

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



He knows, instinctively, what's coming.

When the large black-rubber feed tub used for cattle shows is hauled into the milk house, he knows.

When the shampoo container and the yellow rubber gloves are carried out, he knows.

When the five-gallon buckets are filled with warm water, ready for rinsing, he knows.

And Solomon goes slinking off behind the milk tank. His tail wags only slightly, his head hangs down and he comes to my call with obvious reluctance.

Getting a bath is just not our dog's favorite activity.

And watching him scratch persistently is not mine. A long-haired Sheltie, Solomon has always been prone to skin irritations. Regular baths with a

medicated dog shampoo have proven one of the better preventive measures.

Given the mud of recent weeks and his affinity for chasing the three-wheeler, hanging out around the farm shop and the barns, regular baths would be in order anyway. Especially since he'll sneak into the house every chance he gets.

Despite his lack of bath enthusiasm, he trotted into the milk house recently and cooperatively stood by the big tub so I could lift him in for a sudsing. Waited patiently through the final rinse with no attempt to escape. And then parked his chin on my knee for a dry-down with an old T-shirt.

His agreeableness toward the bath stirred up thoughts of another dog that recently welcomed me with open paws.

That morning, just before the holidays, was sunny, bright and cold. Cresting the little ridge just east of the farm, headed home from some last-minute shopping, I spied the dog lying in the thick

fields.

A black Labrador. A dog I'd never seen before.

I wheeled the car into the grass past the dog and hopped out.

Not smart. Common sense says stopping to check on a strange dog is not a smart thing to do. When it comes to animals, my common sense sometimes takes a back seat to feelings.

This dog promptly rolled over on his back and stuck all four feet into the air, the classic pose of submission. An old dog, with calluses on his legs. Incredibly friendly, his tail wagging the instant his head was stroked.

An old dog that obviously had been loved. By someone. Somewhere. But no collar. No identification. And seemingly lost.

Someone had taught this dog not to get into strangers' cars — though this stranger was foolish enough to invite a stray dog to do so.

Parking the car at the house, I

headed back up the road to call the Lab. He was already on his way. Obviously in need of companionship. And probably food.

Then Solomon spotted the old fellow and took off toward him. The Lab turned tail and disappeared around the only standing cornfield nearby. Putting Sol into the house, I started up the road again to call the stray. But he was already past the other end of the small field and still going.

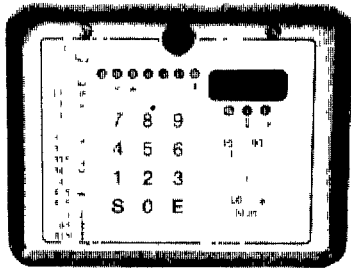
Though I called and whistled, the stray Lab with the big head and the ready affection kept going. Lost. Scared. Hunting for a safer place.

He disappeared, trotting out the road through the development of homes adjoining us. Had he run off from someone? Slipped a collar? Been dumped nearby? Was he headed home? What would happen to him?

It bothered me a lot that day. And the next. It still does.

I'd feel better knowing a dog like that found a friend.

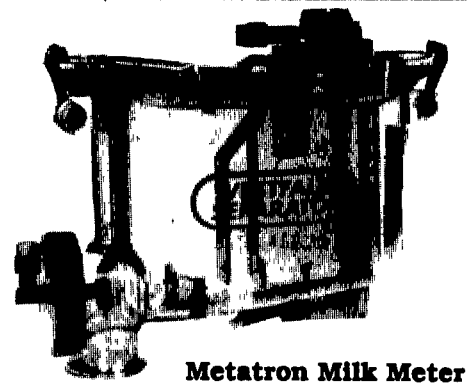
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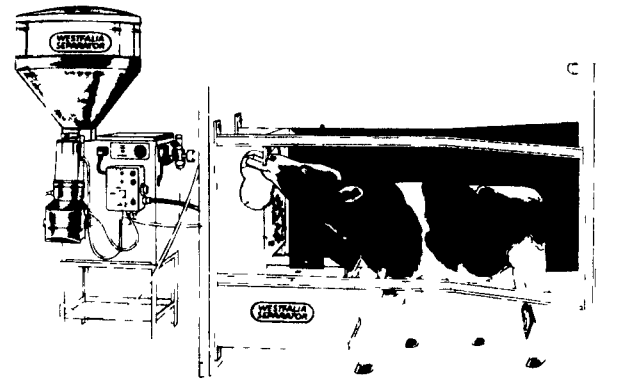
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