

Barn Memories

Submitted by Jeannie Blethen, Marshall, NC

Although born in Brooklyn, NY, by the grace of God I grew up on a small farm owned by my mother's parents in Southwest Virginia. Grandpa farmed with two big black mares, and I dogged his footsteps as long as he'd let me, plowing; mowing, raking, and hauling hay; and even hauling logs out of the woods with horses. My sister and I helped him in the tobacco patch, picking the huge pale green tobacco worms off the sticky, fuzzy leaves. He and my grandmother and her niece milked up to 10 cows in their old barn, and my sister and I helped in the summer. Our favorite place was the barn. In the fall, Grandpa hung the Burley tobacco in the two "long stables" on either side of the cow-and horse-stalls, and we loved to duck underneath and just inhale the sweet, special scent of curing tobacco. When the long stables were empty, my sister and my cousin and I would select the newest of the tobacco sticks, tie a piece of fodder twine around one end for a bridle, and have a stick-horse show, trotting and galloping around the length of the space in the cool, dusty shade of the barn.

Sometimes a young calf would be sequestered in there and we'd make a pet out of it. The ubiquitous barn cats often had their kittens up in the hay loft, where the hay was pitched in loose, and the mother cats had the perfect place to nestle into a secluded spot to have their litter. One of our favorite games, unbeknownst to our elders, was throwing a pile of hay out of the loft window into the stable and jumping out into it.



Almost 20 years ago, when the new owner of my grandparents' farm decided to burn everything built on it and build his new house near where the barn stood, I asked him for the barn doors. He had stood them against the pile of wood from the dismantled barn for the fire department to burn, so I had to hurry to retrieve them. Now they form the back wall of the sunroom in our log house atop a mountain in Marshall, and I look with a tug of nostalgia at the groove the horse-stall latch had dug into the wood of the largest door and the heads of the nails I insisted my husband leave when he had to take the Z-boards off the backs.

