

from another viewpoint...

## Some solutions aren't pretty, elegant

The new mother cow had lost her calf and a local farmer decided to try to find a replacement — a very logical thought. So he enlisted the help of a non-farmer to ride about 80 miles to pick up the new calf.

The “ride-a-long” assumed they would pull a trailer or at least the calf would be nestled in a corner of the pick-up. Wrong. The calf rode in the cab on the trip home with the greenhand working to keep it calm.

The thing about this story is it worked. It saved gas, saved time by not having to hook up a trailer, and if you ask the farmer, it saved energy. Our exhausted greenhand might not see it the same way. But the fact remains, someone found a way, not pretty, not elegant, but workable.

A great thing about humans is our ability to get the job done. One of the best parts of the movie Apollo 13 is when they put all the “things” on the table that could be found on the spacecraft and then were given the orders, “Get them home”. And they did.

We have great opportunities to make things work in a small town, in part because we know each other so well and we know the passions, interests and talents available. Whether it is the tennis courts, the dispatch system or land-fill problems, people want to see things run smoothly and cooperatively. We get behind the issues we are passionate about, and find a solution.

We in the Midwest are better at this than some. One reason is our climate and the remoteness, which in the past has forced us to rely on each other and find the answers. With the advent of instant communication, it’s important we don’t lose sight of our ability to find solutions.

That’s what community is all about. Most answers are lodged in the corner of someone’s mind. Good ideas and recommendations come from a myriad of citizens talking, sharing ideas and listening to each other.

Elected officials sometimes have the ideas and sometimes must listen to their constituents.

When our ideas become realities, through community efforts and the willingness of all, then it works. — *Mary Kay Woodyard*

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## I have developed a fondness for flying

I love to fly on big airplanes that take me a long ways away.

Once upon a time, this was not true. I didn’t trust airplanes — and with good reason.

When our oldest daughter was almost 3 and I was eight months pregnant with our second child, Steve and I took the train to Los Angeles to visit his brother Ken.

Ken was living the life of a carefree bachelor with a good job and no ties. He talked us into going to San Diego in a small plane with him, his girlfriend and another couple. The other man was the pilot; little brother was taking flight lessons.

We got into the six-seater, twin-engine plane with Steve up front with the pilot. I was in the middle seat with the pilot’s girl friend and Ken and his girl friend were in the back.

But there was something wrong with the emergency locator transmitter. It went off while we were in the air. These things are supposed to go off if a plane crashes to lead rescuers to the wreck.

The malfunctioning device made it sound like a pair of fire engines were bracketing the plane all the way to San Diego, and then we tied up traf-



**cynthia  
haynes**

• open season

fic at Lindbergh Field, a very busy airport, because we were jamming the radio frequencies.

The control tower was not happy, but it wasn’t our fault.

After a nice dinner at a fancy restaurant on the bay, we returned to our plane for the trip back to L.A.

Shortly after takeoff, the pilot switched gas tanks because the first was running low. One engine immediately stalled. Then the other went out and the first came back in a weird ballet that had the pilot radioing the tower that we would be making an emergency landing on either the beach or the ocean.

We made it back to the field, but after that I was

## An America without farmers?

*“Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”* — Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia”

In 1801, when Jefferson became president, 95 percent of Americans made their full-time living from agriculture. By the turn of the 20th century, it was 45 percent, and by the turn of the 21st less than 2 percent.

In 1993 the Census Bureau stopped counting the number of Americans who live on farms.

“Farm residence,” it reported, “is no longer a reliable indication of whether or not someone is involved in farming.... The cost of collecting and publishing statistics on farm residents and farmers in separate reports could no longer be justified.”

Over the past two centuries, the nation became urban, then suburban, and now increasingly exurban. Farmers, especially those who are small-scale, full-time and living on their farms, have become politically and culturally distant to most Americans. We still have agriculture, but it is mostly large-scale agribusiness. There is little Jeffersonian farming, almost no “labor in the earth.”

The desertion of the small family farm constitutes the largest population movement in American history. The small-farmer diaspora, here and abroad, partly or wholly underlies other storied American population shifts: the development of cities and suburbs, the settlement of the West, the late 19th and early 20th century European immigrations to the United States, the post-1965 Latin American and Asian ones, the black migration from the rural South to the Northern ghetto, the rise of the Sunbelt, and even the growth of military bases around the country.

The family farm is one of the last homes of old-school American ethnicity and beliefs. In



**prairie  
writers circle**

• frank popper

1993 the Census Bureau found, for example, that farm residents were almost all white, half lived in the Midwest, and their households were 25 percent less likely than non-farm ones to be headed by a single woman. These differences from the rest of the nation have intensified over the past decade.

Many family farmers encourage their offspring to leave that life, and these perhaps unusually deferential children listen. Why they should move on is obvious. The United States is a nation whose metropolitan areas, despite all their evident problems, offer better pay and more opportunity than most of its countryside. This imbalance has existed for the nation’s entire life. But it was nowhere near as large or visible in, say, 1960, much less 1880 or earlier pioneer periods.

American small farmers are victims of the same impersonal national and international economics that wipe out small banks, railroads, airlines, newspapers and stores here and elsewhere. Farmers, like the others, have responded to continued pressures for large-scale, homogenized production — in farming’s case, high per-acre output. Having only this aim, their success brings about the demise of most

scared to death of planes — especially small planes.

Today, I still don’t like little planes, but I’ve developed a fondness for flying.

I realized that when Steve went off to Tunisia and left me at home, one of the things I was most jealous about was that he would be taking that long plane ride, and in business class, too.

It took a little soul searching to figure this out. Most people hate to be cooped up in an airplane with nothing to do for hours at a time.

That, I realized is why I like it. I’m a workaholic. At home, at work, on vacation, I’m always doing something.

When I get on a plane, I just sit there and read a book, take a nap, do a crossword puzzle or watch the tiny television. I’m trapped. There’s nothing I can do but relax.

It’s wonderful. And when we land, getting through the airport and getting our luggage is always an adventure.

What more could you want — relaxation and adventure. Well, an aisle seat would be nice, but you can’t have everything.

of them and their communities. American small farmers now appear to be at the far end of a vast economic shift that gives every promise of eliminating them.

A momentous transition looms. Although the United States and other First World nations have been heading toward it since at least the late 18th century, no nation of even modest size has ever explicitly chosen to navigate it. No one knows the full implications of a farmerless America — or a farmerless France or Japan.

Are there really the links Jefferson suggests between farming and virtue? Does a domestic population working the soil ensure a nation’s social and physical health? What are the international and security consequences of the near-total disappearance of the farmer? What happens when the world’s most powerful country no longer has those who work their own land?

These are at least nation-scale questions, ones whose answers turn the hinges of history. They obsess many farmers, their political representatives and their intellectual interpreters in this country and abroad. The suburban-exurban America hardly notices. In its Information Age world, the farmer has been gone for generations.

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