

## DAD'S SHEEP

Dad enjoyed all the farm animals and was sorry he had to butcher any of them. But that was a fact of farm life, except when it came to his sheep. Each evening we'd enter the cattle barn ready to milk the cows, but couldn't resist walking beyond them to visit our penned-in flock of sheep. Here they spent winter awaiting their newborn lamb's arrival in the springtime. It was exciting to watch the newborns struggle to stand. Their mother nudged them encouragingly as they tumbled down. Soon they were confident and nuzzled their mom for their first meal.

Occasionally there was a lamb that needed more nourishment. We were happy to bottle-feed it for its first weeks of life. Lady oversaw the feeding and kept a watchful eye on those little lambs. They became pets. One of our favorites had a dark pansy-shaped marking on her face, so we called her "Pansy". She followed us like a shadow, ready for us to bury our fingers into her thick wool and scratch her neck. Listening to her contented bleating was a joy.

When early spring grasses covered the pasture, the barn door was opened and the sheep trotted out into the sunshine, eager to munch the fresh green grass. The young kids made us laugh as they gamboled friskily in their newfound freedom.

When Dad began removing the tails of the little lambs, we begged him to leave Pansy's intact as we didn't want her to be hurt. Although he explained the reason for trimming them, Dad nonetheless acquiesced to our wishes. Later we realized the prudence of the trimming. We constantly had to remove all burrs, twigs and "stick-tight" weed seeds that were tangled in her tail. That was the last year we let a lamb's tail be left untrimmed.

Throughout the summer the southwest pasture was a pleasant sight to behold. The wide-spreading elm tree sheltered our small flock of sheep. The sense of peace and serenity was delightfully enhanced by the young kids frolicking on the green grass, or playfully butting one another. Lady kept watch nearby.

The late afternoon chore of rounding up the cattle allowed us to pass by the meadow where our sheep rested. Pansy bleated as she trotted to our call. Lady would run up to her and the two touched noses in greeting.

Dad couldn't understand how anyone could kill such a gentle, trusting animal. He felt their purpose was to produce the fleecy wool that was sheared in early summer. We liked to watch the sheep submit to the shearing and then bound out of the pen, free of their heavy coats of wool. The fleeces were bundled, taken to market, sent on to a spinning mill, and made into skeins of wool yarn.

In her day, our great-grandmother spun the wool, dyed it and wove it into a handsome blue and cream coverlet that we treasured. It inspired us to try carding some of the fleece to free it of dirt then spin it into yarn. We barely made enough for a doll's small coverlet, the size of our potholder loom. We surely marveled at the persistence and industriousness of our ancestors.

Sheep are symbols of peace that have brought pleasure to many generations of farmers and shepherds. They will continue to impart a sense of harmony to our landscape for many more generations.

## **GRANDMA MARSHALL AND HER WICKER SEWING BASKET**

Grandma Marshall's wicker sewing basket rested on the end table next to her rocking chair. It was decorated with Chinese coins tied onto tassels. The round coins were etched with enchanting script encircling square holes in their centers. Her son, Arthur Bailey, brought this back to her from his years in Siam. My sisters and I were captivated with the tools inside the basket that Grandma used to create fancy work.

There were various sized crochet hooks, embroidery floss and embroidery hoops, scissors, thimbles, tape measure, beeswax, and a darning egg. Not to forget the puffy pin cushion we loved, with its small Chinese doll head in the center. Several celluloid hair pins also lay nestled in the basket, ready to secure the neat puffy bun that graced the top of Grandma's head.



**Grandma  
Crocheting**