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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

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THE AVOCATIONS OF A NEIGHBORING FAMILY
by Sallie Sweet, Pumpkin Creek Farm, Bridgeport

"Life is real, life is earnest." This we learned from our readers some years back. But only lately have we grown into the realization that to learn anything by heart involves more than lip service. This was brought to me most convincingly the other day when I visited the new family living on the East and West highway.

I had not been in their home before. My thought about them was a collective jumble of faces, clothes and gossip which others had murmured about them individually and en masse. I timed my visit to the middle part of the afternoon, for I wished to settle a few points for myself. My curiosity was most persistently demanding satisfaction.

When I arrived at the house, I hesitated at which door to knock. According to my views, the one toward the road should be the front door. But on the right side of the clean steps leading up to this door stood a garbage pail. We always put the garbage by the back door. Nevertheless I knocked, then knocked again. A happy looking woman opened the door and smiled. Then I told her I was Mrs. M---- and had come to see her. She put out her hand and shook mine with a firm grip that seemed to say, "Glad to meet you". She said, "Do you mind coming through this back hall into the living room?" Then I knew that the garbage pail was exactly where it belonged in the neat back yard which any one would think was the front. The yard I had come through was ever so pretty. All yards can be pretty.

As we entered the living room, Mrs. G ---- said, "Here is my daughter, Birch. Birch, Mrs. M----, our neighbor. She has arrived in the nick of time to help us. You see, Mrs. M----, my hobby is flowers and Birch's hobby is color, so together we are planning next summer's flower beds. What is your avocation, Mrs. M---? I have an inkling that it will fit right in and be of some benefit to us. In this family we all have different hobbies which work together to make our home as we actually want to have it."

Well, I had never thought about hobbies in any constructive way. A hobby had always meant to me just some way to pass away time. So I sat silent. However, Mrs. G---- rapidly continued the conversation, asking me my favorite color, my favorite flower, and where I thought the best location for a flower bed. It seemed that she liked Iris about the best of all the flowers. It surprised me to hear^{her} call them Iris, for some of the folks in the neighborhood call them lillies while others call them flags. Birch once called them fleur-de-lis. Would you believe it, but there were catalogues cluttering up the entire room? I must say that some of these pictures in the catalogues were pretty. Mrs. G---- told me the falls were the petals which lean down from the petals that stand up, which are called standards. There are Iris with beards, others without. When I saw the picture of the Japanese Iris, I made up my mind to look into some of these stories. The one about the flower being the size of a dinner plate amazed me. Birch had a feeling, so she said, that the lavenders must be planted in the same patch with the borders of yellows and pinks. Her mother was very patient and all she said was, "You do understand color, and we will talk this over at the supper table." That reminded me that we always have our evening meal about six-thirty, so I told them I must be going. Where had

the time gone? Every minute we had spent in talking about next spring's flower beds. Mrs. G ---- asked if there was anyone at home to prepare supper. Then I spoke of Minnie, and Mrs. G ---- said, "Telephone her to manage without you this time, that you will be home later."

When I asked if they had to get supper for men, she only laughed and nodded her head. Then she asked Birch to get up from her knees on the rug where she was placing squares of color together, first one way and then another way for color combinations. She did gather up all the catalogues and moved back some of the chairs. Not until then did I notice that they ate in the living room. The large table was to be set in one end. Birch asked me to help her set places and after that we started carrying in food.

Mrs. G. --- had gone to the kitchen, put on a clean apron and had begun getting dishes already filled with food from the ice box. I never did eat better cottage cheese, nor gelatined salmon. So I inquired who made these. Mrs. G ---- laughed again and said that she did. "The best of all," said she, "is the cake. That is a real triumph. Sour cream was new to me when I came down here, but now we are fast friends; together see what we can accomplish." Then she held up a delicious looking cake. "This is the recipe: Into a bowl, in which two eggs have been broken and thoroughly beaten with a cup of sugar, pour a cup of sour cream. When these have been stirred until well blended, add one and one-half cups of flour mixed with one-half teaspoon of soda, one teaspoon of baking powder and one-half teaspoon salt. When all these ingredients have been well beaten together, add a scant half cup of cocoa dissolved in enough hot water to make it about the consistency of the cake batter. (Or two squares of chocolate may be used instead. In this case, omit the hot water.) Then add one teaspoon of vanilla. Pour into a medium sized cake pan. About forty minutes baking in a 350/degrees Fahrenheit oven turns the trick. Oh, the frosting is so easy; mix a little cocoa and powdered sugar together, add cream, and keep adding cream as you stir in more sugar until there is sufficient frosting of the consistency desired for spreading."

Right then an automobile horn sounded and in came Sara, Judith and John, whistling. They put the bundles which they carried right where their mother was slicing bread. She did not seem to care, but kissed each child on the cheek as she told them who I was. They all talked at once as they clamored for the mail, which John had in his pocket. More catalogues! Sara reminded her mother that the picture of the Iris in the new catalogue was hers. She needed that one to complete the design for the drapery she was drawing. Mrs. G ---- remarked that Sara was undecided whether to make designing her vocation or her avocation. You see, this family have earned the living by means of their vocations and have made their hobbies the avocations, but Sara feels she wishes to reverse this order. Everyone laughed, even Sara.

Soon the men came in from out-of-doors with Mr. G ----. When all the men had washed, put on clean shirts, and Sara and Judith had changed their dresses, supper began. No one was asked to have this or that; our plates were filled, everyone ate what was on the plate, then when anyone wished more food, he asked for what he wished to have.

Mrs. G ---- said she had decided to use more Iris in next year's flower garden. Her idea for this summer had been so successful. The assorted colors of bachelor's buttons afforded her a nice variety. Each day she had picked a different combination of colors, and by this method she had a seemingly endless variety from which to choose. Mr. G ---- told me that during every supper time each person at the table was expected to tell at least one interesting item concerning his hobby.

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The fact must be new to the person doing the telling. He brought out of his pocket a brownish-looking bone, right there at the table. He called it a fossil. Sara and Birch almost shrieked to be the first to have it. Sara "knew it furnished the missing link" in her design. Birch "must have that sort of brownish color". Pete, the field man, spoke up to say that he had seen several bones like that earlier in the season.

John announced that he had decided to make farming his hobby, country doctoring his vocation. His reason for farming was that he wished to have a common ground with his patients and that he was woefully ignorant about farms. Such a gale of laughter as went about that table. Judith said that it was a relief that John had at last found his depth. Thanks be, the decision was made! She always felt that John would be as nearly like father as possible. "You see, Mrs. M----, father is a farmer by trade; he calls his anatomy his hobby." Her mind had been made up to be a musician ever since she could remember. The fees looks good to her; then there would be enough time left to study astronomy.

Brisk, the other man, wished to play a tune on the leaf the way the Indians did. Please, could he have a pamphlet that he had not read before, one about the Indians? We had spent a full hour at the table, but no one seemed to care. When Mr. G---- asked me what my hobby was, what I knew that was new to me, I had no words. I had no hobby really, but I said, "Books." Before anyone could say another word, Mrs. G---- got up from the table, handed me a package saying, "Open that parcel. In it you will find an old volume in a quaint binding. I know you will be interested." I removed the paper while the girls cleared away the supper dishes. The book was beautiful. I continued to hold it while we listened to the radio program. "Mrs. M----, do you like where the loud speaker is placed?" inquired Mrs. G----. "This position is new. We are trying it out for the first time tonight. This talk on wheat is presumably an excellent one. Sara, please set the table for morning after the dishes are finished." When the radio talk was over, Judith played for Brisk to try out his tune. Mr. G---- and Pete began to talk bones and beetles. Mrs. G---- wanted to plan new shelves in the hall. About that time the telephone rang. Edwin wanted me to come home. Judith said she would walk over with me, for she wished to see a certain star. John walked along.

When I got home, Edwin couldn't keep awake long enough to hear the half of what I had to tell about the new neighbors who have hobbies. The following day I brought down the encyclopedia from the attic. The first word I looked up was "book", then "binding". I got so interested that when time came for my evening chores, I did not feel sorry for myself, but was happy in the doing and the remembering that this was my vocation, also that I could read later in one of the large volumes. The following day the children put a shelf in the front room for the encyclopedia books. At first all the children did was to look at the pictures, but by the time the week was up, each child was learning something new from those books, to tell us about at meal time. Even the baby, now six, could find more pictures of birds than any of us.

I never would have believed that there was so much to farming. We looked up about corn, sent for catalogues and bulletins, and read them from cover to cover. Someone told us to put a yam in a jar of water to see it sprout. We also tried a sweet potato, and placed these in a sunny window. Soon green appeared and then there was a race with the vines. For days the eldest boy and girl spent all their spare time in seeing who could find out the most about his choice of potatoes. When we went to the church supper, we took marshmallowed sweet potatoes in one dish, yams cooked the same way in another, and then let the neighbors guess which of the potatoes they were eating.

One little girl in the school collected a certain kind of pickle glasses and at Christmas she gave all her friends a sprouted sweet potato in a pickle glass. Not to be out-done some other children started grapefruit seeds in tin cans filled with dirt. They all painted their cans on the outside; some punched holes near the top of the can, strung wire or cord through these holes, then hung them up in the windows for hanging baskets. They placed on the sill dishes of water with carrots, others with horseradish root. How quickly these did sprout! In our window, the vines and sprouts were not allowed to fill the entire open space, for the pink geranium has played center in that window for years. It would not seem home without that bit of color, which is always so cheerful. So as the winter passed away, we learned much about the things which grew in our south window.

There was a mother in the club who had her children read about automobiles, for she said she had never been able to understand how the gas made the car run. The school teacher and one of the large boys got so interested in tools that they fixed up the school house. Soon all the people came there to sing; they learned new songs, who wrote them, and also interesting facts about the writers. We found that studying about movie people is fun. Then when we see a picture of theirs we feel as though we had a part in it.

It does seem now-a-days we hear little about how bad the boys are, but rather what new thing they have found out about the world and what is in it. We country women now know that other women the world over do very much as farm women do. Women all eat, sleep and manage their households. Life is so full of interests that when people have the same kind of hobbies these people get together some way, regardless of what they do for a livelihood. When they have a common interest, what else matters? -- They cooperate.

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