

Our lane, that narrow strip that most people refer to as a driveway, is rather long. The house where I grew up is set well back from the road, and our cabin is even farther from the gravel road, making the lane even longer.

That farm lane has seen a lot of family history. We children met the school bus at the bottom of the lane, and we were vigilant in the mornings as bus time grew close. "Missing the bus" was not something that was encouraged. Kindergarten was a half-day session in those years, and I was not an enthusiastic kindergartner. Not only was it difficult for our parents to persuade me to go to school at all, but school actually began to make me sick. My stomachs grew so frequent that my dad met me at the bottom of the lane when the school bus brought me home. He carried me to the house, big six year old that I was.

At the bottom of the lane is the mailbox. Watching for the mailman (now a mail woman) was a necessary task if one wanted to meet the carrier for some reason. Perhaps, there was a parcel too large to fit in the box, or my mother wanted to buy stamps. We could not see the road for more than a quarter of a mile, so when the mailman appeared, she made a mad dash down the lane to the road. Or, sometimes, if she were not too busy, she walked down the lane at about the time the carrier would arrive and waited for him. I remember being with her once when I was probably nine or ten years old. For some reason, our road was a detour because of work on the Main Road. So, there were a few more cars than usual on this stretch of gravel.

As it happened, that day a number of barn cats accompanied us down the lane and onto the road. They followed as we walked a little way along the road and then back to the lane, waiting for the mailman. A little red car with a Swift's meat company logo on the side came along. The cats strolled down the road, unafraid and taking up the entire width between the ditches. We tried to get them off the driving area, but they did not cooperate. The man in the car, looking more and more frustrated, finally said, in a sour but accepting tone, "Darn cats!"

The long lane made learning to ride a bicycle a safe endeavor. We could ride up and down the long drive without getting out into the road and in the path of the very occasional car that came by. As the lane slopes down to the gravel county road, it is a good place to coast a bike, learning to balance and coordinate pedaling and steering.

In the winter the lane was, and is, sometimes blocked by snow. These days, with a snow blower that attaches to the tractor, it is easier to keep the lane open. When my father plowed the lane with the back blade on the tractor, it was not so easy. The banks along the lane grew high in those years, and the tractor could not keep them pushed back far enough. The lane grew narrower and narrower until, during some winters, we kept the car halfway up the lane and walked the rest of the way. We still do that sometimes.

Our mother's birthday was on St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. On that day, one of her best friends, a neighbor when Mom was growing up south of the village, always came to visit, bringing a birthday cake. It seems that the 17th of March was usually a very stormy day. Close to the Spring Equinox, a

March storm seemed the norm about that time. Anna usually came with the school bus driver when he returned from his morning route, and she went back to the village with him when he left in the afternoon to pick up children at the school for the afternoon run. I remember Anna struggling through the stormy March day, coming up the lane, bringing a birthday cake for our mother. Anna was an exceptional cook and baker, and her cakes were always a treat.

But, why was I at home anyway, on a school day? That is another long story, and one that can't really be completely explained. For some reason, I did not want to go to school at all for many years, and I missed a lot of days. I suppose that my mother's birthday and the expected arrival of Anna was enough to give me a pass on meeting the school bus that morning.

The bottom third of the lane is pretty, too. There are catalpa trees and two maple trees, and a cedar tree along its east side. It is a pleasant walk to the mailbox. The upper portion, the part that added nearly two thirds of the distance, came about when we built our cabin. That portion of the lane now goes along the west side of the hay barn/lambing barn and then turns, takes a curving route around the horses' round pen, and ends by our yard gate. All of this addition to the original lane can be easily blocked by snow, and often, we leave our vehicle down near the farm house, at the top of the main lane.

The lane can sometimes bring surprising sights. A couple of days ago, I looked out the window in late afternoon after hearing a noise I did not immediately recognize. To my surprise, a Holstein bull was walking up past the hay barn. We don't have any Holsteins, but I was pretty sure he had come from our Amish neighbor's organic dairy farm across the section to the south. I rang the dinner bell to alert Runo, but he had already heard the same sound and was heading for the truck to tell the neighbor.

Meanwhile, the bull walked through the gate and on into the west hayfield. Soon, I looked out and saw the neighbor on horseback, following the tracks of the wayward sire. I went out and talked to him, and he was rather worried, wondering how they would get that bull home a mile away, because he was an ugly-tempered bovine.

But, with two of his sons on horseback, and a border collie on a leash in his own hands, they conferred at the end of the lane. Runo took the tractor, too as a defense for the man on foot. While they were talking about the best way to get the bull back to the road—for the farmer said the animal was no respecter of fences—the Holstein walked back through the gate and started down the lane as if he knew exactly where he was supposed to go. With the dog behind and the horsemen flanking him, he went into the woods at the mailbox and headed home.

The long lane means that we seldom have unexpected company. We know—especially in winter or mud season—that if someone ventures up the entire length of the lane, that person really does want to see us.

So, the lane gives us peace and quiet. Far from the road, we are not bothered by the occasional car that passes, and few people mistakenly drive up the lane, thinking it is a real road. The tranquillity provided by the long lane is

one of its benefits, and we think it far outweighs the inconvenience of sometimes being snowed in.