

Bruce Gilliland

Professor Wood

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Iron Patience

Last week during our rain storm, the wind blew my front door wide open knocking down a stand that held several knick-knacks on it. After getting over the shock, I ran over and surveyed the damage. Among the treasures scattered on the floor was an old fashion metal iron, completely useless, outdated, and very rusty, marked with several paint drops splattered on it by mistake. I have always used it as a paper weight. After all, it weighs five pounds and has no monetary value. However, the metal iron contains a lot of sentimental value, not only because my grandmother gave it to me, but also because it reminds me of those times I spent with my grandmother and the lessons she taught me. This metal iron was used by my grandmother to iron her family's clothes back when my mom was a child. Still daydreaming, I closed and locked the front door, then returned the stand to its upright position, and began to place the items that had fallen to the floor back on the stand. The last object on the floor to be placed back on the stand was that old metal iron. As I reached for it, my mind began to think back to the time I had first set my eyes on it.

It was back in 1964 when my family and I visited my grandmother's house in Tornillo, Texas. We were returning from overseas where my dad had been stationed with the U.S. Army. My father was being transferred to Ft. Bliss Army Base in El Paso. My grandmother's house was just thirty-five miles from the base, and until we got housing we would be staying with her. My mother was born and raised in Tornillo and was finally going home to the house she had

lived in as a child. The house was built in 1940 by my grandfather, and my mother was overjoyed at the thought of being able to once again spend some quality home time with her mom and dad. However, it had been three years since we had last visited—I was only three years old then—so everything was new and different to me.

The house, at first glance, appeared to be normal, but as we made our way through it I couldn't believe what I was seeing. My grandpa had made the house out of adobe and had installed electricity, along with running water. What the house didn't have was a toilet, and that's when I had my first experience with an outhouse. They also had a cast iron stove that was neither electric or gas, but to my surprise used wood. On top of that cast iron stove was the very first place that I laid my eyes on the metal irons. Now, I had seen my mom iron with an electric iron, but I had never, ever seen anyone iron clothes with a metal iron. As I watched in wonder, my grandma told me how she had been ironing this way all her life. She explained that we needed several metal irons, and that they needed to be placed on top of the stove in order for them to get hot. She placed four irons on top of the stove that day and as each one got hot they were used, and as they became cold she would place them back on top of the stove so they could heat up again.

I remember we stayed at her house for over two weeks, and I watched her each day as she ironed the family's clothes, thinking my grandma sure had a lot of patience. On laundry day, that patience was magnified. From the kitchen, my dad and my grandpa carried out a big metal galvanized tub full of hot boiling water, being extremely careful not to burn anyone. Then my mom and my grandmother began scrubbing clothes outside on the back porch with an old fashion washboard. From start to finish, it was a labor of patience.

Since my grandma did not have a lot of modern conveniences it also took a little longer to prepare the meals. I was never fond of waiting, especially for food. So, after several days of hearing me complain she finally told me, "Bruce, the best things in life are always worth waiting on. You need to learn a little patience." Being the little child that I was, I simply disregarded the advice she had given me.

Fifty years have now come and gone, and as I look at the metal iron, I can't help but wonder just how far we have progressed. In today's world, we have so many new technologies and modern conveniences: computers, cell phones, washers, and dryers. They have allowed us to manage our time more wisely. Yet, I feel that perhaps we may have regressed, rather than progressed. We are an impatient society that wants everything, and we want it now. The one thing we have lost is our patience. As I was holding the metal iron I realized just how much has changed. Back in the sixties when my family and I visited my grandma's house things were quite different. As I look back, I realize two important lessons I have learned from my grandma. First of all, I have to be strong; both physically and mentally. The second thing is to be patient, and have "iron patience."