

# Bolivian child becomes part of Mt. Joy family



Two-year-old Ryan helps his mother make fresh bread in their large kitchen.

**BY SUZANNE KEENE**  
**MT. JOY** — In September Marlene Hess will be giving birth for the first time, but she will not be a first-time mother. Marlene and her husband, Andy, adopted their first child - a bright-eyed, black-haired little boy.

"We always talked about adopting, even before we were married," Marlene explained.

In 1980, just one year after they were married, the Hesses took a two and one-half year assignment in Bolivia with the Mennonite Central Committee. Marlene, an R.N., operated a clinic in a rural village outside of Santa Cruz while Andy worked in agriculture, demonstrating appropriate alternate technology and working on a demonstration plot.

During their stay in Bolivia the Hesses learned of a young, unmarried mother who might be willing to give up her child for adoption and they decided to pursue the opportunity.

But after initially investigating the possibility, the Hesses lost contact with the child's mother. Marlene said they just assumed that it was the mother's way of saying she didn't want to go through with it.

But ten days after the woman gave birth, the Hesses got a phone call saying that she was willing to go ahead with the adoption.

"I think it really was hard for her," Marlene said. "She had so many factors against her."

Ryan's mother was unmarried, young and in a very poor economic situation, she said. Marlene said they do not know anything about his father except that he was married and had another family.

Extramarital affairs for men is a part of the culture, Marlene ex-



Ryan takes time out from helping to sample the uncooked dough.

plained. It is their way of proving their machismo, but it often has unfortunate results for the unmarried woman.

The Hesses got custody of Ryan six months before they left Bolivia, but it wasn't until they returned to the United States that they formally adopted him.

Bolivian adoption laws are very strict, Marlene said. To adopt a child in Bolivia a couple must be

married for at least five years, be over 30 and promise never to have any other children.

"It's their way to try to protect their children," Marlene explained.

Their lawyer suggested that instead of fighting the Bolivian law they just obtain custody and permission to leave the country with the child and then go through

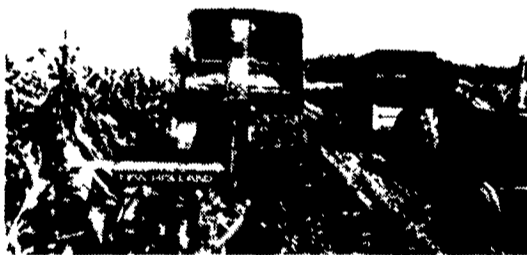
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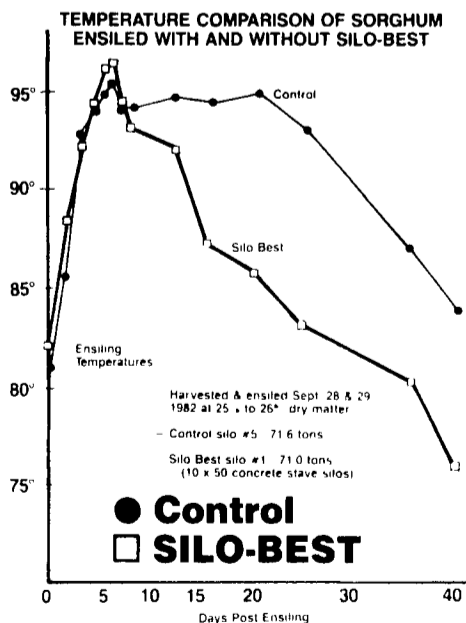
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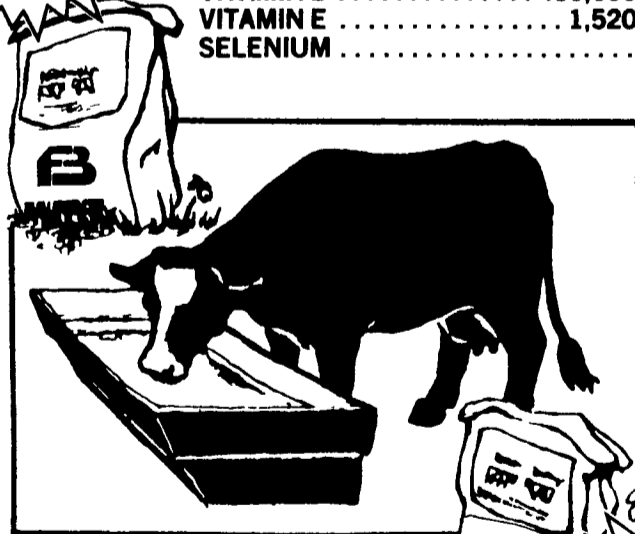


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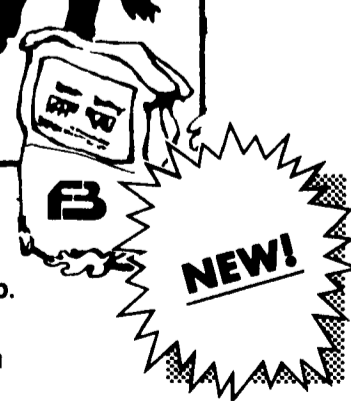
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