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The Home Brew

The following story I received from a lady named Nellie Rider. This lady is about fifty, lives just outside of Vergennes in a nice home where I heard the following while sipping cider in front of a burning fireplace in her living room on a cool drizzly evening. The setting of the story is back around the Great Depression days.

Nellie Rider speaks:

Every fall we would take huge bags of apples we had picked (on the wagon) to the mill behind Topsy and Tarzan. No cider that you can buy today tastes as this did, fresh from the mill, sparkling clear as the sweetest nectar imaginable and the flavor best because the apples were chosen from very special trees. Later when the taste became picky it (the cider) was stored away in wooden barrels in the pungent dirt cellar.

Bits of Lore

Three purposes it was prepared for. First some was put in one barrel to become vinegar; so some "mother" from the year before was added. Mother is thick, dark, and slimy but any old timer will tell you it is as necessary for good vinegar as yeast is for good bread. Then some was stored in good clean barrels to age and only the men folks could indulge. Especially when Dad and a neighbor were horse trading. This was a popular sport in those days and perhaps this hard cider helped Dad get an edge dollar wise on the unsuspecting neighbor. To the rest was added the family recipe and this became the most powerful of brews. Naturally, only for the men and reserved for weddings and very special occasions. These barrels didn't have faucets and so girls were always willing to siphon a pitcher full. To siphon you put a rubber tube, maybe a half inch in diameter and two or three feet long into the bung

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her going around the table to sip the dregs from the glasses

Nellie Rider speaks: Father was in another room.

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hole of the barrel, put it to your mouth and draw until had the cider began to run, then fill the pitcher and cheerfully carry it to Dad. Discipline was such that one never touched these barrels except on command. However, I remember going around the table to sip the dregs from the glasses when the men left and Mother was in another room.

#### Cures for the Ill

After listening to this taste-tempting tale of home brew, I tried to get the recipe. She informed me it was still the family recipe. Quickly, I changed the subject to home remedies for the ill. Nellie came up with some memorable ones.

Nellie speaks: leave the pitch on until it dries and falls off;

To cure an on coming cold, take a glass of warm milk with a teaspoon of sugar in it, add a teaspoon of red horse liniment, and drink. Believe me it burned all the way down and warmed you for the night. Then the throat was rubbed with warm hen's oil (the rendered fat of chickens) and wrapped in flannel. I found one of those old liniment bottles in the attic. The label read 'Not for internal use' and was meant to be rubbed on horses joints for lameness, a wonder we survived, but the cold went away.

Nobody was bald at our house. Must have been the remedy. Take one ounce wormwood, one ounce sage, half ounce white oak bark, and steep in pint soft water two hours, then strain. When cold add a tablespoon brandy and a half ounce of glycerine. This was rubbed into the roots of the hair monthly.

For nervous disorders make catnip tea. Steep the dried leaves, add sugar, milk, and drink often. The oldsters swear