

When I told Runo what I had in mind for this week's newsletter, he said that it was certainly a gripping tale. This, from a person whose acquisition of English as a second language didn't start until he was in his mid twenties.

In any case, the story begins anew each morning. We get up, eat our breakfast, and go to the barn. I head first for the milk room, and Runo opens the east door of the barn and walks across the concrete pad to the green gate. He opens that swinging steel impediment to wandering livestock and calls the milk cows.

"Buttercup! Effie!" Sometimes, they are there waiting to go in, but at other times even repeated calls into the darkness go unrewarded. Then, he must go out to their most likely locality in the pasture and, when he finds them, encourage them to get up and head to the barn.

In the meantime, I am busy in the milk room. Before I begin the morning's work, I look around for the tree frog that lives there. He has kept flies at a minimum all summer long, and he (or she) is a valued inhabitant of the room. This morning, he is in the west window, his skin mostly mottled green today. After I locate him, I put together the equipment, first inserting the filter pad into the milk filter and then assembling the cream separator. Runo will usually come into the milk room before I have finished. He fills a pail with warm water and soap and goes back to wash the udders of the two cows.

I grab the two stainless steel milk pail and go into the main barn. Buttercup is standing in her place on the far western end of the row of stalls, and Effie is near the east end. Their two calves are tied in other stalls in the middle of the row.

I hand Runo his pail and milk stool and go to Effie. I have no stool, only a white plastic pail that I upend for a substitute. Then, the "gripping" part of the story begins. We each grasp two teats of our respective cows and begin to milk. I milk the back two quarters of Effie's udder, but I believe Runo milks the two quarters on his side of Buttercup. I have not watched him, but that is what he says.

The first squirts of milk into the metal pails make impressive "pings," but as the milk covers the bottom of the pails, the noise becomes

more and more subdued. Then, the most interesting feature is the buildup of foam on top of the milk. We milk as fast as we can for several reasons. Mostly, though, it is because there are two hungry calves waiting for their breakfast.

In the case of Effie, I also hurry because she often eventually refuses to "let her milk down," and I have to untie her calf and let him come to nurse before I finish "my side." Then, the milk will begin to flow again as she recognizes that the one she really wants to have her milk has begun to nurse.

Finishing with my side of the cow while the calf is suckling can be a tricky business. Now, I must hold my head tightly against Effie's hip--away from her side where I may be blasted at any time by a calf head that butts the other side of the udder and emerges on my side of the cow. I don't want that hard head in my face.

Eventually, one way or another, we both have our pails full of milk. I pour a generous serving into the dish for Butter, the barn cat. Then I go into the milk room again and pour the milk into the strainer that will filter the liquid into a pail. From there, it goes into the basin of the separator that Runo has, by this time, begun to turn.

Usually, I take over that job, and he goes on to the other barn chores. I like turning the separator. It is a small one, and it takes the centrifuge some time to separate our two pails full of warm milk into foamy skim milk--destined for the two pigs--and thick, yellow cream.

After washing the separator and other equipment, I put everything back in its place, and we wash and sweep the floor in the milk room. We take the jar of morning cream and head for the cabin. It is time for coffee.