

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Mother knows best.

How many times, as kids, was that life-law laid on us? It may have come in different wordings, but it was a repetitive theme most of us heard through our childhoods.

"No snacks before dinner." "Put on your coat (hat, sweater, etc.)." "Just because everyone else is doing it, doesn't mean you have to." "If your friends jumped off a cliff, would you have to, too?"

And that great, undebatable finale to child-parent arguments: "Because I said so!"

We have a couple of mothers hanging around the farm whose behavior leads us to question if feathered and furred mothers always know best.

barn. The hen presiding over this nest has parked herself atop an upended large, round, hay bale out in one of the cattle lots. The hay in this big bale was made from drought-stressed, less-than-ideal grass, resulting in mediocre feed that the cows just are not interested in eating, having more tasty rations available. So the goose nest remains high and dry on its well-insulated foundation.

How this mother goose intends to get her newly-hatched goslings down from that high-rise hay nest is a subject of increasing curiosity around here.

Meanwhile, another mother tends to her new family, also tucked in a nest of hay. This tame, gray-tiger barn cat mother delivered her kittens at one end of the feed trough in a pen of weaned calves. She simply curled up in a large, soft pile of loose hay, which, of course, we would not dare move.

None of the four calves in that pen seems to pay a bit of attention to the tiny trough-dwelling kittens. No other small animals are likely to bother the little family in their raised concrete bunker, with sixteen sharp-hoofed calf feet stomping around the pen.

Once the kittens begin crawling around, though, we may have to intervene. The trough edges

are not that high and the little guys could tumble over the edge and get trampled. If this mother really knows best, she will figure that out. But, just in case, I have a spacious cardboard box on hold.

The two hen turkeys, which have enjoyed free run of the place all winter, never persuaded the newcomer gobbler to make their traveling pair a trio. He preferred to hang around with the bantams, which we finally concluded was due to his lack of ever having learned to fly up high to roost.

Last week, the old hen actually put herself back into the wire-enclosed pen where she hatched last year. She simply strolled in through the open door and began building a nest on the ground. So, The Farmer penned up the pair of hens, added a nesting enclosure with some grassy hay. Then, after dark, he snagged the gobbler and added him to the mix.

After being stuck up in a tree for a day and a half, having no clue how to get down without help, the gobbler finally figured out how to fly up — and down — to roost.

Even animal mothers might know best. But we're not too sure about this potential father.

He's turning out to be a real turkey.

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The Capital Area Beekeepers Association is offering the 16th Annual Short Course in Basic Beekeeping. This popular short course will be conducted Saturday, May 10, from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., at the Dauphin County Agriculture and Nature Center.

Pre-registration is requested before Monday, May 5. The course fee is \$20 per person for ages 18 and older, and \$10 per person for ages 12 through 17. Each fee includes a one-year association membership. Participants are encouraged to bring a bee veil and protective suit, if possible.

For a brochure/registration form, location map, and lodging information, contact Sam Albright, 605 South Mountain Road, Dillsburg, PA 17019, or call (717) 432-2628, or e-mail dauphin@email.cas.psu.edu.

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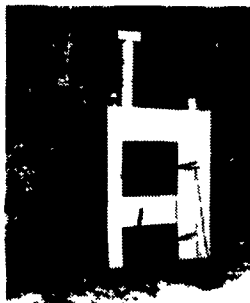
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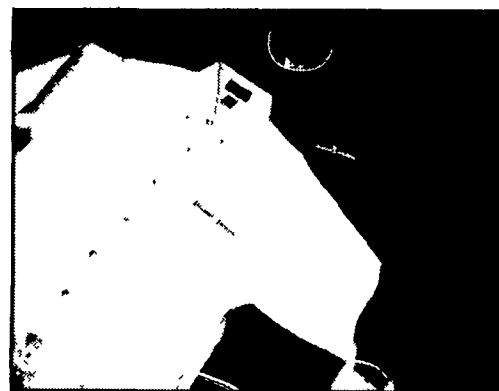
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