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# IN RUTS AND FURROWS

— by Janie Horn Janzen

In my growing up years it took two red and gray tractors and three sunny gold days to plow our wheat land. Soon after the custom combine crew had moved north, I knew Dad would draft me to drive the little Ford while he managed the bigger machine, and that there would be no rest for man, machines or me until the red dirt was turned over.

I was eager for the challenge. Daily routines were blown away as I put the tractor into road gear and let the morning wind explore my face. As we bounced to the wheat field, the thought traveled through my head that my family needed me. My day had a purpose.

When we reached the edge of stiff stubble, Dad stopped to give me final directions, "Drive in third gear and keep it at 1800 r.p.m. If anything goes wrong, wave to me so I can come help you. Ready?"

Dad led the way so I had a delightful view of the first dirt turning up in clods three layers deep. Then it was time for me to start the yearly event. My beginning was easier because I had a furrow to follow, but the thrill was there as I watched the cool earth roll over to tease the summer sun. The red soil smelled clean and rich, and I felt like singing.

By noon we had made a number of rounds, and I had sung most of the music I knew by memory. Mother came and unpacked the picnic lunch while Dad and I looked over the field to see how far we had progressed from the starting point and grinned with pride at what we had achieved. Then under the cottonwood tree, together we savored garden cucumbers coated with country cream, Mother's original recipe crisp chicken, new potatoes covered with crunchy chicken gravy, clear cold tea, and chocolate layer cake.

We returned home after dark, dusty but content.

At 5:00 a.m. of the second day I couldn't find my enthusiasm anywhere. The sheet that I had pulled over my head to keep from hearing Mother's call was also covering red eyes smarting from Oklahoma dirt, sunburned legs because I had insisted on wearing shorts to get a tan, and a bruised bottom where my padding did not match the tractor seat.

Just before my parents lost all their patience, I pulled myself out of bed and into my work clothes. Unable to face breakfast, I picked up a piece of yesterday's cake as I passed through the kitchen and carried it to the field to eat when the sun was up.

Dad and I and silence drove to the field in the pickup. There was no conversation as the gasoline gurgled into the tractor tanks. When Dad reminded, "If anything goes wrong, wave to me," I nodded and we started our rounds. There was no beginning today, and I knew there would be no end. I would follow Dad around and around and around the wheatless field, but we would not finish. 13

My muscles pleaded to get off the rigid metal tractor seat, but I followed the furrow behind Dad.

My skin begged for cooler air, but I followed the furrow behind Da.

My mind searched for songs to sing, but all my songs had been sung the day before.

I began daydreaming, and in every episode I was the sweet super girl who became the heroine of each situation. While I dreamed around the field I forgot my complaints until I forgot to lift the plow at the corner. I became aware of Dad watching my awkward attempts to complete the turn, but when he was convinced I would return to the narrow path instead of creating my own route, he continued on his round.

After that every circle around the field was the same until I saw a blue and white station wagon approaching our land and then waiting at the edge of the plowed ground. Mother was there with a 4:00 lunch. She pulled back the hand embroidered dish towel and revealed a long pan of sweet rolls still warm from the oven. She held out a figure eight filled with tart red cherries and drizzled with white powdered sugar icing and knew it was my favorite pastry. When I reached for my fifth cherry roll, I felt ready to plow on until dark even though the hot sun was still high, and we were still in the middle with no chance of meeting the end of our task.

As I started my tractor for the third day, I began humming a hopeful tune. The tiresome work ahead didn't seem a great problem when we had the prospect of reaching our goal.

Throughout the day furrow met furrow as odd-shaped corner patches were finished.

Late in the day the last strip of stubble disappeared, and we drove toward the road that would take us to the farmyard. At the field driveway I stopped and looked back with pride at what we had accomplished. When I glanced forward I was rewarded by the pleased smile on Dad's face, and then I followed him home singing all the way.

This afternoon I watched Big Blue — a four wheeled drive diesel tractor that was pulling a multi-shared plow. The driver sat on an adjustable cushioned seat in a radio equipped air conditioned cab and plowed the same land that I used to plow. I know it is the same land even though it is now terraced and makes twice as many bushels of harvest wheat per acre. As the one man and the one machine worked, memories of past plowing drifted into my mind. Suddenly those three days each summer seemed just like my life.

Tonight I prayed: Father, You said I could call on You when I'm in trouble. Well, there's nothing really wrong now, and You know I'm doing my best to follow You, but sometimes this rut seems so confining. Yes, it was exciting at the beginning when everything was new. I still remember learning how to ride bike, and starting college was a big thrill. And I thought nothing would compare to hearing my bridegroom pledge his love to me, but at that time I didn't know about giving birth. Now my two boys are having many exciting beginnings, but here I am in the middle. Every day is the same. It's hard to get up in the mornings to go to work. During the day I worry about having enough money to buy groceries, make car payments, and pay the dentist. Frequently I wonder if the hectic schedule we try to keep has a purpose. Then at night I dread the next day because I fear it will be another round. Father, I know I can't have cherries everyday, but would You help me find a song for my life? I want to make it. I want to get to the end and be glad that I plowed through the problems. I want to see a pleased smile on Your face when I reach my reward.

Father, do You mind if I sing?