

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



An unusual addition to one of the front porch flower boxes is visual evidence of a rash of activity overrunning the farmstead.

This nest, tucked between two calendula plants, is neatly woven of straw and grasses, the outside carefully plastered together with mud. Its circular near-perfection and tightness of weave suggests that these were not novice nest-builders. And the clutch of four aqua-blue eggs inside identifies the nest owners as robins.

But the porch box is not where this particular mother robin chose to craft her fine piece of construction. While she may be a master builder, her site selection left a lot to be desired. Her house, built on the alternator of a tractor motor, would certainly have proved hazardous to her baby birds — to say nothing of the tractor motor — when the engine heated and the nest went into flames.

My message to the probably-irate robin, could we communicate, is simply the same unappreciated one often laid on the kids in earlier years: "This is for your own good."

Faring better in this springtime hatching season was an egg of a different sort. In fact, when I first saw the egg's "contents," it already had perky tailfeathers about two inches long on a body far too small to be emitting the shrill, loud peeps coming out of its tiny beak.

The season's lone chick is tough as nails. Watching over it are its buff-beige, semi-tame, half-bantam mother and the beautiful, scrappy small rooster that adopted us a couple of years ago, besting roosters twice his size for the little hen's affection.

First time I spotted this chick, it was attempting to join mama on

the evening roost, some six-feet above the heifer pen floor on a two-by-four. When it finally got there, the little wren-sized chick wiggled between her feet, perched there way up on the top edge of the hay trough, the pair settled down for the night.

Seems there would have been much softer, more comfortable places for a hen and chick to spend the night, like up in the haymow. Of course, the barn cats favor such cushy spots as well. So, perhaps she told the chick, as they hunkered down on their bed of hard lumber: "This is for your own good."

And still another farmyard mother recently eyeballed her offspring and made a decision that would be "for your own good."

Veteran barn cat and champion rodent eliminator Mama Gray appeared some weeks ago much more slim than she had been the previous day. Knowing that she stashes her offspring in bizarre places around the barn, we all kept watch the next few weeks for Mama Gray's litter.

As usual, she revealed her babies in her own good time. Headed out through the yard for evening milking recently, we met Mama Gray coming toward the house, lugging in her mouth a tigerish-striped kitten so big and pudgy she had to put it down every few steps to rest.

After a quick investigation, The Farmer pointed out her destination. A solar-heat gathering extension, about 18-inches wide, protrudes from the lower part of the greenhouse front. Black-plastic

lining enhances the heat absorption. A Virginia creeper vine took root inside last summer and has happily grown there in the solar collector. Until I figure out how to eliminate this tough, pesty weed without tearing out glass, it continues to thrive.

Into this cozy, sheltered "solarium," Mama Gray has moved her four chubby kittens. As they grow, Mama will have captive two-legged babysitters and flowerbed playgrounds for her offspring. In the meantime, the playful kittens are beginning to flatten the unwanted greenery inside the glass.

A pleased-as-punch-with-herself Mama Gray grins at me with those big yellow eyes; I know what she's thinking: "Well, you wanted to be rid of that Virginia creeper."

"This is for your own good."

Host Families Needed

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Barbara Szekely from Hungary and Sascha Hegwein from Germany are two of several students who still need American homes for the 1993-94 school year. They will come to end of August and will leave when school is over in June. They would like to live with a family and attend the high school in the family's school district in order to learn first hand about the life of an American teenager and to share their culture with others. They bring their own insurance and spending money, and the family provides room and board and receives an income tax deduction.

AYUSA International, a non-profit organization, has local counselors who interview the fam-

ilies, provide activities for the students and host families during the year, and try to help the students, families, and schools to enjoy their international experience. Time is running short because many high schools require that exchange students applications be in by June 1.

Barbara wants to be a journalist and likes swimming, reading, dogs, cats, horseback riding, theater, cooking and traveling. Sascha plays the piano and likes sailing, tennis, computers, basketball, karate and stamp collecting. They both have excellent grades and speak good English. If you would like to help one of these bright young people realize their dream of coming to our country please, call Janet Erb at (717) 653-5536.

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