



Down to the wire

Sandra von Sneidern with a tale of tension

In February 1966 my husband Peter bought a property 30 miles [50 km] south of Wagga to run sheep, cattle and wheat. It came with a dilapidated house that had been empty for several years.

Built of rammed earth by D. Singh during the 1930s depression, the walls were 700mm thick and, in one place, bent in where the horse-dray backed in too close. It was a basic design, two rooms each side of a passage with a door each end, low roof, dirt floors and a fire-place in one room.

When Jock Pratt bought the house years later for his growing family he had a 'can do' attitude and made changes. He jacked up the roof and added a ceiling (he was tall). Then he added a veranda enclosing north, west and south sides. The west side became bathroom, laundry and kitchen. A flushing toilet was installed on a concrete slab over the old drop dunny — eight metres away from the house! (Yes, There were actually redback spiders under the seat, which I had to shoo off!)

Jock had cut a door-opening into the earth wall from the kitchen with a saw to make a living area in the only room with a fireplace. Laid on stringy bark sapling bearers, floors were added. (By the time we moved in, dry rot and dead rabbits had made weak spots, so feet were placed with care in hallway especially when carrying the baby!)

But now it was all ours. We moved in three months later with our children, a seven year-old, an eighteen month and a three-month-old. We made it our

home and became part of the Pulletop community. In 1967, my nine year-old son came to live with us too.

Before moving in, a hot-water tank replaced the chip-heater over the bath providing hot water for the washing machine as well. I also got an air-conditioner in the kitchen — a necessity for me. The Kookaburra stove kept hot water going in the old iron urn and kettle we found on the place. I learnt to use the old stove to bake bread and buns, everything needed for the family. I also reared chickens, ducklings and the gosling Fred on its wide hobs.

Lighting the stove at daybreak was essential for the first cup of tea in the morning stillness before rousing the family to milk the cow and get ready for school. As time went on, Rowan and Bruno would have to catch and saddle up the horses before going to school.

The plumbing was very simple, no S-bends, just down into the ground, a 90° angle and straight out. (No wonder the cherry and apricot trees always had lovely plump fruit.) The concrete floor for bathroom and laundry had been laid on top. No worries!

The problem came a couple of years later when the pipe from the kitchen sink blocked up. The enclosed back area had an entry door with laundry and bathroom on one side with the kitchen and dining nook on the other.



After searching around all sides of the house, the only place with water outlet we could find was outside the end of the bathroom. Having lived in the country before, I suggested we make a hook at the end of some fencing wire, pass it up the pipe to reach the sink, then pull it out with whatever was clogging it up.

My husband agreed, organised the wire and we started pushing the wire up the pipe but forgot to measure the length needed. Everything was going 'smoothly' and when it became more difficult to push we thought the wire must have reached the angle below the sink. We started to pull out the wire and all went well for a couple of meters, and then, it would not budge. Obviously the wire was stuck somewhere up the pipe and we needed more grunt to get it out. My husband decided to bring the ute up to the fence and he attached the wire to the front end and slowly backed away.

Wheels spinning it bent the front end and still would not come out.

With all that wire up the pipe this was becoming serious! I went into the kitchen, ran water into the sink and found it was still blocked.

We searched everywhere and could not understand what to do next. After eventually going into the bathroom I called my husband to come in. This is what we saw. Fencing wire, as most of us know, has a tendency to spiral and it had easily found the large plughole of the very old bath standing there on its claw feet. The natural spiral of the wire had gradually curled around the whole bath several times and the hook had latched on to edge.

What we had been trying to do was to pull the bath through its own plug-hole!

Of course the sink was still blocked, so it was still necessary to find the outlet. We eventually found it in the opposite direction outside the dining nook totally buried

in the earth, clogged up with weeds growing profusely in the damp soil — an easy fix! You have to work hard to get a good belly laugh in the country!



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