

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



My life passed before my eyes. That statement is often used to describe those mental split seconds of reaction to a near-miss of some potential fatality. Recovering victims of automobile accidents, heart attacks, plane crashes, and falls from high places frequently report early-life flashback incidents.

A family public sale, I've decided, though far less traumatic, creates a similar effect.

Last week, my life passed before my eyes--accompanied by the sing-song chant of a local auctioneer. Pieces of our family history neatly lined the edges of the yard where we four kids played endless round of croquet and badminton, squashed Mom's peonies sliding into third base, and squabbled over inconsequential in the manner of all siblings.

Actually, it was more a house-cleaning than anything else, a ridding of excess miscellaneous items for which my folks have no use in their next house.

Gone away to a new life, for instance, is the old, tall, wooden wardrobe through which I frequently sorted as a teenager. That wardrobe agonized with me many times over what would be appropriate for my wearing to various memorable events.

Another tall storage unit, lined up near the third-base peony bush, was also sorted through periodically during my early childhood. It was a white kitchen cabinet, its shelves were then known to house such delicacies as the jar of forbidden maraschino cherries. Only the cabinet and I knew of the occasional filching of the forbidden fruit. I

think.

Up for bids was the old walk-behind garden tractor with which my dad spent so many hours. It chugged along for many miles in its lifetime, working rows for potatoes, cultivating string beans, turning, smoothing, and readying soil for the vegetable and flower seedlings Mom started at a wide sun-splashed window on our enclosed back porch.

A wooden, flatbed wheelbarrow evoked mixed emotions. Overriding the pleasant memories of an occasional ride on the wheelbarrow was the recollection of its more familiar loads: bags of potatoes we had to help pick up to be stored for the winter in the ground cellar. How I disliked that job! In fact, at about age 11, I equated picking potatoes with slave labor. "Child abuse" was an unknown term then, or I probably would have labeled it that.

One item which held no memory at all for me--I didn't even know what it was--brought laughing groans from my sister, five years my elder.

The large, clear glass, jug-like container, she explained, was a fuel supply tank for a kerosene stove once used in our household. One of her childhood chores was to fill the container with kerosene. When filled, the glass had to be flipped upside down, and the spring-loaded fuel release mechanism on the top inserted into the appropriate spot to drip the fuel to the stove.

She remembered with a grimace that it was impossible to flip the full container of kerosene and

attach it to the stove without the smelly, oily kerosene getting all over her hands. Lucky for me, the stove disappeared before I came of kerosene-responsible age.

I offered to buy the thing for her--just for old times' sake. She declined.

Likewise, the farmer offered to buy for me a batch of faintly familiar paint-by-number masterpieces, which he figured would tremendously amuse our offspring. I declined. And I neglected to check if the footprints from the cat walking across the wet oil paints still remained.

As bits and pieces of our early life dispersed throughout a gray, wet, bone-chilling morning, it became obvious that a stack of yesterday's memories was accumulating near a pair of very familiar

male persons. Heads together in studied concentration, they plotted new uses for a collection of motors, pipe, wire and other miscellaneous gimme-a-dollar items intended for transformation in the

machinery shop to farm-type gadgetry recycling.

Not only did I see my life flashing by my eyes.

Some of it came along home to haunt me.

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