A Farmer's Daughter

It is the natural earthly things that really count in life. I learned this in early preteen years out on our farm. My parents bought a farm close to the present Music Blossom Center in Northampton Township, Summit County, Ohio. The farmland needed a house to be built on it. There were no buildings, only land and eager parents to start a new farming life, the skills of which were learned in Austria-Hungary, Europe.

My mother's brother was a skilled carpenter. Uncle Joe came to America, built a home for us, built a barn, a silo, a carriage shed, a pig sty, a chicken house, smoke house and an "out-house". A well was drilled for drinking water. A pond was created by excavating some land near the well in the pasture land. The livestock had access to the water when the animals were free to roam.

There were four to six horses, twelve to twenty cows, several hundred chickens, a large flock of ducks, a large flock of geese, a few turkeys, many pigs, "Shep", the dog, several cats. The food for the animals was raised on the farm. There were fields of oats, wheat, corn, hay and buckwheat. The planting, cultivating and harvesting was done by simple manual labor.

When we first moved to the farm there only two older brothers and myself, a daughter. Production and reproduction seemed to be the lifestyle on the farm. Babies of all kinds were being born everywhere. In five years there were four more brothers and sisters. The farm animals multiplied rapidly. The mares were bred by a neighbor's stallion. The cows were bred by the neighbor's bull. Chicken eggs were placed in a home incubator. Ducks sought their own nesting areas, layed eggs and hatched their own broods. The geese did the same as the ducks. Raising our own food was a necessity. Smoking, canning, and drying the food for winter use was a tremendous job.

The cows were milked twice a day. The milk was put into cans, cooled and shipped out daily for consumers use. Some was saved for our own use. The milk for our own use was stored in crocks in the cool basement. Cream was skimmed off some of the milk. The cream was churned into butter. For mini, quick churning the cream was poured into a two

quart jar, then was shaken by hand until butter was formed. The skimmed milk was left in the basement to sour and to become thick like modern day Yogurt. The sour milk was heated, poured into a cheesecloth, then was hung to drain. The liquid that was drained off was called whey. The solid portion within the cheesecloth was called curds. Do you remember the nursery ryhme, "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet eating her curds and whey. A long came a spider and frightened Miss Muffet away?"

The whey at our farm was used to feed the pigs. The curds were used to make delicious foods, Hungarian style. Palacsinta was one of my favorites. Here is the recipe for Palacsinta or Hungarian Pancakes:

1 cup flour
½ tsp salt
2 tsp. sugar
4 eggs
1 1/3 cup milk
2 tbsp. melted shortening.

Sift flour, measure and return to sifter. Add salt and sugar. Beat eggs, add milk and shortening (butter or margarine). Beat until perfectly smooth. Use a skillet that is 8 to 10 inches in diameter. Using moderate heat. Oil the skillet. Use ½ cup of batter, spread it out very thin. After one side is done, turn it over to bake the other side. This recipe makes 12 or 14 Palacsinta. Spread each pancake with cottage cheese topping. Use 1 cup sour cream and 3 or 4 tablespoons of powdered sugar. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Roll each pancake. Serve with 1 tbsp. sweetened sour cream on each pancake.

On the farm our shortening was butter or lard. We made both. The lard was made at butchering time, usually in November when the air was cold and freezing. The fattened hogs were slaughtered, one at a time as we needed the meat for food. Butchering time was a very busy time. Let us proceed with the slaughtering of a hog, sixty-five years ago, on our farm. Select a well fattened sow or boar, one whose belly practically touches the ground when trying to walk. "The slower the motion and the lazier the grunt, the better the animal," said my father. But I loved and cared for all the farm animals. They were my pets. It was a sad day to see even a big, fat sow killed. But we had to eat to live. Survival was/is a way of life. Food raised on the farm was our livelihood. Poor Suzie had to be beaten and eaten! Suzie was beaten with a sledge hammer on the head. She was then stuck in the throat with a sharp butcher knife. The blood was caught and saved to

make "bloodwurst" blood sausage. I know it doesn't sound good, sure had a lot of iron in it and it was filling. "It's good for you, it makes you grow!" "And fast, too!" One look at me and you would understand, especially my feet. Honestly, size 12 is hard to find!

Now, back to the sow. We had a large iron kettle filled with scalding hot water ready to immerse the body. The hair or bristles had to be removed before opening the body for organs removal. Sharp butcher knives were used to take out the heart, liver, kidneys, intestines, and other parts. They were put to good use. My parents preached, "Use every part, don't waste anything." They practiced the golden words. The intestines were washed out, this was my job. The excrement was used for fertilizer in the garden. The intestines were scraped, washed and salted. Later the intestines were used as casings for the sausage and bloodwurst. The heart, liver and kidneys were cooked, ground, then mixed with cooked rice. The mixture was seasoned with salt and peper, then put into casings. The head, feet and tail were boiled with onions, carrots and seasonings to make headcheese. Fried brains was the specialty of our cuisine. Eat brains! Then you will stay slim, I did. The layers of fat had to be cut from the skin. The fat was cubed, then fried in a large kettle. The hot, clarified lard was poured into large ceramic crocks for future use.

Some of the feet were pickled and put into sealed jars. The chops, hams, and sausages were smoked in the smoke house. The smoke house and "Out house" were near each other. The smoke house was used to smoke the butts, the "outhouse" froze our butts, especially in zero weather. Suzie's skin was fried crisp, it was a good substitute for chewing gum. The dogs thrived on the fried skins. My pet, Suzie, proved to be good eating to the last bite. Oh, how I loved Suzie!

The close neighbor raised acres of Everbearing strawberries. He hired children to pick them. My two brothers and I usually picked strawberries from June to September. I well remember my first experience at the age of six. The farmer called the pickers in to the barn where he had the crates and quart wooden baskets. Each picker put his/her initial initials on twelve baskets. Six baskets were placed in each of two carriers with handles. We were instructed to pick one row at a time. As soon as twelve baskets were filled, the

baskets were to be taken to the barn. Each picker had a chosen space to place the picked delicious, ripe strawberries. At the end of the day, the quarts were counted. Each picker was paid (1½¢) one and one-half cents per quart. I had picked one hundred quarts and was paid one dollar and fifty cents. I really felt rich. The strawberries were taken to the Farmer's Market in Akron. They were sold for ten cents a quart or three quarts for twenty-five cents. This was in the early twenties. Last week, July, 1984, strawberries were selling for $1.59 a quart in Ohio.

We always had a large garden. We raised tomatoes, cabbage, peppers, carrots, potatoes, beans, parsley, parsnips, onions, herbs, rutabago, pumpkins, and borders of annual flowers. We canned the tomatoes and peppers. The Cabbage was cut into thin shreds, put into crocks, salted and fermented in its juice, making sauerkraut. The potatoes were stored in a dark bin in the basement. The carrots, parsley, and parsnips were stacked and covered with a mound of sand outdoors near the kitchen.

We had a large orchard. There were many different kinds of fruit trees, peaches,apples, cherries and quince. Some were canned, others were stored in the cool basement. There was a Bartlett pear tree directly behind the barn. We children were allowed to pick the ripened fruit off the ground and eat to our hearts content. I used to rush to the tree early in the morning. I always wanted to get there first. That was soon stopped. One morning a Blue Racer about six feet long was uncurling from a limb ready to drop to the ground.

One day, I was told to go into the barn to get a measuring can. My father wanted to measure the oats for the horses. The hay was nearly used up in the loft. The cross beans were bare except one. A six to eight foot black snake was watching for mice. It was stretched on the beams. I grabbed the measuring can and ran out of the barn in a hurry. Too much snake for me!

We had a large wooded area full of huckleberries, blackberries and raspberries. We had relatives that swarmed into the woods to pick the berries. The berries were canned later made into jellies, jams and pastries.

One day we smoked bees out of a tree in the woods. We got a large tub of honey.

We raised rows of white, red, and purple grapes. The grapes were made into wine. In the Fall, we invited the relatives to have a Hungarian Festival in the orchard. A pig was roasted, wine was served, pastry was abundant. All kinds of food was available. There was music and dancing. A good time was had by all in the fresh air and sunshine.

Life on the farm was very enjoyable. I learned early in my life that it takes tender loving care to raise animals and plants. That each animal and each plant is an individual unto itself. Each has its own characteristics. Each behaves in its own way for a reason. Competition for survival meant dependence, interdependence and adaptation. Health and happiness was very essential for proper growth. Mother Nature's gifts to us should be cherished. Farm life was beautiful.