

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



Seems but a few years ago when they were just tiny. You coddled them, looked after them, worried about them.

The went from infants to toddlers to young people to young adults in a blur before your eyes. We mark these phases as graduations, from simple ceremonies moving kindergartners up to first grade, to the more elaborate, solemn, but joyous, departures from high schools and colleges.

While there are no official ceremonies, it's graduation season for many of our farm youngsters, too.

Our summer crop of brand-new mother cows have begun calving, graduating into their working careers in the milking

herd. The resulting, and unusual, string of heifer babies put a half-dozen overgrown bottle calves into abrupt "graduation" to make room for the newcomers. And weaning several three-month calves simultaneously meant enduring an ear-splitting protest of bawling for the next few feedings.

That passed, as the graduates settled into group pens, their bellies growing wider every day as they chow down sweet-smelling, soft, new-crop grass hay. Meanwhile, their empty pens have been filled with beautiful little replacements, including one escape artist that generated a couple of merry chases before settling into a new routine.

None, however, was more spunky that the baby bull born in the lower meadow and not corralled into the nursery for about 36 hours. He arrived in the calf barn highly irritated at the curtailment of his freedom and took it out on the first person handy. While this pint-sized, bawling, pawing bullfighter never managed to knock me off my feet, he did try, succeeding only in knocking his own bottle in a splattering mess across the floor. By the next feeding, he was hungry and gulped dinner down like a veteran. And, we parted friends when he graduated on to a new owner.

Our four young kittens have graduated into young cats, perfecting their playful antics in the upper level of the old bank barn. After we filled one hay-mow and part of another with some first-cutting grass, the barn became a virtual feline amusement park of fun activity—layers of hay bales to scale, nooks and crannies in which to hide and protruding bale corners at various levels from which to launch pounce-attacks.

However, the racket and disturbance of offloading haywagons and stacking them in the mow initially chased the cat

family into hiding. Several of the kittens ultimately were found tangled in a pile of round-bale netting awaiting disposal. That incident seemed to tame them, almost as though their rescue taught them to trust us. Now, they come running when we appear in the barn, begging for milk and cat food, and affectionately purr as lapcats.

Also rapidly approaching graduation are three Canada goslings (two of the original five hatched disappeared) growing up among the meadow ponds. Their baby goosedown is rapidly being replaced with sleek, handsome feathers; soon the classic white face patch will develop.

One has an especially spirited and bossy personality.

For the first year ever, we have a second group of geese residing in the meadow, co-existing with a family raising goslings. Probable yearlings, this "singles group" rarely shares the same water spaces as the family flock, however. Father ganders are always very

protective of the goslings, chasing off the other geese - dogs, cats, people - that get too close, and this one has fulfilled his role well.

Lately, however, one upstart youngster has snatched that role away from Papa Goose. Watching a half-grown, still-fuzzy gosling stretch his neck, spread his half-grown wings and go flopping off in pursuit of a half-dozen, full-grown adult birds is hilarious. Seems this gifted-student has skipped a couple of grades and is already moving up into job training for a future executive leadership position.

However, there will come a day when the goslings will officially graduate into their adult lives, reminiscent of a ceremony used at one time (maybe still) to honor Brownies moving up into the ranks of Girl Scouts. Appropriately called Fly Up.

Once again, the graduates will leave home and our nest will be empty again.



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