

# Living Unplugged

By Annette Paulo

I guess you could say I was a pioneer woman back in '88. Our young family moved, that hot, dry July, to a wide open valley in northwestern California where the hills were golden, the mountains a majestic purple background and cloudless blue skies as far as the eye could see; we were getting our firewood ready for the winter, making sure there was water in the well, and cooking up a couple of batches of jam. Yes, it was quite different from the life we were used to. No, I'm not talking about 1888, but 1988.

Back in 1988, in our quest to start "building up equity" and living the American Dream of owning our own property, we started searching for a home for our family of five. It seemed that the size of house and property we wanted didn't match our budget and, not wanting to live in a shoe box and just inches from neighbors, we started looking at other options. Back then, alternative energy was a "new" way of living, and when our real estate agent showed us a 40-acre spread without public electricity that had a 3-bedroom/2-bath/2-car garage, small swimming pool, bonus room, fenced/cross-fenced, gorgeous piece of property for the same price as what we could get for a 2-bedroom/1-bath "sardine-can of a house" in town - well, we didn't think too hard about it. Sure, the house needed completing; sure, it was "off-the-grid" (whatever that meant); sure, it was further out from town... but, we could live with that. I mean, how hard could it be to finish up a home and live in a "battery-operated" house?

Now, mind you, I'm a gal who has to have certain amenities. I *need* a washer and dryer; TV is nice; and I've got to have my hair dryer and curling iron. We also have to have computers and internet service. So, it was important that we have enough "juice" to handle all of our needs. Through trial and error, we finally developed a system that worked for us and our budget.

But, there are *so* many stories to tell:

We first learned that a family of five uses a lot more energy than an older couple (the previous tenants of the home), so our power ran out, like clockwork, at 8:30 every night. We were each assigned our own personal flashlight and it was a contest to see who could turn theirs on first. We also learned that propane refrigerators hold a lot less food than conventional electric models AND they are not frost-free. We learned that we did not like doing a 50-yard dash to turn on the back-up generator when the power ran out, because it inevitably ran out when it was either raining and/or very dark. So, we learned how to install a remote switch so we could start the generator from the house.

We learned about such things as inverters, charge controllers, photovoltaic cells, solar trackers, 6-volt/12-volt/24-volt systems, AC and DC wiring, and the difference between watts and amps and how they affect our system.

We learned tricks on how to keep a home cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter through more natural methods.

After more than 20 years of living "off-the-grid", we fondly look back at all the "adventures" we faced while learning about alternative energy. We designed and developed a system (within our budget) that provides us with a comfortable "battery operated" home that allows us to live the lifestyle we want. We sure do wish that we had the resources of today to make the journey easier; but, we do love where we live and love not receiving an electric bill each month! There are many things we would have done differently, "had we known then what we know now". But, all in all, we are quite pleased with ourselves for our accomplishments and pioneering spirit.

*Note: Annette Paulo is a California Licensed Real Estate Agent working in Shasta County. She specializes in rural properties, both on and "off-the-grid". She is passionate about rural living and encourages those with a "pioneering spirit" to reach out for their dreams. Assuring clients they don't have to have the long "learning curve" she and her husband faced; she surrounds herself with excellent resources for her clients. She can be contacted via her website: [www.posituderealty.com](http://www.posituderealty.com). "Positive Attitudes = Positive Results... think POSITUDE!"*