

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



A knocked-down gate is a pretty dependable indication that something is wrong around here. Usually it indicates some four-footed friend - of the bovine type - out running amuck.

Sure enough. The pen, where just a short time before I'd fed a baby bull calf his breakfast bottle, was glaringly empty.

Another calf had skipped town. So to speak.

One escaped calf does not a cri-

sis make. They'll usually manage to slip in with the cows and we'll retrieve them easily enough. Or, on occasion, a bull calf will high-tail it toward the fields and lay down to hide in a field of alfalfa or snuggle in along a grassy bank.

"Look at this," the Farmer commented about a half hour later, glancing out the kitchen window during a morning cookie break.

Our runaway was trotting up the field road from the meadow,

where he had apparently been cooling his heels on the sunny side of the remains of a big bale stack. Close behind was friend Frank, who spied the escapee as he drove up the road and headed him in the homeward direction.

Even before the Farmer closed in from the opposite direction, the calf saw what he took to be a way out of this two-to-one contest.

He took a flying leap in to the upper pond.

This pond is not large, but it is about ten feet deep. Watching from the back porch, I saw a black-and-white blur furiously paddling through the open water beyond the rim of cattail foliage.

One very wet - and no doubt surprised - bull calf was returned to dry off back home in his pen. When I climbed the gate to feed him that evening, he bawled, lowered his head, and threatened to ram me.

Apparently he didn't appreciate the swimming lesson.

Unpredictable animal behavior is the predictable animal behavior here - one more thing that makes

farm living so enjoyable and interesting.

Take the geese, for instance. Matter of fact, we thought someone had.

Early this month, "our" geese hatched out six fluffy yellow-brown goslings from their mid-pond nesting site. When several days passed and the goslings still numbered six, we rejoiced in the pair's good fortune and lack of predator devastation this go-round.

Then, the entire family disappeared. No little geese. No big geese.

After our initial dismay, no feathers, no scene of destruction, no evidence of "fowl" play of any kind seemed a bit reassuring. Surely foxes or dogs or hawks or owls couldn't have wiped out eight geese without some sort of trace. When they got the guinea hatch last spring, at least we found feathers.

Perhaps the appearance of more geese at the pond, encroached on their turf despite Papa Goose's best defensive efforts, had scared off our little family. Maybe they had moved down into the brushy areas along the meadow creek for more peace and quiet.

Several search trips through with the three-wheeler yielded no sign.

But a suggestion that the geese might have moved to the closest neighboring pond was right on target. The fact that it's probably a half-mile away, either through the meadow or the short-cut route via the neighboring wooded housing development, made the walking journey for those short-legged little babies seem highly improbable.

A week later, they returned to our pond, hung around a couple of days, and split again for the neighbors.

Not long after sunrise a few mornings later, they again came trudging back up through the meadow. Soon after, five interloper geese splashed down. Papa dispatched them elsewhere in a hurry.

Apparently this is home, but our neighbor keeps his pond banks beautifully mown and neat - making for easier walking and better predator watch. I promptly looped short our pond-area grass, which we had left grow for the heifers to nibble.

Next thing, these geese will demand landscaping.

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