



SPRING

Spring Showing

Elf artists are mixing their colors,
The best of their golds and their blues,
With rollicking reds for the roses,
And lavender hyacinth hues.

A pretty pink rose they'll paint here,
A gay yellow daffodil there,
Touch tulips with multiple colors
As they dance away on the air.

Elf artists are mixing their colors
And trying them out one by one,
With splashes of green on the meadow,
Bright blue as a frame for the sun.

They'll mix and they'll match 'til they're perfect
And they'll put them all on display
When they pull back the curtains of springtime
And give us a morning in May.

Anne M. Diley (1916-1969)

Moving Day—Farm Style

Recipes in This Chapter

Country Meat Loaf

Savory Pork Casserole

Scalloped Potatoes with Ham and Cheese

Calico Salad

Celery Seed Dressing

Nutty Coleslaw

Featherbeds (Pan Rolls)

Chocolate Chip Date Cake

Grandma K's Cherry Cake

Powdered Sugar Frosting

Country wisdom decreed the first weeks of March as moving time on the farm. To the best of my knowledge this wasn't a written rule. It simply made sense. Or so my father claimed. According to him, the land was still too wet for working so we'd have time to settle in before we'd need to start planting. Plus, it was only a couple of months until pasture, so there wasn't much cattle feed to move.

Those who have never experienced a move from one farm to another have no idea of the camaraderie of country neighbors, the closeness of those willing to lend a helping hand, both inside and out. Moving farm machinery, cattle, their straw bedding, and feed along with our household goods was no easy task and didn't happen in a single day. It called for a lot of helping hands from neighbors, especially those with strong young sons. Once the word went out that we were moving, my father had all the volunteer help he needed. Neighborhoods were like that back in the 1940s and '50s. Besides, there wasn't much else going on in early March.

I remember parts of many moves. Each had their exciting moments, but generally they all fit into a pattern.

It never seemed to fail that on the days Dad picked to move, the skies either threatened snow or a full-blown howling blizzard greeted us at dawn. Drifting snow

and sub-zero temperatures lingered in the following days despite blue skies and bright sunshine.

The moving crew faced one challenge after another starting with snow banks, slippery roads, frozen pipes, and a wood stove heater that was too hot to handle. During one move, after a long, cold day of last-minute packing in a drafty house, the truck loaded with all our household goods slid off the icy road on a steep hill. Later, that same day, a truck tire went flat just short of the driveway to the new house.

Mother and Grandma started packing in the basement weeks in advance. They hand-wrapped each Mason jar of canned fruit or vegetables in newspaper and packed them in bushel baskets.

"Be careful not to overload the baskets," Dad warned. "You don't want bottoms giving out halfway up the basement steps."

Mother merely nodded. She hadn't put in hours filling the jars during the hot summer in a steaming kitchen to have that happen.

The two women emptied the sauerkraut crock, sacked the potatoes, carrots, parsnips, rutabagas, and turnips. Then they moved on to packing dishes in barrels and baskets upstairs. Finally, Mother took the curtains down, washed and laid them aside for the new house. All this time Dad hauled feed and machinery to the new place.

Mother woke us early on moving day.

"Hurry, eat your breakfast," she prodded. "As soon as you're done let the fire go out." Letting the fire die in the black kitchen range and in the large Round Oak heaters was always a problem for her. She had trouble deciding if she wanted a warm house in which to finish packing or a warm one waiting for her.

"Save the ashes," Mother told us, "set them on the porch so the men have them for under the wheels if the truck gets stuck."

"Hurry, wash the dishes so we're finished packing when the men come to load," she went on.

"Hurry, make some sandwiches."

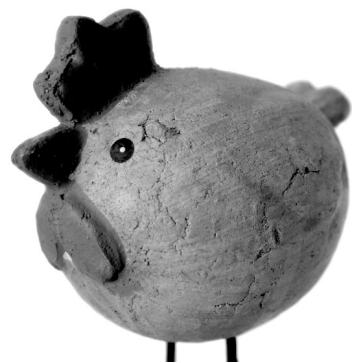
"Hurry, fold the blankets and get the beds ready to knock down."

"Hurry, dress the little ones and take them to the neighbors so they don't catch cold in this drafty house."

"Hurry. . . . Hurry. . . . Hurry."

So she rushed from room to room finishing last-minute packing before the men arrived.

Most times Dad arranged with our milk hauler to move the household belongings. There was one drawback to this system. The milk truck always came late in the morning, as the driver needed to finish his route to the local cheese factory. No one used dollies in those days to move the cumbersome stoves and sofas. The men simply put their shoulders to the heavy cast-iron



stove, grunting and groaning, until finally jostling it into place on the truck.

After what seemed like hours, the open milk truck was loaded and the tailgate locked in place. Kitchen chairs rested upside down on the dining room buffet. Cartons and baskets of dishes and earthen crocks filled the space under the table legs. Bed headboards, springs, and mattresses bucked the wind at the front of the load. As the truck rounded the corner, a dresser drawer slid out and its contents ruffled in the wind.

Down the road the driver pulled into a neighbor's driveway. "Got orders to stop for a bite to eat," he answered Mother's questioning look.

Inside, we discovered a feast to equal a thresher's meal. Marie, Vi, and Myrtle and several other of Mother's friends scurried around placing hot platters of sliced roast beef and meat loaf on the table. A trio of steaming casseroles that included scalloped potatoes and ham, beef and cabbage, and pork noodle hot dish followed. And there were bowls of pickles, beets, apples, and both sweet and sour cucumber scattered about the table.

The table looked full to me, but they continued to find room for dishes of coleslaw, fruit-filled gelatin, buttered peas and carrots, and creamed green beans. Plates of homemade bread, double stacked, fit in on each end of the table. I even saw platters of my favorite chocolate chip date and cherry cakes waiting on the side table.

"Come in. Find a place and help yourself," the women waved us forward. "The first shift has already eaten, but there's still plenty for everyone."

The warm room alone was a welcome relief after the bone-chilling cold of the rapidly emptying old house. However, it was the heavenly aroma drifting from the food-laden table that was almost more than my ten-year-old system could tolerate. My mother stood silently in the doorway staring at the spread of food on her neighbor's dining room table.

Marie walked over and put her arms around Mother's shoulders. "Now don't you go tearing up on us," she said. "You certainly didn't think your neighbors would let you go without a hot meal, did you?"

"I guess I was too busy to think," Mother admitted.

With a loaded truck waiting for them, the moving crew didn't linger long at the table. Before I had a chance at a second piece of cake, they were heading out the door.

My brothers and I tumbled over each other in our rush into the new house. Of course Mother and Dad had seen it before, but we had to wait until moving day to have our first look. We ran from room to room checking the layout and seeking the best area to claim as our own. I can still see the eerie shadows cast on unfamiliar walls and feel the shivers that ran up my spine when I peeked into dark corners. Most of all, I remember my grandmother finding her rocking chair and holding the baby close so he

wouldn't mind the newness.

Dinner over and cleared, the ladies from the old neighborhood arrived to help Mother settle in her new home. They scrubbed the floors, the cupboards in the pantry and put fresh paper on the shelves. They washed and dried dishes. The pots and pans found their way to a new spot. Granted, it took Mother awhile to get used to the new arrangement, but that was part of every move.

No matter how my mother tried to direct traffic, some boxes marked for the kitchen ended up in the attic. She once even found the basement baskets of empty fruit jars hiding in a second-floor bedroom closet.

Outside, Dad had his problems, too, as he helped the men unload the cattle. Wells always froze up on moving day and stanchion parts were missing. As if those things weren't enough, frightened animals fought the move by running in every direction but the right one. Men yelled and prodded. Finally, the last load of cows came in.

Dad always said the hardest part of any move was the first chore time in the new barn. Strange stalls, strange milking time, and strange feed made the animals hard to handle.

Once he grabbed what he thought was a gunnysack of chickens and dumped it in the hen house. Instead it was the sack of barn cats some young helper misplaced. Wild and with their backs arched and bristling, the clawing cats sent the chickens into a sudden molt. When the feathers and fur settled, the men stood in helpless laughter at the hissing cats in one corner and the squawking hens in another. Things like this helped to lighten the load of a hard day.

During some of our moves, I remember whole families coming to welcome us to the new neighborhood. Sometimes they brought a kettle of hot chili or a cake. One welcome I will never forget happened about chore time on moving day. A car pulled into the yard just as Dad came out of the kitchen door. An elderly man rolled down the car window and called out.

"Hey, do you folks play cards?"

"Sure do," Dad answered.

"Good, we'll be over to see you when the curtains are up."

The settling in began.