

# SUGAR CAMP

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #171 —

The French word déjà vu is used when we revisit something we've seen or done before; such was the case with this year's Sugar Camp. My first experience was back in the 1950s. There was a grove of maple trees just south of our house, and dad decided he was going to tap those trees and make maple syrup.

He made the taps from the stems of a sumac bush. The center core is soft and he opened it up with a coat hanger. Then he tapered one end, drilled holes in the trees and drove in the taps. Dad used masonry crocks to catch the sap as it dripped from the trees. Then the sap was poured into a big cast iron kettle sitting on an open fire and the cooking began. I remember that there was snow on the ground and mom didn't think much of Dad's Sugar Camp.

Last summer, on a new farm, we discovered a grove of sugar maple trees; immediately the words Sugar Camp came out of my mouth. Now, the process of making

maple syrup from the sap of sugar maple trees is pretty straightforward. But if you count your time; well, it would be a lot cheaper to buy maple syrup at the grocery store.

The time to tap trees is late winter, when the nighttime temperatures are below freezing and the daytime temperatures are above - this is when the sap runs. We had about 150 mature maple trees to choose from and selected just over 40, which were in close proximity. Collecting the sap is just a matter of drilling each



*This small metal tap is driven into a drilled hole, then the hanger and bag are attached. Now you have to wait for the sap to run.*

tree and pounding in a hollow tap; then hanging on a collection container. Boiling it down to syrup is a bit more complicated.

The farm guys made up a 'stove' from concrete blocks, firebrick, stove pipe and a little scrap steel; and used

standard buffet-style steam table pans to cook down the sap. Starting with full pans early in the morning, they kept adding sap

**"Boiling it down...  
is a bit more  
complicated."**

until the days' supply of 60-80 gallons was gone. As the sap continued to boil down, it was consolidated slowly into a single pan, and the empty pans filled with water. When the last pan was down to half full, the sap was moved to a boiling pot over propane heat — for better control of the final temperature. At 219 degrees it became maple syrup; déjà vu!

Larry Potterfield

The Budde Farm  
Calwood, MO  
11 February 2017

**Midway** USA



*It takes several hours to boil the sap down till it becomes syrup, and it's necessary to regularly skim off the foam — Andrew Robinson is skimming.*



*When the sap reaches the desired temperature, it's syrup and ready to be strained and bottled.*