

Nancy Miller Heald wrote the following story about a day in the life of her family in the 1940s. The two Miller families, Leigh and Belle, Ray and Peg, lived on the farm at 2994 Belfast Road, at the head of Pitcher Pond.

SNAPPING BEANS

In the early morning light, the dew sparkled on the spider webs scattered over the lawn. Belle (Pitcher) Miller stood in the bay window studying Pitcher Pond, gathering her own personal weather information. Today the water was still and clear, like the sky above. No sign of a breeze. It would be another hot August day.

Quickly, Belle washed up in cold tap water and slipped on her flowered house dress and her old “Mother Hubbard” apron. She chose her most mended cotton stockings. Today would be the big picking of snap beans.

Her husband, Leigh, had already gone to the barn to milk the cows. The Jerseys, Guernsey, and Holstein had freshened by early summer and were producing well. The Ayrshire was due any day now and needed to be checked on this morning. Ray Miller, Belle and Leigh’s son, expertly hoed the last of the manure down the scuttle while Leigh gave each cow a scoop of grain. After wiping down the udder he assumed his familiar perch on the three-legged milk stool, held the stainless steel milk pail carefully angled between his knees, and began milking with a steady rhythm. The barn cats silently padded in and sat at the scuttle edge, waiting expectantly. The rhythm soon included a periodic splat as each cat got a face full!

Ray hoisted a hundred pound bag of laying mash onto his shoulder and grabbed another under one arm, then headed up the steep barn stairs to the two large rooms where the laying hens were scratching and clucking. “Cuck-cuck-cuck-connecticut” rang out from the laying nests as Ray poured grain in the feeding troughs and smoothed it evenly.

Once the hens in the “Crows Nest” on the third floor were fed and watered it was time to free the pullets from their coops out on range and feed them. It hadn’t rained lately so the chicken yard wouldn’t be slippery this morning.

Back in the barn Leigh had finished milking. In the kitchen Belle had begun straining the milk into quart bottles. She carefully folded a clean cheesecloth over half of the milk pail, twisted the ends to draw the cloth tight, then effortlessly lifted the pail and began pouring. It seemed as though all she was touching were the two ends of the cheesecloth.

While Leigh had been busy in the barn, Belle and her mother-in-law, Lenny [Lena {Cross} Miller Bowers] had hurried through their morning chores so breakfast would be ready when Leigh came in with the milk. They had made oatmeal, poached eggs, toast, bacon and thin sliced, crisp, golden-brown fried potatoes. Leigh fixed his strong tea with milk and sugar and poured it into the saucer to cool. He usually drank it from the saucer despite Belle's requests that he act more proper. 'Don McNeil's Breakfast Club, live from Chicago,' kept them company on the radio. When the announcer said it was time to "march around the breakfast table," Leigh kept the beat by thumping his knife handle on the table. While Belle sometimes marched, today she would do her "marching" to and from the garden so she just clucked her tongue to the music. This signaled that the show was about over, and so was breakfast at the Millers.