

Amanda's Rustic Cribs

When we lived in the Sacramento Valley in northern California, in early summer, my mother came to visit. Juniper was 2 years and 9 months old, and Amanda was 9 months old. My mother asked me to help her drive home to Sumpter, (Population 141) in northeastern Oregon. I did.

After I helped Mom settle back into her home, I explored Sumpter's small mountain valley and forests, meadows, and streams of the Blue Mountains. I liked the relatively undeveloped mountain area, and I saw more interesting work possibilities for me there than I did in the flat, busier town and farm country in the Sacramento Valley. I phoned Laura and said, "I'd like to move up here."

Laura said, "I'll pray about it, and we can talk about it again tomorrow. Phone again, late morning tomorrow."

She did, and I did, and we decided to move to the Blue Mountains. I borrowed my mother's small pickup and drove back to California. We organized a yard sale, gave stuff away, discarded what we could get by without, packed the four of us and everything we owned in the pickup, and drove north. We enjoyed the adventure of squeezing in close together for 500 miles of easy driving through beautiful country.

My brother, Gerrit, owned a place with a small house trailer and a studio on the outskirts of Sumpter. He lived mostly in his studio up the mountain from the trailer, and his trailer worked well for the four of us while Laura and I looked for a place to rent.

Late afternoon of the hot summer day we arrived, the mountain cooled. Mosquitoes came out in force. Night hawks shrieked and dodged and darted and harvested abundant insects from the air. Their long wings made booming sounds against the mountain when they pulled up sharply from steep dives.

Laura said, "I wish we'd had room to move Amanda's crib up here. I don't want her sleeping on the floor, but if I put her up on the bed, she might crawl off and fall on the floor."

I rummaged through the scrap wood left over from when Gerrit built his studio. I selected suitable lumber, borrowed Gerrit's saw, hammer, and nails, and built a crib. It became the very definition of rustic, "...country lifestyle,... plain and

simple,... of rough wood...”.

I didn't put legs on it. I designed it to sit on the bed, with a flat, plywood bottom and horizontal bars around rather than the more standard vertical bars to confine a child. I built it light enough to move around but strong enough to keep Amanda in her bed. She couldn't talk yet, but I felt sure if she could, she would say, "Quite satisfactory. Love counts more than the cost or appearance of material possessions."

We found a place to rent and took the crib with us.

In my first job, I helped clean up recently-thinned forest near Sumpter. We cut up small trees that had been cut down in the thinning process, and we piled the pieces for later burning.

I took straight pieces of Douglas fir trees home, pieces six feet long and one inch to five inches in diameter. I shaved away the grey surface of the tight-fitting bark with a draw knife and exposed the smooth, rich red underneath, shot through with complex, beautifully patterned cream-colored and white lines like sensitively-executed, abstract drawings.

I cut everything to the right lengths. I used the larger pieces for legs and the smaller pieces for horizontal rails. I carved the ends of the rails to fit, and I drove the ends of rails through holes I had drilled through the legs. I fastened boards across the bottom, and put Amanda's mattress on top of the boards, and we had a strong crib.

This crib was much prettier than Amanda's first crib, which I broke up and used for kindling in our wood-burning heater, but the Douglas fir crib was still rustic beyond the imagination of manufacturers and marketers of contemporary furniture for babies. There wasn't another crib in the world like it.

When we moved to Whitney Valley to take care of the Rouse brothers' hay and cattle ranch, we took the crib with us. It blended well with the natural wood of the old house we moved into and blended well into our rustic living.

When Amanda was ready to climb in and out of bed under her own power, we took the top rail off one side and made it easier for her. She often climbed in and sat in her crib "reading" to her toys.

Amanda grew. She gave up the crib and graduated to a regular bed. We gave the crib to our friends, Ash and Ingrid, for their first child, William.

William grew and graduated to a regular bed. After long use, the red bark on the crib that had served both our families well peeled from the dry wood underneath. The crib looked ragged, far from the rugged beauty it had when it began to help

us take care of our children.

Ash asked me, and I said, “Yes, go ahead. That would be very fitting.”

He cut the crib into pieces. One northeastern Oregon cold autumn day and night, he burned the wood that had been a crib in his heater.

Douglas fir that had been destined to burn as part of a cleanup project but instead had served a warm function in both our families added welcome warmth that day and night to the house Ash and his family lived in and welcome warmth to both families’ memories.