iron cookware foundry in the U.S. closed its doors about five years ago. Existing supplies in stores will not be restocked. Cast iron cookware is snatched up immediately at flea markets and yard sales.

So hurry. Get up early this Saturday morning, cook breakfast for the last time with your steel and Tufflon pots and pans, and head out to scour those flea markets, yard sales and thrift shops.

Take your cast iron home and watch some online videos on preparing it for use.

Teach these skills to your children who, years from now, will be inheriting these pieces.

Then enjoy the delicacies you create again for the first time in generations.

But first take a moment and ask yourself: what other part of your family life was as fulfilling, and is as easy to reclaim, as time in the kitchen?

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