


## On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

### Joyce Bupp



Seasons Greetings!

Well, it's that time of year again when we try a little harder to remember good friends and those folks we care about but rarely see, with holiday wishes.

We tried to get our farmers here to put some "howdy's" together, but they don't seem to find time to do that. So, as usual, it falls back on us girls, here at the barn, to cover their tracks. Our tracks are much prettier than theirs, anyway, with our graceful curved hoofprints, compared to their scruffy, tire-tread, boot prints.

Besides, this gives us a chance to set straight a Christmas myth that has proliferated forever.

It's that reindeer tale.

You know the story. Every Christmas Eve, Santa packs his sleigh up chocked full of toys for all the good girls and boys of the world. Then he hitches eight reindeer, plus another one up front with a red headlight, and off they fly.

Not so. Well, the Santa part is okay. But that nine-headed hitch up front?

Those are cows, my friends. Cows.

Actually, they're heifers, the more lightweight, fleet-footed teenagers of the bovine world. Cows like us can't go, because, once we have a calf, we have to be milked at least twice a day.

And, goodness knows Santa has a full enough schedule delivering those packages around the world, without stopping to milk the team.

Several of us here at the farm always spent our summers practicing to audition for Santa's hitch this week. It's work, let me tell you. Work. None of that reindeer games stuff. You have to stay focused.

Take flying practice.

Heifers just can't snap our hooves and bounce off. Launching takes specific technique. With a little style. And grace. Eight — no, make that nine — clumsy, unpracticed heifers tripping on the roof would make an awful racket. They can't fly around waking up all those sleeping children. Most of the little folks will be out of bed long before their parents are ready, as it is.

No, Santa operates with stealth. So we always practiced making graceful takeoffs by jumping the dry bridge that's supposed to keep us in the pasture. Our farmer, now, he always figures the heifers are slipping across it to snatch green corn or steal fresh alfalfa. If only he knew it was Santa's sleigh-hitch practice, he'd probably be proud, instead of grumbling about it.

After perfecting clearing the ground-level dry bridge, we'd gradually add a little height to our take-off technique. Pastures fence jumping is perfect for that. Once in a while, though, one of us would knock out a post.

Though we on the milking string are too mature for flights around the world, we do have inside gossip on the heifer team that's expected to pull Santa's sleigh later this week. It includes Ashley and Dancer and Francis and Pixie, Connie, Lupine, Donna, and Yipsy.

Oh, and Sparkle got picked to be the headlight in the front. She always has to be poking her head under the strand of electric around the grazing area, so she gets her nose lit pretty regularly.

Now, we all hope that you and your herd of loved ones have a peaceful and happy Christmas season. And, don't forget that the original Christmas celebration took place in a barn.

By the way, when you leave milk and cookies out for Santa, we'd appreciate a snack of hay and a bite or two of cow chow. We'll try not to leave anything behind for you but happy memories.

Merry Christmas!



## Cloister Lantern Tours Tell Test Of Faith

EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Early American winters could be challenging, but the winter of 1765 was especially difficult at the Ephrata Cloister. A year earlier, active and former members of the German religious community began a legal battle over the ownership of the land occupied by the society since 1732. The complex struggle involved illegitimate land deeds, secret alliances, and uncharitable acts. Now, with the benefit of historical research, this dramatic episode in the Cloister's history will be brought to life at the annual Christmas Lantern Tours on Dec. 26-29. The tours which begin every half-hour between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. require advance reservations which can be made by calling the Ephrata Cloister at (717) 733-6600.

"Like any community, the Cloister had its share of challenges and struggles. It's how those challenges are met and the struggles overcome that make the stories of history," says museum educator Michael Showalter.

This year's Lantern Tours are no exception. Each year a new story is featured in these popular tours. Visitors will be introduced to characters from Ephrata's past including Conrad Beissel, the community's founder, and Samuel Eckerlin, a former member who returned to claim the land.

These special role-playing tours are presented by the student historians of the Ephrata Cloister, area students in grades 7 and above who volunteer their time at the historic site. "The story is a bit complex, but the end result is a fascinating tale that shows how people of opposing

views occupied the same land — a challenge that remains even in the modern world," says Showalter.


Ephrata Cloister, founded in 1732, was a protestant monastic community of celibate Brothers and Sisters supported by a married congregation who lived near the settlement. Members, mostly German immigrants, sought spiritual goals rather than earthly rewards and chose Saturday as their main day of worship. At its zenith in the 1740s and 1750s, the congregation numbered nearly 300 people. Housed in impressive Germanic-style buildings, the lifestyle of the celibate members was characterized by strict discipline and self-denial. They became known for their self-composed music, Germanic calligraphy called Fraktur, and printing. Following the death of the last celibate member in 1813, the remaining married congregation formed the German Seventh-Day Baptist Church. Members continued to live and worship at the Cloister until 1934.

In 1941 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania acquired the surviving elements of the historic site and began a program of restoration and interpretation. Today, nine original buildings are part of a 28-acre complex open for visitors.

The Ephrata Cloister is located in the Borough of Ephrata at 632 West Main Street (Route 322) at the intersection with Route 272. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$6.50 for senior citizens, and \$5 for youth ages 6-17. For more information, call (717) 733-6600.

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