

My dispatch from the country

“Gradyville is the place for me,
Amish neighbors and apple trees,
Cows, chickens, horses and hay,
Keep your a.c., I’m livin’ that country
way.

Goodbye, city and suburban life.
Gradyville we are there”

— With thanks to the *Green Acres*
theme song

Well, I’m not quite ready to move to the country, at least not without air conditioning, but my daughter and I are enjoying our yearly visit with Grandma in South Central Kentucky.

Yesterday’s adventures illustrate the quality of life in a small town (well, “town” is actually 8 miles from my mom’s house). As I’m sure I included in last year’s annual August country report, Gradyville only has a post office, a country store/restaurant/gas station and about 100 people.

Every time we drive to and from the house, we check to see if the cows are in the creek and if the chickens are in the yard — the neighbors’, not my mom’s yard, although my daughter did grill my mom about why she doesn’t have chickens. But the car wasn’t good enough and my daughter insisted we take a walk down to see the cows in the early evening.

First, the neighbor across the street saw us and said he would try to get the horses from the field that borders his to say hi. Even with his grandson’s duck whistle, it didn’t work. So we soldiered on down the road. The next neighbor invited us in to watch his wife can her own tomato juice from the tomatoes they grow across the field. We’d already enjoyed their corn, which gave the PR term, “corn sugar,” a run for its money, and her juicy tomatoes, so we went in. The basement canning room not only had rows and shelves of sealed cans to admire, but there was also a huge bucket of trucks for my daughter to play with. So we were both happy.

I asked Debbie why she grew and canned so much. She said she enjoys the whole process. She likes knowing what’s in her food, who touched it, and not having to go to the grocery store for much of anything. All year round they eat pickled vegetables, strawberry jam, salsa, spaghetti sauce, horticulture beans and much more — all from the “store” in her basement. She also eats the fish her son catches and filets himself. There was a pride in the independence of it all. No

mushy back to the land talk — just about what one can do for oneself.

In fact, my mom’s friend had just been telling us yesterday that the Depression around here was not that big of a deal because everyone grew and raised their own food. And if there was an older widow who wasn’t able to do that herself, you’d just bring her over a dozen eggs or whatever it was you had. She said she only knew one family that had been on welfare when she was a child.

After our canning lesson, we passed some Amish and non-Amish kids playing outside. They asked us who we were.

The Amish dad came out to introduce himself. One of the little girls offered to introduce me to “the lady of the house.” One Amish boy shared his tricycle with my daughter and pushed her around the yard on it. A little girl offered for her to sit on her inflatable turtle. They kept offering to take her to see the chickens, but she was a little nervous.

Finally, and I have this on video, the little 6-year-old Amish boy said, “I’ll

get you a chicken.” He brought it back, black-and-white speckled with a red beak, squirming and squawking, but in his tight grip. One of the girls reassured my daughter that the chicken was soft and showed her it was OK by petting it herself and then taking my daughter’s hand to help her pet the chicken.

Then the boy said, “We can kill ‘em, you know. We can kill ‘em and eat ‘em.”

I asked them if they ever make friends with the chickens and then have a hard time eating them. The boy said, “No. They’re good!” But one of the girls, his non-Amish neighbor, admitted it did bother her sometimes.

This morning, my mom made blueberry tart with my daughter. Of course she had picked the blueberries and frozen them herself. Then they walked down the road to see more horses and pick some corn. When they got back, they cooked the corn, ate it and then settled on the front porch swing to read a book.

I’ve just seen the funniest sign up in the coffee shop, understood as hysterical across all cultures:

“All unattended children will be given an espresso and a new puppy.”

She can backpack through Europe after she graduates from college. In the meantime, you can have Paris; Gradyville is the best summer vacation a kid could have.

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Capital Schmoozing

Natasha Rosenstock

1200
The number of Beth El members and guests who attended this year’s Purim extravaganzas

50%
The amount of Beth El’s electricity generated from wind power — part of our Green Tikkun endeavor

1
The number of Jewish co-op preschools in the Washington area...and it’s ours!

61
The number of families that joined Beth El in the last 12 months

2
The number of alternative tracks — a two-day and a three-day — available for our Religious School students

50%
The discount offered to first-time members

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