

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



"The Farmer's Home, Winter" says the title of a lovely Christmas card that arrived recently from an old friend.

It's classic Currier and Ives, a reproduction of one of the famous lithographs that captured a point of time in our collective history. The famed lithographs (personal favorites) stir nostalgia for simpler times, especially during the holidays.

This lovely card depicts a classic, rural, winter scene of long ago: farmhouse and barn in a snow-covered setting. Cattle huddled near the shelter of a lean-to, chickens scratch off to the side under a tree, and loose hay is neatly stacked inside an enclosure of posts. Trudging across the scene is a farmer, barely visible under a pile of fodder he is lugging along on his back, headed toward the cows.

As you hurry to fight mall traffic for one last round of presents..... hurry to pile a grocery cart full one more time with traditional holiday foods..... hurry to mail out a couple of cards to people you forgot who remembered you..... hurry to par-

ties..... hurry, hurry, hurry..... consider this tale which could have come right out of that Currier and Ives setting.

The oldest was maybe eight or nine at the time, that particular Christmas. She had two younger sisters, and maybe the last of the three younger brothers had not even been born yet. This family lived in a small town, almost a village. Father worked as a watchman for a manufacturing plant in the city, several miles away. His holidays were spent at work, just like all other days.

Up the street of the little town was a small grocery store. Supermarkets, C-stores, and buying clubs were still unknown. But promotions were already a retailing fact of life. And that particular year, the little grocery had been running a promotion - like some today - whereby customers got a card punched with each purchase. After so many dollars worth of punches, the promotion cards were redeemable for selected merchandise.

The little girl and her sisters

walked by the store every day on their way to school. And, this particular year, they glued their eyes every day to beautiful dolls in the window, dolls that were obtainable with purchase-punched cards. Though this family had plenty of love, caring, food or shelter, money for any extras was sparse. For weeks, the three little girls eyed those dolls. The eldest especially dreamed of having the doll garbed in a beautiful yellow dress.

On Christmas Eve, the family, with the exception of their father, always took part in the service and program at their little church in town. While they were attending this annual Christmas program, their father would put up and decorate the tree.

After arriving home from the program that particular Christmas Eve, they admired the tree, enjoying the evening as a family. Then, one of the brothers dropped a piece of fruit - maybe a tangerine or an orange - and it rolled under the platform beneath the tree. When the oldest reached in to retrieve the fruit, she found..... three dolls. It was the single - and precious and treasured - gift she and her sisters each received that Christmas.

That doll was the only one my mother ever owned.

My grandmother, great-grandmother and great-aunt had, rather than redeem their promotion cards for things they really could have used, pooled them to make three little girls

very happy at Christmas. Last week was the first time I had ever heard that story, when some spirit prodded me to ask Mom what she remembered about her childhood Christmases.

I treasure that story. To me, it typifies the spirit of the Currier and Ives prints, symbolic of natural beauty, simplicity, and deep appreciation for the

few material things one did possess. We can not go back there - and in reality probably don't want to - but we are reminded to focus on what this holiday season is really all about: love and caring, sharing and gratitude.

To you and your loved ones, from The Farmer and me, a very blessed Christmas season!

Replace Missing China

OCALA, Fla. — Holiday time means we get to entertain! Get-togethers of family and friends mean parties and dinners with special food, creative decorations, and table settings. Family heirlooms and the "good china and silver" always add to that festive holiday mood.

But do we have problems! We have two new additions to the family and not enough place settings of our china. And last year Aunt Lou broke a water goblet when "helping" dry the crystal, and two of my salad forks mysteriously disappeared when grandson Andy did his science project in our kitchen. What are we going to do? The lady in the china department

said all our patterns are discontinued and no longer available in the store. Woe is me!! Great-granny will turn over in her grave if I don't keep up the tradition.

Never fear. Help is near! Many companies (often called "matching services") can help in that search for discontinued tableware. You can find the names, addresses, and phone numbers of dozens of those dealers in "Finding the Missing Pieces" — the new 1998-99 Discontinued Tableware Replacement Services Directory (8th edition). To receive a copy of this directory, send \$5 (includes postage) to JV DIRECTORY, at P.O. Box 5297, Ocala, FL 34478.

Home For Christmas

(Continued from Page B4) community. Golden Retrievers, kittens, a sandbox, ping pong, and calf-feeding intrigue young and old.

Fay and Ira are active at Strasburg Mennonite Church where Fay is an adult Sunday School teacher, librarian, and participates in Sewing Circle. She also serves on the

board of the Mennonite Information Center.

"We are not meeting people," Fay said. "We like to be home in the evenings."

A more relaxed schedule is self-enforced by Fay and Ira during the Christmas season than at other times of the year so that they can immerse themselves in listening to Christmas music and in visiting with family and friends.

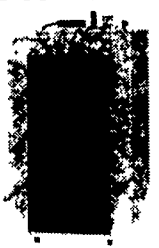
Now that the children are grown and establishing homes of their own, some traditions are changing. Each year a different son and his spouse are assigned the duty of deciding how the gift giving should be handled. This year, the oldest decided that names should be exchanged as couples.

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