

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



How vividly I remember that first September day of first grade for our first child.

Determined to be brave and nonchalant about this whole new path on which she was embarking, I was relieved to have succeeded as she waved goodbye, boarded the big yellow bus, and never glanced back. Until I got home, spied the forgotten pencil box, and could no longer hold back the tears.

One of the best ways for me to cope with the traumas of constantly changing new paths in life is to take a walk down a comforting old, "beaten" one. We have numerous such beaten paths about the farm, permanently worn from daily use by cattle hooves, pets' paws, tractor, and equipment tires, and of course, the soles of barn boots and sneaker treads.

My favorite is our hard-packed field road which bounds fields of hay, corn and soybeans, traverses a small woodlot and curves through the heifers' pasture. Though its path remains constant, diversions along the wayside constantly vary, dependent on season and weather.

With dusk arriving earlier now each evening, walks along that beaten path in the fading light offer lots more appeal than pulling garden weeds. Solomon and I headed there for the first time in weeks one recent evening as the sky was beginning to darken and dew already wetting the grass.

Below the house, the path forms a boundary between a field of late, tasseling corn and the small stream opposite. Already the air was already chilly and damp, making welcome the sweatshirt

I'd grabbed on the way out. In the heaviness of that still, moist air, the aroma of corn plants setting seed was almost overwhelming. A fragrance more enticing to farmers' noses than the costliest perfume.

It grew warmer where path ascended through the woods. Once crisscrossed with the beaten paths of our son's three-wheeler trails, the woodlot has hidden those traces of his earlier years with creeping briarpatches and low-hanging wild grapes. Paths here are now more subtle narrow ones shaped by the shy doe who grazes the alfalfa and fat groundhogs waddling through the underbrush.

Suddenly I missed my four-legged companion. He loves these walks and usually leads the way; some very important doggy-distraction must have come up. A dark, brushy-tailed shadow slipping moments later across the dark meadow offers a clue. Solomon, for whatever reason, is afraid of the foxes half his size. This one plays around in the pasture grass, seemingly unaware it has a spectator, until I move higher back the path for a better view.

There waits Solomon and the brushy-tailed shadow vanishes.

It reminds me of a recent encounter on another beaten path, one of the worn cow trails from the dairy herd's pasture. Headed toward the edge of the woods to herd in the cows for evening milking, I spied a squirrel blithely hopping in my direction along the same path I was following. While I stopped, the squirrel, intent on his pursuits, continued to within about four feet of me.

Suddenly it sat up on its back feet, curiously gazing at me straight in the eye — no doubt wondering what kind of strange

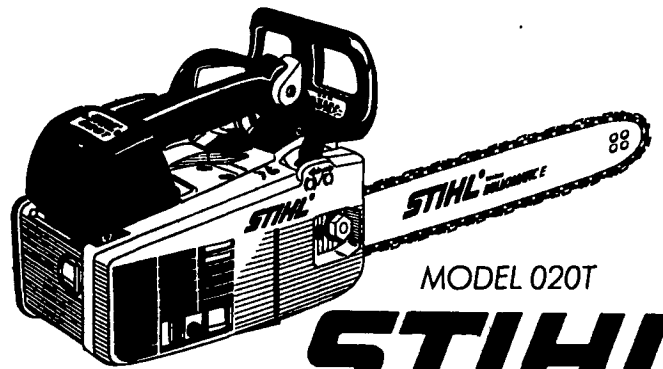
cow this was. Only when I laughed did the squirrel do a double-take and flee with a derisive flick of the tail at this alien, two-legged pasture intruder. But we found no squirrels on this dusk walk across the beaten path. Just a peaceful evening colored with the pink hues of sunset.

Life is a constant following of branching paths, some taken by choice, others laid beneath our feet by fate. How comforting and reassuring to flee briefly from the more hectic paths, to steal a moment of serenity along a favorite old beaten one.

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