

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



It's been a lonely winter.
But maybe that's changing.

Fall was just beginning last year when we spotted the lone Canada goose on the pond. Last summer's family of eight goslings and their parents had flown off several weeks before. We presumed they

had joined up with the growing flocks of V-shapes that honked over the farm morning and evening, en route to feeding sites. For a single goose to be hanging out by itself in the fall, when families are flocking up for winter, is not the norm. Opening day of early goose hunting season in se-

lected areas had just passed. Western border of the selective, early-hunt area followed the interstate, splitting right through the farm. When this goose called to passing flocks of its kind but refused to join them we figured it had been wounded.

Several weeks passed. And nothing changed.

The lone — and seemingly lonely — goose stayed by the pond by itself. Others honked overhead. Occasionally, even a few settled briefly on the pond. When they left, our loner bird remained behind.

It would settle down for long hours on the distant bank of the big pond, a favored corner for our annual nesting geese families. Not far behind that bank of the pond are the cattle exercise lots and the walkway through which the heifers pass daily on their way to the feed bunk. Geese seem to instinctively know that the regular travels of the cattle help to keep predators — especially our hungry local foxes — at a distance, offering them that much more protection.

As fall moved toward winter, The Farmer noted that the goose was taking short flights, from one side of the pond to the other. I continued to call to other flocks passing by overhead, but never joined them. Perhaps, we speculated, it's wounds were healing, but not the point of long distance flights. Perhaps, it would never fly long distances again.

But, by then, the goose had found another family.

Our dairy herd.

The big, beautiful bird spent increasing amounts of time in the feedlot with the cows, growing fat on the grain residue left by them. When we began grazing the hill-

sides to save stored feeds, a Canada goose nibbling grass at the heels of the cows became a familiar — and somewhat hilarious — scene.

And when we began to move the girls to the more distant fields above the house, the goose gave up the lengthening walk and took off in flight, landing gracefully amid the herd of black-and-white cows. One day, either tired or perhaps hurting, our mascot plodded right up through the back yard, taking a short cut to join its "flock" of bovine buddies munching away at the grass.

But now, my prayers about an injured, lonely goose may have been answered.

In mid-January, a flock of about 20 fat, wild geese settled onto the pond with a racket of honking and

splashing about. They've become regulars since then, lining up along the pond bank, nibbling as a flock at tender grass shoots in the meadow, occasionally trekking out into the field to graze in the stand of dormant alfalfa. There is no longer a single goose mingling with the dairy herd.

Now, pairs seem to be splitting off among the flock. Sets of geese, with one larger and one slightly smaller bird, can often be spotted off somewhere to the side by themselves. Territorial posturing is becoming increasingly common among the flock, lending visual demonstration to the term "wild goose chase."

On this Valentine weekend, my heart hopes one lonely goose gets shot again.

By Cupid's arrow.

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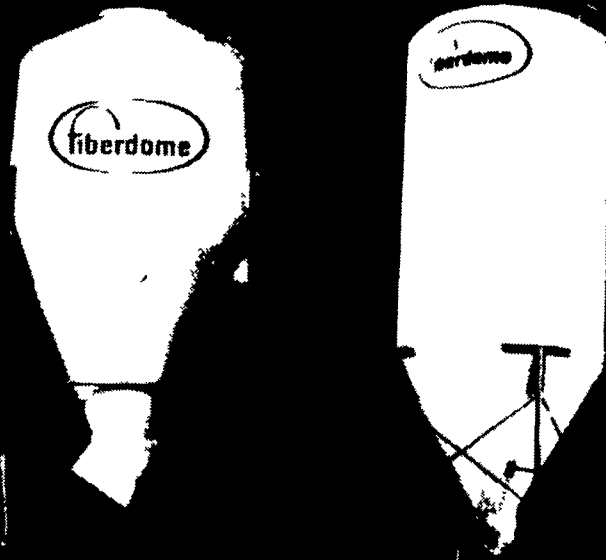
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