

**Family Business:  
An Oral History of Farm Resource Management**

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Cornell University  
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Having represented our project with farm families for several years, Cornell graduate students Allan Bjergo and Alan Berkowitz used the record resulting from their own and earlier visits as primary sources for PhD studies. While representing the project on many occasions, Professor Sarah Elbert provided insightful observations concerning family and business relationships, as did my long-serving research assistant, Laurie Konigsberg Todd.

Financial support from Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences administrators, especially W. Keith Kennedy, Director of Research and subsequently Dean, and from J. Robert Cooke, co-founder of the Internet-First University Press, is gratefully acknowledged, as is encouragement from Liberty Hyde Bailey, Dean 1903-1913. I “met” this illustrious scholar of agriculture and rural life in America through his extensive papers in Cornell’s University Archives. FAMILY BUSINESS suggests that his overriding objective—to bring the benefits of science and technology to rural people while preserving a distinctive culture—has not fallen by the wayside.

Without doubt, my experience as an apprentice farmer stimulated an enduring interest in farming’s family and business connections. With my parents, Raymond and Nettice Colman, I usually enjoyed raising crops and animals as a family even though my father’s considerable skills in this regard lacked a financial management counterpart. Understandably, my mother worried about making semi-annual payments on a five-thousand-dollar mortgage, while I thought village kids belonged to another culture.

Many thanks also to my long-term administrative colleague Peggy Pack, who kept the projects’ many components well organized; to my patient editor, Dianne Ferriss, both for bringing order to erratic punctuation and when calling for renewed attention to semi-focused passages; and to the farm people themselves, who reflected about business decisions in the making while growing older.

## Biography

As a youth, Gould P. Colman preferred apprenticeship activity in a western New York family business to indoor course-and-credit education in Medina, New York's public schools. Tractors were displacing horse power on American farms at his birth in 1926, and once his growing legs reached the tractor's pedals, the Great Depression's difficult cash-flow situation enhanced the value of this family labor. An only child, he helped the family grow and harvest tomatoes and peas—valued sources of much needed income—fed sheep and cows, and harvested hay to feed them, fork in hand, during the pre-baler era of farm mechanization. In every direction, other families also operated businesses in the eighty-acre range, all since consolidated into fewer, far larger operations.

Encouraged by an expanded understanding of human behavior acquired during the military service, the author entered Cornell University in 1947, and with financial assistance from the GI Bill received the BA degree in 1951. Subsequently mentored by Professor Paul W. Gates, during study that emphasized American agricultural history, he received the PhD degree at Cornell in 1962. During the interval between degrees, he blended academic with hands-on apprenticeship education for three years while teaching U.S. history and supervising student building construction at the Storm King School.

Beginning in 1962, a Colman-initiated oral history program at Cornell explored and documented various forms of U.S. agricultural activity: farm supply and marketing, food processing, university and proprietary research, and farm family business, as well as the evolution of home economics as a separate academic discipline. As University Archivist from 1972 to 1995, he also collected and preserved other forms of historical documentation—departmental and central administration records, professional papers, and student scrapbooks among them.

Colman lives in the house constructed with assistance from his wife, Cynthia Carson, and their children, Abigail and Jefferson, on fifty acres of abandoned farm land near Ithaca, New York. All have heartily supported the development of alternative education in the Ithaca schools.



# Family Business: An Oral History of Farm Resource Management

## Introduction

In 1966 selected American farm families began supplying an information reservoir that would eventually become the primary source of FAMILY BUSINESS. Cornell faculty members in Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology (departments subsequently renamed) and myself, the University's oral history program leader, invited their members to reflect about family business decisions while reel-to-reel audio tape recorders and face-to-face conversation implemented a Columbia University procedure known as "oral history." At the time these farm people began tracing decisions and outcomes—from initial idea to implementation—in a business they owned and operated, "oral history" was just entering the American lexicon.

Conversations between the investigators or their representatives and the same men, women, and children continued for nearly two decades, eventually supplying this information reservoir with extensive accounts of family business experience. This record soon confirmed my reservations about a U.S. agricultural college's recommendation to farm people concerning economic success in a family business: limit the business's management decisions to an adult male, presumably an entrepreneur whom they identified with the singular article, "the farmer." Former apprentice farmers themselves, each investigator had seen economically successful family businesses in which women and teenage children also shaped the timing and content of management decisions. Each had also seen family members assess apprentice skills and commitment to the business to determine who, among the apprentices, should progress to management and ownership. Whether or not the investigators' departures from their family businesses had been voluntary, other family members occupied the path to management and ownership, or the business would not support more family members, each wanted the oral history conversations to explore apprenticeship education's contribution to keeping farming primarily a family business.

For the author of FAMILY BUSINESS, his Cornell PhD thesis, *Education and Agriculture: A History of the New York State College of Agriculture*, published in 1961, played an instrumental part in creating this reservoir of primary source material. This study depicted a century-long agricultural college and USDA effort to remake America's principal business along industrial lines—beneficial to supply makers and distributors, commodity marketers and processors, and farm people alike. However, this science-based remodeling effort invaded a culture agricultural economists dismissed as "a way of life." Subsequently, when reconsidering capital and technology's impact on the farming component of American agriculture, he wondered how the "family business," a critical component of that culture, continued to thrive in an increasingly industrialized milieu.

The oral history conversations began when gender-based restrictions on access to higher education's academic and athletic programs were falling rapidly. With men and women alike joining colleges of agriculture as faculty members and students, to continue the existing college survey research practice of seeking information about field and barn activities from men, and home and family-related matters from women, would have ignored the collective management decisions the investigators had observed in farm families and defied the temper of the times. In this information reservoir, men, women, and children of both sexes reflect about family business decisions and outcomes.

Recorded conversations began in 1966 and continued until 1983. During this time farm men, women, and children report family-member responses to wide-ranging circumstances confronting their business, such as equipment purchases subject to family control, weather and taxes that defy such control, and others, like court-

ship, subject to family-member negotiation if not control—but most frequently, some blend of all the foregoing. Some responses seek a short-term solution, while others address long-term business sustainability issues, as when an apprentice prepares for management and ownership, or for departure from the business. Often a speaker returns to a decision in subsequent conversations, providing an assessment of the implementation's impact on business performance and family relationships.

Conversations with almost sixty family members during seventeen years of visitations, when transcribed, filled 21,646 pages of standard 8 ½ by 11 paper. This information reservoir began when an interviewer familiar with the agricultural college's research on the adoption of college-recommended technology and practices engaged a family member informed about the subject through observation or performance. Charged with tracing a physical object's acquisition from initial idea to decision implementation, the interviewer asked family members older than seven to describe the course two purchase decisions had taken from idea to implementation: one involved an article serving the home, such as a washing machine, and the other was business-oriented—a tractor, for example.

However significant to an advocate promoting economic efficiency on farms through labor-saving technology, such purchases constitute only a tiny portion of a farm family's decision-related activity. Recognizing the initial focus's limited value for investigating how farm families make decisions, Cornell investigators and cooperating family members alike readily expanded the inquiry's scope. As Cornell project representatives normally greeted family members—"What has been happening since our last visit?"—open-ended discussion concerning wide-ranging family and business activity, past or contemplated, replaced oral history's conventional question-and-answer format. If the ensuing conversation should omit matters the investigators intended to explore—off-farm income, family relations with hired employees, or criteria for evaluating apprenticeship performance, for example—questions would follow.

Family members often disagreed about a decision's origin, the course its development had taken, and the time between component steps; yet each speaker recalled a far more convoluted path between idea and implementation than the rational step-by-step procedure the agricultural college educators were equating with reality. To clarify a particular decision's emergence from deliberations in which other possibilities were discarded, family members were invited to enter a round-robin discussion, after the one-on-one conversations had been completed. The invitation usually found family members receptive, wondering themselves why discussions that may have continued on and off for a year or longer had taken a particular turn. Seeking to identify critical movers and shapers, and other significant elements in a decision's evolution, this forum usually brought greater clarity to a decision's course and, as the investigators were to discover, those discussions often continued long after their departure.

Limiting the time between conversations with the same person to two years (the usual practice) reduced oral history's vulnerability to respondent forgetfulness and their tendency to reconcile recalled events with existing situations. To reduce opportunities for selective recall and rationalization, reported activities and observations were frequently reviewed with the speaker at a later date and, where feasible, with other family members during one-on-one conversations or group discussion. In addition, touring field and barn with family members enabled project representatives to ask informed questions about resource usage.

The gathering of family decisions and practices' information was not remunerated—a transcript of each person's audio recording having been the sole gratuity. Nevertheless, for many adult participants, the opportunity to acquaint non-farm people with their occupation's demands and rewards was itself a form of compensation.

A shoestring budget supported the initial oral history conversations. To determine how extensively adults and children would delve into family and business relationships with a tape recorder listening, while avoiding travel costs, the investigators enlisted three families, all located in central New York State. Two farmed hilly terrain with poorly drained, highly acidic soil, at a time when New York State farm numbers were declining rapidly—

from 82,000 farms in 1959 to 52,000 ten years later—with environmentally marginal farms leading the decline. When asked to speculate about the future of these family businesses, Cornell agricultural economists expected both to fail within five years. One of them, however, entered the twenty-first century and appears in Chapter 1.

The Cornell College of Agriculture's positive image among these families, evidently a response to generally helpful advice from its Cooperative Extension agents, was doubtlessly helpful when launching the investigation into farm family decision-making procedures and outcomes. Family member interest in tracing the course of decisions over time and through varied family-member interplay having quickly overcome the audio recorder's potentially intimidating presence, the investigators expanded the number of participating families to eighteen, using as recruitment guides aspects of farming that economists considered especially relevant to business viability: commodity focus, operating scale, and land resource adaptability to area crops. These New York family businesses included twelve dairy farms, milk being the state's leading farm commodity; three egg producers, poultry being a significant farm enterprise in the state at that time; and three producing apples, another significant enterprise in the state. Operating scale, a compelling consideration to economists when estimating a farm's economic potential, ranged between barely supplying the owning family's income to also supporting employee family incomes. While business-management skills were not considered, clearly survival for the economically marginal family businesses located at the northern limits of Appalachia required notable human and physical resource coordination; while those equipped with fertile well-drained soil amid gently rolling terrain south of Lake Ontario and in New York's Central Plateau needed another combination of management skills to operate in the more competitive economic environment.

The contributions men and women make to operating family businesses frequently overlap, while many others are gender specific: men selecting new tires for a tractor, for example, and women new drapes for a living room. To elicit revealing details concerning the course a particular decision had taken—amid references to other decisions and outcomes—investigator representatives (usually Cornell graduate students or faculty wives) arranged to have men talk with men and women with women when visiting these families.

In 1979, while implementing a five-year review requirement for research supported by the federal 1887 Hatch Act, a perceptive USDA official noted that, while conclusions based on documentation from New York farm families might be valid, they would not be widely accepted unless the participating families included those from a “real” farm state. This advice to include corn, soybean, or cotton-producing families coincided with one of our investigator's departure from Cornell, tenure in hand, for a university in his native state. Professor Jerry Stockdale recruited two multi-generation families in central Iowa, each meeting the USDA reviewer's reality measure; but given the distance between Ithaca, New York, and their location, these families were visited less frequently.

In addition to thoughts and activities documented in the 21,646-page transcript, FAMILY BUSINESS draws on notes its author created, pen in hand, during subsequent visits with three participating families—two producing milk in New York State—while using notably different business practices to operate on a vastly different scale. Thoughts and activities occurring in each family, along with those occurring in an Iowa family producing corn, soybeans, and beef cattle in a “real” farm state, are examined in chapters that constitute nearly three decades of family business history.

In each chapter, the strengths and vulnerabilities of farming's basic organization can be seen as a family responds to ever-changing circumstances: among them, widespread economic depression and prosperity, family-member disagreements about business practices and objectives, off-farm income opportunities, and apprenticeship activities and aspirations. Two or more generations produce and market farm commodities, while the business simultaneously perpetuates itself through courtship, the birth of children, apprenticeship education, and intergenerational negotiation—all the while keeping the family business competitive amid a nationwide trend toward larger and fewer farms by enlarging its acreage and adopting labor-extending technology. Like

other farm businesses in the United States, each draws on a unique combination of natural and human resources when responding to perceived marketing opportunities by changing its crop and animal components in type and number during the years of our conversations. As with many farm family businesses in the United States, two of these families supplement farm income outside the farm.

Every family business documented in the 21,646-page record could also illuminate decision-related procedures and outcomes in farming's basic organization, but the families featured in the first two chapters of FAMILY BUSINESS were selected because they share a labor-intensive form of farming, a feature that facilitates examining labor-management practices, a particularly critical component of these businesses. In the first chapter this component involves apprenticeship education in a small-scale business; in the second chapter, owner relations with hired employees in a large-scale business are also featured. The third chapter examines a mid-scale business located in a "real" farm state. This Iowa family produces basic crops and beef cattle, while generating significant off-farm income, all with family labor.

Each chapter departs from a long-standing U.S. agricultural college practice known in New York as "Cornell recommends." When describing decisions and reporting outcomes, the related behavior is not considered appropriate or inappropriate. The judgmental "should" has been carefully avoided.

In Chapter 1, "Everyone Needs This Farm," a recently married couple operates a small-scale dairy farm equipped with marginal soil, hilly topography, and little capital but their own considerable labor in home, field, and barn. Later, three children augment that labor, off-farm income supplements farm income, and one apprentice perfects his courtship criteria, then achieves management credibility with his parents and progresses to management and ownership. In our last session together, we learn that his wife's flourishing business supplements farm income, while two capable but unenthusiastic apprentices wonder whether to remain in the same occupation. Extensive detail concerning problems, decisions, and potential solutions illuminates complex decision-making practices throughout.

In "The Brothers," the second family business history, two highly capable brothers manage an economically successful large-scale dairy farm, and while following "Cornell recommends," treat family and business as separate organizations. The older brother, using friendship as a management tool, treats hired employees as surrogate family, while the younger brother, emphasizing economic efficiency, institutes effective cost-control practices. An ambitious intelligent wife, excluded from business management on gender grounds, seeks to end that exclusion without undermining her husband's pursuit of economic efficiency. One apprentice advances to business management and ownership by combining the brothers' management tools with impressive dairy-related skills; other capable apprentices resist the farm's industrial practices and are winnowed from the business. The chapter ends with the daughter, whom the principal owner dismissed as a potential successor on gender grounds two decades earlier, preparing to succeed him.

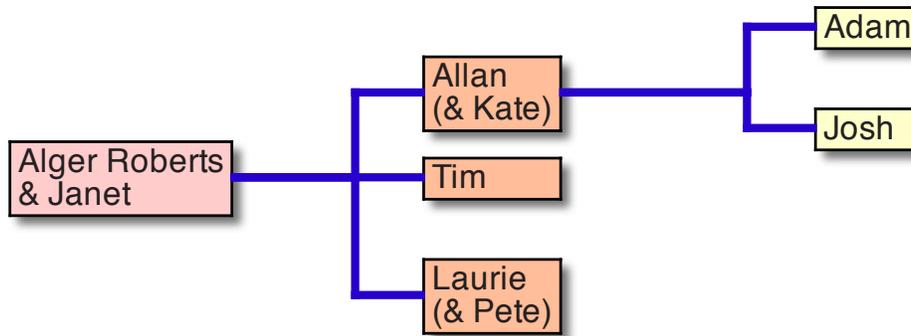
In Chapter 3, "Doing It," the history of an Iowa farm business, a family intellectually and emotionally committed to family and business integration struggles to accommodate the interests of two generations in a business producing and marketing corn, soybeans, and beef cattle, while also operating auxiliary businesses. An energetic, talented wife helps a son, a son-in-law, and their wives advance in the family business without undermining her husband's competent leadership, and also oversees a local store's flourishing activity. Like the farm people previously observed, these family members usually enjoy doing the varied tasks required to operate a shared business, whether individually or collectively—even those that may aggravate conflicting interests attached to gender or generation. As we close our conversations with this family, a highly competent couple and ambitious children—a son, daughter, and son-in-law—approach the ultimate measure of occupational success by keeping family and business together while another generation takes over.

Geographic and population references to New York and Iowa do not reveal the families appearing in these chapters, the place and personal names having been disguised in order to honor an agreement between these families and Cornell University. If production costs and selling prices reported in these business histories appear remarkably low, readers should remember that monetary inflation in the United States was over twelve percent in a single year between the 1960s and 1980.



# CHAPTER 1

## Everyone Needs This Farm



*The Roberts Family*

Looking westward toward the home farm from their hill farm’s location in 1965, Alger Roberts and his wife Janet faced timber-size trees. Yet early in the twentieth century, when less imposing oat and hay crops filled that space, Alger’s birthplace remained out of sight along the hill’s base. Between the hill farm and home farm, a newly constructed macadam-surfaced road negotiated several steep grades.

While Alger’s grandparents lived at the home farm, family members, a hired man, and farm animals consumed garden produce along with field crops—notably oats, wheat, barley, and hay—that the farm’s seventy acres supplied. Any remaining crops, along with butter churned at home from milk that eight cows provided, were exchanged for sugar, coffee, cloth, hardware, and other commodities originating elsewhere were available from merchants located within horse and buggy range. When calling a cash- or plastic-financed transaction “trading,” modern farm people preserve the image of face-to-face commerce.

In the late nineteenth century, in rural America’s cash-scarce economy, Alger Roberts’ grandparents augmented the hired man’s dollar-a-day wage with room and board in their sizable clapboard-covered house, largely constructed from lumber harvested on the farm with family labor. The same agricultural resources also constructed a two-story barn, with assistance from itinerant carpenters; initially covered with bare boards, it had been painted red with white trim by 1965. To maintain the dirt road connecting this business with neighboring farms, Protestant churches, a one-room school, and local merchants, the family joined adjacent landowners in applying horse power, simple farm equipment, and human labor—thereby paying the stipulated highway tax.

After the farm’s main wintertime food supply entered the barn’s upper story—piled loosely atop a wagon pulled by two horses—family members, the hired man, and frequently neighbors as well, forked the hay into adjacent mows. Piled there atop hay from earlier loads, gravity packed the mow tightly, as if a modern baler had been employed. Months later, as snow drifted over the hay field, horses, cows, and a few sheep consumed summer’s bounty in the barn’s stone-walled basement, secure within stalls also constructed with family labor from home-grown timber.

Before twentieth-century farm people made their labor far more productive by turning to larger, faster-moving equipment fueled by petroleum, less complex factory-made equipment and draft horse power supplemented their labor. However, as horse power’s goods and services infrastructure—blacksmiths, harness makers, and other local merchants—gave way to impersonal relationships with regional, national, and global organizations

that service the newer technology, a rural social infrastructure that included the Patrons of Husbandry also disappeared. But evident economic benefits ensued as technology that consumes fuel only when supplying power replaced the horse power's daily hay and grain refueling, whether working or not. While farm people could market produce that formerly generated horsepower, this income did not offset the cost of acquiring petroleum products, larger more complex factory-made equipment, and chemical fertilizers that they could not produce at home. Then during the 1930s, as versatile tractors mounted on rubber tires replaced the cumbersome steel wheeled models from the earlier decade, farm people exchanged far greater labor productivity for increasing dependence on regional, national, and international goods and services' suppliers. Rural America's industrialization had proceeded apace.

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Alger Roberts was born in 1926, during a period marked by rampant monetary deflation. At that time, rural Americans were repaying debt incurred during the previous decade's expanding economy—with expensive dollars or not repaying at all, as numerous foreclosures across the nation attested. With the depressed economy's end still out of sight ten years later, Roberts' father would not consider going into debt to buy machines that would make farm-task performance easier for himself and his apprentice. In 1965 Alger remembered an exhausted twelve-year-old apprentice working at his father's side; but even while working alone, as most farm work is done, his father's knowledge of how long a task should take paced his productive activity. For Alger Roberts, realizing that his own childhood labor had been exploited coincided with supervising his own children's apprenticeships.

Attending high school would have been an intolerable experience, Alger reflected, without the Future Farmers of America. Vocational agriculture students combined social activities with lessons about record-keeping and other modern business practices; and in this nationwide organization a written constitution and by-laws guided his participation, in marked contrast to his father's seemingly arbitrary apprenticeship requirements. Alger remembered his term as FFA chapter president as the single redeeming feature of his high school years.

Meeting one another had been virtually inevitable for Alger and Janet Roberts, Janet's brother having been Alger's best high school friend, and both fathers were officials of the Jasper County Fair—an annual occasion where rural people could exhibit farm and home accomplishments without appearing to boast. Furthermore, both families belonged to the Grange—the local unit of the Patrons of Husbandry—a nation-wide fraternity that farm people formed after the Civil War to protect their family-based occupation from post-war industry's fragmenting impact. Both Alger and Janet traced courtship's onset to contests based on knowledge of Grange ritual. Each remembered outperforming other contestants but not each other.

Alger recalled how World War II's outset in Europe ended the Great Depression. Demand for food and natural fiber quickly increased, he said, and as farm prices changed direction, economic prosperity quickly replaced the only economy he had ever known: "That's when my dad made money farming." Alger's father purchased tractors at that time, not to make farmwork easier, but to generate more salable product with the same amount of labor. In his mid-teens then, and performing most farm tasks as his father's equal, Alger recalled renting additional land from other farmers, thereby enabling father and son to farm on a scale that exempted Alger from military service. Upon reaching twenty, having done every task the farm's operation required except manage the family business, Alger anticipated becoming his father's junior partner, a conventional route to family business continuity. Instead of endorsing the partnership proposal, however, Alger's father encouraged his son to find another occupation.

The nation's industrial sector that facilitated World War II's victorious outcome with mass-produced weaponry applied these production practices to petroleum-powered farm equipment in the post-war period; consequently, farm labor became increasingly productive, while the amount of farm land and the demand for farm commodities stayed relatively stable. Rapid farm consolidation ensued as farm people competed for access to land,

other farm resources, and markets as well. With farm numbers in the United States dropping by thirty percent between 1950 and 1960, Alger's father surely realized that the seventy-acre farm would not support a second family. At that time many apprentices were leaving farming by way of college, but with his high school grades, Alger could not pursue his interest in farm machinery and building design at college. Barred from professional advancement at home and through college attendance, Alger enrolled in a short course for artificial breeding technicians. "I got a pretty good rating," he recalled, yet he never used his technician's certification. "I wanted to farm."

For a farm family a well-matched young couple constitutes a supply of management and labor that can support business continuity, but as Janet explained, "My father-in-law being the way he is, we had to leave. There was no future there. Alger's father wouldn't consider taking Alger in as a partner, nor would he consider letting us buy the farm. Alger had to be a hired hand, pure and simple." Viewing apprenticeship, courtship, and marriage as an occupational ladder leading to management and ownership, Janet preferred further movement to clutching a rung. "We weren't that kind of people."

Alger and Janet's occupational ascent began on a farm located near Northford. "Get established," Alger explained; "establish our credit and move on from there." Yet that concise explanation overlooks an obvious question: why would a beginning farmer with little capital put twenty miles between his fields and his father's equipment? They had tried to purchase the hill farm before moving to Northford, Janet explained, but after obtaining a purchase option from its elderly owners, the wife, as co-owner, decided not to sell. "That was a bad blow to us," Janet said. "Maybe it made us kind of disgusted or something, so we decided to go a little further afield."

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U.S. agricultural colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture had stopped calling farm businesses unable to afford efficiency-enhancing technology "poor" or "small" in 1965, the preferred usage being "limited resource," instead. Certainly the term fitted Alger and Janet, who moved to the Northford farm with basic furniture, Alger's savings as a hired man, and a fifteen-cow dairy herd that he started while a child from one calf. Using a heavily mortgaged title, the couple gained access to ninety acres, a barn large enough to hold the small herd, and a house that would become an excellent investment through the studious application of family labor.

Since Alger's progress as a farmer would depend on the skills, energy, and enthusiasm that Janet applied to their business, he could have called his marriage a "good investment." Indeed, he may have considered her commitment to his occupational advancement a dowry, having grown up with a father who seemed to have viewed his mother this way. In 1965, Alger recalled having told his wife upon their arrival at the Northford farm a decade earlier what "pulling together" might accomplish there.

"I've thought about that," Janet mused. "How did I get started doing some of these things? One day I wasn't and the next day I was." Quoting her husband, she answered, "Well, you did it last night; how about tonight? The first thing you know, it was one of your jobs." Realizing that she could increase family income by working as a secretary—her job before marriage—Janet recalled proposing this move to Alger. He told her that she should continue doing the tasks she was doing, thus providing an assessment of her contributions to the business that also increased their value to her.

Looking back on the Northford experience in 1965, Janet called that house "so old it was modern. We remodeled everything in it. The whole three years we were there we never spent a day, I don't think, but what we changed something. My father was working as a carpenter then, and I don't know how many weeks he spent up there helping. I ended up with something very nice. I was sad about all the work we put in it, but Alger said not to feel that way—that it was an investment. We got enough so it more than justified our labor." Blaming

herself for entertaining assessment criteria different from her husband's, Janet observed, "The trouble with me is I put love into anything I do, whether it's working with animals or a house."

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A "marginal" label that Cornell College of Agriculture faculty members applied to the hill farm during the Great Depression remained on it in the 1960s, yet farmers in many countries would welcome its potentially productive soil. The marginal label had not been based on soil and topography alone. A post-World War I exodus from New York hill farms for village and city employment had persuaded the agricultural economists that such farms would neither generate the tax revenue needed to pave nearby roads—and bus children to newly founded central schools—nor create an electric power demand that would induce utilities to extend service there. Guided by Cornell's land-use recommendations, New York State and federal government land-purchase programs converted marginal hill farms into publicly owned areas designated for forestry and recreation during the Great Depression.

Although double the Northford farm in acreage, the Roberts family arrived at the hill farm when pasture or trees covered half the two hundred acres and the tillable portion had been unplowed since the previous owner followed his neighbors downhill to factory employment in 1939. Nevertheless, Alger called this soil "practical," having examined it many times while an apprentice supplying labor that his father had exchanged with the uphill neighbor. "At the time we bought this and started building it up, we had the idea we could buy adjoining land and expand. We haven't been able to do this, and this has held us back. It's rather difficult to bid against the federal government."

Reflecting upon getting flourishing crops growing on soil unfarmed for many years, and long-neglected buildings into use, Alger indicated that access to low-cost labor made the hill farm less marginal. Constant activity by husband and wife came to mind. "Back then we were younger." Furthermore, Alger noted, "I had a family coming on." Allan had been born at Northford, Tim arrived while the family was returning to Jasper County, and in 1965 Laurie was already helping.

"We had the money from the farm up in Northford, and of course we had to reinvest that within eighteen months." Alger's "of course" referred to the federal tax on capital gains, and his determination to avoid losing any capital. Turning the nondescript Northford house into a "good investment" with family labor and limited capital had been instructive, and on arriving at the hill farm, Roberts expected to make land deemed marginal for farming a good investment in the same way. "We just kept putting the money back in."

"The first thing we did," Alger recalled, "was put on about three hundred tons of lime. We released all the nutrients that had been stored there for years when we put this lime on." But a flourishing alfalfa crop also requires well-drained soil. Alger recalled that Janet initially resisted using the family's remaining capital to construct contoured drainage ditches, but then "went along with it pretty well," having seen an initial investment's outcome. Her conversion occurred while driving a tractor that powered a baler that compressed loose hay into compact bales. "After we got the contour strips in, she found out how easy it was to bale on those strips."

The United States government also helped the Roberts family make the hill farm less marginal. Along with financing diversion ditches that prevented excess water from carrying soil particles to lower elevations, the Soil Conservation Service—a New Deal-era federal agency—paid to uproot bushes and trees from seemingly unproductive hedgerows. While enlarging fields adapted to horse power for tractor-related technology, rabbits, birds, and other wildlife lost secure hedgerow homes; but a half-century later they would be protected by an updated version of federally endorsed soil conservation practices.

The house that came with the hill farm had deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation, so initially the Roberts family lived with Alger's parents. "We had a whole section of the house to ourselves," Janet recalled. "We'd drive back and forth. The road was just very large stones. Every tire on the truck and the car was

flattened twice by the time we got the basement built and could move up here.” Because a dairy farmer who is absent while a cow is calving may return to a dead calf or a dam in extreme distress, there is a significant financial incentive to resist living at a distance. Furthermore, since milk flow gradually declines until another calf is born, failing to observe a cow in heat reduces income. Of course, a bull could readily solve this problem, but the potentially dangerous animal would have occupied the space of three cows and been inferior to sires readily available from an artificial insemination semen supplier.

Lacking sufficient labor and money to enlarge the small barn, Roberts reduced the herd to the structure’s capacity, then applied income from the sale to housing the family. “The only thing we had done,” Janet observed, “we had a mason lay up the basement wall, and he did it in two days with my husband mixing the Latta-Bond for him. And then in between we’d hurry and get chores done, and I’d usually bring up a lunch.” Hesitating a moment, Janet added, “No, that’s not altogether true. As long as I was nursing Tim, I had to go back for lunch. When I stopped nursing him, Mom would take care of him all day long, and I’d bring up a lunch for us, and we’d stay here the whole day and either work outdoors or build the basement, whatever had to be done.” Another pause. “We would come back at night, of course, and work more.” Yet the house remained only a basement. Asked how she liked living in that modest structure, Janet declared, “If this is where he wanted to be, this is where we went. I am not one of those women who belong to NOW.” Janet seemed to stand by her man when dismissing the National Organization for Women but, as would become evident later, she was standing by the farm.

The Roberts family lived in that basement house for about a year, Janet recalled, but Alger disagreed. “We built the basement and lived there four years—doesn’t seem like that long.” He was right—1956 to 1960. “When we got the money, we went ahead and put the framing up and finished it.” “We did just about all of it,” Janet added. “There’s less than \$7,500 in the whole house.” Hiring labor would have doubled that figure. “My father furnished his labor, too.”

Alger had been anxious to complete the house, according to Janet. “He always said that when he got married, the house was going to be just as important as the barn. He feels a successful farmer should have a good-looking house as much as he has a good-looking barn. I could make do. I’m in the house so little, anyway, that the barn was the main thing. He was more upset about it than me.” Moving that conversation from housing the family to housing the family’s principal source of income, she said, “Then he started in. He tore down the little silo and added on a shed to enlarge the barn.”

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The farm day began at 5:00 a.m. during that winter. “In the morning my wife gets up and fixes some coffee to wake me up,” Alger observed. “She is out to the barn before I have my coffee and some cookies.” When leaving the house, Janet entered an unheated room containing boots aligned beneath pegs holding coats and coveralls. Dressed for barn tasks, she stepped outside to stand where the family car and pickup truck were parked. A hundred feet ahead, she could see the milk house under the yard light’s glare, unless heavy snow drifted before the north wind.

Greeted by the kitchen-like structure’s welcoming warmth, Janet faced a spotless steel sink, then a rack containing well-scrubbed parts that would be assembled into a milking machine, and a milk cooler with doors large enough to admit the ten-gallon cans now found in antique stores with an eagle stenciled on the side. Passing through the milk house Janet entered her favorite part of the farm. Here calves confined within pens stretched their necks toward her, anxiously awaiting her affectionate pat and friendly word.

Overhead, heavy timbers supported the storage bin which the local Agway store refilled twice monthly with freshly mixed grain. Elsewhere above that floor, hay bales were piled to the roof. A small silo located next to the barn held ensilage—a roughage component in the cows’ ration, created by mechanically chopping mature corn into small pieces.

Farther ahead Janet could see twenty-eight black and white Holsteins chew cuds from an earlier meal with a contentment that made restraining stanchions seem superfluous, although she knew that hunger, ovulation, or fright could quickly release the large animals' concentrated energy. Proceeding some thirty feet, Janet stood on a flat strip of concrete ten-feet wide, a row of cows facing her from each side—each restrained by a stanchion encircling its neck.

Instead of providing separate milking and housing facilities, which the U.S. agricultural colleges were recommending to make farm labor more productive, at the Roberts' a concrete surface supported the cows when eating, sleeping, being milked, or ruminating. Shaped trough-like in front of the cows, when Alger put the ration there, aggressive eaters stretched their necks to taste a neighbor's portion; shaped at their rear into a rectangular trench, each cow deposited about thirty-five pounds of the farm's principal by-product there each day. When thirsty, a cow could nose a valve at the stanchion's side and water would appear in a steel bowl, unless winter's chill blocked a supply line; and when tired, a cow could lie on a bed of straw which Alger and Janet loosened daily, fork in hand.

Every morning and evening, Alger placed a vacuum-activated milking device mounted atop a steel bucket beside each cow in sequence, connected it to an overhead vacuum line with a flexible hose, then slipped finger-like rubber cups over four teats; as the vacuum power rhythmically squeezed the cups, milk flowed from udder to bucket. Drawing on skill that extensive practice had developed, Alger recognized an empty udder, then quickly detached the milking mechanism to avoid under-milking or over-milking. Next he dumped the bucket's content into a ten-gallon milk can, which Tim subsequently carted to the milk cooler. The following morning, Alger moved the day's production to a small platform located near the road, and then a local trucker moved those cans to a nearby milk receiving station. From there, a large tank truck delivered milk from this and other farms to a New York City distributor.

The motor-driven chain-and-paddle device removing manure from the hill farm's concrete trench was another hill farm compromise between applying labor and capital; far less labor-intensive than the arm and shovel it replaced, the technology was a large step behind the automated scrapers or flushing arrangements employed in more modern dairy barns. Furthermore, while keeping the barn cleaner than the milk inspector required, Alger and Janet were using labor that could increase family income if used elsewhere. Nevertheless, superior cleanliness would ultimately prove to be an excellent investment.

"She will help me get started feeding, and then will usually feed her calves." Alger's statement confirmed Janet's distinction between his tasks and hers. "If something's happened, of course, she stays out and helps. After breakfast, if there's anything to be done at the desk, we usually get that caught up. Then I go back and finish up my chores. She comes out and makes sure her calves have hay, and sometimes she shakes up straw on one side of the barn. Then she goes to finish washing her milkers. I take the load of manure out and sweep up my barn and [do] any doctoring I have to do on the cows and [make] any calls to the inseminator."

Winter afternoons provided relaxation time, Alger observed, "if there isn't anything pressing. Chores take roughly three hours. She takes care of her calves at night. The boys come out and usually get their chores done. Everyone has their chores to do." Rather than consider chores necessary tasks done reluctantly, Alger associated these activities with workforce motivation. "It's one way of keeping their complete interest in the operation."

Getting up and ready for school themselves while their mother was in the barn, reminded Allan, fourteen in 1966 (along with Tim twelve and Laurie ten), that the hill farm needed everyone. "I don't get back to the house until about 12:30, except for a break for breakfast about 9:00," Janet observed. She had been keeping the cows comfortable before breakfast. "Alger takes one side and I do the other," she said, about shaking up straw among the stanchions. "I don't mind. The children and I do everything except feed and milk."

Nature emerging gold and green from wintery brown signaled small-scale dairy farmers to reorganize the farm day. Until hill farm vegetation turned brown again, the cows remained in the pasture all day, eating grass while fertilizing their food supply; but anticipating a tasty grain and a mineral supplement at day's end, they moved to their stanchions for milking without further encouragement. As tillage and planting-related tasks replaced wintertime chores, Janet added field work to her day, and the children joined her when the school bus arrived, and during weekends as well.

Every moment counted during the harvest, called "haying," since opportunities for drying the crop sufficiently to avoid spoilage and protein loss from exposure to rain can be all too brief. Moving hay bales into the barn with dispatch required more labor than the family could muster, Alger recalled. "I had a boy, Bill, help us." (Bill would later live with the family as a surrogate son.) "Allan and Tim would be in the mow to help unload wagons," Alger continued. "We were able to put in about eleven hundred bales a day for a couple of days. Eleven hundred bales is a lot of bales to handle." Boys with arms scratched from projecting hay stems, while piling bales under a sun-baked roof, undoubtedly agreed.

"I do most of the baling," Janet reported. "I spend most of my summer outdoors." Alger's recent birthday came to mind. "He came down about 2:00 p.m. and said the hay was ready to be baled. I don't pay any attention to the hay. He comes in and says it's ready, he says which field I'm to go to, and I go. He tells me how it's been raked, so I know how to bale it. And it was exactly 9:00 when I set foot in the house again. I usually don't bale beyond 7:00, but that was the last of the hay and it looked like rain, so I just stuck right with it." As a birthday present, Alger listened to rain beat on the barn roof above hay, its protein content intact.

"The calves are my responsibility from the day they are born until they get in the milking string," Janet stated, thereby distinguishing productive activity she controlled from that which Alger controlled, like baling hay. "I'm responsible for naming them, and seeing that they are registered; and I'm also responsible for keeping their pens clean." Registering purebred calves with the Holstein-Frisian Association may increase their value as herd replacements, but the Roberts family was not serving this market; Janet was raising the status of her calves.

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Executing her responsibilities might disrupt what Alger was doing, the case when manure from her calf pens overloaded the manure spreader upon joining his gutter cleaner's output. Janet recalled telling Alger, "We need a new one, anyway," fully aware when quoting his reply—"Well, I don't know . . ."—that balking served to demonstrate who was in charge. Turning to that discussion's outcome, however, she said, "We got a new spreader."

While identifying the boundary between gender-based arenas, Janet said, "In the milk house I wash the milkers. He always kiddingly says he has a right-of-way through to put his milk in the cooler." Empowered by responsibility, Janet found that joking facilitated negotiating with the person she considered the hill farm's ultimate decision-maker. "He did nothing in the milk house but what I suggested doing—where to hang everything, and all that—because I'm the one who works in it. The calf pens are arranged pretty much as I thought they should be." Since she was raising the calves, when the time came for selecting calves for retention in the herd, "he will leave the decision up to me."

But Alger's knowledge of available artificial insemination sires compromised Janet's authority. "If I have raised a calf, and by the time it is several months old I just don't think it's reached its potential, I say 'let's not use that bull again,' and he will agree. He knows the bulls as well as I do, and in fact he knows the cows much better. Often he'll say, 'Well, why not use this bull?' and I'll say, 'there was a calf I didn't like'; but he calls the inseminator, and the final decision is his." Yet Janet supported an overriding principle: superior knowledge concerning a matter at issue should transcend arena boundaries. "For anything that he knows more about, I wouldn't dream of interfering in any way."

“Alger shows me in the literature, [and] what he thinks he wants.” Janet referred to purchasing a tractor. “I really don’t care what kind he buys. He won’t buy a tractor until I’ve driven it quite a bit. He wants to make sure it’s something I can handle.” Proceeding to the underlying principle, Janet observed, “I feel we would be very, very foolish not to ask the other’s opinion on anything—when it comes to buying a rug or buying a cow.” While granting the farm’s leader the final word, even for household purchases, Janet said they concurred on “almost everything. On rare occasions when I don’t agree, he will quite often give in and let me have my way.”

Janet set up the farm accounts. “I took accounting, although I never cared for it. Our taxes are extremely complicated. It takes me a good two weeks, working every moment I can spare, to get them done. My father was disappointed that I didn’t work longer. ‘All your training will be wasted,’ he said. It’s not wasted in the least. I could use a lot more.” Janet also prepared income tax returns for other people, which provided money for things she might want that the farm did not need. Janet was sure she knew more about maintaining business records than her husband did.

Business decision-making was described in farm management textbooks as a purely rational process that begins with identifying a problem, proceeds to developing one or more solutions, then selecting one and implementing the choice. But Alger and Janet Roberts might refine the initial problem, introduce more solutions, reassess family and business priorities, or abort that discussion, while deliberating a year or more about purchasing a car or large farm implement. The children could quickly tell when some element had been added or eliminated, according to Janet. “It’s a family farm from the word ‘go,’ very definitely, including the children. Supper time, that’s our discussion time. Everything under the sun gets discussed.”

“We never have any problem that way.” Janet referred to a magazine article concerning domestic disagreement about household expenses. “I know the actual figures. It would never enter my head to spend money—or him either—until we’ve agreed on it. There’s so little of it, it has to go where everybody agrees on.” No household budget existed. “You can’t, because our monthly milk check will fluctuate down to less than half in the summer of what it is in the winter. You have no way of knowing until it comes. You can only guess, and then you are probably two or three hundred off. So you pay the things that have to be paid, and if there’s some left over, then it’s the rug or living room set.”

Time being spent with equal care at the hill farm, scheduling grocery shopping became iffy as spring’s tasks absorbed winter’s relaxation. “I just have to pick the day when there seems to be the least to do,” Janet observed. “If there’s hay to bale, why it’s put off for another day. I do make it a point to go either Thursday, Friday, or Saturday, ‘cause that’s when the specials are.” Janet remembered having a garden: “We quit it. Alger decided he needed me worse to do something else. I recall very, very well one day in particular; I had just nicely got a canner full of tomatoes going and he came in. Some heifers had gotten out. And he says, ‘Come on, you are going to help me. They are headed for the corn.’ Well, to make a long story short, they didn’t get in the corn, but the tomatoes were ruined. It just didn’t pay.”

Evidently unaware of her vulnerability, if Alger should equate personal interests with farm needs, Janet asked rhetorically, “What would anybody do without a creative husband? Of course he expects help with all these things; I’m just not as keen on it as he is. I’m the same way, perhaps, but mine leans towards women’s things.” Actually, no parallel existed; Alger would not clean the house or wash dishes. “His are such big projects,” Janet observed, “they have to have help. I’m the only person around to help. I even have my own regular hammer with a rubber handle, just like his only women’s size. I got that when we put the roof on the garage.”

“He likes to do so many things besides milk cows,” Janet continued. “I am surprised he is still milking cows. And he’s good at them all. When we came here, it was just solid hedge rows, twenty- and thirty-feet wide. No open fields. We got one crop of hay off the first year, it was so poor. Alger has built all this up himself.” Seeing her visitor’s skeptical expression, Janet added, “I’ve gone along and held up the light.”

“My husband got this new road through.” Janet was pointing to pavement that fronted the house. When asked whether she also wanted the road paved, she said, “Oh definitely, definitely. I helped with that. We had a petition that we circulated, and we wrote letters, and of course I typed all of those. We worked together as a team. Once Alger thinks it up, he does not turn the right phrase sometimes. I have been in the business world enough to know some of the malarkey they use. The idea is never mine, but I feel that I can get it in a better phrasing.” Searching to explain leading her husband while appearing to follow, Janet brightened; “I’ve had the training, he didn’t.”

In the future, Janet would find Alger’s behavior less praiseworthy, but in 1968 any existing doubt was well concealed. “If he makes up his mind to do something, he usually does it.” The weather had just “played hob with his plans,” she allowed, while expecting Alger to shape her future in other respects. “If there is anything we are going to do and didn’t do, it must be because he thought up something better to do. He’s got a lot of things tucked in the corner of his mind, I guess, and whatever he wants to do will be fine with me.” Realizing that other family activity had helped make the marginal farm a paying proposition, she added, “I was going to say we’ve had nothing given to us, but they were just the things that can make or break you, I suppose, in the long run. Having all the little things given to us, we were able to put everything into the farm.” Birthday gifts of clothing from her parents and Alger’s parents came to mind. “That made a difference, there’s no getting around it. We could buy an extra ton of lime, maybe, where we couldn’t have otherwise. It helped.”

Alger enhanced those glowing credentials with his behavior among the cows. “Alger will holler at me or I at him, ‘just look at so and so,’ ” Janet recalled. “We see them dozens of times, yet we still have to stop and look at them, mouth open and their head tilted back, chewing away. Happy! And maybe the milker will be on them at the same time and they’re just filling that milker full.” A cow named Julie came to mind. “We didn’t raise her, but she was raised just like we would raise her.” Alger had been looking for herd replacements at another farm, Janet recalled, when “this heifer walked right up to him and started nuzzling him, and that’s what we liked.”

Nevertheless, Janet realized that most farmers would not have Julie in their herd. “She wasn’t built as the average dairyman would want her. She’s short and stocky and all black. She’s been the most terrific cow. This winter, three mornings in a row Alger petted her under the chin and told her what a nice cow she was. Three mornings in a row she ran the fifty-pound milk pail over. We don’t know of another dairyman who uses fifty-pound pails. They all use forty.” In the interest of accuracy, Janet should have added, “among dairymen using pail-type milkers.” During the 1960s, many dairy farmers were replacing the hill farm’s relatively labor-intensive milking technology with a separate milking facility equipped with labor-saving technology.

Developing Julie’s potential with pats and complements was probably good business, given an operating scale that allowed each animal to be treated individually. “It takes a certain kind of cow to respond to that kind of thing,” Janet stated. “If a cow doesn’t respond, there is no point in keeping her. There are barns for that kind of cow, where the guy doesn’t care what the cow is; he just runs them through a milking parlor and all he sees is their udders. We don’t want that kind. He’s got a heifer out there now, she kicks the milker off and does all kinds of things. But loving, she’ll love you half to death, if you will stop and talk to her. He thinks the world of her; he won’t scold her. There are a lot of dairymen that do not have the temperament to work with a cow that close. Their only choice is to have a lot of cows.” When diagnosing listlessness or other evidence of malaise, rather than refer to Holstein norms, Alger Roberts referred to that cow’s normal behavior. Without dismissing talk to animals as totally wasted time, most dairymen increase their income when dividing their attention among more cows.

Rejoicing in the small herd’s response to skillful hands and outmoded technology, Janet cited the hill farm’s 15,000-pound herd average, far above the 10,150-pound average for New York State herds at the time. And there was more good news: “I must put this down on your tape. We found out something the other day that really warmed our hearts.” She referred to a farm having a herd twice as large as the hill farm’s, and equipped

according to agricultural college recommendations. “He has a brand new free-stall barn, a brand new milking parlor, and sixty-five head of cows. We never had over thirty-five and right now we only have twenty-eight. We don’t think of ourselves as being very big, because most people judge you by cow numbers, not the amount of milk you produce. Anyway, this fellow was here and said, ‘I just came from this farm. All they were putting out was 2,500 pounds of milk every day.’ Out of this nice expensive beautiful bulk tank, out of sixty-five head! Every day we ship 1,700, and this is low for us. So I guess we are not as small as we think we are.”

Her husband’s pleasing public image augmented his five-and-a-half-foot stature in Janet’s eyes. After a friend told her that neither she nor Alger looked like farm people, Janet said, “We’ve analyzed it and talked about it and it is true; we are not. Just for instance, how different we are: neither one of us would dream of leaving home in barn clothes, ever, anywhere. If Alger goes to an auction, he comes in and puts on clean clothes, whereas I have seen farmers up to school affairs in their farm clothes, and that just smacks of farms through and through, and we don’t think it’s necessary. It’s the very thing that has given farmers a bad name. It makes other people look down on them.”

Being committed to an occupation that sows seeds and later harvests crops, where calves become heifers and later cows, and family members manage and labor until another generation takes up their tasks and responsibilities made Janet testy about people under less pressure to do what needs to be done. “You really see how slow they go, and you don’t wonder why they are in some of the messes they’re in.” Lawyers settling the estate of Alger’s father, who died a year earlier, came to mind. “Lawyers take forever. They are in no hurry. They are all geared alike.”

Janet did not expect full commitment to doing what needs to be done from workers lacking business ownership. “Hired help does not care like the family does; no matter how good they are, they can’t. It isn’t theirs; it’s human nature not to care as much if it isn’t yours.” If she took a job elsewhere and a hireling assumed her tasks and responsibilities, Janet expected the farm to suffer. “It can’t be done on a successful family farm. You have to work together. We run this farm as a family unit.”

When describing the farm’s division of tasks and responsibilities in 1968, Janet stated, “I’ve gotten so this winter I don’t always go out to the barn when the men do. The oldest boy can feed silage now. I only go out right away about two nights a week now. Maybe Alger will be milking by the time I get out there. Now at first Alger and I did everything. He’d do the heaviest part and I’d do whatever I could to help. I put the milkers together, put them on the first few cows. Now the youngest boy can do that, and we think he should. It’s not hard work. In fact there’s almost no hard work left on this farm. Alger has made everything as easy as possible for all of us.”

Allan strongly disagreed. If that was true, he said, his father would have repaired the mechanical silo unloader instead of putting a fork in Allan’s hand. From his father’s perspective, to step backward along technology’s evolutionary path had been good business. Money for repairing the mechanical unloader would also purchase seed and fertilizer, while he considered Allan’s muscle available and underutilized.

“I guess I was about nine when they started making me come out to the barn,” Allan recalled. “Then after a while I came out of my own accord, and I’d help them pick up pails and dump milk and everything—little jobs. And then sometimes they’d go away and I’d start chores, and so, after a while, I’d start doing the things that I started when they left. And I’d build up from there. Like, I’d start throwing down silage, and then when my mother wasn’t there I’d have to feed it, and now I feed it all the time. They expect me to do things when they aren’t here, and so I do them; and then when they are here, they kind of ask me and hint at it, and so I do it.”

“I have to throw down the silage twice a day,” Allan continued. “When I get home, I really have to hurry to do that, because I get home at four and then we feed at about a quarter to five. In the winter the silage freezes on the inner edge of the silo, and we have this thing, a “pick adz”—it’s sort of like a pick and an ax that I use to chop the silage. I must be pretty strong using that thing, because I broke two handles on it already. It takes a

pretty long time to chop all that up and throw it down the chute. And then I have to feed it. When I get done I start milking, put the milkers on a couple of cows.” The milking machines were already assembled, that having become Tim’s responsibility.

Janet wanted her children to participate in school and church activities, having had her own social activities limited to the family as a child. “If it wasn’t for the cooperation of all the other parents, they couldn’t do what they do,” she observed. “Everything that goes on is right in the middle of chores. What often happens, a parent will take them and when they come home late I will go get them.”

“How I can have less time in the house instead of more?” Fully aware of having wedged transporting children between calf care, bookkeeping, and housekeeping, Janet’s question was rhetorical. “Now when you were here last week, I had to run out and get the youngest boy; he’s in a special chorus, and they have been rehearsing every Monday afternoon for a spring concert. And the oldest boy now is in 4-H, and the youngest one is in Scouts—besides all their school activities. I find myself on the road a great deal. That was something I never used to do. We put less than 2,000 miles a year on the car; used to go to town once a week for groceries and take the kids to Sunday school and back. We put 14,000 miles on this car in the two years we’ve had it.”

“Allan is very antisocial,” Janet continued, “and I can see myself in him, through and through. I’ve seen the day when I never could have talked like this, and it will be hard for him to talk. He much prefers to be outdoors by himself or with the horses or reading a good book. That’s why he has never cared in the least for being in anything at school. In fact, we have had to push him.” Actually Allan’s disinterest in after-school activities was feigned, and in time Janet would discover that her husband had encouraged him to drop school activities that interfered with his apprenticeship. She was right, though, about her son’s interest in horses.

Widget had been a gift from a hill farm neighbor. “I lived just a little way from them,” Allan explained, “and they could see how I was doing with her. She’s a two-year-old, and I’m training her to harness right now. I read just about every book I could get my hands on, and the neighbors told me quite a few things. And there’s 4-H lessons on horsemanship. I learned how to control the horse and everything. So I decided I was ready to train a horse. So I finally got Widget.” Then Allan mentioned a slot car race track: “You get the magnets on the cars switched around so one car runs the opposite way and they collide.” And he had been hunting small game with his father. “Actually, I haven’t got a rabbit yet; rabbits are too fast for me.”

“I started wrestling in school,” Allan said, when addressing his effort to reconcile two forms of education. “After all those workouts, I had to do my chores at home; I was pretty tired, so I gave it up.” High grades remained important though. “I get good marks because my conscience bothers me. I don’t like to leave a thing half done—so then I get a good mark on it. I’ve been on the high honor roll every time this year, and I hope I’ll make the high honor roll this time.” That motivation was actually intergenerational, Janet noted. “Perhaps we push them too hard sometimes, but I don’t think so. They know we expect them to do the best they can, and it’s never entered their head, I don’t think, to do otherwise.”

When hay is being raked while preparing the crop for baling, the tractor driver can fantasize, as Allan observed. “It takes quite a few hours just sitting there, going around in circles, and the circles get smaller and smaller, and it’s kind of boring. I don’t mind, though, because there’s a lot of pheasants and rabbits and things you flush out and they scare you. And sometimes these whirlwinds come along, and they’re kind of fun to watch, and they take the hay way up in the air. Plus I go kind of fast—which I’m not supposed to do—and that’s kind of fun, too. I think I keep a safe speed, though.” At such times Allan sometimes visualized being in charge of the farm. “I don’t think I’d make too many changes.” But one change he would make and readily: field and barn space occupied by cows would become horse territory. “Even though I don’t milk them, I don’t like them.”

Asked about access to money, Allan replied, “I don’t get any allowance or anything.” But he had earned twelve cents a bushel while picking up potatoes that were dug mechanically at another farm, and he had sold Christ-

mas trees, which he cut on the hill. Birthday and Christmas gifts from grandparents supplemented that income. "I ask my parents, and then they tell my grandparents, and then it's their idea to give it to me." As to saving and spending, he said, "I'd rather not use the money in the bank." Allan had about sixty dollars in an account that his parents set up. "It's already there, and I like to feel that I have some money in the bank in case something comes up that I'd really like to have."

Allan had received an allowance, but one payable in time, during the interval between haying and the second hay crop six weeks later. He had used it to visit friends who had moved to New York City. "My parents didn't need me, so they let me go down there. The Harts came up to visit, and they took me back down in the car."

Hill farm apprenticeships included learning to preserve what money had accomplished. "If I do anything like break a Thermos bottle, I have to pay for it," Laurie explained. "I give my money to my mother, and she goes and gets it." After Allan absorbed the preservation lesson, when his mother wanted to replace the family car after it broke down with her at the wheel, he said, "I think it's still a pretty good car."

After Allan and Tim received hay field promotions in 1968, Janet stated, "The older boy was doing the raking, but now the younger one has gotten old enough to do it, and the older boy graduated to mowing. We used two mowers. Their dad would work on one field, and he would work on another." While Tim's field and barn skills impressed his mother, she questioned his commitment to the family occupation. "He likes the country, but whether he will have anything to do with the farm or not, I rather question. He's very sports-minded, too much so."

"Too much so" was Janet's assessment of Tim's regard for farm needs. "Tim has a basketball and hoop out in the haymow, and when he's supposed to be getting hay, he's practicing throwing baskets. He's on a team at school, and he's wrestling now. The older one wrestles, but he realized that certain things have to come before others, and he's willing to put them in the proper order. The younger one isn't quite inclined that way." At thirteen, Tim was negotiating his apprenticeship's requirements. "I couldn't decide what job I wanted," revealed his hand in determining what Allan and Laurie would do.

"I have to go out to the barn and help clean gutters and shake up straw, do one side of the barn, and help Allan," Tim said, reporting his apprenticeship weekend requirements. And then I feed hay, and then we put the cows in, and I usually sweep up the barn. In the afternoon, we have something like recess. On weekdays, after we come home from school, I have to put the milkers together, and then I have to hurry up and bring in milk cans and bring in rinse water to rinse the milkers. Then I feed cows hay, and that takes me about three hours. I'm a slow operator." Realizing that shooting hoops delayed doing the next task, Tim added, "It just seems like three hours. I like basketball. I did real good, but I couldn't do it because I couldn't get there on weekends and stay after school on Tuesday nights." Tim claimed to envy Laurie. "Laurie never does chores. She always stays in the house. That's sisters for you."

"A horrible job," Tim declared, referring to stacking bales in a wagon being pulled behind a baler across contour strips and ditches. "A little peppy one will come up and hit you in the back, and then you go falling over, and then others come scooting up, and then you get all covered up. Once I got buried." Allan intervened. "I don't think you made that part about the bale thrower very clear. It's the thing on the back of the baler that throws the bales into the wagon. Sometimes it makes small bales and sometimes it makes large bales." "Oh no, no," Tim replied; "you got it the other way around. The bale thrower doesn't do that. The baler does it, and sometimes it doesn't work. The baler goes zoom and zam, with the bales popping out like a box of cereal."

Janet had the future of the family business in mind, when declaring Tim's interest in sports "too much so." If the farm's resources would carry only one apprentice to management and ownership, she gave Allan's willingness to do what needed to be done priority. When asked what changes he would make in the farm if in charge, Tim agreed that Allan was first in line. "I wouldn't be here. I don't know where I'd be living, but I'd be married

and I'd be a veterinarian." Mentioning the animal-related occupation brought Ontario, a pet guinea pig, to mind. "In fourth grade I used to go outdoors in the summer and start practicing my flute while he was sitting there, watching me, making funny faces at me. He was almost like a human being." When the conversation turned to Motorboat, an oversize cat, Tim said, "Boy, he looks like a raccoon. He's almost like a human being. If you say, 'what do you say, Motorboat?' he says, 'Yow,' and then you say, 'how much do you want?' He goes, 'Yow, yow' and eats two spoonfuls."

In Scouting, Tim had been moving through its ranks, merit badge after merit badge. "I studied as hard as I could," he said, referring to scouting manuals he read while too young to be enrolled. "I learned everything." Suspecting that he could use his pleasure in observing quail to advance in rank, Tim said, "Maybe I could get a couple of merit badges with them, like pets or wildlife management."

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When calling Laurie's apprenticeship "catch as catch can," Janet presumed that "being the younger, and being a girl, and having a hearing problem" explained lesser expectations for her daughter than for her sons; although Laurie's resistance to maternal guidance may also have been relevant. She had enjoyed washing dishes as a child herself, Janet said. "The feel of warm water on my hands was kind of relaxing, and I'd look out of the window and run things through my mind, and maybe bake at the same time. And I didn't mind it at all; my mother never did either. I tried to pass that on down to Laurie, and somewhere I utterly failed. I suspect part of the reason was we were all out in the barn but her. She wanted to be where the action was."

She did wash dishes, Laurie stated, "when my mother tells me to." With a sense of her worth apparently undiminished, the ten-year-old directed the conversation to a more important matter. "I have to do work in the barn. I used to hate the barn at first, and now I go out to the barn all the time 'cause I help feed cows hay, load up the hay cart, and if I have nothing to do, we play basketball in the barn."

"Sometimes I like to paint," Laurie continued. "Last week I painted the picture of Jesus which was in the window. And last Saturday I started painting a picture of a bowl with all these different kinds of plants in it. I haven't got it finished yet. And I started making a picture of sea shells, sea horses, and things." Asked where those ideas came from, Laurie pointed to a book-filled shelf above her bed; and when her visitor suggested, "Your mother doesn't say, 'Laurie, why don't you paint a picture for me?'" Laurie laughed. "No, she doesn't." Clearly, Laurie's interest in the local Methodist church did not match her mother's. "We always have a fuss about going to church."

But other motherly initiatives were welcomed. "My mother said she was playing the piano at nine. She said she liked it so well, she thought I would like to play, too; so she brought the piano from my grandmother's house and I started playing on it, and then I started learning notes, so she got me a book." Sometimes Laurie's initiative filled mother-daughter niches that Janet wedged between meeting farm needs. When wearing similar outfits to church for instance, "I put the dress on, then she put it on." Laurie had discovered a better way to clean her room. "When she tells me to clean it, I just put that over there and that over there; then she doesn't see where I go. But when I come home from someplace, like going over to my friend's house, I see her cleaning my bedroom." During mealtime Laurie might reciprocate. "I fix it myself, if she has to go someplace, or she's up in the barn and my father keeps yelling he wants some dinner and makes a lot of noise."

Asked about recreation, Laurie immediately mentioned Tim. "My brother just keeps saying I can't swim, and so when I swim out to the middle of the pond, and I'm about to drown, I keep yelling 'Help!' and Tim comes to save me." As to television, her family was watching more than her mother would admit to doing, Laurie stated, while noting her own absence from the group. "My father puts it on the channel he wants to."

Like her brothers, Laurie received no allowance. “My mother said I would spend money. For my birthday I got \$18, and right now I’ve only got \$1.” Laurie intended to increase that number by making pot holders, which she would sell door-to-door.

Looking ahead to life after high school, Laurie envisioned a farm, “but not a real big one like this, because sometimes people like to work.” Like her mother, Laurie associated work with a repetitious job done away from home. “My boyfriend, he likes to work.” “Would you like to be a secretary?” her visitor asked. “Yeah, I’d like to be a secretary, because most of them have to type. I type once in a while when my mother lets me.” “How about drawing or designing clothes?” “Well, some people want me to be an artist, but I’m not sure I’d like that. My father wants me to be a farmer’s wife, but I’m not sure about that.”

But to live in a house surrounded by woods and with several cats appealed to Laurie, and she had already practiced building it with a friend’s help, using old boards. “It wasn’t very big, because we just built it ourselves.” It didn’t get bigger, because Tim wanted the boards and knocked it down. Then Laurie had eyed a shed that her father didn’t use, but a friend of Tim’s got it. “It had an old stove in it, and I really liked it, but Joe took it up into the woods.” Reminded of her own childhood by her daughter’s interests, Janet said, “Even when I was little, I said when I grew up I was going to marry someone who has a farm. It’s not so much a farm as such; it’s that I want to be in the country.”

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The family washer had been leaking for a year, Alger observed. “You make do about so long. If you are in a bind about what you spend, you fix up. And then when you see your way clear, you buy when opportunity comes along. This washer, it really went this time. We knew we were going to buy a washer. Well, finally we had the money. We sort of decide ahead of time what we would like to have. Then if I’m out on business someplace, I’ll stop and look it over, and I’ll tell my wife about it. If my wife sees something, she will look it over and we will get together on this. I like to watch the ads so you don’t have to buy on impulse. I sort of use cash and volume of business to get a favorable price.” When buying the clothes washer and a dish washer at the store where he purchased building materials, Alger got the deal he wanted.

Vacillating between pleasure from washing dishes by hand and having more time for meeting farm needs had ended. “That dishwasher I knew I wanted,” Janet recalled. “I came back home and told Alger, and he says, ‘Well, as soon as we get a chance we will run up.’” Having inserted “I think his part is to make the deal” parenthetically, she continued: “We took our own truck and we got the delivery off, and buying the two at once, it was quite a bit more off.” How soon did she go back? her visitor asked. “It was probably four or five days, because it was in the summer, and it had to be a rainy day. It was probably the first rainy day after I found them. I know I went on a Thursday, and it was probably the next Tuesday before we got back.” “How did your husband feel about them?” “Oh, he wanted them. He looked them over structurally, how they’re made, ‘cause there’s almost nothing he can’t do in the repair line. It looked like something he could handle.”

“She says I lead her,” Alger laughed. “I guess I do, but somebody has to make decisions, and she couldn’t make up her mind about the dishwasher. I said, ‘If we are going to buy it, we buy it now. We’ve got to make up our mind and move on.’ And so we bought it, loaded it in the truck, and brought it home. The only thing I was concerned about, was it the kind and model she wanted. I figure it’s her research to figure out what she wanted.” Buying a dishwasher was not like buying a tractor; Alger would not use it.

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“One problem with this operation is confinement,” Alger stated, while reviewing the state of the family business in 1968. “Those cows are there every night and morning.” Nevertheless, he added, “We will stay with it as a good source of steady income until we get the children educated or are sufficiently sure we have the funds to educate them.” Relating a herd reduction scenario he would later repudiate, Alger continued, “Then we will go

into something else, because I can make an income off the farm in other ways, even if I have to take a decrease. I'm not desperate on making a lot of money. I've watched money be a primary purpose in my father's business. No thanks. Money is secondary. I'm going to try and see if there is some other source of income we can achieve and get away from the confinement of dairy. I would be the same as retired. I'll be out of the dairy business by the time I'm fifty. This is my target date." Roberts was forty-two at the time. "Usually, if I set a goal, I will meet it."

However, the hill farm faced more limitations. "We aren't able to acquire more land, and milk hauling is going to become a problem for us," Alger noted. While installing a bulk milk tank would relieve the milk hauler from climbing the steep hill during winter storms, Alger thought he might lose interest in the small herd anyhow. "As far as the bulk milk tank goes, we don't know. We are just watching and waiting to see what happens. This, of course, would be a major expense of four thousand dollars."

In a nation not economically depressed, dairy farmers were facing operator confinement, long hours in field and barn, increasing production costs, and illness among cows and their keepers at a time off-farm jobs were readily available. With cow numbers dropping 21 percent across New York State between 1964 and 1969, and 17 percent of 318 Jasper County dairy farmers selling their herds, Alger Roberts intended to avoid this defeat. Pointing to a desk in a living room alcove, he said, "I have a file of things I'm interested in from various universities. As I visit people, I pick up information and keep it on file. I get many points of view. I talk with a banker, I talk with other farmers, I talk with Cornell professors. You've got to figure what it costs to grow grain, plus the labor involved plus the distraction—I mean being late in harvesting or planting or something like this."

"I've tried a variety of things," Alger continued, "not on a terrifically large scale—maybe four acres or maybe ten—to evaluate them, see how they worked." To investigate blueberry production in New Jersey, he had chartered a small plane with another farmer, then discovered that blueberry customers there were harvesting the crop themselves and treating the labor as recreation. "I decided to give it a try. With suburbia coming out this way and people interested in getting out, we thought it might be an alternative for us. I have 1,200 plants. I feel quite safe. We've learned a lot about irrigation and how to handle these plants." Alger also planted a few raspberries and blackberries "to see if this could be an alternative."

Asked how she felt about that blueberry project, Janet replied, "He doesn't make a move but what he talks it out very, very thoroughly." While explaining blueberry production and marketing procedures to her, Alger had referred to cutting cow numbers to release necessary labor. "If my wife isn't interested in this type of thing," he said, "if she can't understand what it's all about, well, problems can compound." It seems that Alger had the farm's labor supply in mind, knowing that the children's response to the new crop would depend on Janet's support for the venture.

Blueberries needed more water than the hill farm's existing crops, so the farm needed an irrigation pump and the pump, in turn, adequate power. "I would like to have a newer tractor to run the irrigation pump," Alger stated. "It's a matter of justifying it, because it's a \$6,000 investment or better." Since this investment would require a loan and related interest payments, contemplating the expense made the hill farm's existing tractors seem attractive. "I have an investment of roughly \$3,000 in three tractors." Those were 1940s-vintage International Farmalls. "We overhaul these ourselves. It's a lot of fun to tear them down."

He had contemplated purchasing the irrigation equipment for almost a year when Alger declared, "I've made up my mind this is a good investment." Like the vast majority of 12,000 respondents in a 1974 *Successful Farming* poll, Alger and Janet Roberts wanted farm and family to stay together. For the crop requiring three years to get established, to carry the next generation from apprentice to farmer, Alger could not postpone acquiring tractor and pump. "Of course, my dad wasn't ever in debt," he observed. "He is a degree of uncertainty for me. He said I wouldn't make an exceptional farmer." Tim was the first Roberts family member to report all was not

well among the blueberry bushes. “So far we haven’t had very many. Something has been eating them. There are a lot of deer around here. Wow, one night I saw a whole mess of deer in the field!”

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Reflecting upon where the farm’s leader was taking her, Janet said, “You’d think we would be feeling practically on top now, no debts, everything looks to be clear sailing. We should feel we are all set.” Actually, she continued, “we are not at all. We have lost interest. I suspect we did too much and worked too hard and we are just tired out. That’s why we would like to get even higher production and fewer cows. Cut down to twenty. If these berries start paying off like they should, every year more cows will go. You can’t do justice to both, anyway. Then we could get away at night and get involved in a few things.” Clearly, meeting farm needs no longer came first. “I just want more time right here in the house. Just for instance, I have a trivet downstairs to put together with tile and all. It’s still in its box. I just haven’t had a minute to sit down and do that. That’s all I want my time for, things that I want to do.”

“It’s the animal thing, you see,” Janet said, building a case for eliminating the dairy herd. “We don’t want to be tied down to animals. We want to get out of them. I have said it to Alger many times: if I had known what a dairy farm like this was like and known how deeply involved you get with the animals, I never would have gone into it. It’s just too heartbreaking when you have to sell cows. I used to take all the calves up to the auction. They are adorable when they are only a few days old. It’s a hard thing to do. You have to be practical; your common sense tells you your bull calf is going to grow up to be a very mean, murderous bull. And every time I’d take one, I’d keep saying that to myself.”

“There will be no milk trucks coming this way,” Janet continued. “The plants are all changing to handling bulk milk; they won’t be equipped to handle cans much longer. So we know we are going to have to go, but fortunately we want to. We just hope it won’t be before we are ready.” Even if they should escape this technological crunch, Janet expected cows and apprentices to leave the hill together. “Allan has only three more years in high school, and we will no sooner get him up where he can do a lot than he will be gone.”

But after enlisting Janet’s support for the blueberry enterprise, Alger changed direction. “You can’t trim fixed costs.” Property taxes would not follow cow numbers downward. “We’ve got to watch our pennies if we are going to cut down this herd, ‘cause it cuts down on the efficiency. The big problem, of course, is income. I mean, gee, it’s a good income. In the last three years, the more I said I was going to get out, the bigger the milk checks got. It’s a good steady income. It’s good steady work.”

With the farm’s leader vacillating—maintaining herd size one day, cutting or expanding the herd the next—Janet was thinking independently about the farm’s future. “He talks of adding to the barn some, and yet I don’t think it’s what we want to do. We don’t want to get in deeper, at least I question getting in deeper.” With an alternative in mind that required no new equipment, she said, “There’s a big market for hay. We could seed down the whole farm and sell the hay. If we sold the cows, there would be a good chunk of money to invest, which would bring a return. Plus the berries. We have spent all our married life getting along with such a small amount of money, it won’t take much to keep us going, especially when the children are gone.” Allan liked the idea of making the entire farm a hay field. “We’ll raise Arabian horses.”

Looking back to this indecisive period after a decade had passed, Alger reflected, “I tell you, I was lost. That’s a weird feeling. I always set up a plan, something ahead. I’d done everything I had planned, and I was at a crossroads, and I started to flounder. What I wanted at that time was a choice of going on to a one-hundred-fifty-cow farm or staying where I was.”

Selling hay alone would not support the family, Janet soon realized. Without cows there would be no manure, and in New York State hay’s selling price did not encourage farmers to assist the crop with commercial fertilizer. With barn and field tasks largely relinquished to the next generation in 1968, Janet contemplated two un-

appealing ways to remain productive: collect money from blueberry customers or do what Laurie called “going to work.” “I don’t really want to. I’d like to spend a few years just loafing around the house.”

“It’s a premium corn,” Alger declared about his latest hill farm alternative—an acre of Butter and Sugar, a sweet corn with white and yellow kernels. “People love to come out and pick this stuff themselves. We are going to have more sweet corn next year. You have to supply the market you have and accept it. This is the biggest part of farming.” Several Jasper County farmers were growing pick-your-own strawberries, but when Allan wanted to explore that crop’s possibilities, Alger thought strawberries, blueberries, sweet corn, and cows would be more than the family could handle. He planted a small patch anyhow. “I hope they come out good this spring for him.”

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The family business was not losing Alger and Janet’s labor because of social activity. “If I go to a meeting, I leave supper,” Janet said, “and when Alger goes to a meeting we eat early, and if we both go there is a calamity. Actually, we just know that from the first of November to the first of May, or maybe the first of June, our social life consists of having people in.” An occasional evening away would be possible, Janet granted, while voicing a significant qualification: “The effort just doesn’t seem worth it. I suspect we don’t want to go bad enough.”

“Our idea of a good time,” Janet explained, “is either to go to somebody’s house or they come here. In the summer we do a little bit more. We go on picnics and drives; we will be gone the whole day long because the cows are out to pasture the first thing in the morning, and then they are not put in again until night.” Janet considered Saturday evening unsuitable for visitors. “We prefer to have company on Friday night, and since most people sleep late on Sunday, they prefer to come on Saturday. We get a conflict that way, so we usually let it go altogether.” The visitors were usually family members, and their visits were spotty, Janet observed, although her parents lived across the road from her brother’s farm only fifteen miles away, while Alger’s sister lived ten miles in the opposite direction. “I go for months and months,” Janet said, “without ever laying eyes on my parents. We used to not see his sister, but since his parents died she does come over quite often.”

“A thousand acres and self-propelled combines, and the whole bit with the trimmings,” Janet called her brother’s farm. “It has no relation to this one.” He had more free time than the hill farm allowed her to enjoy, Janet added. “Anywhere from two to four nights a week he will leave his daughter and the hired man to do the chores, and we can’t do that. I shouldn’t say can’t, ‘cause we could if we wanted to put ourselves in that situation, but he’s in danger of losing his hired man, and where he’s going to find another one I don’t know. We don’t want to get ourselves in a position where we depend on anyone but our own family.”

“I’m not on the church board anymore,” Janet stated, as if explaining the reliance on family labor. “Alger doesn’t want me to go to too many meetings. I really don’t care about it.” But like Allan upon dropping wrestling, she did care. “I play music, I played all summer long, in fact, until we got another organist at church. In the women’s section, there’s two meetings a month. And time on the telephone, especially when I was hunting up another organist. As soon as the cows started staying in all day long, I had to quit playing, because it takes so long to do chores. I just can’t get there in time.”

He had envisioned catering to suburbanite desire to look beyond the neighbor’s fence when buying the hill farm, Alger maintained in 1968. “We realized that this area was going to prosper, so we felt this farm would be a good investment. Someone was talking in terms of \$1,000 an acre for land I have at the top of the hill.” Janet did not question that singular possessive, “I have,” in 1968, nor had she done so in 1962 when her husband acquired additional land, not to farm but to resell as building lots. “I stopped down at the middle of the hill,” Alger recalled, “and talked to these older people about buying sixty-five acres or just part of it. Finally I stopped in one day—I think I was coming home on the baler—and visited with them. I said, ‘have you given it any thought. . . ?’” When the couple offered to sell the entire property, Alger remembered hurrying home to call his banker about arranging a mortgage. Unaware of her husband’s real estate coup, Janet reportedly asked,

“Who are you going to bedevil now?” “I said, ‘I just bought the Squire place.’ She said, ‘How are you going to pay for that?’ I said to the bank: ‘Can I put a note on my cows?’ ” The banker had agreed.

He had sold two building lots from that purchase within five years, Alger stated; “I knew the land would always be like a piece of insurance, but I never dreamed it was going to go so fast. It was nothing but a brush farm when I took it over. Ten bucks an acre. This is the thing of it. I’m going to net myself a good thousand dollars an acre with taxes out and everything. I haven’t sold any off from this farm.”

To Janet, her husband’s real estate activity was a hill farm extension. The brush farm’s former owners had been “besieged” by people wanting to buy it, she noted. “I didn’t know this for quite a while, but Alger finally told me they told him that even though they didn’t know us well, driving through here so often, they always saw us working together, the whole family, and they wanted us to have it. Good friends won’t help you out that much sometimes. I was just flabbergasted. And they let us have it so reasonable, terribly reasonable. They took the mortgage on it. And then we ended up selling the house and the pond and twenty acres for twice as much as we paid for it.”

Family labor augmented that initial value. “We redid the whole inside of that house,” Janet reported. “You should have been here that summer. Alger would leave as soon as he had breakfast and would go down and start working. The kids and I would do the after-breakfast chores, I’d pack a lunch for all of us, and we would all go down and spend the whole afternoon down there—painting and cleaning, remodeling, and you name it. And then we sold it. We spent the whole month of July and then parts of June and August—whenever we had a minute. And then, talk about pioneers; Alger and the boys, I don’t know how many days they spent down there clearing the land, because it had all grown up to brush. They pulled out trees with a tractor and cleared out the two back fields.”

Allan supplied details: “Sunday, starting in the morning, we’d go until it was dark with a tractor and a chain, a big logging chain. He’d drive around with the tractor and I’d keep asking if I could drive, and then finally I gave up asking about the middle of the day. There were these trees about ten or twelve-feet high; they were thorn apple,” Allan remembered. “I’d take the chain and hook it to the trees, and then he’d drive across the field to the hedge row, and then I’d unhook it again. That was the hardest part, because after he bumped the tree all over, the chain would really get tied up in a knot. I ruined a pair of gloves because of the thorns. I got pretty sore hands. And then I’d hop on the tractor and then we’d go to another tree.”

“How did the day begin?” Allan’s visitor wondered. “Well, he just said that we were going to take a little ride on the tractor, and then we got down there, and I sort of guessed when we went off in that direction what we were going to do. I was kind of looking forward to it, not because I was going to drive the tractor, but because I was hoping we’d find things—like wildlife or arrowheads or something.” In later years, Allan would say that his labor had been coerced, yet his account of Sunday at the brush farm ended on a high note. “I found a couple of those,” he said, pointing to his father’s collection of Indian arrowheads.

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Counting the surrogate son, the Roberts family had six members. “Our other son,” Janet said, “the boy we’ve had so many years, Our Bill. Our daughter started calling him that when she was just a tiny baby. She always said ‘Our Bill.’ He started out a neighbor, but his folks have since moved. He practically lived here, even after they moved.” But like his mother, Allan considered waged labor inferior to family labor, and when his father paid Bill a summer wage to build a fund for college, Allan reduced him from brother to employee. Although four years younger than Bill, Allan maintained that he would “do more than the hired hand.”

Alger had not missed a milking in fourteen years when Janet and Bill arranged a family vacation. “I had two short vacations in there,” Janet said, referring to her recuperation after Tim and Laurie were born. “Now this will be news to my husband,” Janet continued, but “I could see that Alger was just kind of climbing the walls.”

Having decided that the farm needed a family vacation, she had approached Bill about overseeing the cows. “Bill felt he could handle it, and he kind of started working on Alger and urged him to go.” Reflecting upon having made a management decision while concealing its source, Janet said, “Bill’s so good, and it was obvious he could handle whatever would happen. If a cow got sick, he would call the vets. We couldn’t do any differently. I couldn’t see why anything that would happen I would blame him for, because disasters can happen when you are here.” Knowing that Alger wanted to see the St. Lawrence Seaway’s lock system, Janet said, “I just started a little propaganda campaign. The more Alger thought about it, the more he liked the idea.”

According to Allan, Alger thought the family vacation had been his idea. “My father hadn’t missed any milking for quite a few years. He decided he’d take a vacation, and we all liked the idea. We chose a week that was convenient for everybody, when Bill could do the milking.” “We were interested in why St. Lawrence County is such a big producer of milk,” Alger explained, “so we went up there. And we’re still wondering a little bit, but they hold their costs down. And we saw the Seaway. It was quite an engineering feat. And the children really enjoyed it. We didn’t try to camp. We had a complete vacation. Not any work for your wife, you know.” Janet remembered calling home each night to check on the cows, and Laurie remembered the vacation’s end: “My father got sick of driving. He kept throwing up, so we had to come home.”

To reconcile public education with apprenticeship education, the boys were switching after-school activities with chores. “I’m the captain of a volleyball team,” Tim noted, “and on Friday I have water polo, and we just got done wrestling. One night he’d stay after, and then the other I’d stay after. And whoever stayed after, when he got back home, had to feed the cows hay or else throw down silage.” At sixteen, Allan’s apprenticeship involved milking. “With the horses it would be the same,” he stated; “the hay and working with the land and everything, except for milking them.” Tim’s merit badge pursuit was paying off; with ten in hand, he could soon become a Life Scout.

“I’m beginning to wonder a little bit about this,” the principal apprenticeship supervisor stated. “Frankly, with Boy Scouts and church and 4-H and all these school activities, they are not home too much to teach anything. One of them is gone or someone is here. We just lack the time to show them how to do certain things. I think this is a problem quite a few farmers are having with their sons. Society’s changed; we have to face it.” Yet Alger was not surrendering to these circumstances. “Face it” introduced his apprenticeship education survival strategy.

Using his favorite narrative device—recounting a demanding challenge, then a successful outcome—Alger stated, “Allan really took hold this summer. Of course, we didn’t have any help at all. He did the spraying on the weevil,” a tiny insect that destroys the alfalfa plant. “He said, ‘How do I know where to drive?’ I said, ‘That’s your problem.’ You can’t tell where to drive, actually. I just left him alone and he figured it out for himself. I find this is best. After they get involved, they’ll know the problem and they’ll come back and you can explain it to them easier. I was very pleased.”

“Somewhat in the world of fantasy, this horse business,” Alger declared, after helping his older son build horse stalls in the barn at the home place. “I’ve gone after the boy about it; do your homework, know what you’re talking about. These kids, you have to go with them today. You can’t move them too far. My wife says I am asking too much too soon, but I think this is something we have to do—get him conditioned to the business side of it.”

Thinking about business continuity, Janet referred to Allan’s apprenticeship. “He got to sixteen awfully quick. He’s very horse-minded, and we don’t expect him to leave. And it won’t be many years before he will be thinking of wanting a home of his own. My husband has said if he wants to go on with this farm in some way, then we will go build another house, and he can have this one. Alger has the house plans. He’s got it all figured out how he will alter the plans to fit the lot at the top of the hill.”

With Tim approaching Eagle rank in Scouting's promotion system, a proud mother related, "He won't even be thirteen until Valentine's Day. Tim will be one of the youngest Eagles that's ever been in the area. He has his own patrol now." Reflecting upon his mother's two-dollar-a-week merit badge incentive payment, Tim said, "It helps me, but I don't like to do it." With his satisfaction from farm activities receding, his herd down to one cow, and now unable to "swing" to his next task in the barn, Tim said, "My brother cut down the rope. He always has to wreck something."

"Everybody yelled at me to get out to the barn, especially Tim," Laurie reported. "He drags on, 'Get out to the barn.' He always keeps after me. 'You gonna come out to the barn now?'" Laurie assembled milking machines, Tim's former assignment. "It's a good job," she said. Laurie also hauled hay to cows, fourteen bales at a feeding, in fact.

Conscious of her progress as a reader "from when I was little," Laurie spoke about enjoying *American Girl*, and saving her earlier reading—*Humpty Dumpty* and *Jack and Jill*—"for some little kid who wants to read 'em." Friends had been praising her artistic efforts, but while appreciating that approval, Laurie questioned their actual merit. Asked about movies she had seen, Laurie replied, "Let's see now; we did [go] two years ago." She had enjoyed that film, Laurie declared.

"I don't get paid each weekend like other people do," Laurie continued. "When people come to buy firewood, I usually help and they give me a quarter." But the quarters and money earned through selling seed packets door-to-door being insufficient, Laurie said, "I just always wish I had money." Solving puzzles that appeared in the local paper secured no prize, leaving Laurie's mother to supplement pot holder and seed packet earnings, Laurie said, knowing that anything her mother considered frivolous was out. "Just say I want marshmallows. I don't get them." Looking ahead, Laurie saw only dependency. "It's up to my husband, whoever's going to marry me." "What kind of a man would that be?" the Cornell visitor asked the eleven-year-old. "A nice one that wouldn't yell at me. I would like that, but they're not all that way."

About to select a foreign language in school at that time, Laurie cited her academic models: "It's Allan's second year for taking French and Tim's first year. Allan's a pretty good artist, too." Laurie had also noticed her older brother's quest for personal independence. "Allan is going to live up in a real high tree. He says when Mom wants to visit him, he goes up the ladder, which falls off."

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Three decades after unsuccessfully seeking home farm ownership through a father-and-son partnership, Alger owned the farm—initially through inheritance, then by purchasing his sister's share. "I was concerned because I didn't have enough land. Now all of a sudden I have all this land, but it is expensive land." Jasper County tax assessors had noticed the conversion of nearby farm land into building lots, then raised the home farm's tax assessment to reflect its "potential" rather than its actual value. New York State farm people were resisting that widespread scenario by concentrating their political capital to create "agricultural districts" in which land would be taxed on the value that farm commodities were generating. However, when the state's legislature actually authorized these districts in 1971, local zoning regulations had already limited the opportunities to farm—notably in counties where dominant suburban interests had used zoning to limit permissible land use without having to assume ownership costs.

A blueberry crop responds well to acidic soil, but high soil alkalinity was frustrating Alger's plan for making the home farm pay. "I've had a problem getting the lime content back down," he stated. "I limed it real heavy, and I've used quite a lot of fertilizer—ammonia sulfate. I still haven't got it back down so I can plant berries without getting an iron deficiency." With suburbia edging toward the home farm, Roberts considered rental apartments a more promising possibility for that location. While lining up material and labor to build a four-

unit forty by one-hundred-foot structure, he was looking for nearby farm land, not to farm but to resell as building lots.

“I have to keep a book for the fruit and vegetables,” Janet reported in 1968, “and then I have been keeping a real estate book, too. Alger wants to know whether each one is making any money and how much it’s making.” The real estate book had another purpose: he wanted its keeper to realize that his real estate activity was supporting the family along with the farm.

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To acclimatize building lot purchasers to dairy farming’s sights and odors, Roberts included instructions for rural living in each sale agreement. While keeping the family’s income sources aligned, he said, “One of the reasons I’m selling the big lots, the people come up here and want to have privacy. The person will come out from the city, and they will buy a lot, and the next doggone thing, you’d think they had bought the whole farm. They’ll want to control you. I try to impress upon my buyers, you are buying a lot; you’re a neighbor; you are going to show a tolerance and consideration for the agricultural use of the adjoining lands. This is put right in the deed.”

When proposing the brush farm’s conversion to a minor subdivision containing multiple building lots, Alger alerted the township’s newly formed Planning Board to his interest in rationalizing the accommodation of contending cultures. “Mine was the first minor subdivision.” At the time, this branch of local government was delineating areas where this use of land would be permitted, and having approved Alger’s proposal, its members asked him to represent the township’s agricultural interests on the board.

After receiving that appointment, Roberts withdrew from the advisory committee for the local Agway store. “There was no need for me on that committee,” he declared. “I mean, you can’t advise them.” Against his advice, the store had dropped its farm supply inventory to better serve a suburban yard and garden clientele; meanwhile, the store’s large agricultural-cooperative parent organization was channeling its supplies and services toward the Northeast’s largest farms. “I’m interested in trying something different. I’m trying to envision what the future is going to be, and be there.” Clearly, Agway, as the region’s largest farm supply and service provider, intended to be there as well.

The local artificial-breeding cooperative was serving the smaller farms Alger favored, yet he also resigned as its secretary-treasurer. “I did all the work,” Janet said. “He’d come home and tell me everything that was said, every word practically. And so somebody would call, and of course they’d want Alger right away, and he was almost never around the phone. I’d always insist on their telling me what they wanted, because chances are I knew. When somebody calls, I can handle it right away, so it isn’t delayed.” Alger had been reporting Planning Board deliberations in similar detail, Janet observed. “I’m not going to say I don’t care, because I do care, but I don’t care about taking an interest in it. I prefer to worry about the home.”

It included *Newsweek*, two women’s magazines, two newspapers, and what Janet termed “the good farm magazines.” *Successful Farming* was not there, its publisher having become unduly pessimistic about the future of smaller-scale farming, according to Janet, before it added the final straw: “They dropped the women’s department of it completely.” The *Kiplinger Letter* was also absent—not worth its price for prestige alone, Janet declared, once reliable economic information had become available elsewhere. Much of Alger’s reading material had been digested, Janet observed. “He would just as soon I read to him; he knows I will cut out all the non-information.”

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The Roberts family was gathered around the kitchen table on a wintry day in 1969, and while the north wind howled outside, their Cornell visitor suggested, “Just suppose you had to get out of farming.” “Well, I know one thing,” Alger declared; but before he could finish saying “I’d be interested in doing full-time real estate,” Janet

intervened. “It’s inconceivable to me that we’d have to leave all farming behind.” What would happen to the cows? she wondered. “When it comes right down to brass tacks, do we really want to get rid of them right now that bad?” Anticipating Tim’s answer, Laurie quickly said, “Be a veterinarian, just sit around.” But realizing that sitting around did not pay, she quickly tied her brother’s income to his work. “You can go out and sell all your merit badges.”

As the family contemplated replacing the \$4,600 income that their cows provided in 1968, Alger and Allan quickly agreed that the herd was worth \$15,000. Tim was surprised; he had expected a higher figure. “How much interest would that be?” Allan asked. “We’ve had a three percent inflation rate,” Alger replied; “and we may even move up to four. And if we’ve won in Vietnam. . .” he hesitated, “or the war gets over.” In any event, Alger expected inflation to continue. “If you gain five percent interest on your money, and you have an inflationary rate of three percent, you are only gaining two percent. If you have your money invested in land, you will have a lot higher percentage.” Persuaded that farm people were taking another beating, Janet said, “Farming doesn’t keep up with the inflation rate, whereas a job in another field undoubtedly would.” “Well, if this is true,” Alger replied, “how come we are having so many strikes?” “Why don’t we strike?” Janet asked. On this occasion Laurie understood farming better than her mother. “Who do we strike against?”

When comparing income from a business supported with capital and management as well as labor, with a neighbor’s income from labor alone, and then complain about being poorly compensated, farm people often overlook value residing in land, buildings, animals, and equipment. This equity in a family business tends to accumulate year after year, often outpacing income unless an economic depression intervenes. Understandably, Janet Roberts overlooked equity; she did not expect to sell the farm or obtain a substantial loan—occasions when equity matters.

Severe winter weather prevented the milk trucker from mounting the hill three times in 1969, yet the farm did not suffer. Alger had installed a bulk holding tank, but by hesitating at length, he received the “laggard” label U.S. agricultural colleges were applying to farm people who were acquiring efficiency-enhancing technology too slowly. Yet waiting until other farmers enlarged or sold a small herd was good business; he found a used milk tank of the right size in good condition for ten percent of what he had expected to pay a few years earlier. There had been little demand for the five-hundred-gallon unit that lacked a built-in washer, but Janet lifted this liability by washing the tank each day.

A hundred pounds of milk was bringing \$6.00 in 1969. “The income is there,” Alger stated. “Anybody who isn’t making a dollar better get right out.” That dollar had purchased a new pickup truck, and helped acquire a field chopper and the tractor Alger had wanted. “Didn’t have to borrow a nickel, so we feel we have to keep the cows; we’re almost captive farmers. There is another reason I went ahead and bought this equipment all new. I needed the depreciation.” The federal government aided the farm-equipment industry, and ultimately the nation’s economy, when allowing farmers to depreciate equipment for tax purposes more rapidly than its value actually declined. Faced with his federal subsidy, rebuilding old tractors at the hill farm became far less alluring.

After Allan made cows Alger’s pleasure again—by agreeing to apply his skilled labor to feeding and milking them morning and night in exchange for college expense money—Alger declared, “I sort of enjoy seeing what these heifers are going to do. Like opening a box of Cracker Jacks, you are going to get a surprise. We have graduation days, I tell my wife. We move the calves from the box stall area into the barn. Then they are big calves, and they have water buckets and seem to enjoy it.” But enthusiasm about cows did not reach Allan. “I can foresee a person could make a good living on just berries.” On one hand, Allan knew a person apparently doing all right financially from a twenty-acre crop; on the other, he knew that “birds and disease and cold weather” were damaging those at the hill farm. “We got to work these out and then maybe there will be a larger profit.” Encouraged by his father, Allan intended to study blueberry crop production problems at Cornell’s College of Agriculture.

Nevertheless, Alger declared, “I think the blueberries are going to come out well. I was getting after my wife to get this figured up, ‘cause I know it’s between a ton and a half to two tons of blueberries. I’m a little hesitant to say what they are going to bring per acre, because we have one variety that is dying out and we have some other problems we are trying to correct—freeze-back and I think it’s canker, and also I’m getting a buildup of herbicide residue. It’s a matter of getting established and handling these problems.”

But while Alger and Allan envisioned solutions, Janet was seeing difficulties: “Every year we have to plant quite a few to replace the ones that died. It’s a very discouraging business, ‘cause for every ten you plant you are lucky to come out with five good ones. As far as being upset because things go wrong, we are not getting away from that a bit. We just spray all the time for one disease after another, and the mice chew on the roots, so we have to put out more mouse bait. And the birds will pick all the berries, if you let them. Just one thing after another. We have a deer fence now, as high as the ceiling all around the field. It’s a miracle we didn’t lose every plant, they pruned them back so.”

The vegetables were also proving problematic. They were not supposed to need special planting equipment, Janet noted. “You can drill peas. I think he planted the beans with the corn planter,” but that planter had required special seed adapters. “He had to get special plates for that, and they didn’t work as good as they were advertised. We had to do a lot of hand weeding, and he had to do a lot of hand planting. You know, it was just something all the time.”

Raspberries—being at once somewhat hardier and needing less water—looked more promising than blueberries to Alger. “We planted some Heritage red raspberries last spring. They were New York 696, and they are a new branch-free stock, and they are terrific.”

“We made one decision—I have, anyway,” Alger continued. “We aren’t going to grow any more vegetable crops. It isn’t as dependable as dairy, and there’s so many people in it already. The workload does not fit in with the dairy and our cropping system. It has to be done at the right time, if you are going to get this produce on the market. Labor-wise and dealing with the public, which is a trick in itself, I think we are a lot better off with berries.”

“He sometimes says things that he doesn’t mean, and I suspect this is one of them,” Janet observed about her husband’s anti-vegetable proclamation. “Dealing with the public is a very interesting thing. You never have what they want, no matter what it is you have or what they want. He got a little provoked about it and said perhaps they would be happier if they got their vegetables someplace else, to put it very nicely.”

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Allan agreed, boarding horses at the home farm had been instructive; the income was not there, and if the berries didn’t work out, he would have to choose: either stick with the small dairy herd or move to a farm offering other possibilities. At the time, Allan was thinking about relocating, but for another reason. “My father went out on his own, and that’s what I’d like to do.” But unlike his father, he did not grow up during the Great Depression—an exceptional period when a young person could start to farm with less capital than the preceding generation needed. If Allan had obtained necessary equipment by using credit from public and private agencies, to farm independently would still remain unrealistic while he constituted the farm’s sole labor supply.

While Allan contemplated farming independently, Tim continued to insist, “I’d rather go down South where it’s warm all year.” Yet their father wanted both boys to remain in the family business, although fully aware that even if every alternative source of income worked out, the hill farm would not support three families. Ten miles away, however, a farm with many more tillable acres was available, and it also offered a longer growing season and soil adapted to a wider range of crops. He had told his sons and Bill about Royal Farm’s assets and possibilities, Alger said. “I talked about this with my wife, too. I tried to convince them if we took over that

operation, we could run it easier than we could this one. We would have larger equipment, and we would know what it was going to do.” That concern about predictable outcomes suggests that hill farm income alternatives were encountering more setbacks.

Contemplating Royal Farm’s larger labor requirement led Janet to bring up a fundamental issue underlying the family business: can every hour of labor be counted as a production cost, or does some labor simply sustain a desirable way to live? “Although my husband gets very angry with me when he hears me say this, I don’t think the farmer can count every minute of his time. You just can’t. You go out in the middle of the night to check a cow going to calve. You can’t count all that time. You just do it because it’s your living.”

Addressing the gap between labor availability and farm needs, Alger said, “Trying to get the hay in, alfalfa weevil coming on us, the boys taking their finals in school. This is why I went and bought the new field chopper.” With the tractor-powered machine magnifying his labor, Alger harvested grass while green, or slightly wilted, as ensilage in less time and with far less labor than haying required. Still, nature remained several jumps ahead of man and machine. “I’m trying to get more efficient,” Alger observed, to “get things lined up so I’m not spreading myself so thin. Now the berries should all be pruned; they’re not. You get involved in all these things, and you miss a few things that should be done.”

Although the hill farm labor shortage was being significantly reduced, Alger regretted operating the field chopper below its capacity; but to use the machine efficiently—by harvesting a larger acreage—would create another problem: how to use additional ensilage. Raising beef cattle at the home farm would keep both barn and field chopper occupied, he had told Janet, but then Alger didn’t do it. “I finally got this statement out of him just the other night,” Janet said. “I just made up my mind I didn’t know that much about beef.” Apparently the vegetable experience had been instructive. “With the beef, he won’t go into it any deeper, ‘cause apparently he has reached the conclusion that there’s going to be some pitfalls that he can’t foresee, and he doesn’t want to get caught in them.”

Since acquiring Royal Farm’s larger acreage and larger, more expensive equipment would involve a sizable mortgage, Alger was apparently prepared to submit his cropping plans and machinery purchases to creditor review—in effect, sacrificing his treasured independence to enable two sons, and perhaps Bill as well, to continue the family business. However, the mortgage issue became moot with Janet unwilling to move, Allan thinking about farming on his own, Tim contemplating another occupation, Bill about to enter military service, and Laurie too young to marry a farmer. “The deal fell through,” Alger stated. Revealing disappointment, he spoke about coping with farming’s slowest season. “Winter, it drags on about two months too long. You go out to the barn and have to put salt on the ice; things freeze up like the spreader and tractor, and winds a-blowing. I know I don’t plow the driveway near as much as I used to. I used to think that was a lot of fun, get the chores done and plow the snow.” Janet’s usual ebullience was also absent. “Both of us, back in July, didn’t know how we’d face another winter. Just a lot of little things.”

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When unable to pay their way, older dairy cows don’t rest in a pasture like a faithful horse. Dairy management manuals specify a “culling rate” to identify those most valuable as meat, but where animals are treated individually that decision becomes personal. “Alger used to think he had to deliver them himself and kiss them goodbye,” Janet stated. “We don’t do that anymore. We hire a truck to take them.” She stopped abruptly; the details were too repulsive. “I don’t like to talk about it, because then I get so upset I can’t even sell a cow we hate.” At the auction barn, as another owner takes over, the cow may suffer before being slaughtered by a blow to the head. “Now that Gracious I spoke about, or her mother, they will never go through that, never,” Janet insisted. “That family has been with us from the day we started to farm.”

Talk about keeping a cow beyond its time led Alger to say more regarding waste. “This Vietnam thing is the greatest self-appraisal this country’s ever seen, just looking at what we got ourselves into over there and how this money is spent. It’s coming to my mind that I know how to spend it better than the government does.” A group of young American war resisters, Students for a Democratic Society, claimed his sympathy. “These are all radical moves, no question about that, but at least they are thinking.”

Alger Roberts deemed the threat to the United States greater from within than by anything the Vietnamese could do. Using public housing as an example, he declared: “Frankly, this one-man-one-vote deal; we are headed downhill because of this. They would rather see if the government wouldn’t do it for them.” Like a nineteenth-century Populist decrying urban culture’s erosive impact upon the nation’s sound rural core, he said, “We’ve got so many people who are nonproductive. How many can we have and still not break the backs of the people who are producing?” Targeting presumably unproductive people for undercutting productive farm activity—in the name of environmental protection—Alger declared, “You don’t preserve a farm; you either encourage it with capital and technology or forget it.”

Recounting recent incursions by targeted people, Alger said, “We noticed it this summer. Allan was out with the weed sprayer and he got hollered at, and the fertilizer truck went to spread fertilizer and they stopped that. A hunter stopped to check a pond and they kicked him off of our own property. You find this kind of thing more and more. They are just knowledgeable enough to be concerned, but not informed enough to know what to be concerned about. It gets pretty aggravating.” Those neighbors had a choice, Roberts observed: “If they don’t want me here, they are going to have houses here, and they don’t want that!”

Joining Alger in reflection about America’s condition, Janet exclaimed, “These welfare families! You could give them all the money in the world and they still wouldn’t have anything because they don’t know how to spend it.” Rather than blame the victim, she said that public education handicapped these people by failing to teach them to value everyday things through having produced them. To compensate for this rampant miseducation, Janet wanted to make learning to spend mandatory in school, and she already had a school in mind. After Laurie had been given an assignment “without any care to prices that week in the supermarket,” Janet reported asking her daughter, “Does your teacher realize that lettuce is forty-nine cents a head?”

Although Janet attributed children’s drug abuse to parents who lack satisfying lives, she felt threatened whenever local youngsters were found with marijuana or other illegal drugs. “It’s inconceivable”; she reported telling her children that they could be jailed for possession, yet she also told them what they could expect when the inconceivable occurred: “I’ll tell you right now, you will stay there. You won’t lay eyes on your father or me.” Citing Allan’s newly acquired driver’s license as a source of heightened vulnerability, she said, “I’m afraid we have rather clamped down on what he can go to.” Taking Laurie to a dance had been encouraged, however. “He’s a very good brother.” Janet could also have called Laurie a “good sister,” since she considered Allan unprepared for a date that might lead to courtship.

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“The boys are looking forward to being on their own for a couple days.” Ostensibly, Janet was planning a vacation for Alger and herself in 1970. “They just know they can improve on everything.” But that vacation did not happen, and a year later Janet was still unwilling to leave the children alone. “Although the boys are probably old enough, we have always felt that if the whole family can’t go, there wasn’t any point in going. We wouldn’t even think of it.” Four years after the St. Lawrence Seaway trip, that family vacation actually occurred, like the first through Bill’s initiative. Writing from his military base, Bill and his new wife identified the hill farm as the ideal location for a forthcoming furlough. “We are to plan to go away while they are home,” Janet stated. “They have written to us three times now.” After Bill fed and milked hill farm cows, he would head for Vietnam.

Asked about the apprenticeship's progress, Allan referred to his parents. "We've been getting along pretty well. I turned eighteen a few months ago, and I like to go with the guys down to the Smokehouse or one of the discothèques, and I just hang around for a couple of hours. I don't do any drinking or smoking. I guess they think it's a bad atmosphere. We just go down and watch the movies. They show Flash Gordon movies and crazy things like that. That's the only thing I've found that we don't agree on."

Neither Allan nor his brother received a wage or dependable allowance. Any money they received, Allan said, depended on whether "we'd been working hard" and "if they approved of it. For the last few months, they have been giving us five dollars a week. We have to buy our lunch with it, and we can spend it on entertainment on the weekend or save it. It's only a couple dollars left over after lunch. We don't really spend much, so it builds up after awhile." Tim endorsed this procedure: "I can't keep track of my money." "I'm all right," Allan concluded. "I seem to have enough for what I want, so I guess it's okay." There was other money, too, Allan noted, although not to spend. "When my father sells hay, he puts it in our savings account. I think it's for tax deduction or something like that." Allan was right; at tax time Janet reported the involuntary savings as wages.

"I have to do it," Laurie stated, "if I want to get paid, 'cause I do need money." She referred to washing dishes, removing household trash, cleaning the house and drying clothes—in winter by machine, in summer outdoors by sun and wind, like hay. Feeding hay to cows was uncompensated. "I just do that." So was dressmaking, and here Laurie downplayed her productivity. "I only made three dresses and one jumper." Laurie was also declaring independence from her mother, unobtrusively substituting visits to friends for the 4-H Club and Friday Evening Bible Club that her mother favored. "In the summer, we always ride to each other's houses on our bicycles." But when told how to arrange her room, Laurie became openly assertive: "It's my room."

"Dumbo here one night buys thirty dollars worth of clothes," Tim announced, reporting Allan's escape from their mother's controlling hand. Although Janet had been keeping Allan's favorite colors and styles in mind, limiting her actual selections to sale items compromised those criteria. "I went out and bought my own stuff within a matter of a week or so; spent a lot of money," Allan stated. "I'm satisfied. I got pretty good buys, and everything fits me, and it's the style I like."

While citing the boys' school accomplishments—Allan as president of the Senior Honor Society and fourth in his class, and Tim as treasurer of the Junior Honor Society—Janet stated, "That daughter of mine just barely passes." Laurie's partial hearing loss and unwillingness to wear a hearing aid presumably explained those grades. "She's very vain. I've talked with all her teachers; we've tried everything we know, and it doesn't seem to faze her as long as she passes. I talk about the boys all the time," Janet acknowledged. "I know I leave my daughter out, but as her father told her the other day, if she didn't get better marks, he was going to start telling the teacher she was adopted. I don't know how she can be so different from the boys. She's just a sweet, happy-go-lucky little girl, and we don't worry about it."

Without a flicker of her usual enthusiasm, Laurie related her school guidance counselor's latest advice: "Well, in the eleventh and twelfth grades, I'm going to go down to this special school and be a beautician." Implicitly considering this a lower-status vocation, Janet said, "As long as she is a girl, I will admit, we probably have given up sooner than if she was a boy." Her mother's reasoning would have surprised Laurie. "She has trouble even finding the barn, but the boys have always helped."

"I personally would like to see Allan stay here and go on with the fruit," Janet stated in 1970, "and I think his father agrees with that. I'd hate to see this place leave the family. Even though we've only owned it for fifteen years, it means a great deal to me. I'd like to see one boy here and one boy on the home farm." Laurie might also stay, Janet added, under the right conditions. "There's always the possibility we could find a good son-in-law to take over one of them."

“I made myself a chunk of money on that.” In 1970, Alger referred to the brush farm’s conversion into building lots by “hopping through these little paper hoops,” first returning the subdivision proposal to the Planning Board for final review, then receiving the Jasper County Board of Health’s approval. “I said I’d net over \$30,000 on just that one parcel of land, and I’ll come up with a profit of around \$50,000 on that deal. I borrowed every nickel when I bought it.” Land he had designated for building lots was worth \$300,000—twice the farm’s value in 1970—and Alger, now Planning Board chairman, was aligning his time and equity. “I’m pretty tired the next day,” Alger observed, when board meetings lasted beyond midnight. “It takes two days to get rested up.”

“We keep using the hard-earned cow money to keep these other ventures going,” Janet declared, while assessing her husband’s shifting priorities. “The blueberries haven’t paid for themselves yet.” Although often reminded that Alger’s real estate activity was financing his retirement and creating an inheritance for the children, it remained Janet’s nemesis. “We’ve made money there,” she granted, then quickly burnished her husband’s image as an exceptionally able farmer. Several Cornell professors had visited the hill farm recently, she noted. “They came here to see what Alger was doing to get all the crops off this land that isn’t supposed to produce anything.” Cornell’s prestige would soon rub off on Allan, she observed. “Alger is so pleased that Allan is going there. He told him the other day, ‘you’ll be the first to graduate from there.’” Nevertheless, Alger’s ambivalence about his son’s attendance at any college of agriculture would soon become apparent.

Unlike dairy cows, building lots did not require Alger’s attention each evening. Asked about his evening activity in 1970, Alger definitely preferred accommodating cows to joining his wife’s latest social activity. Drinking beer amid clouds of cigarette smoke while playing cards with her and another couple had been sufficient abuse, he declared, without the frivolous conversation. “When they get going on, sometimes I doze off. Unless something is going on that’s interesting, I just can’t spend a lot of idle time with some of these people.”

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“A rough year for us emotionally,” Alger observed in 1972, and Janet agreed, by calling the previous year at the hill farm “an awful tough year.” Allan had failed a freshman course at Cornell, then transferred to the Jasper County Community College, thereby losing his military deferment. Then with a critical labor shortage looming at the hill farm worse news arrived from afar. Bill had been killed while flying a helicopter in Vietnam. “It was a year ago the eighth of this coming month,” Janet recalled. After Bill’s death Allan lost much of his hair. “Bill was like an older brother to Allan,” Alger stated. “It made me nervous, the worry, concern. I lost weight.”

Janet blamed a Cornell instructor for the farm’s labor crisis, saying that he failed to give her son enough attention. “Allan just wasn’t prepared for advanced courses,” Alger countered, but Allan himself attributed the farm’s impending labor crisis to his college financing arrangement. His Cornell classes having required more energy than feeding and milking cows morning and night left him with, “I decided it would be better to fill my freshman and sophomore requirements at a community college where it’d be easier. I do my homework on Sundays.”

“We’ve had some tough luck on some of our cows this year,” Alger continued. “We’re down on milk, we’re down on cows. Two abortions. Almost lost my best cow, one of my pride and joys. All this bothers me considerably.” Janet supplied details: “Our best cow had dead twin heifers. The vets came here every single day for five days; one day they came twice. She appears to have made it, but twin heifers out of your best cow, boy, what a loss. Then we had a cow had her teat stepped on and it had grown together on the inside. The vets cut it open, but it got an infection and she’s lost the corridor; she’s got to go. Five cows in all. These were all close to 20,000-pound cows.” Compounding that loss, the farm’s electric supply line failed at a critical time. “Cows are very subject to stress,” Janet explained, “and you shut the milker off in the middle of a milking, and the cows that aren’t milked just go haywire. We got mastitis. Every time you treat a cow for mastitis you have to throw the milk away for three days—six milkings.”

“Part of it could be laid to management,” Alger granted; “my interest in the real estate and not concentrating on management the way it should have been.” But then Alger qualified this response to Janet’s criticism: Allan’s lack of milking experience had probably exacerbated the mastitis, he said. “We had this same problem when Bill started milking. I can milk with my eyes closed. I know my cows.”

To replace the lost cows with young stock already in the herd would cost much less than buying adult animals of comparable quality, but Congress had recently imposed marketing quotas on tobacco farmers, and Alger feared that it would limit the milk supply before young animals could become productive. Faced with two unappealing alternatives—a lower production base and paying six hundred dollars for herd replacements he might have to milk morning and evening in Allan’s absence—Alger decided to appeal his son’s draft classification.

To demonstrate hardship—a Selective Service appeal procedure requirement—pitted the federal government against farm people, Alger maintained. “To go out and pick up somebody to come in and work, it’s not there. The minimum wage is too high.” The appeal procedure reminded Janet that government bureaucrats don’t understand farming. “Their argument is that you can just hire somebody to replace him. Now, in the first place, why would we want to hire a perfect stranger to replace our own son who knows the farm from beginning to end, and hire someone who we’d have to watch like a hawk? In the second place, it would take all the net profit we have from the farm in order to pay a hired man, so we’d end up with nothing.” The appeal procedure took an unexpected turn, however; amid vigorous opposition to the Vietnam War on college campuses throughout the United States, that procedure became moot.

By 1972, Allan had given up on farming independently. “I would like to stay here, but I don’t know what decision my father’s going to make. He might sell out if the price is right, and he’s talking about buying Royal Farm again.” His enthusiasm spurred by his father’s renewed interest in Royal Farm, Allan contemplated operating both farms, another unrealistic aspiration, since farming locations ten miles apart would involve considerable unproductive labor and equipment usage. “I really don’t know,” he added, implicitly citing the decision-making principle his mother had endorsed: “It depends on what he wants to do.” His father was not committed to Royal Farm, Allan noted. “So far it has only been talk. If he starts getting serious, I’ll have to start thinking about it more seriously too.”

Tim’s labor became more valuable, while Allan’s labor remained in doubt; but after agreeing to milk cows on a piecework basis, he soon quit. “I got sick and tired of milking cows.” Tim had earned fifty dollars, enough to finance a first-rate evening’s entertainment. “I knew my girlfriend wanted to go to the prom, and I’d never been to one. It was a nice night. I had a good time.” Wrestling camp would have been better, he added, “but that cost about eighty dollars, and my parents wouldn’t let me go to that anyway, ‘cause it lasts a week.”

At seventeen, Tim’s income depended “on how good I am, how much work I do, if I don’t break anything—like tractors for my Dad—or if I work harder than my brother, and if I get on the honor roll.” Scouting counted too, and although Tim had lost interest in moving up, his mother wanted a top-ranked Eagle in the family. “If I don’t cooperate, I don’t get my five dollars.” Asked, “Has it ever been nothing?” he replied, “Oh, yeah, quite often, like when they think I’ve been spending too much money, they’ll tell me to cool it. They won’t give me any more money, and I have to stay home for awhile. I get to go out about once a week.”

Tim was raising the misbegotten offspring after a wayward Hereford bull broke a fence separating him from a Roberts’ Holstein in heat. “Alger wasn’t too enthusiastic about the idea,” Janet stated—surely an understatement—yet his opposition didn’t matter; she was directing Tim’s apprenticeship now. “Tim has such a sweet way about him. He has taught her to come when he calls her.” But the calf was a short-term project. Tim was looking for a job elsewhere. “My father sort of denounces the idea,” he observed. “He doesn’t like people to work for other people. He tried to implant the idea that we should be independent like a farmer is, be our own boss.” Tim was not persuaded. “I have trouble making decisions by myself. I sort of like being told what to do.” In that

spirit, he had recently applied for admission to the U.S. Military Academy. “People criticize you on the way you dress when you wear regular clothes, but when you are in uniform they really can’t cut you down that much.”

A new car at the hill farm confirmed Allan’s status in the family business. “I needed a car and was thinking about buying a used car,” Allan stated, “but it was my father’s idea to get a new car. He helped me pay for it.” Allan chose the car and Alger made the deal. “He was going to buy a used thing,” Alger noted, “so I bought him a new Maverick, partly on wages.” Henceforth, whenever Tim’s participation in the farm became an issue, Allan expected to override his mother’s voice: “It would be up to my father and me.”

Without knowing how Allan was compensated at the time, Tim guessed “by regular standards.” Actually, Allan was receiving part of the milk check, neither a standard nor an unusual dairy farm procedure. Like Tim’s merit badge compensation, it was performance-based.

Expecting nothing less of herself, Janet stated, “I thought to myself, I wish I had a different blender, but how can I justify it?” One compelling answer was letting her spend the money she had earned while preparing income tax returns for others, Janet stated. “Then I came across an article, ‘You Can Make Butter in a Blender.’ I told Laurie, ‘That’s it! My conscience will be clear!’ I slept good and went and got my blender with about ten speeds. And now I make butter.”

“I’m not sure if it’s the seventh or eighth year of never missing a day of school, all three of them.” Janet was attributing her children’s good health to home grown food undenatured by commercial additives. Unpasteurized milk from contented healthy cows received particular credit. “Unpasteurized?” her skeptical visitor asked. In response, Janet proudly cited barn cleanliness: “Our highest bacteria count that we know of had been 8,000, and you are allowed 25,000.”

“We don’t spray,” the committed environmental conservationist continued, yet Janet knew that Alger applied an inorganic herbicide after reading *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson’s well-documented study of DDT’s adverse environmental impact. Evidently thinking that doing it before plant emergence did not violate Carson’s injunction, she said. “He jumped down my throat,” when she called that application spraying. Alger also applied an insecticide, Janet noted. “The only insecticide he has ever used was the year the alfalfa weevil was so bad and we were forced to. We wouldn’t have had anything. There’s a responsibility. If one farmer breaks the chain, you will never get rid of something. Had we not sprayed, the weevil would have kept alive on our farm and just kept spreading in the area. You have to think about these things.”

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Asked in 1974, “How are the blueberries doing?” Janet declared, “That’s been a sore subject. You had better talk to the men about that. I don’t like what they are doing, so I’d rather not discuss it.” Janet continued, however, in a voice edged with sarcasm. “Talk to Alger, because he heads it up and we defer to him, and he is the one whose words carry the most weight.” Alger had traded the blueberry bushes for a sawmill, and Janet’s carefully fostered “master of marginal resources” image had left the hill with the berries.

“Yeah, we’re getting the blueberries out,” Alger declared. “It was taking so much labor. And the marketing. People were coming at all hours and we were busy. And two things happened: We had a severe freeze-back, and previous to that we had heavy snows that knocked out a deer fence, so the deer got in and browsed them off. Birds too. Last year we had an infestation with birds. We didn’t get around to spraying for blueberry maggot, and we got that.” And other hill farm alternatives looked more promising. “We are going to expand the raspberries. We are going to rearrange the sweet corn. I’m sure this is going to keep going. We’ve got another venture, and that is renting garden plots.”

Perhaps blueberries could have become profitable on the hill through utilizing cultural practices that addressed freeze-back and other limiting conditions, but with Tim’s labor beyond his control and Allan’s absorbed by

cows, Alger lacked the labor their application would require. Of course, he could have hired that labor with real estate income, but if he considered doing it, he kept that thought to himself.

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To operate the field chopper efficiently, Alger faced an intermediate problem: where to house additional ensilage. Replacing the small vertical silo with a larger structure would provide the desired capacity, but Alger favored a far less costly structure that family labor could create through adding concrete sides to a concrete slab already in the barnyard. “We got a lot accomplished this summer, Allan and me working together,” Alger observed. “We worked like the devil. We concreted the sides of the trench silo, widened and lengthened it so it holds four hundred tons. We poured eighty yards of concrete. That’s a lot of concrete.”

“We rebuilt the barn roof that summer, too,” Alger stated, listing project outcomes: “\$4,600 worth of new construction,” apprenticeship enhancement he called “the experience that Allan gets out of it,” and “relaxation.” Replacement rafters and roof boards were cut from logs harvested on the farm, using the sawmill he had purchased with blueberry bushes. Perhaps \$500 spent for building materials came out of pocket.

When helping Allan test the herd for milk and butterfat production once each month, Janet said, “We visit then,” in effect indicating that mother and son were out of touch at other times. Allan called his mother’s absence from the barn “dropping out,” and said it had started several years earlier. “At first I started taking care of the young stock—the heifers and the calves—while my father was milking, because my mother dropped out.” The only reason she was feeding calves in the morning, Allan hastened to explain, was because he was heading for class at that time. Dismissing the possibility that she might be doing more, he added, “That’s all she does.” As to breeding decisions that he and his father were making, Allan used the words his mother formerly applied to such decisions. “We talk it out between us.”

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Invited to make a hypothetical choice between house or barn activities, Janet replied, “Impossible! I enjoy them both.” “Suppose you had to cut out bookkeeping then?” Allan had learned to keep farm records at Cornell, and his mother considered him “quite capable,” yet she expected to continue doing this task. “It isn’t anything he needs to do, that’s for sure. I can’t conceive of a situation where I would have to drop either one, and I’m not going to answer you. I’d have to have a very bad accident or debilitating disease. Then the question would be taken out of my hands.”

Yet according to Allan, the situation Janet refused to countenance had become an every day event. “I would work straight through from morning to five o’clock, so she stopped making dinner because nobody would be there.” Whether she washed the milk tank or not, Janet said, “depends on Allan’s schedule.” With her barn and field responsibilities receding as Allan’s apprenticeship advanced, Janet was refocusing her daily activities. “I cook completely around my husband’s tastes. The children eat the way he wants it or fix their own.” And Laurie was staying in step, Janet happily noted. “The boy she goes out with now is very much like her father. She waits on him hand and foot and seems to enjoy it.”

“Tim is the one that’s a little impetuous and headstrong,” Janet observed, clearly welcoming her younger son’s dependency. “That’s why he needs supervision, and he knows it. I’ve heard him say it many times.” Tim had received the West Point appointment, then changed his mind. “He’s leaving for the Navy shortly,” Janet said with unconcealed anticipation. “With Tim gone, I will have to go back to helping more.” That was not good news to Allan. “I can’t tell my mother this calf’s mother was a super-high producer, so feed her more calf supplement. She’s been doing it for twenty years. She’s not going to listen to me.”

Allan’s occupational grasp resembled his father’s tenuous hold at the time of his marriage, but Allan considered marriage “highly unlikely” himself for the foreseeable future. Asked whether the absence of living quarters for

a potential family was a significant constraint, Allan replied, “You see, that’s the biggest problem. That’s why it’s highly unlikely. Where could I live and still be close to the farm?” Alger still favored moving to the home place with Janet, leaving their house to Allan, but Janet declared, “I’m not very into that. I like my home right here.”

Laurie quickly rejected her school adviser’s recommendation to become a beautician, her mother said; “She made up her mind that it was a lower-class job. She didn’t want any part of it.” Since Janet associated higher education with greater status—having said, “That is why we want to see the children get a degree”—she may have projected her own status concern to her daughter. In any case, when Janet’s visitor remembered Laurie’s rough time in school, Janet replied, “Oh, was she? Well, if she was, yes, definitely. She’s on the honor roll.”

Allan returned to Cornell, having completed Jasper County Community College’s two-year curriculum, but not to take more courses in horticulture. Instead, combining dairy science courses with agricultural economics aligned academic and professional activity. “Before I come to classes I milk and feed cows for three hours,” Allan stated. “I get home by five at the latest, and I milk and feed again for three hours. And on weekends I do the same thing, and in between morning and night I help my father work on equipment, or repair the buildings, or whatever has to be done. Right now it doesn’t bother me at all, but my first year here it was more than I could take. It felt like two tons on my shoulders.”

“My father is paying no college tuition for anyone in my family,” Allan observed. “Since he did this with me, he decided to do it with my brother and sister also.” Concurring with her husband’s reluctance to finance higher status, Janet declared, “We did not spend that kind of money on Allan, we would not spend it on Tim, and we will not spend it on Laurie.”

“I get \$200 a month and a heifer or heifer calf a month, which gives me about ten percent ownership of the herd,” Allan said, while reflecting on his progress in farming. Calling “getting cows in my name rather than cash” his father’s device for keeping him on the farm, Allan stated, with “cash, I can just split, but cows pretty much have to remain within the herd to be worth what they are.” But “splitting” was not on Allan’s agenda. “I really don’t want to.” Asked whether other family members understood the father-and-son agreement, Allan said they did, “but it hasn’t been discussed in any way.” Although Alger cited superior resource coordination to justify by-passing the mother of one party to the agreement and wife to the other, the Cornell student of modern farm management practices was finding his father’s undiminished authority hard to accept. Noting Alger’s put-downs of his college education, Allan stated, “All I know are theories.” While calling his current management authority “zilch,” Allan anticipated making summer field-work decisions. “I’ll do it at the time of day I think is right, in the manner I think is right, with the tractor I think will do the best job, and he’s going to say, ‘Why did you do it this way?’ in a derogatory sense. I know from past experience that’s what’s going to happen.” Yet that downbeat account ended on a hopeful note: his father was spending less time with the cows. “I’m looking ahead and thinking five years from now he might be out of it completely, or at least to a very great extent.”

“The problem is going to be how much income he wants, as opposed to how much equity he’s going to let me gain,” Allan stated. Turning part of the hill farm into building lots didn’t interest him. “That’s a good source of income, but you don’t gain equity that way. You’re losing equity. If I can’t fulfill the requirements that my father wants for a yearly income, then I’ll have to develop at least a small portion of the farm and sacrifice some of my equity.” That scenario was hypothetical of course; Alger owned the farm.

In the oral history conversation, “takes after” is said to explain the behavior of some member of the Roberts family. Allan attributed his million-dollar equity goal—twice what his father had achieved from farming—to drive and ambition inherited from his father’s father, while attributing Tim’s behavior to his mother’s side of the family—a less fortunate inheritance, which Allan proposed to overcome. “He just can’t take ridicule; he needs encouragement.” His mother was encouraging Tim, Allan realized, but the wrong way. “I’ve noticed a tendency for mothers to protect the younger child, and she’s protecting him from my father.” His brother

would not enter the Navy, Allan predicted. “He could stay here for another two years, another five years. He keeps backing out of things.” Allan’s evidence was up-to-date. Tim’s most recent job lasted only three months.

James Hightower’s, *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*, originally titled *The Failure of the Land Grant College Complex*, was enjoying media attention at the time. Hightower charged the nation’s agricultural colleges with fostering capital-intensive large-scale farming at the expense of limited-resource farmers, but Alger Roberts disagreed. “Jim Hightower and others are not telling the story of what agricultural colleges have done for farmers like us with ‘marginal’ lands. Alfalfa, hybrid corn, mastitis control; we have definitely benefited. And now we are getting cuts in our agricultural research. We definitely need some corrective research, but instead Hightower says it’s all bad.” At the same time, Alger insisted that his older son’s progress in farming had been inhibited through attending a Hightower target.

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Janet’s praise of inactivity surprised her visitor in 1974. “We can spend all Sunday afternoon doing absolutely nothing, and all Wednesday afternoon doing absolutely nothing. It used to be such pressure all the time. Now there is time.” Although Alger had given her a microwave oven soon after these devices came on the market, and a new car was the one she had wanted, no enthusiastic conversations were mentioned, and Janet spoke rather guardedly about how much she and Alger were actually talking. “There’s a certain amount of conversation that has to take place to keep the business operating.”

Cooking to Alger’s taste, supervising Tim’s apprenticeship, and doing things with Laurie was not filling the gap in Janet’s day that her older son’s occupational advancement created. “If you are going to feel like you are somebody, you have to do something of your own somewhere, either at home or away,” she observed, pointing to a tray of seedlings on a kitchen window sill. She would plant them around the barn when Spring arrived, like she had done in other years, Janet said. “It looked so nice. All summer long everyone commented when they came for berries.” A long pause followed. “My husband encourages it.”

“I got more excited about that than I did the oven,” said Janet, referring to a wheelbarrow that Alger had purchased together with a barn cleaner and a garden tractor that he would use to cultivate raspberries. “They gave me a very favorable price,” he stated, and recovering every cent invested in the replaced equipment many times over made the deal even sweeter. “The wheelbarrow was supposedly my birthday present,” Janet observed, “a bright shiny green one, a nice big one with rubber tires. The old one had steel-wheels.” She caught the contradiction immediately; if Alger had been making farm tasks easier, why had her wheelbarrow been so difficult to push? He didn’t notice its condition, she explained, until he used it to move concrete while building the silo.

“I really miss her,” Janet declared, referring to Alger’s mother, who had died six years earlier. “It was just unbelievable how good she was to me, her daughter-in-law. You could talk to her about anything and she would understand.” Harmony in a family business is achieved through the husband’s direction, she told Janet, while expressing sympathy and advocating forbearance on the wife’s part. A corollary accompanied that advice: the wife should not expect the husband to appreciate her contributions to the business. “That’s the person,” Janet observed, “who I’ve tried to pattern myself after.”

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Janet greeted her visitor two years later, saying, “There’s been a lot of changes and I will not discuss them”; but a lengthy pause later, she said that the day Allan finished college in 1976 Alger stopped going to the barn. “Well, granted he talked about it, but I never expected it to happen.” Tim was not surprised. “It’s not like he woke up one day and said, ‘Well, I’m going to retire.’ We were introduced to the fact, so we just tried to adapt to it. My brother has the farm.” “I still have my two rabbits,” Janet stated, “and I take care of them.”

Allan did not own the farm in 1976, but by covering overhead—taxes, insurance, and machinery maintenance—he gained effective possession. “That will take care of the rent,” Alger stated. Citing Allan’s recent pur-

chase of his first large implement, a manure spreader, Alger agreed that ten percent of the milk check was no longer sufficient compensation for his son. Asked how income and expenses were currently apportioned, Allan replied, “its very sketchy right now. We’ve got to go down and see a lawyer very shortly.”

But Allan did not equivocate when asked how he felt about his occupation. “I really like what I’m doing. I’m oriented toward profit. I’m confident about my ability to handle it. The work doesn’t bother me, ‘cause there’s really nothing else I’d rather be doing.” Pausing at length he added, “Sometimes at night I wish I had the time to go out, but I’m competing with all farmers, and I just keep pushing more and more. Mostly the means of competing is herd average.” At almost 17,000 pounds—notably higher than his father had achieved—Allan said, “I want it higher.”

He was doing “everything that’s covered all through college,” Allan said, and U.S. agricultural colleges were recommending a father-and-son partnership for continuing a family business. Anticipating a smooth transition at the point his father and grandfather parted company, Allan said that without a partnership, “I wouldn’t envision myself being able to ever pay for everything that’s on this farm.” Allan’s father was equally adamant: “I try to make this clear to him. His going to agricultural college is one reason it got built up so big. He thought it was going to be a two-man operation. I said the hell with it, I want out. I want to get out and do other things.”

Yet Alger knew his son could not do the planting and harvesting alone. “I’m going to have to help him next year. I’ll probably plow the farm or something like this. I like to get out in the field and work, but I want no part of management.” Alger expected his son to like him better once in charge. “He thought he was doing all the work and I was making all the money. What was I going to do? It was the only way to go. My efficiency was dropping. I thought I was working an eight-day week. I was very tired of it. I had accomplished pretty much what I wanted to do: set up a farm operation, make it profitable, keep up on technology, give at least one of the boys a chance to farm it.”

A family business risks disconnected generations when retaining yesterday’s equipment until a designated successor assumes appropriate responsibilities, but baiting the successor with upgraded technology may lead to unmanageable debt. Alger Roberts avoided that dilemma. A beneficiary of favorable circumstances within and outside his family—during a period of relative prosperity for farm people—he purchased a mower, wagon, truck, diesel tractor, and field chopper, and winterized the farm shop as well, all without acquiring debt.

Responding to his wife’s criticism for the seemingly abrupt withdrawal from farm management, Alger tied his withdrawal to his son’s advancement in the business. “If I were here to pick up anytime something happened, it wouldn’t do him any good. He’s got to learn how to cut his own brush. I’ve always been there to pick up. My father-in-law got after me about a year ago. ‘Anything went wrong,’ he says, ‘you were always there to carry the responsibility.’ And, he says, ‘you can see it in your kids.’” He had given Allan due notice, Alger said: “If you decide you don’t like it, we sell the farm,” then added for his visitor’s benefit, “I’m not in debt; I have alternatives.”

A year after passing business management authority to his son, Alger remarked, “Our relationship has changed. Before, you had to chase him down to talk with him. Then there was a long period of time he would just blunder along and get himself in some mess and wouldn’t say anything. Now he will come and start talking about things.” “Yeah, I ask him for advice,” Allan granted, then added that his father’s advice rarely surpassed what he could figure out himself.

Laurie had been watching father and son lay out the day’s activity when saying, “It works out most of the time. Allan comes in for breakfast and they discuss what they are going to do; but if they have decided on one approach and Allan does another, Dad blows up. I stay away from those discussions. When my parents get upset because of Allan, they start saying things to the rest of us. I just have to leave, because I can’t take it.”

Allan had added a sterling reputation to his goals when saying, “I want to have the highest herd average and have the reputation of being one of the best farmers around.” Asked about the new goal’s feasibility, he replied, “I not only have the knowledge, but I’m willing to put forth more hours and effort than most guys are.” As if reciting a business management text, he added, “I’m just concentrating on keeping those efficiency factors as high as I can.” But when asked about his commitment to this occupational success indicator, Allan turned to less academic matters. “It’s that feeling of competition with other farmers and meeting the goals I set for myself.” Nevertheless, caution controlled ambition. “There’s a lot of pitfalls up ahead, and I’ve got to come to them slowly. My herd health problems and veterinary bills are increasing at approximately the same rate as my milk production. If I try too hard too fast, I could end up with infectious disease in the herd, because I haven’t had the experience of those guys who are up there.”

In a 1978 survey of New York dairy farms, Cornell agricultural economists found a direct relationship between herd size and economic efficiency: an under forty-cow farmworker having produced 270,000 pounds of milk the previous year, while on a 130- to 150-cow farm, the figure was above 500,000 pounds. That case for up-scaling would have been even stronger without Allan’s almost 500,000-pound production from under forty cows, while farming land that agricultural economists labeled “marginal” for his purpose. Allan hired his brother to help with the harvest during his first year in charge. “I gave him the jobs I knew he would like the best—the same jobs I wanted to do myself—but I was interested in getting the work done in time, and we did very well.” To reduce expenses and avoid disagreement, Allan was doing every task he could possibly handle, but record keeping had eluded him. “That was always my mother’s job, and she seems reluctant to give it up.” Calling the mother-and-son stand-off “the first conflict,” Alger said, “I was getting caught in the middle, which was very uncomfortable. We hassled on this one, finally ended up in the lawyer’s office. First everybody wanted to take care of the books, then nobody wanted to take care of the books. Now Allan is doing it. He is finding that this is quite a chore.”

Asked how his mother felt about the family business-management transition, Allan seemed to refer to a farm management textbook view of family and business separation. “It doesn’t bother her at all right now.” Money she received from the milk check had not changed, he pointed out. “So far as she’s concerned, there’s really no major change.”

But Tim and Laurie had changed, according to Allan. “I might as well be running a hardware store.” Torn between enjoying their company, capturing their labor, and reducing the cost of their maintenance, he remarked, “A lot of other farms, there’s more family participation. One child feeds calves, one takes care of heifers, each has their own responsibility; but we don’t have that here. I think I’ve seen my brother and sister become more and more irresponsible.”

“They are living here rent free,” Allan stated, when viewing his siblings as welfare recipients. “My father and I, we’re being very patient.” Tim wanted to attend college, Allan noted. “He doesn’t have any money,” and Laurie was supporting a used car with a part-time job. “She hasn’t paid for it, and it is giving her a lot of trouble.” Unable to control their labor like the farm’s former manager, Allan said, “He’s no longer there pushing and asking for help all the time, and they just aren’t doing anything.”

If his brother and sister paid their living expenses, Allan observed, “the more improvements we can make on the farm.” Realizing that those payments would do little to improve the farm, he turned to an underlying agenda. “My mother seems to defend them. I don’t understand her feelings.” While his own contributions to the farm loomed large in his mind, Laurie’s and Tim’s had evaporated. “I’ve always gone out and done chores at night and they never have. I feel that this was my contribution to supporting the household, and I feel that they should do the same. She views it that since I didn’t pay rent, they shouldn’t either.”

Laurie called the management transition “a big change and a big improvement.” “We hardly ever saw him so I never really knew him,” she said about her father. “It’s the opposite now. We hardly ever see Allan, but I see

Dad all the time.” She enjoyed their talks, she said, unless her car came under scrutiny. “He gets fed up with it because he didn’t come with me to pick out the car. I did it on my own. He likes to think he is the only one who can make all the decisions.”

“Mom is sensitive about everything,” Laurie continued. “It’s been like this since last year,” when she had “withdrawn mother’s prize possession” by moving into an apartment. “If they didn’t put up such a fuss about it, things wouldn’t be so strained right now, but Mom took it as though I was leaving for good.” In the apartment, “everything just hit me at once.” Medical bills absorbed her savings, snow tires her credit. “I couldn’t make the rent payment. I didn’t have any money to buy food.” Forced to return home, she was told to help out or pay rent. “I make it sound like my parents are dictators, but they do try to tell you every move to make.”

“Allan comes down and says, ‘Who can help me?’ ” Laurie continued. “Mostly what I do is feed the calves and help feed hay. I hate the cold, but if Allan needs help doing something outside, I really don’t have much choice but to go out and help him.” Escalating her complaint level, Laurie brought up farming’s unpredictability. “You want to plan activities and can’t because of whatever may happen on a farm.” Hesitating briefly, she added, “It used to be worse. When Dad was head of the farm, he’d come in and relieve all his frustrations on the rest of us.”

After-school activities conflicted with farm needs, Laurie recalled. “I had to come home and help with chores, and sometimes I would resent it.” Furthermore, school graduation presents had been calibrated to reflect contributions to the farm. “Allan gets a brand new car for graduation, Tim gets a used car, I get a ten-speed bicycle. In another family, I think everyone would have gotten the same.” The exceptional farm day came next: “Farming is a twenty-four-hour thing, and my parents kind of stressed that with all of us.” Laurie also remembered financial setbacks. “Say one of your best cows gets milk fever and it dies; that’s a bad personal loss. . . . Farming,” she summarized, “has been tough on all of us.”

Yet Laurie concluded, “I wouldn’t trade it for any other place; I feel farming makes you more open to ideas.” Physical health, mental stimulation, and learning to do things by doing them, she credited to farming, and above all, taking responsibility. “As much as we hated it, at least we learned it.” While hoping to marry “someone who has a satisfying job,” Laurie did not expect to help do it. “I would like to see my husband every night and not have to go trucking out to the barn and help. I don’t see how the marriage is going to last unless a farm wife gets into farming. She’s going to build up a lot of resentment because the husband’s spending a lot of time on the farm.”

Discussing the behavior of farm people at greater length with her daughter had persuaded Janet that an occupation guided their behavior more than heredity. “It’s really not strange that divorce is rare in farm families, even though farming is so much more difficult than any other way to live.” Having much to cope with promotes family unity, she said. “The farm needs everyone, and if one pulls out—and that can include a child—it’s going to leave an awful gap. The whole thing may collapse, so everyone just keeps going. The responsibility is to the farm.” Could the reverse be true? Janet’s visitor asked; what if the farm is taken away? “Definitely, absolutely,” Janet replied; “that would be the end of the family.”

Yet according to Alger, Janet was contributing to the very situation she deplored. “She spent more and more time with a couple of friends. She got involved with problems the girlfriends were having with their husbands. By this time, I was getting highly irritated with the whole situation. We ended up with a lot of resentment and hostility. Finally I said, ‘It’s got to be one way or the other. You want to stay here, fine, be part of the family. If you don’t, we dissolve it.’ Simple as that. But it isn’t resolved at all.”

To Janet, her once model farmer was an oppressor. “I’ve had it thrown back to me,” Alger stated; “I was a dictator. I say I carried the responsibility. And who was better qualified to make decisions? I did call the shots. If there wasn’t stability, there wouldn’t have been anything left.” Casting about to re-fix the authority farm man-

agement formerly anchored, Alger declared, “I was brought up in the Puritan ethic. As father, you are guardian of your family. You take care of things.”

“Allan taking over this house, which is my wife’s home, gives her a feeling of insecurity,” Alger observed. “‘What’s left for me if he takes over and we move to another house?’ When you are trying to pull them into the business, you can’t help taking sides. And then any conflicts between husband and wife expand.” And family housing was but one divisive issue, Alger granted. “I think our philosophies are different. Janet says, ‘How can you walk right out of something like that?’ I planned on it; this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to get out five years ago.”

Although well aware that the family did not depend on farm income alone, Alger’s real estate business remained Janet’s nemesis. “I would be the first to admit a great deal of the money we have made did not come off the farm, but had we not been farming, we could not have taken advantage of the situations as they arose. If not every member of the family is involved in the farm, then you’re going to get friction.”

But Tim would not be involved. “Well, his great blueberry escapade fell through, the sweet corn fell through, the garden plots fell through.” Tim was listing his putative tickets into farming. “The only thing that might not fall through would be the sawmill, and that takes so much work that you wouldn’t be able to make any money.” Nevertheless, Tim considered the blueberries and sawmill exchange a good idea. “You have to introduce yourself to it, see if it will work, take it from there. I don’t think he was dumb for doing it.” Reflecting on the closure of these entries into farming, Tim said, “At this time I don’t want to get into agriculture whatsoever. I’m satisfied to let my brother have the farm. There’s no hope. This farm isn’t big enough for a partnership.” Although fully aware that Allan had earned college money by milking and feeding cows before going to class and again at night—“He’s worked hard for what he has”—Tim seemed to think that Allan had been paid twice: initially with money to attend college, then with privileged access to farm resources.

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Surprising his family and perhaps himself, by 1977 Tim had financed tuition, books, room and board, even car expenses, while attending a two-year college located nearly one hundred miles away. Next he planned to train as a medical technician, then move south “where it’s warmer.” Meanwhile at the hill farm, “When everything goes wrong, my parents will get on me and start yelling at me, and I’ll have to go and help.”

While attempting to finance four years of college with a wrestling scholarship, Tim received nearly twenty offers but “they were expensive schools,” the cost of attendance being way beyond him. “Without me knowing it,” Tim reported, his parents enrolled him in Jasper County’s community college. “They just wanted the labor. They didn’t want me halfway across the state where I wouldn’t be able to come home except for vacation.” Yet Tim did not object to his parents “crafty” effort to meet farm needs. “I should have used my head and taken out loans. All those scholarships. I really felt obligated, and now I feel bad.”

He was lumping college, family, and farm together, Tim granted, when calling Jasper County’s community college “worse than high school” because it lacked a wrestling team. “I just wanted to have more freedom. I didn’t want my parents dictating my life like they were.” Recalling the rejected West Point appointment, Tim said, “It sounded like a bunch of Mickey Mouse stuff.”

Like Laurie, Tim attributed tension between family members to being overwhelmed by farm needs. Whenever friends had participated in a school activity, he said, at least one of the parents managed to attend, but Alger and Janet had come to only one of his many wrestling matches. “I must have wrestled about four hundred times. That gets to you after a while.” Perhaps his mother had been making a point, when saying that Tim’s wrestling scholarship offers rewarded disloyalty to the farm.

“I don’t think it affected my mother.” Tim had been asked about his father’s withdrawal from farm management, but a pensive moment later he was less certain. “I really couldn’t say. I don’t like to analyze their marriage or anything.” However, Tim noted that his father was “acting like a twenty-five-year-old, bombing around the countryside every day enjoying it”—a big improvement he thought from “taking it out on all of us” when a calf died.

In 1977 Tim described his father’s current recreational activities: fishing in Florida, hunting deer in New York’s Adirondack Mountains, and square dancing with Janet. When preparing for those dances, Tim noted, “he’ll go down and look through all my clothes. He’s dressing more up-to-date.” Commenting on these clothing raids, Tim said, “He’s only given me about two bucks for each shirt. He has all this money saved up, and I’m down to my last fifty bucks; but he’s worked hard, so he deserves it.” His mother didn’t understand his father’s behavior, Tim observed. “There hasn’t been any change with her, so she can’t really understand why he is going through this change.” Among the children, only Tim commented on his father’s recent progress from building lot developer to full-scale real estate broker. “He likes to talk to people. I think he’d really be good in real estate. He’s pretty honest. Sometimes he talks like he has an IQ of two, so the person thinks he’s a hick. Very smart. He knows all about land. I think he will really enjoy it.”

“Is Allan going to make it or isn’t he? I don’t know,” Alger reflected. “This has been a rough year for him. I can see the mistakes he makes. I can see the mistakes a lot of farmers make. He’s intent on raising his herd average. I keep cautioning him to watch his income over the feed costs. He’s got some labor-coordination problems. He might get depressed. It makes me nervous, but I’ll say this: he is a stick-toer. He will hang in there. He is doing very well with the cattle. One thing I would like to see . . . How shall I put it? He gets wrapped up in a shell. He’s got to get out, start mingling with the farmers. He’s got to get involved in some farm organizations. He’s got to find himself a woman. He needs that.”

“I think he’ll do okay,” Laurie agreed. “He’ll make a good farmer and a good father and a husband, too. Allan has a lot of patience.” Her brother was moving toward the reproduction phase of the family business, Laurie observed. “He’s talking about hiring a female helper. I really think he needs somebody to back him up, like a wife or a girlfriend.” Yet Laurie added a cautionary note when labeling stories featuring husband and wife togetherness on farms “nonsense.” Although in close physical proximity, she said her parents were not really together. “They don’t really know each other after being all tied up in their jobs.” Laurie called the evening meal that Janet extolled for farm and family solidarity “just a good time, mostly.” Family conversation improved, she said, “the day Dad quit the farming.”

“My brother is very smart when it comes to managing cattle and the business aspects,” Tim stated, while clearly less impressed by the appearance of Allan’s cows and barnyard. “I go out to the barn and tease him about how ugly his cows are.” Turning to business continuity, he said, “It’s going to be interesting to see if my brother’s going to live here for the rest of his life with my parents, or if my parents are going to move out and give him the house.”

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“I got a four, the top grade.” Janet said this in 1979, after taking an advanced typing course at the Jasper County Community College. “My daughter said it seemed like a crime to waste it. She was familiar with Cornell’s College of Agriculture, so down we went one day, and the position was there, and it sounded like something I’d be interested in.” The typist position resembled her former position at the farm, Janet observed. “I’m doing what I think a woman should be doing.” The professors could type their own correspondence, she granted, “but it wouldn’t look as good and it wouldn’t go as fast. I think we complement each other; and this is the way a good farm operates, too. Everyone has their place, but not everyone can be in charge. I think the man should head up everything.”

“She’s gotten out and gotten to do things more,” Laurie stated, calling her mother’s new employment “the best thing that ever happened to her. She’s involved with the Ladies’ Guild and Home Bureau. I think she’s fairly happy.” Without farm needs abrading their relationship, Laurie expected her parents’ marriage to last.

“The most important thing that’s happened is that I have gained ownership in the farm with the cows and equipment,” Allan stated in 1979, after managing the business for three years. “I think I’m pretty good with the cows, and I really wanted to get control over them.” Circumstances, regional and national, favored his progress from apprentice to dairy farmer; the cost of grain—Allan’s biggest expense—was down and his income from milk, from culled cows, and surplus calves was excellent. “You can make all kinds of mistakes and still make money.” He had made mistakes, “lots of little ones, nothing big.” Pointing to a herbicide mistake, Allan said, “Weed control is really poor this year. I tried a new herbicide and I really didn’t follow directions like I should have, but it affected my yields only slightly.” “He had everything going good,” Alger countered, “but he used Ramrod and Atrex on all the fields and it didn’t do the job. I was irritated because everything else had clicked, and I said, ‘God, why didn’t you use it on one field?’ This, you know, upsets me; but it wouldn’t do me any good if I got too upset.”

He could have controlled weeds and avoided conflict with his father, Allan granted, “if I had talked things over with him and followed his advice.” But ending his apprenticeship had been more important. “I like doing things my own way. I think that one of the main advantages of being a farmer is to go ahead and do things your own way.” Yet Allan was exercising that treasured independence cautiously. “I never make any big expansion moves, so it’s kind of hard to make a big mistake.”

“I was kind of nervous,” Allan said, about agreeing to pay his father nearly \$70,000 for cows and equipment—a price he considered a little below market value. “This was a big step, going from just a hired hand to sole proprietorship, no partnership or anything in between.” Father and son had discussed the arrangement for a year, according to Allan, probably about every two months. “I was sort of drifting all the time. All I really wanted was the cows.” His debt would have been smaller that way, but Allan’s father had been unwilling to separate cows and equipment. “I think he was afraid I was going to abuse the equipment too much if it was his instead of mine.”

He had been paying his father more than the \$400 plus interest a month that their agreement stipulated, then allocating \$7,500 for taxes, building repairs, insurance, and other overhead costs, Allan reported. “I’m really starting to gain some ground. I’m paying off the principal faster because the interest is getting lower. It turns out that’s probably the best way I could have done things. Any increase in net worth or net income is all mine. Any mistakes I make won’t hurt him. You learn real quick this way.” Yet while scrambling for equity with “seven-day-a-week ten-hours-a-day type stuff,” Allan was still not doing everything he needed to do. “I don’t want to get him upset,” Allan observed about his father, “because I might need him.”

An elaborate task-accomplishment ritual allowed father and son to meet hill farm needs without compromising a treasured sense of individual independence. Citing the field chopper and harvesting of corn ensilage, Allan explained: “Well, in the morning if he says, ‘What are you going to do today?’ I’ll say, ‘I’m going to chop corn.’ He’ll say, ‘Well, want some help?’ [Then] I’ll ask him, ‘Do you want to drive the tractor?’” Allan expected his father to “end up doing half my chopping. He likes to plow, so he’ll do maybe a third to half my plowing for me.”

“We are relating a lot better now than we ever did before.” Alger said that after Allan purchased a sizable farm implement at auction. “It really tickled me,” the father said. “He bought that corn planter himself, looked it all over, just in a short time, and bought it. Gee, he got himself a good deal, nice shape and everything.” But Alger said those words to Cornell’s oral history visitor, not to his son. “I hear him tell other people he thinks I’m doing okay,” Allan stated. “Personally, he will pick out some little weakness.”

“It’s not that I really enjoy not going anywhere,” Allan stated, still unwilling to purchase machines in order to finish chores earlier—until “I don’t push myself to get out of debt so fast.” Yet a new diesel tractor recently arrived at the hill farm. “My father talked me into swapping two tractors plus cash,” Allan said. “This was about three months after I put myself \$70,000 in debt, and I didn’t think much of buying a new tractor. He worked with the dealers and dickered with them. I think the dealer thought he was dealing with my father. I figured this was his idea, and if I got into trouble, he would have to get me out. It turned out to have been a real smart move.” More powerful than the 1940s-vintage tractors, the new tractor used less fuel while doing more work.

The 1978 Cornell dairy farm efficiency study indicated that among five hundred participants, Allan was spending one hundred dollars above the average to maintain a cow for a year. While this information did not help him reduce that figure, Allan was keeping track of another young dairyman’s management decisions, “one of the better farmers around.” Like Allan, he was also taking over a family business. “I’m keeping an eye on him. Maybe he’s keeping an eye on me.” While not actually knowing each other, both young farmers were patronizing the same sources of information: an artificial insemination technician and a Dairy Herd Improvement Association supervisor.

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“The biggest excitement we’ve had up here in quite a few years,” according to Allan, and the event Laurie had anticipated since childhood occurred on an autumn day in 1978. “I really like my brother-in-law. I think she did all right.” “It was the most gorgeous day; it was beautiful,” Alger recalled. Pleased by Laurie’s decision to be married at the farm, Alger helped get ready. “We put in new carpeting, and Laurie and I wallpapered, and Laurie painted.” After the ceremony, Laurie had moved to a hilltop several miles away but not to another family business; each workday she left that home for a bank teller’s job.

Everyone in the Roberts family liked Pete, a different situation than her previous boyfriend presented. She had been about to join that man in Philadelphia, Laurie recalled, when her father declared, “If you live there with him, I’m going to disown you.” Laurie had been nineteen then. “Seeing that my father means a lot to me, I wasn’t going to cut off my family ties.” Looking back to that father-daughter confrontation, Laurie doubted “he really would have done it. The whole trouble was that they didn’t like him that well.”

Laurie and Pete returned to the hill farm within the year. “They’ve got twenty-five acres, a large pond,” Alger said about that oversize building lot. “Allan didn’t want to work it. It’s hard to get in back there.” But the mortgage holder was ambivalent about the deal—at once admiring his daughter’s ability to negotiate the seven percent interest that Allan was paying—while complaining about receiving less than the going rate, then above eight percent. “We sawed the logs out for a house,” Alger recalled, and Allan added, “They used a lot of my equipment, and they used a lot of my diesel fuel. The framework is made from a barn they took down maybe a year ago, and they stored it in one of my barns.”

Like Alger and Janet upon arriving on the hill a generation earlier, Laurie and Pete lacked money for building material and time to assemble what they could afford. While distinguishing “necessary” from “desirable” building components, solar heating went immediately, its cost having been way beyond them. Thinking about stretching their limited dollars through small-scale farming, Laurie said, “Now like tonight, Pete brings up ‘let’s get goats.’ He’s already talked to the people down the road and brought home two books on it. We always check everything out before we go plunging in. We’re always looking for ways to make everything cheaper.” Trying to live well inexpensively included limited consumption. “You feel that you can almost not live without this stuff, but after a while, when you do force yourself not to use that item, not to eat that, not to do that activity, then when you do go to do it, it feels funny, and you know you can live without it.”

In addition to the mortgage on their oversize building lot, Pete and Laurie borrowed \$10,000 from a bank; but rather than increase that loan, they were leaving interior walls and ceilings unfinished. “Debt bothers me tremendously,” Laurie observed, “and it bothers Pete, too. That’s why we are willing to sacrifice; we didn’t want to

get into a twenty-five-year mortgage trap.” Laurie wanted Pete to cut firewood and do “tons of things that just have to be done” at home, but his research technician job in Cornell’s College of Agriculture was buying food and building materials, paying property taxes, and repaying the bank loan. Laurie had been doubly productive at home, combining house construction activity with turning her interest in handicrafts into a business. “I invested \$900 into the business and I made \$1,000.”

“Be self-sufficient, that’s our main goal,” Laurie continued. “We’d like to have a vegetable stand. We want to get into berries, something like my father had, be able to sell Christmas trees, rent out some stables for horses, sell firewood. Also get into my crafts. Pete can do consulting work. He does caning and furniture refinishing.” While needing a wage earner to get out of debt—a five-year period, Laurie estimated—their relative value in a wage economy would determine who would leave the hill each workday. “We need his income worse than mine.” But Pete’s job at the College of Agriculture was temporary, and when its research grant support ran out, Laurie expected to resume traveling to work on schedule.

Laurie and Pete had been studying organic farming and home construction techniques with the same instructor. Like the American agricultural college outreach arm, Cooperative Extension, the Rodale Press promoted sound nutrition and other healthy living practices; but unlike Cooperative Extension, it encouraged replacing capital with labor wherever feasible. With a Rodale kitchen cabinet construction publication in hand, Laurie said, “I’m building the cabinets.”

Prompted by a family discussion about moving to Royal Farm, Laurie reflected about her formative environment in 1980. “I would really feel lost if that was to get sold. When people go by, they slow down and they look at the farm. They say, ‘Oh, I know where that is,’ when I say I grew up there.” Asked about its negatives, Laurie couldn’t recall “one bad thing” about living there. If everything else goes wrong, at least your family’s always there to make you feel right. That’s my security.”

Yet thinking that friends, husband, parents, brothers, crafts, and “whatever I’m into” should fit together seamlessly without established priorities led Laurie to limit parental visits to one a week, thereby avoiding lectures about a wife’s responsibility to her husband. “If I want to go out with my girlfriends, that’s up to me,” Laurie declared. “My father thought it was wrong; I should stay home and take care of my husband. I said he can take care of himself.” Pete was quite willing, she said. “There’s no big deal about that.” But it was a big deal to a father who wanted to take nonexistent grandchildren fishing.

“We never paid Dad for the bulldozer. That would have been a lot of money, if we paid that.” While reflecting about how the thousand-foot driveway that was connecting the house to the highway was constructed, Laurie did not mention anything resembling the father-and-son business continuity ritual. “We worked for it, we gave him our labor.” This happened while Alger constructed four apartment units at the home farm.

If not welcoming customers in the sales office he had constructed in his boyhood home, the fully licensed real estate broker was bulldozing access roads with another subdivision in mind. The family’s leading generation was leaving the farm each workday—Alger to pursue real estate possibilities with sales book and bulldozer, Janet to type letters and manuscripts for Cornell professors—when Janet declared, “We aren’t a farm family anymore.” However, at home Allan was creating an apartment inside the farm shop where he would live and keep farm and family connected.

“Bought a new tractor, a new truck, put a silo unloader in the silo, and right now I’m gearing up for putting in a whole new pipeline milking system.” Allan was highlighting two years of professional accomplishment. “I fell in love with that tractor as soon as I saw it.” The 84-horsepower Case was far more powerful than “the first big tractor on the hill,” a 61-horsepower David Brown that left the farm with tires and engine completely worn out.

With a high speed road gear adapting Allan's new power supply for highway travel, eighty tillable acres previously too distant to farm became much closer. Asked about using a mortgage to acquire them, Allan replied, "I think I could," after having rejected a pipeline milker salesman's milk now and pay later offer. "You'd be foolish to try and save up the money because of the way the tax laws are set up. You have to borrow the money for a farm." Using real estate business contacts with local bankers, Alger was establishing mortgage credibility for his son. "He's telling them what I'm up to," Allan said. "I don't know this for sure, but I get the impression they're keeping an eye on me."

Reflecting about performing a detested task that had required insulated boots and three pairs of socks, Allan said, "I've had that silo unloader a year and I still love to hit the switch and stand there and watch the silage come down." Chore time had been cut fifteen minutes, but milking cows at the hill farm remained labor intensive. "My back's been sore since last fall," Allan said, about milking forty-two cows with equipment that his father had used with thirty-two. "Every morning I wake up and it's still sore"—the result of bending from the waist 168 times every day to attach or detach a milking unit, and 84 times to lift buckets of milk into the receptacle leading to the bulk tank. Allan expected a pipeline milker to relieve strain on his body and cut a half-hour from chores. "Most of these farmer meetings start at eight o'clock and I should be able to make it to most of them."

But one chore would remain after a pipeline milker had been installed. Losing one of his best cows due to insufficient observation would not happen again, Allan said. "I go up every single night since then to check my cows, sometime around eleven, midnight. I haven't missed a night. I haven't had any dead cows, either. It's gotten to the point where I can't go to sleep unless I've gone up to the barn and checked on them."

Clearly confident about his dairy farming skills and commitment, Allan stated, "The whole first year after I bought the cows and equipment, I put in my time and I didn't know where I was headed. I didn't know how I got myself into this situation, but not since then. I feel like I have both hands on the reins." With the merest twinge of guilt, Allan spoke about watching the American hostage situation in Iran unfold on daytime television. "I almost felt like I was one of the family members. I had been watching the whole thing for a year and a half. The morning that they tried the rescue attempt, they had it on TV for four hours straight. I watched the whole rescue attempt when I should have been out doing my chores."

However modest Allan's hill farm herd expansion, when compared to that of many modern dairy farms, it created another roughage storage problem: together, the horizontal and upright silo could not meet both adult and young stock requirements. To achieve the necessary capacity, Allan was contemplating "the biggest purchase I've made yet," a vertical silo eighteen feet in diameter and sixty feet high. "I figure I'd better start about a year in advance checking out prices and everything." Given his "pretty good" cash flow, "I knew I could afford it." Yet before proceeding, he wanted the truck and tractor "paid for. . . What I mean," he explained, "is getting my savings account replenished to where it was before"—a decided contrast to the practice of many farmers at the time, who were borrowing on the value of equity in the business, then borrowing again on the loan's accomplishment in conjunction with monetary inflation.

Because the silo Allan contemplated would be a permanent installation, this purchase could tie him to the hill farm until he recovered the investment. The tall blue steel cylinder with an American flag and family name emblazoned near its top would not present this constraint, but the costly Cadillac of silos, commonly called a "blue angel," can be hard to justify unless the intended content is especially spoilage prone or its owner has moving in mind; a blue angel can be dismantled and reassembled. Allan purchased a much less expensive model, but even that silo was too costly for Alger. Enlarge the horizontal trench silo for about one quarter of the upright's cost, he said.

But Allan quickly dismissed that solution. His father had rarely removed silage from an open silo with the north wind sweeping down, he declared. When his visitor suggested installing a heated cab on the new tractor

for about \$2000, in order to remove silage from the trench silo in comfort, Allan countered, “You get a better quality product out of an upright silo.” While that intrinsically superior ensilage quality claim is questionable, Allan could meet the small herd’s requirement while exposing little additional roughage to oxidation.

“It looks almost like no man has ever been around them.” Allan spoke about watery geysers erupting from the hillside below the farm. “It’s all water that runs off our farm, then goes underground and comes shooting back up.” Yet the pleasure the artesian wells provided was being clouded by his father’s pessimism about dairying’s future on the hill. “Moving is always in the back of my mind. He keeps telling me that they are going to shut me off some day, so I shouldn’t put too much money into the farm. I’ve been hearing that for twelve years. There’s a lot of things he could have put into this farm that could have paid for themselves by now—and would have made life easier in the meantime—like the pipeline.” Yet his father could be right, Allan acknowledged. “The milk hauler might try to get rid of me; that’s in the back of my mind.” Uninterested in the real estate business—his father’s insurance against that outcome—Allan was encouraging the milk hauler to draw personal milk from his tank like the driver’s predecessors had been doing. “Hopefully, that is getting back—that I’m shipping pretty good milk.” Blended in the tank truck with milk that might barely meet legal and market requirements, Allan’s milk improved the whole.

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He had overseen the farm’s operation eight years in 1984, yet Allan still expected his father to sell, if he failed to make the monthly payments that his father had been subsidizing with labor and equipment. “He’ll say, ‘Well, how’s things going?’ ” Alger observed, when updating the family business continuity ritual. “When he says that, I know there is something in the wind. I’ll ask him what he’s going to do here and there, like ‘Are you going to seed anything this year?’ There’s certain things you can do to make the operation easier for him. I don’t mind that part. As long as I’m not working for him or anything like this. I’ve got my tractor, and with his tractor we can turn a lot of sod. It’s good to get out there and smell that fresh ground going over, getting involved again.” Allan had another task in mind for his father. “I know once the pipeline milker is in, he’s going to show a lot of interest in it.” In that event, Allan intended to visit Tim, who had moved south to Virginia.

Allan’s instructors, whether on the hill or at Cornell University, emphasized pursuing economic efficiency, and both advised using credit to gain leverage; but they disagreed about the appropriate debt-to-equity ratio. “I feel safer,” Allan said, and he was meeting his aspirations as a farmer, while following his father’s cautious approach to financing hill farm technology. “The more I improve things, the easier it is to meet the rental payments and the principal payments and the interest payments.”

Haying had been finished on June 13 in 1984, two weeks earlier than usual, giving Allan time to harvest two more crops before those fields turned brown. “This is the first year I’ve ever gotten a third cutting,” Allan said, notably pleased, since cropping decisions had been more difficult than those involving cows and equipment. Yet amid the good news, a worrisome note accompanied his report of an 18,000-pound herd average—nearly 4,000 pounds above that for Cornell’s panel of superior dairy farmers. In Tim and Laurie’s absence, Allan said, “I keep going. I sprained my ankle really bad once, but I did the milking that night.”

Nevertheless, Allan’s marriage design omitted assistance in field and barn. “I think the best way for a married couple to get along is for the wife to have her interests and the husband to have his interests, and not try to force one upon the other. If she had no desire to work on the farm, but she was actively pursuing a career, that would be fine with me. I like being completely my own boss out there, and I want to keep it that way.”

But Janet considered her son’s marriage design incompatible with farm needs, and with those needs in mind nominated a candidate to implement an alternative design. “If he’d marry this girl I’ve picked out for him, there’d be no problem. She is the nicest girl, and what a help she would be on the farm!” While resembling her own marriage arrangement—“I’ve known her parents all my life; I went to school with them”—the proposal for her son’s use addressed the family-housing aspect of business continuity: with herself the mother-in-law,

the house could accommodate both families. Thinking that her son wanted more romance than her proposal provided, Janet had urged him to emphasize farm needs. “Learn to love this woman after the wedding,” she reported having told him.

“He hasn’t gone through the wringer yet.” Speculating about how a severe economic depression might impact the family business, Alger observed: “I keep my fingers crossed, because he may just fold. But he’s had these good years and he’s beginning to get more confidence. He likes his cows; he’s done a good job of breeding. He has his herd sheets, and he shows me what some of them are doing.” Alger had noticed feet in the herd that needed attention when hoof trimmers appeared among Allan’s Christmas presents.

Alger expected farm and family to stay together, unless Allan should become seriously ill or lack sufficient labor. “We got him established.” Allan, however, strongly disagreed. “I wouldn’t say it was completely established. It’s been thirteen years now since I was told if I didn’t give up my after-school activity, the farm was going to be sold, and that was a thirty-two cow, two-man operation. I was milking forty-four in December, and except for some part-time hired help—which is college students, not my parents—it’s a one-man operation.” Of course that statement overlooked the business continuity ritual, and its labor and equipment aftermath.

“Now he’s a little bitter about it and blames us both,” Janet observed. “Somewhere back there, when Allan was in high school, apparently his father suggested very strongly that he drop out of extracurricular activities; but I wasn’t aware of it. I did everything I could to convince him to keep on wrestling, because I saw that he got to wherever he wanted to go and I picked him up. I always worked these things in; I thought they were important.” But farm needs, as recalled in the nineteen eighties, were less compelling than those existing at the time Janet commended her older son for putting first things first. Even then, she did not understand Allan’s struggle to reconcile wrestling activity with his apprenticeship. “He told me he just wasn’t interested, and he just didn’t want to go on with it.” Tim’s responses to farm needs were also being revised. “It didn’t bother him one iota,” his mother said, about his efforts to reconcile apprenticeship requirements with an interest in sports. “He did what he wanted to do.”

Allan revised his account of family responses to farm needs as well. His brother had been allowed to go out for sports, Allan explained, because he “wasn’t accomplishing anything” on the farm. Having eliminated labor that Tim supplied to the family business, Allan justified his expanding ownership by citing its absence. “I expect the older generation to cooperate in passing the farm down from one generation to another. I think that is especially true if that younger generation had to work on the farm when they were kids, when they were going to high school, when they were going to college. I think they almost have a right to expect that.”

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Perhaps prompted by the marriage proposal that his mother submitted for his use, Allan soon revised his own marriage design and a year later said, “Personally, I would rather be married to someone who showed a really strong interest in the farm, someone with a farm background, willing to take on some of the chores I really don’t like to do but, you know, aren’t that hard. That’s personally what I’d like to see, some woman who’d love playing with the baby calves and helping with the field work.” Understandably, his mother wondered how her nominee became disqualified.

“He has been wanting to be married for a long time, and he finally met the right girl.” Laurie meant her younger, not her older, brother. “She’s going to be working and support the both of them.” Thinking that this woman’s gardening and animal interests would fit into the small farm her brother envisioned upon completing his veterinary studies, Laurie said, “I can see them being very happy with something like that.” Thinking about Tim’s forthcoming marriage pleased his mother enough to support the living arrangement she had resisted when Laurie proposed it. “I wanted her for a daughter-in-law,” Janet said. “We were still helping Tim a little bit. It seemed silly to rent two apartments. He was ready to be married, and they were making the arrangements.”

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“I’m just doing the things I want to do,” Alger said, while stirring embers in the fireplace at his real estate office. “I’m doing a lot of odd jobs that should have been caught up. And gradually spring will come.” Real estate was selling well, he said. “I’m not under pressure. I have sufficient income, so it’s working out quite well and building up something for future years, for my retirement, and also for the kids.” Berries would soon grow again at the home farm, Alger predicted; this time elderberries. “They are a Canadian variety and very high in sugar.”

An adjacent studio apartment awaited final touches—window and door molding, painting, hinge adjustment. “I get my own lunch. I’ve got smelt and I’ve got pike. I ate all my trout. I’ve got venison. I’ve got elderberries.” Clearly, Alger was living alone. “The problem in my future is the fact that Janet does not want to change. She does not want to leave the hill. And what’s going to happen with this I don’t know. She wants to be independent. Fine, so do I. I want to do the things I like to do. And this is probably why I have an office here, because it separates the two. She isn’t able to accept what I’m doing. She doesn’t like the real estate business. She doesn’t like working with people. She feels very insecure.”

“Instead of being caught and intimidated,” Alger asserted, he had taken his future in hand. “I feel that now it’s her choice to make; if she wants to go on with what I am doing, or she wants to go on with what she wants to do. It takes Janet a while to come around. She is beginning to realize that her late forties doesn’t mean life’s over.”

“The farm was taken from me,” Janet explained. “That is the problem. I’ve been reading about it recently; it’s a problem in a good many farms.” Yet rather than address apprenticeship’s encroachment on her contributions to the farm’s operation, her account of the family fracture emphasized insufficient appreciation of those contributions. “You end up being a piece of equipment. You can go for so long and your spirit just breaks.” Yet she had been surprised when pressing the insufficient appreciation complaint with Alger; instead of offering sympathy, he had asked whether she appreciated what he had done. Lavish praise of his leadership had been directed to various Cornell visitors, not to his ears. “Apparently I didn’t say it either,” Janet concluded. “I thought I was. I thought all this killing myself doing a man’s work was saying thank you; but I realize now that it wasn’t.”

“Janet and I worked very closely together on the farm,” Alger said, leading up to who blinked first. “If you notice, as soon as we got the diesel tractors, she didn’t want to handle that type of equipment.” However, attributing her withdrawal from farm activities to technological change overlooked a deeply felt goal shared by Alger and Janet: family business continuity rested on apprentice access to age-appropriate tasks.

“For years it didn’t make any difference,” Janet stated. “You’re so busy and you know it’s for you, too. But then one day you wake up and you realize that it isn’t yours, and you have a little more free time, and you start thinking, and that’s when the problems begin.” The absence of her name on the farm’s deed was among them, but here Alger conceded nothing. To justify sole ownership, he recounted a recent conversation with a lawyer. “We got talking about setting up trusts and deeding land and, gosh, we talked the thing all over the place. If you start deeding land and one of your kids gets married and dies, well, the lawyer says he has seen farms split up and gone right out of the family.” Yet realizing that a trust arrangement could circumvent this possibility, Alger added, “He was telling [me] that trust funds get a little complicated.”

And a few weeks after calling her contributions to the family business underappreciated, Janet backpedaled. “I didn’t do that all to help Alger. I enjoyed that quiet time, just me and the livestock. That was my best time of day.” Still maintaining that the husband should make family business decisions and the wife should help implement them, Janet said her mistake was helping Alger too much: “He accused me of being domineering and not letting him see the books. I felt that I was taking something off his shoulders.” As to Tim’s apprenticeship, Janet said, “I thought I was sparing him all these problems.”

“I have never set foot in his office; I was told not to,” Janet stated before adding, “it’s Alger’s home farm,” as if justifying her absence. But the real estate business taxes remained “our taxes,” and the related records were her responsibility. “With all those apartments, I have no intention of letting someone else do what I am capable of doing.”

Not knowing what Alger’s will provided and unwilling to ask, Janet stated, “By law Alger can’t disinherit me, and I assume he has been fair in what he has done.” Turning to an issue of greater concern, she continued, “I wish Alger had a retirement plan. I’ve talked to him about it several times.” Referring to IRA and Keogh accounts being promoted on television and in popular magazines at the time, Janet said, “I don’t understand why he doesn’t do it. For some reason I haven’t reached him.” Of course Alger had a retirement plan, as he had told his wife many times, but not one operated by a large, remote, and impersonal organization. An independent businessman was in charge.

“That was fifteen years ago last Christmas,” Janet declared, upon tracing the onset of her husband’s domineering behavior to his mother’s death. “A farm wife needs a good mother-in-law. I could not have coped without her, because she used to take care of her son for me.” The marriage counselor list in Jasper County’s Yellow Pages was expanding almost yearly, but Janet would not dial a number. “I don’t believe in professional therapists. In the first place, you are paying them; they can’t possibly care about you the way my mother-in-law did, and that’s what makes the difference.”

“Why don’t you ask me what I feel about the dairy price supports?” Janet wondered, implicitly declaring her opinion on public policy issues as important as Alger’s. Without waiting to be asked, she declared, “I think they should be done away with. It would get rid of all those farmers who have no business farming and let the good ones succeed. My son is not making the milk surplus.” Janet also said the U.S. government was forcing her to use margarine, encouragement of “thousand-head herds” having made butter too expensive. She expected dairy products to remain unduly expensive in a deregulated milk market, however. “It’s your labor in there.”

Laurie also had a statement to record. “I love the word ‘independence.’ If anything means ‘independence,’ I latch onto that. I’m always thinking pro-woman.” Turning to her mother’s situation, she stated, “You know, you invest twenty-five years, you should get some kind of return, and it seems like she’s not.” Yet rather than attribute this outcome to her father’s behavior, Laurie considered both parents victims of a formative culture in which the husband expected to lead and the wife to follow.

“I just thought about farming and women a couple of years ago,” Laurie continued, “but ever since I was sixteen, I always felt a woman has her own mind, and she should do what she wants to do. It really didn’t dawn on me that it was considered ‘women’s lib’ until I started getting into that.” A woman can be a farmer as readily as a man, Laurie maintained, if she avoids childhood disorientation. “It seems like from inception, the girl is never treated as if she is going to take over the farm. She doesn’t pick up the skills to the extent her brothers do. Most farmers are not with the times; you don’t see them encouraging the girls to be into the farm like the boys.”

But Laurie was probably being overly generous when crediting her commitment to independent thought to her father, having enjoyed the leeway to become responsible for her own behavior while her parents were monitoring her brothers’ school and farm activities. “I would feed the cows hay, and I could be gone from nine o’clock until midnight over at my girlfriend’s house. They didn’t care as long as I was back home.”

“Oh, I fantasize,” Alger replied, when asked to contemplate using the rest of his life. “I got thinking, ‘God, why don’t you get in the Peace Corps?’ ” Farm people in less economically developed countries could become more productive, he pointed out, without the costly Green Revolution fertilizers and herbicides that U.S. agricultural colleges were recommending. “It’s like Pete and Laurie on their well. I just took a backhoe and dug it. We didn’t have a well driller. Nice good water. There’s so many things that could be done simply.”

“There’s one awareness for me,” Alger concluded. “Perhaps I could have done things differently, but I have to say this: I accomplished one thing, and that was to get one of my sons to be a farmer. I’m not so sure it’s right at this time. As I got away from the farm and watched the rest of society, I began to wonder why in hell anybody would put that amount of time in. You could have been down bowling, doing your fantasizing, and so on. About the time I get thinking this, I meet people who say, ‘I want to farm because I want to get out of the ordinary things I’m doing, which are blah.’ ”

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Nearly a decade had passed when I visited the hill farm on a sunny March day in 1992. Alger Roberts, busily skidding logs to the sawmill with his bulldozer amid patches of melting snow, yelled, “Nothing better for a winter day,” by way of greeting. Soon Allan arrived from the barn, and as we walked toward his living quarters, I asked how often his father appeared at the hill farm. About one day in four, Allan replied. “He seems to show up when he is needed.”

As we approached the farm’s former shop, a tractor-size door loomed above the adjacent people’s entrance, but inside—in space where Allan had repaired machinery and wondered where a married man could live—a large living room and three spacious bedrooms appeared. Soon after welcoming me to her home, Allan’s wife, Kate, called the large exterior door “vestigial.”

Kate and Allan had been married six years in 1992, and on this day their son Adam became two-years old. While gathering at the kitchen table to resume the family business oral history, Adam climbed between the adults, miniature tractor in hand, and on reaching the table’s center, he replicated motions he observed while riding in the cab of a much larger tractor driven by his father. When told about his grandchild’s rudimentary apprenticeship activity on that occasion, Alger claimed to have seen evidence of a promising farmer when Adam could barely walk.

Recalling the circumstances leading up to their marriage, Kate remembered having been a Cornell agricultural college student seeking a part-time job. Responding to a job-availability notice that Allan posted on a Cornell bulletin board, initiated a period when task-assignment and performance-assessment defined their relationship; but Kate recalled being tantalized by Allan’s cautious approach to a more intimate arrangement. Each party had been hoping to get beyond self-consciously circling the other, Kate remembered, when Allan broke the stalemate. Inviting her for a “date” quickly initiated an intense courtship in which the couple addressed family business issues that Allan had long been exploring with Cornell’s oral history team. Readily rejecting his parents’ practice of concentrating management authority in one person, and compensating family labor with the opportunity to meet farm needs, they agreed to continue the current practice of compensating Kate’s labor with regular monetary payments. At the time this conversation occurred, she was buying into the business like Allan had done—starting with cows.

Kate accounted for family business activity at the hill farm much like her mother-in-law reported for the oral history record a quarter-century earlier. Like Janet Roberts, her information concerning the farm’s resources—cows, land, equipment, service providers, and related maintenance and operational decisions—was extensive and up-to-date, and like Janet, Kate praised her husband’s performance as a farmer. She also said, “I always wanted to live in the country”; but rather than clutching a treasured formative environment, Kate had grown up in Brooklyn with a mother and sister who shared her enthusiasm for country life. In 1992, they had joined Kate in Jasper County and were living a few miles away.

Possessive pronouns so apparent in the preceding generation’s conversation were absent, yet house and barn emerged as distinct jurisdictions. Initially guided by Allan’s revised marriage design, Kate had supplemented Allan’s labor in field and barn; but then the couple reverted to his earlier design, and in 1992 a child daycare business that Kate created and managed was supporting the family along with the farm. The couple adapted their home’s bathrooms and exits to meet state mandated daycare facility requirements, an investment in Alger

Roberts' property that Kate was prepared to treat as rent, if necessary, but she did not expect the issue to arise. "The old man has an elaborate estate plan," Allan observed. By announcing the plan's existence—without revealing its details—Alger Roberts encouraged the next generation to stay committed to the hill farm without relinquishing his ownership. Nevertheless, Allan and Kate seemed confident that their interests there were being respected.

"Back trouble," Kate said, explaining her transition to quasi-independent businesswoman. Calves remained Kate's responsibility, but her inability to milk left the farm without sufficient labor if Allan should become seriously ill or injured. Flu did strike Allan a week earlier, Kate said, and when she could not locate a part-time college student worker, Allan had dragged himself to the barn. Once there, however, milking and feeding were done poorly and milk production fell, although the Farm Sitter Service phone number had been visible on the kitchen refrigerator at the time.

When calling that number, a stranger would face a Rube Goldberg-like barn equipment control panel Allan had created, while replacing labor with capital one machine at a time. To unload the silo, remove manure, and move milk to the bulk tank, he would connect switches and machines through trial and error; but Allan—knowing what would happen—could move a switch, then quickly hit another.

"The house is occupying the shop," Kate stated, and while Allan agreed that her daycare business had pushed the farm shop toward the oversize door, he insisted that cows had pulled the shop into the barn with greater force. Repairing farm equipment became more satisfying in their presence, he said, then added that he was feeling more independent "out there." Furthermore, Allan noted, bovine radiation—rather than costly fuel oil—was warming the shop.

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An ensilage wagon that had served the hill farm twenty-one years was making Allan's wintertime recreation productive; and after rebuilding its unloading mechanism, he expected to repair other equipment at far less cost than buying new before spring arrived. While unable to overhaul the newest tractor's high-pressure hydraulic system and diesel engine without special tools he could not afford, Allan's pleasure in commanding more than twice the power his father's tractors once supplied was unmistakable. "It's almost paid for," he said, but this time "paid for" did not refer to replenished savings. The tractor dealer's use now and pay later offer had been persuasive. In 1992 Allan declared, "It's foolish not to borrow if the deal is good."

But having two motorized carts to weigh, mix, and deliver the ration to waiting cows seemed to violate hill farm economics. Allan could operate only one cart at a time, yet after spending \$8,000 for a new machine, father and son were rebuilding the older cart. "We are working together," Allan stated, pointing to a bearing support that his father had redesigned. "While he was doing that, I worked on another part." But the older cart would still spew exhaust fumes around the cows and its operator, unlike the new cart's relatively clean-burning Honda engine. Labeling the older machine "insurance," and the new machine an accommodation for his "health conscious" wife, Allan mentioned more insurance: With a second bulk tank in the milk house, four days could pass with no milk truck on the hill.

Allan bought the new silage cart when milk had fallen to eleven dollars a hundred pounds, four dollars below its price six months earlier, and Cornell's agricultural economists readily indicated that farmers operating with borrowed money needed a better price. Being virtually debt free, however, Allan expected to continue until less favorably situated dairy farmers improved the milk price by selling out. "Eleven-dollar milk is OK," he said, but to become profitable, Allan intended to make eleven-dollar milk less costly.

The price of grain—Allan's principal ration outlay—being beyond his control, Allan had been limiting herd consumption, yet he had approached a 20,000-pound average from forty-six cows while reducing operating costs. That herd average put the Roberts name among the exceptional Jasper County dairy farms listed in a

regional periodical, and pleased by the visibility, Allan fantasized about having the Roberts name atop the list. “If everything were right,” he declared in 1992, “I’d go for it.”

When the federal government restricted the application of the highly effective herbicide Atrazine, to limit its extended residual impact, instead of protesting government intrusion on their freedom to farm, Kate and Allan treated the restriction as a sizable step toward a healthier environment. Returning to a long-unused tractor-mounted cultivator, in conjunction with a safer but less effective organic herbicide, made corn production more labor-intensive; but Allan readily noted a countervailing benefit: spending less money for chemicals. Certainly the second family income facilitated reversing the long-standing practice of replacing labor with technology.

Alger Roberts was not jeopardizing a farm real estate deal by skidding logs with his bulldozer at the hill farm; New York’s once vigorous farm real estate market had entered the doldrums a decade earlier. Farm buyers being scarce in Jasper County, he advised clients to protect equity by cutting costs. Look beyond conventional commodity production and marketing practices for niche marketing opportunities, he said, while keeping the sawmill purchased with blueberry bushes occupied.

Twin calves, unusual when Alger contemplated the dairy-beef niche fifteen years earlier, seemed about to become commonplace, although inserting an embryo in each horn of the bovine uterus was still far from being a cost-effective way to create beef animals. Alger expected animal physiologists to solve intervening “technical problems”—given appropriate research funding—thereby enabling one hundred cows to yield \$23,000 worth of beef in addition to two million pounds of milk each year. With unanticipated feeding and housing problems in mind, Alger was raising a few hill farm calves as beef, while waiting for the local zoning code to be revised. To have someone well-informed about farming and real estate on the town board, Alger was considering running for the open seat.

Pete had heard Alger’s self-employment appeal many times, when the grant supporting his Cornell position ran out. Since regular pay had become habitual, he moved south, relocating near where Tim was living in Virginia. According to Allan and Kate, his tasks and responsibilities as a city engineer suited his skills and interests, but for Laurie, supporting her husband’s satisfying employment involved a cultural conflict. To reconcile residing in a highly zoned suburb—where porch colors were prescribed—with cherished activity emphasizing independent choice, she had been returning to the hill farm each summer with two teenage sons. Living with her mother on the hill, while marketing suburban-made handicrafts in a shop her father helped construct near his real estate office, was keeping family and business connected.

Tim’s “backing out of things” behavior continued, according to Kate. His once distant goal attained, the veterinarian vacillated between practicing independently and working for others. Luring his son northward, Alger had helped Tim buy a practice located within an hour’s drive of the hill farm; but within two years, Tim sold the practice at a loss, then returned to a warmer climate to work for others. And Tim’s backing-out behavior did not stop there, Kate noted. He had backed out of marriage as well, leaving two children with their family split apart.

Adam’s concluding statement, “He hit cow,” was said while pointing to his father. Adam usually moved freely among the animals, Allan noted, a practice Grandfather Alger considered further evidence of a promising farmer. However, the mother of twin calves, born that morning and already frisking, had sensed a threat to her offspring, and upon swinging her head toward Adam had faced Allan’s boot.

Kate concluded the visit by providing a new version of a familiar subject. The Persian Gulf war was in its third week, and—like her mother-in-law commenting on the Vietnam war—Kate expected other sectors of the U.S. economy to benefit from this distant activity, but not farm people, whom she expected to get the short end of the stick.

Across the road Alger, although physically absent was mentally present. Pointing to her new car, Janet said, “Alger made the deal.” Much concerned about his welfare, she said, “Be sure to talk with Alger, he needs company.”

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In 2002 a second decade had passed since Allan struggled to reconcile his marriage design with farm and family needs. At this time Kate’s daycare business continued to support the family along with the farm, but her clientele had changed. Instead of children who provided playmates for Adam, a canine clientele was keeping pace with her children’s physical and mental development. With no school bus stopping at the hill farm, apprenticeship requirements and state educational mandates could be accommodated without the discomfort Allan had experienced as a teenager. Allan and Kate were providing both forms of instruction for Adam and his brother, Josh, already ten. At the time of my visit, the boys were observing seven dishes placed along a kitchen wall, each containing a different dog food; their charge was to determine the nutritional value of the ration their canine clients freely selected. Presumably, an assignment’s solution required extensive observation whenever selected dogs were admitted to other parts of the family’s quarters. Drawing on readily available home-schooling publications to supplement the hill farm’s canine clientele, fifty adult Holsteins plus young stock—and wild inhabitants of nearby woods and streams—it was clear that the parents and students were surpassing state government educational requirements.

As to curricular coverage, Kate identified language and literature as her core responsibilities, but she was also arranging private lessons where an educational objective exceeded the competence of both instructors—the case when identifying a computer program suitable for analyzing student field observations. “Allan does the math.” Cooking and house cleaning were mandated subjects, but the students were allowed to negotiate their timing. Displaying student art and nature-study accomplishments with notable pride, the parent-teachers highlighted educational outcomes: student curiosity about diverse matters and ability to solve increasingly complex problems.

Rather than enforcing the link between education and labor that Allan had experienced as an apprentice, he was inviting Adam and Josh to join his field and barn activities without requiring their participation. Joining the boys in throwing hatchets at a plank, and honoring their expressed preference for education’s academic component over his economically productive activity, further repudiated his parents’ linkage between recreation and hill farm needs.

Outdoor dog runs had forced several lesser farm buildings to relocate, and in 2002 Kate’s judicious perennial plantings were putting the now long-unused sawmill out of sight. Yet after losing ground to a daycare business not yet a year old, Allan considered Kate’s operation subordinate to the farm. Asked, “What portion of family income comes from the farm?” Allan immediately declared, “one hundred percent.” Adding, “The other business exists because of the farm,” enabled Janet Roberts’ words to survive long after her death five years earlier, a victim of cancer. Pausing briefly, Allan amended that figure. “OK, make that ninety percent.” “How about your father’s labor?” “About one percent.” A longer pause. “He grows my roughage at the home farm. Make that ten percent.”

Asked whether the business continuity ritual still applied, Kate preempted Allan’s reply. “Same music, different tune.” “Tune” meant the “Roberts Family Partnership,” the long-awaited estate plan that Alger revealed a year earlier in his seventy-fifth year without, as Kate noted, having used the terminal word “death.” In business governance and ownership, Alger remained present; management and ownership had been vested in both generations, with himself and Allan as “general partners,” while Laurie and Tim shared ownership but not management, as “limited partners.”

Asked, “What milk price is OK?” Allan replied, “fifteen dollars,” the going price for a hundred pounds, sufficient for family needs, he said, yet not enough to stimulate the overproduction and market instability he ex-

pected to follow a better price. However, the hill farm's current 17,200-pound herd average suggested the onset of a terminal condition—having fallen from 23,000 pounds, a number that put the Roberts name atop a list of outstanding Jasper County dairy farms. However, that ego-boosting figure required costly feed supplements that Allan could afford only briefly, while he considered the 17,200-pound figure sustainable. Since adopting a New Zealand farming innovation known as “rotational grazing” in 1995, the cows have met most summertime nutrient requirements from grazing in the pasture; but implementing the environmentally friendly, organically compatible practice requires moving easily erected electric fencing in a timely manner. The skillful observation of moisture availability and plant growth, which avoids depressed plant growth through overgrazing, restored an element of art to an increasingly science-and-technology-dependent occupation according to Allan. He also noted another benefit from rotational grazing: farming, while more intellectually challenging, also became more relaxing for himself, his family, and the animals.

After large-scale milk producers installed self-detaching milking equipment inside dedicated milking facilities, late twentieth-century agricultural engineers developed a portable version. Adopting this equipment cut Allan's waist-level bends in half, making his labor at once more productive and comfortable, without having to invest capital in a separate milking facility. With sophisticated sensors replacing human skills when avoiding undermilking or overmilking, Allan shared the twice-daily activity with unskilled college students and a retired neighbor. Reflecting upon this technology's impact on life at the hill farm, Allan said these helpers were finding the once detested task relaxing. Consequently, he was spending more time with his family; and much to his surprise, the incidence of mastitis had declined when machine consistency replaced human skills.

After coping with milk transport uncertainties, farm labor shortages, and changing mate-selection criteria, the family business faced another imposing hurdle in 2002. Spreading the dairy's principal by-product directly on fields throughout the year remained legally permissible—with the surrounding woodland providing farm run-off pollutant absorption—but building lots were invading the protective band, some with Alger's assistance. Although readily available, environmentally compatible manure storage and distribution facilities could reconcile non-farm activity on the hill with family business continuity, contemplating this capital-intensive solution reopened Alger Roberts' often voiced question: how much investment can the small-scale dairy farm afford in that location?

“We have the raspberries,” Allan stated, indicating that family income did not depend on cows and canine clients alone. “And,” Kate added, “they need trimming.” Plausible alternatives to the hill farm's output having failed, and with Allan reluctant to put more capital into the dairy—or more labor into berries—and knowing that adversity could emerge in other forms, his father's route to income security was looking more attractive. To keep the hill's proliferating houses aligned with family income, Allan was studying business law and real estate management at Jasper County Community College three evenings a week, while preparing to meet another challenge to the stability of the family businesses. Kate wanted the labor-intensive business to adopt another industrial practice, a desire shared with many farm women. Once an annual vacation became a farm year component, the family could visit Kate's sister, who had moved to Florida. To provide the vacation while meeting the small-scale farm's daily labor requirements, Allan was exploring the feasibility of synchronized calving. Having every birth occur within the same month would make the milking-free period prior to calving available, but Allan questioned whether the business could afford the related veterinary charges.

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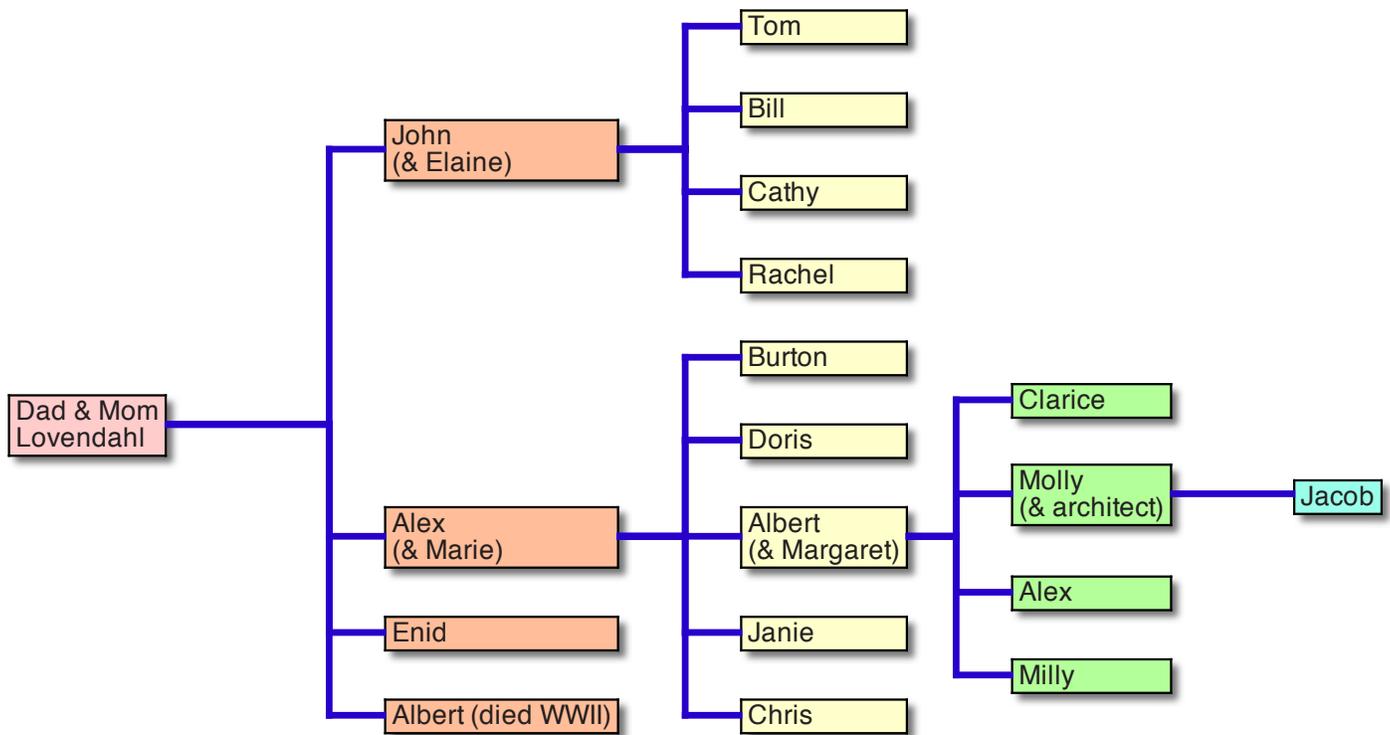
When Cornell's agricultural economists labeled the hill farm “marginal” for farming, suburbia had not spilled into that countryside. Nor had other circumstances that sustained this family business emerged and interacted—notably government income stabilization and soil conservation programs, labor productivity-enhancing technology, and off-farm employment opportunities. Of course, family and business integration continued at that location, while generation followed generation, because these people recognized the potential relevance of

those circumstances to farm needs and family income, and because the family business made and implemented appropriate operational decisions in a timely manner. However, the economists may have been right about farming's feasibility on that hill, if nine decades prematurely. Asked if farm and family stay together in his estate plan, Allan insisted that if either boy continues to farm there, parental expectations won't be the reason.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Brothers



*The Lovendahl Family*

Wheat from New York's Wanase Valley supplied America's bread makers soon after England's thirteen American colonies united as a nation; but when early nineteenth-century pioneer farmers moved wheat production westward to the Mississippi Valley, a temperate climate and deep rich soil proved equally congenial to a higher value crop. As the vast terrain between Ohio and Kansas became the Corn Belt, wheat production moved westward and northward, into the Dakotas and western Kansas, where it abounds today. In the Wanase Valley, general farming replaced wheat, but by the mid twentieth century this multifaceted combination of crops and domestic animals had given way to specialized dairy farms.

As the valley descends into New York State from narrow upper reaches among Pennsylvania's hills, corn, grass, and alfalfa—dairy farming's mainstay crops—flourish amid the valley's temperate climate and glacial soil. During the 1960s large-scale farms flanked the valley's western slope, and like the Lovendahl farm, each converted these resources into milk, a commodity that enjoyed a dependable market. A deep, wooded ravine lay between that farm and the river as it snaked its way northward to Manchester, a flourishing urban center forty miles away.

As apprentices, the brothers John and Alex Lovendahl studied the family occupation while laboring on that farm throughout the Great Depression. Having gradually assumed responsibility for tasks that contributed to crop and animal production, building and equipment maintenance, and other necessary activities in sequence with the seasons, negotiation with parents directed toward enlarging their stake in the business would have probably followed, given other circumstances. With the United States preparing to enter World War II, however, instead of advancing professionally, the brothers entered the armed forces as naval officers. When that

war ended, the family business bridged the occupational limbo in which the authority-holding and authority-seeking generations reside in physical proximity, yet beyond the other's reach. Two Lovendahl generations, the father and John, the younger son, became partners, and with business continuity secured, nearby farmers could not pick over the family's means of production—land, buildings, cows, and equipment—at auction nor apply the skills, energy, and ambition of its mature apprentices to their own agendas. The partners' initial resources included 26 dairy cows.

Twenty years later, the Lovendahl barn contained 220 black and white cows (weight-conscious Americans having rejected cream-heavy milk from the Guernsey and Jersey breeds). Although the exclusively Holstein herd was unremarkable in 1968, the barn's architecture was remarkable, man and beast having exchanged positions while cow numbers increased by a multiple of ten. Instead of people delivering food to animals confined by stanchions and taking milk and manure away—like the Roberts family was doing—the cows propelled themselves to feed bunks and to a milking facility in which people were confined. Reminded to go there twice daily by a mild shock to the rump from an electrified wire, the cows proceeded assembly-line fashion into an industrial work station named to convey a domestic image. Awaiting their arrival inside the milking parlor, the brothers stood on a carpeted walkway located several feet below the animals, and as the cows entered, udders at eye level, they quickly looked for signs of illness and other evidence of malaise. Having washed stray manure from each udder and checked teats for injury, they connected and later detached milking equipment. With man, animal, and machine movement integrated along this constantly moving line, the brothers' labor became vastly more productive than the preceding relationship permitted.

Unless momentarily inconvenienced when a tractor-mounted scraper removed manure from the barn's concrete floor, the Holsteins could stand apart, mix with others, eat a ration delivered to feed bunks by a motor driven auger, or claim a cow-size space where a side and front rail provided a modicum of privacy. Yet in the "free-stall barn," named for the freely entered enclosures, its occupants were far from being free. To allow adult animals to leave that barn at any hour or season would undermine the workplace design by requiring additional labor. This design enabled the Lovendahls to accommodate twice as many cows as its stanchion-equipped predecessor had done. Labor productivity being a modern farming imperative, the advent of free-stall housing shook dairy farming as it had not been shaken since cows were first inseminated artificially some two decades earlier.

Unlike deciding to invest in a free-stall barn, exploring artificial insemination's feasibility risked delayed conception in a few animals. Cows conceived with semen from selected sires having proved superior milk producers, a business could adopt the technique incrementally, consigning males with less compelling semen to slaughter, then sending less productive cows to join them. Building and equipping a free-stall barn, however, required significant capital, and in most instances a substantial mortgage. That investment could jeopardize a business if cows accustomed to having an appropriate ration placed directly before their stanchions should deliver less milk in the more competitive free-stall environment. Nevertheless, possible labor productivity enhancement made a building style unknown in New York State before the 1950s the favorite housing for large herds during the 1960s.

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John Lovendahl initiated nearly three decades of oral history documentation in 1968 when telling his Cornell visitor, "We have been pioneers in group feeding of cows in free-stalls. I might point out that the number of cows per man and the milk sold per man is unusually high. We sell over 700,000 pounds of milk per man annually." The brothers were laboring seventy-five hours or more a week to accomplish this: milking and feeding cows twice daily, growing and harvesting corn and hay in season, removing manure regularly, repairing buildings, while also performing other necessary tasks. Lane, the brothers' single employee, was hired six years earlier—an expense they could barely afford, yet necessary to replace their father's labor. He operated and maintained tractors and other farm equipment.

Four decades before this barn design reduced milk production costs dramatically, poultry producers created an industry by applying Henry Ford's assembly-line concept to egg production. With human and machine movement coordinated in buildings housing 30,000 hens caged in groups of twelve, the birds consumed a ration conveyed to their cages mechanically, while other machines moved eggs to a central location to meet eggs arriving from the other 30,000 bird structures. Hens can repeat a ten-month egg laying cycle after resting, but egg production declines in subsequent cycles; so to keep the assembly line moving, the industry turns them into chicken soup after the initial cycle, then quickly replaces them with younger birds. However, to replace an adult Holstein after the initial milking cycle would be economically prohibitive, given the cow's far longer productive life and greater value. To create assembly-line milk production in the free-stall barn, the Lovendahls needed to reconcile the line's constant movement with the dairy cow's varying milk output and, consequently, their varying nutritional requirements during the milking cycle.

The birth of a calf, an event called "freshening," initiates this cycle, and dairy cows can freshen a dozen times or more; but as with hens, production declines with age, so few cows complete more than five cycles on a modern dairy farm. During the production cycle, the nutritional requirements of hens and cows differ dramatically, however. While a ration formulated for the average egg producer can be nutritionally adequate among genetically similar hens throughout the cycle, one designed for the average milk producer could leave the recently freshened Holstein, then delivering a ton of milk a month, seriously malnourished.

To accommodate the milking cycle's varying nutritional requirements with the assembly line's continuing movement, the Lovendahls divided the herd into four groups, basing each group's composition on current milk output, then supplied an appropriate ration within each group. To keep the assembly line moving, they regrouped the herd a month later, again supplying an appropriate ration for the new stage in the milking cycle. While moving a cow from the highest to the lowest output group during a milking cycle, the brothers avoided using labor to detect readiness to breed and health problems that could be dealt with more productively elsewhere. True to the rural aphorism, "the eye of the master fattens the ox," as John Lovendahl observed, "If you are looking for a cow in heat, you usually go to only two of these groups. Most of your problems of cows under stress would be with the high-producing cows."

Rubber-tired tractors equipped with articulated tools reduced haying time in the 1960s to a fraction of what horse-powered implements and pitchforks required. Yet a protein-rich harvest still needed three days of drying weather, preferably sunshine with a warming breeze, conditions all too infrequent in the Wanase Valley. With variable harvest weather making a nutritionally consistent hay-based ration virtually impossible, and bulky stems and loose leaves making the crop physically incompatible with the labor-saving auger technology propelling the ration to feed bunks, the Lovendahl ration's roughage component consisted of ensilage—an alfalfa and grass mixture, or corn that had been harvested while green and chopped into small pieces mechanically in the field. Housing the ensilage in two vertical silos that overshadowed the barn made the vast hay storage capacity of the nineteenth-century dairy barn unnecessary. Thirty feet in diameter and eighty feet high, each could hold three farm houses stacked one above the other. In a barn resembling an oversized shed, large electric fans along an exterior wall rotated with an industrial cadence to regulate temperature and moisture.

Since bovine udders recharge gradually, the Lovendahls could not move milk from milking parlor to bulk tank with factory-like continuity until a much larger herd would march through the milking parlor three times a day. But in 1968 the Lovendahls were capturing every drop available. With the first cow entering the milking parlor at 4:30 a.m., and every animal having completed a second passage—parlor and equipment had been cleaned by 6 p.m. Few public or private employment agencies connect worker and workplace as effectively as the Lovendahl families maintained the fourteen-hour, seven-day-a-week schedule. "We got every third Sunday off and every other Saturday off," John's wife, Elaine, explained. "Lane and Alex got every other Saturday off, and John got every other Friday off, except, if it was his week to have Sunday off, he took Saturday off and Lane took Friday."

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The mile-long road between John and Elaine's house and the free-stall barn was atypical in the United States—residence, barn, and equipment shed usually being located together. Since early in the twentieth century, when a neighboring farm absorbed the surrounding land and removed accessory buildings, the house dominated its surroundings. Striving for historical authenticity, the couple had carefully restored exterior windows and doors, then carried authenticity inside with appropriate wallpaper and antique furniture. Having planned, painted, and sewn curtains to create the showplace image, Elaine considered the outcome her domain. "The house is mine on decisions, definitely."

Having contributed carpentry and masonry skills to achieve that outcome, in 1968 John Lovendahl was pressing two boys to make their room resemble a *House Beautiful* illustration. Told to shape up beds that rested on bricks, Tom, fifteen, and Bill, thirteen, told their father, "no problem"; but the bricks remained in place while the boys responded to the father's cool rationality, reasoning in return, back and forth, reason for reason. Told to respect parental authority, they questioned parental values, especially their mother's passion for order and cleanliness, values their father supported when changing his clothes in the basement on arriving from the barn. Cathy Lovendahl, twenty-one, and her sister Rachel, sixteen in 1968, had not prepared their parents to expect this challenge to family governance.

Alex, the older brother, and his wife Marie's bungalow-style home reflected the presence of less assertive occupants. Apparently disavowing any inclination to attract attention or dominate its environment, the structure merged with surrounding bushes and trees as if the natural environment had anticipated its arrival. Within, functional furniture, wall coverings, and lighting fixtures maintained the unobtrusive image. A floor-level entryway had been added to the bungalow's initial design—to capture loose dirt and stray manure—but every family activity did not always revolve around cows. When the house had been new, Alex placed baskets of freshly picked apples on the lawn for customers who came there during the daytime and evening.

Neither of the couple's older children were living there when Cornell's oral history team arrived in the summer of 1968: Burton was twenty-five, neither married nor regularly employed, and Doris, two years younger, was married and teaching art in the Wanase Valley High School. Albert, next in age, had just graduated from Cornell University and would marry that summer, then move across the road into the house that his Lovendahl grandparents occupied when he started his apprenticeship in the adjacent barn. Janie, a free-spirited teenage daughter born in 1951, was visibly present in a driftwood and bottle decorated bedroom that prompted her mother's declaration, "I hate the mess." Even Chris, the late child born in 1962, had leeway in his living arrangement. "They more or less chose what they wanted done in their own rooms," Marie Lovendahl observed. "Some of them are pretty wild." While not a wild decorator, Albert regretted having increased his mother's work by neglecting his room. Giving children such latitude being unusual in the Wanase Valley at that time, Marie observed, "Some of my friends probably think I'm crazy that I let them."

As apprentices, John and Alex Lovendahl had seen their father allocate family resources to business components with little consultation with their mother, and as adults they expected to manage the business the same way. Elaine and Marie found this concentration of authority unremarkable when marrying the brothers, having grown up in families where husbands made business decisions and wives helped implement them, while overseeing home and family-related matters. Before allocating resources to a Lovendahl business component—calves, apples, or the alfalfa crop, for instance—John wanted to know what the component was contributing to the bottom line; and to this end, Elaine was recording costs and returns for each component account. When John put thirty gallons of diesel fuel in a tractor, Lane purchased parts to repair a plow, and a veterinarian treated a sick calf, she charged the appropriate accounts. After seeing income outrun costs in account after account, the record keeper declared, "He always knows what he is doing."

A half century earlier, Cornell University agricultural economists participating in a nationwide, land-grant university effort to bring greater economic efficiency to America's numerically predominate but economically backward occupation, asked forty New York farmers known for squeezing impressive quantities of milk from every hour and dollar to submit yearly production cost data. Although not named in Cornell's annual cost account project report, readers could readily determine what their strongest competitors were spending to produce a ton of alfalfa, for example, or a bushel of corn, or to maintain a cow for a year. Then Cooperative Extension's county agents urged farmers with higher costs to enhance labor productivity by adopting land-grant university and USDA recommendations. Elaine considered organizing and submitting Lovendahl business records to this long-standing cost account project time well spent; but if allowed to join the brothers in making business management decisions, she expected to spend it better.

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The Civil War's outcome remained uncertain when a Congress representing only the industrializing North encouraged widespread post-war economic development during the summer of 1862 by authorizing a transcontinental railroad's construction, dedicating much of the middle American frontier to homesteads that would convert lower-value grazing land to agriculture, and underwriting universities that would include agriculture, engineering (then called mechanical arts), and military training in the curriculum. To implement these costly post-war ambitions, it allocated portions of the nation's most valuable resource: the vast public domain then extending across middle America. As farm people, lumber men, and land speculators purchased Morrill Act allotments, at least one university in each state benefited financially, and New York's land-grant university benefited far more than others. Using his Western Union income, Ezra Cornell purchased most of New York's Morrill Act land allotment, then successfully speculated in Wisconsin timberland that the allotment secured, all to the benefit of his university.

In a nation then eighty percent rural, agriculture and farming were virtually synonymous. Farming skills were acquired much as they are today, through apprenticeship, and little public demand existed for higher education in agriculture. Professional opportunities that would await twentieth-century agricultural college graduates—among them, opportunities to supply farm people with equipment, feed, fertilizer, seed, chemicals, and credit; to prepare farm commodities for consumer use; and to implement federal and state health and environmental regulations—were far in the future. Morrill Act support for college education in agriculture represented Congressional homage to America's predominant occupation. Few college students studied that subject before the twentieth century, even with the inducement of free tuition.

After the Civil War, apprentice farmers continued performing diverse tasks under a master's eye, with future business management and ownership in mind. But workers in the nation's proliferating factories now operated machines to increase labor productivity, and doing it without sharing the apprentice farmer's long-term prospects. Those teaching industrial workers to coordinate thought and motion with a machine's movement were largely invisible to the workers and to factory foremen, their immediate instructors. These workplace designers, often faculty members in distant colleges of engineering, were applying scientific principles derived from mathematics and physics to magnify selected worker movements while minimizing unproductive movement.

During the 1880s, a new discipline dedicated to reducing manufacturing costs dramatically emerged in America's flourishing colleges of engineering; as Frederick W. Taylor, scientific management's leading practitioner of rationalized workplaces, announced on his business card: "Systematizing Shop Management and Manufacturing Costs a Specialty." Workplaces designed by Taylor and his professional colleagues soon turned out clothing, household appliances, and other consumer goods, while adding "mass production" to the American language; but without a "mass consumption" counterpart, the enhanced worker productivity would have quickly overloaded company inventories.

Chicago's immensely popular 1893 World Colombian Exposition linked America's post-Civil War scientific and technological accomplishments with a living style called "modern," to boost mass consumption, but its impact was largely limited to urbanizing areas in a country that remained predominantly rural. Pressed by a coalition of social and economic interests united under the Progressive banner, to renew its support for national economic development, the federal government soon brought "modern" living and its mass consumption to the countryside.

Rural Free Delivery, which Congress authorized in 1896, and soon known as RFD, turned rural mailboxes into significant marketplaces. Introduced to the accoutrements of modern living by voluminous catalogues from Sears & Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and other national and regional retailers—that encouraged access through "easy payment," credit-based transactions—rural people consumed mass produced commodities, clothing, patent medicine, household goods, and farm supplies, among many others. Then the federal government made higher education a rural economic development vehicle again by subsidizing agricultural college research in 1887 and agricultural college classroom instruction in 1890—in each case authorizing annual appropriations rather than the Morrill Act's one-time grant. With many states supplementing these federal agricultural college subsidies during the 1890s, often more generously, these colleges quickly expanded a bare bones curriculum by cloning science- and engineering-related disciplines, using a prefix "farm," "rural," or "agricultural" to identify the clone.

The newly minted agricultural economists confused many farm people when they applied industrial concepts to an ancient occupation; for example, when they urged people who were recording debt for horse medicine or hallway carpet in a ledger along with services to others—such as a day's labor—to keep business records. To the agricultural economists, mixing family with business-related matters exhibited a misunderstanding of business that they intended to end. The economist's bottom-line indicator of business profit or loss, "operator's labor income," created further confusion among people who associated "labor" with factory workers or people they employed to supplement their barn and field activities. Crediting one person, the "operator," with income an entire family generated was less controversial—the husband being considered head of the family at the time. Families living comfortably on the difference between receipts and obligations, however, wondered why economists would record the operator's income with red ink. To explain, having counted the going rate of interest on the family's investment in land, buildings, animals, and equipment as an operating cost, the economists asked farm people whether they would expect such compensation upon loaning an equivalent sum to others. Nevertheless farm people, when free of debt, did not readily equate interest they were not paying with lost income.

In a ledger that Cornell's agricultural economists had provided, J. L. Sailor entered "Taking Topsy to horse" on September 2, 1915. Upon repeating the entry on October 29, the New York farmer charged the horse account with four hours of labor, the time required to drive Topsy to the stud and return home. In that year he charged the horse account with 642 hours of labor, largely for feeding horses and cleaning stalls, yet the account balanced after the wheat and corn accounts were charged for the manure's fertilizing value. Labor other family members supplied, often with manure fork in hand, was recorded as "family" and entered in a "personal" account, as though those family members belonged to another organization. In 1915 the Sailor business charged the Sailor family with "1800 quarts of milk, 12 roosters eaten, two hens eaten, and 30 cords of wood." After crediting the family for boarding a hired man and "the operator," Mr. Sailor's personal account lost \$497.65 during that year.

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With man and machine systematically aligned in the milking parlor and feed delivery system, the brothers could have claimed Frederick Taylor's business card by changing "factory and manufacturing" to "farm and farming." As president of the Adams County Farm Bureau, the local branch of the largest U.S. farm organization, John Lovendahl could have introduced himself with the words, "Systematizing Farm Management

and Farming Costs a Specialty.” Like the American Farm Bureau Federation, a long-time political ally of U.S. agricultural colleges, he advocated allowing producer competition to adjust farm commodity production to marketplace demand. Yet the Lovendahl business joined its competitors to sponsor advertising directing the Pepsi Generation to drink more milk.

For the Lovendahl brothers business management was a team activity, with Alex using friendship as aggressively as his brother controlled operating costs. Asked about his most noteworthy contribution to the business, Alex cited maintaining his brother’s friendship, an emotionally challenging aspiration when John was pressing him to uproot his favorite part of the farm, having identified the apple account as the farm’s biggest loser. When ranking his interests, Alex gave business matters a much lower place. “I try to put the family first and perhaps the church second. I think it’s awfully important to spend some time with a child. They don’t want you to be out, especially when they are younger. Never been too active in the Farm Bureau.” However, Alex had joined the governing board of the local Dairy Herd Improvement Association. Probably these long-time friends understood the Lovendahl business better than his wife, Marie.

“Alex did not discuss the farm at home,” Marie reflected after her husband’s death in 1978. “When he was a child, his father used to talk everything over at every meal. Minds would be churning with the meal.” Marie had been disappointed, having expected at the time of her marriage to keep abreast of field and barn activities at mealtime. His father had protected the family, son Albert suggested, by limiting access to potentially disquieting information. “I know he was tired out but I don’t ever remember him bringing the tension into the home and leaving the stress on the rest of the family.”

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“When I get married I want somebody like my father,” seventeen-year-old Janie told her Cornell visitor in 1968. “You know, a lot of kids don’t feel that way any more. They think their fathers are terrible, and I think my father’s great, and my mother both, because they can accept things.” By “things” Janie meant marijuana. “I like it a lot because it opens your mind and you can see things clearly.” With the escalating U.S. military presence in Vietnam in mind, she declared, “I’d give anything to end the war.” Grateful to the father who accepted behavior she considered hippie and enabled her to live close to woods and a river she loved, Janie wanted him to enjoy each day. “My father gets up at 4:30 in the morning and isn’t through working until 6:30 at night, and then sometimes he has to go and check the barn, and that’s awful long hours.”

Volunteering at a daycare center for migrant worker children was unusual in that area, Marie observed. “Of course, I take Chris right with me, and then he gets the experience along with the other kids.” Chris was seven then. “He’s been very sheltered, and it took a little adjusting, but as far as noting any color difference, he didn’t. Children just don’t, apparently, which is great.” Her older children, Burton and Doris, had entered another culture as high school exchange students in Latin America, and in 1968 Alex and Marie were giving a young Latin American student a window into their aspect of American culture. Burton had expected to improve living conditions for third world people as a Peace Corps member, but in 1968 he had been dropped from the Corps, apparently for having openly opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

When speculating about how well an impressive annual income and sizable equity compensated him for milking over 200 cows twice daily, Alex reached no conclusion but he knew that cows must be milked and the business managed. While joining his brother in the milking parlor morning and evening, he was accomplishing both tasks simultaneously: moving cows and equipment to the pulsing beat of the milking facility’s vacuum pump, while resolving critical business issues—dividing farm income among themselves, Lane, and Albert, for example, or discussing ways to stay competitive with Midwestern milk, then entering the New York market. “Hang a microphone over the walkway,” John told a Cornell graduate student who wanted to trace farm management decisions from impetus to implementation.

Addressing these matters in a facility John's wife Elaine did not enter, protected the brothers' business decision prerogative, but her clerking role with the business records provided access to relevant information. "I take messages," she said; "I go on errands. And if somebody wants something looked up, I find it for them just like that." Husband's helper status had given way to part-time employee, but Elaine exceeded her assignment while recording Lovendahl feed, fuel, fertilizer, equipment, building supplies, and other costs. She had compared these figures with those Cornell reported for superior dairy farms and discovered a way to save more than the nickels and dimes she had been garnering by paying bills immediately before interest would be due. Upon asking the brothers to consider her idea, along with Lane's recommendations about farm equipment, she was told unequivocally, "Men run the business."

With her husband and Cornell's oral history visitor present, Elaine asked, "Why should I be kept out by an accident of birth?" Responding quickly to the familiar question, John noted advice that two Cornell farm-management professors provided: letting wives participate in business management could complicate making business decisions through introducing extraneous family-related concerns.

Nevertheless, Alex's wife Marie endorsed the professors' underlying assumption that if given the opportunity, farm wives will divert to home and family resources a business needs to become efficient and profitable. "There were things we wanted for the children and the home—I did, anyway—that we just didn't feel we could afford because we were building up a business. When the children were small, I used to fret and stew and think we should be saving money in a special account for their education. Alex kept saying no, we have to keep reinvesting in the farm because that's our livelihood." Marie remembered setting the family washer's water control at the lowest position. "We did live very close."

"I think the thing Elaine and I used to resent as much as anything was the lack of family time," Marie reflected. "You know, the men worked such long hours that we had very little time off to do things as a family, and this used to bother us." At one time she suspected that Elaine was getting more family time from John than Alex was providing. "Every wife, I think, feels that her husband never gets as much time off as somebody else does."

Yet each Lovendahl family was able to set business aside for a full month every other year, unusual on a farm requiring daily labor. "The big things were our camping trips," Elaine observed. "We always camp; it's cheaper, and besides that we do enjoy it. We could get away. Other people are able to do this if they have really good men. But a lot of farmers just can't get away." Camping together in Yellowstone, Glacier National Park, and Yosemite, and walking the Continental Divide and within the Grand Canyon, had become treasured memories. "You had time for a real vacation," Marie stated, "to really do something with your family. The children remember those trips and those things we did so much. It's something to really look forward to when you think you can have a whole month every other year."

"Totally unnecessary, but it's fun and I enjoy it," Elaine said while distinguishing family vacation time from being county chairwoman for the Western New York Federation of Women's Clubs. "We have lunches and literary teas—that kind of thing." Other personal pleasures included a garden club, an Episcopalian women's group, and a civic club that supported the local library. Then Elaine downplayed a deeply held value when saying, "I would do anything to get out of cleaning the house."

Recalling images of farming entertained before meeting the brothers, Marie remembered surprise upon arriving at the farm from her home near New York City when finding no street lights there. On her part, Elaine had not anticipated farming's appetite for her husband's labor, forty hours a week having usually supported a family in her small Ohio village. The outwardly stable marriage of their husbands' parents, whom they called "Mom and Dad," also surprised Elaine and Marie. Both had come from broken families.

Marie had considered Mom's experience as a farm wife with a critical eye before concluding that farming had been a lengthy disappointment for the former rural school teacher. Mom had expected immersion in a foreign

culture to follow her marriage to the 1910 Cornell civil engineering graduate as he took up a foreign position, according to her daughter-in-law, but deep disappointment followed when Dad changed occupations. Dissolving the marriage having been legally impractical and socially impossible in Adams County at the time, Mom joined Dad on a one hundred twenty-five-acre farm in a house already a half-century old. A bathroom and other amenities soon followed, but Marie suspected that Mom's life as a farm wife rarely proved as satisfying as the life she had envisioned.

Marie learned from a former college roommate, Enid Lovendahl, that Mom's agenda outlived her life on the farm. Her daughter Enid, born midway between the brothers' arrival, opened the door to other cultures that Mom Lovendahl missed and Marie entered vicariously as a migrant child daycare volunteer. After declaring independence from marriage while the mother of three children, Enid had returned to Cornell to acquire a master's degree in education, apparently with parental support. Combining graduate study with child care tested her endurance, Enid told Marie, while insisting that the outcome more than justified the effort as students in France, Bolivia, Indonesia, and Brazil studied the English language under Enid's guidance.

Contrasting Enid's zestful self-direction with her own constraints, Elaine traced her more limited experience to her teenage years. "Liberal arts was accepted for my brothers but not for me." Dismissing insufficient intelligence as the reason, Elaine noted her status as high school salutatorian. Having found nursing, teaching, and office work—the traditional women's occupations—unattractive, Elaine had entered nursing school, but reluctantly. Citing her resulting credential and his wife's homemaker-oriented college curriculum, Alex supported his brother's determination to separate family and business matters. "The women," he said, "aren't equipped to make farm decisions."

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Dad Lovendahl's sense of economic opportunity seemed keen-eyed in 1914. Using a loan from his father, a lumber mill owner, he purchased the Wanase Valley farm when the production cost versus the selling price for farm commodities was highly favorable, a reference point farm people used in later economic downturns when demanding "parity," the relationship existing between 1910 and 1914. World War I European food and fiber shortages enhanced an already flourishing farm economy, and the cost/price relationship improved again when the United States entered that war in 1917. When peace returned, however, the demand for farm commodities contracted abruptly. Five years after Dad entered farming the cost/price relationship had reversed, farms that geared up to enjoy highly favorable prices produced unmarketable surpluses. The nation's rural economy had been depressed nearly a decade when the stock market crashed around urban America in 1929. Then another decade, the one characterized by the Great Depression, would pass before World War II food and natural fiber shortages reinvigorated America's rural economy.

While days and seasons were becoming years of economic adversity, Lovendahl family members applied skill and energy to crop and animal production on one hundred twenty-five fertile Wanase Valley acres, using tools that a few years later would seem rudimentary. John gave his father's contribution to family business survival particular credit. "He was a driver, he was a worker; yeah, a man with a lot of grit and determination." Calling an overheard bank officer's conversation with his father about an overdue loan a pivotal point in his own apprenticeship, John said, "All my life I've been very conscious of debt and being a steward of money."

Yet John Lovendahl misspoke by calling his apprenticeship's location a "typical subsistence farm." Instead of home consumption and neighborly barter sustaining his family through the long Depression, Lovendahl milk, chickens, eggs, apples, beans, and wheat supplied national and international markets, although at low prices, as most U.S. farm produce was doing at that time. While Cornell's agricultural economists reported his father's labor income with red ink, after including a hypothetical return on investment among operating costs, negative labor income was a far lighter economic burden than subsistence farming.

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John first met Elaine at the wedding of a fraternity brother while a Cornell College of Agriculture student, and that encounter precipitated a whirlwind five-month romance, a courtship much too brief for farming's future claim on his waking hours to emerge. Elaine recalled that once married, he introduced that critical aspect of farming cautiously. "We lived in the cabin the first summer we were married." Located near a farm pond, the simple structure had "no running water or electricity, but it was a very, very beautiful place. It was just like a summer-long house party." After John had worked with his father on the farm or on rented land, Elaine recalled ending the day with farming at a distance. "We went down to the river every night swimming and picnicking, and it was just lovely." With winter approaching, the couple moved into the house they bought outright a year later, John using money he had accumulated as a World War II landing craft officer ("He didn't play poker," Elaine observed), and she also helped pay for the house, using an inheritance from her father.

Reflecting upon her initiation into farming, Elaine recalled, "I always had a car to drive. I think that makes a big difference. I was never stuck on the farm. I could just take off and go." While pregnant with Cathy, the couple's first child, playing bridge with women who also expected babies had been a frequent activity. "We compared how much weight we'd gained and that sort of stuff. Our time was our own pretty much. That whole first year on the farm I had no idea of what was going to happen next. I didn't know the difference between hay and straw." Being outdoors with John and driving a tractor had been fun, Elaine remembered, but as the farm claimed her husband's labor and their money, the honeymoon ended.

"I wanted to immediately go ahead and start doing it," Elaine said, "it" being a house restoration plan she had carefully developed. "We had some great old discussions about that, because he needed the money to spend on the farm. We didn't have any kind of furniture. I didn't like that at first, but I certainly came to accept it and to understand the reasons for it." When introducing the young bride to farming, Mom Lovendahl pointed to a treadle sewing machine. "I mended blue jeans that had been there before the war. Quickest way not to spend money, if you mended them."

"Everybody knew her," Elaine said, returning to Mom Lovendahl's impact on her life. "I joined everything too." Giving the Home Bureau special praise, Elaine called the organization a source of many useful home remodeling ideas. "I liked that a lot." Many rural counties in the United States established this component of the land grant university's Cooperative Extension division during the 1920s, once its business-oriented Farm Bureau counterpart was in place. Few women attended Farm Bureau meetings before feminist-generated social ferment undercut the man-in-charge business-management model, but they could pursue home and family-related matters in Home Bureau units, using study guides prepared in colleges of home economics. Cooperative Extension also served rural children of apprenticeship age in 4-H clubs (Head, Heart, Hands, and Health), using gender-specific study guides to separate family and business matters. Before becoming the Adams County Farm Bureau president, John Lovendahl had been a 4-H club leader. Cornell's Cooperative Extension administrators rated him among New York's finest.

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Enid precipitated a courtship approximating John and Elaine's in brevity when introducing her Cornell roommate to her older brother, a 1939 Cornell graduate in agriculture. Alex and Marie chose a wedding date to follow Marie's June 1943 Cornell graduation, but the Japanese government moved it forward by attacking Pearl Harbor. After the ceremony, Marie accompanied her naval officer husband to military assignments throughout the United States, and during that time Burton and Doris were born. "I came home and stayed with Mom and Dad because my mother had other children around and they were alone. It was good that I lived on the farm those times because it showed me what farm life was like. I thought people who farmed couldn't do anything else; you know, the little subsistence farms you have around the suburbs. I never even thought about farming. It was completely out of my world." Those "little farms" had been hobbies or income supplements, not subsistence operations.

Letters Alex posted overseas told Marie that her husband wanted to center his occupational future around apple trees and, upon his discharge, an Adams County fruit grower provided the position he presumably wanted. Nevertheless, Alex stayed there only a year. As Marie explained, that grower wanted a foreman, not the manager who would oversee the apple production's every aspect. When an attractive Cornell Cooperative Extension position opened, Alex pursued another long-standing interest in farm building design and construction, and for two years he told Farm Bureau audiences throughout New York State how Cornell-recommended designs could reduce housing costs for animals, crops, and equipment. Nevertheless, attractive subject matter, alert audiences, and steady pay did not compensate for travel to meetings between Chautauqua County in the west and Suffolk County five-hundred miles to the east. Recalling her time as a single parent coping with three closely spaced children, Marie said, "I think part of it was definitely that he would have more time to spend with his family." Alex readily agreed. "I wanted to get back to the farm."

A lot of friction," John said, summarizing the father-and-son partnership before Alex joined them. "I could have stayed in the Navy. I had a commission, and some of my associates have gone a long way." Whatever the financial considerations, friendship seems to have been a significant reason for expanding the partnership. A family story has the brothers making a cross-continental camping trip in a Model A Ford the year Alex finished college and John high school. While the hundred-dollar travel cost figure may have been embellished, the brothers clearly emerged from that varied adventure as friends.

Without a tragic airplane accident, a third brother, also named Albert Lovendahl, might have saved the Lovendahl family from their occupation's continuity limbo. After his death as a military flight instructor, when the United States was preparing to enter World War II, Alex and John obtained commissions in the Navy, but not, as Elaine pointed out, to avoid the draft. "Their draft board refused to draft them." The farm's crop and animal output justified that exemption.

Before John insisted that the apple orchard leave the farm, Marie's name appeared in the apple account with Elaine's note: "sorting and packing." "Yeah, I enjoyed it," Marie recalled. "I earned some money. It's always fun to have a little extra money you can spend without counting the family dollars. I bought encyclopedias one year and a TV set one year, something we'd wanted but wasn't necessary." Volunteer work at the migrant daycare center, however personally satisfying and welcomed by clients, produced no income. According to Marie, she was thinking about a paying job when Alex said, "Most of your income will go for taxes." He had missed her point, she said.

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In 1960 the Lovendahl business had become a land grant university success story, its 10,000-pound 1948 herd average having reached 13,400 pounds, while 80 hours of labor maintained a cow an entire year, 17 fewer hours than the business consumed in 1952. Equipment accounted for eleven percent of the capital invested, about half of what some competitors were spending—no stereo speakers, captain's chairs or high gloss paint having been charged to the equipment account for recreation or status. While controlling equipment costs in 1968, Lane, the equipment-oriented hired man, expected to extract 10,000 productive hours from a John Deere tractor with 8,000 hours already on its meter. Nevertheless, savings achieved while lowering production costs could not finance a free-stall barn's construction and equipment. Before seeking the sizable mortgage that this would require, the Lovendahls were certain that no combination of crops and animals could approach dairying's economic promise in Adams County.

Dry beans, once profitable with a Cuban market, had become victims of tense U.S.-Cuban relations, and while the valley's former money earner would still flourish there, wheat needed a western acreage and western property taxes to be profitable. Apples, also formerly profitable in the Wanase Valley, presented notable production and marketing constraints. While commercial fertilizer encouraged output, expensive chemicals controlled insects and disease, and considerable labor applied them and pruned excess branches, it was weather condi-

tions that determined crop size and quality. If there were adverse conditions in a flourishing apple growing area, buyer competition might augment the value of the remaining crop, but commercial buyers had left Adams County for more promising areas by the 1960s. Marketing Lovendahl apples directly to customers was not by choice.

In contrast to apple's volatile prospects, a cadre of state and federal employees were establishing milk's price at the bulk tank, and while the systematic supply-and-demand data analysis was inconsistent with John Lovendahl's enthusiasm for aligning supply and demand through producer competition, he explained that milk's highly perishable nature constituted a special situation. Few days had ended before John reminded his brother that the farm's cow and apple accounts were heading in different directions.

Access to land adapted to corn, grass, and legumes limits herd size unless roughage can be hauled a considerable distance at less cost than when grown locally, sometimes the case in the southwestern United States. Probably the Lovendahl partners could acquire additional land from less competitive neighbors in time—barring serious illness or accident, given their physical resources, relevant skills, ambition, stable organization, access to capital, and favorable market—but before that process could unfold, a neighbor's misfortune came to their aid. "He had a fire and lost all his machinery," John observed. "He was not the best farmer. Things went downhill." Moving quickly, the partners displayed their occupation's cannibalistic tendency: "We bought the place within a few days after that."

Another misfortune, this one at the Lovendahl farm, also aided business continuity by extending to business ownership the generational transition already occurring with management. After a tractor overturned with Dad Lovendahl at the controls, Dad withdrew his labor from the business without withdrawing his capital. "He had time to think things over in the hospital," Alex observed. Still in his early sixties, Dad chose to remain in the house he had shared with Mom since changing occupations, thereby turning potential relocation costs into business assets.

To avoid family divisiveness in the event another accident disabled a remaining partner, the brothers turned the Cornell farm management professor's family and business separation advice into a formal agreement. If one partner became incapacitated, Elaine explained, "the other partner would buy him out at a definitely established price that is updated at the first of each year." Although avoiding drawn out estate settlement negotiations, this arrangement left the remaining partner with a sizable problem: where to locate the buy-out money.

Without Dad's labor, the brothers' labor efficiency still equaled that of any participant in Cornell's dairy-farm cost-account study, a remarkable accomplishment since a herd double the Adams County average in size was being housed in two barns located nearly a mile apart. Recounting how he and his brother fed and milked the divided herd, Alex translated the economist's term, "labor efficiency," into "struggling with less help than we needed because we could work harder ourselves." Then, with unproductive motion during fourteen-hour days already limited to travel between the barns, the brothers increased the pace.

Emotional and rational assessment may remain entangled long after fire destroys a barn. If of obsolete design and no livestock and equipment are lost, the owner may suffer little financial loss; and if an obsolete building is well insured, private rejoicing may follow. Yet eight years after fire destroyed a Lovendahl barn, Elaine did not rejoice. "It was August eighteenth. This was a terrible time for the family, let me tell you, because John wouldn't get home until ten o'clock at night. It was just a terrible time." With two cows sharing a stanchion in the remaining barn, the brothers milked half the herd, then replaced those cows and repeated their motions. Nevertheless, John's recollection emphasized the labor-intensive event's financial aftermath. "The fire did not hurt us as much as some might think. Some good neighbors helped us the first day or two, thank goodness. We had pretty good fire insurance. We lost no livestock. Alex is excellent in planning farm buildings, an excellent

contractor was available, and in a matter of six weeks the building was constructed and we were in business again.” Attached to the existing barn, the new building eliminated unproductive travel, and with Lane replacing their father’s labor, the brothers addressed Elaine and Marie’s principle complaint about farming. In 1968 each family was enjoying five days of family time during six consecutive weeks.

Although conveniently located on a one hundred twenty-five acre farm, as that acreage expanded, hauling bulky roughage to the lost barn’s increasingly peripheral location added labor and equipment costs to the alfalfa and corn accounts. Nevertheless, John Lovendahl’s financially focused assessment overlooked apprenticeship’s contribution to business continuity. That facility blended recreation with productive activity. Burton, Doris, and Albert rode tricycles between rows of stanchions while waiting for their father to take a milking break, then supervise feeding the calves penned nearby. Marie often visited the barn at milking time, thereby uniting family and business.

“Even before kindergarten I wanted to be a farmer,” Albert reflected, and older family members confirmed that statement’s accuracy when recalling the small boy’s routine upon arriving home from school: change into coveralls, then head for the barn. Although considerably older than Albert had been at that time, Chris didn’t know much about cows, which troubled his father and embarrassed Chris; but the barn, now almost a mile from the house, lacked the lost barn’s educational facilities. Even if calves were penned there, Alex could not teach his son to feed them until the last cow had marched through the milking parlor three and a half hours after the first one entered. “It’s a problem to lead him into farm work the way I’d like to,” Alex observed.

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Once 125 Lovendahl cows had been housed in a single building, fifty hours of labor maintained a cow an entire year; yet that impressive figure was quickly cut in half by a New York farm that had been replacing labor with technology more rapidly. “We could see that free-stall housing was the coming thing,” John recalled. “A Cornell economist was pushing on us.” Persuaded by the free-stall barn’s labor-saving possibilities, the partners tore out the recently installed stanchions, then made the labor they expected to save productive by nearly doubling the barn’s capacity.

“I thought they were out of their tree!” Elaine exclaimed. “Marie and I both, when they did this huge expansion. I said, ‘Oh, you guys are crazy!’ ” But the New York State Bankers Association did not agree; its publication, based on Cornell cost-account data, *Agricultural Yardsticks: Business and Efficiency Factors That Affect Income On New York Farms*, considered the up-scaling move good business. Many German, English, and Low Country farmers had adopted free-stall housing and farmers in other states as well, but New York’s relatively favorable milk prices had not encouraged farm people to substitute capital for labor this aggressively. Before taking this capital-intensive step, Alex examined free-stall barns located as far away as Michigan to limit risk. “You can discuss it with the farmer or his help,” he observed; “how certain things are working out and observe them.”

Although they were turning calves into heifers at less cost than most participants in Cornell’s cost-account project, the Lovendahls did not install young stock facilities in the free-stall barn. Dismissing insufficient capital as the reason, John said their banker “more or less let us write our own ticket”; but having examined Cornell’s cost-account reports at length, John concluded that focusing every farm resource on milk production would make the business more profitable. With Congressional milk pricing guidelines narrowing the distance between survival and failure at the time, in Adams County alone two hundred dairy farms disappeared between 1959 and 1964. Several friends of Alex’s avoided demise by entering the poultry producer’s path to industrialization. Invited by Alex to specialize in the bovine life cycle’s pre-productive phase, these farmers agreed to a contract that the brothers offered.

While designing the free-stall barn and supervising its construction, Alex did not expect to become a full-time dairy farmer, apples and cows having coexisted on the Lovendahl farm while the herd was expanding to five times its 1948 size. Housed in free stalls instead of stanchions, however, the Holsteins delivered less milk—700 pounds on average—and with red ink looming in the cow account, John suspected a nutritional deficiency. Unable to observe the herd with the care certainty required, and with herd size magnifying a miscalculation's consequence, John pressed his brother to give cows his full attention. Subsequently, both monitored conditions known to affect milk production—humidity and temperature levels, the presence of air currents, the state of hooves, and free-stall comfort-level among them—then discussed these observations and contemplated solutions while milking cows.

Alex remembered conflicting advice: a Pennsylvania State University professor having asserted that twenty percent protein would be sufficient “if we got enough sulfur,” while a feed company salesman insisted that twenty percent protein would only be appropriate if the ration contained alfalfa. Upon finally tracing the lost production to insufficient protein, the brothers realized they had taken cost controls too far; urea, the most economical source of protein, had made the ration unappetizing. “It took us at least two-and-a-half years to shake all these feeding things out and get the herd producing,” John recalled. “We were completely baffled at first, but now it seems like the answers are so simple. In eighteen months we went from a 12,000-pound herd average to a 14,000-pound average.”

What the Lovendahls learned about group feeding at their own expense and considerable risk, other farmers would learn through the agricultural press and university and government publications. Two years would pass before the University of Illinois reported its group feeding research and nearly three before *Hoard's Dairyman*, the preeminent dairy-farm journal, carried comparable information. “It seemed very logical,” John observed, “that cows can be broken up into groups and fed in a bunk.” “Maybe we were going a little bit blind when we started that,” Alex's son Albert reflected. “We just knew it had to work.”

Reflecting on the sources of that confidence, John Lovendahl appeared to recite a passage from *Feeds and Feeding*, the farmers' bible of animal nutrition. “Theoretically, twenty percent protein would work for a cow producing 90 and 100 pounds of milk, if she would eat 40 pounds of grain, but a cow will only eat about 3 percent of her weight in dry matter.” Realizing that theory and practice can diverge as dozens of variables interact, the brothers consulted fellow dairymen and feed suppliers. “He helped us more than anybody,” John stated about Agway's regional field man. This large agricultural cooperative, Adams County's largest protein concentrate supplier, surely noticed the area's proliferating free-stall barns when stationing him there.

At a later time former apprentices from nearby dairy farms would help Albert Lovendahl monitor these conditions, but while such men were being winnowed from these farms as farm consolidation proceeded during the 1960s, they were not available to the brothers. With Lovendahl milk production falling and the apple account losing \$3,000 in a single year, the business could barely afford to employ Lane. Allowing him to purchase repair parts and minor machinery sustained an “equipment manager” image that was part of Lane's compensation. “He's the type of man we like to keep happy on our farm,” John observed.

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Contemplating his age and that of his brother, John anticipated different business ownership. If opened to sale, the farm would have a very limited market, he realized, given the buyer's sizable mortgage and hefty operating expenses that included New York property taxes. Faced with financing a stranger or a family member, Albert's sterling performance as a dairyman supported his claim on designated successor status. Furthermore, while a Cornell student, farming had remained more attractive than the campus controversies that attracted his older brother. As his mother noted, every roommate at Cornell came from Adams County, and throughout those college years Albert's lengthy courtship with an Adams County native was enhancing his ability to reconcile family and business matters.

Margaret Lovendahl remembered meeting Albert at the Adams County Fair while a high school sophomore—"a produce, livestock, and homemaking fair," she said—distinguishing this celebration of rural life and local accomplishment from those captured by carnivals and demolition derbies. Her succinct summary of the courtship, "I dated him for five years and then we were married," reveals the couple's ample opportunity for contemplating how extensively forming a family would require marrying a business. On many dates, as the stranger to farming was getting acquainted with the cows Albert was feeding, the couple contemplated their future as a family while also being integrated into a business in which a father, uncle, and long-term employee were firmly established and a younger brother's future remained unknown. When reconciling family aspirations and interests with these realities seemed especially problematic, Albert recalled having considered the Christian ministry a less demanding career; neither party, he said, questioned the divinity of Jesus. At the time Albert's father and uncle invited him to join the partnership, Albert's wife had observed the farm's operation sufficiently to make his acceptance conditional: her husband must not limit family time to whatever the business leaves unclaimed.

Asked shortly after the wedding about participating in business decisions, Margaret seemed to recite a passage written in stone. "Farming is a man's business. We just weren't intended to be involved. There's really nothing the women can do. The women aren't going to come up and milk the cows, and the women aren't going to decide on the breeding records, and the women aren't going to decide what the farm needs to buy." Having declared certain tasks outside her purview, Margaret identified her future contribution to the business: helping her husband become the best farmer he could be.

Margaret began addressing this task before the wedding, knowing that her father-in-law wanted every Lovendahl and neighbor to know that his star pupil could cope with greater adversity than a familiar herd and familiar people had presented. Alex had an apprenticeship "graduate school" in mind: a large Texas dairy farm with many sick cows, low milk production, a high manure pile, disgruntled employees, and a milk inspector who threatened closure. Yet this sorry business would be a sheltered workshop. Since Alex designed its free-stall barn, his brother understood the conditions his nephew would face as farm manager. Turning it around would bolster Albert's self-confidence and reputation as a superior dairy farmer, yet he would not be blamed if it collapsed. Alex postponed his release from the milking parlor and Albert's fiancée gave up her senior year at college to enable Albert to accept this challenge.

Recalling his "graduate school" experience, Albert said, "I didn't expect what I was going to run into, just out of college. We were just married, went on a one-week honeymoon and drove down in this hundred-degree heat." An 8,000-pound herd average, not close to paying expenses, awaited him along with disgruntled employees, all far from earning their pay. Before ending that year in Texas, Albert had changed every employee. "I learned an awful lot about handling men. I can handle one of these operations myself. I don't have to depend on my dad's or uncle's know-how."

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Two years later, with Christmas four days away in 1970, the brothers were seated in Elaine's living room. Albert and Elaine, a farm appraiser, and an attorney were also there, along with a tape recorder that would preserve the ensuing conversation as oral history. To introduce that record, John said, "We are trying to verse ourselves in what is involved in incorporating the farm. We would like to complete these studies so that we can incorporate at the end of this year." Once legally incorporated, the brothers and Albert would be employees as well as owners and then, if the new corporation owned their houses, heating, maintenance, and taxes on them would become tax-exempt operating expenses. Faced with an attractive tax benefit linked to having three men in charge of her house, Elaine wavered. "That's too big a one to let go by, Elaine," John interjected, "We can't afford to let that one go by." The others chimed in, "pay electricity, the whole thing, fuel, all utilities." "Yeah," Elaine responded, "I understand." Exercising leverage her house co-ownership arrangement provided, Elaine pressed the group to recognize her sons' stake in the business with corporate stock and to legitimize her participation

in management decisions with a single share for herself. Evidently forewarned, the attorney quickly intervened, “I think you should . . .” Checking that peremptory tone, he updated the farm-management professor’s advice to exclude wives from business matters. “You might better give the boys something else other than this. I think you ought to keep this stock within the three of you.”

On January 1, 1971, shares representing the tangible assets of a business named “Indian Bluff Farm”—land, equipment, animals, buildings, but not houses—were divided between the brothers with a single share to Albert, his license to talk business while milking cows. Family and business remained distinct, with the proviso empowering the business to buy a widow’s stock having been carried over from the partnership. Another provision authorized Albert to buy additional shares at opening day value, thereby expediting his route to sole ownership by freeing him from paying for value his skills and energy were expected to add.

Perhaps the brothers could retain Albert’s skill and commitment with a salary or by sharing farm income or by combining these rewards, but by organizing under 1958 Congressional legislation known as Subchapter S—the legal basis for a family corporation having up to ten related stockholders—they obtained a highly attractive benefit: authorization to divide income between salaries and dividends at their discretion. When distributing Indian Bluff Farm income, the brothers could take each stockholder’s financial situation into account along with his contributions to the business, whether actual or anticipated.

Once corporate income was divided three ways, Albert hoped to prevent his father and uncle’s incomes from falling, a goal that would require increasing farm income \$25,000 in a single year. While reaching it would surely claim his full attention in field and barn, Albert was reluctant to jettison a deep-seated personal ambition: to develop a truly superior Holstein through selective breeding—gently disposed, giving twelve tons of milk each year for many years—while transmitting superior genes to future bovine generations. Pursuing both ambitions simultaneously seemed impossible, given his premarital agreement to protect family time.

“I absolutely had a hemorrhage,” Elaine declared when asked to explain the absence of houses among Indian Bluff Farm assets. “If it wasn’t for the way the income tax is set up, we wouldn’t even consider doing this. It just doesn’t seem honest.” Nevertheless, the driver’s seat felt comfortable. “If we can’t come to an agreement, we’ll just have to keep them out of the corporation.” Alex, wary and patient on the house issue, had learned that houses are often the Achilles heel of a family corporation.

After citing their older daughter’s steady progress, elementary school to exemplary Cornell graduate to college librarian, an occupation approaching gender neutrality, Elaine and John attributed this happy sequence to their high expectations and firm discipline. Contrasting these child-rearing practices with Alex and Marie’s laissez faire approach to child development, they attributed Burton’s college radicalism and subsequent drug activity to insufficient discipline. They were avoiding this mistake, they assured their visitor, by grounding their second daughter, Rachel, at home during the coming summer, the high school junior’s 85 grade-point average having fallen below her parents’ expectation.

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Two years later Elaine summarized what high expectations and firm discipline had accomplished. “Bad things have happened.” Rachel had attended Cornell one semester, then busted out and headed west to join cousin Janie on a California commune. “Tom is bad news. Flunking is what he is doing, and last year at this time he was also flunking.” Consistent with the high expectation and firm discipline child-rearing commitment, Elaine and John sent Tom to a military school, supposedly to receive superior remedial education, only to learn that the school’s desperate financial condition accounted for his ready admission. “Tom’s just funny about money,” his mother observed after that episode. “He dropped two thousand dollars for six weeks.”

While feeding cows earned that money, Alex, John, and Albert commended his skill and reliability, yet Tom wanted to operate tractors and field equipment. Lane's labor management style had not changed, however, since it troubled Dad Lovendahl when Tom and Bill were much younger. The brothers seemed to have different people in mind when assessing Lane's contribution to the business, John citing sterling contributions to an efficient profitable operation, and Alex abuse of family members who might someday threaten his authority.

But Elaine's face brightened, when moving the conversation to her appointment as Adams County crew leader for the 1970 U.S. Census. "I really liked that executive bit," she said about this reward for Lovendahl family loyalty to the Republican party. While recounting the census taker training and count supervision experience, Elaine spoke like her husband while describing farm cost control procedures. "We really went ahead, gung ho, and did it. I'm really proud of the job we did." Tom had been at military school during the executive performance. "Those six weeks were just sheer heaven." Elaine's visitor misunderstood; Elaine meant the executive activity, not Tom's absence. Academic difficulties aside, she was proud of boys who started barn chores at 4:30 Saturday morning, skied all day, then returned for evening chores before lounging on her antique furniture. However, a new parental concern had emerged, and to prevent friends of the boys from introducing illegal drugs, Elaine and John were planning a home-based vacation in the coming summer.

"We should be having this idyllic life now that we've got enough money to do things," Elaine observed. "Instead, we've got more problems than ever." Since Tom's military school fiasco, Elaine said nothing about high expectations and firm discipline, speaking instead like President Carter when attributing his faltering administration to widespread cultural malaise. "It's hard for anybody to be sixteen. The times are out of joint, that's all. I mean all of our friends are having the same kinds of problems." Yet knowing that few of those children shared Tom's daily reality, Elaine added, "Tom used to talk very strongly about staying on the farm. John has pointed out to him that you cannot run a farm like this without education, so now he has sort of stopped talking about it. He's kind of dejected right now."

Perhaps prompted by Elaine's glowing account of her census crew-leader experience, Marie reopened the paying job issue with Alex. On this occasion his response ended the discussion. By keeping him productive, he said, her support constituted a significant contribution to family income.

Although John Lovendahl called breeding Holstein heifers to Holstein sires "rationally balancing resources and objectives," his brother resisted that practice. "Our veterinarians are strong proponents of breeding dairy heifers to beef bulls," John granted, since with a smaller calf fewer calving difficulties occur, but dairy characteristics are compromised so the calf becomes veal. To balance resources and objectives, in consultation with his nephew, John supervised inseminating a group of heifers with Holstein semen, recording their size and weight at the time. When subsequent calving difficulties fell within the normal range for heifers of adequate size, he called purchasing herd replacements with less dairy potential than calves from Lovendahl heifers "a terrible crime." His brother was not persuaded. "Alex craves rest," Marie observed.

Over one hundred Indian Bluff Farm heifers had produced Holstein calves when John declared, "That was crazy to throw away those heifer calves. In another year we shouldn't buy any more cattle." His brother had been right about breeding heifers, Alex granted, yet a persistent question underlying the principal business management decision continued to rankle: had the herd expansion that eliminated the apple orchard and stationed him in the milking parlor seven hours a day been necessary? Although his brother's cost-account analysis indicated that the farm would not be highly profitable otherwise, Alex knew that smaller farms could be profitable, if to a lesser degree, without clouding each day with a commanding schedule and industrial atmosphere. Yet Alex also knew that the business crossed farming's Rubicon when investing in the free-stall barn. Recent news of a bankruptcy, at the very farm that initially alerted the brothers to free-stall housing's economic possibilities, had been sobering. Alex readily granted that his brother's whip cracking had avoided that outcome at Indian Bluff Farm.

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A cow account \$40,000 in the black gave John Lovendahl cause for cheer in 1973, yet he would not cheer with Indian Bluff Farm's annual cost for maintaining a cow exceeding that for several dairymen in Cornell's cost-account project. Replacing part of the ration's grain component with grass silage, he reasoned, would bring the figure down, and he anticipated another significant benefit to the business by doing it. "I don't like to see so much open ground on these farms."

Corn plant roots wither after the harvest, leaving the surrounding soil vulnerable to water and wind erosion after frost asserts its loosening power; but secured within the matted roots of alfalfa and grass, these particles stay in place. Furthermore, where both an alfalfa and grass mixture and corn are used for ensilage, the crops can be harvested sequentially, making a harvest amid chilly late autumn wetness less likely. Yet, at the time the corn component was vulnerable to leaf blight in the Wanase Valley. While thinking about driving a hundred miles to get "inside information" from a Cornell plant pathologist, John was wondering what as yet unidentified source of adversity might jeopardize the crop. "It scares you; it makes you wonder about all your eggs in one basket." Clinching his case for deriving Indian Bluff Farm's ensilage from both sources, John added, "The profit on our alfalfa account has been good."

Cornell agronomists were recommending high-moisture corn as a cost effective solution to John's ration component problem; however, this highly nutritious but spoilage-prone blend of kernels and cob, harvested while green, required a costly storage facility. To determine how each alternative would impact the business, John reviewed recent college and proprietary research and the farm's cost-account records, then decided to derive ensilage from both corn and an alfalfa and grass mixture. This solution avoided high-moisture corn's expensive storage facility, extensive worker and task realignment, single-source vulnerability to alien forces, and having so much open ground on the farm. "A neighbor is all corn silage," John observed after implementing that decision. "He was chopping corn three weeks after we were through this fall."

This solution's underlying principle—farm resources become more valuable where mutually supportive—applied to human resources too, John noted. "We brought my nephew in when we were just starting to make money. I feel he is going to be an asset to the business; he is something we shouldn't let go of." Readily agreeing with his brother this time, Alex attributed the farm's 17,000-pound average from 270 cows to his son's "knack" with dairy cows. "I don't know of any herds this size that are producing any better in New York State." Jumping ahead of agricultural college research, Albert had added methionine, an amino acid supplement, to the ration. "It's not proven," he noted, "but it seems to increase production terrifically. Herd health helps too; we know more about ventilation."

Designing a truly superior Holstein had remained Albert's personal goal, and to this end he had been observing daughters of superior bulls in other herds. "I look at some of the daughters and talk with them." Unaware of having attributed human speech to his favorite animal, Albert continued, "The semen market is kind of interesting. It's better than the stock market. If a guy had more time and the extra cash to work with, here's a way to make some extra money." Albert was selling cows to other dairymen for less than their value in the herd to create barn space for his bovine progeny, a counterproductive practice according to his uncle, but one Albert quickly justified by referring to Subchapter S: "Anything distributed would have to be distributed to all three of us, and in income tax my dad and uncle are quite heavy right now."

Albert's equity in the business had increased significantly through purchasing corporate stock at its opening day value. When facing an "if something unfortunate happened to another stockholder" question in 1973, he said, "I could go to the bank and get the financial backing to get the stock over into my name." When the Cornell visitor wondered how Lane felt upon seeing the former apprentice progress to full ownership so rapidly, Alex said, "Oh, Lane would like to be part owner; yes, that's true. It's too bad, perhaps, that we haven't worked him in. We have him on a pension plan and would like to have him feel he is well paid. But I know it's hard for

John's boys to work with Lane. Indian Bluff Farm is a family farm." Denouncing media assertions that outside corporations were absorbing America's family farms, he underscored the vitality of family management and ownership by noting that over ninety percent of the corporations engaged in farming in the United States were organized under Subchapter S.

Margaret intended to keep Indian Bluff Farm a family farm the traditional way when expecting to have "at least one more girl and one boy anyway." Although four children lived in that house with Mom and Dad Lovendahl forty years earlier, Albert and Margaret found the space inadequate for the family they envisioned, and few days ended before they had examined an architect's plan to lift this limitation. Yet unable to afford its implementation and having refused a generous offer from Albert's parents to exchange houses—knowing that Marie liked her home—they could only dream. Yet a year later a spacious kitchen, recreation room, and two bedrooms were added, and Indian Bluff Farm had paid the bill. In the end, Elaine had agreed to make the Lovendahl houses corporate assets. Professing to understand his wife's motivation, John said, "At the end of the year we divide up the inequalities with a monetary fund, and that keeps the women happy."

Home again in 1973, John's daughter Rachel recounted her life in California in terms familiar to young people in the United States at the time: being deeply in debt, having little self-esteem or sense of direction, working for little pay as a nurse's aide. "We got into drugs a lot—heroin. We were really in bad shape." Calling the once glamorous route through life "just disgusting," Rachel stated, "Now I'm clean. I've completely quit because of having found Christ." Thankful to the father and uncle who arranged her rescue, and pleased by the warmth of her reception at home, Rachel noted her pregnant condition. "I feel obliged to make myself as unirritating as possible."

Leading up to reporting an impending divorce from the Vietnam veteran she married in California, Rachel stated, "He hasn't been to college at all. You know, he's blue collar." Prompted by the invidious comment, Elaine started to say, "You're blue collar, too," but instead noted the distance between her daughter's SAT scores and Ivy League material. "I could have made it at Cornell," Rachel responded. "I didn't want to learn what they were dishing out." Turning to her father, she declared, "He wanted us all to be Superman. I mean, my goodness, we are just people. I think we all turned out really well."

That remained an open question for her father. "Quite a trauma," John Lovendahl said, choosing words carefully while recounting his sons' current situation. "Tom has lost interest in school and has vamoosed with Bill and lives around with the neighbors." Without mentioning firm discipline, John focused on a subject his brother had been raising while milking cows. "I think the farm has been a little rough on the boys, there being several bosses to jump on a boy and even the hired man." Things could have been done "a little differently," John granted, and cited his own recent mistake, asking the boys to work on his day off because their labor was especially needed then. But that mistake happened, he quickly noted, before the Highest Authority became his principal guide. "First of all, there is God, second there's country, then comes family, and they are all built on each other."

"I spent all my life going to church and I never really knew what it was about," Alex stated, recounting his own conversion to charismatic Christianity. "We may sound like a bunch of kooks, but it has been one miracle after another in my own family." He had been attending a prayer group with Marie, Alex recalled. "All of a sudden I began to feel that I wanted to speak and said, gee, I'd better go speaking out, and I had this gift of tongues right there. Next day my wife received it." Joining his parents in spiritual rebirth, Burton committed himself to freeing young people from destructive drugs. Janie alone did not become converted. "Pentecostal churches can become quite noisy," Alex observed after departing from a "quite liberal" and "mainly social" church. "Their type of worship is a little hard for me to accept in its entirety." Nevertheless, conversion's happy outcome initiated his brother's search for the gift of tongues. "I think he received it from a Catholic nun," Alex observed.

Crediting his new faith for helping him cope with the farm schedule, Alex referred to “milking three, four hours at a crack. It’s something you face up to and do; it’s a chore.” Performing a detested task seven hours a day to sustain a business other farmers were seeking to emulate seemed paradoxical to his Cornell visitor, but Alex replied, “Well, you have to have a conscience on this. I think everybody would like to get out of milking the cows. You’re pinned right down there; you can’t take a breather. At the same time, I feel the responsibility to do my share.” That share would be lighter, the visitor observed, if Lane shared it. “Now Lane is particularly good with the machinery, so we don’t ask him to milk very much, in fact very little.”

“What do you want to do that for?” was Alex’s response when John told him about intending to seek another term as Adams County Farm Bureau president. Little inclined himself toward public visibility, Alex mentioned family conversation as a favorite cow-free hour activity, along with making wine from a small vineyard, and maintaining longstanding friendships. “I go over and play a little bridge every Monday night with some of the fellows at the village.” Sometimes, when speculating with Marie about why some workers and workplaces fit harmoniously, while others do not, Tom’s situation entered the conversation. Marie recalled having traced Tom’s rejection of established routines to early childhood. “He used to walk from home down to see Grandma when he was a year-and-a-half old. He’d just take off and go.”

The number of farm women challenging the U.S. Census reference to husbands as “head of household” was increasing rapidly when Marie declared, “I feel definitely it’s scriptural, that the man is the head of the home.” She only realized this, Marie added, upon being spiritually reborn. “That a wife must submit to her husband would have thrown me into a tizzy a year ago even.” Yet she was not endorsing old-fashioned patriarchy, Marie insisted. While continuing to say the husband should represent the family to others, she added a qualifier: only after husband and wife reach decisions through discussion, which can be lengthy and heated.

Across the road, family headship had been a non-issue since Albert and Margaret had agreed during their lengthy courtship to consider their contributions to the family equally important. Patient negotiation was resolving family differences, Marie observed, even when a child’s provocative behavior might suggest a spanking. “Margaret can’t stand to hit the children.” When citing her husband’s endearing qualities, Margaret put “infinite patience” first.

Asked to identify the most divisive family issue, Albert replied, “I love working with cows. Even if they were to strike oil on the farm and I didn’t have to work another day in my life, I think I would still have a herd of cows.” Pausing a moment he added, “From my wife’s point of view, you never get enough time off.” But in contrast to his father’s negative view of the farm schedule, Albert credited the “organizing tool” with help in mediating between business and family interests. Margaret could expect him home four days a week after thirteen-and-a-half hours of farm work that began at 4:30 a.m., he said, and on two other days after eight hours. “It’s a lot easier with family relations if you do have a schedule, because your wife knows when you are going to get home.”

In Cornell’s 1973 dairy farm cost-account summary, size and profit rise together. Although another New York farm had climbed higher than Indian Bluff Farm, its \$20,000 higher net income did not shake up the Lovendahl business like free-stall housing’s advent did a decade earlier. To play catch up, Albert said, would involve an unacceptable sacrifice. “Most farms that I have observed, of those that do well, the owner is in there working with the animals.” To keep Indian Bluff Farm competitive, without becoming the full-time manager of a larger work force, Albert intended to reduce operating costs, a difficult goal while simultaneously trying to raise the herd average.

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“Highest in this region.” Alex was repeating an Agway salesman’s statement about Indian Bluff Farm’s 17,775-pound 1975 herd average. Even at a thousand pounds less, the figure would have been impressive, but farm income would have fallen. “We have been fortunate,” Albert observed. “My coming and taking an income

hasn't drawn down the income of the other partners." While veterinary costs were nearly double those for cost-account farms operating in the black, the herd returned a \$71,000 profit. Indian Bluff Farm's competitors shared responsibility for the happy outcome, having manipulated political levers that John Lovendahl would not touch. Milk priced at \$9.00 a hundred pounds was only bringing \$7.50 two years earlier.

Margaret's furniture refinishing hobby—a high school carry over—did not require sizable profit, nor did her emerging interests in cooking and sewing, or her most ambitious project, getting her family to act collectively. Reporting progress there, Margaret said, "The girls help me bake. I hold Milly in one hand, I stir with the other, and Molly holds the bowl. It's like a circus. If I get it done, I feel like I have accomplished something. They have done something with me." Each evening the collective expanded on schedule, one parent reading to Molly, the other keeping track of Milly. Noting the one-year age difference, Albert stated, "This is why after six o'clock until one of them goes to bed, it takes two people."

The family collective ended at the road's edge. "A degree of separation is necessary," Margaret observed, "when you're in partnership with the families involved. Otherwise, you start getting involved in other people's business too much and that isn't good for any business." Realizing that leaving the degree of separation unspecified might imply a sizable gulf, Margaret quickly added, "we are all good friends." Nevertheless, Alex and Marie called ahead before visiting grandchildren, in effect requesting permission to enter the collective. On his part, Albert's brother Chris called Margaret "tight" with her children.

Albert made church attendance a collective activity when he adopted his wife's Catholicism, yet "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" remained his principal guide. "When I'm having trouble, I usually pray and it does good for me." Yet this charismatic Christian had not joined his father and uncle's prayer group. "I think we do have some feeling that we should have our personal lives separated a little bit from theirs." Noting Margaret's simple hobbies and family focus, friends nicknamed her "Old Domestic," yet she readily acknowledged worldly fantasies: "travel, not be afraid of riding in an airplane, be smart, witchy, write a best seller." Asked about her personality's diverging aspects, she said, "I get confused with myself," before adding that she felt fully integrated most of the time. Crediting Albert for this happy situation, Margaret continued, "He's the only person that I've ever been with in my whole life that I could feel like myself around, like I could act myself and feel comfortable, and that's hard when you are me."

"I'm really satisfied with life as it is," Margaret continued. "I'm not under someone's jurisdiction, I can be my own boss." "With the farm schedule organizing your day?" her surprised visitor asked. "Albert never has told me that I have to be here for three meals a day. If you love him, you do these things. I know that makes him happy." Husband and wife were drawing satisfaction from the same source, Margaret observed. "That's why Albert likes working on the farm; he's his own boss."

Yet OPEC was entering the American language at the time. "You don't know if we will be able to have the gas and oil to run the farm," Margaret stated. Although the Oil Producing Exporting Countries increased America's access to petroleum a few months later, the shortage reminded farm people of a frequently overlooked aspect of their occupation: powerful transnational political and economic forces that govern access to vital means of production.

Thorstein Veblen, to many scholars America's premier economist, knew this in the nineteenth century. Foreign and domestic commentators were attributing the rapid transformation of America's Midwestern grazing frontier into farms to the absence of external constraints, but Veblen drew on academic knowledge and hands-on-the-plow experience to call "the farmer his own boss" concept a myth. Unable to find an academic position after receiving the PhD degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1884, the socially inept scholar returned to his earlier occupation. For seven years, the Minnesota farmer found railroads and other large impersonal corporations controlling his access to supplies and services—notably equipment and transportation—while

competitive fellow farmers depressed the selling price of his produce. And at the time he called the farmer's independence a myth, home grown hay and oats—not petroleum—fueled Veblen's horsepower.

While OPEC's petroleum squeeze threatened the farm's operation, Margaret mentioned a group of Americans known for relying on animal power and limiting material possessions. Frustrated at the time by her children's fascination with their playmates' possessions, she said, "I admire the cohesiveness of Amish family life, the way that they transfer their morals and their concepts of value to their family." Asked whether her collective could use the Amish model, Margaret cited an immediate constraint. "You have to have a pretty hard and fast set of rules to live by yourself before you can transmit that to your kids." Furthermore, giving up electric service in the home and tractors on the farm to hold alien behavior at bay seemed excessive. "It's an unusual person that is willing to give up all they have to go live a life like that."

Albert's emergence as Indian Bluff Farm's principal manager freed Elaine and Marie to discuss the parenting each had been observing next door. No longer constrained by business stability concerns, Marie discovered that John and Elaine considered encouraging children to pursue life's possibilities a license for irresponsible behavior, while Elaine learned that her daughter, not the cousins down the road, introduced Tom and Bill to marijuana. That happened while Rachel had been grounded at home for failing to meet parental expectations.

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Reverting to no-nonsense discipline, John Lovendahl declared that "While Tom is in the house, he knows that he will have to toe the line." Tom had enlisted in the U.S. Navy to circumvent promotion requirements at home—without having anticipated military constraints on his freedom of action—and in 1975 he was on "legal hold" in the home of a former landing craft officer. Bill was expected to toe the same line. "I want them up in the morning, and I expect them to use a civil tongue around us and be polite and to do what we ask them to do. I've kicked them both out of the house several times when these things didn't come off."

"I've done a turnabout," Marie stated. Influenced by the impact of Burton's firm "no" on young drug abusers, she said, "I think that children need discipline to learn good work habits." With proper discipline, she suggested, her free-spirited daughter could channel evident artistic ability, then teach art like her sister Doris was doing, instead of doing unskilled work while living at home with a daughter conceived on a California commune. "What about the discipline?" Marie's visitor asked. "As long as any of our children are here, we are going to love them and accept them the way they are."

After many discussions with Alex concerning the physical and psychological costs of accommodating his brother's ambitions, Marie stated, "I wasn't quite sure whether it was worthwhile or not, just staying home and keeping house. If Alex had owned an individual farm, I would have had a much more active part and probably would have learned to keep the books. I think each wife learns to do what she needs to do, and so I think I probably could have." Separating business and family matters, she concluded, limited life's possibilities.

Without doubt, Chris misunderstood Indian Bluff Farm's promotion requirements when telling his mother that, should becoming a professional musician or football player not work out, "I can always come home to the farm if I want." With his farming skills notably inferior to those Tom and Bill acquired long ago, and "corporate employee" age restrictions, Lane's authoritarian presence, and the barn's factory-like atmosphere impeding his apprenticeship, the farm's lawyer warned Alex to follow corporate labor regulations to the letter. Nevertheless, Alex was running interference for his son. "I give him a little pay for it."

Recalling the Cornell professor's advice at an earlier time—to separate business and family matters—John reflected, "It would have been so easy to have family friction just kind of tear this apart. There is a lot less danger of it today than there was two, three years ago." Explaining the threat's demise, he said, "We learned to love each other through Christ. Prayer is the big thing; it cools you off, fills you with love." Elaine agreed, but only

in part. “A husband and wife should pray together, and they should study scripture together. I like it, but I don’t like it as much or as long.” She remembered a Full Gospel Businessmen’s conference where she wanted to shop and visit museums, while John had insisted on attending every session. “He spends a lot of time with the nursing home ministry, which I don’t exactly resent, but then he’s too tired; he doesn’t want to invite people in to play bridge, which I would rather do. Since he’s become a Christian and been reading his Bible, and gets into the part about wives being submissive to their husbands, this I have a little trouble with.”

For Elaine, marriage meant partnership; “I have always thought that way.” “The husband should be the head of the family,” John countered. “I think he should discipline the house.” His list of “things I know I must do” included getting the boys up in the morning, prohibiting Cathy from letting unmarried couples stay in the cabin, and “being in harmony” with his wife—although he anticipated difficulty when harmony required addressing an issue’s emotional aspect. “She thinks I should talk to her more. When she gets angry with me, sometimes I clam up.” But Elaine plumbed harmony’s limits when saying, “I would like to be closer to the decision making at the farm than I’m allowed to be.” “She shouldn’t have a role in the farm business,” John countered; “she is in charge of the house. This house is her personality.” Then John adopted materialism as a cudgel: “I feel that she’s had practically everything she has wanted here.” Clearly reluctant to continue the contentious exchange, Elaine told her visitor, “I’m accepting it as gracefully as possible.”

“I’ve had the whole world against me in some of these things,” John declared, telling his oral history visitor what he had told his wife, while connecting the family headship claim with his pursuit of business profitability. Having cited evidence of success, John bolstered his claim with biblical references. Elaine had also been studying the Bible, however. “She thinks I’ve gone off the deep end in my faith.” Escalating his campaign, John declared, “All right, my wife likes alcohol,” as if this abject behavior required firm discipline.

Elaine pleaded guilty, but to a different charge. Yet conceding to being “a terrific travel bug” prompted John’s statement, “Blowing money on things is an emptiness.” “Had buying television time for the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship been an emptiness?” she asked. “I get great fulfillment out of that.” “Perfectly adequate,” she said, referring to America’s favorite material possession. Eyeing her five-year-old car like Lane assessing a tractor with 8,000 hours on its meter, she said how long she expected to keep it: “As long as possible.”

Yet, having recounted different views about where authority in family and business reside, and described other marital rough spots, still Elaine called her husband “a good guy. It’s very nice being in love with somebody for twenty-seven years.” Searching to explain affection’s triumph over those centrifugal forces, Elaine readily dismissed her visitor’s suggestion about having similar personalities. She liked to have fun, she said, he was “too serious all the time”; she procrastinated, “he goes out and makes things happen”; she had emotional outbursts, he was coolly self-contained. However, Elaine’s claim to being less productive than the superwoman her husband presumably wanted, “He had a wonderful mother,” did not ring true. Mom’s daily agenda included reading *The New York Times* and several magazines, and performing various housekeeping tasks.

Apparently addressing the family headship issue head on, Elaine stated, “I think really I’ve always been submissive,” but with a qualification: “I don’t think of it as being submissive, if you know what I mean.” Apparently, submissive meant being prepared to negotiate a pathway through differences. “John likes fishing and hiking. I’ll go for a hike with him, except he goes so fast I can’t keep up, so then he slows down so I can catch up. Then he will go along with me with things I want to do. I figure it’s about as good as anything going on.” However, once her husband considered a matter settled, negotiation ended. “If I died,” she once said, “he wouldn’t go into a collapse or anything; he wouldn’t choose to.”

Invited to make a wish, John and Elaine both wished to take a boat trip together, while disagreeing about its cost and who would be in charge. “I would take a cruise on the Queen Elizabeth II with my husband,” Elaine stated. “Take Elaine up to North Creek and come down the river in a canoe together,” John replied. When Elaine actually traveled to Israel the following year John, Alex, and Marie went with her; a grand adventure,

according to Marie, but costly to the person who once said, “Our television set is older than Chris. I keep hoping it will break so we can get a color one. We got a new stove because the old one quit after twenty-four years.” Friendship overcame the Lovendahl aversion to spending money without creating something to sell, Marie explained. The farm’s artificial breeding technician was moonlighting as a travel agent and signing up the four people allowed the trip to proceed.

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Greeting her visitor in 1978, Elaine said, “I don’t really know if I want to talk about the boys ‘cause I get so upset”; yet having said that, she continued, “Our boys are both dropouts; they don’t conform. From outward appearances we did all the right things. They never did any homework, the rats. The drugs, that’s all I can pin it on.” Then another tentative assessment followed, again with a skeptical note. “Everything is called ‘dyslexia’ now.” But when linking the boys’ situation with the farm’s operation, Elaine did not equivocate. “By the time Bill was born, we got the other farm and doubled the farm. And then John was very busy. And then we had a fire in 1961, and there was one year after the fire that was just dreadful; it was really terrible.”

While calling the state of Indian Bluff Farm “excellent” in 1978, Alex reported the 18,000-pound herd average and profit approaching six figures with less enthusiasm than an economist might expect. However, he became animated upon citing other evidence of successful farming: “I think we were one of the first ones to get our crops harvested. Through the years we have put in tile drains where we had wet spots in the fields. We were able to go a lot of times when none of the others could.”

“In the last two or three years, a couple of times in the harvest season, or in the planting season, we had a major breakdown,” Alex observed, while explaining how friendship recently compensated for a business-management error. “It’s an awful critical time, and we’ve had to borrow a tractor from the neighbors.” Without labeling Lane’s effort to extract 10,000 productive hours from the John Deere tractor a mistake, he called acquiring an almost factory fresh International tractor after its first owner absorbed the initial depreciation “a very excellent decision.” Explaining how informal neighborhood relationships allowed Lane’s project to exist amid Lovendahl aversion to risk, Elaine said, “Everybody and his brother was using our generator.” When electric supply lines collapsed during the previous winter’s three-day ice storm, this machine powered milking equipment on local farms. “When they got through with it, it went to the next guy and the next guy. They were using it twenty-four hours a day.” Citing this Lovendahl contribution to the mutual support system, she said, “For anybody with many cows, that’s poor management not to have one.”

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Whether formulating a ration, selecting a sire, or identifying the animal most valuable as meat, a dairy cow’s milk output is essential information. Cited in conversation, web site, or publication, a high number authenticated by a milk testing service tells dairy farmers where superior herd replacements can be found; and feed, semen, and dairy service providers are also guided by these reports. After employing the freelance milk tester to reduce authentication costs, the Lovendahls removed their large herd from the Adams County Dairy Herd Improvement Association, thereby leaving the service more costly for its remaining members. That was all right with Elaine. The largest milk marketing cooperative in the Northeast had recently levied a special member assessment to compensate for serving economically marginal farms. “Remember that Dairylea thing?” she asked. “We got out of Dairylea years ago. It was obvious that there was poor management there.”

The Lovendahls also deprived Cooperative Extension of an effective advocate when turning to proprietary suppliers of goods and services for technical information, rather than to its representatives. With herd size also shaping bovine research, Albert was looking beyond Cornell to University of Illinois dairy research, then based on larger herds than Cornell was studying at the time.

Fifty-nine New York State dairy herds contained more than two hundred cows in 1969, but during the next five years, while the state's total dairy farm number declined, herds containing two hundred cows or more became three times more numerous. Needless to say, income did not outpace production costs on every upscaling dairy farm, yet Cornell's survey data confirmed the positive relationship between herd size and profit. In 1978 four-hundred-plus dairy herds were appearing in the state and one was nearly three times more profitable than Indian Bluff Farm.

Rather than respond to the bottom line's affinity for dramatic herd enlargement by following suit, the Lovendahls continued to refine the cost-control strategy they adopted fifteen years earlier. "I've learned how to artificially breed the cattle," Albert announced, a cost cutting accomplishment he readily attributed to farm employees who performed tasks, individually or together, without direct supervision. "Exceptional men," he said, enabled him to take on the new task while continuing to monitor ration content and herd health, and while consulting neighbors, suppliers, and academic specialists. "I think a lot of farmers get mired down where they don't let men make decisions themselves." These former apprentices on nearby farms were gradually becoming specialists under Albert's guidance, while concentrating on tasks located either within or outside the barn. "I've got him trained to do a lot of the work in the barn," Albert said about a recent hire.

One employee continued to work independently. "Most farmers just couldn't stand a man like Lane working for them who would be making his own decisions and wanting to go his own way," Alex observed. While thinking that Lane, a former farmer, was trying to prevent Tom, Bill, and Chris from finding a place within Indian Bluff Farm that he could not attain, Alex echoed his brother's assessment: "Lane has certainly been a large part of our success." That said, he quickly added, "I don't think he really means to be this way."

"I work the same schedule that the men do," Albert stated, while exercising the freedom he presumably enjoyed as his own boss. "It doesn't leave a very good picture for them if I take additional time off while they're working out there. We pretty much stick to the schedule." Scheduling himself for barn duty the previous Christmas day—when his third child, Clarice, was a small baby—had offended his wife. "I was really mad about it," Margaret stated. "With three little children, that's kind of hard. Fortunately, one of the men asked him if he'd switch Christmas and New Year's. It worked out perfectly. The men are very good like this; they help each other out." Her visitor missed an opportunity to ask, "Did you speak with his wife?"

After Janie associated her brother's long hours in the barn, day after day, month after month, with diminishing life's quality in a conversation with her mother, Marie recalled her response: "Anyone who is building a business, whether it's a farm or a business in town, works this kind of hours when they want to achieve." Janie was not persuaded. "What's the use of getting ahead?" she had asked. "That doesn't bring happiness."

Returning to the insufficient family-time issue, Margaret said, "When we were first married, it really used to bug me on his day off, because I wanted to do so many things that I was just miserable, because I didn't know what to do first. It sounds dumb, but we had so much stuff to cram into such a little amount of time. It took me a long time to relax and enjoy a day off. Oh, well, he has tomorrow off and we have thirty things we want to do." Pausing at length, she continued, "I can't say that I've never said to Albert, 'you spend too much time in the barn.' Most of the time it is a situation that he really had to be there, or he's there because something happened. It's not that he's hiding out in the barn. You can't live a farm life without being part of a farm; it's a way of life more than a job, like a doctor, always on call." Asked about the doctor's wife, Margaret said, "I read journals, whatever Albert has around I pick up. I keep informed. I think I do, anyway. I pick up on points he might not pick up, to have something he can use. In a business like a farm, it's something that's going on all the time, and something that's alive that you have to talk about. If I didn't know anything about it, I think we would run out of conversation." With Albert's truly superior Holstein apparently approaching realization, Margaret had stopped subtracting Albert's unscheduled insemination trips to the barn from family time.

“There isn’t much we don’t talk about to each other,” Albert agreed, emphasizing “each other.” “Margaret is very careful. She doesn’t involve herself talking to Dad or John.” Nor did she talk with the exceptional employees about their work. “Even if I were the sole owner, there’s a lot of men that would take resentment if women are telling them what to be doing.”

A friend had told Margaret about selling a bull to an artificial breeding service for a “fantastic” sum when she said, “If that ever happened here, I imagine that they’d have a way of taking care of something like that.” Having called that decision one for others to make, Margaret reflected about her state of mind: “I don’t usually think like this, but I was wondering the other day what I would do if I never married and had all the children. I think I’d be in the same frame of mind, because there are so many interesting things to do and to think about.” Stopping abruptly, she said, “I don’t like to think about it.” Yet she did. “I wish he had longer vacations.”

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Elaine had been playing *Marriage Encounter*, a board game popular in the United States during the 1970s, with her husband when she said, “We thought this was just terrific.” Learning during play that he wanted his leadership in the business acknowledged with greater enthusiasm, Elaine called him “a very big pusher.” Because of him, she told her Cornell visitor, others “really get out there and get it done.” Magnifying that praise with self-criticism, Elaine added, “I’d never do that. I will put everything off until tomorrow.” Thinking that the game may have encouraged reciprocity, the visitor asked John whether he considered emotional expression legitimate communication. His response, “a little bit,” led to conceding that perhaps he had neglected his family. But instead of welcoming that conciliatory statement with a grateful “at last,” Elaine kept the ball in play. Her automobile dealer father had neglected his family evenings and weekends, she recalled, while selling cars. “A car doesn’t have to be milked. You know, the cars aren’t going to be ruined.”

Then it was John’s turn: “She is a very intelligent woman. She has a good business mind. I don’t want to force my attitude on her, but the way the business is arranged, the three men are the directors.” Returning to the farm’s condition at the time he pressed his brother to remove the apple orchard, then give cows his full attention, John declared, “Giving on some things could open up a hornet’s nest of things, and then it overwhelms you.” Finding her participation in business decisions firmly barred, Elaine trumped her earlier efforts at reciprocity. “That’s just not my department, and I’m not concerned about it now.”

But instead of responding to that surely difficult concession by dropping his family headship campaign, John resurrected the materialism lever. “She is going to have to get her eye off the material things. She has all the material things anyone could ever ask for.” Joining the local Al Anon group, which in rural Adams County was not very anonymous, had made Elaine’s occasional alcoholic drink campaign fodder. “I just feel the whole neighborhood is in it with me,” John declared.

Yet, when offered the position in the family that his brother coveted, Alex rejected Marie’s endorsement. Concentrating authority in a family business this way, he said, could jeopardize business continuity, a lesson he had learned the hard way, Alex observed. But upon attributing Burton’s lengthy rebellion to his forceful criticism of his son’s apprenticeship, Marie interjected, “One expects more of the oldest child.” Alex would not be diverted. “All the time now I’m catching myself being too critical of Chris.”

“It should work out.” Alex referred to a nearby situation and a neighbor’s request for advice concerning a son he had forcefully criticized as an apprentice, but now wanted as a business partner. They must stop “throwing bricks at each other,” Alex observed, and concentrate on “the goodness in each other,” adding that of course the father must consult the son when making business decisions. But Marie considered that advice inadequate. A woman, she said, who is wife to one member of the proposed partnership and mother to the other, held the key to the desired arrangement. She sent a message that husband and son could not ignore, Marie pointed out, when taking a job where her work would be appreciated, when her labor was needed on the farm. Father and

son must address her deeply felt grievance, Marie observed, before the partnership could proceed. Calling production-based practices “gimmicks,” when addressing Indian Bluff Farm employee compensation practices, Alex said, “Lots of farmers pay their help a certain percentage of the milk check or something like that. In a bad year employees suffer; at other times they are going to get too much.” The compensation problem is more complicated, he said. “You’ve got to be interested in the employee’s welfare and family and show that you are concerned.” As to the monetary component, “John always says, ‘Put them down, Alex—what you think they ought to be,’ and then I’ll put them down and we discuss it from there. We aren’t paying each other equally. I just can’t do the work any more, and John has not been able to put in the hundred percent time either.” Albert alone was being paid for the labor and management he provided, and for what he was expected to provide in the future. “We want Albert to have a real good salary so he can buy into this thing. It doesn’t do us any good if we pinch him.”

Elaine responded to that compensation formula by asking Alex whether Albert’s actual and expected contributions to the business exceeded those of the farm’s former linchpin; and to clinch her case for rewarding past and future contributions alike, she denied that her husband’s farm time had decreased. When recounting his sister-in-law’s appeal, Alex stated, “There is no way to work it out mathematically that I can see. You just have to sit down with what you think is right.”

Hoping to enable Tom, Bill, and Chris to remain at Indian Bluff Farm as adults, Marie pointed to a nearby farm where three boys and their parents seemed entirely satisfied with a partnership agreement. Nevertheless, Alex readily dismissed this business as an Indian Bluff Farm continuity model. “Let’s face it; they can’t all stay there. There isn’t room for them. I don’t care what kind of a farm it is. Eventually, some of those boys are going to have to go unless he buys other farms for them.” Alex was expecting Marie’s model family to depend on farm income alone, although farm numbers would have plummeted far more rapidly in the United States if farm families were actually doing this. At the time, farm family income from other sources in the United States approximated that from raising and marketing crops and animals.

Asked whether Indian Bluff Farm could accommodate more family members, Alex replied, “definitely. Go to school and study, work along the same pattern Albert did, maybe work away from here for a year or two.” This reminded Marie of a conversation that occurred while the Lovendahl families celebrated the previous Christmas: that implementing this business continuity scenario would be difficult. Tom had been admiring Albert’s ability as a farmer, Marie recalled, when Alex’s sister Enid interjected, “If you want to be like that, the first thing you’ve got to do is go back and finish school and go to college and get the training to do it.” Tom, in turn, guided the conversation to a more likely possibility: a forthcoming trip to the Rocky Mountains in his van.

After talking with Janie at greater length about formal education’s relation to personal happiness, Marie doubted that a relationship existed, yet she still associated happiness with productive activity. “I do think it brings happiness when you feel you are doing a job well.” Tom could enjoy staying at Indian Bluff Farm, Marie suggested, if he would “settle down and work,” although knowing that repeating the same task on schedule was not Tom’s idea of happiness. On his part, Alex expected Tom’s diverse interests and Indian Bluff Farm’s industrial practices to be reconciled, given the ability of farm families to lift obstacles to each generation’s advancement. “Certainly a farmer should be able to cope with them better than most people.” With those words, Alex Lovendahl ended his contribution to Cornell’s oral history inquiry into how farm families make decisions. When its representatives returned two years later cancer had taken its toll.

Shortly before his father’s death, Chris said, “If I’m really in trouble, he’s the guy who helps me out.” As an example, he remembered being thoroughly soaked in a water fight with other Indian Bluff employees and being discouraged about finding a permanent place among them. His father urged the fourteen-year-old apprentice to take the buffeting in good spirit. Being reminded that the farm’s operation depended on each attacker, Chris had questioned the value of his own contribution to the business. “Sure, it’s quite important,” his teacher had

assured him. “It’s the way you grow up into life. You’ve got to start small and get big.” With that advice in mind, Chris said, “I think I might get into milking more, try to force myself into it.”

Expressing surprise and mild amusement, Alex recounted his inquiry about retirement benefits at the Adams County Social Security office. Told he could not participate in business decisions as a beneficiary, Alex suspected that this federal regulation was written by people unacquainted with farming. “I’m certain,” he said about his son and brother, “they are going to respect what I think.” Nevertheless, the Social Security benefits let Alex leave the milking parlor, his dignity intact. Constant motion while milking had been aggravating a condition he was attributing to a hernia. “I hope this will calm down so I can do more.”

During that final conversation, his oral history visitor asked whether removing the apple orchard decades earlier had been a mistake. After chiding the graduate student for trying to compress a highly complex situation into a categorical assessment, Alex referred to a nearby farmer who also entered the 1960s with both dairy herd and apple orchard. Instead of concentrating the farm’s resources on cows, this farmer had expanded both herd and orchard. “He’s not being near as profitable as he should be,” Alex observed. “He should be getting right out of that fruit and running after his dairy. He doesn’t have enough records or enough sense to realize it.”

In 1978, Bill’s relationship with Indian Bluff Farm remained tenuous. He had coped with mental depression through a seemingly endless winter, his father reported, but after farming’s slowest season ended, he had become a valued worker on a neighboring farm. Another difficult winter later, he had returned to Indian Bluff Farm. At that time, Albert noticed that he rarely found Chris where Bill was working. Addressing bullying behavior that Bill mastered under the tutelage of Lane, the farm’s long-serving employee, John cited Al Anon doctrine. “Only Bill can do anything about these things.” Alex, however, favored a collective response: “We all tried our best to help.”

Albert having been among those helpers, Elaine may have been saying thank you when telling him, “Your vet bills are absolutely outrageous.” Those words had been collegial banter, she assured her visitor. “High-producing cows take a lot more care. It does cost more for the vet, but you still end up with more profit in the long run.” Further endorsing Albert’s management practices, Elaine suddenly asked, “Have you heard about the champion cow?” Doubly pleased about her nephew’s accomplishment, Elaine reported a neighborhood party that Indian Bluff Farm sponsored to celebrate. “Albert’s mellowed things. It’s a lot easier for us to spend money.” Continuing to applaud Albert, Elaine noted that he created the champion cow while handicapped by Margaret’s demands on his time. “He does have a real conflict with his family life.” As Elaine saw it, by being unwilling to help Albert operate the business, Margaret had infringed on his ability to meet farm and personal needs; but if Elaine had known her niece’s actual contributions, she might have said that anyhow. Albert, she thought, was “getting a lot more time with his family than John did when he was that age.” Could jealousy be operating here, her visitor asked? “I am jealous at times.”

Shortly before her brother-in-law’s death, Elaine said, “If something happens to Alex, his stock would have to be sold to John and Albert. I don’t think that is too realistic, because where are you going to come up with that kind of money?” Since Elaine knew that Albert’s ownership-transition inquiry at a local bank had been positive, the rhetorical question signaled that negotiations were underway to settle that estate within the family.

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“I’m much more upbeat than I was the last time you were here,” Elaine greeted Cornell’s oral history team in 1980. Agonizing about the character and duration of her boys’ connection with Indian Bluff Farm had ended when the three families were gathered to celebrate the previous Christmas. At that occasion, Tom and Bill announced that any future employment there would be short term. “They just don’t want to work that hard. Most people don’t. I think it’s more unusual to find someone who’s willing to work sixty-hour weeks as a regular thing.” Although clearly inconsistent with the boys’ well-documented skills and ambition, Elaine maintained

the upbeat theme. Quickly turning to Bill's recent marriage, she expressed affection for the young woman who had helped him sort through conflicting ideas about Indian Bluff Farm. On that day, Rachel's young daughter played at Elaine's side while Rachel attended community college classes that would lead to nursing credentials. Elaine's family time had also increased as Tom's recent work at Indian Bluff Farm replaced much of his father's labor. "We've had a happy time."

John picked up that theme: "We brought the heifers home." Housing and feeding young stock through contracted arrangements had become so costly that no profit remained, even for heifers sold at top market price. But when housed in a shed-like building that Alex designed, these costs fell below those incurred by New York dairy farms that were housing calves individually in hutches that resemble a child's playhouse.

This kind of housing avoids a disease epidemic while increasing costs attributable to feeding animals and cleaning pens; yet Indian Bluff Farm's skilled committed employees lost only two calves the previous year—a low figure, even among hutch users. Friendship augmented cost concerns when deciding to bring the young stock home. The contracting families "weren't making a good income," Albert stated. "It wasn't a big enough business for two families." To allow that arrangement to spiral downward, he said, would have threatened "a real good relationship."

Integrating young stock into the farm's operation required task and worker realignment. One herdsman took over the task Albert sometimes performed on family time, after completing an artificial breeding course at company expense. The other herdsman, Albert noted, "needs to find the area of his expertise that he can take care of, the thing that he can excel in." Albert was less indulgent when making his own assignments. "I've got to force myself to get more into the field work, and more into the book work of the farm, and then the tax work. Now I've got to kick myself in the tail to get on some of the rest of this."

"It's probably crossed my mind." Albert had been asked whether access to Indian Bluff Farm stock might persuade some "exceptional men" to take over his less attractive tasks. "It's pretty hard to get into something like that without developing jealousies among the men." Nevertheless, he had watched another Adams County farm do this in order to retain valued employees. "They've done exceptionally well with it. That is probably the main reason it has crossed my mind. I've got to wait to see what Chris wants to do."

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Since inadequate business records can make estate settlement difficult and expensive, John happily noted that lawyers and accountants had fully endorsed Indian Bluff Farm's record-keeping system. "The settlement of Alex's estate went through without a hitch. We had an outside appraisal, and it set the price of the stock as of the day of his death. We are buying the stock over a fifteen-year period." Albert had acquired one-third of the corporation's stock at opening day value at that time, and, given his uncle's agreement to sell two shares each year, he would own two-thirds of the business when John Lovendahl reached sixty-five. For the retiring generation, agreeing to withdraw from ownership, however slowly, had been difficult. To explain the reluctance to divest, John adopted the perspective of the person pushing the business toward notable financial success. "Maybe he thinks he is still in the glory of his younger years," John observed.

"I would really like to see Chris come back," Albert ventured, but with a qualifying note that resembled his father's statement about his own apprenticeship. "I really want him to make a choice from a strong position. I want him to be able to know that Chris Lovendahl has abilities and Chris Lovendahl can do things." With these promotion guidelines in mind, Chris was arriving at his father's former work station each weekend. "Usually I milk from four-thirty to eight o'clock and from quarter to two to six" While neither teacher nor apprentice was satisfied, Albert would not inform the exceptional men that kinship trumps merit. "Maybe I'm a little too tough with him," Albert observed, using the words his father applied to his own situation. "Of course, I'm extremely particular how things are taken care of. Sometimes it's hard to strike the balance that you should."

“I really want to farm, I think,” Chris told his visitor, but rather than let “I think” convey serious doubt he added, “In the springtime, I don’t go out for any sports and after school I come up and help.” If pursuing a distasteful job diligently did not open the management and ownership door at Indian Bluff Farm, Chris expected to generate a useful credential when seeking other employment. Paraphrasing his father’s words, Chris spoke about sticking with the distasteful task. “You can’t call in and say ‘I can’t milk.’ Everybody that does their job gets sick of it after a while.”

Not everyone, actually. With his Uncle John in mind, Chris added, “I think that he enjoys it so much he will never quit. He’s just like my grandfather. He’s always got to be doing something.” Although Dad Lovendahl died shortly after Chris was born, his reputation lived on. “I wish I was like that. Sometimes I’m dead.” His uncle’s endearing reference to the farm’s employees—“We love these guys just like they are our own”—reminded Chris to stay focused, and he had probably heard his brother repeat what Albert told his Cornell visitor: “I think we probably would like to have a son to carry on the farm.” Challenged at the time about limiting successor status to sons, Albert agreed that a daughter might suffice, “if she finds a farm boy who might be interested in coming in.” On overhearing that statement, his seven-year-old daughter, Molly, had been disappointed, having expected to become a farmer on her own merit. “If I can’t be a farmer, I’m gonna’ be president,” she declared.

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Understandably, Elaine’s upbeat family account omitted Bill’s lodgment in the Adams County Jail. John reported that event and its immediate cause—a physical altercation between himself and his son—and without prompting referred to the underlying cause his brother had often mentioned while milking cows. “I know Lane’s hurt the boys terribly.” He had also hurt his son, John added, through an effort to help him: “I set up some farm wages for Bill. Alex and Marie objected. Of course, I should have gone to Alex first and gotten approval. It never should have reached Bill. I should have paid him out of my own pocket.” Nevertheless, a silver lining emerged around Bill’s situation, one John had seen when other clouds darkened the Lovendahl horizon. “If it weren’t for the problems of these kids, I don’t think I’d ever have become a Christian and gotten my life straightened out. It’s hardship and battles that make people.”

Elaine preferred to “make” people at the yacht club, preferably while playing bridge. “I’m just sorry that our kids don’t feel this way. That’s the part where I feel I’m a real failure.” Yet Elaine had reason to feel vindicated, having encouraged her children to support each other through adversity. Rachel had been living with Cathy while attending nursing school, and upon his release from jail, Bill joined them—and then got the haircut he had resisted at home.

Warm sunshine announced Spring’s arrival in 1980, when John told his Cornell visitor, “Cathy and I hiked down the Grand Canyon last spring. She’s coming tomorrow and we are going to canoe the river together. I like that. We did a lot of those things when the kids were young.” Accounting for this recovery of yesterday’s pleasures, John stated, “I do a lot less telling members of my family what to do or trying to dominate them.” Dominating Cathy had been difficult in any case, given her tenure-track position in a large academic library. Cathy had reminded her mother that financial independence gives gender equality a solid foundation; but, she had responded: “I’m not a middle-aged career woman.” “It’s nice to have money,” Elaine continued. “I wouldn’t want to live the way Bill does. I just wouldn’t. I get very upset just thinking about it.” Yet Elaine did not dismiss her son’s concern about letting money replace other values. “Money,” she granted, “can lead to a bunch of silly things.”

“I don’t think Alex was able to function as sharply as he would have otherwise,” Elaine reflected after his death. Whether an unnecessarily high estate tax had been due to poor health or indifference about money, she expected to avoid its repetition. “John gave me \$100,000 last year,” a division of income Elaine called “plain good business.” Tax experts at a Cornell estate planning seminar had recommended balancing equity between husband and wife to reduce estate tax liability.

Estate planning usually occurs earlier in life where apprenticeship, courtship, management, and ownership constitute an occupational ladder to full membership, as Albert demonstrated when saying, “I think we probably would like to have a son to carry on the farm.” Middle generation efforts to reconcile the next Lovendahl generation’s skills and interests with Indian Bluff Farm’s quasi-industrial practices also constituted estate planning. “Estate planning, that’s an emotional thing,” John observed, after limiting his withdrawal from ownership to two shares a year at age fifty-eight. “I used to think that retirement would be great,” Elaine observed. “Now I say, ‘oh heck,’ it’s good this way because John likes it.”

Asked about retirement’s best feature, Marie stated, “I just don’t like having to be scheduled anymore,” then added her enjoyment upon meeting others purely for fellowship. “Nobody’s trying to get power, and nobody’s trying to manage anybody else, and there’s just an easy flow and it’s fun.” Racquetball—her notable indulgence as a farm wife—had joined tennis, and quilting—formerly casual—had become serious. “I just finished my first big quilt, my pride and joy.” But Marie’s retirement was incomplete while her youngest child’s future in the business remained in doubt. “Mothers want to be the good guys and have their kids like them,” she said, a reference to directing Chris toward the milking parlor in early morning darkness. “It’s really very difficult when they have to impose the discipline.” Yet, Elaine declared, “Marie isn’t involved in farming at all and never has been.”

Elaine’s statement fitted the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. agricultural college’s business-management model. But this entrepreneurial understanding of family and business relationships was being challenged by more complex family-and-business relationship accounts appearing in newspaper and magazine articles, as well as books by Willa Cather, Marie Sandoz, and other popular authors. Faced with numerous stories representing the family business as a single multi-faceted organization, the government agencies acknowledged that on small-scale farms, where family members provide at least half the labor utilized, family and business matters may be integrated. Recognizing those as “family farms” limited management participation by women and children to economically insignificant operations, thus leaving the entrepreneurial management model relevant to larger, economically significant operations. Given the government agency family-labor requirement, Indian Bluff Farm lost family-farm status long before Alex Lovendahl applied that term in 1978.

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“It was close.” In 1982 John Lovendahl recalled a disaster at Indian Bluff Farm that could have been worse. “I’m convinced He spared us. The odds are too great the other way.” A massive silo’s collapse had turned the section of the barn where Albert, two employees, and sixty cows had been a few moments earlier into twisted steel and scrap lumber. Half the silo’s content had been destroyed, and the remainder was subject to loss unless quickly rehoused. John remembered neighbors arriving with shovels and other equipment. Joined by the farm’s employees, they had been surveying the wreckage and wondering how to save the remaining silage while feeding and milking over two hundred cows, when an insurance adjuster arrived to announce that the damage was not covered.

Margaret was telling her oral history visitor about her husband’s happy occupational attachment, when that devastating event entered the conversation. “He never, never complains. Maybe once, twice a year he will come in discouraged, like when the silo fell on top of the barn. He came in and sat down to breakfast. I looked in the door and I said, ‘What’s the matter?’ because I could see there was something wrong in his face. He didn’t say anything. He sat down and ate his breakfast, and then he said the silo fell on top of the barn. I didn’t even get excited, because I thought it must have been minimal damage. ‘Course he was almost killed in there. He was trapped inside the barn. That kind of got him down that day for quite a while.”

Like the farmer in the film *Country*, facing a tornado and mentioning a breeze, and Ole Rolvaag’s literary protagonist, facing a devastating blizzard with equanimity in *Giants in the Earth*, Albert approached decisions

with far-reaching consequences under crisis conditions with cool deliberation. “We had to decide what to do with those cows,” he recalled. “We had to dry off a lot of the cows that were still milking well, and we had to make a lot of culling decisions. We had to decide what to do with our silage. We knew we didn’t want to take it very far, and we wanted to get it done in a hurry. We had probably a hundred neighbors that showed up working with hand tools, and women showed up to prepare food for the people that were working. One brought a bulldozer and others came with bucket loaders. Another had a place to put the silage. The men we have on our farm worked extremely long hours.” Asked about overtime pay, he said, “they absolutely refused.”

Albert raised the responsibility issue without prompting. “I wasn’t really worried about it structurally failing. We had never heard of it happening.” Yet the ensilage’s acidic content had been eroding the silo’s foundation. “We had some blocks that were in bad shape on the bottom of the silo. I did try to get a hold of a man on repairing, but we got it emptied out two days before we had to start filling it again.” “Had to” referred to farm income. “The way you put those forages up affects your production, everything for the next year.” Yet that silo’s collapse was not truly accidental, John noted. “It was about fifteen years ago that they started building silos of the magnitude of this one. Now they are starting to fail.”

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Computer technology was impacting almost every American business when Chris identified his passport into a future at Indian Bluff Farm. “John, my dad, Albert each brought a specialty,” he explained in 1982. After his apprenticeship, Chris expected to study computing fundamentals at a two-year college, apply his specialty outside Adams County, then await Elaine’s retirement and a paying opportunity at home. However, Chris qualified his commitment to this scenario. Apprentices on a nearby farm were moving up occupationally without becoming specialists. “They have two brothers, the father, a younger boy, and two sisters, and they are all involved. They do excellent work. I can see a lot of success come out of that farm.”

“I’m very happy about Bill,” John stated soon after returning with Elaine from visiting him at an Arizona dairy farm. Clearly feeling vindicated, he had acted as head of the family when exiling his son to this farm. “It was a good dose of tough love. I think that’s what he needed. It was awfully hard for Elaine to accept it.” Elaine gave the visit a mixed review, however: delighted, on one hand, to find her son physically and mentally healthy, yet disturbed, on the other, by seeing his apprenticeship go awry. “It was a nice sort of a family feeling,” she said about that business, “but I’m used to a very efficiently run operation, and I don’t think that it was very efficient at all.”

“Tom’s very capable; he does good work,” his father observed about the full-time carpenter, who was building a new house in 1982. But with few house starts occurring in Adams County, Tom’s next job was unclear. “It’s been kind of slim picking this winter,” John Lovendahl stated. In a whimsical conversation with his mother, Tom had referred to a few animals he was keeping for recreation as his farm. Subsequently, Elaine reported this conversation to Albert, who entered its substance into the oral history record somewhat testily. “It’s a tough situation, but they have made their own choices; it’s not like they were invalids or something.”

For Albert, being in step with other large-scale, Wanase Valley dairy farmers, a group he called his “community,” was replacing his uncle’s production cost-reducing goal. Opportunities to compare dairying practices and outcomes had become the local Holstein Club’s main attraction, he said; “There is quite a close association, trading back and forth of ideas and management techniques.” Rather than be praised as agricultural college innovator for adopting new technology and practices quickly, he said, “You kind of measure yourself on what has been done. I don’t think you need to move tremendously fast on new information,” whether coming from a magazine article, advertisement, salesperson, or college professor. “You don’t want to believe what you hear or half of what you read. You kind of work things over in your mind and then discuss them with friends or other farmers. Some mistakes won’t show up until you start comparing.”

Since this community extended the pedagogy underlying Cornell's cost-account project to whatever a member would show or tell, Albert felt that Indian Bluff Farm employees were properly compensated. Furthermore, milk had flowed almost continuously at Indian Bluff Farm since he compared twice daily milking costs and returns with a community member's three times daily milking numbers. With the first cow entering the milking facility at 4:30 a.m. and the last completing a third passage at 12:30 a.m., he called the new practice "a way of expanding the business without having to put up buildings or purchase cows." His nephew was exercising foresight rather than correcting a weak bottom line, according to John Lovendahl. He called the previous year at Indian Bluff Farm "the best financially the farm has ever had—head and shoulders above any year we have ever had."

"An awful lot of people" associated speeding up the milk production with bovine burn out, Albert explained. To compensate Indian Bluff Farm cows for delivering more milk each day, he had reformulated their rations and was ready to repeat the reformulation. If necessary, he was prepared to trade fewer years in the herd for more milk in the tank. "I feel there is going to be more production per cow before she leaves the herd, doing it this way."

Still, Albert's income would not have approached \$100,000 if two people continued to separate udders and milking equipment. Sensor-activated disconnecting devices had been available for a decade but, following his own advice, Albert had approached their adoption cautiously. "It took us quite a period to want to put one man in the parlor. We found it quite stressful for one person, and when we have an unruly animal, we like to have two people in there." Nevertheless, after having compared one- and two-person milking parlor operator costs and outcomes within his community, "We got over that idea and got involved. It has worked quite well. I feel sure that one can do this as long as it's the right person." Surely, his visitor suggested, positioning animals for milking while excluding those under antibiotic treatment, observing each animal for injury and other signs of malaise, keeping track of those needing attention, then connecting machines and udders, when repeated hour after hour, tests that person's endurance. "This is why you have to have more of a quality person," Albert stated, citing this specialist's gender: "He's got to take notes. This is one of the reasons we were so long in getting around to it. I feel that the cows are being taken care of."

Albert was delivering that care himself well before daybreak. "I usually get up at 3:30 or 3:45, and then check the dry cows and springing cows and heifers, and then get up to the barn about 4:20 for milking. The following morning I'm coming into the cow barn at 7:00." Weekly tasks might require additional barn time. "At the end of the week, I know there are several things I need to get done—like if the heifers have to be sorted—so I've got to fit myself in and then fit the men into what we do." The week's schedule provided a day-and-a-half of family time, although a by-pass provision could be invoked. "I guess one thing that might bother Margaret is that when something goes wrong, that's when I am called to go up to the barn."

Only Albert, among his nine-member Lovendahl generation, was keeping family and business together in 1982. How remarkable skill with dairy cows, employees, and family members came together in him puzzled his mother. "He wasn't exceptionally brilliant. Albert is the child that you don't know where he came from." Albert, however, traced these cow and people skills to an apprenticeship that provided timely access to wide-ranging tasks—from the simple to the most demanding—under an instructor who showed him how to proceed, then urged him "to get at it and get it done." Should an impending decision require coping with unclear or contradictory elements, a frequent situation on farms, Albert recalled his father's "do the best you can" advice. Other fatherly advice came to mind: "Be patient and recognize one's limits." Then Albert remembered something else: "Pick the right moment to talk about things."

Asked whether two brothers would soon be running Indian Bluff Farm, John Lovendahl replied, "Chris is graduating this year. He is less and less interested in the farm. He isn't a little boy out jumping on the tractors like Tom did, or fooling with cows all the time." Albert answered the question indirectly. Turning toward a

five-month-old son who carried his grandfather's name, he said, "I hope I don't pressure him. I would love to see Alex come back and go into farming." Margaret agreed implicitly. Indicating that her principal contribution to the business had not changed, she said, "I try to make Albert's life the way he needs it, so that he can run his business the way he needs to run it, if you know what I mean."

With three families no longer "vying with each other," John Lovendahl expected further family and business integration. "I'm sure with his daddy beside him, Alex is going to be around the barn and around the calves and around the machinery." America's dairy economy may suffer under aggressive competition from manufactured fluids, he granted, yet John remained optimistic about the small boy's future at Indian Bluff Farm. Milk producers that operate with borrowed money will be squeezed first, he noted. But could replacing multi-skilled workers and diverse tasks with narrowly skilled specialists make dairy farming less attractive? the visitor wondered. Asked how members of his community felt about following the poultry industry's path to industrialization, Albert replied, "They talk [about it] among themselves all the time."

"I'm just finding these things out myself," Margaret stated, a reference to the apple orchard's removal some fifteen years earlier. Eliminating his parents' favorite part of the farm kept the business competitive, Albert recalled telling his wife, adding for their visitor's benefit: "Other farmers consider that was a good move. Over the long run this farm has been a financial success. Over the years most of our decisions have been made from an economic view. Maybe now we would have the luxury of not having to make it that way, but if we hadn't made the decision at that time, we wouldn't be in the position to have that luxury today."

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Eight years later, when returning to Indian Bluff Farm on my own, I saw that land near the free-stall barn had been reshaped by bulldozers and backhoes into a vast lagoon, the centerpiece of a manure distribution system far more compatible with the human and natural environment, but also far more costly than distributing manure on nearby fields each day had been. When scattered over wet or frozen ground, a situation frequently encountered in northern states, only a portion of the manure remained to fertilize the forthcoming crop. Propelled by heavy rainfall or rapidly melting snow, another portion migrated to streams, wells, and nearby ponds; and as the herd expanded, that polluting impact increased. While complying with state and federal government environmental protection regulations adopted during the 1980s, the eight-million-gallon manure lagoon reconciled this large dairy farm's operation with upstate New York's expanding non-farm population.

When emptied before spring planting and after the harvest—and its content transported to fields and immediately integrated with soil, instead of degrading the surrounding environment—plant nutrients and organic matter that 500 cows supplied remained in place. Nevertheless, a downwind neighbor complained bitterly about the noxious odor emanating from the lagoon, especially while being emptied.

Albert Lovendahl had not expected a neighbor to consider the family business a predatory corporation. When a black flag appeared above the downwind neighbor's garage, he said, "What were we to do?" The neighbor had rejected his buyout offer, and if Indian Bluff Farm could continue supporting John and Elaine, Albert and Margaret, their five children, and the families of eight employees without the manure lagoon, the members of Albert's community didn't know how. Albert added 120 cows in 1988, bringing the Indian Bluff Farm herd above 500 adult animals, when two community members already had over a thousand cows. In 1990, the farm manager who enjoyed working with cows was contemplating becoming the full-time manager of a larger herd and larger workforce, when his visitor asked, "Do you have to make the business less satisfying?"

Having anticipated that question, John waved his visitor toward a pickup truck he had parked in the driveway. Heading southward parallel to the Wanase River several miles, they reached a community member's "milking center" as the last of 1,200 cows completed the second of three daily trips down one of four milk collection lines. Seeing animal, worker, and machine movements choreographed on an industrial scale reminded the vis-

itor of eggs from 30,000 hens rolling from a conveyor merging with conveyors from adjacent buildings. “Milk factory,” he muttered. John nodded perceptibly. “It takes a lot of capital to keep this place running.”

While returning to Indian Bluff Farm, John suddenly swung the vehicle from the highway onto a vast field where no obstruction diverted a tractor’s course along the valley’s flank. The time was mid-October and heavy rain had fallen a few days earlier, yet instead of bogging down as the visitor anticipated, the truck continued ahead on ground that retained midsummer’s firmness. Beneath this part of the farm’s manure distribution system an invisible network of four-inch plastic tubes was removing surplus water, while on the surface contoured terraces were preventing water from moving saturated topsoil toward the Wanase River. While enhancing Indian Bluff Farm’s ability to produce milk with factory-like continuity, manure’s assembly-line movement from the lagoon to incorporation in thoroughly drained soil also enhanced the Lovendahl claim on Frederick Taylor’s business card (“Systematizing Shop Management and Manufacturing Costs a Specialty”).

To align its roughage supply with the larger herd’s requirement, Indian Bluff Farm added ninety acres. The \$600 per acre price would have been a great bargain if located in Illinois or Iowa, but with surface and sub-surface drainage enabling these Adams County acres to do what Corn Belt soil does naturally for corn, grass, and alfalfa, each acre approached a midwestern price. Installing continuous plastic drainage with laser-guided machines was far less costly than laying individual tile to a grade fixed by rod and transit had been, and would make millions of U.S. farmland acres far more productive. But planting, harvesting, and other operating costs have been absorbing the financial means, even with the U.S. government assistance available to farm people since the 1930s.

Reducing the milking facility’s labor costs helped Indian Bluff Farm finance and improve those ninety acres. In 1990 the milking specialist’s gender qualification had been eliminated to facilitate recruitment, and at that time a woman of medium stature coordinated her movements with those of machines and animals hour after hour, positioning cows, cleaning udders, attaching milking units, and checking each animal’s condition. Reducing production costs while nearly 600 cows put 23,000 pounds of milk (on average) into the bulk tank, let Albert exempt one employee from making labor more productive. Departing from the cow-per-worker rule of thumb, twenty-to-one in the 1950s and eighty-to-one in 1990, he instructed her to feed calves at a pace young Alex could match. Yet the Taylor system had also invaded Albert’s family. “The children have more activities than when they were younger, and their schedules are affecting our schedules more, and I think it is going to be more and more that way as they get older. It’s just going to become more and more a factory than a family.”

The technology in farm headquarters, which had moved from the milking facility to a nearby office, confirmed a high school teacher’s prescience when telling Chris that the computer would soon become an essential business tool. With software occupying space that farm periodicals, reference books, and other paper records formerly filled, and with each animal’s breeding and production records readily accessible in the computer’s virtually unlimited electronic memory, along with nutritional information based on up-to-date research, Albert could readily formulate nutritionally appropriate yet cost effective rations. However, photographs mounted on wallpaper that Margaret and her mother selected surround this man and machine alignment, thereby reminding employees and visitors that this facility serves a family business. On one wall Dad Lovendahl faces the barn where his grandson started an apprenticeship among cows confined by stanchions, while the brothers—the intermediate generation in this business summary—stand beside the lost barn’s far larger replacement. Employees and family members often appear together in these photos, the former usually occupying the front row. A horse-powered implement seat that once supported Dad Lovendahl became office furniture when welded atop a forty-quart milk can that once transported milk from twenty-six cows.

Images of the farm’s towering silos appeared there, too, but the silos themselves had left the farm, along with conveyors that mixed and delivered rations with spiral efficiency. The rations were prepared in 1990 as they had been before the free-stall barn existed, but the batches were far larger. An employee using a bucket loader—the

sizable machine often seen at construction sites—conveyed the ingredients Albert selected to an oversized wagon equipped with scales and auger. When powered by an adjacent tractor, the machine mixed ensilage from a moraine-like pile with ingredients subject to price and availability. These were housed in truck-sized compartments in an adjacent shed, currently cotton seed bearing traces of lint, cookies formerly on a grocer's shelf but still appealing to cows, and dried waste from a Manchester brewery. Once thoroughly mixed, the worker moved the wagon past feed bunks while an integrated conveyor delivered its contents to waiting animals.

Chris had become a professional farm adviser in 1990, but not, like his father forty years earlier, a Cooperative Extension employee. Public support for the agricultural college and USDA advisory service had followed America's farm population downward, although a group of New York vegetable growers still wanted technical and marketing information from an independent source. Using the milk testing cooperative model, they had formed a cooperative, the organization that employed Chris and supplied his computer. A records' management specialist filled the Indian Bluff Farm position Chris formerly had in mind. After training her to take over work Elaine started as her husband's helper, Elaine directed her critical eye to travel company offerings. In 1990 husband and wife had just returned from visiting Australia and New Zealand, a venture in materialism that Elaine barely mentioned, but which John recalled with great enthusiasm.

Albert, still unique among his Lovendahl generation when managing Indian Bluff Farm, now had an assistant—his daughter Molly—who had followed him, a grandfather, grandmother, great grandfather, and aunt to a Cornell degree, before violating his prescription for becoming a farmer by marrying an architect; nevertheless, in 1990 she was completing a management-oriented Indian Bluff Farm apprenticeship. Her charge—to develop a procedure that would enable the business to retain valued employees—addressed her father's abiding concern since her grandfather's death. Asked about this task's location in the farm's organization, Molly replied, "middle management," a term unusual among farm people at the time. While Molly approached designated successor status in the family business, her husband was commuting to a Manchester office.

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During the next twelve years Indian Bluff Farm's upscaling trend continued. In 2002, 850 cows, each producing 24,700 pounds of milk on average, supported twenty-five employees, a noteworthy number in an area where local jobs were scarce. Most worked fifty to fifty-four hours each week, considerably less than the brothers and Lane applied four decades earlier. Consequently, the cow-to-employee ratio had fallen to about fifty-to-one. Yet when measured in pounds of milk per worker, the farm's labor productivity figure had increased dramatically: 1,663,000 pounds of milk per worker was more than twice the 700,000-pound figure John Lovendahl announced with great pride thirty-four years earlier.

Replacing the milking facility's parlor image with "center" terminology recognized its thousand-cow capacity and industrial features, while a half-mile away roughage production awaited appropriate words for its enhanced labor productivity. A fast-moving field chopper hesitated only momentarily, allowing an empty ten-wheel truck to replace one fully loaded at its side. On reaching the barn's concrete pad repository, a massive eight-wheel tractor capable of carving a highway's passage multiplied its operator's labor. When piling the load atop previous loads, it packed the ensilage tightly like gravity did in the vertical silos. Meanwhile, ten-wheel tank trucks had improved manure's neighborhood reputation, having eliminated noxious odor and highway residue while delivering lagoon content to 1,200 owned or rented acres. Transferred in the field to a portable tank equipped with oversize tires and soil injectors—that was then propelled by a powerful tractor—the former pollutant's organic matter and plant nutrients stayed in place.

Yet the capital-intensive practices Albert's community used to keep farming profitable and environmentally friendly were making the smaller-scale dairy farms favored by Albert's parents virtually unsustainable in that location without a niche market or supplementary family income. In the community's limited land base, each acre had acquired twice the value of similar land on the Wanase Valley's opposite flank.

Invited to reflect upon family business outcomes since the oral history record opened some three decades earlier, Albert identified his children as the farm's principal product. Having recounted productive careers and family stability, Albert mentioned a period after his father's death and his uncle's gradual withdrawal from the business when pleasure had been hard to find. Sole management had been lonely and difficult, he said, but this trying time ended on an upbeat note. His post-apprenticeship assertion—"I don't have to depend on my Dad or Uncle's know-how"—had been seriously tested, yet farm income did not fall.

Before enlisting his daughter's participation in business management, Albert faced an emotionally demanding choice: either top off a two-generation investment in his brother's apprenticeship or endorse his wife's investment in the family collective. To avoid that decision, he could have divided management responsibilities between brother and daughter, but would have risked task coordination should the employees choose sides. Exercising the management role he described as "fitting things together," Albert emphasized a critical problem for large-scale dairy farms: how to keep highly competent employees committed to a business they do not own.

To adapt her grandfather's labor-management principles to the larger workforce, Molly introduced an industrial labor-management concept—the employee as stakeholder—at Indian Bluff Farm. Having become familiar with each job's task components and the workers' interests and concerns, by working at the side of each employee, Molly built a permanent organization—an annual Indian Bluff Farm stakeholder conference—on the resulting mutual respect and credibility. At these events, veterinarians and business analysts update the employees about their stake in the business by reviewing the farm's operation, outcomes, and possibilities. Molly also introduced another modern business-management tool: a procedures manual outlining selected tasks, step-by-step. While reducing employee training costs, the manual has encouraged consistent task execution among employees having varying skills and interests; and for the growing number without apprenticeship experience, it has provided elementary education.

Assigning employees to jobs inside or outside the barn—the initial step toward an administrative structure—had evolved into distinct units, each having a designated leader. Suspecting that the inside and outside boundary line was occasionally contested, the visitor asked Albert, "Do you intervene often?" Quickly Molly interjected, "Not as often as he used to," perhaps indicating that her labor-management innovations had been effective. Although herd numbers were approaching 1,000, Albert still worked with animals thanks to a tool unavailable to earlier generations of farm people, yet readily available throughout America in 2002. He was "fitting things together" seated at farm headquarters, driving a truck, or working with animals—cell phone at hand.

With hired employees outnumbering family members four to one, Indian Bluff Farm was clearly no "family farm," given the U.S. government agency's family labor requirement. If family management and ownership were considered appropriate criteria, however, the farm's claim to "family farm" status improved under Albert's direction. As majority stockholder, he joined the nationwide trend toward eliminating gender as a barrier to economic mobility, enabling three Lovendahl generations to own Indian Bluff Farm in 2002. John and Elaine, the family's leading generation, held ten percent of the farm's \$6,700,000 capitalization; Albert and Margaret, its middle generation, sixty-nine percent (Margaret's twenty-six percent being non-voting); and Molly, its post-apprentice generation, twenty-one percent.

At that time, two Indian Bluff Farm commodities were expected to enter the marketplace without contacting cows, an apparently irrational departure from the nation's century-long farm specialization trend, and this farm's cow-oriented employees, buildings, crops, and equipment. Although expected to lose money until integrated into the farm's operation, sweet corn and peas will protect the farm's dairy operation from an unanticipated outcome of its state-of-the-art manure distribution system. With additional applications and manure's nutrients remaining in place, two vital plant nutrients—nitrogen and phosphorus—accumulated to reach a counterproductive level for dairying's mainstay corn, alfalfa, and grass crops. And while absorbing excess nutrients, the new crops will enhance Indian Bluff Farm's long-term possibilities. As agronomic and economic

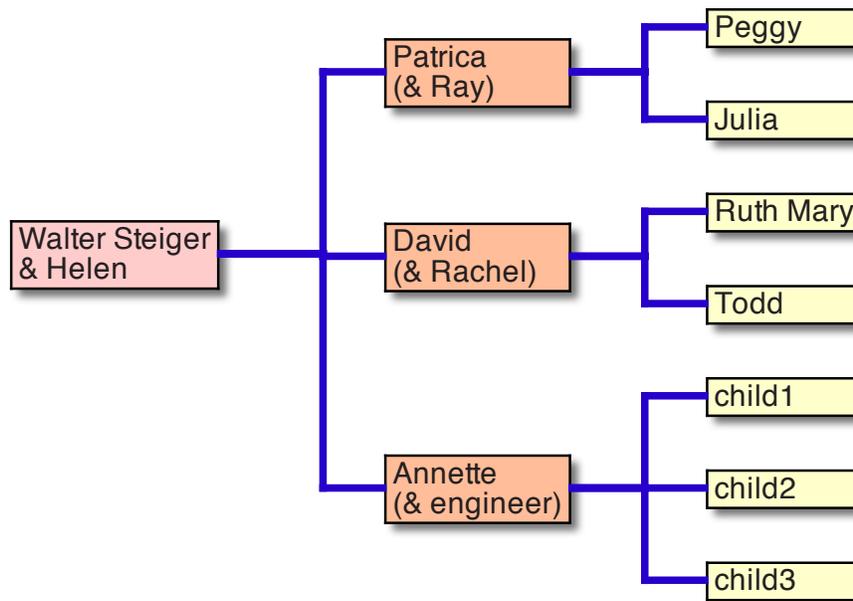
forces continue to interact, circumstances less favorable to dairy farming may emerge in the Wanase Valley. If cows eventually follow wheat, dry beans, and apples to other locations, the farm's stakeholders will have mastered two readily marketed crops well adapted to area soils and climate.

In Molly's age group her Alcott address was unusual, jobs in the village of four thousand—located ten miles down river from Indian Bluff Farm—having been scarce, and the Manchester commute considered lengthy; yet Molly was an ardent village booster. Having ordered farm supplies electronically from home several days each week, she pointed out that other young families could also conduct business online while enjoying local amenities, among them several musical groups and an attractive library. Molly also considered real estate costs an Alcott plus, her attractive late-Victorian-style residence having been far less pricey without a Manchester address. But her highest accolade went to Alcott's newest business. The independent architect's home-based practice would soon eliminate her husband's Manchester commute, seemingly longer since their son Jacob's birth four years earlier.

At Indian Bluff Farm headquarters, estate planning seemed evident, given the physical alignment of three Lovendahl generations. Molly was supervising labor relations in one office; her father was "fitting things together" in the next, unless doing it while in motion; and in a nursery located between them, Jacob replicated the productive activity visible nearby with miniature farm equipment (unless implementing his father's designs with miniature building components). If Jacob integrates these interests at Indian Bluff Farm as an adult, like his great-grandfather Alex Lovendahl had done, the farm's milking specialists will release him from doing his forebear's lengthy monotonous chore. However, concentrating cow knowledge in the cow-dependent business in one person, already midway into life, may threaten business continuity. Fortunately, Molly's brother, Alex, may lift this source of vulnerability, given the estate plan his father voiced soon after his birth sixteen years earlier. Perhaps Molly and Alex will manage Indian Bluff Farm together as the Lovendahl family's middle generation, although the oral history record of this business indicates that family membership does not guarantee promotion.

## Chapter 3

### Doing It



*The Steiger Family*

Among the nation's prime corn, soybean, and hog producers, agricultural statistics are no trivial pursuit; yet while Iowa's farm commodities rank behind only California and Texas in economic value, they lack the assured domestic market that California's vegetables and New York's milk enjoy. When the world's consumers secure Iowa's basic commodities from Illinois, Indiana, Brazil, or Australian producers, nearly everyone in Iowa suffers, for if not growing corn, soybeans, hogs, or cattle—or supplying goods and services to those who do—they probably process farm products that buyers will recognize from the grocery store label.

While competing for access to farm land as generation follows generation, farm families have made an Iowa acre three times as valuable as a New York acre having similar farming potential. Facing less intense competition, almost every New York farm family owns land while, in Iowa, one family in three gains access through tenancy. Nevertheless, the Old South image of impoverished tenant and antagonistic landlord has little relevance there. Iowa tenant families may have a million-dollar machinery inventory and a landlord relationship that extends beyond the family's initiating generation. Whether cash rent or a crop-sharing arrangement regulates tenant access to land, kinship may be facilitating the connection. For the Iowa tenant, an Aunt Jane honoring a parental "never sell the land" admonition can be a valuable asset.

Accompanied by my oral history colleague, Sarah Elbert, I departed from Cornell University during midsummer in 1979 to document family and business relationships in Bund County, Iowa, an area known for basic crops, and highly competitive family farming. An economically vibrant farm economy was ending for farm people in the United States at that time. Many had assumed that the previous decade's favorable economic conditions would continue, and having leveraged equity to acquire additional land, larger machinery, or other resources, in 1979 they faced continuing debt with declining income. Equipment dealers were also coming up short after accepting economic optimism as partial collateral for credit-based transactions. Other farm people and service providers had not expected the economic euphoria of the 1970s to last and, having approached

business expansion decisions more cautiously, were anticipating bankruptcy auctions where their more aggressive competitors' land and equipment would be redistributed, sometimes at bargain prices.

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When leaving Cornell that July morning, a Midwestern weather report provided good news. Rain clouds hovering above Bund County were creating an opening in the busy midsummer farm day for this oral history inquiry, and that evening numerous muddy patches in the Acker driveway confirmed that information's accuracy. Released from rising at daybreak to cultivate corn or soybeans by fields too soggy to support a tractor's weight, late into the evening Ray Acker reflected upon his circuitous journey from an apprenticeship in farming to a secure position in his favorite occupation. His lengthy detour through college then factory employment ended, we learned, when the Steiger family business needed additional labor. Ray's wife, the former Patricia Steiger, twenty-five and two years younger than Ray, and their daughters, Peggy, four, and Julie, two, completed the Acker family.

The story-and-a-half Acker home seemed to have been plopped onto farm land by an unseen hand, in rural midwestern fashion, some sixty feet from the road's edge. Spartan in landscaping, the exterior was covered with checked white paint adhering tenuously to a grayish clapboard surface, and inside there was barely enough space for a couple with two children; the structure had been designed for tenants who would not allow these modest accommodations to deny their access to the surrounding acreage. That landlords value acreage, rather than housing which would allow tenants to live close to their work, is common knowledge in Iowa. This sanctuary from cold and rain had been Pat Acker's childhood home. Having lived there twenty-seven years, her parents, Walter and Helen Steiger, had recently moved to Bund Center.

While "center" in a middle American address may magnify a few houses located near intersecting roads, Bund Center's 2,500 villagers and associated businesses constitute Bund County's geographic, economic, and cultural core. Farm people in this and several surrounding counties depend on goods and services that its grocery and clothing stores, grain elevators, and associated businesses provide, and as Bund County's seat of government, an ornate courthouse and nearby law offices supply legal services. Much of the county's social activity revolves around Bund Center's public school system and five churches, four Protestant and one Catholic.

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Like Albert Lovendahl in New York's distant Wanase Valley, Ray Acker expected to end his apprenticeship as a farmer. "That was my main ambition. I helped Dad milk the cows and do the chores and the field work." While yet too young to operate a tractor, Ray pretended that his bicycle had four large wheels and a powerful engine. "Probably the first thing I did was cultivate corn. We had two tractors. I really thought I was doing a lot." That formative environment included animals. "I bought a heifer from a neighbor and started a calf herd." Clearly pleased during that wet July evening about where ambition, appropriate skills, occupational commitment, and a fortunate marriage had brought him, the young farmer readily attributed his rescue from factory employment to his wife's parents.

Ray's wife, however, remembered being less enchanted with farming. "I always wanted to go to Disneyland as a kid. We never were able to go because of Daddy milking cows or farming or no money. I realized it was a hard life; Daddy was always working." Having associated marriage to a farmer with a husband's absence in field and barn, Pat determined to avoid that sequence as an adult. Ray was an occupational outcast when she married him, his parents having been unwilling to facilitate his occupational advancement, either through increasing the family acreage or by supplementing farming income elsewhere. According to Pat, her husband considered attending Iowa State University and subsequent factory employment as forms of banishment.

Understandably, Pat did not remember their initial meeting—no student having been a stranger in Bund Center's high school—and among Bund County's 20,000 people, membership in social, educational, business, and

religious organizations intertwined. They had been friends in high school and as friends attended Iowa State University together. During a courtship summarized as we “kind of grew on each other there,” Pat expected to make home and family responsibilities her career; but with Ray’s future employment unclear, she continued her teacher preparation curriculum.

When attributing the declining number of farms in the United States to “agribiz,” a disparaging reference to large-scale farm equipment, chemical, and marketing services, critics of modern agriculture often pass over intermediate agents: the farm people using agribiz products and services to acquire the resources of less competitive neighbors. Companies processing farm commodities for industrial and consumer use share the “agribiz” label, but whether serving farm people on the input or output side of a business, these organizations often employ people who could be farming if the land were available. In agribiz, former apprentices once responsible for performing diverse tasks under varied conditions, are reeducated to repeat the same task on schedule in situations where the locus of responsibility for task performance may be unclear. Ray discovered the latter as a quality-control inspector in a factory that transformed farm animals into groceries and industrial products. While expected to prevent substandard product from moving down the line, he was also expected to keep daily production targets in mind.

“Ray was tired of being bossed around and being caught in the middle,” Pat said, recounting her husband’s effort to reconcile quality and quantity along a constantly moving production line. Yet having participated in many such end-of-day conversations, Pat understood that conflicting workplace expectations were but a single manifestation of her husband’s dissatisfaction with factory employment. With being married to a farmer an alternative to living with a husband dissatisfied with his working conditions, Pat reminded her parents at every opportunity about Ray’s long-standing ambition. Nevertheless, Ray remained in that factory four years. “Taking a son-in-law in is kind of different than taking a son in,” Helen Steiger observed, “because you’ve raised a son; he knows what you expect of him.”

Like Alger Roberts when observing a child’s behavior, Walter Steiger looked for signs of occupational aptitude. Lacking this blend of curiosity, vitality, and interest in farm activities, he did not expect an inherited acreage to save the unfortunate farmer when confronting serious economic difficulty. Ray, however, had demonstrated occupational aptitude: after transforming his bicycle into a powerful tractor as a child, he learned to cope with farming’s frequently conflicting workplace imperatives. He also coped with the factory’s conflicting workplace requirements, all the while prepared to exchange regular factory pay for farming’s financial uncertainties. Pat, meanwhile, had been teaching elementary school, an activity meeting her mother’s “family business” reentry requirement—being “weaned away” from her natal family. Collective credibility had also been expected. “We felt they were well established as a family,” Helen noted. “I didn’t think it was too bad to have them come back. In fact I thought it was terrific when it opened up that they could come back. And it has been terrific.”

Walter’s father and Helen’s father created Ray’s occupational opportunity by entering farming’s version of retirement. Once their labor became subject to their own discretion, Walter could not grow and harvest 600 acres of corn, soybeans, and hay while keeping track of 70 beef cows and their calves. But with a young, industrious colleague working under his direction, the two-person workforce could readily accomplish these activities, and then use the surplus labor to farm a larger acreage or do custom work for other people. Acquiring larger, more versatile equipment would apply that labor efficiently, and with equipment performance specifications readily available—and the Steiger family cash-flow situation favorable—the necessary decisions could be simple and quick. Deciding how to increase the family labor supply, however, presented complex family and business relationship issues. While labor readily recruited outside the family could provide several decades of family business stability, integrating the desired person’s contribution to production with family reproduction could open larger possibilities, given continuing inter-family negotiation and compromise.

At the time Walter Steiger visited his parents, Ray was repeating the same task on schedule. “He talked to my folks about whether they thought I would be interested in farming and to find out a little more about what my goals were,” Ray recalled. “They were pretty enthusiastic about my having an opportunity to farm.” Reflecting upon having his future subjected to negotiation by his own and his wife’s parents, Ray noted the absence of other bridges over the gulf between his financial resources and access to land, equipment, and supplies needed to farm independently. Measuring progress in farming by “cropping season” during that rainy July evening in 1979, Ray cited his fifth season. “It was pretty much what they were willing to do for us.”

Stretching full length on the living room floor of the Bund Center home was Walter Steiger’s pleasure. Wintry drafts that reached his back through loose tenant-house floorboards and foundation cracks could not find him there and during inclement weather, when every shoe had carried mud or dust into the tenant house, the paved driveway fronting the spacious brick-faced bungalow and two-car garage became Helen’s particular pleasure. Formerly the home of a bank president, the house had been new in 1963 when Helen and Walter passed it, en route to a high school basketball game. “Such a pretty place,” Helen remembered telling her husband; “I’d just love to live there. I’d be so happy if I could live there.”

Noting that statement’s sequel, Helen said, “Quite unbeknown to me—which is the way Walter operates—he came in and talked to the owner.” Having entered an aspect of business management she intended to change into the record, Helen Steiger quoted her husband’s statement to the fellow church member: “If you ever put your house up for sale, I’d like to know about it.” The owner’s subsequent phone call came as a complete surprise, Helen recalled. “You know, I couldn’t believe this.” The couple inspected the house the same day, Helen recalled. “We bought it just like that.”

Impressive ability to make those financial arrangements quickly suggests using acreage ownership as mortgage collateral; but Walter cited another source of financial security, a mutual fund the couple entered soon after their marriage. “We always kept putting in,” he said. While providing a financial buffer for the family in the event of bad weather or low farm prices, Walter said the fund had served the family business as mortgage collateral when acquiring 290 highly farmable acres. “Cheap land,” Walter said, noting a happy combination of an attractive interest rate and excellent crops with favorable markets that followed its purchase. However, the new owners of the attractive Bund Center home remained in the tenant house another year to prevent another family from assuming that tenancy.

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“I started driving tractors when I was about eight,” Pat’s brother, David said while recalling his apprenticeship in the family business. “Part of the fun was to go out and drive tractors and be with Dad.” When the farm’s labor shortage and Ray’s availability coincided, he had mastered most farm tasks as an apprentice. “Dad asked me if I could farm with Ray if I ever wanted to,” David recalled. “I said, yes, I could, or I thought I could anyway.” Sixteen at that time, eleven years younger than Ray, David did not know his brother-in-law very well when he said what his sister and parents wanted to hear. At that time to remain in the family business, with or without Ray, seemed unlikely; visual images and a career in building design and construction were his compelling interests then. But Walter wanted to keep his son in the family business, and supporting three families would require a larger acreage or other source of income. Without doubt, while talking with Ray’s parents about Ray’s future, the Acker acreage entered Walter Steiger’s conversation.

When entering the Steiger family business, Ray joined what Walter called “a three-way partnership”; but Walter’s subsequent reference to “when Ray came to work for us” clarified the extent of this partner’s authority. “He does carry the biggest share of weight and responsibility about decision making,” Ray observed. “We do a lot of talking before we make a decision, but he’s actually the one who says yes or no at the end.” Attributing his secondary position on the agricultural ladder to necessity on that rainy summer evening, the grateful young farmer said, “He’s done a lot for me. I wouldn’t have been able to farm if I had to go out and buy a \$20,000 tractor.”

Concentrating management authority in the middle generation of a three-generation family business was itself unremarkable, yet the three-way partnership had a remarkable feature: Walter and Ray would be working among crops and animals each day, while the youngest partner attended high school and later college. Although David would join his father and brother-in-law on the acreage every summer and during planting season and harvest weekends, the difference between the labor he supplied and Ray's contribution to the business would increase with each new cropping season. Securing his son's position in the family business with his son-in-law's labor might prompt reservations on Ray's part, Walter realized; yet he expected his son to lift any resentment his son-in-law might feel. "Ray has to work a little harder than David at this time, but David will make it up. He has a little extra drive; it will be made up in the long run." However, the partnership's creator never told his son that a labor deficit existed. "It was just them giving me money to go to college," David stated. "There was never a formal partnership." Everyone in the family wanted the business to remain a family matter, he recalled. "Being a family member, it was more to try and do it with Ray than it was trying to find somebody else. It was more or less Dad running the operation and hiring Ray."

Formerly an ambitious apprentice himself, Walter understood doing what needed to be done. "When I went to school, the first thing I enjoyed doing was to run out in the field. I was good at working at night." He had suspended his contributions to the business for World War II army service, but not again, even for a honeymoon. "I was very dumb about farming," Helen joked, fully aware that ending her wedding day in the tenant house had triggered an incremental transition in business ownership. "My father just kind of pitched in," Walter recalled. "Then he paid back some of what I did for nothing when I was a kid. He kind of helped me out." "They've worked together always," Helen noted. "Walter is a farmer through and through. He loves it and lives it. Even when he was young, his dad let him have so many cows and so many acres. The farm we moved onto was still leased under his father's name, but we got the profits off it. He would work with his dad's machinery, but Walter did the work and eventually made enough to pay for that plus buy more. Then everything they bought new belonged to Walter. There was never a written contract." Tax records documented ownership. "You had to declare what was yours for the income tax. They had that down accurately, but, I mean, my cattle weren't kept in one field and his in another." Looking ahead, Helen expected to repeat that experience. "Ray is just giving his work to us. There's no way to draw a line, my work against your equipment; there's no way you could ever balance it out. But Walter wants it to be a home and a farm for them eventually."

As an apprentice, Walter might have heard a neighbor say, "Grandfather built the barn and bought the first tractor but Dad was less ambitious." In 1979, while still recounting family business development in generation-size increments, his daughter Pat was applying the annual measure endorsed by business and government. "It's an equal partnership," she observed. "David's had an equal third ever since we've been back. Of course, Ray has been working twelve months and David has been going to school nine of them." Yet Ray seemed to agree with Walter's statement, "David's coming in didn't cost Ray anything." Calculating those costs in dollars like his father-in-law, Ray overlooked the family time his wife had monitored.

"Kind of a phasing out of his father and our taking over," Helen said, summarizing countless farm, home, and community activities connecting the tenant house honeymoon with her generation's position at farming's apex. "The same thing we are doing with our kids," followed those words. "I don't know that we ever said it out loud that we wanted any of our kids to come back into farming. If they had chosen not to be farmers, it wouldn't have disappointed us. I can really say that. He may have felt that his son should have been a farmer." Checking that professed uncertainty, when asked how the business would have coped with its labor crunch if Ray had not entered the three-way partnership in 1974, Walter replied, "We'd just struggle along then until David got there. We'd still farm six hundred acres."

"It just didn't seem possible at all for Ray to work into our situation at that time," Helen stated, while searching to explain Ray's lengthy factory employment. "We weren't financially prepared to start tapering out at all; we weren't settled on what we wanted to do." Uncertainty about the family residence extended that employment,

according to Walter, who said before the Bund Center house became available he intended to tear down his parents' former home, then build anew on its site. However, parents who generally supported the generational transition in the business drew a protective line around an empty house. To explain why he did not press them, Walter related a similar situation's unhappy outcome. The son of an elderly Bund Center couple overrode his parents desire to protect their former home. But when he burned that house to clear the site for one his wife wanted, they were looking in its direction from a Bund Center nursing home. That bitter vision of smoke hanging on the horizon, Walter noted, also impacted that family's surviving generations.

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Kernels and cob must be separated before corn can become cereal, oil, sugar, meal, or grain for human or animal consumption—something usually done in the field in late autumn after sun and wind have reduced moisture content. A sizable machine appropriately called a combine, harvests the ear, then separates kernel and cob and if the kernels still contain excessive moisture a pint of propane will dry a bushel of grain. Unheated air circulating around ears of corn housed within wood or metal cribbing will also do that; and once thoroughly dried, kernel and cob can be separated mechanically at little cost. However, this low-cost environmentally friendly drying method may be impractical if the crop provides collateral for a loan, it requiring months instead of hours—sufficient time for this form of security to lose value in a fluctuating market.

Walter, formerly an apprentice in his family's corn-shelling service, operated the shelling machine in 1979, Ray or David drove a truck that collected cobs spilling from it, and Helen received the telephone calls requesting service. With farm crops requiring little attention during summer after the seed bean crop had been hoed, this service was utilizing unproductive family labor, unless chemical weed control failed due to insufficient or excessive moisture. In that event, with the custom service competing for labor with tractor-powered mechanical weed control, family time could disappear between Sunday's end and midnight six days later.

Religious sanction protected family time for twenty-four hours, but farm tasks might await at Sunday's edge. "Occasionally," Pat observed, "they go out at midnight Sunday to do the harvesting." To insert family time between tightly woven farm tasks during the week, Pat had been tempting Ray with new dessert recipes; yet Ray still might limit his absence from the field to half an hour. Pat readily dismissed her grandmother's dictum, "You tell the guys that supper is at six and if they are not there they don't eat"; but when Ray let field tasks invade a dinner she had prepared with an eye to season and weather, he heard why a certain young woman decided never to marry a farmer.

The \$8,000 corn-shelling income—although modest when compared to that from crops and animals—was dependable money, their former competitors having concentrated their resources on farming more acres. "It isn't all for the money," Walter noted. "It's getting out and meeting the guys and visiting with them." With clean white cobs and yellow grain tumbling from the sheller, conversation might turn to the nation's economy or how neighbors are doing. "All this is an outlet for my interests."

Unless a customer stopped farming or switched to drying corn artificially, the service rarely lost a client. "Quick and dependable," Walter reported. "We never broke down"; "we" having recognized David and Ray's skills and diligence as well as his own. With every member committed to rapid service, Helen could get the crew on the road within minutes, as Walter explained with an example. He had been grinding feed for cattle when Helen let him know a customer was waiting. "I quit right there. Thirty minutes later I was on the road going to the job. That's the way it always is with custom work; when somebody calls, you go. You catch up when you get back." Hearing about that lengthy farm day, I asked about a typical day. "Oh, since the 20<sup>th</sup> of April," a date nearly three months earlier, "we have averaged probably fifteen hours a day. Three years ago was the first I ever put in a twenty-four-hour day, and we have since put in three." The pace increased under his management, Walter indicated and, without appearing to boast, contrasted his parents' wintertime preference for Florida

sunshine with his own reluctance to relax with nature's approval. Upon entering Walter's "partnership," Ray made that pace his own.

Soybeans destined to become human or animal food or an industrial product are priced by a "board of trade" and designated commercial; but thousands of additional acres are grown for seed companies. Distributing this seed to local distributors enables ambitious midwestern farmers to remain productive during farming's slowest season through owning or renting large trucks and driving long distances. "Ray started December first and finished the first of April," Pat observed. "He had two semi-trailers on the road hauling to Illinois and Minnesota, with an occasional trip to Missouri and Wisconsin." Pat's cousin drove the other truck. "That kept us pretty busy," Ray observed. "We both drove about 20,000 miles, so we weren't home too much." "They'll leave at two o'clock in the morning," Walter said about drivers who occasionally included David, and they "might not get back until eleven the next night." That mileage financed a truck Ray, David, and Walter had purchased together, and finished paying for one that Ray had acquired three years earlier. For Pat, three consecutive nights on the road surpassed her husband's summertime limitations as a father. "Daddy comes in for dinner and for coffee, and he's always home for at least one meal a day, except this winter, and they just don't know how to handle it. These kids are going crazy without seeing him." He had also been productive during that time, Walter quickly noted. "We had another truck at home that I hauled grain with for the neighbors. That kept me pretty busy all winter."

"Walter and I have done all the work pretty much for five years now," Ray observed, adding with seemingly flawless logic, "When David's here full time it's going to drop our work load, so we are going to need to expand." Already in hot pursuit of rental land that could keep the family labor force fully engaged, Ray said, "We've got some leads with neighbors down the road." However, Pat awaited her brother's college graduation with more family time in mind, meanwhile turning some farm activity into family time. Parents and children were traveling the mile between home and the Steiger beef cattle feed lot together. "Ever since Peggy's been a little squirt," Pat Acker observed, "once in a while on Sunday night we'll ride along with Ray down the road to do the chores. We'll go in the feed lot and stand where it's safe. Ray and my dad just have a ball taking the kids out and showing them. My dad is mellow, and Ray really enjoys the children."

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Helen Steiger had joined a growing number of farm women in the United States who augment family income from outside the family business. Enticed by the opportunity to manage a business apart from her family, she dressed in an attractive slack suit to advertise J.C. Penney's up-to-date merchandise, while managing its Bund Center store. Although she traded the manager's title for freedom to visit children and grandchildren during business hours, its substance was not in doubt. After studying retailing's nuances under her guidance, several young men had become urban store managers. Access to a resource Margaret Lovendahl lacked, and deeply missed, allowed Helen Steiger to leave young children in responsible hands during business hours. After driving only a mile, her mother could show grandchildren how to hoe tomatoes without damaging roots and recognize peas ready for picking.

Expecting to remain in her parents occupation had been "the last thing" to enter her mind as a child, Helen said. Tenant farmers in the Ozark highlands of Arkansas, her parents had been milking cows by hand when persistent regional drought augmented the Great Depression's economic devastation. Refugees overwhelmed by accumulated adversity headed for California in John Steinbeck's classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, but other refugees moved north and east—Helen's parents among them. They were living in Bund County when the sixteen-year-old high school graduate joined them in 1945. This was fortunate timing, Helen observed, since she needed a job badly and an earlier Arkansas transplant was managing the Penney store in Bund Center. A family lode of ability and ambition abetted this happy coincidence, as Helen noted, by reporting that three

brothers were currently holding professional jobs in Iowa. Surely Walter and his parents recognized this ability and ambition when employing Helen's father to augment their labor. Later the Steiger family had another position available. If advertised in a local paper and classified "Family Business," the text could have read: "Wanted, ambitious intelligent marriage-eligible female."

Helen explained how a rudimentary house with "one bulb upstairs, a partial dug out basement," and no bathroom became a honeymoon site, when saying, "The house was on the farm and he had the farm land." After traveling to an outhouse for five years, however, the bathroom's absence became a priority issue, yet the landlord would not provide it. Helen recalled proposing a self-financing arrangement but Walter's father objected. "I'll never forget that," Helen said. "He thought that was the dumbest thing because we would be giving the bathroom to the landlord." To obtain the bathroom with his approval, Helen finally persuaded the landlord to treat the facility as a "capital improvement" subject to depreciation. "It would belong to them after ten years. Can you imagine that?" From the comfort of her Bund Center living room, Helen remarked, "My heavens, it's been out there over twenty years, and it's still good."

"Walter was always very agreeable on anything that I wanted to do," Helen remarked, before excepting home improvement. "He didn't have time," but painting, window repair, and plastering were fine if done with her labor and the landlord's material. Interrupting the grass swath between house and highway to create a door yard had been another long sought goal. "I begged and pleaded to get shrubbery put in there. We didn't feel we could afford it." The landlord eventually complied, perhaps rewarding his tenant's respect for highly productive farm land. "I was so tickled I didn't even want to prune it back." Cedar trees marked another victory. "If you had cedar trees around the house, real green cedar, you were really moving up." Much to Helen's regret, her children considered the outcome of her victorious encounters with the landlord, "everyday stuff. At the time it was really special." The tenant house was suffering again she noted, its paint peeling and windows needing repair. "It's beginning to really look bad; it shows a lot." Pat agreed with her mother's assessment of her home's condition, but not with her mother's solution.

Her contributions to farming were home-related, Helen Steiger stated, a preference other family members endorsed by completing field and barn tasks in a timely way without requiring her assistance. Home, however, was not a single structure; a second building contained 350 hens. Like flocks many farm women once maintained, Helen's provided meat for the table and money for home improvements. Although miniscule in an industry where 30,000 birds is considered a small business, her flock did not arrive at one time and leave together to become chicken soup. "I raised the baby chicks up through to laying hens and then sold them off for eating chickens." A custom butcher retailing meat and groceries—a familiar combination in midwestern villages until the late twentieth century—prepared her chickens for the table. "Most of mine went to relatives." Helen's younger brother owned Bund Center's pharmacy, and Walter's aunt, uncle, and grandmother also lived in the village. "Spent another couple of hours washing the milkers," Helen remembered. Thirty-five dairy cows added value to family labor before the cost of equipping a small dairy operation with mandated technology undercut that value; and without doubt another small herd would have left a New York hill farm if its land could support abundant corn and soybean crops.

Asked about participating in land acquisition and equipment purchase decisions, Helen Steiger replied, "Before any major decisions—purchase, or anything else—I've been consulted." Readily agreeing, Walter recounted his wife's displeasure at a time he purchased an acreage upon finding it available, rather than risk losing it to another buyer while consulting her. Consultation did not involve responsibility for a decision's outcome, however. "Whether I thought it was right to do," Helen said, "I couldn't say that I've ever had a decision on that, only discussion." Greater involvement on her part would not have improved the business, she insisted. "He and his dad worked it out fine. I was perfectly happy with a good living coming in without too much effort on my part, except just being a good wife." A pensive moment later Helen Steiger added, "That makes it sound like

I've never been a part of it, but that really isn't true. I've been aware of it all the time, and if there's ever a need, I'm there."

At this time the American Farm Bureau Federation was promoting the "kitchen conference," the idea being that give-and-take family discussion guided the organization's Washington and state capitol lobbyists. Yet the Steiger family, a longtime Bureau member, preferred talk about children, grandchildren, crops, cattle, corn-shelling customers, trucking, neighboring families, and Helen's store activities to discussing their occupation's policy issues. No kitchen conference occurred when three Steiger generations gathered at Walter and Helen's home to celebrate holidays and birthdays. Men gathered in one part of the house, women in another. "We are apt to hear them talking about farming," Pat recalled.

Inadvertently demonstrating the "apt to hear" technique, Helen Steiger described a family business issue, while simultaneously listening to her husband address another aspect of the business in an adjacent room. "He's telling him more than he has ever told me!" she suddenly exclaimed. Having learned the technique as an apprentice, in 1979 Pat shared with her mother conversational snippets she garnered during the men's midmorning coffee break in her kitchen, fully aware that eavesdropping was one-sided communication at best. "We need to have a family meeting," Pat suggested, "so we know what is going on instead of just what we catch."

Like Janet Roberts' "whatever needs to be done" doorway into operational decisions, "if there's ever a need" allowed Helen Steiger to challenge her husband's approach to multifamily business continuity. But instead of claiming superior understanding of a divisive matter like Janet Roberts, Helen Steiger drew on established mother and wife positions to mediate family member disputes. With every adult family member directing a well-sharpened hoe toward alien plants among soybeans destined for seed, she walked endless rows during the hottest part of the midwestern summer in order to lead a "consensus building" forum. While exploring interwoven individual and common interests underlying family business continuity—among them son and son-in-law equity, access to family time, and sharing management authority between generations—she urged each participant to identify what he or she expected to contribute to the business and what they hoped to gain in return. Walter summarized his wife's objective in two words, "more communication."

"We heard quite a bit while we were walking beans," Pat stated, speaking as if eavesdropping had occurred. "Mom asked, 'What do you guys want?' I said I wanted a place to build a new house, something that's mine. Ray said he wanted to learn to make things better, so that we didn't have to walk the beans so far. It's hard work cutting corn out of beans." Asked what improvement her husband had in mind, Pat said he wanted to apply more herbicide than her father was willing to use. "David said he wanted an empire." Although not sure what her brother meant, Pat recognized his ability and ambition. "He has it in him. He wants to make a good go of it. He doesn't want to putter; he wants to do it." Asked if her ambitious brother might go outside the business to circumvent his junior partner status, Pat said she had been reassured about that, having overheard the men talk while drinking her coffee. Nevertheless, her brother's professional status remained of concern. When returning directly from college to the three-way partnership, she pointed out, he missed an opportunity to develop a reputation as a superior farmer apart from his family.

Viewing "board of trade" sales as a form of gambling, Walter Steiger consulted several expensive marketing tip sheets when selling farm commodities; but as Ray noted, his father-in-law's long-standing aversion to risk carried greater weight in his marketing decisions. Those commodities having been jointly produced, as Ray readily pointed out, this cautious approach to marketing was lowering his own family's income. "He's always had to account to somebody and now all of a sudden he doesn't have to," Pat said explaining her father's lock on marketing decisions." Rental contracts and deeds to the acreage had recently passed to her father, appropriate recognition, the daughter thought, for his dutiful contributions to the business while the preceding generation was in charge. When representing the family in the marketplace, she said, her father knew he had reached the apex of his profession.

Her parents approached business decisions much the same way, Pat recalled, since she noted this procedure as a teenager. Either might identify a problem and contemplate one or several solutions, then share the assessment with the other, usually during breakfast; but discussion might continue for weeks, months, or even years, as when Ray entered the business. “They have to settle in their minds what they want to do.” Asked how her father felt about inviting other family members to join those deliberations, she said, “He doesn’t see the need.” Citing top-down management’s benefit, she said, “Mom and Dad are working their hardest so it comes out the best for us kids.” Nevertheless, Pat wanted her generation to be involved at every phase of business decisions, fully aware that to realize financial benefits while moving up the agricultural ladder would require better interfamily communication. But she granted that the ten-year age difference within her generation between David and Rachel Howland, his wife of two years, and herself and Ray could make this achievement difficult. “This is not Dad’s strength. He is not a good communicator.” Asked whether her father could be withholding information to avoid interfamily conflict, Pat replied, “It’s not that he doesn’t want us to know. It’s not a matter of keeping us out.”

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Lighter streaks among darker earth told Walter Steiger that running water and gravity had moved highly friable topsoil down country, but that message was coming from land others farmed. “That section there is ours,” he declared, waving toward a wide grass-covered waterway that snaked between rows of knee-high corn. “We left it that way,” he said about the grassy shallow drainage ditch noticeably wider than those on neighboring land. “We were one of the first ones to start baling hay off our waterways.” To make this crop financially feasible when grown on fields well adapted to higher value crops, Walter was feeding the hay to beef cows, thus adding value to the crop much like dairymen when turning hay into milk. “These last few years we’ve baled a tremendous amount of hay off that waterway. People go by and see all that hay.”

“Privileged work,” Pat said about her mother’s contribution to harvesting alfalfa hay in prime condition. No doubt driving a tractor that propelled a baler along that wide grass-carpeted waterway under a luminous midwestern sunset had been pleasant, especially after having spent the day within a store’s four walls. But as Pat explained with an example of her own, privileged work involved uniting family and business. Ray had been repairing a cultivator, she recalled, and was anxious to return to the field when she asked, “What can I do to help?” Soon she was screwing grease covered nuts onto the bolts he was holding, yet Pat called the “really scrungy and grungy” task “privileged work.” “You know, that really helped a lot. It made me feel good to know I helped him.” What would you have been doing otherwise, Prof. Elbert wondered. “It didn’t interrupt my schedule that much. That kind of thing I can do and be part of it, like Mom coming out this afternoon to bale hay.” “You only have to tell her once what to do. She’s always there to help,” Walter said about his wife’s contributions, and he considered his hayfield activity—loading bales onto a wagon—privileged work as well.

In contrast to Alex Lovendahl’s industrial workplace dilemma, Walter Steiger was not constrained by a schedule. “He will take time off,” Helen stated. “If it’s something I need to go to or want to go to, that’s still first.” Her husband would tap that valued resource “to please me,” she added, even when farm tasks overlapped. Yet after visiting Florida, California, Hawaii, and Europe, the couple had scarcely left Bund County in the last three years. Since Helen wanted to return to Hawaii, Walter said he had been letting his favorite person down.

Asked to characterize the ideal farm wife, Helen said, “In this area they’d probably say I’m not a very good farm wife. A lot of the farm wives go right into the field with the husbands in the morning. They turn off all house-keeping, all social engagements, everything. They just go to the field and they farm.” While commending the “close fellowship” that may result from doing essential tasks with family members, Helen described “a better farm wife,” as one who “stays in the house and has the house decent for a farmer to come in and decent meals and a nice happy attitude. You protect him, I guess. That’s the way the good Lord set it up really. I would not be a fighter for women’s lib.” Then Helen Steiger amended that comment: “I like women’s libbers to the point I

think we should have equal rights. Our world has changed. Women that have to support themselves should be paid for it without any doubt at all.”

For Helen Steiger, being a good farm wife became more difficult when farm women dropped the hospitality function that sustained rural neighborhoods. “In the old days, before we watched our diet, it was large cakes and sandwiches and pie even. Anybody who came to help or happened to drive in at that time came in. They ate dinner with you at noon. Then at 3:30 it was again sandwiches or cakes or pies or doughnuts with drink in the field. If they worked real late, it was supper time again. I did all of that. That was my contribution to farming.” Calling the current practice of sending men to a village restaurant for coffee and lunch, “almost like a slap in the face,” Helen noted that her daughter was missing privileged work. “Pat never has to have people in for dinner at all. A lot of work was involved when you got it straight from the garden.”

Calling her children’s readiness to do whatever needed to be done the core of their apprenticeships, Helen said that Pat and Annette (the daughter tracking labor costs in the personnel department of America’s largest processor of corn sugar), took charge of the kitchen on alternate Saturdays as teenagers, even when the corn-shelling crew and visiting pheasant hunters were present. “They did the shopping and they did the cooking.” Those apprenticeships were not limited by traditional gender boundaries, the girls having fed cattle while David cooked and washed dishes and clothing. “When David decided the gym clothes had to be washed, he’d wash them. They were always ambitious kids.” Apprenticeship supervision constituted privileged work. “We kept up with 4-H and Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts too, and camping when the kids were into that. They just did it. We did it together most of the time. We just enjoyed doing everything together.” Walter and Helen’s wedding gift to each daughter—a mobile starter home—avoided disrupting family solidarity by discouraging financial or emotional attachment to a distant location. Annette’s situation in 1979, however, presented a particularly demanding challenge to her parents: a husband who knew little about farming and did not care to know more.

While Steiger family clothing, home furnishings, and sources of farm power clearly differed from the Amish, when blending work, education, and recreation while weeding soybeans, this family resembled a gathering that sustains the Amish culture. The Amish call assembling to erect a barn or repair a fire damaged house a “frolic,” from the German *frohlich*, a joyous occasion. “It started out being a party,” Pat said about her family’s hoe-in-hand effort to improve the crop destined for seed. “Mom and I did it for exercise and fun. It’s a good chance for all of us to visit back and forth.” But having joined her mother, sister-in-law, father, husband, and brother to remove alien plants, other tasks awaited. “I can handle an afternoon and an evening, but you’ve got to have some time to get the housework done. A morning, afternoon, and evening means the next day you do double time around here. I was sick of it when we quit.” Yet the family turned to the commercial crop after finishing the seed beans. “Basically economics,” Pat explained, even though a week of demanding work added little monetary value to the crop. Explaining the unusual reference to economics, she said, “Each stalk of corn in there is robbing that bean of moisture that it needs to live. You sure feel good when you get down to the end and you can see where it looks clean.” Yet reflecting four years later about that bean field activity, Pat considered the family frolic privileged work. “I wouldn’t mind doing it for a week now.”

Weeds and volunteer corn became unusually abundant that summer when heavy spring rains diluted the herbicide application and made subsequent cultivation inadequate. “They made one less trip and it showed up,” Pat observed. “There were a lot of corn-shelling jobs, and they ran out of time. I’ve heard them saying, ‘maybe if we had gone over the field one more time or done different things.’” Weeds had been less troublesome “in the old days,” she noted. “If we had plowed the land to death the weeds wouldn’t be there.” She referred to the plow Thomas Jefferson improved two centuries earlier. Equipped with a curved moldboard, it put weed seeds under a thick layer of topsoil too deep to germinate; but then the inverted topsoil becomes erosion prone in the presence of wind and rain. Like many midwestern farmers, the Steigers were initiating tillage with massive tractor-mounted steel chisels that scatter soil stabilizing crop residue throughout the tilled area; but since weed

seed and insect larva are also scattered there, the moldboard plow's technological successor has expanded the demand for herbicides and insecticides.

After studying herbicide usage recommendations in national and regional farm publication articles and advertising, consulting agricultural college bulletins, salespeople, county extension agents, and corn-shelling customers, Walter—suspecting some unanticipated adverse outcome—wanted to apply less than the chemical manufacturer recommended. Ray, however, favored following the manufacturer's label. Reflecting on his chemical education since returning to farming, Ray recalled an apprenticeship limited to the chemical standbys—arsenate of lead and paris green. “I really felt inadequate that first year. All the chemicals have come into being since 1965, except a few of them.” Although attributing an aborted Wyoming vacation with his wife and girls to insufficient applications, Ray would not dismiss Walter's concern about inadvertent outcomes. Whenever he spilled a small amount of herbicide on his hands, Ray said, his urine quickly turned bright yellow. “It scares you sometimes to work around it.” Nevertheless, he was certain that millions of humans throughout the world would starve if American farmers stopped controlling weeds, insects, and diseases with potent chemicals. “Dad's changed on applying chemicals since Ray's been here,” Pat observed. “He used to try and squeak by and put half the required amount on, but Ray's convinced him to use all of it. Cutting down doesn't do anything.”

After Ray selected an herbicide and its application rate, three tractors entered a field that had been chisel plowed, Ray first, and while his tool's sharp rotating disks minced clods and previous crop residue an attached sprayer applied the herbicide. Next David's wide field cultivator blended herbicide and topsoil, thereby preparing the seedbed for the most critical operation. Then Walter's eight-row planting machine measured, then placed seed and fertilizer, at the appropriate depth and spacing. Acting together, men and machines had committed nearly forty acres to corn or soybeans at day's end. Not enough, according to Ray and David, who expected to accomplish more with the same labor after getting larger machines.

Walter agreed that Bund County's deep fertile soil and supportive temperature and rainfall made continuous corn and soybean cropping economically attractive as long as long-term environmental consequences are overlooked. “Whenever you plow up permanent pasture, fifteen years later you can tell where that pasture was. There's something there that fertilizers don't bring. Its tough to go all grain.” Addressing this Iowa farming trend, he declared, “They don't want to monkey around with the cows anymore. They don't want to monkey with the hay, so they plowed it up,” not just fields, waterways as well. “You have to make your waterway large enough that it pays to shut your herbicides off and stay out of the waterways.” Using simple arithmetic, Walter indicated where Iowa's topsoil was going. “Twenty years ago you had a five-year rotation: hay, corn, beans, corn, oats. Every year a fifth of the land was in hay, a fifth in oats, so two-fifths were kept down. Now we've got all of it plowed up every year. The old way, if you had a hard rain some fields would have only one chance in ten years to be washed. Now they have a chance every year. You are speeding up erosion three-fifths.”

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Pat had overheard her husband and brother contrast her family's cautious business expansion with some nearby family accomplishments, and said, “There are several farmers in the area that are bigger farmers than we are. We are at a thousand acres, which isn't big for three families at all.” While envying these farmers, she suggested they were confusing appearance with substance; “I'm not sure how solvent they would be if somebody called for a loan or two.” Clearly endorsing her father's cautious approach to business risk, Pat Acker questioned more rapid expansion for a business already supporting three families quite adequately, until a recently acquired corn-shelling machine's ability to increase that income had been tested.

“They turned and slapped a bunch of embargoes on us and destroyed the whole market.” Walter referred to the Carter Administration's response to Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, and the federal government's sudden switch from a long-standing agricultural commodity price stabilization policy to treating food as a weapon.

Given this policy change, he questioned the sanity of anyone buying farm land when interest on the mortgage approached income from the harvest. Yet Walter was questioning his own mental stability at the time. “In an operation where you have always had everything paid for, it’s hard to stick your foot out and turn the boys loose. It creeps up on you anyway and you do things.”

“Last week I told Walter he’s working harder than we ever did before,” Helen observed while interchanging personal pronouns. “Some days I wonder if they are ever going to make it through all of it, I really do. It’s funny, we never did take much time off, because farming is his work, but it’s also his fun.” Yet Walter had been dropping the pace occasionally, knowing that Ray would not leave the field while he was still there. Understandably, seeing Walter leave the field several hours early left Ray confused, not knowing that his wife had been pressing her father to create more family time.

While counting her family among the world’s more fortunate people, Helen Steiger distinguished adequate income, freedom from debt, multi-million-dollar equity, good neighbors, good health, and community support from occupational success. “We are hurting now more than at any time in order to keep an inheritance for the kids. That’s our main goal, so they won’t have to sell out what we have made in order to be able to hang on to it for themselves.” Noting that federal and state estate tax legislation and implementation guidelines keep changing, she said, “About the time you think you are supposed to put the farm in one person’s name, then they come out and say put it in both names.” Rather than leave business continuity dependent on staying in step with legislative decisions and administrative regulations, Walter and Helen purchased a life insurance policy that would cover the largest estate tax they could envision. “And that,” Helen stated, “binds our finances more than at any time since we have had finances.”

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Before turning eastward from Bund County the next morning, Prof. Elbert and I speculated about how our oral history snapshot of this family business would appear if repeated, but with older participants and different circumstances, within and outside the family. Barring serious accident or illness, we expected the family’s forthcoming middle generation to enjoy a larger presence in managing a competitive business. But would gradual farm expansion occur in conjunction with existing income sources or would this generation emulate the more risky, aggressive expansion of flamboyant friends? Or the family fracture Walter feared might occur, leaving the Steiger business with insufficient resources to compete with Iowa’s ever-larger farms—itsself becoming a victim of the nationwide farm consolidation trend. The family business infrastructure also entered our speculation. With labor-saving technology reducing the rural population, and thereby eroding the economic vitality of farming’s culturally supportive communities, would Bund Center join other midwestern villages in economic decline? Before heading eastward that July morning, we intended to return, tape recorder in hand.

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The return trip occurred four years later. When no wet weather had been found in which to continue the family business record, Helen Steiger called Cornell University on a day Bund County farmers could use twenty-four hours. “Come ahead,” she said, “we will work things out.”

While proceeding west from Chicago’s O’Hare airport, and looking at rural Illinois and Iowa from a commuter plane, only an occasional farmstead interrupted a horizon-to-horizon vision of corn and soybeans; yet in 1983, four relatively prosperous decades were ending for farm people in the United States. With equity for many families static or changing direction, a jarring headline appeared amid colorful farm magazine advertising for the latest labor-saving machinery and chemicals: “More Grain Elevators Belly Up in Bankruptcy,” indicated that grain already delivered there might be poorly compensated. Contrasting rising production costs with stable or falling commodity prices, *The New York Times* predicted the year ahead would be the worst for farm people since the Great Depression.

Yet when bringing the family business record up to date, Helen Steiger emphasized continuity. Her generation advanced in family and business during our absence, she said, pulled ahead by the death of Walter's father and pushed from behind by the birth of more grandchildren. And the house Pat envisioned during the bean field conference had become an actual structure, although while driving to it the checked surface of the tenant house remained in mind. Having driven past the decorative plywood-surfaced structure located on its site initially, Prof. Elbert and I soon learned that the new home's suburban appearance ended at the doorway.

"I think we have a comfortable house," Pat said while facing a large family room where her one-year-old son operated miniature farm equipment under his father's enthusiastic eye. The couple had been urged by both Ray's and Pat's parents to provide space where their children and neighborhood children could play under parental supervision, a feature Pat praised. "I want to keep on top of things, but not be nosy about what they are doing." Disney and other animated features were not immediately accessible on the home's sizable television set. Demonstrating her comfortable feeling, Pat switched the channel when a beer commercial, regular TV fare at the time, appeared. "That's something we don't do; beer isn't good for you."

"I love keeping the grandkids," Helen Steiger said, linking family continuity with Pat's idea of a comfortable home. "I would never raise kids in town. When they come into town I may have ten other kids. I don't know where they all come from. You have no control over them, but the grandkids love it. I'd have to be too mean if I raised kids in town."

On his part, Ray gave the house his wife wanted a mixed review. "I've always wished we'd waited a little bit longer." Construction costs were increasing rapidly—sixteen percent in one year, far outpacing family savings—when the landlord's family encountered the situation Walter and Helen's life insurance policy was expected to avoid. "The mother that owned the land died," Ray noted. "They needed money to pay the inheritance taxes, so they were agreeable to sell this part." The tenant house, detached from its farm land and now worthless, accompanied the two-and-a-half acres.

After enabling two generations of the family to farm surrounding land, the house left its foundation during a family frolic in the hands of its former occupants one board at a time. Then Walter, Ray, and David addressed Ray's concern about construction costs by laying the new structure's concrete foundation in the cleared site. "They had time in between," Pat observed, leaving the bracketing activities unmentioned. Hired carpenters framed the structure and installed walls, floors, and ceilings, then electrical and plumbing work was contracted. "We did the roof and the shingling to hold down costs," Pat continued. "It just boggles your mind. We started building in May, when the interest rates were nine percent. We finished at thirteen percent in November. Then we got visiting with the banker and ended up with a ten-year loan at eleven percent. We are paying off a twenty-five-year house mortgage in ten." Walter was among those visitors. "I went to the bank and said, 'Hey, can't we do better than that?'" Properly motivated, the banker offered a lower interest rate. "We secured it with our land."

"A bunch of gals get together on Wednesday mornings to exercise in the basement," Pat said, introducing the exercise concept unknown to earlier generations of farm people. "We push the furniture back," Pat said, allowing local women to compensate for their occupation's decreasing physical demands. "Last Wednesday we had seven gals and nine kids. We have more kids than we could afford sitters for. None of us could do it if we had to pay the sitter too." Current communication technology was keeping Pat productive during the Elaine Powers-type exercises, by alerting the corn-shelling crew to calls for service through CB radio units attached to the trucks and tractors.

Like Ray's "cropping season," Pat used another salient feature of Iowa's rural environment—the county fair—to measure her progress in farming. "My sixth fair. I will be Superintendent for 4-H and Home Economics, and for Science and Mechanic Arts for the second year, and last summer I judged two achievement shows." Given

the exercise group's time demands and those of other contributions to family and community, Pat said, "I plan a little more flexibly, because I don't know where I'm going to need it."

Nevertheless, Pat claimed to be less productive than her mother had been at her age, even with a microwave oven and electric clothes dryer's assistance; but the daughter considered herself her mother's equal when avoiding waste. When tempted to "buy that \$2.98 material" for a dress "you are only going to wear once," Pat had resisted what she called "situation ethics," purchased better material, and later adapted the dress for another use. Noting that principled behavior may outwardly resemble situation ethics, Pat said, "I wasn't hired to bale hay. Dad would hand a check over to me and say, 'Here's for your work.' You know, a bonus kind of thing."

Like his illustrious economist predecessor, Thorstein Veblen, John Kenneth Galbraith grew up among farm people. Looking back from a Harvard professorship to his formative culture in Ontario, Canada, he remembered people who used every available resource to keep a family business going. Noting this behavior's consistency with the Marxist view of labor's position in a capitalist economy, Galbraith called farming "self exploitation."

The Steiger family's response to an unusually wet spring suggested that Galbraith had been on the mark. "Instead of three of them working together, it's been one doing one thing and one doing another, and the third trying to keep everything moving." Pat offered no details. The overworked men did not stop for coffee and the bean field conversation had been muted. "The guys wanted to walk fast and get out of there." Yet with "self exploitation" apparently evident, a shorthanded neighbor had hay ready to bale. "We were all ready to help," Pat stated.

While engaged in an academic, farm management goal-setting exercise, Pat and Ray agreed to slow the pace and welcome comfortable time—once they became established in farming. Yet with Pat's security depending on "Ray being comfortable in what he's doing," and Ray's on enlarging the acreage, they will continue to fuel the cropping season and annual fair treadmill with their labor. Yet enjoying the varied tasks that propelled the family business from generation to generation was putting the "self-exploitation" concept in doubt.

Nevertheless, Pat was feeling exploited because farm machinery and household goods had become unduly expensive. Identifying the cause, Pat expressed a deeply rooted historical grievance on the part of farm people toward workers who act collectively to better reward labor—their single contribution to production—while farmers supply capital and management, as well as labor, to create commodities that enjoy little, if any, collective advantage in national and international markets. Unionized workers, she said, refuse to return, "an honest day's work for an honest day's wage."

Asked to help with house payments, Pat recalled telling Ray, "I teach Sunday School, I teach Bible Club. I still enjoy teaching." Yet producing income, the public school position Ray had in mind, would place Pat in an educational forum she considered unproductive. "The economy is sitting there, because people come through it without learning how to work." Friends were calling her apprenticeship-oriented educational goals a lost cause, she said, citing children's ready access to illegal drugs as a significant deterrent to the discipline her form of education would require. "And this in small-town rural America!" Pat exclaimed, while tracing illegal drugs and going-through-the-motions education to a single source, "Eastern attitudes."

Walter Steiger also targeted a distant agency for occupational subversion—in his case the federal government—for allowing farm people to treat children's wages as a business expense. "They shouldn't feel that they need to be paid for working on the farm when that is part of their home. I think you can give a generation too much financially, but morality, you owe them that." Yet his forceful appeal for farm and home integration did not mean his grandchildren's farm work was uncompensated. "Tax laws make it foolish not to in this day and age."

Understandably, Ray had cause to feel stress in 1983: production costs were rising and selling prices were static or falling. Yet whether discussing acreage expansion, machinery purchases, marketing practices, or financial responsibility for his family, Ray traced the stress to his father-in-law's behavior. He was treating him as a dependent, Ray said, not as the fully qualified farmer he saw in the mirror. Many hired men, Ray pointed out, participated in management decisions more extensively than he was doing. "He is responsible for my family's income, and I ought to have a little input into how that income is derived." To farm on a lesser scale than some friends, while owning no land himself, was not what Ray expected from nine cropping seasons. "I would like to see the three of us farming at least twice what we are farming now. We've discussed many times how we could farm an additional 160 acres, get it all done in probably a week's time, and have just as much income as all the days we spend doing custom work for other people." For Ray, choosing between continuing the custom service or farming on a larger scale came down to one question: "Where can we be the most efficient; where can we get the greatest return for the time we spend?"

As Walter anticipated, Ray's confidence in his answer led to pushing for additional acres during an economic recession. "I think we have to be more aggressive," Ray insisted, "because the people who are getting the additional land are being very aggressive." Some, he realized, were operating at a loss to gain access to land, anticipating a better economy. "If you are going to farm at a loss, it would be just as well to buy it and take the loss there, I suppose." Yet accepting a financial loss in order to acquire additional land was problematic. "I have never been able to fantasize how to get it paid for."

Ray could have considered a \$22,000 annual income and \$25,000 increase in equity evidence of success in farming during that depressed economy, yet "it wouldn't have to be that way," he said, with Walter's marketing monopoly in mind. "We were thinking about one person being in charge of soybeans and one in charge of corn and the other in charge of the animals." Then Ray added a hopeful note: Walter himself seemed to be considering other possibilities. While concerned that Ray's independent manager proposal lacked a conflict-resolution procedure in the event two or more independent managers wanted to use a tractor or other shared resource at the same time, Walter knew he could not stonewall his thirty-five-year-old colleague—with nine cropping seasons under his belt—like he had done when his son urged him to use readily available computer programs to improve his marketing decisions. "We've never been able to get that off the ground," Ray observed.

Recognizing Ray's greater age and experience as a farmer, David granted that his brother-in-law's claim on management authority exceeded any he could muster. "I am trying to accept that I'm only twenty-five, still under my father's wing. I'm a hired man." But David soon clarified that observation: "I have a lot more responsibilities than a hired man, but I have no major commitments." Until some productive endeavor on the acreage or another income-producing activity depended on his initiative, David could not move up the agricultural ladder with "things I absolutely have to do"; yet he was clearly reluctant to surrender an indeterminate condition he called a "hang-loose-type thing." However, Pat called her brother's hanging loose condition irresponsible after Ray brought his absence from the field early that morning to her attention. "I have been out since 6:00 riding my horses, checking cattle, checking fences, doing other things to further my knowledge about farming," David countered. These tasks would have gone faster in a pickup truck, he granted, but from horseback he was able to capture images of farming with his camera. "Trying to work my hobbies and interests into the farm operation" he considered a contribution to business continuity, citing an interest in visual images that his wife shared. "Rachel and I have made an agreement that we are staying together."

Fourteen-month-old Ruth Mary crawled to the porch, seeking her father's attention, having already disrupted her mother's conversation in the living room. Prompted by her daughter's perseverance, Rachel mentioned her four-year child bearing moratorium. Although Pat provided child care two mornings a week, and Rachel's mother was available on short notice, Rachel said, "More Ruth Mary's would not work. I want to do my weaving and creative things that are part of me. They take a lot of time. I would like to go farther. It's kind of hard when you are in Bund County, Iowa. We don't have weaving shows and yarn supplies and everything else."

“I still feel like I am raising myself,” Rachel continued. “I was just getting where I felt confident about who I was and what was me, and then we had Ruth Mary, and it really threw a kink into my view of myself. I am just getting it back again.” Without the regional weavers’ guild, rediscovery would have been more difficult, Rachel observed. “I’ve met a lot of women there that now are friends. We eat dinner out and things like that.” Like Pete Roberts in distant upstate New York on similar occasions, David was on his own. “I usually don’t leave something for him. I tell him there’s ham in the refrigerator, and then he gets it.” A larger weavers’ group awaited Rachel in Des Moines, an hour’s drive away. “I haven’t taken that into my sphere yet.”

When Rachel called the Methodist church she attended with her business colleagues “helpful, very fundamental, very Bible-centered,” her use of “fundamental” differed from John Lovendahl’s. Rather than encouraging husbands to discipline the family while acting as God’s surrogates, Rachel’s congregation relied on prayer and compassionate behavior to maintain peaceful relations within and among families. “Ruth Mary already goes to Sunday school. They teach them to be humble and kind and loving instead of get all you can get.”

Yet Rachel limited endorsing her congregation’s practices. “The congregation is very much against drinking because it hurts your body. Well, I’m against sugared cereal and not exercising because it hurts your body. My Christianity says it’s not right to do things like that with your body.” Asked where this religious injunction came from, Rachel quickly excluded childhood. “David and I weren’t brought up that way. We had lots of pop and potato chips.” Distinguishing that formative environment from the home she called “this joint thing,” Rachel reflected, “I didn’t feel my home was mine. It was a temporary thing; I was someday going to have a home of my own that would be my home.” Asked about the presence of television, Rachel said, “David and I do have a set, a very small one.” Clearly aware of the question’s cultural implication, she added, “We hardly ever watch it.”

Like her sister-in-law, Pat Acker, Rachel Howland expected her connection with farming to end when leaving high school, marriage to a farmer having been something she “never ever wanted to do.” But David lifted a notable source of occupational discontent when agreeing to remove traditional gender labels from farm activities. Their courtship proved pleasantly liberating, Rachel recalled. Instead of closing opportunities for self-discovery, her decision to marry a farmer ended parental pressure to become self supporting. College courses in textile design opened. “I’d be a farm wife, so then it was okay to major in what I wanted to.”

Although the three-decade-long feminist campaign for gender equity in the United States had barely started when Alger and Janet Roberts adopted the entrepreneurial “man-in-charge business model,” David and Rachel’s “joint thing” followed this cultural watershed. The resources accompanying each woman to a family business also affected her subsequent participation in its management: Janet Roberts, a refugee from the farm that her brother inherited, brought energy, intelligence, and total commitment to the welfare of the business her marriage initiated, but not capital. Rachel Howland’s parents, on the other hand, wanted farm and family to remain together when their other child, a professional psychologist, was not maintaining the connection. Realizing that access to the Howland acreage might keep the Steiger family business competitive with Iowa’s ever-larger farms, Rachel observed that she had married an acreage along with a husband. “I don’t think we will ever move.”

Clearly distancing herself from her mother-in-law’s home-focused “good” farm wife, Rachel declared, “I think of a farm person as the woman going out and doing the men’s jobs as well as the women’s jobs.” With David apparently supporting their daughter’s gender-neutral apprenticeship, Rachel said, “I really approve of David taking Ruth Mary out.” A doubtful note followed, however. “She’s been small and it’s been winter and things like that. I hope that he won’t not take her out because she’s a girl, where he would a boy.” Asked whether her husband might attach gender labels to farm activities occasionally, perhaps unconsciously, Rachel said, “I don’t think he does, but the other two on the farm I think do.” She suspected that Ray was reattaching gender labels, with Pat’s support, that David was removing. Why, Rachel wondered, was her sister-in-law so backward? “There’s only eight years difference.”

“I started walking beans when I was ten years old,” Rachel said, describing her adjustment to a more intense operating pace. “I had done it a number of years before I came here, but these people are terrible. They don’t quit. They just go and go and go.” Recalling a bout of stomach sickness and tunnel vision amid shimmering heat and herbicide-covered plants, all while pregnant with Ruth Mary, Rachel said, “We were clear down at the end of the field, one-quarter-mile rows, so I had to walk back anyway, so I just kept doing it. And when we got to the end of the row and I told David, but Walter said, ‘We’ve got to go one more row.’ I should have quit, but I didn’t because everybody else was going.” Rachel laughed while relating what happened next: “I went another round.”

Rachel did not intend to increase the number of Iowa widows relying on tenant management, as well as tenant labor, if something serious happened to David, and she had been preparing to circumvent farming’s traditional gender arenas under the eyes of a skeptical neighbor. “Rachel wanted to learn to drive the truck and they didn’t want to encourage her,” Pat observed, apparently endorsing Margaret Lovendahl’s, “They really don’t need us with the bigger machinery and that kind of thing.” As if endorsing the men’s efforts to stalemate Rachel’s progress as a farm person, Pat noted, “They haven’t offered to show her how to drive the tractors.”

When broaching the “if something happened to me” subject that farm men sometimes refuse to countenance, Ray said, “We always look at farming as hazardous. People can get hurt real easily.” Having purchased a life insurance policy that would keep his family financially secure, Ray declared himself “insurance broke.”

“We have a lot of farmers in our area who are farming like four-thousand acres or a lot of land, and they are buying up a lot of these family farms to do that.” Rachel also said, “There are people who would just as soon shoot them as say hello because of that.” Yet with the post-World War II farm-consolidation trend in the United States continuing unabated, Rachel wondered how long the three families could continue living well from a thousand acres, while supplementing farm income by trucking grain and shelling corn. Nevertheless, she was unwilling to make 380 Howland-family acres available to the Steiger family business while a long-standing tenant family farmed them. “They would have to find another farm to farm just so David and I could live better, and I don’t want to do that.”

If Walter thought about increasing family income by ending the animal presence and covering the thousand acres with corn and soybeans, he was keeping that distasteful thought to himself—meanwhile staying competitive through maintaining the pace and gradually making family labor more productive through acquiring larger equipment. The new corn sheller was outperforming its predecessor, he noted, before citing another compelling feature: “It takes all our spare time.” Remaining competitive, he said, required every member’s full commitment to the business; but given that commitment, he regarded the resulting credibility like money in the bank. “Everyone should just pitch in and work as a family. If you’ve got that credit there, you can always rely on that.” Yet some nearby farmers were generating greater economic momentum while drawing on bank- and farm-supply dealer credit. “The kids are always letting you know. They tend to look up at these people.”

Three “real flamboyant” brothers had enlisted Ray and David’s admiration with talk about farming 5,000 acres, according to Walter, during the social period after church services. Noting that favorable economic circumstances had supported their aggressive expansion, Walter said, “They bought when land was \$700 an acre. They kept buying land because it kept going up on them and they had a lot of equity.” As if welcoming the current economic recession, he said with a smile, “maybe they’ve kind of come to a halt.” Repeating an observation that farm management opportunities occur in cycles, Walter cited an encyclopedia article about farming conditions in the United States after the Civil War. “Land prices got high, interest got high, foreign markets were taken over from American products, and then things started to turn. Land prices went down, laborers were required to take less, and they had a big argument about foreign products coming into this country, and everything went down until it hit bottom. It took about four years for the cycle to turn around.”

He had lived through such a cycle, Walter observed. “We had the Depression for twelve years or so. The folks took eggs and cream to town in order to buy groceries.” Relating that experience to the cycle’s current position, he began, “the trouble I have with this age group of kids,” a reference to their gung-ho determination to expand a business with “interest running \$500 dollars on land that will gross only \$350 an acre.” David and Ray should hunker down, he said, draw on credit established within the family to outlast competitors, then increase income and equity during a favorable economy.

“Farming wasn’t bad in 1982 for the people who haven’t over-expanded and got themselves in trouble.” That said, Walter expected other benefits as land and equipment from those in trouble was being redistributed at auction. Ray, however, agreed with Henry Ford about the folly of responding to current circumstances with yesterday’s ideas. “There’s tremendous competition nowadays. I never remember my father having mentioned anything about that while we were growing up.” Corn and soybean prices once held for extended periods, he noted. “Now you can lose a dollar in a hurry.”

Farmland prices fell dramatically in the United State during the next two years, in Iowa as much as twenty-nine percent in a single year. Yet when depicting the resulting family and community devastation in text and photographs under alarming “farm crisis” headlines, the national media rarely noted similar economic conditions that had separated farm people from their resources at least three times since the Civil War. Such recessions provide a stabilizing agent for his occupation, Walter Steiger maintained. “You have to have a place somewhere that it binds up the guy that’s getting too big and slows him down and makes him more efficient—squeezes him so he cuts back.”

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When incorporating the family business three years earlier, Walter and Helen’s signal contributions to its welfare were reflected in the name: “Wallen Farm.” Explaining the underlying rationale, Walter said, “It gets complicated at times. Sometimes you wonder whether it’s good or not, but it kind of holds things together. I think it’s probably the best way to go to make things run smoother and give the sons a little more direction.” The family would have taken this step sooner, according to Helen, but Walter’s father had resisted a legal arrangement that seemed to open business decisions to broader participation—a situation she desired and called “the new ways of doing things.” Ray, however, seemed ambivalent about the decision to incorporate, pleased on the one hand, to have his participation in management decisions formally recognized, but concerned, on the other hand that his responsibilities as husband and father would remain diluted. Putting the three-way partnership on a legal foundation had been considered, but only briefly, because Walter feared that a divorce or other serious family dissention could disrupt resource coordination at any time and business continuity during an estate settlement. Splitting the business three ways was also considered, especially by Ray, but lacking the labor an independent farm operation would require, he said, “I don’t look for that at all. There are a lot of family ties that would almost eliminate that. At least I hope that the family ties remain as close as they are now. Many families sooner or later have trouble, but it’s something we try to avoid.”

When stock certificates replaced direct ownership of capitalized assets, the Steiger family business achieved legal perpetuity, a status that doubtlessly appealed to many of the 11,000 U.S. farm families that had taken this step. But it was hardly an incentive for the business that was approaching perpetual life through the apprenticeship, courtship, marriage, and childbirth sequence, when Walter and Helen addressed the capital retention aspect of business continuity with a life insurance policy. However, Ray equaled his father-in-law’s ownership of the family corporation—an occupational promotion achieved through exchanging truck ownership for corporate stock—that Walter and Helen Steiger facilitated through retaining ownership of the acreage. To have exchanged ownership of the farm’s most valuable resource for corporate stock would have put Ray’s equity with his father-in-law beyond reach.

Three cropping seasons and county fairs later, the corporation's promise had faded, with Ray probably the most disappointed, not having expected the three-way partnership's authority structure to reemerge in corporate form. As Wallen Farm's president, Walter refused to convene his family as a corporate board more frequently than the yearly legal minimum. "There should have been some bonuses," Pat observed, "except the corn price dropped by about a dollar by the time we incorporated. Expenses went the other way and the cash flow. . ." Silence indicated the direction. "There's three things that happen when you incorporate," Walter noted. "Social Security gets wild—you can't shelter anything. It costs us \$800 a month." Truck insurance had increased, and maintaining legally required records cost nearly \$2,000 in 1981 alone. Furthermore, the dividend Walter expected to distribute disappeared when Helen supported reinvesting in the larger equipment Ray and David needed to farm a larger acreage. "They went all out and bought big trucks and big machinery," she observed, clearly pleased to have given Ray and David this occupational boost. Helen also promoted middle-generation participation in Wallen Farm's management as corporate treasurer. "I'm really working the books." Those regular stockholder financial updates pleased Ray, who considered his monthly trucking expense and income report a model for the business; yet those reports soon stopped. Walter still wanted to mull over the figures before sharing them with others. "I'm not sure," Helen said, "how I feel about a corporation yet."

Since nine cropping seasons seemed to carry more weight with fellow Bund County farmers than with his father-in-law, Ray understandably liked the aphorism, "He who threshes grain should take it to market." Asked whether other young farmers in that area were finding formerly supportive kinship connections limiting their occupational advancement, Ray's response reflected a half century of farm consolidation in the United States: "I haven't really checked with anybody. One problem is that there aren't that many people my age that are farming right now."

Had Ray consulted Bund County's Cooperative Extension office about farm equipment, chemicals, or use of credit, he would have received a thorough-going response based on extensive university and proprietary research. But if asked for advice concerning a close relative's conflation of business and family matters, the organization Congress established in 1914 to provide authoritative information to farm people could not refer to relevant research. U.S. agricultural colleges and the USDA had bypassed family business continuity issues that may impact every family member emotionally and financially and require many years, even decades, to resolve; offering instead merely a financial and physical resource agreement between father and son. And Ray could not turn to the Bund County Farm Bureau's young farmers group. "I'm past the cut-off age. I think they go up through thirty years of age. I'm too old." Although legally separate from Cooperative Extension at that time, the Farm Bureau still considered farm management an entrepreneurial activity, and at his age Ray was expected to be managing his own business.

David remembered having called across the road, "Hey, Ray, what do you think about this?" But those initiatives gradually encountered a cool reception; "I've found out that it doesn't always work that way with Ray. I have to feel him out." A casual comment about family relationships could be like talking with his father, David said. "I don't get any kind of response."

Instead of criticizing his management, Walter wanted Ray and David to consider what staying in step had accomplished for them. "They don't really look at the real assets they are building up." While operating in a difficult economy, corporate assets had increased \$150,000 in two years, and each family had received \$44,000 in wages. Then Walter augmented his case for keeping corporate management in experienced hands by looking on the expense side of the ledger: "You've got to come up with tens of thousands of dollars instead of thousands." Fertilizer alone cost \$30,000 in 1982, other chemicals, \$20,000. Operating costs that had increased for five years were still increasing. "You're always selling to meet commitments."

Nevertheless, Wallen Farm recently purchased two \$40,000 trucks and grain storage bins, while trading up for a combine and two tractors. Invited to explain notable purchases with the cash flow presumably tight, Walter referred to the business continuity principle Helen had been advocating: “You can’t squelch all of their ideas.” Investment credit had been “a factor in trading a little heavy,” Walter explained. While muting Wallen Farm’s income tax payment, the federal government was subsidizing the grain bins. Paying Wallen Farm twenty-six cents for each bushel withheld from the market helped stabilize the grain market, while simultaneously subsidizing the farm equipment sector of America’s economy. One payment covered nearly half of the bin’s construction cost.

“We could have sold all our corn crop for \$3.40 last year,” Walter said, reporting a missed opportunity that other family members had surely noted. But neither a marketing seminar he attended the previous winter nor numerous marketing newsletters indicated that a bushel of corn would be more valuable at harvest time than when stored in government-sponsored bins. Having mistakenly stored the crop, Walter could not continue postponing the sale, since yield estimates for the newly planted crop could depress its value.

Yet after coping with farming’s natural and man-made tribulations as an apprentice, tenant, and land owner, at age fifty-five, Walter Steiger said nothing that resembled Alger Roberts’ proclamation at thirty-nine: “I’ll be out of the dairy business by the time I’m fifty.” But Roberts was farming marginal land with an enjoyable and more profitable source of income at hand. “It’s a solid all-around operation,” Walter declared. “It’s one that will survive. It won’t even need to expand.” Nevertheless, he was scouting for additional land at that time. When asked, “Why purchase unneeded land?” Walter Steiger replied, “Firming up your base for the kids.” Prompted by this reference to business continuity, Walter alluded to Ray’s proposal to farm more acres: “Corn isn’t going to be shelled as it used to be.” Asked, “Suppose you end the service?” Steiger responded, “They’ll probably want to expand and maybe rent another three hundred acres.” Soon after that conversation, Walter purchased eighty choice acres without incurring an operating loss. A favorable economy was returning.

When tracing Rachel Howland’s background to “a real good farm family,” Helen Steiger spoke from both personal knowledge and the Howland family’s local reputation. “Her mother and I were 4-H leaders and Girl Scout leaders together.” Exercising a voice in business management based on Howland and Steiger family negotiations concerning access to the Howland acreage, Rachel addressed Walter’s singular disposition of jointly produced commodities, having said, “Ray just mentioned it the other day, and David has said that in the past.” Identifying the missing component in Ray’s quasi-independent farmer proposal, she said in the event of disagreement about access to shared resources, and the disposition of jointly created commodities, she said: “I think Walter will still be the one in charge.” Yet at that very time Rachel was limiting Walter’s opportunity to exercise that authority, in consultation with Helen and Pat. Acting collectively, the women were encouraging their husbands to think collectively.

“I’d rather have the confrontation between Ray and me or Dad and me,” David stated, yet he accepted his wife’s conflict mediation as long as it stayed unobtrusive. “I’m not sure I’d be happy if she did more than that.” At other times David welcomed Rachel’s advice. “In the farming operation, when I come in and I’m mad at Mom or Dad, I’ll talk to Rachel about it. That helps calm down some of the tension. We try to reason it out. If we decide we’ll do nothing about it, it’s okay. You know, things happen.”

Helen Steiger had professional counselors in mind, when saying, “We’ve never had a problem so severe that we needed to consult with somebody about getting out of it.” Consulting Ray’s parents about land and labor problems, and Rachel’s about access to land, and about a major commitment to the business for David—all drew on family resources. But daughter Annette’s family connection was tenuous, and Helen’s most reliable counselor about this situation was not available: “We miss her a lot,” Helen said, speaking about her mother’s recent death, lip on the verge of trembling. “It really is a different plateau in your life. I never even thought about the subject. It’s scary.”

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“We can order merchandise for the whole store,” the now fully accredited store manager observed about her favorite management tool. “I put my payroll on it,” Helen Steiger said. “When I want readouts for our business during the month, I put a little brain into the computer terminal to go to the New York office to see exactly what we’ve done.” Then a family precedent came to mind. Annette, she noted, “has been doing it all the time.” Although handicapped by the local bank’s higher wage scale, her store had secured the President’s cup for Penney stores in central Iowa. “That’s the biggest gain in sales and operating profit during the past year. The big thing is the fact that we are all women down there. It was a challenge, and I really got into it.” This women’s collective constituted a surrogate family, Helen explained. “The office gal has two little kids, so I let her go home at twelve so she can be with the kids.” Walter was home then as well. “He has learned to heat up the stuff in the microwave.”

Nevertheless, Helen called herself “a misplaced person,” still participating in the family business, “whether I really want to be or not,” although a daughter and daughter-in-law had picked up many of her former responsibilities. “I can’t just fly the coop and maybe do silly things. I listen to all of Pat’s gripes, and I listen to Annette’s gripes, and I listen to David and Rachel’s gripes. I keep reassuring them that they are important people and they do have responsibilities.” Yet while fully occupied, Helen was pushing to do more. “I’ve got a lot of projects I’m going to do. I used to sew. I did all my tailoring and stuff for my own kids, and I kind of miss not being able to do that for my grandchildren. I’m pushing a little too heavy working forty hours and trying to keep up the house and my social engagements and taking care of my grandkids, and I realize that.” “Why not employ a house cleaner?” Prof. Elbert suggested. “I couldn’t have anybody come in and clean my house. It would never feel as clean unless I did it myself. I would feel that I was neglecting my first place.”

If Helen’s wishes actually governed his behavior, Walter said they would be in Hawaii instead of talking about going to a place they had visited twice already, initially after another couple dropped out of a group tour. “When we go on vacation, everything goes smoothly; you forget the problems of the world or day and get to know each other better.” But cattle would need attention during that absence. “You hate to obligate somebody else to take care of them when the weather gets bad. It always seems the minute you get down the road the cows get out, and so you get a little shy about leaving.” Family members and neighbors could oversee the cattle, he granted. “If you just get out and go, they take care of themselves, and if they didn’t, it wouldn’t matter.” “Why not go then?” Citing a competing attraction, Walter called Bund Center “one of the best little towns in the country. As long as you are young and able and kind of enjoy it, then it’s pretty hard to break away.” Explaining the village’s drawing power, he said, “The majority are country people. They are all agricultural. We enjoy these people. There’s a girl in the bank. . .” Stopping momentarily to calculate friendship’s duration, he added, “She isn’t a girl anymore; she’s sixty. She goes to our church. We go to community concerts together.” A furniture dealer and banker were also long-standing friends in a community that resisted flamboyance, while honoring productive behavior, a living style Walter termed “pretty aggressive.” As to the Hawaiian vacation, Walter said he had been ready to go after the last harvest but Helen’s job interfered. “Christmas and wintertime, that’s when the stores are busy. We are going to Hawaii if we can get there. I think we are going to have a good four-week vacation.”

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The demand for strenuous human labor had continued to decline on American farms, yet in 1990 the oversized, midmorning snack remained a rural midwestern social convention. Upon returning to Bund County nine years later, on this bright July morning in 1990 I saw donuts and Danish piled atop Helen’s kitchen table as if awaiting a nineteenth-century threshing crew. While watching Walter, David, and Ray attack the caloric abundance as if farming’s human energy demand had not changed, this visitor joined Helen, Pat, and Rachel in saluting the morning’s accomplishments and possibilities with coffee and Danish.

Three generations of the Steiger family were assembled that morning. When meeting Ruth Mary's brother, Todd, then entering the post-toddler phase of his apprenticeship, I knew that Rachel had maintained her family reproduction schedule. The rest of the family business human continuity resource was also there. Assuming aptitude for farming, appropriate apprenticeships, and subsequent courtships—and the absence of serious ill health and accident—five children, upon achieving middle-generation status, should be able to continue every income-producing activity in a competitive manner without requiring anyone's departure. While parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles added their responses to Iowa's economic upturn to the oral history business record, the future source of labor, management, and ownership played quietly at the opposite end of the kitchen, unless an attentive older child's question or comment opened a brief conversational sidebar.

Walter Steiger's cyclical economy lesson had been validated again. Wallen Farm's acreage having increased forty percent during nine years of relative prosperity, and with corn, soybeans, and hay occupying 1,630 Iowa acres, a hog component was augmenting beef cattle on the animal side of the business. With larger, more versatile machines and more effective chemicals making Wallen Farm's labor force increasingly productive, all aspects of farming, plus trucking grain and shelling corn, remained family matters. Farm consolidation had eliminated the Howland-family tenant, enabling the Steiger family business to rent those 380 productive acres. In addition, Walter had purchased 250 acres at auction. His enthusiasm while reporting that acquisition suggested he had corrected a flamboyant farmer's mistake. Asked if this actually happened, Walter replied with the broadest possible grin.

David left his "hang-loose thing" behind and climbed the agricultural ladder by making a major commitment to the business; through negotiations between the Steiger and Howland families, Rachel's parents agreed to finance the hog component of their son-in-law's feedlot operation. Vesting management responsibility for the animal component of the family business in David opened the way to dividing management authority along commodity lines—much like Ray advocated nearly a decade earlier. While marketing 500 hogs and 100 cattle each year, David is also selling some of the corn and hay that Walter and Ray supply to feed them. In 1990 this integrated crop-and-animal production unit apparently provided a viable alternative to continuous cropping practices and vast animal feedlots.

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While preparing to update the Steiger oral history record by reading the transcript of his conversation nine years earlier, Ray had been surprised by the frustration he expressed on that occasion. Having developed Wallen Farm's computer-assisted record creation and retrieval system during the following years, in 1990 Ray was routinely handling business information that his father-in-law had formerly sequestered. Wallen Farm's designated record manager had forgotten that his secondary position on the agricultural ladder once seemed endless. Having investigated computer applications that enable farm people to quickly apply wide-ranging information to business management decisions, Ray repeated his grain hauling initiative, and in 1990 the farm management consultant was sharing that expertise with area farmers. Evidently sufficiently established in farming to enjoy some comfortable time, Ray and Pat recently ended seven vacation-free years by making the Disneyland trip Pat missed a generation earlier. That family adventure accompanied the resolution of two long-standing marital issues: family time, which increased as Ray's management consultation service replaced long-distance driving, and family income, which increased when Pat became a full-time teacher in Bund Center's middle school.

During the 1980s, however, Helen Steiger became jobless when her employer replaced the Bund Center and other local stores with shopping mall superstores. Her energy still abundant and interest in retailing undiminished, she returned to a family business as a salesperson in her brother's Bund Center pharmacy; Helen's only concession to retirement was making just a half-time commitment to that job. Asked to compare the satisfaction this work provided with being in charge of the store, she replied, "doing what I want to do." Walter applied the same words to his daily activity, but when asked whether this meant having the final word in business

decisions, Walter only smiled knowingly. Entering retirement with his customary caution, Walter was drawing on credit generated within the family during a difficult economy to achieve business counselor status. And life now was being aided by farming's decreasing demand for strenuous physical labor, the lengthening American life span, and his own good health.

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Agricultural specialization proceeded apace during the next twelve years. When I visited the Steiger family on a clear brisk January morning in 2002, only Bund County's gently rolling terrain distinguished its endless blanket of corn and soybean stubble from the Illinois prairie that had supported these crops a half-century earlier. During the 1990s, updated New Deal-era soil conservation programs had removed trees and brush along water courses, adding more productive acres to Iowa farms and expediting the movement of ever-larger farm equipment. Wildlife, while dislodged again, unlike in the 1930s had politically effective animal welfare and environmental interest groups who were engaging federal and state legislators and administrators on their behalf. Native plants, along with the pheasant and deer they feed and shelter, had received secure accommodations on nearby wetlands.

Interrupting his account of family responses to circumstances emerging from local, national, and international conditions, Walter stopped the pickup truck near a small corral where seventeen longhorn crossbred cattle munched bales of hay. Noting the mini-herd's genetic diversity, Walter identified several animals as promising breeders and another as a candidate for the family freezer, accounting for the small herd's presence with a single word. Lest this visitor understand "fooling" to mean the animals were purely his daily pleasure, Walter quickly added, "for sale." "How about the other cattle and David's hogs?" "Gone."

The animal component of Walter Steiger's version of sustainable farming encountered an extended period of market instability when overproduction of hogs and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of beef cattle, occurred nationwide during the 1990s. When leaving the farm four years earlier, the last group of hogs returned about half its cost of production; but as countless farms across America stopped raising hogs, that depressed market turned favorable. With Wallen Farm's hog housing facilities scarcely a decade old awaiting the bulldozer in 2002, a few miles away an already larger hog operation was expanding its facilities to better enjoy the favorable market. With beef cattle numbers in the United States also outdistancing market demand, Wallen Farm's beef cattle lost money two years in a row, then followed hogs off the acreage, leaving Wallen Farm firmly within Bund County's continuous-cropping agricultural mainstream. Nevertheless, Walter Steiger defended the practice he had been dismissing as unsustainable by citing an economically attractive alternative to erosion-conducive tillage practices that agricultural engineers had perfected during the twentieth century's final decade.

Much as uniting three productivity-enhancing machines on one chassis in the nineteenth century allowed one person to simultaneously harvest, thresh, and winnow grain, a single operator employing "no till" technology can now plant thirty feet or more of farm land with corn, soybeans, or another crop in a single pass, even when encountering heavy sod. Before being combined, this machine's components had already dramatically increased the power and effectiveness; planting equipment twelve-feet wide in 1900 had reached forty feet, the nutrient-to-aggregate ratio in chemical fertilizer became much smaller, and a single herbicide application had replaced multiple applications. Although called "no till," the computer-controlled machine tills seed beds a few inches wide—sufficient to facilitate germination in most domesticated plants—while also measuring and delivering seed, fertilizer, and herbicide, and leaving behind its passage a soil-binding mulch of residue from earlier crops. With global positioning technology added to this combination of machine, seed, and chemicals, a meter-by-meter record of the previous harvest supplied by the harvesting combine can adapt seed count and fertilizer application to the existing nutrient supply, thereby reducing seed and fertilizer costs along with environmental pollution due to nutrient run off.

Although not the largest “no till” planter available, nor equipped with global positioning technology, Wallen Farm’s machine was securing the farm’s highly productive topsoil within a layer of plant residue. Indicating the machine’s effectiveness, Walter pointed to a sizable culvert that drained a field it planted. Although that culvert overflowed in a recent storm, he subsequently found no evidence of erosion in the field.

Clearly pleased to be asked about the corn-shelling service, Walter replied, “down to one customer,” while leading this visitor into the farm’s equipment shed. Passing behind six red tractors ranging from 125 to 200 horsepower, and a much smaller cultivator-type tractor apparently hiding among them, we reached the machine in question. Clearing a thick layer of dust from the sheller’s drive belt and cob elevator, he praised the machine’s superior features, as if asserting that its sterling performance did not warrant such neglect. Yet a 20,000-bushel grain holding facility—equipped with petroleum-fueled drying equipment located some two hundred feet from the equipment shed—indicated that Wallen Farm was not the machine’s sole customer. With this capital-intensive facility in place, corn and soybean selling price and delivery date become subject to negotiation between seller and buyer, making the marketing process far less risky. Given Wallen Farm’s extensive control over the elements of agriculture, the family business seemed a factory-like, steady-state operation. Walter, however, firmly disagreed. The recent soybean crop suffered from dry weather, he pointed out, while Brazil’s soybean crop had been excellent. Nevertheless, Walter accepted foreign competition as a normal feature of midwestern farming—but not a local seed producer’s flamboyant behavior. Targeting his premium land rental payments, Walter said they were putting thousands of prime Bund County acres out of reach for less aggressive farmers.

Hoe-in-hand conversation lost privileged-work status among the Steiger family’s younger generation before 2002, leaving Wallen Farm to choose between walking the seed bean crop with Mexican workers (like its flamboyant competitor) or eliminating the labor-intensive crop. The business having Helen’s father as its most recent hire, having chosen the latter response, Wallen Farm relied on herbicides to eradicate undesired plants in the commercial crop. In 2002 Walter granted chemicals he had used reluctantly twenty years earlier the status of sunshine and rain. “You can’t do anything without herbicides.” Ray’s application-rate decisions were no longer contested.

David and Rachel’s agreement to stay together had collapsed a year earlier, a great surprise to Walter and Helen and, they said, to the couple’s Bund Center friends as well. Clearly hoping that reconciliation would follow the divorce, the parents would not say whether their son’s relationship with another woman proceeded or followed the collapse of his major commitment to the family business, but the consequence Walter feared from a divorce did not occur. The Steiger family still farmed 380 Howland-family acres, but with cash rent replacing crop sharing, the renter faced bad weather and low commodity prices alone. While the divorce’s long-term impact on business continuity was unclear, the divorced couple’s decision to remain in close proximity will probably check further fragmentation. With Rachel occupying the former “joint thing” home, and David living in Bund Center, their children and other family members from three generations were engaging each other in the course of daily life.

When making David responsible for federal farm program paper work and office contacts—a major commitment in a business relying on complex federal agricultural program supplements to marketplace income—Wallen Farm’s officers restored an element of son and son-in-law equity. Yet David’s fellow farmers knew it was Ray who was overseeing Wallen Farm’s herbicide and fertilizer applications, operating its grain dryer, and providing a farm management consulting service. Furthermore, Ray’s presence on the governing board of the Farm Service Agency, Bund County’s federal agricultural program coordinating unit, and service as County Fair treasurer was increasing his visibility throughout the county.

An occasional automobile moved dust around a single gas station, lone restaurant, and mostly empty stores in many small midwestern villages after World War II; but when the twentieth century ended, merchants in larg-

er villages that benefited from their competitors' decline were now struggling to meet stiff competition from a regional shopping mall's attractive prices and wide-ranging merchandise. Bund Center, however, was not suffering. In 2002 its single empty store was being remodeled to serve a growing clientele, and elsewhere along Main Street a bank's recently upgraded facilities anchored flourishing clothing, grocery, and hardware stores; in the surrounding residential area, the village's economic vitality had created a seller's market. With nearly every existing house occupied, a dozen new houses designed for middle-income buyers stood on land that recently raised corn and soybean crops. A well-patronized restaurant and Bund Center's first motel—a two-story national chain operation—occupied the village periphery with three small factories. Together, they employed 150 people to make hardwood furniture components, plastic housewares, and food condiments.

Much like railroad construction that brought economic opportunity to late-nineteenth-century midwestern villages, transportation planners and legislators in Washington, D.C., and in Iowa's state capital, Des Moines, located a federally financed four-lane highway a few miles from Bund Center, thereby giving a displaced hog and cattle farmer a new outlet for his talent and ambition. With the integration of the village economy with the movement of people and goods between central and eastern Iowa increasing the demand for residential housing, David revisited his teenage career choice. Without rejecting his chosen path, he picked up the once-rejected alternative—building design and construction—and in partnership with a local banker, constructed much of the middle-income housing located on Bund Center's periphery. Given the economic momentum that Bund Center's concrete connection with Eastern Iowa was generating, David's dual interests seemed likely to intersect on the eighty acres his father purchased during the 1987 buyers' market. Those acres border Bund Center.

“Easing into,” Helen Steiger replied when asked about retiring, yet the phrase seemed inappropriate for someone who was supplementing a half-time salesperson position in her brother's pharmacy with promoting local retailers as a volunteer through the Federation of Women's Clubs. Until customer dissatisfaction with impersonal shopping mall service set in, she said that access to the regional shopping mall via a four-lane highway had devastated local merchants. But combining friendly well-informed service, nationally advertised merchandise at acceptable prices, and highly effective person-to-person advertising had made the local merchants competitive again. Although claiming no credit for devising the recovery's strategy, Helen's enthusiastic account of that volunteer service suggested she had been active during its creation.

Judging from Walter and Helen's glowing account of Annette's new home, bringing the family together stood atop a decade's accomplishments. Unlike the mobile home that accompanied a marriage ending in divorce, this parental gift honored a second union's stability and physical proximity with abundant brick and mortar. Annette and the industrial engineer she married twelve years earlier—and their three children, ages six to ten—were living a few blocks from them. With David also living a few blocks away and Pat just a short distance by county road, several Bund County miles encompassed three Steiger generations. Walter and Helen seemed to reduce that distance symbolically in their family room with portraits of grandchildren who often came there after school and on weekends.

When I did not recognize the Acker home during this visit, I learned that my envisioned structure had been destroyed by lightning. However, no board-by-board removing family frolic had occurred; an insurance-compensated contractor bulldozed the fire gutted structure, then erected a culturally undistinguished replacement. But rather than disappear, “privileged work” had migrated to Bund Center's middle school, a location that would have been highly unlikely a decade earlier. Pat Acker was teaching educationally disadvantaged students there, assisted by an enthusiastic volunteer. According to Helen Steiger, mother and daughter enjoyed doing this important work together.

Walter continued the conversation about business continuity when parking the pickup near a small obsolete barn near the Acker home. In its basement, a friendly sheep, several goats, two llamas, and a pot-bellied pig eyed us carefully, while he linked the youngest Acker child, a boy already fifteen, with this evidence of farming

aptitude. But upon returning to Bund Center, Walter Steiger identified another possible contributor to business continuity. Waving toward a farmhouse where a friend of the younger Acker daughter lived, he suggested that a long-standing friendship was merging into courtship.

“Reading, crocheting, sewing for grandchildren,” Helen replied when asked about easing into retirement. After acknowledging a modest decline in energy, she referred to attending church functions and promoting local retailers, leaving the time involved unspecified. On his part, Walter spoke about attending community playhouse presentations with Helen, picking up golf balls on Bund Center’s new golf course with his grandchildren, “fooling” with cattle, and trying to laugh about mistakes—leaving the source of those mistakes unspecified. Asked if the mistakes involved business decisions by his family’s current middle generation, Walter repeated his knowing smile. The much-anticipated trip to Hawaii had occurred a year earlier—probably their last, he said; but rather than imply that the active mid-seventies couple was not up to further travel, he added, “too commercialized now.”



## Chapter 4

### Conclusions

In contrast to family-owned farms operated in most states with family management and machine-enhanced labor, large farm businesses located in southern California and the American southwest utilize a wider range of industrial practices to produce vast quantities of fruit and vegetables throughout the year, as if from a steadily moving assembly line. They combine man-made and natural resources in a manner aptly described six decades ago by Carey McWilliams in a classic study of industrial farming, *Factories in the Field*: favorable temperature and sunshine promoting plant growth; a naturally dry environment, thus avoiding untimely applications of water, while federally-supported irrigation systems apply appropriate amounts of this vital resource at optimum times. Attracted by year-round planting, crop maintenance, and harvesting opportunities, assembly-line workers operate productivity-enhancing machines while a larger number—manually skilled and usually migrant—perform planting and harvesting tasks that await future mechanization. Should a commodity's output outpace demand, or a slack point arrives in a commodity's production cycle, the assembly line slows while employers keep this work force available at minimal cost by combining piece-work compensation with access to simple housing. With natural and human resources coordinated in open fields under factory-like conditions, fruit and vegetable assembly-line output becomes predictable to a degree unusual on American farms, a decided marketing asset. Another industrial adoption—the corporate form of ownership—facilitates garnering the necessary capital.

Other assembly lines prepare beef cattle for market while utilizing a semi-arid high plains environment and a widely dispersed human population to mitigate negative responses to large-scale feedlot by-products. Large-scale poultry producers, however, made this environmental support system unnecessary by the mid twentieth century by assembling labor-enhancing technology inside factory-like buildings. Soon a minor feature of nineteenth-century American farms was transformed into a coast-to-coast poultry industry. Development of a large-scale animal confinement system continued to enhance labor productivity—notably when formulating and delivering rations to animals, controlling air temperature and humidity, and addressing an especially challenging large-scale animal confinement area problem: that of removing manure while retaining its fertilizing value. Suddenly confining 10,000 hogs within factory-like buildings became a feasible way to farm. Then, in the twentieth century's final decade, computer-controlled technology mastered dairy farming's labor-intensive milking chore; and with this technology and several modestly skilled workers replacing highly-skilled workers with less versatile machines, thousand-cow dairy herds can pass through largely automated milking facilities twenty-four hours a day.

While highly industrialized assembly-line farming's capital-intensive character and corporate structure tends to attract non-farm people seeking investment opportunities, sufficiently skilled farm families in which dominant members subordinate other family values to business efficiency, can also move in this direction. Highly versatile, the family business's organization that owns and manages over ninety percent of the nearly two million farms entering the twenty-first century in the United States, ranges in scale from capital-intensive agricultural assembly lines to labor intensive farmer's market production. Like early nineteenth-century counterparts initiating agricultural industrialization by attaching draft horses to simple machines—and those using ever-larger, more versatile equipment powered with petroleum in the twentieth century—these businesses combine family reproduction with occupational education to retain land, labor, management skills, and other resources from generation to generation. Yet this form of business is subject to instability during this transition as some apprentices progress from basic task performance to ownership, while others are winnowed out. Negotiations that determine the future locus of management and ownership may involve two or three generations of a family and can be lengthy and difficult, especially when a member of the advancing generation

contemplates marriage that enlists labor and promotes family reproduction, yet may also introduce a source of discord. Furthermore, the business is subject to instability when family-related activities preempt business initiatives, the case where teenage children give public school-related activities priority over apprentice-related tasks, or recreational activity preempts the labor supply at critical times. While tension between family and business may be accentuated when family members take contributions that other family members make to the business for granted, and gradually diminish as family- and business-related activities merge during the day, it may fester indefinitely as members from two or even three generations evaluate each apprentice's suitability for business management and ownership. Concessions made to accommodate business needs or realize apparent opportunities may reemerge years later, re-formed into deeply felt resentment.

Reflecting on the happy progress of his occupational odyssey, a grateful New York farmer observed, "a business is fortunate to have a family." But since every member of his three-generation family apparently enjoyed meeting wide-ranging environmental and human challenges to their business collectively, he could have said, "a family is fortunate to have a business."

Freezing temperatures that deter plant growth—briefly in the South and up to five months in northern states—make the family-business approach to farming advantageous when producing the nation's multi-million-acre wheat, corn, and soybean crops, as well as grasses and legumes that animals consume as hay and ensilage. Housing and feeding workers—who will later execute the tillage, planting, crop maintenance, and harvest sequence—throughout the production hiatus poses a heavy financial burden, but in this business the family carries this burden. And the family members remain productive, although at a slower pace, during farming's slowest season by repairing equipment, ordering fertilizer, seed, and chemicals, and negotiating operating credit. Wintertime services may also include running an auxiliary business, and the family connection may prove invaluable during extended periods of bad weather or low commodity prices, perhaps by reducing household expenses or by augmenting farm income with off-farm work.

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Agricultural colleges supported under the 1862 Morrill Act could have investigated farming's family and business relationships during their initial decade, and then informed twentieth-century publications and county-based outreach programs, but in the late nineteenth century such research seemed unnecessary. To agricultural college faculty members and their USDA allies, the nation's industrial sector—recently instrumental in the Civil War's outcome—seemed the evident route to economic and social progress. At that time commodity production costs were falling dramatically, while home and neighborhood production sites were giving way to factory workplaces where machines magnified human labor. Advising farm families to concentrate business management decisions in the husband—who acts as an entrepreneur, applying college and USDA-recommended technology and practices—resembled the family and business disconnection the industrial worker experienced when departing from home to operate a machine under a foreman's guidance. Consistent with this advice, these educators ignored a vital family and business connector, the apprenticeship form of education, while advocating for rural school centralization and its course-and-credit measure delivery method.

Nevertheless, the advocates of family and business separation expected each farm business to generate an adequate family income, a position that ignored the off-farm employment and other income that kept many farm family businesses viable throughout the twentieth century. While identifying barriers separating a farm family and an adequate income, the agricultural educators distinguished between environmental and business management-related conditions. Farms handicapped by highly acidic, poorly drained soil, hilly terrain unsuited to farm equipment's evolving technology, or difficult access to markets were labeled "marginal," while "bad management" was attributed to those experiencing serious financial difficulty while equipped with adequate buildings, equipment, soil, and having sufficient access to markets and credit. Associated in turn with basing business decisions on insufficient or erroneous information, or with using a flawed procedure for reaching

them, the educators considered allowing other family members to participate in business decisions a case of bad management.

To discourage bad management, county-based college representatives informed farm people about sound soil management practices, credit use, and countless other aspects of crop and animal production and marketing, but problematic family and business relationships received a different response from the self-proclaimed “change agents.” Lacking access to relevant research, the county agents withheld advice or relied on personal knowledge of the family’s situation when providing it.

Early in the twentieth century, the U.S. agricultural colleges separated family and business matters internally when organizing teaching and research along gender lines. Business-oriented commodity production and marketing-related disciplines taught by male instructors remained in these colleges, while emerging family- and homemaking-related subjects became the province of female instructors in newly established colleges of home economics. Having exported the expertise needed to address emotion-laden issues that arise as farm families transfer business management and ownership to another generation, the agricultural colleges offered a purely business solution: a financial agreement between the presumed entrepreneur and one or several sons.

Family and business interdependency supports considering “being my own boss” a prime occupational attraction for farm people. Although the concept may seem preposterous when the same people readily acknowledge reliance on easy access to petroleum products, electricity, repair parts, and other vital industrial supplies and services; nevertheless, when allocating family resources—labor, buildings, and equipment among them—to specific aspects of crop and animal production, perhaps reallocating those resources within a single day in response to changing circumstances, these families demonstrate a degree of independence from externalities that few American businesses can match. Dependency within family, neighborhood, and community enables farm people to take the concept seriously.



## Appendix

### The Author



Gould Colman

# Gould Colman

- Reared on a farm in Orleans County, NY, he first visited Cornell as an impressionable 10-year old.
- Drafted into the US Army (1945-1946).
- A Cornell history major (BA, 1951; MA, 1953)
- 1956-59 Storm King School (Social Studies teacher, Student Construction Supervisor)
- 1959-62 Cornell University Graduate School
- 1962 Cornell PhD in History
- Hired by Cornell's College of Agriculture to write a history of the College based upon his doctoral dissertation. The book: *Education & Agriculture: A History of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University*. 1963. <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/10733>
- Noteworthy knowledge of Cornell University's history as University Archivist.
- Lives on a 50-acre abandoned farm acquired while a graduate student.
- With agriculture an intrinsic part of his world-view, he built his own home and uses multiple tractors that include an operational F-14 Farmall.
- Extensive knowledge of the historical treasures held by the Rare and Manuscript Collection at Cornell makes him a compelling resource for those who wish to chronicle their own journeys at Cornell via the eCommons Collection: "The Legacy of Cornell Faculty and Staff"  
<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/14143>



See: "Barry B. Adams talks with Gould Colman"  
<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/33374>



## The “unretired” Gould Colman



*At his home with his regularly-used, 75-year-old Farmall F-14 tractor.*