

Easter Seal Kids Spend Day On The Farm

BY VAL VANTASSEL

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CENTERPORT (Berks Co.) —

It started like any other farm tour day at the Dave and Robin Phillips farm. Their oldest daughter Amy and her friend Jessica Erikson washed down the animals to be exhibited. Rain the day before made the lawn look lush. The petunias beside the milking parlor bloomed in profusion. After cleaning the barn, Robin sprinkled barn dry over the floors. The cows were tied to trees beside a pony at the lower end of the lawn from the picnic table where the children would gather. Robin donned clean overalls and her blue flowered milking bonnet. Her husband, Dave has an off farm construction job so he couldn't be at the tour but he supports Robin's efforts.

Helpers began to arrive. Don Stewart, a Bern Township policeman, pedaled in with his young daughter and son on their bicycles. Another family friend, Warren Blatt brought his camera to record the event. Mary Haag and her niece came in a pick-up truck complete with two goats and a guinea pig. Dottie Spatz, Robin's mom and a seasoned tour veteran, conversed with Berk's Dairy Princess Ann Mitchell. Robin's middle daughter, Laura, stood by ready to take care of the youngest member of the family, Sarah. Beth Phillips, a cousin, accompanied the youngest children to the sand box.

After unloading the livestock from Mary's truck and tying them near the picnic table the adults and teens gathered on the concrete paths at the side of the house to wait for the children.

A blue van pulled in the driveway followed by a second van and a car. The kids of Easter Seal's Camp Lily had arrived. Adults surged forward to welcome the happy campers. Parents gathered children from the sandbox and followed. Easter Seal Kids are physically disabled children of all ages, but strange as it may seem, it wasn't the crutches, walkers or wheelchairs that left that all important first impression. It was the energy and enthusiasm of 13 kids who just happen to have some extra hardware.

One of the first campers out of the van was Mark Adams. Flashing a smile and sporting a Holstein t-shirt, Mark headed straight for one of the goats. "I got this shirt at an animal sanctuary we visited," he explained while scratching the goat's head. "I wore it especially for today," he added. Clyde, the goat, enjoyed the attention, occasionally taking a playful nip at someone's clothing, and rubbing his head on Mark's leg. Mark who attends Wilson School District is a bit of a farmer himself. "I've got 10 animals, three of them are sheep," he said proudly.

Counselors dressed in bright colored Camp Lily t-shirts finished unloading youngsters and soon everyone was busy. Some petted goats, others looked at the guinea pig. Robin's helpers snagged a couple of kittens and campers stroked them while sitting on bales of hay.

Robin pried the kids from the animals with promises that there will be time to pet them later. She sent Amy to fetch Madeline, an

aged Jersey that has seen 600 touring children this year alone. Don was on his first farm tour, Robin turned to him and asked, "Would you mind holding Madeline, Don." Don looked the situation over and agreed. Robin turned to her audience, some seated on hay bales, others at the picnic table while some preferred to stand.

"Our farm is different from a lot of places. Here women do the farming. We also have a different type of cows called Jerseys. They are smaller and easier for us to handle," Robin explained.

Amy pulled forward another animal. "This is Spotty. Does anyone know what breed of cow Spotty is?"

"It's a Holstein," one of the campers shouts.

Robin hands her a cow shaped pencil eraser and promised more prizes for kids that are on the ball. Amy pulls Spotty up next to Madeline. The healthy Holstein two-year-old dwarfs the aged Jersey and when Robin announced that Spotty could grow even more there were oohs and aahs.

The youngsters also were impressed by the cow horns that Robin passed around the group. One whispered to another, "You could really get hurt with these." Her confidante nodded.

The group also took Robin's discussion of litter very seriously. "Sometimes cows eat litter that's tossed into fields from the road. We put these magnets in the cows stomachs to try to attract the metal to them. But the magnets don't work very well and sometimes cows can get really hurt. So when you see litter I want you to pick it up." She instructed.

The mood lightened appreciably when Robin announced that everyone would have a chance to milk Madeline. And unlike many tours where a number of students back away, everybody in this crew wanted to milk the cow.

"I have had 600 kids here this year. Never has any tour been able to get enough milk in the bucket for me to have milk in my coffee. Let's see if you guys can," Robin said as the kids lined up.

With the support of two camp counselors and instruction from Robin, Stacey shyly tried her hand at milking. She gently massaged Madeline's udder, pulled the teat and milk squirted into the pail. Balancing on her crutches, Stacey beamed.

Stacy's magic touch was just the beginning. Zah Zerbe, a 13-year-old from Leesport leaned over from his wheelchair, and pulled Madeline's teat. "I did good!" he exclaimed pointing to the rising level of milk in the pail.

"Boy is this group smart. The last group that went through here couldn't get anything in the bucket. In the old days when farmers had to milk by hand 10 to 15 cows was all that they could handle. This is really hard work," Robin stated.

C.J. Stokes almost couldn't wait for his turn. His limp is slight and he had no problem getting down to the task at hand. His first couple of tugs were unsuccessful and he was ready to give up but with a little help from Robin he too was able to milk the cow. "Can't I do it just a little longer," he asked when his turn was up.

Robin answered, "I'm going to have to get you out here to milk cows for me."

C.J. milked just a minute longer then pointed out, "I bet you've got enough milk for two cups of coffee."

Robin laughed. Before the group was finished, all the campers, counselors, a couple of the helpers and several of their children had successfully milked the

cow. Robin announced that they would now go to the barn to see the modern way to milk cows. "There can't be much milk left in that cow," C.J. announced confidently.

For some students getting to the barn was a relatively easy matter. Several held hands with helpers. Others with more serious disabilities had counselors walk in front of them while they held on to the

counselors shoulders for support. Counselors also guided Zach and Leo Fies in their wheelchairs.

The boys watched enthralled from just outside the door while Robin washed Madeline's udder, hooked up the milker and milk splashed into the glass container.

In the parlor, C.J. pressed close to the jar unable to believe how much milk was still in Madeline.

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The Easter Seal kids finished the farm tour with some fresh home-churned ice cream.



Zach Zerbe didn't let his wheelchair keep him from enjoying life on the farm.



The kids threw their crutches aside to listen to tales on the farm.

Kid's Korner