

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



What makes an heirloom...an heirloom?

Is it age? Is it beauty? Is it historical significance, functionality, timelessness of design?

Or is it in the eye of the beholder?

There's an "heirloom" parked on the windowsill behind our kitchen sink. At least its an heirloom in the eye of this beholder. But no antique dealers are likely to make a beeline trying to acquire it from me.

My heirloom is a 10-inch, white, stoneware pitcher, a classic design of a once-ordinary household item. It's the sort of pitcher one would see on a museum or restored historic-site visit, often paired with a companion white, stoneware basin located at a handy spot for washing up.

Or maybe it was used for serving cold milk or chilled water. Or steaming, hot gravy.

It's history is a mystery. But it arrived at our house by

way of a not-unfamiliar route for occasional heirlooms. A junkpile. From which The Farmer rescued it, knowing my affinity for such items.

The reason the white, stoneware pitcher had ended up on a junkpile, rather than someone's prized antique display case, is glaringly obvious. It has a half-inch, V-shaped gap broken out of the spout. The rough edges of the break have grown dark and ugly with age, and tiny, dark, cracks run from the break down toward the body of the pitcher.

A second reason — possibly — that the pitcher did not cross an auction block or command a sum of money is that it well may have been an ordinary, everyday, piece of kitchenware of the time, purchased at a general store or five-and-ten, equivalent of today's "dollar" stores. It's not delicate English china or heavy, hand-thrown stoneware.

Nevertheless, the somewhat faded, somewhat cracked pitcher remains an heirloom to me, simply because it once belonged to a talented acquaintance I admired very much. And it sees regular use here, not for milk or ice water or gravy or washing up.

With a bouquet of flowers plunked into the stoneware pitcher, the chunk broken out of the spout isn't even visible. And, it's the perfect "vase" for displaying flowers in our country-farmhouse decor.

While rooting through a cupboard a few days ago, trying to organize and stack heavy-duty

plasticware storage containers — none of which want to fit into the other — another heirloom tumbled out and nearly "bonked" my toe. This one is from family, a hand-crafted, wooden rolling pin lovingly used to bake by kinfolk countrycooks a few generations ago.

It's one of those quirky twists of fate that a handcrafted rolling pin should end up in the kitchen of a cook who dotes on micro-waving, converted a few years ago to instant mashed potatoes (fixed with lots of whole milk and real butter) and rolls out dough for anything maybe once a year. By comparison to the junked stoneware pitcher, the rolling pin is an heirloom grossly underemployed.

For my breakfast muffin this morning, I dug a dessert-sized plate out of a stack in another cupboard, from a supply turned over years ago by my mom. White, with a small floral pattern around the edge, these little dishes originated as freebies in cartons of dry oatmeal, I'm told, and are probably well over 50-years-old. They match some petite, shallow dessert bowls of the same source and vintage.

Etched in my brain is an anecdote I once read, about a woman who recalled a dream. In the dream, her husband, a widower,

had remarried, and her successor was enjoying using all the prized, family

heirlooms she had carefully "saved" hidden away for years.

I'm using — not saving — the heirlooms that have been passed down. Even the rolling pin, now and then.

And, when I'm gone, I hope someone else finds use for the few heirlooms they may inherit — by desire or default.

If I don't manage to drop them first.

Given my history of damage to breakables, that chipped-lip pitcher is probably living on borrowed time.

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The show will include educa-

tional displays, hospitality, and African Violet Society of America information. A sale table will include blooming and unusual varieties of African violets. These plants are easy to grow and make wonderful gifts.

For more information, please contact the show chairman, Jill Fischer at (908) 464-4417 or Karyn Cichocki at (973) 579-7914.

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