

## Farm Girl Felicia

I'm thrilled to be a charter member of this group. The first one hundred members belong to many groups together. So, from word of mouth, the group has really grown in the year and a half.

I have been asked to share my farm girl experience with the membership. If you attended the first caucus in 2019, you heard a few of the stories. Life on a farm is full of hard work, adventure, and imagination for kids.

I grew up in the country. Wide open space between houses. As soon, as you were big enough, you were driving. Having an older brother was my motivation. Whatever he could do, I could do. Around the age of 5, I was driving a tractor through the fields. This was no easy task because it took me standing up with both feet on the brake to stop. Even more, it took the same amount of weight to operate the clutch and both hands to change gears. I didn't drive a pickup truck till I was about 7. My Grandfather told me to run to the house and drive the truck to the field where the cows were. Before I got there, my Mom was yelling at her Dad. How could you do that? She's never driven a truck before. Then she started yelling at me. Why didn't you say you couldn't drive? I just said if my brother can do it, I was sure I could. I have to admit, it was hard to reach the pedals. Of course, it wasn't an automatic and I had to open and shut 3 gates on the way.

My first adventure was riding horses. I don't remember my first time, but I do have a photo of me with my Grandfather on his horse Blueberry when I was one year old. My first full sentence I spoke was "Make him go faster." My first dream was to be a barrel racer.

We had dairy cows that we milked. If you have never done that, it is an experience. Nothing automated. You need three things: a stool, a pail, and a pair of kickers. Trust me, you want the kickers. The milk was put into a silver milk can and picked up on a daily run. If a milk can was old and rusty, my Grandmother would paint scenes on them and turn into flowerpots. Then we had Hereford cattle. They were all pets to me. I had a special pet calf named Rosie. I was 4 when Rosie was born. My brother's pet calf was named Suzie. We began hitching the red wagon to the cow's lasso and riding in the wagon. We decided it would be much more fun to ride them. First, we broke Rosie. Because as my brother would say. "This is a great idea. You go first." It wasn't that hard to break Rosie because she was already so gentle. Suzie was a bit harder. We loved riding the cows on the highway. Even though there wasn't a lot of traffic, it was always a shock to the auto drivers.

My brother was already in school. So, the rule was that I couldn't ride Rosie unless my brother was with me. So sometimes, I would have the lassos on the cows waiting for him to get off the school bus and go riding with me. We also had horses that we rode to check on cattle or fences. I have to confess I never had the strength to put in a fence post.

We grew tobacco, corn, soybeans, and a vegetable garden. We always had a large corn field. First it was fresh corn. Then we would freeze it. As the corn hardened, it would be fed directly to the animals or taken to the mill. As for the other vegetables, we would sit on the porch and break or shell beans and peas for a few days. Then came hours of cooking and canning. Then there were blackberries, strawberries, walnuts, pecans, pears, plums, watermelons, and apples. We made fresh cider and lots of jams and preserves.

When the weather started getting cool in November, it was hog killing time. I was sorry when I got old enough for chitlin detail. If you think the taste is bad. The smell is worse. But even worst than those things are cleaning them.

Years before I had a driver's license, I could operate any farm equipment. I had a passion for animals. All except one, snakes. I enjoyed going frog gigging with the boys even though they made me carry the sack. We made innertubes out of patched up tires. They were great for the water or the snow.

My brother could talk me into anything. I was always climbing trees. But my brother says "Let's swing on vines. You go first." So, I did. If the vine didn't break, he got on with me. When we were really young, there was a water tank on the front of the tractor for setting tobacco. My brother says, "Let's hide in the tank." So, I climb up the tractor and into the opening of the water tank. My brother follows me and gets stuck. We were rescued about an hour later. I think this may be a cause to my claustrophobia.

We had the animals, the fruit trees, the creek, and the countryside. But my favorite spot was the field of clover. It was soft and I loved the smell. You could lay in the field, watch the clouds, and feel at peace. I haven't been a farm girl in many years. But since I've retired, I have considered buying some land in the country.