



According to the Millers, big families are fun. They ought to know with a family of eight. Parents Grace and Eric are surrounded by children Daniel, 20; Laura, 19; Eldon, 16; Joel, 14; Alicia, 12; and Patrick, 10.



"The sewing machine has always been the center of our home," Grace said. Although she has tried to relegate her bridal sewing business to a back room in the farmhouse, she finds it works much better to be the hub of family living.

## Big Families Have More Fun

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

**MOUNT JOY** (Lancaster Co.) — Having six children in this era isn't commonplace. It's enough to garner lots of stares when the family walks down the street.

Grace Miller laughs as she recalls the reactions of some people who find it difficult to believe that she and her husband Eric have six children who range in age from 10 to 20.

"I love a big family," Grace said. "I think people who don't have big families are missing out."

The Millers have made conscious choices that enable them to enjoy a large family in an era noted for hectic schedules and expensive toys.

"Early on, my husband and I selected the motto: I must live simply so others may simply live," Grace said.

That philosophy affects every area of family life. Some people may observe that it means no television, few presents, and little money.

It does. But so much more is included — most often spelled "time." It's teaching children the satisfaction of working with their hands, of working together until a job is completed, and having fun doing it.

An example of that is daughter Laura, 19, who was the 1999 Elizabethtown Fair Queen, and who, for six years, clinched "best of show" at the state level for her sewing fashions.

Laura achieved her sewing expertise just like Grace did — by watching her mother.

Grace said that she grew up as the eighth child in a family of nine.

"I used to sit on the mending pile and watch my mom sew," Grace said.

Because Grace was left-handed, she became frustrated trying to imitate her mother's sewing movements. But by fourth grade, Grace had made her first dress from fabric scraps. By 12 years of age, Grace was quilting.

Her high school teacher recognized her sewing skills. In-

stead of insisting she sew a beginner's basic project, the teacher assigned her to sew projects for her.

After high school, Grace sewed bridal gowns for a few friends. Her reputation spread. Since then, Grace is booked month's in advance. For the last four summers, Laura has assisted her mother in the bridal business.

"Laura is a natural at designing. She can visualize a project better than I can," Grace said. Rather than purchase new clothing, Laura enjoyed buying thrift shop clothing and making changes to fit her personal style. Laura is studying fashion design and production at LaSalle Fashion Institute, Boston.

"My sewing machine has been the center of everything," Grace said of its location. "I've given up my living room for a sewing room, but it's been worth it for the children."

Her sewing room is in one of the farmhouse's large rooms. The adjoining living room is

where the family gathers, encouraging family togetherness.

When the children were small, Grace pieced at least 100 quilts and was hired by several artists to quilt projects that have been pictured in several newspapers, magazines, and even in a book.

Grace gained skill in fitting clothing and in combining patterns through experience.

"When you work with fabric and patterns, you soon understand how lines work and how to manipulate them," Grace said of adapting styles to clients' wishes.

The custom-made bridal gowns allow brides to combine features in several dresses into the gowns of their dreams.

"Precision is the name of the game. If you cut right, it will sew right," Grace said of the frustration improperly cut fabric produces.

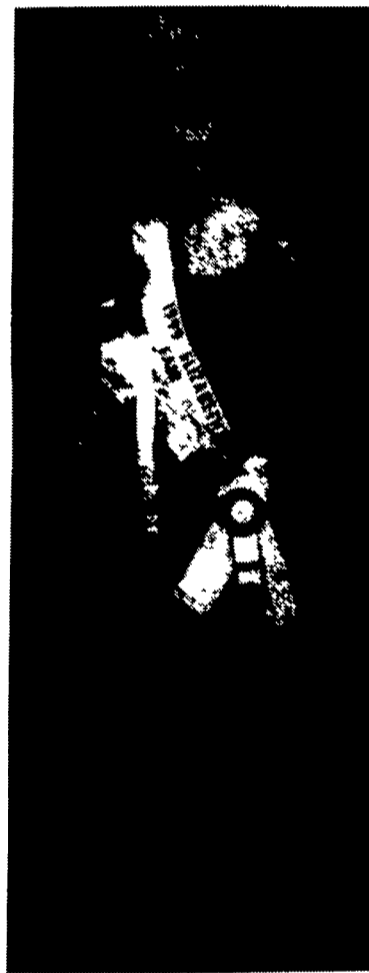
As a 4-H leader, Grace said she stresses the importance of learning to cut and sew straight. She is proud that her 4-H members all advanced beyond county competition in 4-H.

Unlike most sewing clubs, Grace begins classes in January. Although Grace is a 4-H sewing leader, Laura was never in 4-H. By the time her mother was teaching, Laura was so advanced she preferred sewing independently. This limited the sewing competitions that she was eligible to enter.

Grace limits her own competitions. Although she has won many ribbons for her sewing projects, she stopped entering in local fairs because she didn't want to stand in the way of amateur seamstresses.

"I want others to find the satisfaction of working with their hands," Grace said.

She even allows some of her clients to sew some parts of their gown to give them the satisfaction of "making it."

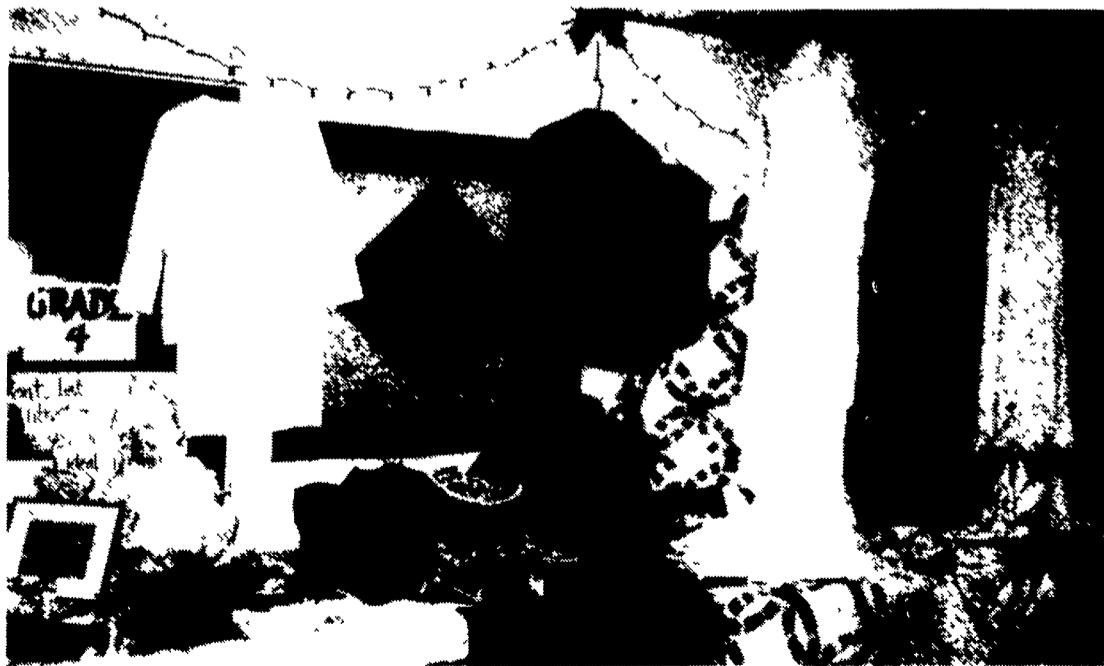


As the 1999 Elizabethtown Fair Queen, Laura wore the gowns she made. An accomplished seamstress, Laura is studying fashion design and production at LaSalle, Boston. She is also a recipient of Lancaster County's Farm and Home Foundation Scholarship.

Some clients purchase their own fabric. Others rely on Grace to buy it. Most of the fabric Grace purchases is from the Columbia Sewing Outlet and from Philadelphia fabric stores.

"I don't keep a fabric inventory. Colors change. This year's burgundy is not the same shade

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These are a few of the many sewing projects Grace has recently completed. Grace said that she learned to sew by sitting on a pile of mending while watching her mother at the sewing machine. The family tradition continues with daughter Laura, who learned by watching Grace. The two had the unusual distinction of winning "best of show" in the adult and youth constructed clothing division at the state Farm Show.

