

Fire Takes House, But Lynch Family Still Has Important Things

GAY N. BROWNLEE
Somerset Co. Correspondent
FRIEDENS (Somerset Co.) — Exactly two months after fire destroyed their house on an icy day in March, Gary and Nancy Lynch look around them and see their four, happy children — Mike, Andy, Lauren and Jessie — and their livelihood — a 90 head Holstein dairy — and say that life is good. In fact, it is wonderful!

We still have all the important things, they say.

With the six of them living in a large mobile home, things are cramped, no doubt about it, but the Lynch's are making the best of an unexpected situation created by the loss of their 160-year-old farm house.

The day it happened all the kids but Lauren, who was ill, were in school. Gary was out running errands in the area. Around 9 a.m., Nancy had checked the wood-burning stove in the basement and everything seemed in order. Soon she noticed a strange popping sound coming from downstairs. Smoke assailed her as soon as she opened the basement door.

The fire then spread quickly in the old dwelling. Nancy dialed 911. The call went through but before she could give all the infor-

mation, the telephone lines melted.

She dashed outside to the car but had no keys. To return inside for them would have spelled disaster for her. Flames were licking out the basement windows. Fortunately, another vehicle nearby had keys in it. Lauren was outside in her bare feet with an ice storm in progress.

Until the fire department arrived, neighbors tried futilely to withstand the blaze with fire extinguishers.

Meanwhile, Gary noticed that firetrucks were leaving the firehouse. He recalls thinking how awful it was that there was a fire to battle on such an ugly day. As he drove toward home, he knew from the location of the smoke he saw that the trouble must be at his own farm.

"I thought, 'I hope it's the barn,'" he said. "I knew Nancy and Lauren were home." Although he was driving a four-wheel drive, Gary says he couldn't make any headway to get home faster. "That's probably the sickest I've ever been in my life," he said.

Five fire companies tried unsuccessfully to save the structure. The Lynch's lost all their possessions except what they were



Standing in front of their temporary housing, a mobile home, is the Lynch family: Gary, Lauren, Jessie, Andy, Mike, and Nancy.



This computer feeding machine saves Gary and Nancy Lynch many hours of labor in the barn. They call it Herbie.



Here, Herbie has doled out the proper mixture of feed to one of the registered Holstein cows in the herd of Gary and Nancy Lynch.

wearing at the time. Even the lines to the water pump went, along with the pump itself. There was no water for the cows.

Outrageous words are sometimes spoken at just such a moment and Nancy says the ludicrous statement she made while the house was burning was, "Well, the mending's done." She said, "They (bystanders) looked at me like I was nuts." It seems that the Lynch mending chores never topped her list of favorite things to do.

"Before the day was over," said Gary, "we were swamped with food, clothing and cash. The response was overwhelming."

"It's like you look at it and it's not yours and then it is," said Nancy. "You phase in and out."

By the following morning, a radio announcement had to be broadcast to stop item donations. In fact, after they sorted through the mountains of donations and kept all they could use, Gary said six pickup-truck loads of good clothing had to be hauled away. Among the recipients of the excess donations were the Salvation Army and World's Attic in Somerset, which is a self-help and thrift store.

Even their Church of the Brethren pastor who has worked with disasters testified he had never seen such a response.

"We were lucky we were on Farm Credit's bookkeeping system," said Gary.

Just days prior to the loss, Gary and Nancy officially received the top DHIA dairy herd production



On the living room couch and tossing a tennis ball is Rebecca Cline, Gainesville, Fla., aunt to Jessie, center and Lauren Lynch, right.



Laddie the collie farm dog is pictured with Nancy.