



Cows Do So Make Milk and other Oddities

Written by: Bertha Fisse Robbins and Edythe Fisse Emanuelson
Edited by: Marissa Blahník

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Bertha and Edythe

PREFACE

Our childhood was not very much different than that of thousands of other middle-class children in New York City in the early teens of the twentieth century. We were segregated more or less from other children; we were given a few more luxuries; we were pampered by an adoring family, and we had the great privilege of getting out of the city as soon as school closed for the summer. It is the memories of this childhood that we thought would make interesting reading.

We are four years apart in age - my sister and I - and it has been fun for us to compare our impressions of identical happenings. The older one remembered the details a little more distinctly, perhaps. Yet the younger one was able to see things in a clearer manner. There are some incidents that were only a faint memory to the older sister, and without the younger sister's vivid memory, it would have never been written.

We had such fun writing this little book that we want to dedicate it to our five children, so they might better know a Grandma and a Grandpa that they were separated from far too early in life.

TO: JANET, ROSS, ELAINE, GAIL AND MARILYN

RIVERVIEW FARM

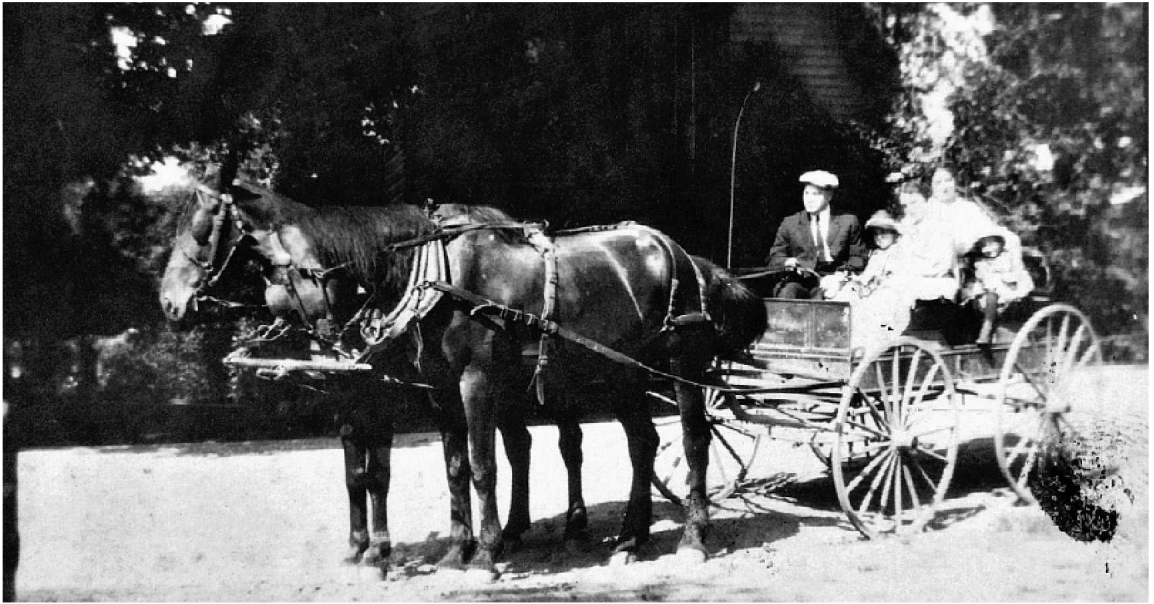
What a heavenly retreat Riverview Farm must have been to my young parents, who were so anxious to keep their little girls out of the city during the hot summers! They must have been made to feel very much at home and welcome, for they went back year after year. It must have been lonely for my mother, and hot and miserable for my Dad to have been separated all summer long, and yet, for our sakes, they were willing to do so.

Week-ends were so much fun. Daddy would come bringing Aunt Anna, or Cousin Mae, or Aunt Nettie, or Grandma, and we would go to the Railroad Station with the horse and buggy to meet them.

Looking back on the hospitality of the folks at Riverview Farm, I don't wonder that they called it their home away from home. Mr. Conn was like a Daddy to my father, pampering him with home-made ice cream by the gallon. Mrs. Conn was such a good cook. I remember Mother telling folks how 'everything on the table came from the farm.' Sweet corn, platters full; blackberries floating in heavy cream; mashed potatoes golden with fresh-churned butter; peas in the pod; home-made bread! Any wonder we city folks loved the farm?

Mrs. Conn had a sense of humor that would charm TV of today. One dark night she scared the living daylights out of us by suddenly appearing draped in a black bear skin. I can still see the laugh in her eyes as she was supposed to be scolding us for being in the creamery AGAIN. I can still taste the fat, hot gingerbread cookies I was given after the scolding. I still have the recipe for those cooking in my mother's recipe box. I must make some for my girls - but they will never taste as good as they did on the farm.

On the farm we laughed a lot; we sang a lot; we walked a lot and we certainly ate a lot. We came back to the city fat and healthy. Not as tan as you would expect because of the big sunbonnets we wore, and the long-sleeved dresses to protect us from bug bites, and the long stockings we wore to protect us from scratches and bites.



Bertha, Edythe, their father, William Fisse, mother Bertha Zarske Fisse, and an unidentified passenger.



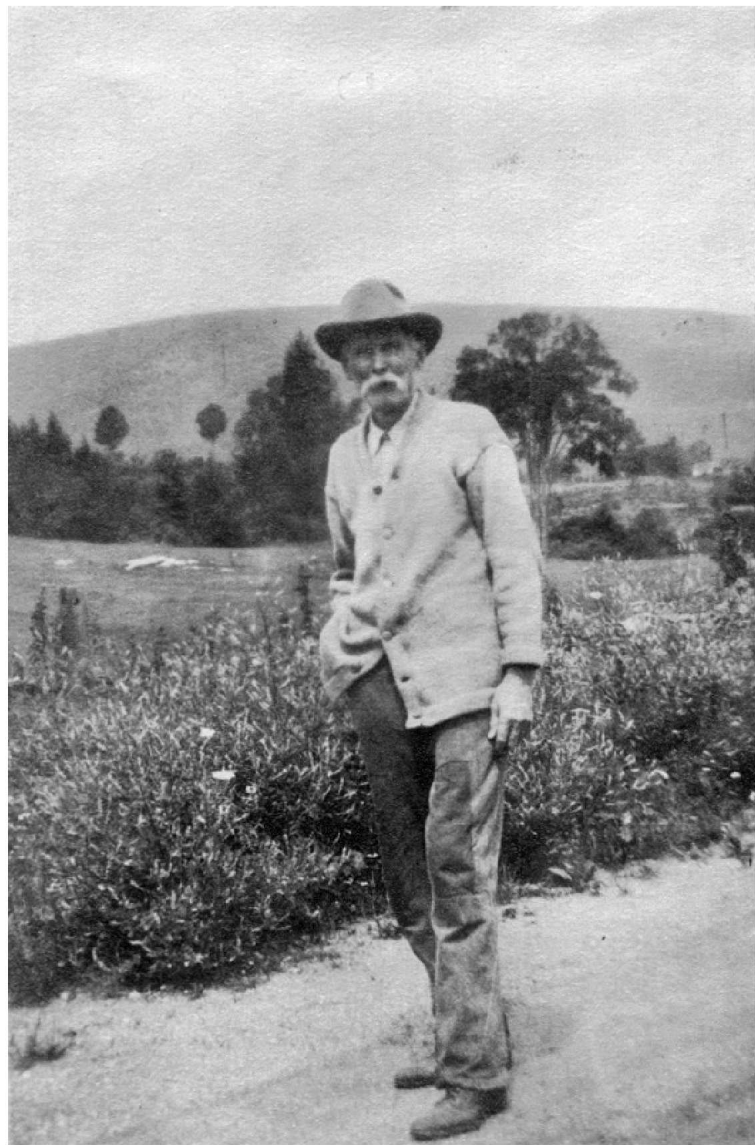
Riverview Farm. Bertha and Edythe's room was by the pasture fence.



Mr. and Mrs. Conn, Walter D., and guests



From left: William Fisse, Edythe, Bertha, Bertha Zarske Fisse, and Walter D.



Mr. and Mrs. Conn



A FARMER'S LIFE

A farmer's life is not an easy one any season of the year. This was a busy and hard-working group of farm people, but it really was amazing how little of all their endeavors they really enjoyed themselves. Fuel had to be purchased, clothing had to be bought. The animals had to be fed and the farm hands had to be paid somehow. Being self-employed, they had to sell their fruit, dairy products, vegetables and even hay to make ends meet. Eggs were candled and only the imperfect ones were put into water-glass for their own use. The best went to the market. Cream was carefully skimmed from the pans of milk in the ice-house and all of it was sold. Milk was poured into tall cans and picked up each day. Any milk over the quota was used mostly to fatten the pigs, some of which went to the market too. Vegetables were picked, packed and sold while in their prime. Only the specked tomatoes, and over-grown lettuce were on the farmer's table.

Chickens went to market when they no longer laid eggs, and the old roosters went to the soup pot.

We, the boarders, fared some better. We really ate better than most, when everything was plentiful. Fruit, of course, wasn't available, so Daddy's boxes were treats for all.

However, despite the lack of these few things, the lack of the corner store was what the attraction was for us city folk. With no wax-paper wrapped TipTop bread, we were served hot white bread fresh from the oven. Oh, the smell of yeast bread baking! The ginger and molasses cookies, and the biscuits and muffins that came out of that wood-burning range!

The farmer's life is not an easy one. He plows, plants, cultivates, harvests, packs and ships. He cares for the animals as he would his children, cleaning the barns, and feeding them regularly. He walks miles rounding up the cattle and spends hours milking them. He cares for his milk equipment as carefully as he does his own kitchen equipment. He cuts the hay, stores some, bales and sells some. He plows the snow and cuts the ice and stores it in the ice house. All winter he works cutting wood and splitting it. He repairs his own tools getting them ready for summer.

His wife works just as hard in the garden and kitchen and with summer guests.

These were the farmers I knew when I was a child. Perhaps today's farmers fare better.

FARM FRIENDS

Being a city-kid, life on the farm was so very different from life in the city. So many thrilling things were always happening on the farm. Once I woke up to find a new-born piglet in bed with me. Our room was on the first floor on line with the pasture lot. It was a usual sight to waken to the neighing of the horse as he stuck his head in the window looking for a lump of sugar.

Have you ever felt the velvet softness of a horse's lips as he gently picks a lump of sugar from your outstretched hand? His teeth are so large and white and look so threatening when they are at eye level. You soon learn, however, not to fear them, as he never opens his teeth until the sugar is well within his lips.

Fluffy baby chicks and ducks are another joy to cuddle. The mother hen is very protective of them, and it is sometimes impossible to get one of her chicks in your hands. However, even she soon learned not to fear us and would turn her back and waddle away so we could hold one of her precious babies for a minute or two.

Kittens, calves and puppies; ducks and chicks and piglets. What a well-spring of life there is on a farm.



Bertha



Edythe

"THERE'S NOTHING TO DO, MAMA!"

And what do little girls do all day long on a farm? Mother was very young herself, and it must have been lonely for her with Daddy in New York City all week. But she managed to keep herself and my sister and I busy most of the time.

She was never too busy to play with us. She showed us how to extract the tiny black seeds from the plantain blossom and pretend they were coffee beans. She showed us how to rub two soft white stones together. The result was a tiny cupful of soft white sand that resembled sugar. These things kept us busy for long periods of time.

We made golden-glow wreaths for our hair. We made hollyhock dolls, and looked for the "king" in a pansy. We made bookmarks with Butter and Egg blossoms. We searched for hours on our hands and knees looking for four-leaf clovers.

Mother and Daddy were city-kids themselves, and how they loved the country.

Mother pasted Ladies Home Journal cutouts on pieces of linen and we cut out a whole family of dolls and their clothes. Then, she would teach us how to play with them. Little people need to be taught how to use their toys. I see young mothers today give their children books of exquisite "push-out" paper dolls, which the children tear and discard because there is nothing else to do with them.

We took long walks through the cemetery and read the gravestones. One, in particular, made Mama cry. It marked a baby's grave and said "Ah, what hopes lie buried here!"

There were long cool evenings sitting in the lawn swing with Mrs. Conn and Walter D. Mama had a lovely singing voice and "Baby Shoes" and "Hello, Central, Give me Heaven, for my Mother's There" still hum sweetly in my ears when I remember the swing and its accompanying squeak as we rocked back and forth.

Naptime for my sister and I were the hours Mother spent on our little dresses which she made by hand and exquisitely embroidered.

In between time, Mother spent with Mrs. Conn in her old fashioned kitchen learning to bake bread and to make gingerbread cookies. She helped churn the butter and to make pot cheese.

There was always plenty to do, and I still found time for mischief.



PIGGIES

"Move over and stop wiggling!" I shouted to my little sister who was sharing my bed. We were on the farm and it was very early in the morning.

The wiggling continued, and I was very annoyed.

"Lie still!" I commanded and got a sleepy grunt from my sister and a silly, scared squeal from something under the covers.

We pulled back the blanket and found to our astonishment a tiny, fat, pink and entirely naked baby piglet!

We squealed with delight and the little runt squealed in terror. He was so tiny and he felt exactly like a real baby. His skin was soft and warm and we could feel his little heart beat.

During the night he had been born with eight other piglets and being the smallest, he had been shunted aside by his mother. Daddy had washed and hand-fed him before tucking him in bed with my sister and me just for the fun of it.



TEMPTATIONS

Why is it that "Thou shalt not" seems to be a challenge to most of us? There were several places we were forbidden to go while on the farm, and those were the very places I wanted most to be.

One was the mysterious room that was just above the one we had. I know now that there was no mystery about it, but I was told so many times not to go up those stairs, that it became something that I must do. I remember the day I did just that. I crept up those stairs like a mouse, but all I can remember was that you had to go up a few steps to go into one bedroom off the landing, and down a few steps to go into the bedroom on the other side.

Another forbidden place was the hen house. Why I loved to sneak in there is a mystery to me. It was hot and smelly as I remember and the hens on the nests would hiss at me, and I was always caught and punished. What was the attraction?

But the Creamery was another story. I KNEW what was in there, and if there is anything I love more today as then, it is thick cream. There floating on big vats of ice water were the big shallow pans of milk with a thick layer of cream on top. What a

temptation!! The cream would be so thick that a leathery skim would be on top. I never did learn how to get a bit of the cream without putting a big wrinkle in that skim, and leaving a dead-give-away as to the culprit.

Mrs. Conn used to pour a glass of milk for me in the evening and let it sit in the ice-box over night so that in the morning I would have half a glass of cream to drink, and still I would find myself in the Creamery looking longingly at the pans of milk with their creamy tops.

The barn, the silo, and the ice-house. How I loved those buildings. I suppose I was often in the way, but everyone was so kind to me.

The pastures, the wood-pile and the corn crib were also forbidden because of the river, the snakes and the rats. But get into them I would. I loved to shuck the dried corn kernels off the cob, even though I ended up with sore fingers.

Now that I think of it, I was no more angelic than my dear little Grandson is today!

THE ROOT CELLAR

Another interesting and forbidden place in the house on the farm was the root cellar. City kids never see a root cellar, so I had to investigate so I could tell my friends about it.

There in the semi-darkness hanging from the beams were row after row of long black stockings filled with onions. A knot was tied after each onion, and you cut off the bottom as many as was needed. Mrs. Conn once tried preserving eggs the same way, but the rats found them and drained the shells right through the stockings. She never tried that again.

On shelves there were big jars of pickles, and home canned tomatoes. In big crocks was sauerkraut. I'd snatch a piece of sauerkraut, but it was awfully salty, as I remember it. Big turnips and carrots and potatoes were down there too. It smelled spicy, and moldy there, but it was cool, dark, quiet and I loved it.



Bulls Bridge, Kent, Connecticut

QUICKSAND

"Mama -- Mama, Bertha's feet are stuck in the mud and she can't get them out!"

My little sister came running to Mama with this startling news one bright sunny morning. We were on the farm in Connecticut. Two little city kids out exploring in the pasture lot.

Mama put aside her sewing and went with my sister to see what kind of trouble I was in this time. She made all of our school clothes by hand during the summer months while on the farm and it seems I always saw some kind of sewing in her busy fingers.

I had on a bright red sweater and could be seen quite clearly way out in the cow pasture, tugging and pulling at my leg with both hands. My leg had sunk into the soft mud up to my knee and I was having difficulty keeping my balance.

Mama immediately suspected quicksand and ran for help.

It wasn't long before several of the farm hands were running toward me carrying a long ladder and a rope. Although only a few minutes had elapsed, I had fallen into the mud and in my struggles to get out I had sunk in up to my hips.

I can still feel the sensation of that warm, soft sand sucking around my body. It dragged at my little black pumps until they came off and my stockings were being pulled both ways at once since they were firmly fastened with long garters to my drawers-waist. I seem to feel that insistent tug even now on my shoulders and legs.

Soon the men had the ladder laid between us and a lasso was thrown over my head and shoulders. I remember being very proud of the fact that it took three men to pull me out. It was the best tug-o-war game I had ever had -- now, after it was all over.

It seems the more you fight against quicksand, the larger the suck hole gets and I was certainly creating a big disturbance.

Little by little they dragged me to the ladder, and when, at last, I had something tangible to hold onto, I set up a wail and became absolutely helpless to my rescuers.

Finally, one man lay flat on his stomach and gradually wormed his way across the rungs

of the ladder until he could grab me. Then the other two men pulled the ladder, the man and myself until we were safe on firm ground.

I was a sorry-looking little girl, I can tell you. Everyone was excited -- the gamut of emotions ran high. They were thankful, angry, and relieved all at once.

I was loved, scolded and praised all before I was bathed.

But if I hadn't gone into that pasture lot that morning, the whole herd of cows might have been lost for that suck hole had appeared some time during the previous night and it was directly in the path the herd took for water and salt-licks during the day.



Bertha



RATTLERS LIKE COOKIES TOO

Even the snake fanciers or whatever they are called say it isn't so, still I know that snakes eat fresh, warm molasses cookies.

I was only about four and at the farm in Connecticut for the summer months. Early one morning, as I sat in the soft white sand, sifting it through my fingers and pretending it was sugar, a rattler slithered out of the woodpile and came toward me.

Mama stood several feet away too terrified to cry out or move.

On the grass beside me lay a large molasses cookie. It was still warm and fragrant. I picked up my cookie and took a bite just as the snake raised its head and body preparing to strike. In my baby mind, I thought it was begging for cookie as the dog did at meal time.

I obligingly broke off a piece of my cookie and laid it before the snake, and before my mother's unbelieving eyes, the rattler devoured the cookie and wriggled back into the woodpile without striking me.



Walter D.



Of course, I was totally unaware of any danger and was very much puzzled at my mother's queer behavior when she finally got strength enough to run to me and snatch me up from the ground.

ONE TOO MANY

As I grew older, I was allowed to go with Walter D. to bring in the cows in the evening. It was a long walk but an interesting one. As I remember it, we had to walk down the road a bit, cross over, and go over an embankment. There was probably a path but I remember skampering up over an embankment after Walter D. Maybe he didn't appreciate taking a kid with him, and took the longest way around. We had to cross the canal on a wooden bridge and followed a long path up hill to the pasture lot.

We went pretty high up, I remember looking back and being able to see the whole farm - the house, barns and silo.

One evening, we were surprised to find a new-born calf with the herd. The walk home was long for me, but for that tiny weak stumbling calf, it must have seemed an eternity. It took us so long to get back that the folk were worried, but when Walter D. shouted "We've got one too many," there was much excitement in the barnyard.

I don't think I learned any of the facts of life from the experience, because I distinctly remember thinking that it was an orphan that had been adopted by that cow. We had often visited the Odd Fellow Orphanage, and I knew about orphans and adoptions - if nothing else.



Edythe and Bertha



Edythe

HAY RIDES

I feel so sorry for the little girls of today who are taken to a "Dude" ranch for a hay ride around the ranch lot. The hay rides I remember were so different!

I would go with Walter D. and the men in a rickety old hay wagon way down the road somewhere, and have the time of my life playing in the field while the men pitched the dry hay onto the wagon. The ride home on that sweet-smelling, slippery hay was more fun that I can begin to tell you. You had to hang on for dear life as the horses trot along. As bits of hay fell all along the road, I was afraid that I'd be next to go. The thrill of that 5-mile an hour ride was far more exciting than when I drive 50 miles an hour in my little VW today.

One year I spent a winter in Palmyra, N.Y. The Girl Scouts went on another memorable hay ride that I wish every child could have the chance to enjoy.

The hay wagon was on rimmers as the snow was deep and unplowed. It was lined with hot bricks to keep our feet warm, and we lay buried in the hay. It was a bitter cold night and the jingling of the bells on the horses and the singing of the Scouts was a tingling experience.

We rode maybe ten miles out into the country and stopped at an old farm house. The lady there had a roaring fire in the fireplace, a stack of hot bricks to replace our now cold ones, and a big pot of soup waiting for us. We stayed just long enough to drink a mug of hot soup, sing a few songs, and warm up. The ride home in the moonlight is something I will never forget.

I wonder where all the ragweed hay-fever and asthma was then. I never sneezed, or wheezed or coughed and struggled for breath despite the hay dust. Yet my oldest daughter suffered so from asthma that we could never take her on a farm or on hay-rides.

INTERIOR DECORATOR

Mother spent some of her vacation days sewing our clothes by hand and some of the time she did exquisite embroidery. She was rarely seen without a piece of sewing in her hand and there was always several strands of bright colored embroidery thread around her neck. She would sit in the lawn swing and work color after brilliant color into pillow tips and center-pieces.

The little snips of silk thread were never discarded carelessly, for mother soon found a use for them. She would carefully place them on the grass beside the swing.

Although she slowly rocked the swing and never worked without whistling or singing softly, it was a sight to behold to see a golden oriole hover over the bright threads, snatch one and carry it overhead to add to his nest. This went on all summer and several years later, after we were sure the nest was deserted, I had the most beautiful swinging nest to bring to school.

FRESH FRUIT

"Looks, mama! Look what the mailman brought!"

"What is it? Is it from Daddy? May I open it, please, mama?"

It was a shoebox securely wrapped and tied as only Daddy could wrap and tie a parcel. We knew it was from him just by the way the string was fastened at every intersection, but what could it be?

Mother let us tear off the wrappings and as we lifted the lid, the aroma that came from that box shall ever be with me. Packed carefully inside were a few peaches, a pear or two and several bananas! The sweetness of this ripening fruit was something I shall never forget - and the taste - wonderful!

For, although we were on a farm, it was between seasons for fruit. The cherries were gone, the peaches, pears and apples not yet ripe. We children were truly hungry for the fruit we had every day in the city.

Tucked in between the fruits were boxes of Kerr's butterscotch, jube jubes, and chewing gum. We had been away from the city for all of four weeks and with no corner candy store, this was surely a treat.

South Kent, Ct.

Aug. 23 1915.

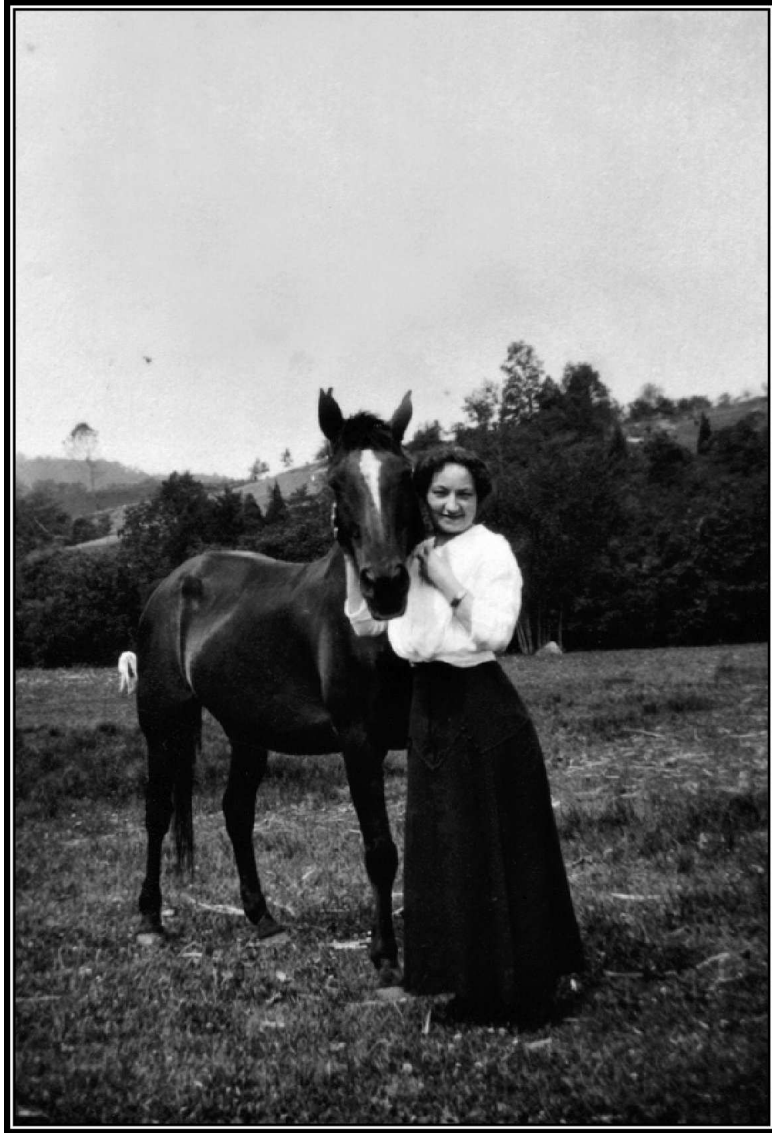
Dear Daddy.

Just a few lines to

let you know how glad I am that
I will soon be able to give you
a Big hug and lots of kisses. we are
having a good time and I have
enjoyed my crayons very much
yesterday it rained all day
so we had to play in the room.
The candy and fruit tasted fine
When I come home I will bring
you a little birds nest which
the wind blew down from one of

the trees. Give my love to
Grandma, Aunt Anna & Uncle
Henry and Uncle Frank, not for-
getting my Dear Aunt Nettie so good
bye till we meet Sat. I am

your Loving little
Daughter
Bertha



Bertha Zarske Fisse

EVEN EPIDEMICS CAN BE FUN - SOMETIMES

Polio - what a word of doom that was in 1914 and 1915. New York City was full of it, and the tragedy of this horrible disease was evident all over. Early in May the schools were closed and we children were kept indoors and away from others entirely. My folks decided to get us out of the city for the summer, but they practically had to sell their souls to get permission to leave. The Board of Health finally sent us the release papers and we were on the New York Central on our way to the farm in Connecticut.

It was the first time we had been there in the spring of the year, and it was like a new experience. Trees were in blossom, and cherries were ripe. It was planting time. It was a busy time for everyone on the farm, but they took us in and kept us safe from the epidemic.

For Walter D.'s sake, as well as the law, we were all three quarantined for ten days. Even that was fun for awhile. Mrs. Conn would bring us our meals on a tray, and we ate picnic style in our room. Before returning the empty dishes, mother would carefully wash each one in our little basin. Mrs. Conn would further sterilize them. You could hardly blame her when you read the newspapers and knew what this disease could do.

But we were all right and soon we were out running wild. We were both older by this time, and were allowed to do many things which had been forbidden years before. I got to feed the chickens, and go for the cows with Walter D. I helped (?) churn the butter, and I gathered eggs. I shucked corn for the chickens, and I picked strawberries and peas, eating as many as I picked, I'm sure.

Oh, this was a glorious summer. In September instead of packing up to leave just as the harvest time arrived, we stayed on and on. We watched the fruit ripen and picked, packed or preserved. We watched the thrashing of the wheat, and the filling of the silo. We watched the leaves turn to gorgeous colors and we felt a chill in the air that had never been there before.

It was November 5th before we came back to the Bronx. I remember the date because it was Mother and Dad's anniversary and the family and friends had prepared a huge welcome home party for us.

Starting back to school two months late was no problem for me. There were many empty seats in my classroom due to illness and the real work hadn't begun as yet. I had so much to tell anyone who would listen about the farm, that the time went fast.

COWS DO SO MAKE MILK!

"They do so!" I almost screeched in my righteous indignation. "They do so!"

"Aw, who do ya think ya foolin'? I've been up early lotsa mornings and I seen the milkman bring the milk right in bottles! He makes it somewheres."

"Well, I know the milkman brings the milk, but he does not make it. The cows make it. I saw Joe, on the farm, squeeze it right out of the cow's faucets!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" The kids doubled up with hysterical laughter. They'd never heard such nonsense. I was red with embarrassment, but I felt I was right, and pulled myself up tall even as I was fighting back the tears. I stamped my foot and yelled above their screams of laughter.

"I'll prove it. I'll prove it! Ma--ma! Ma--ma! Eee--ee--ip!" It was our special call. In the Bronx with fifty kids calling "Mama" every once in awhile in the alley between apartment houses, it was essential to have a special call.

"Eee--ee--ip! Ma--ma!" I yelled again and again until Mama finally stuck her head out of the fifth-floor window and called down, "Yes?"

"Mama, don't cows make milks?"

"Yes. Yes of course," and then with some annoyance, "Is that all you wanted?"

We were rarely allowed to play on the sidewalk with the kids unless Mama was there too, but today was an exception to all rules. We had just returned to the city after a long stay on the farm in Connecticut and Mama was very busy unpacking our clothes and putting everything in its proper place.

"There now! I told you so! My mother is telling the truth - and so am I! And besides," I added not willing to get rid of my audience so quickly, "and besides, it is so hot when it comes out, it smokes!"

OATS GROW INTO GRASS!

They had all stopped laughing, my group of seven-year old friends. They were really listening, so I felt very important and just had to add to my story somewhat.

"And besides, real grass grows from horse's oats!"

Mama's confirmation of my story about milk certainly had an affect. The kids accepted this astonishing tale with "Real grass? Honest?"

"Huh-huh, honestly!" I said, "and when the iceman comes, I'll prove it too!"

With an additional reason for waiting for the iceman, we were more than impatient for his arrival. A summer day in the Bronx can be awfully hot, and ice chips (dirt and all) taste awfully good. I was never allowed to beg for ice chips as Mama insisted that the ice was made of chemicals. I began to doubt that. On the farm I had seen great chunks of ice, buried in sawdust, in the ice house. I had even seen the sleds and the great ice saws with which the farmer said they had cut the ice out of the lake the winter before.

When the iceman finally came, we all ran to meet him, but to his surprise, instead of begging for the usual ice chips, we all begged for a few grains of oats from the horse's feed bag. He obligingly poured a few of the long yellow grains into our grubby hands. We ran over to a small 8" by 12" metal grating in the sidewalk. It was put there by the water company to cover their shut-off valve. A fine collection of dust and silt had laid a nice layer of soft black soil over the valve.

We poured our precious oats through the grating and scratched them under with sticks. Then all we had to do was water them and wait for the results.

A week or so later when the light green wisps of grass struggled weakly to the top of the grating, I was indeed an important person, for there was my proof that oats grow into grass.

EPILOGUE

And so -- now it is the year 1971 and I am 64 years old. I've enjoyed reliving my childhood and I hope you've enjoyed my memories too. However, I cannot close without telling you the most interesting part of all.

One day, Elaine happened upon a Connecticut telephone book and came up with the name of Walter D. Conn, New Milford, CT. She sent me the clipping with a note saying "Could this be your Walter D.?"

At Christmas time I addressed a card to Mr. Walter D. Conn and enclosed a note asking if he was in fact "our" Walter D. and added, "if so, you will be more interested in my memories of Riverview Farm than anyone else."

Soon I received a lovely letter telling me that he "certainly did remember little Bertha," and that he would be interested in reading my memories.

So I sent my stories to him and he said he and his wife and children had a great time reading them. He invited me to their home where I met his Sarah J. and five of six children and their families.

It has been a wonderful relationship. Walter D. and Sarah J. have taken me to all the well-remembered places. The old house is now cut in two and we had to go to two different locations to get a picture of the whole! The canal, the river, the covered bridge, the railroad station, lover's leap, the Post Office, the cemetery. I've slept in the same bed that had graced the "Parlor Bedroom" when we stayed at the farm when I was a child. I've even had a chance to prop my feet against the old Parlor stove again.

Walter D., Sarah J. and their wonderful sons and lovely daughters have taken me into their hearts and homes as though I was one of them and I have never felt as welcome and comfortable with anyone as I have with them. There's been a lapse of 53 years, but these stories have brought us together on Memory Lane.

The sons and daughters who were born and reared on the farm particularly enjoyed the stories and pictures as, of course, they recognized the places and people of which I wrote.

This has been a wonderful experience and I've been glad to share it with you.
-- Bertha Fisse Robbins

EDITOR'S NOTE

I remember discovering Foo Foo's wonderfully vivid recollections from Riverview Farm after her death in 1990. These stories, as well as an assortment of tales from other periods in her life, were carefully organized complete with photos in a manilla envelope and a leatherbound portfolio, a priceless legacy for her children, grandchildren and future generations to come.

Years went by and in April 2012 I rediscovered this treasure while packing up our house in Newfoundland to officially move Mom to West Virginia. I knew at once that I had to preserve these fragile artifacts so they could be shared and enjoyed by us all.

I've transcribed the stories as written, keeping hyphens as they were used by Foo Foo and Edythe but correcting obvious typos. In cases where two different drafts of a story existed, I compared the versions and either combined them into one, kept Foo Foo's later draft assuming it was preferred, or, in one case, indicated an alternate ending when the version was too different to choose one over the other.

I did a little digging and found an article from the Kent Historical Society's May 2007 newsletter called "The History of Bulls Bridge," by Johnnie Lindberg which provides some additional history about Riverview Farm. Here are some excerpts:

Four miles south of the Town of Kent is a small village called Bull's Bridge, with a population of about fifty. At the turn of the century there were eight active farms in Bull's Bridge. Years back the road from New Milford came up the east side of the river, past the depot in Merwinsville along the wooded banks of the Housatonic, then into Bull's Bridge.

Going westerly from the foot of Pickett's Rock to the canal were the pastures and crop land of the former Walter Conn Farm. Up in the field the original spring house still stands, in good condition. The spring water was piped down to the house, their only source of water. The house and farm buildings were on the east side of Route Seven, one half mile down from the cement bridge. When the canal was built, the Connecticut Light & Power Co. erected four bridges across the canal so that the Conns could get to their crop land. Three of these bridges have disappeared but one at the site of the old Kennedy Farm is kept in good condition so that the Connecticut Light and Power Co. can get to their property. The telephone line now runs through that property.

In the late 1920's the Conns moved to New Milford. When they left a family by the name of Hoag moved in - Mr. and Mrs. Martin Hoag and their daughter Martina. They did not farm as he was an employee of the Connecticut Light & Power Co.. After his retirement in the 1950s, they moved to New Milford.

Then a most amazing feat was performed by Mr. Leroy Newton. He acquired the house from the Connecticut Light & Power.. The house was built in the form of an "L". He split the house in two and hauled the two sections up to his farm and made two houses out of the one. One house is used on the farm for hired help, and the other is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Goodsell.

This volume marks the first of what I hope to be several volumes and is therefore limited to stories directly relating to the Riverview Farm. We are so very lucky that Foo Foo was such a talented storyteller and that photos exist from that time period as well!

-- Marissa Blahnik, November 2012







Bertha and Edythe, making mischief in the hay loft at Riverview Farm.

Looking back on the hospitality of the folks at Riverview Farm, I don't wonder that they called it their home away from home. Mr. Conn was like a Daddy to my father, pampering him with home-made ice cream by the gallon. Mrs. Conn was such a good cook. I remember Mother telling folks how 'everything on the table came from the farm.' Sweet corn, platters full; blackberries floating in heavy cream; mashed potatoes golden with fresh-churned butter; peas in the pod; home-made bread! Any wonder we city folks loved the farm?

Excerpt "Riverview Farm"