

Farming in winter no easy chore

As the Editor of Maclean's magazine's People section, Marsha had the high life. Then she made a dramatic change, becoming the only editor in Maclean's history to leave a choice position to become a shepherd on a farm in Minto Township.

Marsha has continued to write for many national publications while she actively farms. In 1989 her "Letter From the Country" made its debut on CBC Radio's "Later the Same Day" and it was an instant hit with city dwellers, which should come as no surprise because nostalgia for "the country" plays a powerful role in the psychology of modern society. Scratch almost any Canadian and you will find a farmer under the skin.

"Dear Aunt Jean" her letters begin... and with that the "Herald" welcomes a new voice to our pages.

Dear Aunt Jean,
As I grabbed my pick axe and handsaw and went out into a blizzard to do my chores, I realized that maybe farming in winter does mean I am a few pickles short of a jar.

While city folks battle brown-grey slush in the downtown streets, I often find that just getting to the barn means leaping through thigh high snow drifts.

Ice rain is the worst. It makes the drifts turn to crisp blockades that seem to carry weight for a few steps before you crunch through the jagged edges and have to claw your way out.

One energetic, albeit "mature", Scottish shepherd friend has set up a kind of winter hazard fence line to guide him to and from his barn in blinding snow. He spaces the poles at in-

**Letter From
The Country**
by
Marsha
Boutton



tervals and each one is decorated with orange reflecting tape. If he takes three snowshoe steps without seeing a pole, he knows he's off track. The man is positively canny.

I try not to tread off the beaten track myself when snow is swirling. I have heard too many tales about pioneer days and even more recent times when a simple amble up an icy, snowed-in lane way led to disaster.

There are some chores that simply can not wait for the weather to break - feeding and watering livestock, for example. Unfortunately icy rain freezes the edges of the big round bales of hay that are intended to allow the sheep to feed freely and provide some convenience for me.

This leaves me in the inconvenient position of having to bash the frozen bale with my pick axe and rip away the outer core of hay with my trusty hack saw.

Sometimes it gets pretty frustrating. As soon as I have axed and sawed a bale open the eager sheep descend and making a quick exit comes close to scaling a Matterhorn of snow and wool.

Just when I manage to get everyone fed, the water pump

generally freezes. At this point I have been known to pull my snow-covered toque over my face in the hope that what is obviously a bad dream will be over soon, but it never is.

This year the annual water freeze up came after the chores and after supper. I discovered it as I prepared for a long hot soaking of tired muscles before bed. Oops, no water.

I have learned to keep a few gallons of water in the basement for just such occasions. While they boil on the stove I clamber into my damp snowsuit and assemble assorted flashlights for the dreaded trip to the pump house, 150 long yards across a snow drifted wilderness.

The pump is six feet down in a styrofoam lined hole. Every winter I promise to install a staircase, but every spring I forget about it. An old crate is my only step into the pump hole.

After years of experience I know that the trouble generally lies in a little rubber hose called the venturi tube, which must be massaged with hot water. It usually takes a few jugs before the pump clicks in, by which time a damp snowsuit can start to seize up making getting out of the pump hole an almost arthritic exercise.

Then there is a mad dash back to the house to make sure that the water is flowing. Air gets trapped in the line and it takes a few spurts and burps for it to work its way through the taps.

After one particularly gruelling pump house war, a girlfriend from the big city called me as I was thawing out in my trusty long johns by the fire. She had endured a dreadful day in the city

streets and the road salt had fairly ruined a fine new pair of suede boots.

"I had to call you, because I just know that you are out there in the country having a great time, with your feet up by the fire

and those darling dogs curled at your feet," she said. "I wish I could be there."

"Absolutely right," I told her. "There is no life like it." Then one of the big furry dogs shook wet snow all over me.

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New farm movement

A new co-op movement has begun.

Directors, members, customers and employees of agricultural co-operatives in Ancaster, Ayr, Beamsville, Cambridge, Cayuga, Dunnville, Embro, Guelph, Lynden, Milton, Norwich, Woodstock and Waterloo County are meeting to reshape their co-operatives.

They are investigating ways to increase their co-operatives'

viability. For a number of years, many of these agricultural co-operatives have felt the same pressures as their over 7,500 members, many who are farmers.

"Co-operatives, like any business, must be profitable, but co-operatives have a unique ability and responsibility to give those profits back to the members and rural communities they serve,"

says Clarence Diefenbacher who is chairing the area's CRO steering committee.

The group, known as Group 5 CRO Steering Committee, issued a letter to Co-op members and customers this week inviting their feedback and input into their co-operatives' direction. The committee is expected to have a business plan early this year.



Legion Donation

Members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 120 Georgetown, donated \$1,000 to the Love in Christ Food Bank Monday morning. Pictured above: (From left to right) 1st Vice President Paul

Yates, President Bob McNelly, Director of the Love in Christ Food Bank Laura Ellison, 2nd Vice President Dave McNelly, and Public Relations Officer Marj Tufty. (Herald Photo)

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