

June 4, 1948

Mrs Shepherd (Borrans Farm, Horton in Ribblesdale), wins first prize in this Letter Competition with her quiet unspectacular record of her life on a dales farm nine miles from Settle. Here are some extracts from her story.

“I have tried not to let the work and worry of a farm and large family take all my life”

A YORKSHIRE FARMERS WIFE TELLS US HER STORY

Dear Mary Day
I think it may be of interest to your other readers to hear how a farmer's wife, up in the heart of the Yorkshire dales spends her days.

I have been born and bred on a farm, and my ancestors for generations were farmers too, so I guess farming is in my blood all right. My husband and I have lived here (it is mostly a sheep farm) at the foot of the mountain Ingleborough in the Pennine range, for twenty-three years. The house is just an old-fashioned structure with no modern conveniences and we have certainly had lots of up and downs since we came here (more downs than up, I am afraid!); but we have brought up a family of nine children, five girls and four boys, the eldest twenty-seven and the youngest seven.

Family Background

My husband was born in Canada and spent some years there in his younger days, where the type of farming is much different. He always has a leaning to go back there, but he has never got me persuaded yet that it could be any better than Yorkshire, so I guess that is partly why we are still here.

My two big lads work on the farms around, being at home, for the busy season—for example lambing, haytime and so forth. Two of my girls are married, and live not very far away—neither of them married a farmer though!—and I have two grandchildren. Another of my girls is a hospital nurse, a younger one works at Settle (our lovely old market town nine miles away).

The two younger children go to our small local schools at Selside, which has a total of about fourteen scholars—but it is a very happy “family” affair there (the teacher is a farmer's daughter from the Huddersfield district and is a great asset to the life of our small hamlet). Many Scholarships have been gained from this school during the last twenty years - three were my offspring - so it is not surprising we wonder what could be gained by sending the children away by bus to a large school ten miles away. They certainly would not get the individual teaching.

My fourteen – year old son Robert gained a scholarship last year and now attends a technical college thirty-five miles away. He is more interested in the mechanical side of things than farming, but he comes home every weekend and is a real lover of this country.

You may be sure that my life until now has been a busy one. I always do my own laundry, baking, redecorating, (an awful job in an old house), I may say!) and I never seem to have a moment to spare till evening when I try to get some of the everlasting mending done, my goodness, how it piles up every week! But I confess to falling asleep over it occasionally.

Outside the windows

But I have tried not to let the work and worry of a farm and large family take all my time. I take a great interest in the social life of our little hamlet here at Selside, and also further afield at Horton, a village about three miles away, where I have helped many times in getting up concerts for some good cause. I am passionately fond of music (good music, not boogie woogie or crooning!), and have done quite a lot of singing in my time. Several of the girls of our family have quite good voices too, and when I have them all at home around Christmas time we can raise a family choir-with the boys doing yodelling additions. I do not profess to be an expert pianist, the *Warsaw concerto* just about gets me down, but I do manage to play for most of the dances we hold now and again at Selside-with the very efficient aid of two farmer neighbours one with violin and one with accordion.

Amateur dramatics interest me keenly too, and several of my neighbours –farmer's wives-are just as keen as myself. We have trudged in all kinds of weather to each other homes, and farms to rehearsals. Before the war, very daring, we entered the drama festival at Settle two years in succession; and speaking for the others they put up a splendid show. I am also a member of a women's organisation in Horton, and we are already arranging items for a concert to be held there this autumn.

Church - and Cinema

We have fortnightly church service at Selside School, and we all thoroughly enjoy it, taking part heartily in all the hymns and psalms (for which I play). Our vicar cycles up from the village and believe me it isn't always nice weather. He arrives looking very wind swept and battered sometimes! Our harvest festival is a great occasion. We have the service on the Sunday afternoon, and the next day a sale of gifts fruit and vegetables, home-made toffee and parking pigs and so on: with a dance to follow it – a real Harvest home.

As our nearest house is in Settle, my husband and I are not interested; but the young people manage to get away quite often – by bus, train or bicycle, now that petrol is scarce. So, I do appreciate the wireless. When the younger members of my formidable family are in bed, we can often enjoy a first-rate programme; and look forward particularly to *Saturday Night Theatre*. I get so absorbed in the play that I generally forget that I supposed to be darning socks. Then I sit back when it is over and feel thankful that I have been able to listen to an excellent performance with my feet on the fender.

And Holidays...?

Holidays have always been few and far between, especially if bad weather makes hay time and harvest late (and we certainly get some rain in this district). But two years ago I managed a lovely holiday with a friend in Hampshire in the Roply area, where the pretty thatched cottages and level fields were a great change from the rugged beauty of our Yorkshire dales. Sometimes I take the younger children for a day at the seaside, or to a show or some local sports. And that seems to be achievement enough, when every day brings its work. I help in the fields in hay time, and before the boys grew up I did quite a bit of work with the horses; even to mowing at 5.00 in the morning! Of course, there is no need for me to do that now. Machinery is not very well suited to our style of haymaking for our meadows are very hilly and implements are not much good in some places. So, my job now is using the rake, until I nearly go dizzy, and dashing in and out of the house preparing meals and drinks.

The great storm of last winter still lives fresh in our memories. It was a nightmare to most of the farmers around here. We had the excitement of the Dakotas dropping bales of hay for the sheep; the struggle to keep the water running; the work of shovelling the snow off the attic roofs to try and stop it dropping through into the house as it melted; the difficulty of getting provisions into the place, and the milk away from it.

The one bright spot was the “human touch” of the railway officials, who stopped the trains at Selside to enable us women folk to do our shopping in settle. I can still see the funny side of being hoisted in and out of those trains by kindly guards and signal men (we had no platform and some of us were no light weights!)....

This farm is quite close to the famous potholes that every now and again get mentioned in the papers; we often have callers-hikers and ramblers-looking for a cup of tea, or enquiring their way, and we are never by any means lonely. Weekends are usually very busy times for me, as often various members of my family, with their friends, pay a visit home; and we get lots of surprise visits from our town relatives and acquaintances.

Now I shall have the extra work of young chickens, ducks and goslings coming along. Spring is a delightful time of the year, but it is certainly a busy one. What with cleaning-time to squeeze in amongst all the other jobs, weakly lambs to attend to, and so on, one just goes on automatically from dawn till dusk-generally never achieving as much in any day as one had hoped.

This is content

I try to get a hearthrug done each year during the winter months, using old cast offs, washed and cut into small pieces and pegged onto hessian. These are the most suitable coverings for our blue-flagged floors. I usually wear clogs until most of the rough work is done, so you may guess they make quite a clatter on the flags but it keeps them clean.

At Christmas time we usually have a batch of poultry to of some sort to dress and despatch. I save the feathers as if they were gold, and make my own pillows and cushions etc.. and revel in a feather bed.

“Busy as our life is, I am happy and I hope it never comes to my lot to have to live in a town. I could not bear it. Give me the open spaces and the pure air of these mountains where I was born.”

And please god may my last resting place be here in Yorkshire where I have spent my life.

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Here are the results of our Letter-Discussion on:

“THIS IS MY LIFE”

Because of the immense and extremely interesting entry for this competition we are increase the awards: doubling the third prize and extending the list of “runners-up”:

1st Prize (£15)

Mrs Shepherd (farmer’s wife), Borrans Farm, Selside, Horton-in Ribblesdale, Yorks

2nd Prize (£10)

Mrs Gammie (farmer’s wife), Cairnton, Fordoun, Kincardineshire

3rd Prizes (£5 pounds each)

Mrs Lawson (farm workers wife), white pump cottage, Ullenhall, Warwickshire
Miss W L Wates (farmer’s daughter), Styles, Rodhuish, Washford, Somerset

The Article above was printed in the Farmers Weekly in 1948, it is described as “some extracts from her story”, a much more extensive account of “her life story” must have been submitted to Farmers Weekly but only these extracts exist today.

