



When City Meets Country

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by Carol Schlagenhauser

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When I married Mike in the winter of 1996, I couldn't have possibly predicted our living arrangements or lifestyle in the years to come.

He was a country boy who had grown up in several rural towns in Ohio and West Virginia, and didn't have running water or a real bed to sleep in during much of his childhood, which was unusual growing up in the 1970s. His form of entertainment was going skinny dipping in the backyard creek or helping his brothers lug a deer back from the woods.

Mike and I had come from two different worlds, though we lived only a couple of hours away from each other before we wed.

Shortly after we married, I moved an hour away from the busy city in which I lived so that we would have equal driving distances to our jobs. The small trailer park that we moved into offered even less privacy than the neighborhood from which I came. A year later, we bought five acres of wooded land on top of the highest hill in the area. It was in the middle of nowhere and it seemed to take me forever to remember how to get there from the nearest little town. By our second wedding anniversary, we had settled into our new homestead and I loved it. It took me no time at all to adjust to such a dramatic change of surroundings. I loved our beautiful view overlooking distant hills, a vast amount of land with no other houses in sight, and I enjoyed the fact that I could sit outside at any time and hear nothing but the wind rustling through the trees. My dogs had lots of room to run, and I could go outside and hang my laundry wearing only my pajamas without fear of being seen by neighbors or passers-by.

Within a year, Mike and I became acquainted with some folks who raised llamas. We ended up getting a couple of their older geldings that had been abused by their previous owner; thus our hobby farm was born!

Soon after, we took in a couple of older Pygmy goats that had also been abused. My best friend and I began going to a weekly livestock auction to learn more about the care and characteristics of other types of animals. I bought a box of newborn chicks there and raised them in a big, black water trough in our living room until they were old enough to survive on their own. Next came ducklings, which I raised the same way, and then turkeys. Since then, our small hobby farm has grown a lot bigger. Mike added an extra room and a chicken coop to the original pole barn; more than tripling the grazing area for our critters.

As we added ponies, donkeys, Nubian goats, sheep, peafowl and an emu to our outside menagerie, we also added chinchillas, bunnies, guinea pigs, birds, a hedgehog, a potbellied pig, and stray dogs and cats to our inside collection of pets ... and along the way we adopted two older children, who have also developed a love for animals! Steven and Amber have experienced the joys of watching births, grooming livestock and picking berries that city kids would not be able to imagine. Our children also participate in the daily animal care and are learning to identify and treat various types of ailments.

Raising animals is not the only thing that I've learned over the past

decade: I've also fine-tuned my cooking skills, learned how to can fruits and vegetables, and become more knowledgeable in barn building, fence construction, landscaping and herbal remedies, as well as homeschooling our children. Last summer was the first year we planted a small garden; it was so successful that we plan to triple its size this year.



I would never have dreamed that the past 10 years would have brought about so many changes in my life. We have taken in so many sick and abused animals over the years that friends and acquaintances will call us every now and then to see if we will take in another critter that needs a good home. Because we have so many "misfits"

living here, we call our little ranch "Funny Farm on the Hill." Every now and then I still go back to visit my mom in the city where I grew up, and although I do miss the conveniences of being only five minutes away from church, shopping centers, banks and other places of business, I would not trade all the other advantages of country life that we have here for anything in the world!

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