

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Sometimes, I'd be tempted to just bag it.

Especially when winter is displaying its meanest side, hammering us with winds, socking us with sleet and snow, or leaning on the thermometer 'til it slides down in submission.

But Derra's fiercely-wagging tail and doggy grin of expectation, and a couple of cats milling around our feet in anticipation, coax me back outside when evening barn chores are finished and a cozy easy chair beckons.

So we go moonlight meandering.

Moonlight meandering has been a fresh and frosty adventure most nights so far this brisk,

"brrrrrr" winter. On less blustery evenings, we mosey up the grade toward the bunker silo and high field road, to admire the neighborhood landscape from the farm's loftier hills. Derra zips ahead, nose against the ground for the scent of the deer which travel through from woods to woods.

Most evenings, though, we head for the more sheltered, low-lying meadow. The bulk of the farm's wildlife hangs out in that area, so the buffet of scents and smells and territorial markers they leave are hugely entertaining to Derra and her cat groupies.

By the time I reach the edge of

the yard, Derra is already down by the second pond, nose working in high gear. Spotting a cream-colored "yellow" lab on a snowy, moonlit night is more by assumption than by eye, but Derra's jingling "dog tags" give her away.

In recent years, with a little engineering assist from The Farmer, the swampy meadow has morphed into a pond-strewn wetlands area. As the cattle were fenced off from the springhead and lowlands areas, pasture has been converted to fish and wildlife habitat, including several ponds.

Those ponds have been growing ice cover since late November, one of the earliest long-term freezes we can remember. While the ice is rough and bumpy, the cats are just delighted with these hard, slick rinks. Suddenly there are these large expanses of flat shiny surface providing easy short cuts, far superior to poking one's dainty little paws down through rough, ice-crusting snow.

So the cats race across the frozen ponds, from one to another to another, creeping under the piers and pausing to investigate the ragged lines of animal tracks

which criss cross the ice's snow cover. Patches of dried cattails along the frozen edges hold yet more scents of ground rodents and water birds to add interest to this buffet of things to sniff.

Derra jingles back from a side excursion, joins the sniffing party among a patch of cattails and starts digging frantically with her big front paws. Though she makes only a minimal dent in the frozen ground, that muskrat scent is just too enticing to ignore. Prolonged concentration is no Derra's great suit, so she soon abandons the excavation and jingles off in another direction.

Stars sparkle from the big black upturned bowl of sky overhead, with Orion the Hunter tramping through the heavens above the woodlot, as he always does these wintry nights. A gust of wind rattles the dry grass patches and the cats come charging from their ice-capades to pause at my feet, waiting to see which direction we go next.

Marking the far end of our wetlands is the Frog Pond, an enhanced swamp with slightly raised islands for goose and duck nesting. The cat trio races among the small mounds of ice-locked

land, sniffing out every hint of smell lingering from last summer's hatching season in this normally inaccessible-to-cats territory. Derra pokes her nose among the young rhododendrons, savoring the unseen marks of fox and squirrel, rabbits and muskrats, frogs, birdlife, and the deer which sneak-through on occasion.

The wind picks up more, rattling the bare branches of mulberry and oak and swamp maple. Derra dances back, nose white with snow, still bouncing with the endless energy and pure doggy pleasure she finds on our moonlight meanders. We turn back toward the lights of the house, the cats racing ahead, Derra pausing for one last moonlight muskrat check.

Back inside, Derra races upstairs while I hang up layers of outerwear, coats, hats, gloves, then slide another chunk of wood on the fire. By the time I reach the top of the basement stairs, she is sprawled at the foot of easy chair, where The Farmer is sound asleep. Both are snoring.

When it comes to promoting restfulness, few things are better than a healthy dose of moonlit fresh air.

Jack-In-The-Box Cheese Carving Springs Into First

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The third annual Creative Cheese Carving Contest was conducted at the 85th Pennsylvania State Farm Show. When the carving was complete, Angela Housch of Berks County was named the winner, receiving \$150. Her jack-in-the-box was the winning cheese sculpture.

The event featured the talents of six amateur contestants demonstrating their cheese-carving skills. Each contestant was provided one hour to sculpt an image from a five-pound block of cheddar cheese.

Mahoning Cheese Company from Smicksburg, Indiana County, provided the cheese for the contestants.

Second place went to Karen Huston of York County, who received \$100, and third place went to Wendy Gregory of Perry

County, who received \$50. Each winner also received a gourmet cheese basket.

To other contestants included Mike Wedrick of Northampton County; Ken Howard from Dauphin County; and Rodney Flenchbauch who resides in York County.

Among the other cheese creations was a cow jumping over the moon, a cat, cow, pig, and a farmer. All carvings were displayed in the cheese sculpture booth in the food court during the week of the Farm Show.

Judges for the event were Lori Burkholder of WGAL, Channel 8; the Pennsylvania Dairy Princess, Melinda Wolfe; and the Virginia State Dairy Princess, Laura Robinson. They were looking for the most creative, visually appealing and original sculpture.

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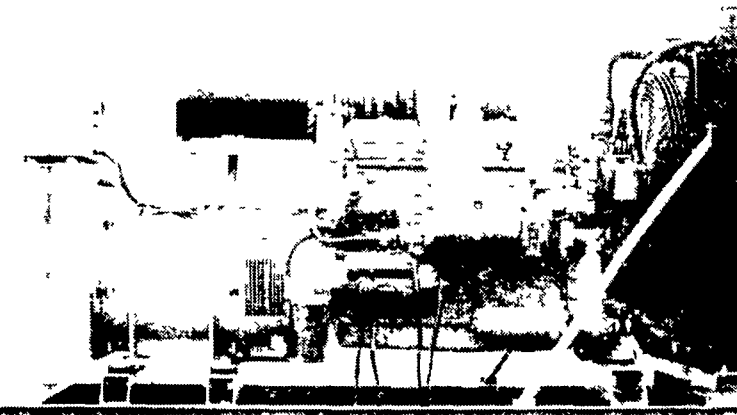
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