

THE EMPTY NEST NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XVI, NUMBER 3, FALL, '97

"Plant a green tree in your heart
And a singing bird will come."
--anon



IT'S HERE, FOLKS!

PUBLISHING EVENT OF A LIFETIME! (JACKIE'S LIFETIME, THAT IS)

Stories from the Round Barn



JACQUELINE DOUGAN JACKSON

(This issue of the newsletter is going out to many more than the usual mailing list—to colleagues, former students, lost friends whose addresses I've refound on the Internet, fourth cousins once removed, a woman whose wallet I returned in California, strangers I've met on planes, trains, bike trails...)

No, friends and family, this isn't the BIG BIG book you've been hearing about from long before this newsletter ever began. It's that book's child, but (as children are) a work complete in itself, reads like a novel so start at the beginning, and it's beautiful! (The big big book, The Round Barn, is still a couple of years down the pike.) Above is the full-size cover. In this issue: pre-publication reviews, jacket blurbs, how to get copies, thank you's to the quick and the dead, appropriate cartoons, how I started this book when I was 14, how colleague Phil Kendall said (In 1979) I'd never

write it, and more and more and more. I regret Dad (also Mom, also Eloise) didn't live to see it, but they'd read it all, over and over. A story: When Northwestern U. Press took this book, Dad, at 90, said to me, "Now how long before it'll be published?" Me: "Well, it's not finished yet and that will take a year, and then it'll take them at least a year to get it printed--" Dad, shaking his head, "I'm afraid it's going to be a posthumous book." Me: "Oh come on, Dad, you can manage to live a few more years!" Dad, quick as a flash, "I didn't mean me!"



TWO FIFTY PRE-PUBLICATION REVIEWS:

(This from Publishers Weekly) (September issue)

In 1906, the stalwart, deaf, one-time minister, W.J. Dougan, founded the Dougan Guernsey Farm Dairy in Wisconsin. Although his neighbors were skeptical, he kept with it until his death some 40 years later. In this memoir, rich in human warmth and rural detail, his granddaughter describes the kind, life-wise man who dominated her past. Grandpa Dougan could be pedantic but also laugh "until his eyes disappear." The story of how, as a young man he asked God for some direction is charming. Deciphering the letters "PC" in the clouds, he decided it meant "Preach Christ" but after going to college and becoming a minister, he loses his hearing and asks again. He receives the same empyreal answer, but this time he decides it means, and always meant, "Plant Corn." Jackson follows the Depression and WWII decades as Grandpa and Grama develop their farm and children alike. She speaks of the essentials of farm life, of detasseling corn, dehorning calves, churning butter and how to milk a cow (a perfect introduction for city folk), and includes a sweet, wholly fitting chapter on her own sexual awakening. Jackson chose to write of her past as a present-tense third-person narrative, which can be difficult to sustain, but she manages to carry it off with aplomb. When he'd founded the farm, Dougan painted his cement silo with five "Aims of This Farm." The last aim was "Life as Well as a living." In this heartfelt memoir, Jackson makes us see just what he meant. Fifty-three photographs and line drawings.

From Kirkus, August 15, a reviewing medium used widely by schools and libraries:

Delicately filigreed vignettes of a Wisconsin farm life from children's-book author Jackson.

In 1906, when his hearing failed, Jackson's grandfather abandoned his ministry and bought a dairy farm. By 1907 he was delivering milk, the bottles stoppered with a cap imprinted "W. J. Dougan, the Babies' Milkman." He was a conscientious farmer who ran a tight and good ship, experimented intelligently, and treated his employees with respect. He prospered. Jackson grew up on the spread, and here she paints its days. There are profiles of farmhands, loony and saintlike and otherwise; conjurings of the odor, light and aura of tucked-away places on the farm--a dim passageway between cow barn and side building, secret venues in the Big House where Jackson could pick away at the wallpaper unseen. Many of the 47 short chapters recount everyday events: milking and detasseling and delivery runs in the dead of night, Grampa's first tax return (it set him back 13 cents), the ebb and flow of depression years and boom times, and the kind of stuff that stays fixed in a young mind (a rail-walking hobo cut in half by a train). And there are not a few episodes written with startling beauty; in one, she tells of an early infatuation, her first, with a young fellow working on the farm. It was during WWII, he enlisted, and his plane went down over Europe. A green star was placed by the MIA's name on the church honor roll. Years later Jackson finds the honor roll in a storeroom of the church, presses a gold star ("the kind her piano teacher used to put on a piece when it was finished") of ultimate sacrifice atop the green one and closes the man's short life.

Elegant and polished. Jackson finds little gems in the muck and toil of farming life.

(Those "delicate filigrees" bemused me. delicate filigrees??? --but then they tell about the hobo cut in half, which story can't be too delicately filigreed, so I hope the review-reader doesn't stop dead at that first strange line!)

Read about this odd cow they put on the book spine, on p. 5! (full picture)



Stories from the Round Barn

JACKSON

TRIQUARTERLY BOOKS
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS

See p.3 for booksignings coming up; P. 5 for news on the Website!, and thank-you's. P.6. for **BELOIT AREA SIGNING** and "Can This Barn Be Saved?" (IT CAN!) Next issue will again be general news, so send in ^{your} news for our ~ Alligator Special. ~

THE EMPTY NEST NEWSLETTER VOL XVI NO3 P3

And here are the nice jacket-back blurbs, plus more at 17. Their idea: I wanted a cow!

"What I love in Jackson's energetic narrative is that she shows us functional people who know their own feelings. They love one another and their Wisconsin farm life. They practice kindness and openly despise sadism.

Family members talk to each other about things that matter. Like any story-loving American I try to keep clear of both the cynical patter of our sitcoms and the self-centered bleating of so much contemporary literature.

What a joy to come across Jackson's cheerful, serious, funny, visceral scenes! When I finished reading *Stories from the Round Barn* I said to myself, 'Yes, I had almost forgotten. Our species is capable of joy and imagination and decency. And here's a handbook for us.'"

—Carol Bly, author of *Letters from the Country*



"An ingeniously devised round barn encircles the lives of an ordinary, extraordinary American family living through times that echo our own. The book casts a wide net and wants reading aloud in classrooms to

encourage the young to gather their own family stories, while there's time."

—Richard Peck, author of *The Last Safe Place on Earth*

"Storytelling at its best—a careful capturing of details, letting the reader 'see' what is

happening . . . A basic theme is celebrated here—how the everyday 'warts and all' interaction between wise adult and wonderfully curious child creates the most important education of all."

—Ben Logan, author of *The Land Remembers*

HERE'S HOW TO GET AHOLD OF STORIES FROM THE ROUND BARN

1. Urge your library (town, school, university, all of 'em!) to buy it.
2. Put it on your holiday or birthday list so someone will give it to you.
3. Buy it yourself! Various options here: (its hard cover)

--Most expensive: order from the publisher. You pay the full \$24.95, a whopping Chicago tax (8 3/4%) AND shipping. (See address)

--Come to the Illinois Authors bash at the Illinois State Library (Spfld,

LOVER over, but has copies Oct. 25): all books purchased there (not just mine) are 10% off. Not only that, I'll be there (and 60 other authors) to chat and sign books.

--Our UIS bookstore sells books to faculty and staff for 10% off, so get it there. Also there'll be an elegant book-signing for the book, in the

PAC restaurant Oct. 29, 3:30-6:30, sponsored by the English prgrm.

--It's available, discount, from an online bookseller: www.amazon.com

--Have your own bookstore order it. No shipping (usually); local tax.

--get it from me: IF YOU'RE BUYING IN BULK (2 or more) I'll give my author's discount to you.

--Visit Stories RB WEB SITE! <http://www.uis.edu/~jjackson>

--FINALLY, BUYING IT AT CLOSE TO FULL PRICE FROM "FRIENDS OF THE ROUND BARN" WILL HELP SAVE THE ACTUAL BARN! And for the **BELOIT AREA**: I'LL BE AT THE BELOIT PUBLIC LIBRARY NOV. 8, 1-5, TO SIGN BOOKS! FREE MILK&COOKIES! See stuff on p. 6; website.

--Finally yet: think of this book as **one-stop shopping!** For everyone on your holiday list; for birthdays, weddings, bar mitzvahs, memorial gifts, thank-yous. As I said in Elle's wedding issue, though, it's not for young kids. Too much sex and violence; you know farms! I wrote this as an adult book, though there are stories in it that kids will enjoy. Be judicious.

Order from your bookseller or from:

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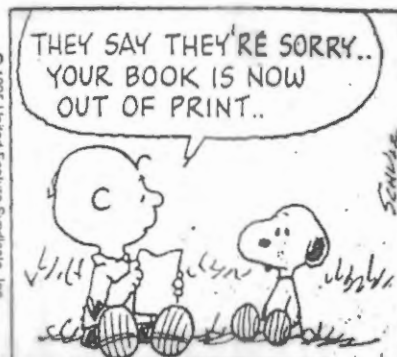
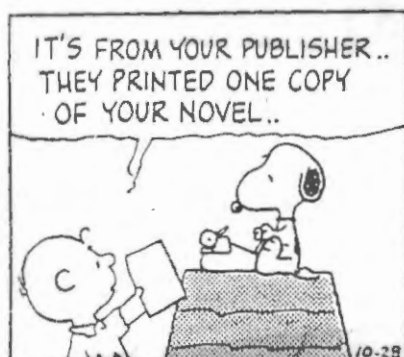
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over, but there'll be more chances.



SOME BACKGROUND ON THE BOOK

I really did start writing farm stories down at fourteen--I came across the dated notebook this summer. I really did tell Grampa I was going to write him a book and call it The Round Barn, but I was fifteen or so, ignorant of how to go about it. So I didn't grab a pencil and ask him all the things I've long wished I had. Over the years I wrote the children's books many of you are familiar with. Just now and then a scribble about the farm. And I was v. busy with raising a family, and teaching, and various life problems. --Then Dad nearly died in 1967 and I panicked; I mustn't lose his stories, too! So I flew from Ohio to Wisconsin three times in his three month hospitalization and got down reams of stuff. That was the start of interviewing anybody I could find, who'd had anything to do with the farm. Moving to Rockford, 18 miles south of the farm, put me near lots of such people. I made many attempts to write the book. The problem was how to organize it, with so much material spanning so many years. What point of view to take, with so many points of view? Who is the teller? How to combine the information I wanted to give, with the stories there were to relate? It wasn't till I was at Sangamon State and had a sabbatical in 1979, to write the book (though my colleague and good friend Phil Kendall said I never would--I had to prove him wrong!) that I figured out how to present the material. It's taken such a long time since because of working full time, raising a family--also tuition money, doing stupid (i.e. time consuming but rewarding) things like taking classes to England, generating other new classes, taking increased responsibility for Mom and Dad at the farm, etc. I've had two more sabbaticals since the first, though on the third I applied to do something else (the committee would never have given me a third for the same project!). But by then Reginald Gibbons had heard my stories and said Northwestern wanted to publish the book, so I never did do the other project--not that I'd really intended to, anyway; it was a worthy one, but a ruse. The last couple of years I've been on as high a gear as possible on the book; that's why so few Empty Nest issues and why I've so totally neglected most of you. But, it's here! And, I believe, worth all the effort over the many years.



"By the way, I'm taking off the first two weeks in August."

SOME OF THE FALLOUT OF WRITING THE BOOK

My working on the book over twenty years was not only very good for me, but very good for Mom and Dad. They were my strongest contributors and they read everything I wrote, and shared with delight in the discovery of letters, documents, etc. People came out to talk, or I drove Dad and Mom (till she died) all around the state to talk to those who were once on the Dougan farm. I published the stories in the Beloit paper, thanks to Bill Behling the editor, who was always a fan of Dad's, and that brought others' stories out of the woodwork, also let the community enjoy the stories, and call up Dad and Mom to talk about them. (In one story, Dad, then 8, waiting for his beloved teacher's nuptials out on the lawn, gets absorbed in a book and reads right through the event, to his agony. 75 yrs later a friend called from across the street, "Ron, I'm sorry you missed the wedding!") Work on the book gave a focus to my times at the farm, made for much lively activity, and brought about visits that never would have happened otherwise--Dad seeing his brother three times, for instance, and me taping their talks. (Pat revealed the names of the two little girls who took him and Ronald under the culvert, and showed them how girls were different from boys. Dad wouldn't name them to me, since both were still alive, living in Beloit!) It meant we saw a lot of Eloise, who'd grown up next to the farm and knew oodles about life there and Dad's own parents that Dad and Mom didn't know. She'd never told anyone before. Through work on the book I got to know my parents much more

deeply, and also my grandfather, by trying to live his life after him-- through my adult memory, through others' stories of him, and by pondering his own words--letters, articles, sermons, farm records, notes to himself. And that has been a rare and blessed privilege.





See this cow with sprung shoulders? Dad took her picture when he was 15; in his album wrote, "BEAUTY. WHAT'S IN A NAME?" Someone at the press liked her well enough to put her face on the book's spine!



MANY CONTRIBUTIONS NOT IN THIS BOOK

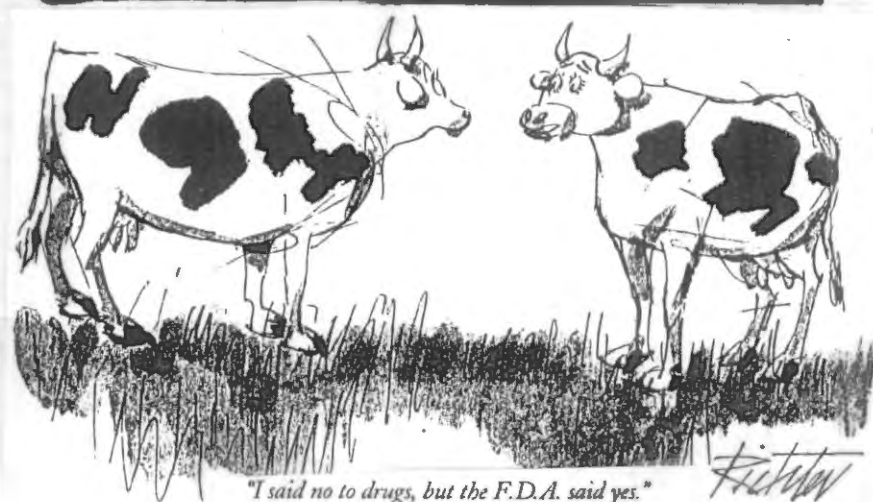
I've talked to hundreds of people over the years; in Scandinavia; England; California to Maine, Wisconsin to Alabama, and I have scores of you on tape. Most of you have already had your stories written up, and the expertise you shared with me. But this book is only 260 pages! Much of your material is in the BIG BIG BOOK, TO BE PUBLISHED. All the American Breeders Service material. More vet stuff. More hybrid corn. All Howard Milner's outrageous milkman stories. Craig's stories, and Uncle Pat's. The whole tragic story of Esther. Everything that happened after 1949 up to 1971, when Dad retired, and lots that comes before '49, that there wasn't room for. For we had to cut and cut and cut. My splendid editor has good sense: from the start he said we'd bring out a smaller book first, with just stories, and later on bring out the entire work in two volumes, with many more stories and everything else. A 75 year history of farming. For this book, he urged the focus to be on Grampa, Daddy, Jackie as the scribe. So if your story isn't here, it's coming. *It's coming!*

How can I thank everybody who's helped? First's gotta be Reg Gibbons, my editor, and John Knoepfle who got us together, and then the rest of NUPress who've seen the book through. And all of you who've contributed stories and information, my folks, sibs, many others, my dean and UIS for TIME, my Brainchild writing group, my kids, my critiquers, Mitch, Eloise for being a little pitcher, Grampa for being Grampa (and thankfully deaf or else he wouldn't have turned to farming) and whatever Powers There Be that gave me life, and particularly life as it was lived on the Dougan farm.



MITCH HOPPER CREATES JJACKSON WEBSITE

Rochester IL: Jackie sat by in amazement and admiration as Mitch deftly put together a handsome website telling about the book & the saving of the actual barn. It was fun, fun, fun, and truly miraculous! (He chose the pix of me, don't blame me.) <http://www.uis.edu/~jjackson> Check it out, and send comments, critiques, suggestions. With that and email, I'm into the postmodern age! THANK YOU MITCH! (Check out his site, too it's linked. He's as nifty a guy as ever straddled a Harley.)



The Empty Nest Newsletter has been issued sporadically (for the last 16 years) for family and friends by the editor, Jackie Jackson, 816 N. Fifth, Springfield IL 62702. Phone: 217-544-2916; school (U of Ill at Springfield, from which I have no intention of retiring) 217-786-6779. Website for Stories from the Round Barn: <http://www.uis.edu/~jjackson>. Email: jjackson@eagle.uis.edu. Publishing policy: No news is too old, too trivial, too personal, too controversial to print. (I do use judgement on some things, respect YOUR wishes not to have certain items in the Newsletter.) And look, guys, when I said last time to renew your subscriptions so's you not miss a single exciting issue, several of you sent money. That was a joke! akin to when I start a new year, and thank you all for your letters and telegrams of congratulation, of which of course there aren't any. You needn't send \$.

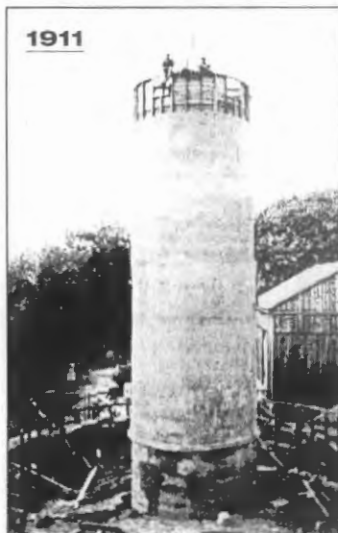
The newsletter is a gift freely given!

save

this old house

EDITED BY PETER EDMONSTON

(March/April '97,

from This Old House magazine.)

The Dougan barn, anchored by a 14-foot-diameter concrete silo, center, was framed entirely with 2x6s. When it was a working dairy, right, feed drained from the silo to the 42 milking stalls. To move the building, the silo will have to be cut into sections.

PRICE

\$1

LOCATION

Colley Road, Beloit, Wisconsin

The Dougan Round Barn is an object lesson in the plight of the Midwestern farm. When it was built in 1911, it was an innovative design: Compared with traditional barns, the circular floor plan could hold more milking cows and was easier to clean. It was here, in 1931, that an enterprising farmhand invented the Korn Kurl, the first of many corn edibles that established Beloit as the snack-food capital of the United States. But the completion of nearby Interstate 90 increased land values enough to make development more attractive than dairy farming and in 1971 the farm was closed and sold. Now an industrial park is scheduled to be built on its 110 acres, and the 60-foot-diameter, 60-foot-high barn, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, must be relocated. Last November, after years of neglect, it was condemned and slated for demolition, but the city has held off in hopes of finding someone to give it a new home and a new purpose. Moving and re-erecting the barn in the same area would cost about \$50,000. The owner has offered to contribute to moving costs, and purchasers can also get help from the Wisconsin Barn Preservation Initiative, which offers information on barn conversions. A less desirable outcome—dismantling the structure—would still be better than demolition and disposal: The old barn would yield as much as 3,000 board feet of lumber and siding.

CONTACT Friends of the Dougan Round Barn, Inc., P.O. Box 131, Beloit WI 53511

CAN IT BE SAVED? WILL IT BE?

It's in bad shape, but can be restored if done soon. We--a Beloit area group now designated "Friends of the Round Barn"-- have been working on this ever since Beloit condemned the barn. We've tried many avenues: 1st, to leave it where it is: but the corporation that owns the land (since Dad sold it in 1971) wants an industrial park and the barn GONE. We tried to get it at the "Welcome to Wisconsin" station nearby, where it'd make distinctive the major (and generic) gateway to our dairy state, but the State won't take it. We urged the city to make it a "Welcome to Beloit"--they'd only have to move it across Colley Road--but Beloit refused. Old World Wisconsin has a round barn; the Janesville Thresheree is pretty far to move it, and it'd be a warehouse there. We have investigated other sites and we'll have exciting news soon. The barn CAN be moved, and in one piece--not slicing up the silo like carrot disks. Moving and restoration will take money. We'll go after grants and donors: no contribution too big or too small. I myself will contribute \$5000; we'll also sell

Stories at a 10% discount, with all profit going toward the barn. Earl Boutelle, who's responsible for demolishing the barn (an expensive proposition), has been heard to say he'll donate \$5000. We're getting promotional ideas--your name in brass over a cow stanchion? An amber bottle, of which we still have a few, for a donation? Auction off Grampa Dougan's marijuana license, used when he raised hemp during WWII? All ideas welcome, and also we'll welcome any or all of you as "Friends of the Dougan Round Barn." **YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE NOW TO SAVING THE BARN!** Make the check out to "Friends of the Dougan Round Barn, Inc.," and send to that name, or Round Barn Fund, P.O. Box 131, Beloit WI 53511. Tax deductible!

BELOIT AREA FRIENDS:

Come in for cider & cookies! I'll be signing at Beloit BUT COPIES ARE OVER, BUT THERE WILL BE ANOTHER CHANCE OCT 1st at Nov 8, 1-5. (\$7.50) + list price. 30% contribution to saving the barn, a tax deductible. A deal!