

Every day is Mother's Day for Karen Fry

BY SALLY BAIR
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MASTERTONVILLE — For Karen Fry, everyday is Mother's Day. She has chosen to put aside a satisfying career as a teacher to devote full time to the duties and rewards of being a mother. And she has no regrets. She also has little time to be bored or to wonder about the commitment she has made.

"My teaching experience made me aware of the importance of a mother's being home. I could see the difference in children whose parents read to them and who spent time talking with them. As a remedial reading teacher, I didn't see those children," Karen says.

Karen adds, "I enjoy what I'm doing. I feel strongly there are a whole lot of things you can do at home with your children that are productive." Karen is doing many of those things.

She taught for 11 years before her oldest son Daniel, 6, was born. Daughter Katie is now four. But it was nine years ago that she and husband Jeff moved to a home in the country which has helped shape their lifestyle since then.

The Frys live on a 13-acre farm near Mastertonville, and the activity associated with the farm keeps Karen and the children busy during the day when Jeff is working at his job with the state.

Asked if they had intended to live on a farm and become virtually

self-sufficient, Karen says, "In our minds we dreamed about it. The idea of moving to the country and having space for a garden was very appealing, but we didn't think of animals and we had no idea of getting involved."

Despite the fact that the plan was not thought out in advance, Karen says, "It was all fascinating. It was all new. But we haven't changed our minds yet." Neither Karen nor Jeff grew up on farms, though Jeff handled sheep on a part-time job.

What they had intended to buy was an old stone farm house to restore. What they actually bought was an old stone farm house dating from 1863 to restore, a lovely barn dating from 1820, and an assortment of outbuildings, many of which needed to come down.

Now, Karen says, "The house has become a small part of the whole project."

Instead of putting a second coat of paint on all the house walls, they need to concentrate on proper housing for their animals, or make barn repairs or fencing.

Karen is now surrounded by animals, herbs, vegetables and antiques, and she has turned her interest into a business which fits in nicely with her desire to be with her children in their pre-school years.

First the animals. The Frys became interested in sheep shortly after they acquired the farm, and

to educate themselves they contacted the Warn Menhennets in Chester County and paid a visit.

Karen remembers, "When we visited the Menhennets we took notes all afternoon. They taught me record keeping. It is tremendously important to keep records."

The result of that visit was the purchase of two ewes and a ram, and the start of a registered Shropshire flock. Last summer they were forced to reduce the size of the flock during the dry August, but they presently have five ewes, two rams and 10 lambs.

Many of their lambs are sold locally for meat, and last year when they had 17 lambs, they had a waiting list of people wanting them. But Karen adds honestly, "I would much rather sell them for breeding stock."

While she does not yet want to make the commitment to show which might increase their visibility and create more sales, Karen says she is planning to show next year at the Elizabethtown Farm Show. She does sell sheepskins which are prepared so that they are machine washable, increasing their attractiveness for use in the home.

About seven years ago they added goats. One Toggenburg did not make it through the summer dry spell last year, but they still have one Toggenburg.

Karen says, "I always liked goats and I always told people that



Karen does most of the preparation of her herbs in this workroom attached to the stone barn. She likes to sell the herbs fresh, but also dries a large portion of them for resale, as well as for use in her home.

someday I would have a goat. Goats are more like domestic animals and they are very dependent on the person who milks them."

That person is Karen, who thoroughly enjoys it. "I enjoy the quiet time in the barn in the morning."

Karen points out that kids make neat pets for children, but adds, "It does tie you down."

And the goat's milk is a pleasant plus. Karen says, "When we were getting 2½ gallons of milk a day I used it for everything. Our children started on goats' milk. I prefer it. When it is properly handled and cold I like it better than cows' milk."

The largest business Karen has entered into is her growing of herbs, and she has called her home "Fry's Herb Farm" on her business cards. Behind her home is a traditionally shaped Pennsylvania kitchen garden, with raised beds and borders of herbs. She said these gardens include vegetables, culinary and medicinal herbs and frequently, boxwood. Her medicinal herbs, she said, are grown strictly for historical purposes.

Karen pointed out that these gardens date from the time of Charlemagne, when the custom developed of measuring them in multiples of 11. Her garden measures 33 feet by 33 feet. She visited local places like Donegal Mills and Historic Schaeferstown to observe gardens growing there.

"I grow 50 different kinds of herbs - everything I can get locally," Karen states. She admits to having had an interest in herbs for a long time before they moved to their farm, and once grew them in pots in her kitchen.

She enjoys using them in her cooking, and likes to encourage other to do the same. "I think people should try herbs fresh

rather than dry. They have a lot more flavor."

She attributes a growing interest in herbs to concern about health and the fact that herbs add flavor, allowing cooks to cut down on the amount of salt added to foods.

One way of spreading the word about herbs is through the cooking classes she teaches at the Chef's Bazaar in Lancaster, and through talks to various clubs. Karen says, "I enjoy working with adults, and I stay in touch with teaching."

Karen has also sold herbs to local restaurants who use them fresh in their daily menus. She markets fresh herbs through the Chef's Bazaar, and supplies many herbs, primarily dried, to The Herb Shop in Lititz. She adds, "People do come here, but I have not advertised."

She envisions the possibility of expanding the herb business by selling herbs to gardeners. But one problem with the herb market is making it a worthwhile business. "Anything you do with your hands you can't charge the full amount for your time," Karen says.

Karen also has a large vegetable garden, measuring 120 feet by 40 feet. "I do most of the vegetables. My husband plows and discs," Karen says. While she sells a few vegetables, she points out, "I never have vegetables to sell in bulk." Indeed, Karen preserves most of the vegetables for her own family. She also purchases fruits to preserve.

How does she manage all the work? "I mulch a lot, so it's carefree," Karen explains that she mulches her garden with four layers of newspaper, covered generously with straw. She said she often mulches as she plants seed so that the weeds never even begin to appear.

Her children have a garden of their own, and have drawn up

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This is the flock of registered Shropshire sheep which Karen Fry raises on her small farm near Mastertonville. Children Daniel and Katie help Karen feed the sheep on their first day in the pasture.



Herbs are just beginning to grow in this border of Karen's traditional Pennsylvania kitchen garden behind her stone farm house. Here Karen grows vegetables, culinary and medicinal herbs, although she says the medicinal ones are grown only for historical purposes.

Homestead Notes