

**On being
a farm wife
- And other
hazards
Joyce Bupp**



Home, someone once said, is where they have to take you in when you go there. Or something to that effect.

Who first phrased that philosophy I'd hate to have to guess. But it's generally a valid one. At home, we're pretty much loved and accepted, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

Even animals can sense that. Case in point. . .

Last week, we emptied the dairy barn manure storage pit. This entails a sort of "blending" process, in which our stirring and loading auger is backed into the pit, and vigorously churns the contents. It's a necessary preliminary step to the actual emptying process, since the manure waste flows in from the bottom, allowing a fairly rigid crust to form on top. While that crust helps contain odors and provides a handy place for birds to snag insects — and cats occasionally to snag birds — it doesn't flow very handily into a liquid spreader.

Blending mixes the harder crust

with the liquified contents beneath, so the whole business can be pumped out into the tank. And — let me assure you — even dairy farm families are never thrilled about the inevitable odors this necessary, periodic, job of livestock farming generates.

But at least the odor usually retreats a bit overnight when the stirring and hauling shuts down.

It was while I was sitting and tying my sneakers, still about half asleep that morning, that I spied on the kitchen floor tell-tale fresh drops of liquid manure.

But why? At this early hour? No one was hauling the stuff; and regular dairy barn "droppings" on the kitchen floor usually arrive in clumps of sawdust, straw, etc.

The farmer's arrival for breakfast shed a bit of light on the drops.

A strong liquid manure odor had assaulted him as he hit the bottom of the stairs on his way to the morning milking. And, while it was still plenty dark in the kitchen, there was just enough light for him to see a small body shaking itself

off in the middle of the floor.

He put the puzzle together in an instant: a cat had fallen into the manure pit.

And not just any cat, naturally. This was loveable, tiger-striped, half-house-cat Rhett, who had fled to the house for comfort and consolation, after taking an obviously unexpected plunge in the stirred, uncrusted pit.

After eating, Rhett loves nothing more than being hugged or cuddled. And, comfort-loving pet that he is, Rhett learned long ago how to paw open the basement screen door.

The farmer found him highly un-huggable at that early morning hour, needless to say. The cat got a quick invite to the outside.

When the poor, dripping, forlorn critter was back eyeing the basement door moments later, man opted to lend beast a hand. On his way to the dairy barn, he snagged the smelly, dripping cat and dunked him into a bucket of water in the greenhouse to remove the sticky pit residue.

It was hours before the cat showed his furry face around the house that day. But, when he did get up enough courage to wiggle back into the kitchen, he looked his normal, beautifully-groomed, striped self.

At least until you came within a foot of sniffing distance. A lap cat he wasn't, not for a couple of days,

anyway.

In retrospect, the individual who really lucked out, though, was the youngest offspring of this family.

He generally shuns his bedroom (it's hard to find a bed in a landfill,

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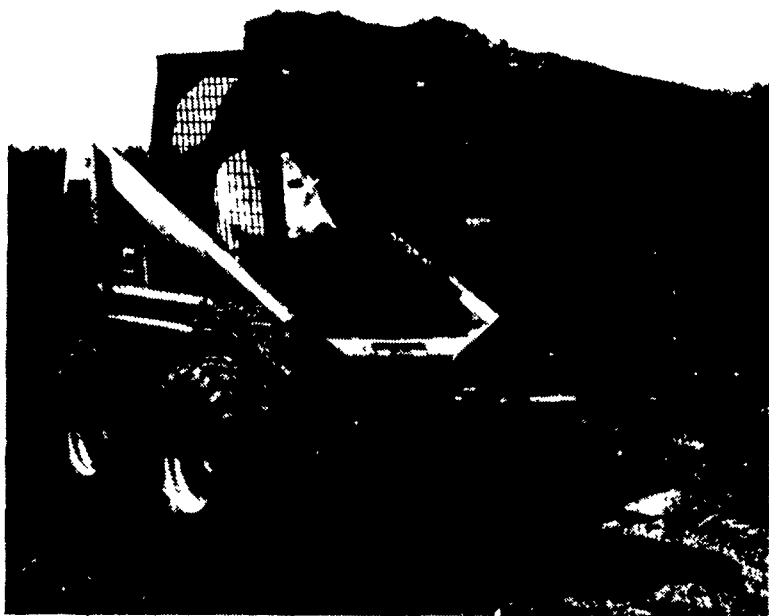
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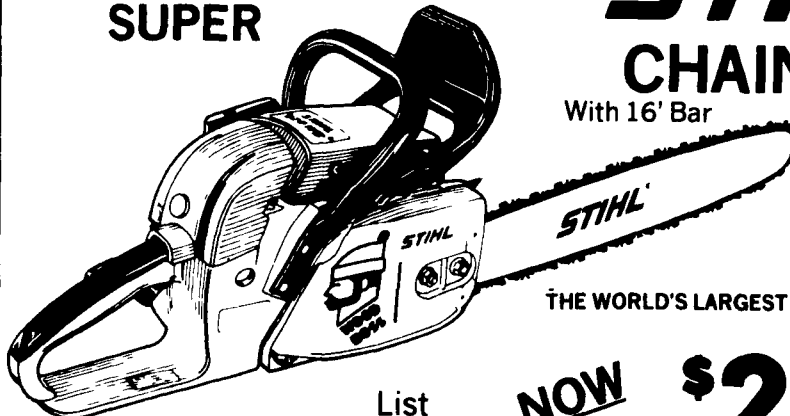
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