Magic of this Modern Age

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by Beth Cummings

If you're feeling abused today, you may have a job that is a small job, and you may have some other small job. (I have a few on my list.) The idea is to make you feel good about yourself. It's not about feeling good about yourself, but about feeling good about making yourself feel good. It's a matter of perspective.

Getting lunch was not merely a matter of opening cans with a trick can-opener, transferring the contents to a search-proof pan, and flipping a lever on the stove. Oh no! Your great-grandmother probably spent hours preparing lunch, to say nothing of the time spent preparing a dinner.

To have fruit and vegetables in the summer, you have to worry and fret over a garden all summer long, and then spend days in the fall canning. Your telephone places these things at your beck and call. You don't have to get up at four or five in the morning to get the kitchen range going, nor do you have to endure any such all-enveloping heat as the old-fashioned cook stove sent out. The new ranges are heavily insulated so as to radiate as little heat as possible. In fact, we can almost get along without any range.

How amazed our ancestors would be if they could see us preparing an entire meal, even preparing food for a party, in kitchens and ovens much smaller than theirs were. An electric roaster can accomplish such magic. It is really a portable oven with its own electric coils built into thickly insulated walls. It can be attached to an appliance outlet. But roasting is only one of its achievements. It bakes, it broils, and it steams; it can also be used as a warming oven to keep food hot, and it cans and preserves.

This versatile roaster is the answer to the prayers of the woman who is always having unexpected guests or informal suppers. Since it can be plugged into any outlet, a meal can be cooked and served in the dining room, kitchen, porch, or any other place where there is an outlet available.

If the "bunch" plans to come in for supper after a skating party or the movies, chili con carne, for example, can be started in the roaster and be cooking while they are gone. Or hot cheese sandwiches (made early and kept wrapped until wanted) can be toasted in the bottom of the roaster and eaten hot.

Your great grandmother would gasp at the case with which our electric mixers stir up batters for cakes and waffles. And she would probably be tolerantly amused at our concern over our diets. When they went on picnics or had parties, Junior and the baby ate as much fried chicken, potato salad laden with onions, pie, cake and ice cream as they wanted. But the modern mother bottles up the right amount of fruit juice containing the right vitamins, serves half portions of a food that the youngsters can eat, and denies them even a bite of some of the other food.

If your abused feeling hasn't vanished by now, perhaps a little reflection on how changed are the quantities in which we cook today will banish your self-pity. We should be glad that we don't have to cook in huge black kettles food that will be gone within a day or two. Perhaps the American appetite is on the wane; at any rate there are countless households which have pans whose size can hardly approach those early kettles. They were about the size of our pressure cookers, but much larger quantities of one food were cooked in them. The facts that preparation of food is so much easier now and that so many of the foods we eat are on the market at comparatively low prices are in part, at least, responsible for the reduction in quantities of cooked food.

Can you see yourself standing over a seething hot range, stirring boiling mixtures in big black kettles with a long wooden spoon? Then you frantically drop the spoon and open the oven door from which gushes a blast of even hotter air while you haste and test your meat? What a difference there is between those days and these of regulated ovens, meat thermometers, self-basting roasters and skillets, electric stoves, clocks, mixers and refrigerators. Yours is a pretty bad case of self-pity if you aren't ready to give three rousing cheers for the privilege of using these aids to easy living.