

Life With Allegra Leininger And 96 Dolls

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
REINHOLDS (Lancaster Co.)
— Allegra Leininger's dolls are enough to make any doll lover envious.

With 96 dolls and plenty of clothing, high chairs, and rocking chairs to match, it's enough to make a doll lover's heart pound faster.

A perky upturned nose, a dimpled smile, long sleek tresses or a curly mop of hair give each doll a personality of its own. To hear Allegra talk, it's almost easy to believe these dolls are not lifeless but a roomful of lively babies.

"You aren't behaving very well," Allegra scolds as she picks up one to straighten the ruffles on its dress.

The most unusual feature about these 96 dolls is that Allegra has made every one of them.

"I always loved dolls," she said. "As a child I remember spending hours and hours hanging up doll clothes that I kept in a little wicker basket and talking with my dolls."

The one daughter the Leiningers had among three sons was never interested in dolls but threw them in a corner. There were few dolls in the house until the children were grown and living on their own. Then Allegra decided to make a doll from a kit. That was 20 years ago. Since then, Allegra keeps her eyes open for doll patterns, and each year she makes more and more. Every one is different and Allegra confesses that she could never sell one after she made it.

"Each one becomes my favorite while I sew it," she said, "so my favorites keep changing."

Some nights she lies awake trying to figure out how to make an eyelash or fashion a unique twist to the nose.

Occasionally she becomes frustrated, but she finishes every one she starts.

Most of her patterns are selected from the doll collection magazines to which she subscribes.

Don't think Allegra spends her days entirely with dolls. This busy grandmother of seven says that it was bred in her to keep busy because she grew up as a farm girl.

Allegra grew up on an E-town farm, met her husband-to-be in 4-H Baby Beef Club, and after marriage moved to her husband's family farm in Reinholds.

"At first we had dairy, but decided to switch to chickens."

They founded an egg ranch on their land and Allegra candled

eggs seven days a week and delivered eggs in a van to stores in three counties.

Vernon was named a Master Farmer in 1976.

The couple sold the egg ranch after the avian influenza outbreak in the 1980s.

Over the years, the Leiningers bought several surrounding farms that adjoin the family farm. At one time, the Leiningers farmed more than 1,000 acres.

"We were fortunate to be in an era when you could make money farming," she said. "The money we made we put back into land."

Because only one child wanted to continue to help on the farm, some of the land was sold. Now the Leiningers and a son crop farm about 600 acres. The couple raise feeder cattle and hogs.

It is common to find Allegra chasing hogs, running for equipment parts, and preserving food, but she does not like tractor work.

This year, the Leiningers had the best corn crop ever.

"We were fortunate to get the rain when we did and we fertilize heavily," she said.

The Leininger home is surrounded by about three acres of lawn, which Allegra mows. She has extensive weeding to do in the many landscaped areas around the property. Recently she finished planting more than 900 spring bulbs.

"Growing up, I didn't have much and I learned to appreciate what I have," Allegra said. She thinks children today are discontented because they have not learned to appreciate little things.

"But there comes a time in everyone's life when you just can't get everything you want," she said.

Those times are good, she believes, for it can bring changes in attitudes.

Today's parents, she said, don't make children do enough things around the home.

"Parents should teach children to be helpful. Show them how to do chores. In later life, children will appreciate it."

"Sometimes our children were upset by needing to work, but everyone came back as an adult and told us how thankful they were that we made them work," she said.

Allegra admires those who keep interested in life as they grow older.

"Life can be very joyful. I think life is great. There are so many things to do and I just started a new



Allegra designed this room especially to display her doll collection. She has sewn 96 and is in the process of making three more. The placement of eyes, mouth, and nose and the type of hair can give a whole new personality to a doll, she said. Some of the dolls have real hair, some wear hats and some carry books.



Allegra Leininger planted more than 900 tulip bulbs around the home that she and husband built on their farm.

activity," she said. She works out at a fitness center three days a week.

Allegra is active at Mohler Church of the Brethren, where she plays music and sings.

"My mother made sure that my two sisters, a brother and I learned to play an instrument," she said.

"We gave music programs while growing up."

Allegra continues to give music programs by playing the marimba with a group.

She has been a Society 3 Farm Women member for 26 years and has served on all the committees

and offices. Recently she was elected second vice president for the county organization.

"Although I keep busy, I do think we all need times to just sit down, look at life, and appreciate it," she said. "We really are so blessed."



Allegra claims no favorites among her doll collection except to say that each new one seems special as she makes it. Sometimes she lies awake at night trying to figure out how to complete a special technique on a new pattern.



Because her mother loved music, she named her daughter Allegra, and said, "One of my children must be musically inclined." She was not disappointed. Allegra practices playing the marimba in her music room. She performs with a marimba band and sings solos.



The walls of the Leininger home are filled with crewel and cross-stitch pictures that Allegra makes.

Homestead Notes