

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



As storms go, the blizzard that dumped on us last week proved to be an exceptionally noisy one, filled with worrisome sound effects. Or maybe it just seemed that way because I was snowed in at home, while the rest of the family was snowed in at a Harrisburg cattle show.

It began with dripping sounds, the innocent patter of rain on the windows. Maybe the late news forecaster's dire warnings would be wrong. Show classes were

scheduled to begin early the next morning, and the last thing I needed to face would be snow, as I planned to join the rest of the family after morning barn chores.

Rising winds altered the dripping to a bumping racket. The east windows of the house rattled as the wind relentlessly hammered at them, then swept upward to wrestle with the writhing maple limbs overhead.

Stuffing a fat log into the woodstove, I silently hoped the

coals would not slip into gray ashen death by morning's chill.

Sleep came slowly, wear of worries nagging at my peace of mind. There are miles of swaying electric power lines - and shallow rooted trees - between the milker pumps and our electric cooperative's power substation some distance away.

Wham! The ancient latch on our old wooden door to the bedroom snapped open and the door swung inward, waking me instantly from deep dreaming. Horrified that a window had blown in somewhere downstairs, leaving the unabated east wind to rolick in the post-midnight darkness of the house, I stumbled down two flights of stairs.

All windows and doors were secure, but just standing in the upstairs, it was possible to feel the draft of the wind forcing through the old house's cracks and cran-

Constant pinging sounds rapped a staccato rhythm against the glass. Ice. Ice that would cling to tree limbs. To power lines. Weight and wind on power lines add up to problems for power companies and

farmers with a string of cows to milk.

A return to sleep came slowly, to again be interrupted by the unlatching of the door from air pressure forces within the house. Still, the pinging against the windows hammered away in the blackness outside.

A jangling telephone woke me to the pale shadows of early morning. In the limbo-land of being summoned from slumber, it took a couple of seconds to realize that it was a farm wife friend on the phone, not a call from the barn for milking assistance.

Flashing lights outside confused me. Lightning? Arcing power wires? At least the power was still steady and milking underway.

At the barn, even the cattle seemed restless with the storm's fury, heifers and calves huddled in the farthest corners, away from the wind-driven snow blowing through every opening.

Thunder? Maybe. Or was it snow cascading off the metal roof of the house? A pile of snow outside the basement porch confirmed that at least part of the rumbling was a

mini-avalanche off the house roof, cascading harmlessly to the ground.

But not totally harmless. Ducking into the greenhouse to escape the wind and check plants, the unwelcome tinkling sound of breaking glass came from under my feet. The roof avalanche had spilled off a corner and onto the greenhouse, shattering two glass panes and slicing through the inner-lining of plastic.

Melting snow dripped through the plastic ungraciously onto my head, a sarcastic "belly laugh" from Mother Nature's bag of practical jokes. Is it too much to hope that it was her parting final punch for the season?

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