

I Never Cared About This Stuff When I Was A Kid

She was off to the city to make a new life for herself — a sophisticated one — one without manure shoveling, endless garden weeding, and dirty clothes stained from farm chores.

She succeeded. First in the business world and then as a registered nurse in the big city. But as the degrees, awards, and pretty things accumulated, a funny thing happened — a yearning for the farm. . . .

In her own words, Janet Golden writes this tribute in honor of her father, William K. Jacob of Campbell Hall, New York.

JANET GOLDEN

Special To Lancaster Farming

PHILADELPHIA — I've come to recognize the puzzled look. It's usually followed by "Why do you want to know? You never cared about this stuff when you were a kid."

I'll smile and prod him along with "Yeah, well things were different then." He'll stare off onto the fields as if to recapture a lost moment and will then satisfy my curiosity with the proper response. The answer usually involves anything from animal breeding to John Deere tractors to his beloved and often cursed sheep. But whatever the question may be, it never ceases to amaze him that I now have an unquenchable desire to learn all that I can about farming.

It's true that I didn't care about farming as a kid. It was uncool to be a farm kid back then. I wanted to fit in with the town kids — you know — go to football games, school dances, and pep rallies. Weeding the garden, feeding the animals and shoveling manure were not a part of the sophisticated image that I wanted to portray.

And portray it I never did. Friends in college were often amazed that I grew up on a farm. "You don't look like a farm girl," they'd reply. While annoyed by their stereotypical ideas of just how a farm girl was supposed to look, I was secretly pleased that I didn't pass for the Green Acres type. I worked hard at becoming a modern woman. I matriculated from a competitive university, headed for the big city and fulfilled my dream of becoming the All-American business woman. I had a comfy desk job, a sports car and a wardrobe full of stylish suits.

Yet, as the years passed and the allure of pretty things and empty accomplishments grew dim, I found myself being drawn back to our farm. The yearning was gradual at first, but soon, like a salmon that instinctually returns to its birthplace, the time came when I often needed to return home.

At first, I didn't recognize that I was making more trips home. In fact, it was my husband who first noticed. He'd come to predict just when we would need to visit the farm. "You're different there," he would say, "You're as care-free as a child."

"Don't be silly," I'd say, "What difference could that old farm make?" But I knew he was right. I was different there. I didn't feel so odd and alone on the farm. And slowly I came to understand what the difference was.



Janet Golden finds the need to return more and more to the family farm where she has fond memories of growing up with her father William Jacob and her mother, who is now deceased.

I realized that picking beans reminded me of steamy afternoons spent with my mother. We used to pass the hours canning, laughing, and talking about anything that popped into our heads. I remembered how good it felt just to be with her.

I understood that baling hay wasn't just a sweaty farm chore. It was a family bonding together, determined to bring in the hay before threatening rain clouds destroyed all of our hard work. Afterwards, there was a glorious sense of togetherness, as we sat around drinking lemonade and admiring our accomplishment.

Even the daily farm chores meant the guarantee that things would be the same to-

morrow — that the farm would be there, my family would be there and the world was a sane and happy place.

There's also an innocence I abandoned when I left our farm. The innocence we only have as children. The innocence that doesn't know the agony of a mother's death, the ache of loneliness from a family spread miles apart or the pain of watching familiar farms being bulldozed and replaced with fancy homes and swimming pools.

But as the years pass by, and I take in all that I can about farming I realize that I'll never be able to replace those memories. No amount of farming will bring back those old warm feelings. Perhaps it's a good thing that I've come to understand that. I know I could never make it as a farmer. After all, I never could tell the difference between a crop of alfalfa and a crop of rye grass. No, for me it's deeper than just the land, the barn or the animals. To me, farming will always represent the sweetness that life should hold.

But maybe we all have farms of our own. Maybe we all have a place where it's OK to get dirty, to watch nature unfold, to be thankful for another day. Yet in the meantime, I'll keep asking my father more questions about farming. And he'll continue to look puzzled and pretend to wonder why I ask so many questions.



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