
For the Classroom

Stories from the Sheep Barn

— by Lyn Barton as told to Lisa Russell and Donna Lee Miele

In Lyn's last year of life, these stories were written down with the help of her assistant, Lisa Russell, and community member Donna Lee Miele in order to preserve and remember some of the amazing things that happened at the farm kindergarten. We are very grateful for the creativity and initiative of all who were involved in recording these stories, and glad to share a few of them with a wider audience. More may be printed in future issues of Gateways.

Mrs. Barton's kindergarten students had class in the sheep barn. You might not think it, but there are surprises every day when you have kindergarten in a sheep barn. Sometimes there are even magical surprises, the kind that no one, neither Mrs. Barton nor her helper, Mrs. Russell, can explain.

Butterflies in the Classroom

Butterflies, for instance. Mrs. Barton loved butterflies. She loved every living thing that contributed to life in the sheep barn, and to life in all the Threefold community farms and gardens. Butterflies, as you know, sip flower nectar and spread pollen, much the same way that bees do. In this way, they help to make new seeds for new flowers and fruit. Unlike bees, of course, butterflies never sting. They just float beautifully in the sunshine from flower to flower. So Mrs. Barton asked Mrs. Russell if she knew how to hatch butterflies.

Mrs. Russell was always bringing surprising things to Mrs. Barton's children. She showed them how loofah sponges grow on a vine. She helped them grow the gourds that brought rainbow colors to the fall garden, and showed everyone how to make a birdhouse out of a gourd. She helped to build towers out of wood and stone. Of course, she knew how to hatch butterflies!

Butterflies start out, of course, as caterpillars. Mrs. Russell brought them in a tiny little cup, where they lived quite happily. Every snack time, the children could wait their turns to pick up the cup and look inside at the caterpillars. Every day, the caterpillars got a little bigger. Every day, they wove new and thicker webs—not like spider webs, for catching other insects, but caterpillar webs, which are like practice blankets, fine and silky. The webs are

practice for the day that each caterpillar will weave its cocoon.

And one day the caterpillars did become cocoons. Mrs. Barton gave the children a tiny butterfly castle. The children took the cocoons out of the little cup, and put them to bed in the castle.

One rainy day, the cocoons hatched! It was a day that any butterfly would be glad to be born in a castle rather than outdoors. The children were enraptured with the wrinkled, slowly unfolding wings, and the butterflies' long, fine antennae, tipped with soft black puffs, like little pompoms.

Mrs. Barton was ready for that rainy day. She knew the butterflies would be hungry. What do you feed a butterfly born in a castle? Mrs. Barton decided it should be orange juice, straight from a fresh orange. Some of the children got right to work preparing that orange juice, and not a moment too soon!

Along with the children, Mrs. Barton opened the castle, and the hungry butterflies began to climb out. Mrs. Barton squeezed a little orange juice on each child's arm. When the butterfly crawled up the right arm, it had a wonderful meal.

It's important to be very still and quiet, to make your noise and your stillness butterfly-sized, when you are feeding a newborn butterfly straight out of the cocoon.

And Mrs. Barton's children knew this. They held perfectly still and watched those baby butterflies uncurl their wound-up, curly tongues. The butterflies sipped juice, oh so delicately, and they let their wings stretch out and dry. With every sip, the butterflies became more beautiful, and looked stronger and stronger, until. . .

One decided to fly! It could not go outside,

because of the rain, but the butterfly didn't mind. It flew down the hall. And that was only the beginning of the adventure. The butterfly went into the room down the hall, and then into another room, and then back to the classroom, and then into the overhead light! In the end, he came back for some more juice. There was nothing more interesting in the whole place than his castle and that good, fresh orange juice.

The rest of the butterflies stayed on the children's arms for a long time. Then the butterflies climbed on sliced oranges, and the children carefully passed them from hand to hand.

Everyone had to agree with Mrs. Barton and Mrs. Russell that the butterflies' curled black tongues, sipping juice, their slender legs, and their expanding, intricately patterned wings, were miraculous.

The First Hatching of Mantises

Mrs. Barton also loved another kind of insect, the praying mantis. Mantises are good for the farm because they are fierce predators of insects that eat the farmers' crops. A farm blessed with mantises will be a healthy, well-protected farm.

"Mrs. Russell," said Mrs. Barton, "Do you think we could have some praying mantis eggs in the classroom?"

What a good idea. Mrs. Russell said, "Of course!"

Mantis eggs come in a dried-up cluster that looks like a leftover piece of a flower, or the stump of a peeled stick. But inside are dozens of baby mantises just itching to hatch. Mrs. Barton had four of these clusters, and on the day they hatched, hundreds of babies wiggled out at the same time.

Mrs. Barton put her hands into the mantis tank to help scoop the babies out and into the garden, but as soon as the mantises found Mrs. Barton's hands, they didn't need any help. They wiggled up her arms with lightning speed! Then they were on her shirt, then on her skirt, and in her hair, and then they were all over Mrs. Barton! She was covered in hundreds of little mantises, which are very strong and vigorous, but gentle, and so tiny that they must have looked very funny, prickling and waving from the top of Mrs. Barton's head. The children laughed and laughed. No one could ever forget.

Farmer Josh and Farmer Alexis and All Their Animals

Butterflies and mantises were only the beginning of the surprises that came to the sheep barn. Farmers

Josh and Alexis offered plenty of surprises too. Farmer Josh and Farmer Alexis lived across the way from the sheep barn, in an old farmhouse, with a shed full of animals: ten ducks, two geese, two turkeys, two bunnies, and a great big rooster named Romeo. The turkeys were named Tom-tom and Natasha.

Every day, Mrs. Barton's children would take their scraps from snack to the animals. The turkeys were just babies, no bigger than kittens, and they liked the children to hold them in warm, gentle hands.

Romeo, the rooster, was a big, burly, tough rooster. He was red, white, and black. Mrs. Barton had a doormat welcoming visitors to the sheep barn with a picture of a rooster just like Romeo. Maybe this was why he thought he was welcome to knock on the door any old time he wanted, and ask for a snack.

Every day, Romeo would come to the door for rice, oatmeal, or whatever snack the children were having. He looked big and tough, but because the children shared their snack every day, he would let Mrs. Russell touch him very lightly on the back. If his snack wasn't waiting for him when he came to the doormat, he would knock at the door, peck peck peck, and the children all knew who was knocking.

The Sheep in the Road

One fall, Mrs. Barton asked Mrs. Russell if she would like to be with the children and the animals every day. Mrs. Russell said yes! She wondered how days would be in the sheep barn, surrounded by all of those animals. It wasn't long before she found out.

Mrs. Barton, Mrs. Russell, and all the children were at the greenhouse having circle time when Farmer Josh's and Farmer Alexis's geese began to honk loudly. The sound came from the direction of the sheepfold, and sure enough, along with the honking came very loud bleating! Someone had left the sheep door open, and the geese had gotten into the sheepfold.

From the greenhouse, Mrs. Barton, Mrs. Russell, and the children could see sheep running out the sheepfold gate! The geese had chased the sheep out of the sheepfold! How silly. The sheep were so scared of the geese that they ran right out onto Ackertown Road. They kept on running down the road, and they didn't look like they were going to stop!

Mrs. Barton knew just what to do. "Your car is near the sheep barn, Mrs. Russell," she said. "You must herd the sheep!"

And Mrs. Barton gathered the children close to

watch, and to keep out of the sheepfold mischief.

Mrs. Russell had never herded sheep before. But she knew that Mrs. Barton was right. She jumped into her car and drove after the sheep. She carefully drove around the little flock. The sheep began to slow down. Mrs. Russell drove around in front of them, and the sheep stopped. But they didn't turn around

and go back to the sheepfold. Mrs. Russell knew she would have to help the sheep back home, as quick as a wink. Cars would soon be coming down Ackertown Road, and the sheep would be in danger.

Mrs. Russell began herding the sheep with her car. She drove down the road backward! And the sheep turned around and walked in front of the