

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



One week before, there was nothing there but a few scattered, loose, floor boards and a broken bale or two of alfalfa hay.

Now, standing atop the stackin the old bank barn center strawmow puts your head up near the main barn beam. These fresh, shiny bales, packed tightly within the strawmow dividers, are the winter bedding supply for the weaned heifers and baby calves.

High up on the bales, in the shadow, lofty reaches of the old barn, has always been one of my favorite places to pause for a breath during barn chores. Especially after scrambling to the top up a staircase of bales.

But, just filled, the mow has no stairway, just sheer, shiny sides. Only other way to the top is to climb the straight-up ladders built into the haymow walls. As old as the barn itself, the ladders are made of inch-plus-diameter wooden rounds. The rough-edged, shaping-tool strokes that formed them decades ago have long been smoothed by pairs of feet going to the top.

At the top, one must swing oneself from the rungs, up and over the large, squared beam that forms the upper edge of the mow's side wall, then scramble onto the top of the bale stack. Going down entails putting that same procedure into reverse — swinging one foot out over the beam and onto the top rung, then working backwards to a final drop to the barn floor, while hanging on real tight.

Our youngest found a better way.

When he announced that he and a friend were coming to do some

rappelling on the farm, my stomach knotted up. Rappelling — sort of rock climbing in reverse. Swinging out from the top of a high point and letting oneself down with ropes. A sport in which you can get hurt if not careful. But, then, that's true of just about anything.

He had first tried rappelling in a tall tree and wanted to progress to a wall. By the time all personnel and gear were assembled, the wall — which was outside — was wet from a gentle thunderstorm that had swept down on the afternoon. Whew! What a relief for this Mom.

Who should know better. Next thing I knew, the rappelling had been relocated into the high — and dry — reaches of the old barn. From the top of the just-filled straw mow. At least the straw-littered wooden floor of the barn seemed a slightly safer landing spot than the concrete at the foot of the prior site of choice.

His friend Jen was persuaded to be belted into the harness and swung out over the side of the mow, walking herself down the side of the strawmow. She made it look relatively easy. This was too good a chance to pass up.

"Can I try?" They belted me into the nylon harness, which fits over one's "fanny," and fastens at the front of the waist to the rappelling rope with thick, aluminum hardware. I climbed the ladder to the top of the strawmow and donned a pair of thick gloves our son handed me. Then he instructed how to put my left hand high on the rope above me, my right hand below on the



With the help of the Indiana County Dairy Promotion Committee, these dairy ambassadors and dairy maids will promote the dairy industry in Indiana County for next year, from left, Tim Beatty, son of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Beatty; Jason Cribbs, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Cribbs; Cindy Hartman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hartman; Julie Lockhart, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lockhart; Jennifer McMillen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William McMillen; Annah Neal, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Brad Neal; Amy Trimble, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Duane Trimble; and Tammy Trimble, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Trimble.

rope as the "brake," put all by weight into the harness and swing out into thin air.

In other words, Mom, "sit on it."

It worked. I swung out from the beam, and with a couple of jumps down along the sides of the bales, descended to the floor.

Neat! And not very life-threatening from up in a strawmow.

On the other hand, the very idea of swinging out from a mountain-side cliff, hundreds of feet above rock-strewn landing spots cushioned only with boulders, sitting

my weight in a nylon harness hung onto a rope, with no brake but my own hand, brings just one thought to mind.

Rappelling. Think I'll stick to getting my "heights" kicks by scaling the strawmow ladder.

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