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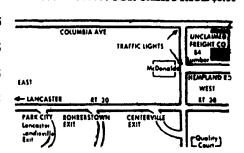
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On being a farm wife

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Joyce Bupp



Lancaster Farming, Saturday, October 25, 1986-85

One word. There is one word that, in essence, captures all that is Fall: tang in the crisp air, spotless clear blue sky, red and yellow leaves coloring the hillsides and fencerows, woodsmoke hanging in the air, and a bright, white harvest moon so near you could almost reach up and pick it from the sky.

Cider. That's the word.

There are basically two ways to obtain this classic seasonal liquid.

You can, obviously, run down to your nearest retail market and buy up a supply.

Or you can squeeze your own.

Easier said than done. Apples don't squeeze with the same ease of something like an orange or a grapefruit. In fact, try to flatten an apple and you'll probably end up with a handful of applesauce. Tasty. But not cider.

What you need is a good, sturdy, old-fashioned cider press.

Now, mind you, this piece of equipment is not something the size of a Cuisinart. It's more like 6 feet long, 4 feet high, and comes with a variety of old cast iron hardware and sturdy, round baskets made of wood slats for holding the chopped bits of apple

for pressing. Nor does one store a cider press in the back corner of the kitchen cupboard. Ours — an ancient model acquired long, long ago by the farmer — spends its life mostly ignored in a dusty corner of the barn. About once every ten years, it is resurrected on a glorious Sunday afternoon for a sort of ceremony which reinforces the farm roots in both our ancestral pasts.

This ritual begins on our knees. Under trees colored with red and

yellow apples, we crawl through dried grass and crunchy leaves, gathering "drops." Material for this most recent cider pressing

ritual originated under trees owned by generous neighbors whose land we farm, and who graciously allowed us to harvest the fallen jewel-like fruits.

Piece of antiquity that it is, the oaken press with its rusting hardware has no plugs, points, or power. It's life comes from a sixinch-wide umbilical cord, a canvas strip run off the belt-drive of another link to the past, our youngest's lovingly-restored John Deere "B".

With the extra manpower lent by good friends, apples are rinsed and tossed into the clattering machine, a few handfuls at a time, to be run through knives and chopped to bits. Periodically an apple, thrown in as an offering to the noisy knives, catches one on the upswing, and goes flying back out to roll off down the paved driveway.

Two baskets are kept busy, one sliding front to go under the heavy wooden press, while the chopper fills another in preparation. The farmer turns the press, by hand, then adds extra leverage with a special turning tool shaped like a baseball bat, but squared.

And, then amber liquid pours down over the old oak press floor, and cascades into a modern plastic bucket, filling the air with the heady perfume of autumn. Long before the last handful of apples is tossed to the knives, the sloped drive is dangerously slick with chopped apple - like walking on applesauce - and scrubbed, sanitized plastic buckets hold the thick, foamy, coppery-colored juice.

Some is shared, some will be frozen, some will be canned and some incorporated into Grandma's oven-cooled applebutter.

That's not just cider sitting there chilled in the refrigerator.

It's a jug of memories.

