

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Gusting winds. Trees bending low, covering from angry gray clouds thundering overhead. Rain beating down, blowing almost parallel at times.

A mad dash to yellow school buses, creaking to a stop inside the inner playground area of our elementary school. Teachers, strained looks on their faces, bidding students farewell at the interruption of a fall season school day.

Hurricane. Hazel was her name, a destructively-nasty storm which plastered damage across the area in the 1950s. This was in pre-politically-correct times, when hurricanes were matter-of-factly and stereotypically dubbed with female names. Didn't matter what her name was, Hazel battered us

rather memorably as I recall, including some excused school days.

Kids don't understand property damage, job losses or threat to life and limb as readily as they understand days off from school. So my brothers and I thought hurricanes, like Hazel, were more diversionary entertainment and unexpected vacation from school than they were economically destructive. Several other hurricanes of significance rolled through that era of time over a couple of years, though Hazel sticks with me more than the rest, for some reason.

Maybe it was the big trees she knocked down in the woods behind our house, our childhood playground, which further cemented Hazel's visit in my mind.

After I contracted a major red, rashy, and terribly itchy case of poison from playing in one of them, Hazel's aftermath held less appeal, at least until all the residual poison leaves dried up.

Our early parenting years brought the way-more destructive Agnes, which parked over Pennsylvania for some three days, crying the blues — 15-plus inches worth — the whole time she hung around. With a three-year-old and a three-month-old baby, Agnes pretty much confined this mom to the house for her duration.

Power remained on for us through Agnes' stay, though The Farmer's grandparents, who lived just a short distance away, were plunged into darkness during that stretch of mid-June storminess. One pleasant memory of Agnes' stay was sharing a hot lunch with them one day, three generations of us, snug in our cozy kitchen, while the rain and wind beat against the windows.

When Agnes finally lumbered off, we had springs and streams running from the backyard, where no streams have gurgled before or since. Still, we were lucky to have known Agnes and been left with no more than a littered and soggy back yard. Towns, farms, businesses across the region lay flooded, damaged,

destroyed, and, even worse, lives were lost.

Now, like birdwatchers recording sighted species, we can add Isabel to our "life list" of significant weather events. Downgraded to a tropical storm one by the time she hit the Mason-Dixon line, Isabel mustered enough of a parting punch to leave us powerless, thankful for Uncle Earl the master electrician and his ways with cranky milking system generators, and added fodder for our downed-tree firewood stack and kindling collection.

While we were spared any major destruction, Isabel did manage to pick up one of the calf condos about a foot into the air and sit it back down on cement blocks parked there to help anchor down a tarp strung across the front as a calf rain-guard. She also peeled away a single piece of barn roofing, which we have as of last weekend's writing, still been unable to locate. And, a piece of maple tree limb Isabel plunked onto the hood of the battered old farm pickup added yet another "character line" to its crinkled countenance.

Given the goofy weather of the last 10 months — early, early winter, plentiful snow, cold, late spring, wet summer, soggy hay, fungus-laden wheat crop, etc., etc. — we had long speculated that this would be the year.

This would be the year, with a tall, beautiful corn crop nearly ready for harvest, orchard trees laden with fruit, soybean fields thick with podded stalks, we would also have a significant hurricane.

Some things, you'd be just as happy not being right about.

Gardeners Plan Composting Workshops

SPRINGFIELD (Delaware Co.) — Delaware County Master Gardeners of the Penn State Cooperative Extension are planning Composting Workshops in September and October.

Composting is an important part of home gardening. When the gardener recycles home waste materials, such as vegetable peelings, grass clippings, leaves and even shredded newspapers, he creates rich, organic nutrients that will greatly enrich the garden soil.

The Workshops will be conducted at the 4-H Farm and Educational Center, Garrett Williamson Foundation, 395 Bishop Hollow Rd., Newtown Square. They are scheduled for four consecutive Saturdays — Sept. 27, Oct. 4, 11 and 18. The sessions will begin at 9:30 a.m. and last about an hour.

Preregistration and a fee of \$5 are required for attendance. Space is limited so register early. Checks should be made payable to DCCE, and sent to Delaware County Cooperative Extension, 20 Paper Mill Rd., Springfield, PA 19-64. For further information please call (610) 690-2655.

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