

A story written by Birgit Jorgensen

## **What a Difference the Years Make.**

When I was a little girl in Denmark our large Household Laundry (Storvask) was done once a month. It was a huge and energy challenging job. During the month smaller amounts of clothing were hand washed (Klatvask), as needed, and hung outside to dry.

Automatic washing machines and dryers didn't exist. The detergents we now use were not invented and the materials to be washed were heavy and prone to wrinkle and shrink.

Mom arranged for a washer woman (vaskekone) to come to our house to assist with the laundry process. The dirty clothes were soaked overnight in large washtubs in the laundry room. The next day the washer woman made a fire under the large kettle (Grukedlen) which had been filled with water and soap that was sliced into thin pieces and whipped into the water until dissolved. The soaking clothes were added and boiled for an hour.

Next step was the Wash Board treatment. Any boiled clothes, which still had stains or dirt, got the Wash Board treatment consisting of rubbing the clothes against the Wash Board and adding extra soap to facilitate the process until the stains were gone.

The following step took a lot of strength and energy. That was the wringing process. The boiling clothes had to be picked up and wrung by hand until free of water and then rinsed by being placed in the large washtubs which by now had been filled with clear, cold water. This process had to be repeated a couple of times before all the clothes were cleared of soap. After the last soaking and wringing, the laundry was hung outside to dry on clothes lines, erected each month on laundry day for that purpose. During wintertime the clothes froze while hanging and were completely stiff when retrieved. Also, you could not wash and dry clothes on a rainy day unless you were able to string laundry lines inside on the loft for the clothes to dry there.

Once the clothes were dry they were sorted into essentially two piles. Everything in the first pile had to be ironed. The second pile consisted of large table cloths and sheets that had to be sent to Mangling, a place where each table cloth or sheet was placed between heavy rollers and came out without wrinkles. In some cases the materials first had to be stretched back into shape by having two people pulling away from each other as hard as they could while holding on to the opposite ends of the material.

Yes indeed, what a difference the years make. I did my laundry yesterday. All I had to do was add the detergent and dirty clothes to the washer and push the start button. When the washer had finished washing the load of clothing I transferred the load to the dryer and pushed the Start button.

When the clothes were dry I folded them all and put them back in the drawers. No sweat.