

Or, what's a nice couple like you. . .?

Zimmermans add a little milk to the Boston Tea Party

BY DONNA TOMMELLEO

EAST EARL — Dairy families know all too well that vacations can be few and far between. The demands of the herd and field work must be met first, often leaving little time for anything else.

As one Guernsey breeder recently queried, "Vacation? What's that?"

But this is the unique story of a couple of young Holstein breeders that did manage to get away from it all — for two years, that is. And although their escapades didn't take them to the far corners of the world, they found the experience of a lifetime in good old Boston, Mass and still managed their Lancaster County farm.

Helen and Loren Zimmerman had been married 11 years and had been milking Holsteins for nine years when they moved to Boston so that Helen could work on a bachelor of science degree in nursing from Northeastern University.

"It wasn't a fly-by night decision," Helen explained. She and Loren had discussed the idea for two or three years prior to the move.

"She (Helen) had been saying all along that she wants to stay in nursing and get her degree," Loren added. And although Helen was already a registered nurse, completing a program at Bucks County Grandview, she was anxious to further her education.

Helen could have attended Penn or Villanova but that would have meant night school or driving back and forth to Philadelphia. After much discussion it was Loren that decided on the area.

"I thought maybe it would be a good idea to get away from the farm and see how the other half lives," he explained. The couple agreed the decision was not an easy one and admitted they even considered the possibility of a herd dispersal.

Understandably, the move warranted much preparation. All the calves were drawn off for

registration and several cows were culled.

"Everything was brought up to date, as much as possible," Loren said. He admitted at that point a few of his friends though he was about two eggs shy of a dozen.

Despite the negative response around them, the Zimmermans moved to Boston where they received a well-rounded education from not only the university professors but the "other half" as well.

Once inside the "Bay State," the Zimmermans's may have felt not unlike Dorothy shortly after she piloted her house to Oz — a stranger in a strange land.

While Helen concentrated on her nursing degree, Loren pursued a real estate license and took several business courses.

Surrounded by "city folks," Helen and Loren encountered many double takes once they told their new friends they were bonafide farmers.

"First of all, everyone went into shock," Helen laughed. "No one believed us," added Loren.

People were confused as to how the farmers financially supported themselves in the middle of Boston.

"We were financially supported by the farm," explained Helen. "We knew we'd be draining the farm for two years because we planned for it before we went."

Once the looks of disbelief subsided, the urbanites began asking questions.

Loren remembers one such question and answer session where he innocently explained that he bred his own cows.

"You what!?", was his friend's startled reply. Loren said he then explained the artificial insemination process for about an hour.

"He understood the A.I. concept, but he was just so far removed from he didn't know how it happened," Loren explained.

Helen said that most people were



Loren, farming on his own since 1970, kept close tabs on the farm through telephone calls and occasional flights home in his two-year absence.

really suprised to learn that dairy farmers no longer hand milked.

"It just goes to show," said Loren, "that we've got a lot of work to do."

They explained that dairy farms are few and far between in Massachusetts and projects such as Farm-City tours are nonexistent.

To educate their friends, the Zimmermans admitted that at times they'd talk for hours. Loren used his farm experience as the basis for speeches in a speech class.

But what the Bostonians lacked in farming knowledge, they made up for it with milk consumption.

"I saw more milk consumed in restaurants up there than here," Helen reported. "I couldn't believe how much milk the university sold. That was incredible."

While the Zimmermans were busy educating their friends, they worked just as hard in the classroom. Helen graduated with high honors at the end of the two-year period. However, the amazing feat was that she completed a five-year course in that time and still managed to hold down a part-time job. Loren dabbled in real estate, attended classes and worked construction.

Meanwhile, business on the farm commenced as usual. Loren's brother Dale and cousin Mervin managed the farm in the Zimmermans's absence.

Loren kept close tabs on the farm's progress through semi-weekly phone calls and occasional trips home. He also kept all the book work in Boston.

"When you have an investment like that, you can't get too far away from it," he said.

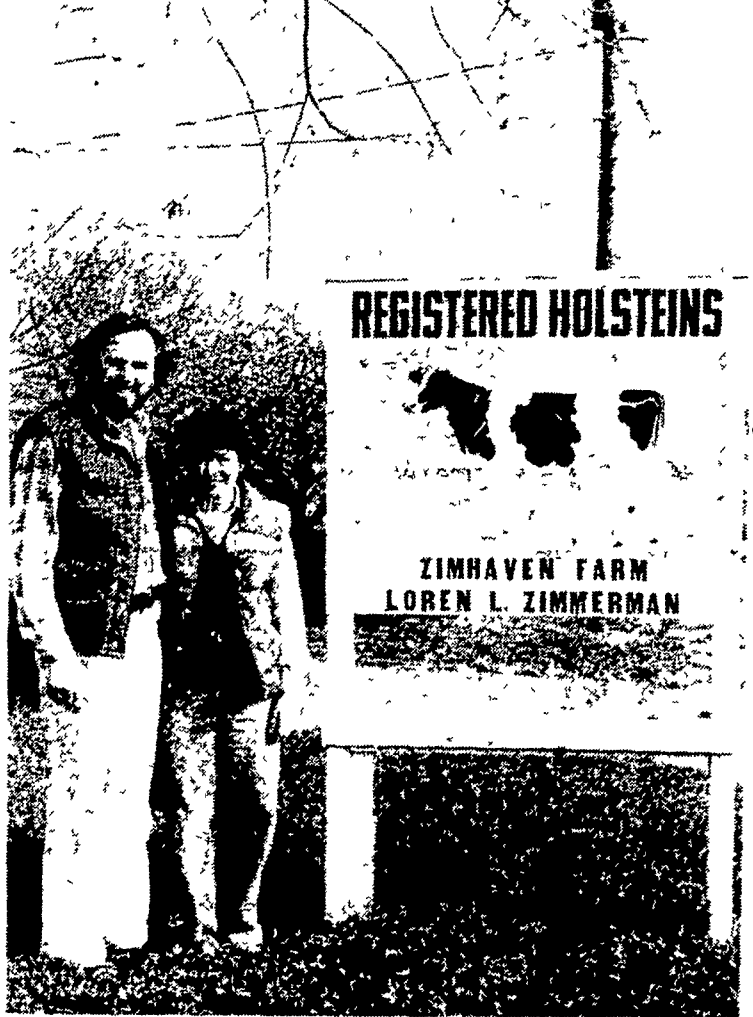
Many of Loren's visits home, which lasted three days to a week, not only benefitted the farm but Helen's studies as well.

"He worked his schedule around my school schedule," Helen said of her supportive spouse.

While Helen concentrated during the exhausting final exam periods, Loren assured her of the necessary peace and quiet and would usually retreat to the farm for a while.

"I was glad to get out of there," Loren joked. "She would lock herself up with her books and that was it. She didn't even know I was there."

In addition to her nursing education, Helen research studies allowed her to work closely with a state senator, and said she realized that applying political pressure for a cause, such as milk promotion, may not be as difficult as people think.



Home again! After returning home this past August from Boston, Loren and Helen Zimmerman agree there's a lot of work to do to educate the non-farm public about dairying.

"It can be a matter of sending the right letter to the right person at the right time," she explained.

Loren echoed his wife's feelings but added, "Most farmers are too busy to write letters."

The RN expressed dismay at farmers that request a refund of their advertising adjustment contribution from their milk check.

"I think there is no excuse for that," she charged. "Milk is our product. If we're selling it we have to advertise it."

And in the two years the Zimmermans spent in Boston, they advertised the story of milk to anyone curious enough to learn.

Helen, although pleased with the new and different environment, said she missed the animals. Occasionally, the couple babysat a friend's St. Bernard dog, which made Helen feel a little more at home.

Back home, they both said they missed their new friends and the stimulation one finds in a college environment. Loren said he especially missed the feeling of being away.

But if their milking herd of 50 Holsteins missed their globe-trotting owners they kept it a well-guarded secret. The Zimmermans reported no health problems or dips in the herd average while they were gone. In fact, things went smoother than they expected.

"I can't believe it worked out so much better than we ever thought," said Helen. "Everyone tells you the worst and I think people think the worst."

Meanwhile, normal operations have returned to the 175-acre rented farm and Helen has returned to full-time nursing work as a supervisor at the Ephrata hospital.

The registered herd continues to average almost 15,000 pounds of milk a year on their diet of high moisture corn, haylage, corn silage and a 20 percent soybean concentrate in pelleted form.

Loren is a member of a breeders' syndicate, Chief Associates Syndicate and has bred several of his cows to the syndicate sire, Mariu Perseus Chief, presently leased to Select Sires.

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Animal lover Helen explains the ins and outs of dry cow management to a recent visitor from Massachusetts.