

Our sense of community is heightened by life's milestones



BY DIANE O'SHEA

The writer is a farm operator near Granton in Middlesex County

A special lady passed away recently. Sitting in the chapel at the funeral service, I pondered. Why does one have to die to be honoured?

Here was a woman, who with her husband of forty-some years had farmed through some of the prosperous and not-so-prosperous times. She was a mother too and a devoted grandmother. She was not a woman who moved mountains but she was a stable, reliable, pillar of the rural farm community. The turnout, like most rural funerals, was significant. It was right to be there. It was important to honour this lady. It was

more important to support the family at this time.

The minister spoke warmly of the community who had responded to this lady's illness, sustaining her and family members. She thanked the community for their gestures of love and friendship through the last few months and especially for gathering on this funeral day. As with most country funerals, this was a community event.

As I, too, listened, I was moved by the emotional feeling generated by the crowd. Here were warm, caring people. It is this traditional sense of community, this deep commitment to fellow men and women that we in our rural farm communities must uphold. Such a value cannot be measured. It cannot be awarded dollars and cents. The sense of community is priceless.

A good friend and neighbour has often suggested that we as farmers pay a price to farm. It is true. Hours are long. Work is hard. Holidays and leisure time little. Returns never

seem to be enough to meet the financial demands. Farmers tend to be snubbed. The business of farming in all its complexities is wearying. On the flip side however, the sense of community shines brightly. In times of death, sickness, disaster, the rural community rallies and responds in an out pouring of support. Such a response strengthens those in crisis. We don't appreciate our neighbours near enough. Why does it take a tragedy to bring such a response? It seems to me that we spend a lot of time criticizing our neighbours instead of praising.

Last year we were awed by a neighbour's handwritten message in a Christmas card. The message thanked us for growing the assortment of fresh vegetables that we do for those in the community who do not garden but liked having a handy place where they could purchase fresh, quality produce. Instead of the usual rural community back-stabbing banter, we were being complimented — up front! How gratifying!

So to my neighbours and yours too — some well-deserved heaps of praise so that when we are not longer part of the community you will know just how much you really are appreciated.

To all those, who despite the endless hours of farm work, manage to grow and maintain immaculate flower beds, gardens, shrubberies and lawns. I am in awe and do appreciate your efforts. You make my trips up and down the country roads a pleasure.

To those neighbours who find ways and means of keeping up farm buildings and fences, particularly those with an appreciation for the massive, grand old barn structures, thank you. Regardless of the economic conditions of the times, your deep sense of pride and responsibility is admired. In addition, the farm signs that dot many a farming operation indicate to me those same values. So many in our world do not possess such values or perhaps don't have the opportunity to do so.

To all those leaders of rural youth, thank you for your commitment to today's young people. Your efforts contribute to a wholesome society, saving taxpayers vast amounts of money.

To all those who do the little things like washing the local community centre's tea towels, or cleaning up after the fair or whatever is over; your willing volunteer service contributes much to the life of the community.

To my neighbours who operate 'neighbourhood watch'. Your alert eyes keep our farms and our community in care.

There are countless other reasons to comment our neighbours and to appreciate the farm communities in which we live. Sometimes we need a gentle reminder. A trip to any of our major cities, jungles of apartments and concrete, often reaffirms such appreciation. However, for me it was that funeral of that special lady. That's what it took.

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A farm house is:

by WENDY FIELDER

A place where the soap has to be washed before you can wash your hands.

A place where boots are lined up outside the door when it's sunny, and lined up inside on the basement steps to be tripped over when it's raining.

A place where you can find opened mail everywhere except where you thought you put it — especially produce cheques.

A place where a salesman, the crop inspector, and the vet can find a meal if they just happen to arrive at 11:45.

A place where mud-caked boots are "walked across the floor" on 2 newspapers to get to the telephone.

A place where yesterday's paper, the hog journal, a report on artificial insemination, and COUNTRY GUIDE can be found in the same rack. You can never find today's paper. Someone used it to walk across the floor to the telephone.

A farm house is where you can almost always smell the aroma of baking. The 10-kilogram bag of flour is a way of life.

A farm house is where, during spring, the cardboard by the back door is changed as often as the wet socks.

A farm house is where the mending pile is as high as the laundry pile.

A farm house is where laundry day is a 12-hour seige.

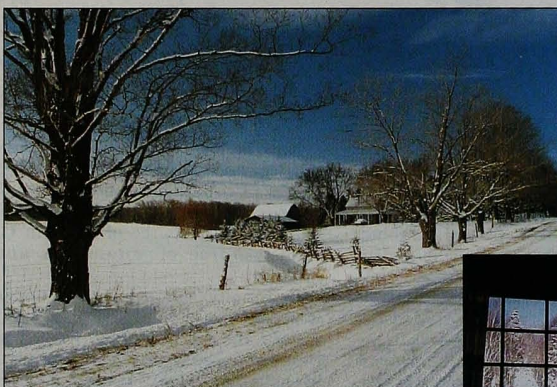
A farm house is where the lights turn out late and turn on early.

A farm house is where the major decisions are made around the kitchen table.

A farm house is the place where everyone is a weather forecaster.

A farm house is a place of calories and for some, the fight for slimmness is constant.

A farm house is where the "lady of the house" does everything from driving a 15-ton combine to pulling out slivers.



The photo above was taken by Janet Root, New Lowell, Ont., and the one on the right by Maxine White of Sundridge, Ont. Both were entries in our photo contest



A farm house is the last place on the farm to get repaired. The animals can't go without water, but people can manage for a couple of days.

A farm house is where accounts are spread out on the kitchen table in the evenings.

A farm house is often a place of laughter.

A farm house is the embodiment of togetherness, for all things seem to start there.

A farm house is calmness and chaos all rolled into one.

A farm house is never "off the beaten track". It more often than not is in the middle of the beaten track.

A farm house never has to "get back to the basics". It never left. The farm house is the brains, the muscle, and the pulse of the farm. It is also its heart.

The farm house is the place which really earns the title of "Home"!

Wendy Fielder, who grew up on a farm, writes children's books and teaches in rural Manitoba.