

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



"Do you have a minute?" asks The Farmer, on one of those glorious, warm, sun-splashed mornings we've been so blessed with this October.

("No" is not an acceptable answer to this farmer-posed question unless you really want to mess up his already too-busy schedule.)

"Sure," I reply, peeking out from behind a row of damp blue jeans and summer-scuffed tee-shirts being hung on the washline to dry.

"I need a shuttle," he explains. Shuttles are always an adven-

ture. And on such a spectacular morning, doing anything outside is preferable to anything inside, especially tackling the stack of mail and paperwork threatening to avalanche off the kitchen table.

Enroute, we assess how harvest is progressing among the fields still scattered around our rapidly-urbanizing and industrializing neighborhood. Most of the corn that wasn't chopped earlier for silage has been combined, while soybeans wait their turn. It's satisfying to note that a neighbor's late-planted beans are ripening to maturity ahead of our first frost.

At this stage of October, every unfrosty morning is a bonus.

Trees along the way are beginning to wear a brownish-tint, a hint that they may not color very brilliantly this season. Too dry, some experts have suggested, and our local stands of hardwoods appear to be reinforcing that theory. Though swamp maples are showing some of their lovely Fall reds, even those are softer, more muted.

Our first stop is high on a hill that overlooks The Farmer's boyhood home and haunts. Lovely new homes dot the vista, interspersed with strips of re-greened stands of alfalfa and grass hay and remaining small clusters of woodlots. We drive to the far end of the field, along a fencerow brightened with briar patches sporting maroon-colored leaves and fading stalks of goldenrod. The dead, bare "hawk tree" holds no hungry redtail in its naked upper branches on this stunning morning, luckily for the rabbit that zips out ahead of the combine.

A brief conference between The Farmer and The Farmer I, in the combine's cab, says we have trou-

ble. The pickup, left in the field overnight, refuses to start. Speculating on a battery problem, The Farmer hooks up jumper cables. Nothing.

Fortunately, equipment operator Bobby returns just then with the empty grain truck, after his latest run to the mill. He backs the larger truck toward the pickup and they attach the two with a heavy chain—kept handy for just such expected emergencies.

"Do you think you can pull it with that?" I tease Bob, as he maneuvers the grain truck into towing position. His one gentle tug on the chain stirs the pickup's started into action. One problem temporarily overcome.

With his "wheels" back in operation, The Farmer departs the

field—and me in hot pursuit. Where did he say we were going next? I hustle to keep him in sight, and finally catch up as he parks at the next harvest area. Shuttles run more smoothly—trust me—when you both end up at the same destination.

Condensed again into one vehicle, we retrace our route back to another field for a tractor and loaded wagon. He departs in one direction; I take the other. I beat him back to the farm—but not by much. Too much sightseeing.

The sun shines, the maple leaves wave in the breeze. That stack of paperwork beckons, like a whip-wielding overseer. Sigh.

Shuttling equipment is more fun.

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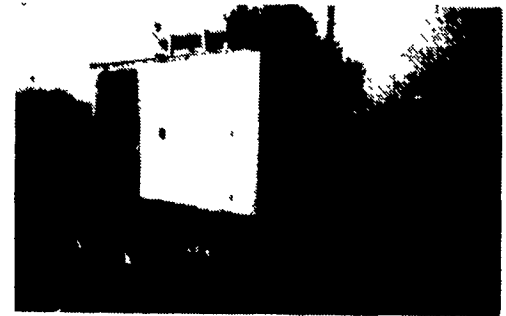
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