

## On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



"Where's Marvinna?"

Luckily no one was around, or they would have asked why I was talking to myself. Again.

Having gone into the barn just prior to starting evening milking chores, I'd noticed that one of the box stall doors was hanging open. Stall resident Marvinna was nowhere in sight.

A big, old, tame cow, Marvinna has long been a favorite of ours among the girls in the herd. She

knows where she belongs, goes there when she comes into the barn and causes few disruptions by running up and down the alley or jumping into stalls that belong to other herd members.

Our vet has often commented on how he likes this particular cow. Even the classifier on his last visit paid per the honor of scoring her as high as he could without making her Excellent, since her udder was absolutely bone-dry at

the time. Having a dry cow scored Excellent is almost unheard of.

This old cow possesses some genetic, inborn high-strung tendencies. Her sire was a bull called Astronaut, aptly named as it turned out, because most of his daughters quickly went "into orbit" over the slightest non-routine event. As Astronaut daughters go, Marvinna might be considered one of the more laid back of his offspring.

A few years ago, she managed to completely slice off a teat from her udder in an accident with a piece of metal. Though we were devastated and fearful of how we would ever handle her inbred nervousness through a painful injury, our fears turned out to be unfounded. She barely even lifted a foot through the treatment and healing process. That quarter of her udder ceased to produce milk and has not caused her a single problem since.

But where was she now? Probably at the far end of the feed alley, with her muzzle buried deep in a feed cart piled full of corn.

That's where escapees generally gravitate to, gulping down snatched feed so fast they can hardly swallow, as if knowing they will promptly be caught.

Then I glanced up — and there stood Marvinna.

She had apparently made her trek around the feed alley which runs the length of the barn in front of both rows of cows. Either she had eaten her fill — or the carts were empty. I unfastened the protective chain which was still up across one of the alleyways. She strolled to the pen's open door and stepped inside, with a distinct aloofness that silently questioned why it had taken me so long to notice her there.

Most of our cows are of relatively calm temperament, like Marvinna, primarily because cows that are "kickers" are just too dangerous to fool with very long. But then you have those inevitable bovine individuals that are more irritating than they are dangerous. Cows like Pokey.

Pokey is badly-named. Dancer

— or even Clogger — would be more descriptive of her nature. She has the nervous habit of constantly lifting her left foot while being milked. Never the right foot, just the left. And, because she's always dancing with that left foot, she keeps working a little closer and a little closer to the next cow on her left.

After her "dry" period vacation, Pokey recently calved and came back into the milking string. Figuring she always wanted to wiggle to the left when being milked from the right, we switched her to the opposite side of the barn, where she would be milked from the left. Maybe it would serve to neutralize her tendency to drift sideways in her stall.

Good theory, huh? 'Cept, it didn't work. Pokey immediately found that by "clogging" with her left foot, she could stomp the milker hoses and remove the pesty machine that was distracting her from stuffing her face with silage. After a couple of milkings with that routine, we threw up our hands and switched her back to being right-side milked. She hasn't removed the milker since.

Cow, 1; humans, 0.

Such aggravating cow habits make Marvinna's harmless escape and return trips look downright amusing.

I thought about Pokey — and gave Marvinna a hug.

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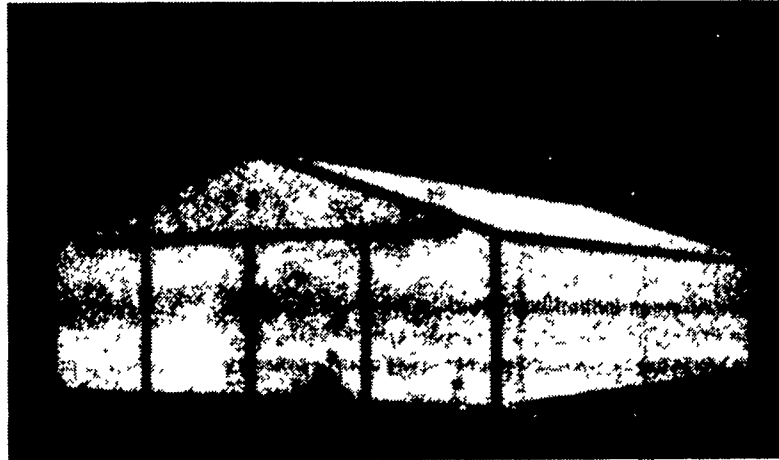
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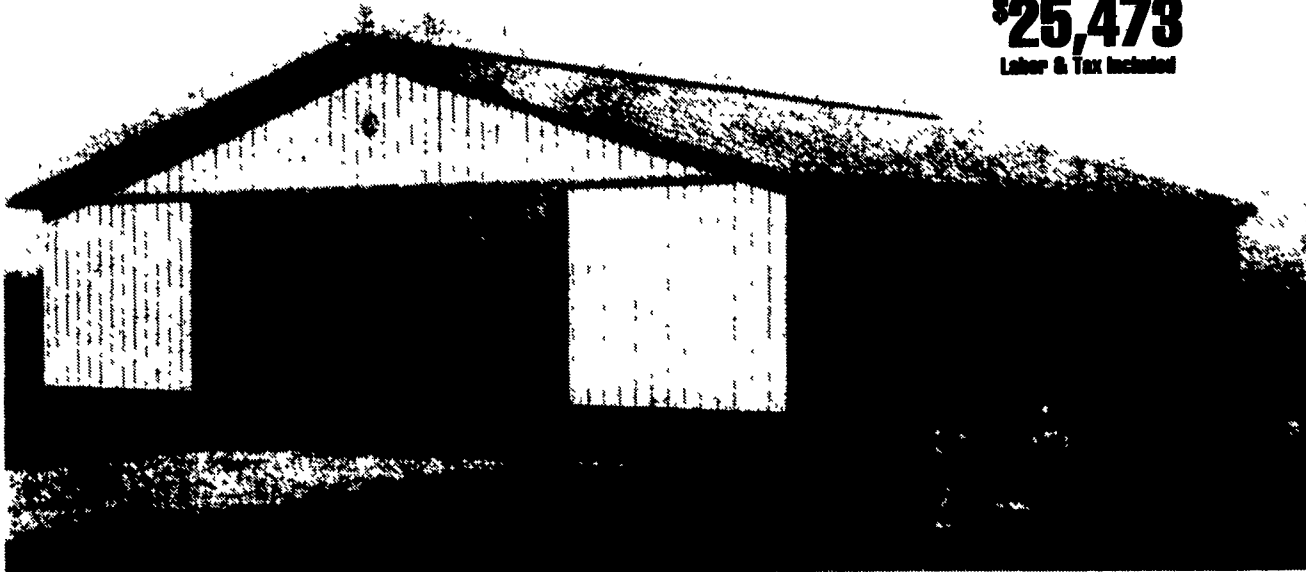


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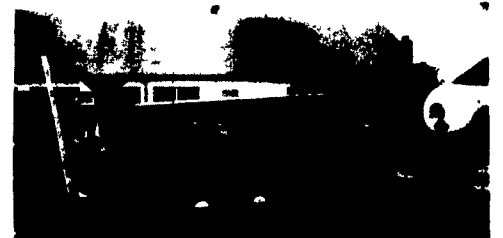
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