

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



A sort of guardian angel keeps watch over the open kitchen-dining-living area of our vintage farmhouse.

The halo above her head is of disheveled, straw-colored hair - with visible roots, a receding hairline and bald spot not quite concealed even with careful arrangement of the remaining tousled locks. Her garb is a lace-trimmed, yellow dress, faded from the years and with a ragged tear on the left sleeve.

Permanent smudges mar her smooth, flesh-like tones, though her blue eyes with their dark lashes remain shiny bright. Her lips are pursed in a permanent, small opening, just the size to accept the small baby-bottle accessory that came with her in the original, cello-wrapped packaging box.

This 12-inch plastic baby is a precious memory from our first-born's childhood. It's one of the perhaps three dolls remaining from the early years of a more outside-oriented "tomboy," who

much preferred barn and field action to maternalistic play. In fact, the Farmer retrieved this baby doll some months ago from where it had long ago been abandoned...in the old barn.

A spare room in the house has been turned topsy-turvy in the last week by a childhood memory - and a dream - of our youngest. He has "reorganized" the stuff stashed there to accommodate a platform for the inexpensive electric train of his boyhood, track, engine and cars packed away many years ago. I've already been interviewed by this railroad operation as a potential scenery painter, succumbing after years of protests that we have no space for such a layout.

As they (and we!) age, the toys of childhood become the treasures of adults.

If you don't believe that, go search out some old toys. A recent look at a friend's toy farm equipment collection highlighted the value we adults are putting on our memories. Further questioning of

several farmer friends confirmed what I suspected.

Farmers are still playing with their favorite toys - they're just bigger sized. Almost every one recalled their hands-down favorite childhood toy was either of the farm equipment or truck lineage. And one farm wife confessed that, though she had her share of dolls, she was more likely to be out with the farm toys.

The Farmer admitted that his favorite childhood toy... wasn't his. His heart belonged to a prized, die-cast metal truck and flatbed trailer toy owned by a cousin. When the cousin's family moved, and the toy was discarded in the housecleaning process, guess who managed to retrieve it for countless more hours of play?

And, while trying to reorganize the stash misplaced by the impending railroad yard, I found in a drawer two of my own childhood treasures. These two small dolls, one a bride and one dressed in the colorful ethnic garb of a foreign nation, are today's collectibles. The bride is somewhat the worse for the wear of numerous play weddings put on by small hands, but her companion in the drawer remains almost like new.

How I wish I had back the doll-house of my earlier years. My brothers' windup trains. And the toy farm equipment which doubtless helped one to recuperate more quickly after emergency hospitalization as a child.

Today's youngsters seem to get

so many gifts, so many things, that one wonders sometimes if any of them have much meaning because of the sheer volume of play items available. Will the fought-over Cabbage Patch dolls of a few years back, the space stations, video games, the dinosaur figures, or Teenage Mutant Turtles so currently "hot" someday stir fond memories when today's generation so eagerly awaiting Christmas

are all grown up?

Someday, I'm going to give our children their previous toys at Christmas.

Someday. After they're old enough to really want them.

May your holiday season overflow with much love and many happy memories, and may you be blessed with a very Merry Christmas!

Let Nature Decorate The Holidays

NEWARK, De. — It's not coincidence that holly and pine are traditional Christmastide decorations. Early winter is the best time to prune evergreens.

"Most evergreens thrive on light pruning this time of year," said Jo Mercer, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension ornamental horticulture agent. "So you have plenty of opportunity to collect an assortment of greens, berries, cones and flower buds for holiday wreaths, swags and centerpieces."

Mercer suggests pines, arborvitae, junipers, false cypress hollies, rhododendron, magnolias and spruce as good sources for greens.

"But don't use hemlock or yew," the agent adds. "Hemlock needles shed too quickly, and yew wills."

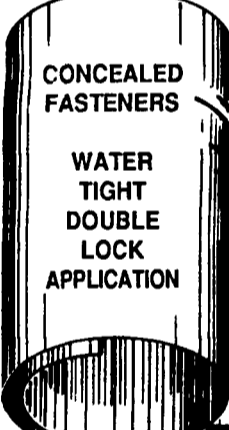
Holly stems, pyracantha and cotoneaster berries create festive seasonal detail on a wreath or

swag, as do cones from pines, spruce and hemlocks. Add a distinctive, natural effect with flower buds of andromeda, rhododendron and magnolia.

"Practice careful pruning techniques when gathering evergreens," advises Mercer. "Don't shear off the tips of branches. Instead make clean cuts at a main branch or node. The plant should look essentially the same when you are done."

Plan to make the decoration soon after gathering the greens, while the branches are still pliable. If this isn't possible, keep cuttings fresh by moistening the foliage slightly and storing in a plastic bag. Put the bag in an unheated garage or shed.

Some people use anti-transparent sprays such as Wilt-Pruf on their creations before they attach bows and other ornaments.



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