

I believe in tipping generously in restaurants. Except in rare instances, the people who wait on customers in eating establishments work hard and often do not receive much in the way of appreciation from the people they serve.

I do not know this from personal experience. I have never worked in a restaurant, but I see the staff--mostly young women--hurrying from table to table, trying to fulfill the desires of all their customers. It cannot be an easy job, and it is often one for which the compensation is inadequate.

My empathy, however, arises mostly from other sources. Partly, it is just human nature to watch what others are doing, and it is obvious how much effort goes into serving meals and beverages to people who think that they are the only ones needing attention.

Mostly, though, my compassion for waitressing arises from the lambing season. That may seem strange, but daily chores in the lambing barn have some similarities to work in a restaurant.

When a ewe has a lamb or lambs, we move her and her offspring to a little pen where they can spend a couple of days that allow the lambs to get started and for the little family to bond. We have twenty-four of these pens along one side of the lambing barn. During the season, they are usually mostly or completely occupied.

This means that we must provide feed and water for the ewes while they are in the small pens. Thus--the waitressing experience I have. Twice a day, each ewe receives a little bundle of hay and a pail with a measure of oats, wheat, and pellets in the bottom. Once a day, we also provide a pail of water.

The sheep know when feeding time has arrived. They begin to complain and harass the help the minute they hear the first oat hit the bottom of a pail.

We hurry along the alley way, serving each pen in turn. The ewes that have not yet received their meals often put their front feet on one of the gate boards so that they can lift themselves up above the rest, making it easier to harangue the laborers. They complain, constantly and volubly, obviously insinuating that there is no reason for us to spend our

time serving those other ewes. After all, they know who is important and who should receive preferential treatment. The noise is deafening.

We work as quickly as we can. The ewes that have not yet had their lambs are in large pens of a dozen or so, and they complain just as loudly. The families that have graduated from individual small enclosures to "mixing pens" with several ewes and their lambs are equally annoying. It goes more quickly to provide them with feed and water, though, so the cacophony of "baas" from those quarters is quickly stilled. But, as we work our way down the line of lambing pens, we realize that for sheep as well as for people, the big "I" has great relevance. And, when everyone is fed and watered and quiet has returned to the barn, I realize that I didn't get even one tip.