

THE GIRL IN THE RED FLANNEL JACKET

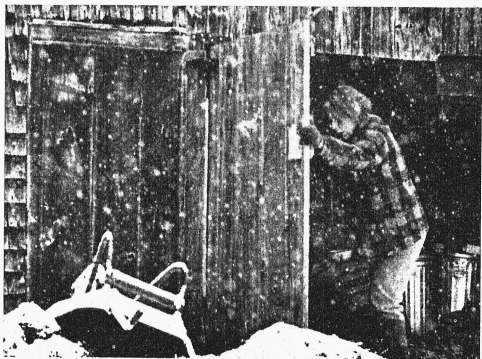
In 1919, America was singing "How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down On The Farm?" Now, more than a half century later, the trend may be starting in the other direction. Disillusioned city dwellers are migrating to the country. Some go to join communes and grow organic foods, while others go to escape the urban traffic and pollution. Marty Stevens differs from those who have moved to the country to enjoy the "pure life." Living alone on 100 acres of Maine farmland, she takes her land, her crops and her animals seriously.

Thirty-three years separate the Marty of Cornville, Maine, from the Marty who was born and raised on Chicago's South Side and who spent ten years in New York as an off-Broadway director, part-time actress, weekend theater manager and ghetto schoolteacher. Now instead of sipping an after-theater drink at midnight, she is pulling on a red flannel jacket and going off to the barn to care for a sick cow.

But the transition from city girl to New England farmer was not an easy one. She spent hours in her cellar just learning how to stoke a coal furnace. She planted her first garden too late for the northern country and she thought you could rent a cow.

The first time Marty had ever seen a tree up close was when she studied radio-TV journalism and theater at the University of Missouri-Columbia. "I think Columbia really triggered my feelings for small-town America," she says. But Marty had aspirations to be a director. After graduation with a B.J. in 1959, she took off for New York.





She made the rounds of NBC, CBS and Time-Life with no luck. She got a job as a secretary and spent her off hours off-Broadway. "I finally devoted my full time to the theater and went broke," she says. In 1963, she landed a job in the New York office of the Skowhegan, Maine, School of Painting and Sculpture. "I went to the Maine campus for the summer and fell in love with it."

That was the beginning of Marty's summers in Maine. The next year she rented a farm there. Later she purchased an old schoolhouse for a summerplace.

In the meantime, she had taken some education courses and started teaching math and English in a Puerto-Rican-black ghetto. "It was one of the most despairing things I've ever done. The kids didn't have a chance. They were damned. Some of them were making \$300-400 a week selling drugs. How could I tell a kid like that that you need an education to succeed? I was a good teacher but not a good fighter. I asked myself if I could drive myself to the point where I could succeed and the answer was no."

Disillusioned with New York, she bought her 100-acre farm in Cornville and moved to Maine. "Some of the local people thought I was crazy, a city woman alone trying to farm." But an 83-year-old farmer, Zelot Kincaid sort of adopted her. He showed her how to repair the porch on her 200-year-old farmhouse, where to put the bearings for the barn, and how to smoke butchered pigs.

With the help of neighboring farmers, plumbers, county extension workers, and a little bit of trial and error, she has made a living for three years off the rough New Eng-

land countryside. "Now I grow everything I need. The only necessities I buy are coffee and cigarettes."

"I don't miss New York at all. Maybe, it's because the problems of dealing with this kind of life (repairing the barn, making your own butter and cheese and caring for the crops and animals) are so overwhelming there isn't time for anything else." It takes Marty three hours a day just to feed her two horses, six sheep, and assorted numbers of cattle, geese, ducks, hens, goats, dogs and cats.

Some people come up here wanting to live a rustic life and to be creative, to paint or write at the same time, she says. It seems there is never time for both though. "Up to this point, being able to supply all of my own needs has been enough of a creative outlet for me."

Her only income is the money she makes teaching welfare recipients subjects they need to get their high school diplomas. "I sell a few things from my garden and some butter, eggs and cheese too," she says. Marty also breeds and sells a few animals now and then. "The farm is not a profit maker, but my profit is the self-satisfaction I get from living here."

"I'll never go back to the city. There is such impermanence there. You teach a kid you'll never see again. You redo your apartment and the building is torn down. But here, when you see the cut nails a person dropped 200 years ago and you see the apple trees he planted and you know the flies bit him just the way they bite you when you're planting your own trees — well, you know you're a link between the past and the present and the future." □