

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Empty, just as I thought. While the woodstove was still quite warm, the log sections stuffed in earlier had burned down to a glowing bed of coals. And the night was to be another frosty one. Empty. What looked like a sizable supply of wood in the basement, stacked there a few days before after morning barn chores, had dwindled to a scattering of wood crumbs and bits of bark. Time to refill the space from the main supply kept on the basement porch beneath a bright blue tarp. Empty. Well, almost. All that remained under the tarp on the porch were a few odds and ends of firewood chopped a little too long to fit the stove. Getting desperate, I dove into the emergency, backup, wood supply in the woodshed. The woodshed holds my supply of flowerpots, garden mulch bags, tools, plant flats, the lawn mower and other such miscellaneous outside-use items — oh, plus a small

reserve of cut, dry wood. But not more than a few wheelbarrow-loads worth. Making it, well, almost empty. A couple of armloads of wood I carted inside would hold us overnight — but not much more. We need a firewood stocking session — or the fuel oil tank filled. The Farmer is way ahead of me; he had already planned spending the next afternoon restocking the empty firewood supply. Cutting firewood here on the farm actually serves a dual purpose. It saves considerably on heating costs. Our oil furnace runs only on extremely cold and windy days, very early mornings when the stove has burned low, or if we've been away and not kept the woodfire stoked. Cutting firewood also helps keep the pastures, fence rows and edges of fields along woods clean of debris. Few wind-packed storms — summer or winter —

roll through the farm without tossing down a limb or two. Sometimes we lose whole old trees, especially since the Gypsy Moth infestations of past years. So we burn the "falls," the "drops," the "trimmings" which are already on the ground and which clutter sections of the meadow or get in the way along the edge of fields. It makes for some interestingly-shaped firewood sometimes — but the stove doesn't care if the stuff has kinks, curves, knots or holes. And, it burns fine. On this particular "harvest" afternoon, the three of us — man, woman, dog — bounce in the pickup to a distant, hilly corner of the heifer pasture, where a couple of large, dead limbs have toppled out of fence row trees. Sunlight bathes the meadow in a warm November afternoon glow and the sky hangs overhead in a clear, gorgeous shade of blue. A perfect day for this harvest. Oaks have turned a leathery brown but the maples are still golden. The local mockingbird clan scatters as we truck through the creek-bottom area and climb toward the farthest hill. And our resident redtail hawk, resentful of our disturbance, gracefully glides out of a tree near the field road, sails across the meadow and lands in the distance. The Farmer slices through downed limbs with the blaring saw. Solomon goes off to sniff at groundhog holes and enjoy whiffs of rabbit trail in the meadow grass. I trek to several trees hanging full with colorful bittersweet vines for fall decorations.

Small bits of wood scattered about make great kindling, filling the two boxes we brought along — and then some. While The Farmer cuts, I gather and toss the wood in the pickup. In little more than an hour, we have a full load. Solomon has curled up in the warm sunshine, away from the grating chain saw noise. It is time to go bring the cows in and milk. Later in the week, The Farmer relates a radio news report he has

heard. In Bosnia, a small bundle of firewood is worth half-a-year's wages. Half-a-year's wages! We pile a pickup full of waste wood without giving it a second thought. Halfway around the world, that tiny amount could mean the difference between life and freezing to death for someone. We have many, many, MANY things to be appreciative for as we offer Thanksgiving for our blessings. And a full woodpile is just one of them.

Thanksgiving Thank-You Notes

Most families celebrate Thanksgiving, but they don't always consider its meaning: to give thanks for the many things that make life worth living. This activity encourages each family member to think about what Thanksgiving means to him/her by thanking other family members for everything they've done to make life happier. Needed: 3x5 index cards and pens marking pens or pencils, slips of paper, hat to draw papers from. While waiting for Thanksgiving dinner, write each family member's name on a separate piece of paper. Place names in a hat. Each person draws a name. (Draw again if you get your own name.) Give each person an index card and these directions:

- Fold the card in half.
- On the outside write the name of the person you drew. (Use

markers or stickers to decorate, if desired.)

- On the inside write a note of thanks for something that person did, or write something about that person you particularly admire.
- Sign your name at the bottom of your thank you note.

Collect the notes (don't read them). Use as place markers at the Thanksgiving table. When everyone assembles for dinner, read the notes before beginning the meal. The family can decide whether or not to take turns reading the notes out loud.

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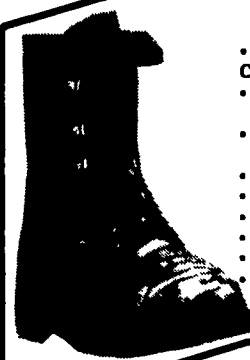
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