In the process, the blade gouged out chunks of ground and the wheel carved deep tracks in the glacial pack. Somewhat uneven to start with, the lawn now mostly resembles the potholestrewn interstate betweed the state line. Cascades of snowmelt runoff, detoured from their usual engineered flow around the yard by frozen flotsam and jetsam, took a meandering path instead through the lawn, adding ice slicks to the rough and tumble effect.

You don't want to go there. Especially in the dark, when you chance tripping on a frozen-fast branch and falling on your face onto a sharply-jagged stick protruding out of the glacial residue.

While most of the region was buried beneath the wintry snowpack, the mess could be ignored as an out-of-sight, out-of-mind

issue. Goodness knows, just keeping up with the outside chores most of the last three months has kept us plenty occupied.

And, the stuff was all frozen fast to the ground, anyway.

So when the lawn-care publication turned up on the kitchen table a few days ago, I just looked at it and sighed. The picture of plush, perfect green grass on the cover is a shocking contrast to the reality of our backyard. To use a popular, politically-correct description, the yard is a "challenge.

Still, as I scattered a bucketful of dirt and debris under the old pine tree, sweepings from around our diminishing woodpile, a tiny finger of hope and optimism waved at me. It was the slender shoot of a small bulb, yellowgreen and healthy, poking up through the rough, ragged residue.

That — and the flock of robins cavorting in the grass on a sunny road bank earlier this week have finally convinced me that spring is truly on the way.

The snow shovel can just stay parked by the back door a bit longer. But I might prop a lawn rake there beside it.

Maybe I can scuff loose some worms from under the leaves for

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, March 15, 2003-B3

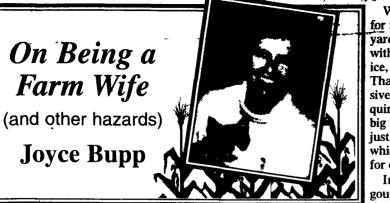
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jagged-edged pieces of wood,

scattered about the ground like

so many pick-up sticks strewn

about in a game. Multiple ice

storms wounded our trees, crash-

ing bits and pieces of limbs,

branches, and twigs of varied

slain old pussywillow still lingers,

despite an early assault on it with

chainsaw and clean-up crew to

break down its fallen carcass into

more manageable and usable

pieces. Before the chunks could

be moved, though, snow piled in

over them in layers, which in

turn were thoroughly soaked

with rain, al' of which then froze

into giant, funky-shaped, ice

Residue from the mortally

sizes all about the yard.

A battleground.

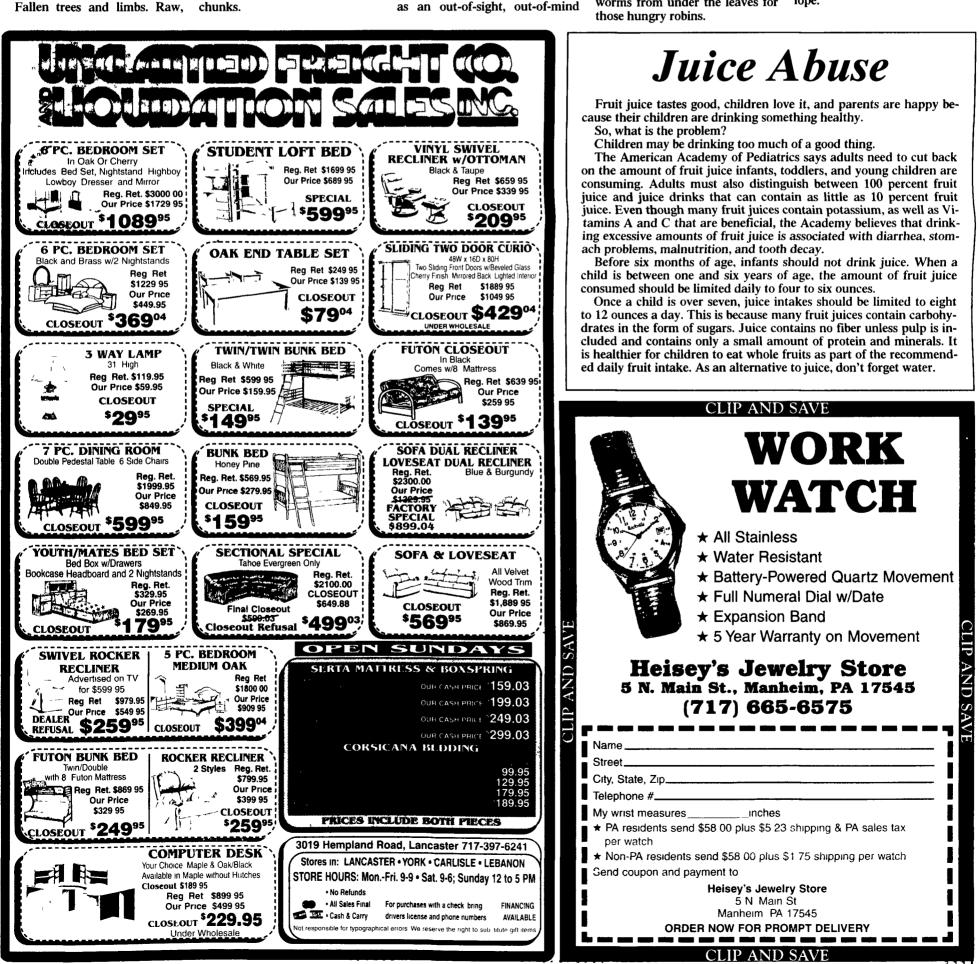
That's what it is. A battleground.

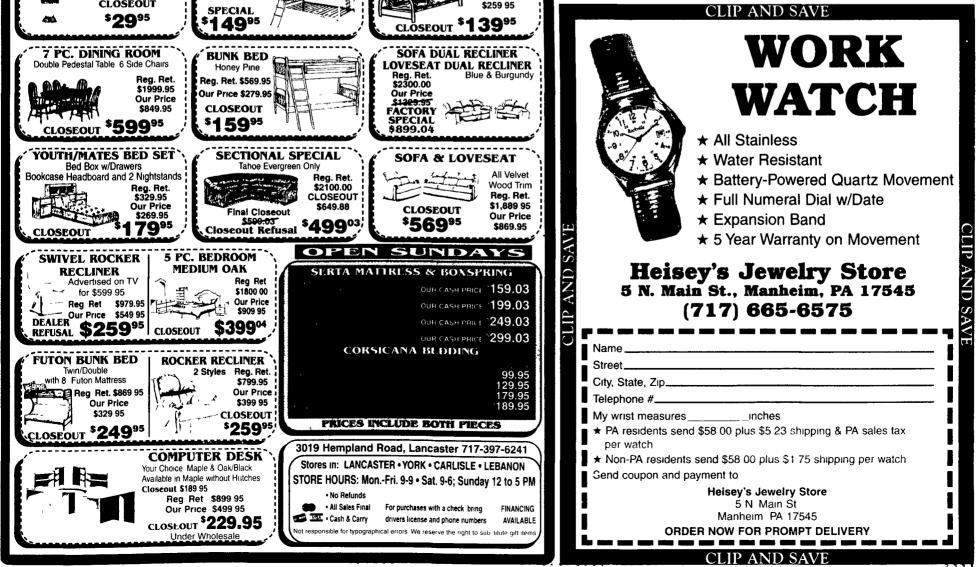
Signs of destruction, everywhere. Piles of residual trash. Fallen comrades. Even walking through is hazardous, requiring careful steps and a sharp eye to avoid dangerous obstacles.

And that's just the backyard.

Mother Nature fired her first shots months ago, with early December's preview of the winter to come. Ice storms are generally more a March phenonemon around here than a post-Thanksgiving happening. It was our first, introduction to the good, oldfashioned winter to follow.

And what a mess it's made. Fallen trees and limbs. Raw,





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