



Sharing the farm with Fresh Air children is an annual event for Ruth and Lloyd Martin. Here, daughter Ann, left, and Angela from New York City take a break from trampoline jumping, a favorite activity of the children.

Farms Are For Families To Share

LOU ANN GOOD

**Lancaster Farming Staff
LITITZ (Lancaster Co.)** —
"Farms are for families and I want to share ours," Ruth Martin said. For 31 years, she and her husband Lloyd have opened their arms and their farm to Fresh Air children from New York City.

The delight that shines from the eyes of these children when they bottle feed a calf, help dig potatoes, and pedal bicycle on the Martin's paved driveway, is reward enough for Ruth.

"Seeing them learn is so fulfilling," she said. "They need to learn the simplest things — that a watermelon must ripen before you pick it — that seeds must be planted before beans grow — and that lying and stealing are not necessary."

Many families are hesitant to host fresh air children because of potential problems. That doesn't stop the Martin family.

"Sure, there are problems. You can't outline the problems ahead of time because each child is different. But the solution is to find a workable answer. You face the problems when they arise. Be firm. It always works out," she said.

Her philosophy for living is "A person who has faith to move mountains must first move little hills."

In her years of caring for Fresh Air children, Ruth has had plenty of opportunities to move "little hills" and even mountains.

One time, a boy arrived in their home only two days after he had witnessed someone being murdered in an elevator. The first two days, he would lean against the wall and cry from the awful memory. Ruth's heart ached for him. In a few days, he bubbled with happiness.

He summed up his transformation by saying, "I feel better since you told me that you love me and God loves me, too."

The Martins hosted Fresh Air children before they had any of their own. Now, their family includes Kathy, 24; Tim, 21; Ann, 17; John, 15; and Mike, 12. The children are so enthusiastic about the program that one daughter vows, "When I get married, I will have three or four Fresh Air children at the same time."

Several times, the Martins did host siblings together. "But we

found it worked better to have them at different times," Ruth said. "They seemed to argue more or the older one would boss the younger one."

In the first years of the program, the Martins also had Fresh Air children return to the farm for a week during Christmas vacation. In fact, two weeks before the Martins' first child was born, they had two children for a week. It snowed and the children were constantly in and out of the house.

"The kitchen floor was a mess from all the tracked-in snow," Ruth said. "I decided not to wash it on Saturday because I knew that it would get just as dirty the next day."

When Ruth took the children to the train terminal on Monday and returned home, she was pleasantly surprised to find her husband had washed the floor.

"He hadn't done it before and he hasn't done it since," Ruth said.

Ruth still uses a wringer washer to do the laundry. "Every child likes to help with that, but I really need to keep a close eye on them at all times," she said.

Boys especially, the Martins find, need to be watched closely.

At first, the Martins were hesitant to take boys on the farm because there are so many ways they could get hurt. Ruth said that they found boys must be constantly watched because they are more daring, "but they just love the farm and it's so rewarding to see how much they enjoy it."

Since the Martins have older children, it makes it easier to keep a closer tab on the activities of the Fresh Air children.

The Martins milk 49 cows on their 72-acre farm, and have rabbits, cats, and a Dalmatian dog. At one time, they also had pigs — a real favorite with Fresh Air children.

The different lifestyles become evident in everyday living. Only two of the children in the 31 years the Martins have kept them have grown up with a father living in the home. Eating habits are different. One child absolutely insisted that potato chips needed to be bought from the store each day because her family always threw away leftovers instead of tightly closing the bag to preserve them.

While the children like corn on the cob and watermelons from the

garden, they are accustomed to different meals than farm families.

Ruth adapts by serving lots of spaghetti and homemade pizza during the child's stay so much so that her husband once remarked, "That's enough spaghetti to last until next July."

Farm families usually go to bed early, but it's difficult to get city children to do so. They like to sleep late in the morning. Ruth said that she lets each one sleep as long as desired because it is easier to have a happy child. But that doesn't mean that she is lax in discipline otherwise. The children are given chores just like her own.

"Some children sulk a little and complain that they don't need to wash dishes at home, but I don't back down," Ruth said.

She finds that it works best to get children as young as possible then they cooperate better each year they return because the children know ahead of time what is expected of them.

While most Fresh Air children are poor writers, Ruth said, many do send pictures from time to time, and as they grow up and marry, ask the Martins to host their grandchildren.

Lloyd takes advantages of teaching the children that there is another way of life other than depending on free handouts. When children say, "Look at all this free food you get from the farm," Lloyd tells them, "It isn't free. I bought the farm, I pay taxes, and I planted the seed."

Ruth used to wave aside his explanations with the words, "Oh, they're too little to understand." Now, she believes that children grasp a lot of things that make sense later in life. She thinks it's valuable for them to learn how food is grown and processed.

Fresh Air children are often amazed that the Martins "live in this big house all by yourself."

Some people don't want to host Fresh Air children because they don't have enough space or believe the house isn't furnished very well, but Ruth said, "These children are not use to luxuries. They never complain."

While she does not want to minimize the problems and inconveniences of hosting a Fresh Air child, Ruth wants to encourage

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