

A Typical And Not So Typical Farm Woman

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CHAMBERSBURG (Franklin)

— Farm women tend to be versatile, but Doris Meyers has to be one of the most flexible and versatile of the lot. Not only is she mother to five children and grandmother to three, and pursues such typical farm-wife activities as leading the 4-H Capon Club, the 4-H Quilt Club, gardening and crafts. She also is president of Meyers Bus Lines, Inc. and is responsible for the day-to-day logistics of getting 1,500 children safely to nine schools on 16 bus routes.

Doris's life hasn't always been quite this complicated. For awhile, all she managed was five children, a huge farmhouse, 51 veal calves, and a chicken house full of fryers.

But when she and her husband, Dean, purchased a bus company in 1980, Doris suddenly found herself juggling the scheduling of drivers and substitutes, hiring drivers, troubleshooting, and keeping a daily log of any incidents that occur with students.

"It's a lot of book work," Doris said. "If a child falls, or gets off at the wrong stop, I log it, because of insurance and liability claims. This is a high-risk business, and I take it seriously."

"We haven't had major problems," she adds. "We feel well-blessed."

Meyers Bus Lines is Chambersburg Area School District's largest contractor. The district is geographically the third largest in Pennsylvania. All Meyer's drivers have two runs, a secondary and an elementary, with three also having noon time kindergarten routes. The drivers average 65 miles a day.

This of necessity keeps Doris home on school days. She must be

close to the two-day radio base—each bus has a two-way—and to the phone exclusively for bus calls, in the event of a breakdown, the need to get a substitute driver, or to solve any other problem that may arise. Fortunately, there are few breakdowns, thanks to the maintenance performed by Dean and his son-in-law. The busses—18 full-size busses, one mini-van and one Caravan—are serviced in a converted wagon shed on the farm.

Besides being responsible for the maintenance, Dean also acts as a substitute driver in a pinch. "He drives maybe three times a year, when it's a necessity," Doris said. "He keeps his bus license up so he can do that." Son Ryan, 19, who works full-time on the farm, also substitutes occasionally.

Not that Dean and Ryan don't have enough to do otherwise. With 40 cows to milk on the home farm and another 38 on a neighboring farm, they have plenty of work. Youngest son Darwin, a high school senior, milks at the neighboring farm in the evenings. They also have 18 sows and about 100 feeder pigs, and 160 acres of corn, alfalfa, timothy and grains on the home farm. Rented land brings their total acreage to about 400.

The bus company is a family affair—one married daughter drives full-time for Doris, and the other is the company's bookkeeper. Doris is not involved in the day-to-day operation of the farm. The oldest of eight children, seven girls and one boy, she grew up on a farm and was "Dad's right hand for anything but milking," she says.

Her farm training has stood her in good stead, though. The years of experiencing the unexpected occurrences and interruptions that crop up daily on a farm have prepared her for managing 16 bus

routes from her kitchen.

"I don't mind interruptions," she says. "I live by flexibility. When the phone rings or someone needs help, I drop what I'm doing and run. I've turned the oven off with something in it already, to drive school bus because of a breakdown."

"The bus company is our top priority," Doris adds. "The farm work is done around the bus schedule."

While Doris spends a large part of her time managing the bus company, she still finds time for the crafts and 4-H activities she loves.

"When I'm not on the phone, I've got my hands busy," she said.

Her hands were busy recently making a crib quilt for her newest grandson, born April 10.

For the past year, she has been the organizational leader of the county-wide 4-H Quilting Club. "I got into it because of the need for leaders, and also to help myself learn," she explained.

Doris's mother and one of her sisters are quilters; Doris always had the desire to learn, but couldn't find the time. The year-round club "makes me find the time," she said.

The capon club is Doris's other 4-H love. Her children joined the club about ten years ago, and when the leader retired after a few years, Doris's children encouraged her to pick up the responsibilities. "I didn't want to see the club dissolve," she said. She recently ordered 500 caponized chicks to start her fifth year as leader.

About 12 children participate in the 18-week, county-wide program. Doris teaches them the care and proper feeding of capons, and also how to dress and package the birds for market.

"This is the best 4-H project there is, for kids to have a profit for their work," Doris said. "Each child makes \$5-\$10 profit per bird."

Doris was well-prepared to take over the Capon Club, as she had raised and dressed fryers and capons for her family for years.

The Meyers live on Dean's home farm, built in the 1860s. When Dean and Doris married in 1960, they moved into a mobile home on the farm and lived there for three years, as Dean's parents still lived in the house.

The spacious home has two stairways, including an open one in the kitchen. Triple doors between the parlor and the living room, and between the living room and the kitchen, allow most of the downstairs to be used as one large room. Dean's parents had used the rooms to hold religious services.

Decorating those rooms are many of Doris's handmade items. "I got into making crafts out of necessity, to decorate the farmhouse," she says.



Doris spends a lot of time running Meyers Bus Company from her kitchen with the help of two phone lines and a two-way radio.



This painting of Doris's first bus route includes the historic Rocky Spring church. She calls the painting, by her sister-in-law, "My Serenity." Doris won the trophies (at right) at local and state bus rodeos.

Prominently displayed is a bear Doris made out of a baby shawl used by her father-in-law as a baby. She also had teddy bears made for each of her children, using the shawl material for the ears and paws.

Chicken and duck collectibles preside over the living room, while the teddy bears watch over the parlor, but throughout the kitchen and office areas, schoolbuses are the

main theme. Ceramic busses, bus refrigerator magnets, small metal busses, a large calendar with a picture of busses—Doris has them all.

"I love the business," Doris says simply.

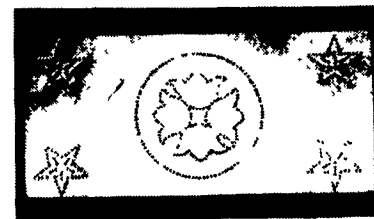
The business to Doris means being a mother, grandmother, wife, 4-H leader and executive director. A combination just right for someone who enjoys flexibility and versatility.



Doris's husband, Dean, used an old kitchen cabinet for 19 years to hold herd records in the barn. When Doris claimed it for the house, she discovered that one of the panels had been ruined by water, so she created a tin art panel to replace it.



Doris displays several of her handcrafted items, including a crib quilt for her newest grandson. Cross-stitched on the back of the quilt is: "The best kind of sleep/Bestowed by Heaven above/Is under a quilt/Handmade with Love."



Tin art sample shows Doris's skill.

Homestead Notes