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**“Utterly” Rural:
A Teenager’s Countryside View of Living**

By Gail Kauranen Jones



“To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter... to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird's nest or a wildflower in spring - these are some of the rewards of the simple life.”

- John Burroughs

“I can’t wait to go to college in the city,” my daughter exclaims, after walking barefoot with me through animal droppings to rescue a cow meandering in our backyard. Somehow, after three months of grazing in our agriculture-designated meadow behind our home, the cow slipped through the electric fence that a local farmer placed upon our land a few months earlier.

Cows are used to reduce our lawn to manageable levels, after another local farmer who previously hayed our field opted out of the deal. The new alternative had been pleasant and relaxing until now. I would often watch in contentment, with maternal instincts, the mom and her babies gently move along the three-acre field during the day.

Walking casually by, my daughter and I slowly guided the cow to re-enter her designated area as she slipped under the fence to join her siblings.

This temporary escape of one of five cows occurred only a day after my daughter called me from downtown Topsfield en route home from a sleepover at her girlfriend’s home in Boxford. “I’m stuck on Main Street., behind a pony, and I can’t move,” she says. The annual parade, that leads local residents into the first full opening day of the Topsfield Fair, had begun.

“Now, there’s a trolley in front me,” she yells at me from her cell phone, as she’s stalled in traffic. Although we live five minutes from downtown, and within walking distance to the Topsfield Fair, it took her 45 minutes to return home.

A few hours later, when she braved going grocery shopping at Stop and Shop in Danvers for me, she calls to say: “You won’t believe this, Mom. There is a horse trotting up Rte.

1,” she shrieks. “I’ve had it with this fair.”

I laugh, recalling when she was little that I would often take her and her brother three times a week, after they pleaded with me, “One more time, Mom. P-l-e-a-s-e.” A few years earlier, she would proudly offer her teenage friends a free parking spot in our driveway. This year, she is opting not to attend the fair at all.

Listening to her repeated traffic nightmares, I understand fully now why Topsfield residents are given discount tickets to the fair. The inconvenience of living with “the oldest fair in the country” is at times, particularly on a sunny weekend of times past, truly a challenge. Errands that once took ten minutes sometimes extend to an hour.

Still, I hope when my daughter is immersed in the excitement of her longed-for city living that she recalls awaking to the calm of nature, and the many innovative ways we managed our land.

The cows, when well behaved and grazing within their limits, often add a Vermont flavor to our Topsfield home. I watched the babies grow, feeding only from grass. Now, they are soon ready to return home well-fed.

I hope my daughter will think the same in her days ahead, as her world expands—that she is well nurtured and her home will always be a safe haven, seasonal traffic jams aside.

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