

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



"It's always different. But it's never disappointing."

That's the evaluation I overheard The Farmer relating recently about one of our family's favorite "escape hatches."

Everyone needs an escape hatch. A place to get away from the phone and the daily routine. A place to read, to think, to meditate. A place to get in touch with your own inner self. A place to share with those loved ones whose lives are so intertwined with your own that it's easy to take one another for granted.

It might be a quiet corner of a park or a busy ski slope. A grassy meadow or a movie theatre. A sandy beach with the rhythmic break of foam-topped waves or simply a sun-splashed corner of your own back yard.

One of our favorite escapes for running away to is "the mountains." A vague-sounding description, but every member of our family instantly knows what it means.

"The mountains" is the center-state site of a rustic, utilitarian

cabin communally maintained by a group of family and local friends. With no central heat and no indoor plumbing, its magnetic draw lies not in cushy, comfortable amenities, but in the peaceful, lovely setting.

Tall, whispering hemlocks that tower over the little cabin. The mountain stream running just steps behind - clear, icy water chattering as it tumbles over mossy rocks. White tails of deer glimpsed as they bound into the laurel. Squirrels chasing each other up and down the thick trunks of old oaks.

And birds. Chattering chickadees and perky titmice. The bright blue flash and scolding scream of the bluejays squabbling over corn under the deer feeder. A pair of cardinals, the more shy, pale-feathered female hanging back while her brilliant red mate scouts the territory.

In fact, it was while gazing out the back window of the cabin on a weekend several years ago that my interest in birds took root. A bluish-gray, black and white little

feathered fellow came walking down the tree trunk, headfirst, just beyond the window. Headfirst. That was fascinating.

A subsequent search of the bird book of course identified the headfirst trunk stroller as a nuthatch, still a favorite to watch because its tree-travel method is so amusing and gravity-defying.

The farming valley that leads to "the mountains" adds a further draw with a variety of hawks. We've watched harriers gliding low over the rolling fields and seen numerous red-tails, including a pair engaged in a minor confrontation, probably over territory. A more recent spotting was of a broad-winged hawk, which con-

veniently flew right toward the car from a fencerow tree perch, then soared in ascending circles until we lost sight.

Most winters bring snow cover to the mountain valley, but this year's dryness has left the forest floor mostly bare. Sleds and cross-country skis are often put to use on the nearby mountain roads and trails, but barely enough white stuff could be found on a recent visit to roll a decent snowball.

So, instead we hike, scouting for signs of deer and turkey, debating if a shredded dead tree stump was worked over by a bear or a porcupine. Our son and I explore a section of mountain new to me, searching for swampy-area

ponds he and The Farmer have both stumbled onto while skiing and cycling. Climbing a logging trail uphill behind a son less than half your age and with legs twice as long is a breathless sort of adventure. But worth the effort.

We find ice-encrusted ponds - five of em' - scare out a deer, and crawl through the debris of newly-logged hemlocks and hardwoods. Light is fading on our return, weary-legged but with new terrain etched in our memory maps. A 15-degree temperature derails the plan to retrace the steps next morning with The Farmer.

Next time. On another escape. Just as soon as possible.

Teens Don't Know Beans About Food

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.)— Teenagers may love to eat, but a recent Penn State survey reveals they have limited knowledge about smart food shopping and basic food safety.

The survey polled 64 teenagers at Pennsylvania 4H Achievement Days. "Although these young people are knowledgeable about nutrition, most have surprisingly little awareness of how to shop for and prepare food wisely," says Dr. Jan F. Scholl, assistant professor of agricultural and extension education at Penn State.

"Similar studies conducted at other universities confirm that young people have trouble identifying which products are the best buys. Many young people aren't aware of some of the simplest measures to avoid contaminating food, such as washing your hands before preparing meals.

"It's especially important to teach teenagers good sanitation practices because so many of them prepare foods at home and work in food-related businesses."

The survey revealed that teens know little about the risks and

benefits of certain food handling practices. "For example, more than 50 percent felt that eating rhubarb leaves — which are poisonous — was a health benefit," says Scholl. "Seventeen percent felt that using soapy water to wash fruits and vegetables was a good idea."

Common sense food safety practices, such as avoiding raw eggs to reduce the risk of Salmonella poisoning, also were not widely known. Twenty-one percent of the teens indicated that drinking homemade eggnog made from raw eggs was not a health risk. More than 10 percent didn't know you shouldn't buy dented canned goods.

Teens were slightly more savvy about food shopping than about food safety. Yet more than one-third could not calculate the cost per ounce of cheese, and close to half couldn't calculate the cost per ounce of cereal. They simply selected the biggest box as the best buy.

Despite much coverage in the media about the need to reduce fat

in the diet, 25 percent of the teens couldn't determine the fat content of a labeled package of ground beef. Fourteen percent believed lard was low in saturated fat.

"It's clearly not enough just to teach young people nutrition and food preparation," says Scholl. "We also must teach them about shopping and food safety."

Scholl and food science faculty at Penn State recently received a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to help young people and their families make better decisions about food handling practices. She is preparing educational materials for 4H groups and will work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to disseminate materials through PENN-LINK, a computer network that connects teachers across the state.

"More and more people — both young and old — are interested in managing their diets and leading healthier lives," she says. "By reaching them at an early age, we can help them develop good habits for a lifetime."

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