

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Silence. Rare, perfect stillness. In the murky half-light of dawn, the quiet was absolute. Unfamiliar. Almost eerie. Without so much as a glance through a window, the awakening part of my mind knew the source of this unusual absence of noise.

Hours before, the bright glare of the barn's night light shimmered on the pristine whiteness, fading into muted shadows around the lawn and meadow.

"The snow isn't coming down any more," the Farmer had remarked at that late hour. "It's blowing parallel to the ground."

Now, the cumulative effect of these billions of tiny frozen droplets, piling together in the damp, biting cold, had seemingly insulated our world into silence.

How delicious to just lie there under a toasty warm electric blanket and listen to this absolute stillness. It was almost as if the world had just stopped operating.

Then, from two stories below, came the sound of the water pump kicking into gear. Thirsty cattle keep the pump operating almost non-stop. Now, nudging their noses at some fountain in quest for water, the cows' thirst broke the unusual early-morning quiet with a familiar background noise. The cows were still operating.

A chipper, cheery voice near my right ear further confirmed that the meditative silence was gone. The clock radio's alarm - an early morning radio disc jockey - offered a rundown on snow accumulations of the region and lists of daycare centers opening late.

A low rumble, rapidly growing louder into a roar, and an accompanying flashing yellow light momentarily lighting the dark bedroom, confirmed that the township trucks were busy making the roadways passable. Indeed, the rest of the world was still operating, albeit with two-hour delays.

Perhaps it is just me that has trouble operating normally under fresh snow conditions.

Indeed, the self-discipline I can usually impose on myself to knuckle down to the computer, calculator, or cattle records gets blown away with a morning blanketed under fresh snow.

Fresh birdseed must be scattered, of course, especially since the tree feeder ran empty while my handy extension ladder, on long-term loan from the shop, has been temporarily borrowed back.

Slogging through the drifts around the barn, any excuse to pause in the shelter of the haymow is a welcome one. It comes in the form of a loud, welcoming "Meow!", from the farm's current most beautiful cat. The 10-pound "Skunk" is far prettier than his name, with a thick, black coat accented with white feet, belly and face blaze. He pokes out from the stack of hay, begging to be held. Who could resist such a come on, even without boot-high snow outside the door?

Inside stuff must wait while snow is cleared from the front walk and porch. More inside jobs go on hold while inventory of the bird feeder visitors is made,

accompanied by a cup of hot chocolate and leftover holiday cookies. A female cardinal lands on the windowsill, apparently confused by the greenery of houseplants on the inside, and pecks at the glass, special thrill on this pleasurable morning.

And it would be unforgivable to not try out the cross-country skis

on this fresh snow. They glide unusually well across the packed snow of the road, offering an exhilarating ride down the hill to the farmstead.

Even making lunch on such a day offers an excuse to work near the kitchen windows, each framing a sort of Currier and Ives-like winter scene.

By mid-afternoon, between answering phone calls and moseying to the window to look upon the snow and the birds, not a whole lot else has been accomplished. And yet it has been a most enjoyable respite.

Good thing it doesn't snow every day. I'd probably goof the whole winter away.

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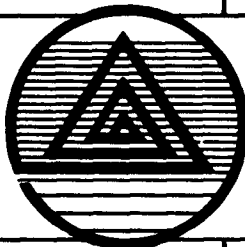


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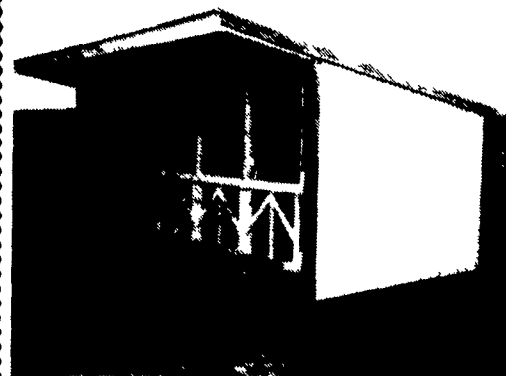
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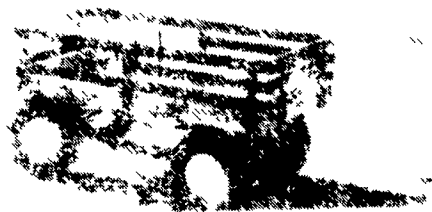
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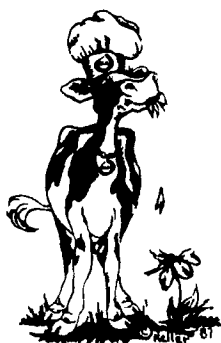
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