

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RJB-21
Home on the Farm

846 Broadway - Lot #49
Saugus, Mass. 01905
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:



It was 5 o'clock when I walked through the Barnes front door, past two pairs of muddy boots. A wood fire was burning in the old Crescent Queen stove which dominates the kitchen. Greta Barnes and her mother were busy preparing dinner and complaining about the day's Spring Cleaning. The farmhouse is casual, somewhat untidy, and very liveable. The furniture is comfortable and functional. The couches retain the shapes of visitors long after they depart. Spring Cleaning is marked by cursing, laughing

Richard Balzer is an Institute Fellow exploring the effects of social and economic change on lower-middle-class America.

and complaining. Wayne and Lynn, Greta's daughters, have stayed home from work and school to help. They have cleaned the entire house, and stripped the linoleum from the dining room floor, laying bare the wood. While admiring the wood floor, Wayne cannot help but remark that the linoleum might have been uglier than the wood, but it kept out the odors from the barn below.

This comment precipitates a whole new rehash of the day's cleaning. My presence is hardly noticed. Soon, though, everyone is called to dinner. Buddy, Greta's husband, is home from work, and Arthur, her son, is just up from a nap. Only Richard, the youngest child, is absent, off at Little League, and dinner will have to be saved for him.

The table is full with pork, potatoes, corn, and apple sauce, all grown on the farm. Hands begin to reach, and food is passed around. Potatoes missed the first time around will pass your way more than once again. Dinner is a noisy time. Stories and jokes dominate the conversation. The day's events are shared while the vast pile of food on the table is whittled away. Story falls upon story, and the food keeps getting passed. A plate once emptied is filled again.

The women clear the table and wash the dishes. After the dishes, Granny retires to her favorite chair in a corner of an alcove off the kitchen, and begins to read a book. Greta and Lynn turn the dining room into a fitting and pattern cutting room for a new dress. Lynn and Greta shout, yell, and laugh as they attempt to work together on Lynn's dress--each has a better way to do it.

Wayne, who has temporarily disappeared upstairs, reappears to claim Lynn for choir practice. Lynn, now perched on a chair, being fitted by Greta, vainly protests. Wayne hardly waits to hear the end of Lynn's plea before pulling her off the chair. Greta, left with the pattern, watches her daughters walk to the door and calls after them in mock anger, "You rotten kids."

Buddy and Arthur have put on their weather-worn coats, small woolen caps, and crusty boots, and are headed to the barn for the Spring night chores. Greta and Buddy Barnes had a dream when they got married. They wanted to own their own farm, and they wanted their children to grow up on it. In 1959, two years after they got married, they bought the farm they still live on. Their children: Arthur (22), Wayne (19), Lynn (17), and Richard (13) have lived there all their lives.

"When we bought this place," Buddy says, "we didn't have any money to speak of, so we borrowed some from my sister, and another \$1,000 from the Beneficial Loan Company for the down payment. When we bought the place there was the house and 55 acres, and we paid \$12,000."

In order to help meet the mortgage payments, almost as soon as they bought the place the Barnes began raising poultry for a Mr. Spencer. "It was a real pain," Greta says.

"The deal was this," says Buddy, "Mr. Spencer would give you all the birds you were capable of handling, and pay you a cent-and-a-half a bird per week. He'd supply heat, and everything the birds ate. We'd supply the labor and that's what the cent-and-a-half was for.

"At first Mr. Spencer was kind of reluctant about giving us the chickens because we had about 50 chickens and a couple of cows and right off the bat he was suspicious about whether we were going to use the grain for our animals. He didn't come right out and say it but I told him that if he thought we were going to use his medicated grain to feed our animals, he could take his damn birds off the farm.

"His birds were being forced to eat so much they had to use the medication. And we couldn't see it. Ever since I was a kid, I always believed in organic gardening. What started me off on that was a fellow I knew who had an orchid garden and he had used so much chemical fertilizers that he burned his land to the point where he couldn't grow nothing, not even grass. And it took him about 2 years to bring that land back to the point where he could use it again as far as the gardening is concerned. Even now we don't use fertilizers or poisonous sprays on the garden. I don't know whether the kids told you but one of their duties in the summer when we grow potatoes is to go out and pick the potato bugs off the potato plants. They take their can of oil and every night they go out to the potato patch and pick off the potato bugs because I don't believe in using the poison sprays because some of the poison will get down to the ground and kill the bacteria in the ground and it's just one of those things where if you kill the bacteria in the ground, it isn't going to be producing the way it should.

"I don't rightly know how I got off on that, but with the chickens it was a lot more work than we figured. " "It was a happy day," Greta says, "when we told Mr. Spencer we had had enough of the chickens. When we first got here Buddy was making two bucks an hour and I wasn't working. We had my two nephews. My mother was living with us. We had to borrow the down-payment. We didn't have much furniture and I had the baby two weeks after we moved in. So we needed the chicken money, it came in handy."

Both Buddy and Greta knew that the farm couldn't be self-sustaining and they'd have to work to keep it. Buddy said, "Sure I'd have liked just to farm, but when we bought the farm, the land was stripped of all machinery; stripped of everything as far as workings. Naturally I had to buy the tractor and hay-making equipment, and the plow and harrows and what-have-you to go along with that. So I had to continue to work for a living. It meant doing the farmwork as a second job."

"I went to work," says Greta, "because we needed the money. Besides, with my mother living with us, it wouldn't have worked out well if we both stayed home. My mother and I have a clash of personalities, just like Wayne and me. I realized that it was wiser for me to be out working and my mother to be inside taking care of the kids, so six weeks after I had my second child I began working at Western Electric.

"There have been some problems with it, but if my mother hadn't been here to help raise the kids Buddy and I would have had to work different shifts. That would have meant we'd hardly get to see each other.

"I'll tell you," Greta continues, "having both parents work changes things for everyone in the family. For a woman it really means holding two jobs: a work job and taking care of the home. My house is always a mess and it doesn't bother any of us, but I can't imagine how the women at work who need to keep their places spotless do it.

"I think a woman needing to work is also tough on the men. They give up a lot. With their wives working, they give up the American sense of dominance, of 'I can provide'. Really, the whole family gives up. A teen age daughter may have to do more cooking than she would in another family. Everybody has to pull together in a different way when both parents work.

"Buddy and I decided the only way to do it was to limit our jobs to forty hours. I never do overtime, or work on the weekends. Sometimes Buddy does put in a few hours in overtime. Even though that's where the best money is to be made, we figure we'd like to put as much time as we can with our family. "

Both Buddy and Greta are diligent workers, but neither is really satisfied by factory work. Greta says, "I think I'm a good worker, but do I like my job? Not particularly. To be honest I think I have a lot to contribute and I don't think I get a chance to do it at work. I suppose that's one reason I'm so involved in activities around where we live. Like the Grange that we belong to needed to raise money. So I got a hold of my mother, and we did up six turkeys from our farm for a turkey dinner. We peeled the potatoes and made the meal for 175 people. We got fiddlers and arranged the whole evening. There was dancing and fiddling, everyone had a grand time. The Grange makes me feel important, like I can really contribute something."



Buddy doesn't complain about work, but then Buddy doesn't strike one as complaining about anything. He enjoys working around the farm; he doesn't mind the extra hours. He says, "I don't mind it because on the farm you're not working under pressure. When you're working in the shop they expect you to do a certain amount of work regardless, even though they don't stand there and say you gotta do so much. Still, they push you to a degree. You try to give them a day's work for the money they give you. But when you're home, if it takes you an hour to do it, ok, if it takes two hours, there's nobody there saying you got to have it done in the required time. The guys down at the shop don't understand why I put so much time into the farm. They think I work too hard. What they don't understand is for me the farm work is relaxing."



Over the years the farm has shrunk from 55 acres to 35 acres. Twice the Barnes have had to sell pieces of land to meet outstanding bills.

"When Lynn was only 18 months old," says Greta, "she needed a heart operation. That was serious and expensive and the bills came pouring in a few years later when Wayne got sick with infected kidneys. She had to go in the hospital and they told us there was no guarantee she would come out alive. That's how bad the problem was."

"One week to the day later," Buddy said, "Arthur came down with the same virus. Three weeks later Lynn caught it. We hadn't fully recovered financially from the expenses of Lynn's operation and all of a sudden we had three kids in the hospital."

"Blue Cross took care of a lot of it, but we had to take care of a lot of expenses. There were doctor bills and penicillin. We had to put central heating in the house before the doctor would let the kids come home."

"It was getting to the point where we were pretty financially embarrassed. We couldn't see how we could bail ourselves out. We didn't want to take out any more loans because we couldn't see how we could pay them back."

"So we sold ten acres of land and paid off all the bills. We sold another ten acres a couple of years later."



"We've had a lot of offers to sell more of the land," Greta says, "All these developers would like to buy the land. We've been offered a lot of money for our remaining 35 acres, more money than we could ever have otherwise. But," she says, "what would we do with the money? We have the kind of place that we always wanted, why should we want to move? Lots of people leave the countryside to go to the city to find work. They work all their lives to make enough so that they can buy some land in the country to retire on. We've had it all along, so I guess we're lucky."

"This farm means a lot to all of us," Arthur says. For me there's a feeling of accomplishment on a farm which you don't get elsewhere. Like when I sit down at Thanksgiving dinner, because that's supposed to be the highlight of the harvest; 90% of the food on the table came from the farm and we all had a hand in it. We all worked the potatoes and picked potato bugs and hoed and so forth and so on. Like my mother says, seeing food you've grown on the table is more rewarding than bringing home a paycheck.

"I think I'd like to make a go of farming. You're your own boss; you're self-employed and it's not the hassle. You may have to work 10 hours a day but if you can make a buck working for yourself, it's worth \$5 working for someone else."

The Barnes have just purchased a new tractor. It is a major investment which affects everyone. "See" says Arthur, "we have an old tractor and she's tired. So my father and I went down and looked at the different tractor dealers and found what we thought was a pretty good buy on this year old International 415. We needed \$500 for a downpayment; well, we weren't too sure of whether or not we could scrounge it up so I said, 'Have no fear.' So I got the \$500 for the downpayment and we got the new tractor. It's already made work easier. We spread manure around 6 weeks ago which, in past years, was impossible. The old manure spreader we had, if there was any snow on the ground at all, the wheels would just slide. This new spreader, it doesn't make any difference what it was running on, the tread on the tires dug in and it spread. And the old H can still pull, so just the fact that there are 2 spreaders cuts your work in half and makes it easier on everybody.

"I'd really like to work the farm, but I don't know if I really have enough to try it. I'll be honest with you, maybe I could get a job in a machine shop and make enough to support a family. After being raised the way I've been raised and working the kind of jobs I've been working, I wouldn't want it. That would be a last step."

Wayne also knows the importance of the tractor to the farm, but thinks of it much more in terms of what it means to her father. "The tractor, it's going to make everybody's life easier, especially my father's. My God, he's 54 years old, he does twice the work everybody else does around here. I mean, I honestly feel that the fact that my mother gives him vitamins helps, but it worries me that someday he's going to have a heart attack. If you could have seen him this past summer with the baler and the tractor and just being so totally exhausted, it's worth it to me to know that he doesn't have to work that hard with this tractor."

Wayne is currently working at a funeral parlor. Since graduating from high school nearly two years ago, she has held a variety of jobs. For a while she wanted to join a Methodist acting group in California. That idea abandoned, she thinks now about going to school to learn horsemanship, but the purchase of the tractor is such a large investment that it rules out school for the immediate future.

At the Barnes', leisure, as well as work, is a family activity. "I don't think we ever really talked about it that much," says Greta. "Our own parents were that way, spending most of their time with us, and we just naturally wanted to be that way with the kids."

"We've always tried to stress one thing," Buddy says, "and that is if the kids worked they deserved to be provided with recreation. There's always been plenty of work for all the kids. When the girls grew up, they had to take and do their share of the outside work as well as the inside work. As far as I'm concerned, there's been a good many girls that was raised on a farm that was out taking care of animals and there was no problem with their growing up so why should it be any different with my children? And naturally it taught the children the responsibility of taking care of the animals in the event that anything happened to me that I couldn't do it, or Greta couldn't do it. The kids would be there and know how to take care of them. Every one of them learned how to milk so that any one of them could do anything that had to be done in the barn work. Naturally, if they've got to do that work, you've got to show some kind of recreation for them, and get them all involved in it. That's the way I always felt about it. When we first came here, there was no pond down back. And the summers used to be pretty hot and the kids would want to go swimming. So we used to take them to Harrison's pond down the road here. It wasn't too bad when we first came up because they only used to charge 10¢ a person to go in there swimming. That wasn't too bad. Then it started going up to 25¢, 50¢, \$1.00. Well, when we came home from work and the kids wanted to go swimming, we'd take them down swimming, then we'd come back and after we had supper we'd do the barn work or whatever else had to be done and they'd get all sweated up and want to go swimming again. Well, back to Harrison's. It began to be a pretty expensive proposition. We had a dry spell and I had a pond dug out down back here, so that solved the swimming problem. Whenever the kids came home and it was warm enough for them to go swimming, they never had to ask any questions, they just went swimming. So naturally, it made a place for them to go skating in the winter, and when they went to Sunday school and got involved with other kids they'd have cookouts and in the wintertime they had skating parties. Then, in the wintertime, if there was no skating, we'd have the beano games and card games, and we used to, at Christmas time, get all kinds of games that we could play together."

Wayne says, "We've always been a close family, doing things together. My parents didn't seem to go out a lot by themselves or with friends on Friday or Saturday nights like a lot of other parents."

"The only time they went out a lot was when they went square dancing. They'd go out square dancing and we kids would stay home with Granny. But then when we got old enough, they taught us, had us take square dance

lessons. When we got old enough to join the club, we'd go square dancing with them.

"They used to take us to the movies when we were little. Or what I used to love was the bingo games we had. Saturday would come and we'd go to the candy store and buy all kinds of penny candy. Then we'd come home and wait for the bingo game. Every time you won a bingo game you got a piece of candy. We'd play for hours; straight games, H's, crosses, fill up the whole board. My father never played; he was always the caller. When someone won, he got a candy too."

Greta and Buddy smile when they hear about Wayne's memory. Greta says, "The kids did all sorts of things. We were very close with their allowances so they used to put on plays. They'd rehearse a play for months. Anything they wanted, we took them for and bought, but the kids did not have much money, none of them got more than 60¢ a week allowance. So to earn extra money they'd put on shows and sell popcorn, 10¢ a bag. The plays were pretty good too."

"They'd put on circuses too," says Buddy. "They'd do horseback riding and have a regular show."

Greta says, "We used to have skating parties. We had swimming parties; we had hayrides for them."

"Even when they got older," Buddy says, "we used to think of them when we thought of recreation. It was never a question of just Greta and I going on a trip and leaving the kids home. We'd always plan on taking the whole family, it was more fun that way."

Both Lynn and Wayne consider each other their respective best friends. "I look at some of my friends," Lynn says, "and they can't stand their sisters. They hate their sisters; they wish they'd move out or something. But I don't want that to happen with Wayne and me. We've always been close; we became friends because there aren't so many people out here. We stayed close because, well, we love each other."

Wayne says, "Lynn, aside from being my sister, is my best friend. I'm the one that always gets myself into embarrassing situations, and she's the one that kind of comes along and smoothes it over. Lynn and I do a lot together, and we use 'the money'. We've always pooled our money; there's never been Lynn's money or Wayne's money; it's always The money. I get paid on Saturday and so I take us through the weekend. Lynn gets paid on Monday so she takes us through the week. I make more so naturally I kick in more. It seems to make perfect sense to me, but when I tell other kids at school or work, they can't understand it."

Like the two girls, the two boys have a very special relationship. Although there are eight years difference between the two, they are very close. Richard and Arthur share a room. To make some extra spending money over the summer, Richard rode on Arthur's milk route. Arthur paid him \$1 a day, and bought him lunch.

"I like sharing a room with him," Richard says. "Sometimes we're just lying in bed for a couple of hours, just talking about different stuff. Like last night we talked about baseball. Lots of times I'll be thinking of something and if I don't understand it I'll ask him. And while we're lying there he'll explain it all to me."

Arthur enjoys his younger brother. He likes spending time with him. Occasionally he admits that rooming with his brother can upset him. "I have," he says, "certain articles that I consider mine. I don't know how to describe it, it's just my possession and I don't want anybody messing with it. I can't give you an example because one minute it'll be a model airplane and the next minute some trophy I won in high school or something, and he'll touch it or break it and it really ticks me off. But really that's minor, all in all it's fine."

"I think we're all very close; the only thing is as we get older, we don't say I love you so often to each other. I don't know, maybe it becomes more embarrassing to say it as you grow older."

Richard, Lynn, Wayne and Arthur feel close with their parents and their grandmother, who has been, they all say, like a third parent, a third disciplinarian. "She'd never hesitate," Wayne says, "to correct you when you were doing wrong."

Granny, as the kids call her, has lived with the Barnes since they got married. She is the one all the kids remember waiting at the door when they returned from school. Richard says, "Some of the kids at school talk about coming home to an empty house, but there was always Granny there."

Lynn says, "I love her. I mean she didn't have to live with us, and raise us kids, but she did, and I'm really glad she did. All my friends love her too, they can't help but call her Granny. She's very practical. She'll tell you, when you're dreaming of something, spit in one hand and wish in the other and see which weighs more."

"Having my mother live with us hasn't been easy," Greta says. "I think it's been hardest on Buddy, but my mother means so much to all of us." There are tensions when any two generations of adults live under the same roof, but both have learned to deal with them.

Recently Granny had a stroke, and it upset everyone in the family. "People may complain about Granny," Wayne says, "but it's hard to imagine the house without her." Greta says, "I cried a lot when my mother had her stroke, but somehow I handled it."

Richard, of all the kids, took it the hardest. At dinner on the Monday following her stroke Richard asked, "What happens if Grandma should get sick during the night?"

His grandmother answered, "Well, if I get sick, we all have to die some time or another."

"We didn't talk about it anymore," Greta says, "but Richard vomited Monday night. He didn't go to school on Tuesday because he told me he wanted to stay home with Grandma, just to make sure she'd be ok. I told him that would be ok and if he wanted to stay home the next day, that was alright too."

Rose Beaton has recovered. She is a strong, stubborn woman, like her daughter, Greta.

Wayne, more than Lynn, is feeling the tension of being somewhat grownup and yet at the same time her parents' child. On the one hand she says, "I know that no matter what I do, no matter what predicament I get myself in, my family will be there to support me. Sometimes," she says, I think they're too strict. Like, even though it isn't enforced, I feel like they want me home before 12. I very rarely come home past twelve; they don't say anything about it, but I feel their displeasure when I come in late. I'm nearly twenty years old, and when I go out, I shouldn't feel bad if I come in late.

"Sometimes I question the authority, which you don't do to my father. My father was brought up in the old school that the father is boss. And I just can't buy it. I feel that he can be wrong. We don't have calm discussions, my father and me, because the minute I start disagreeing at all he starts the I Am The Father act and I get boiling with anger and I start yelling and he starts yelling. But then it's over.

"My mother and I are both headstrong and this sometimes causes problems between us. Sometimes I swear I'll never speak to her again. Once I didn't speak to her for two days and it was terrible. I was glad when it was over and by then I didn't even remember what made me so mad. With all the fights we've had, I wouldn't choose another mother. For all the times she's called me a bitch, there have been more times when she says to me, 'Have I told you I love you?' It really makes you feel good."

"When we have an argument," Arthur says, "I voice my disagreement but I really can't follow through. I do a lot of things under protest because I think Dad's methods are wrong, but it's like they say, a little knowledge of psychology is dangerous. I don't know if this is the typical stage I'm supposed to be going through--where I'm trying to express my manhood--he's the dominant male and I'm competing with him. But I don't know, I have a lot of respect for him.

"He's really strong to the point almost where he could be called stubborn. He has the courage of his convictions and though he's never really come out like a religious fanatic, he's got strong moral views. I think there are very few fathers like that in my peer group...they all want to be one of the boys.

"He doesn't try to be one of the boys--he's my father. I'll tell you the kind of thing my father would do. He signs his paycheck over to my mother because she takes care of the finances. She gives him \$5 a week; it's really not an allowance, just some spending money. When I was going to UNH, he was sending me two or three bucks out of that so I'd have a little spending money for beer or whatever. That's something more than a buddy would do."

Neither Buddy nor Greta has tried to push the children into farming, or anything else. Greta says she wants her children to be happy. "I don't want them to get ulcers." Buddy says, "I don't care what they do just so they try to be good at whatever it is they do."

Summer is quickly approaching. The hot weather will soon set in and the heavy farm work will have to be done. The pond will soon be ready for late night summer swims. Last year, on a warm summer night, Richard and his mother were out in the pond and it started to rain.

Greta said, "We'd better get out of the water, because if the lightning hits the pond we could die."

Richard asked, "I'm in it too, will I get hurt, Mom?"

"You might, and you might not."

"If it hits the water would we both die?"

"Probably."

"If we both die, will our family bury us?"

"Yes."

"In one coffin?"

"Probably not."

"Well, would they give us a discount on the coffins?"

"Probably not."

"It would probably be a very expensive funeral then, wouldn't it?"

"Yup."

"Well," Richard said, "maybe we'd better get out."

Richard J. Bage

Received in New York on June 24, 1974.

