

**On Being a
Farm Wife
(and other
hazards)**
Joyce Bupp



Every parent has probably experienced it.

That moment of utter parental exasperation when—for a fleeting moment—you could just set that frustrating kid aside and out of your life. Very temporarily, of course. When it actually happens, when they slice those apron strings and depart merrily off on their own life, there are separation pangs.

Awareness of that crashed over us some six years ago, when our

newly-married daughter and son-in-law packed up a van-full of worldly belongings and headed West. We had no idea when we would see them again.

Believe me, it gave this mom a deep, deep appreciation and empathy for the mothers of the pioneers. Many of them never again saw the sons and daughters they waved goodbye to, as they headed West to homestead. Even a letter was somewhat of a rarity.

This distance is less vast in our late twentieth century, thanks to technology. Via telephone, postal and parcel service, even the computer, our family has remained close and in touch at least weekly from west to east coast. And at least once a year, they've returned to visit or family here has gone there.

I thought we had adapted pretty well to the absence and distance. They were happy with their active lives, while farming and extra-curricular involvements kept us equally occupied. We are all simply too busy to dwell on the distance between us.

Then, along came a new gliche—a grandson.

Originally, they planned to visit with us three weeks. While the nation's weird weather of the summer of '95 has messed up many lives and plans, it worked in our selfish favor in this instance. Josh and his mom extended their visit back here by an extra two weeks.

See, their summer was to again

be spent in a fire tower on the Idaho Montana border as seasonal employees of the U.S. Forest Service. Spotting, charting and directing firefighting efforts—from a vantage point of a 9,000-foot mountain-top observation and living area—is a summertime opportunity for these two whose lives are somewhat free when schools are not in session.

But their mid-June arrival date at the tower was delayed for a week. Then two. Then three. Seems there was 10 feet of snow covering the dirt parking lot which serves the tower, as well as the drifts over the rugged road that climbs the mountain to it.

Meanwhile, month-old Josh was being inducted into farm life back East. Manure coated his stroller wheels on trips around the dairy barn. He went on his first farm-pond fishing trip and his first trip to a cattle auction. The dogs

sniffed at him and went on their way, but Monk, the housecat, remained fascinated with the scent of baby and poked her nose around the baby equipment scattered around "her" house.

Summer finally arrived in the Fayette National Forest and our two generations of family are back West. She writes that most of the snow is melted, except for a high, solid drift from which they must jump down to reach the outhouse. They have yet to see the herd of elk reported nearby.

Monk has "her" house back, minus the intriguing smells. Our sink is back to holding only dishes, and not a baby who loves an evening bath there. And, I thought I'd handled missing them pretty well until I found one tiny sock a few days ago. A baby bottle left in the refrigerator. And a soft baby blanket which had slipped behind his mom's bed, scented with baby.

Two hills away from us, a tall, cellular-phone, broadcast tower was erected a few years ago. Wonder if they'd consider doubling it up as a fire tower for this neighborhood.

We know someone who could staff it.

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