



Little Hen in the Foothills

The True Story of Miss Broody, the Brave Little Foothills Hen

by Susan Colleen Browne

A Family-Friendly Excerpt from the book, *Little Farm in the Henhouse*,
created especially for the readers of Little Farm Writer!

Chickens Return to the Little Farm

There once was a little blond hen who lived in the Foothills, and her name was Miss Broody. She lived in a small chicken coop in the middle of the woods. Life was pretty good—she had lots of fresh grass to forage in, her humans brought fresh feed and water every day, and she had four blond hen sisters who were sometimes bossy, but mostly friendly.

But when it comes to everything outside her chicken pen, there was so much Miss Broody didn't understand...

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One sunny September afternoon, my husband John and I arrived home in our old Ranger, with five Buff Orpington pullets in the truck bed secured in two boxes. After all the misfortunes with our previous chickens, we were thrilled to have a new set of “girls.”

Over the years, our hen-keeping had been a learn-as-you-go kind of experience: caring for our first flock had involved a sharp learning curve, and our second set of hens had been even steeper. But with our five young Buffies, a breed known for their gentle natures, John and I were sure the third time was the charm—that we *finally* knew what we were doing.

Clambering out of the pickup, I couldn't help feeling pleased we had such a nice little home for them. For sure, our coop was nothing fancy—not like the super-cute designer ones you see in magazines, with ingenious little flourishes, entryways and nest boxes.

Although John had made a number of improvements to the coop and chicken compound, like an outdoor covered roost, and a wee, slanted roof over the feeder to keep the girls dry as they ate, our hen digs were simple and utilitarian, like the rest of our place.

That afternoon, John and I gingerly pulled the two boxes out of the truck bed and ferried

them into the chicken pen. Indignant thumps and fussing came from the boxes. As we released the five girls, I braced myself for a full-on freakout, like our other hens had done in their new place.

But these chickens didn't seem terribly disturbed, despite the unfamiliar surroundings. As soon as they were on solid ground again, after a bit of hesitation, they started pecking the nearest weeds tentatively, then with a little more gusto. I'd heard Buff Orpingtons were mellower than other chickens, and now, I felt the adaptability of these girls was a good omen!

Yet when it comes to keeping hens, John and I also realized that just like with life all-around, sometimes with your hens you have to take the bitter with the sweet.

Now, onward for the story of Miss Broody!

An Unforeseen Development

With our new flock, John and I had hit the jackpot. Or so we thought.

For months, our five Buff Orpingtons were model chickens. Aside from the two bedtime glitches, they'd quickly settled into their new home. As I mentioned, they also started laying right away, and were cooperative and copacetic. A far cry from our previous flock.

One of the hens, as is typical, became the Alpha girl—the one who seems to set the agenda for the flock. Our new Alpha wasn't really aggressive, thank goodness. But strangely enough, she was the smallest hen!

Anyway, we thought we had it made. That is, until mid-spring—when one of the hens went broody.

Broodiness is when a hen's mama instinct kicks in, and her only focus in life is to sit on eggs to hatch them. I had always heard Buff Orpingtons are especially prone to it, but Buffy, from our second flock had never gone broody—probably because of the bullying.

Anyway, when one of our new blonde hens wouldn't come outside anymore, I suspected broodiness—and a little research confirmed it. Whether there are any eggs beneath her or not, a broody hen will sit on the nest in a sort of somnolent state, from sunrise to sunset. I suspected with that kind of dedication, the hen's hormones have sort of tricked them into thinking they *are* hatching eggs.

It's like she's mostly asleep—but if you try to get her off the nest, she'll hiss big-time at you.

There are two problem with broody hens. One, she stops laying eggs. And bear in mind that even if she's not sitting on her own eggs, she's all too willing to sit on the other hens'. The

second problem is that she will seldom leave the nest—not even to eat or drink. Which can lead to a broody bird's insufficient intake of food and water.

From the day we'd brought the flock home, this particular hen who wouldn't leave the nest had seemed to be less vigorous than the others. She had also developed her hen characteristics somewhat more slowly—her comb was sort of shrunken, and pink instead of a pale red.

On the day I discovered her sitting on the nest all day, the day she refused to move, I took charge.

I lifted her off the nest, and placed her in the yard with the other four. After a few days of being taken out of the nest box, she seemed to get the idea and rejoined the flock.

Then a month later, we had a hen go broody again. And despite all of our Orpingtons looking exactly alike, I'm positive it was the same girl. She'd been in the middle of a heavy molt while the other girls had molted a couple of months earlier. From my research, I gathered that when a hen is out of sync with the flock, it can lead to problems.

I think the troubles had actually started weeks before, when our little Alpha girl began chasing this hen away from the feeder. And often hassling her out in the yard. Not pecking her or anything, but this more passive hen seemed to be intimidated enough to hide out in the coop most of the day.

When I came around to refill the feeder, shaking the feed in a plastic quart container, I got into the habit of holding back a measure of feed. If this more submissive hen came out to eat, but got chased away, I'd bring her out into the yard, and give her a little pile of feed so she could eat undisturbed. I have to say, she got pretty spoiled, and soon expected to be singled out for this treat every time!

Anyway I was discouraged that she was apparently having a second round of broodiness so

soon after the first. Despite our new “no-name” policy—which our chicken-wise neighbor had encouraged—John and I ended up giving her a name after all: Miss Broody. Because she was spending her entire day—and it appeared, her entire *life*—in a nest box.

This went on for weeks. I knew she’d likely stopped laying because I’d often discover her on an empty nest, and our egg production was two-three eggs per day inside of four or five.

So I went back to the drill. Despite Miss Broody’s objections, I would gently lift her off the nest, setting her out in the yard with the others, then sprinkle a little feed for her onto the ground. To keep her off the nest, I’d close up the nest guard.

For about two weeks, she’d go right back into the coop and either settle onto the floor, or stand next to the nests, squawking plaintively. One spring evening, when it was nearly dark, I discovered that she had settled onto the floor for the night—apparently too intimidated to claim her spot on the roost. I guessed she’d been sleeping on the floor for some time.

My conclusion: the other hens had decided she was an outsider.

I carefully lifted her to the roost. She seemed unsure and shaky, and after I stepped out I heard a thump. So I peeked back in. Miss Broody had jumped back down to the floor.

I tried it again. I set her back on the roost, and amazingly, there she stayed. The next night, finding her on the floor again, I once again set her on the roost. Hesitantly, she scooted closer to the other four girls.

The following day, she was spending a few hours outside with the other four. That night, when I found her on the floor and got her onto the roost, she not only scooted a little closer, but actually nestled against the huddled-up foursome.

The day after that, she was bellying up to the feeder and eating away. And the next morning, she burst out of the pen with the other girls to peck at the scratch John tossed out. We

began watching her carefully, to make sure she didn't resume her bad habits—that she had for sure fully rejoined the flock.

But it looked like Miss Broody was back to being a real hen again!

Strong Instincts

Keeping a positive outlook, I realized long ago, comes in handy for the homesteady lifestyle. You are bound to run into setbacks, challenges, and outright troubles, but staying on the sunny side of the street always helps.

So when Miss Broody rejoined the flock, I was sure my broody-prevention strategies had worked—that we were past this whole broodiness thing.

If only.

Within three weeks, she was back to her old tricks—sitting in a nest box again, all the livelong day. Actually, a broody hen doesn't really *sit*, she settles her whole self into the bedding, fluffs out her feathers, and sinks her head into her chest. Her eyes half closed, she will appear to be in a stupor. But if you disturb her, she'll rouse instantly, and squawk—or even hiss at you!

As I mentioned, broody hens stop laying too. The day I discovered Miss Broody had relapsed, I lifted her out of the nest box and set her out in the yard with the other four hens. After a long moment, she began her normal chicken behavior, scratching the ground and wiggling into the dirt for a dust bath. She ate heartily too, and when she joined the other hens on the roost that night, I was hopeful she was finally “cured.”

But no.

In the next five or six days, her broody instinct *really* settled in. Every day, John and I would close the nest boxes in the early afternoon, after the other girls had had a chance to lay. But that didn't help: Miss Broody would simply sit on the floor of the coop. We would move her

out of the coop into the caged pen, or to the yard, or into the orchard, but every chance she got she would race back into the coop.

We ended up having to close it up in the daytime, by setting a large plastic pot or rock in front of the hen door. More than once, she managed to push the plastic pot out of the way and sneak into the coop! Yet the days she was denied a nesting spot, once she emerged from her broody stupor, she would join the other hens.

But Miss Broody absolutely would *not* sleep on the roost. At bedtime, several nights in a row, John and I would lift her from the floor and place her up onto the roost. One night, I tried it twice. Another night, John went five rounds moving Broody. But she would immediately jump down and settle back on the floor.

I did more research, and discovered what I call “chicken whisperers”—people who really know hens, and have lots of advice about broody ones. “Breaking” is the term for trying to get a broody hen *un*-broody, and I found many suggestions we had already tried.

But there were some strategies we hadn’t. One remedy is a cold-water bath. Apparently a broody hen’s body temperature runs high, and bringing her temp down via cold water can help break the broodiness. Another therapy is to put the hen into “chicken jail,” as one expert called it, which involves isolating the hen in a dog kennel without any bedding. That way, the hen wouldn’t have any nesting material to sit on—and certainly couldn’t fool herself that there were any eggs under her!

Both of those strategies seemed problematic to us. The bath sounded very high-maintenance, and as for the kennel, we didn’t have one, and would have to build some kind of little cage. By now, to be truthful, I was getting discouraged. For one thing, babysitting Miss Broody was seriously impacting not only my gardening time, but my job (writing and

publishing).

Also, in the last week, we'd had only a few eggs from the whole flock—I suspected a brooder's pheromones were somehow impacting the other hens' egg production. I soon decided that our flock's reduced egg production was certainly a much larger problem than one hen not laying!

In any event, the experience was quite a lesson for me: to discover a hen's implacable instinct. And to learn that I, the puny human, had very little influence over it.

Broody and Anxious

Mid-spring rolled around—and with it, our first warm spell.

John and I were still keeping the girls in their caged pen all day, but springtime had its rewards: we tossed rich green leafy weeds to the girls, and judging from a hapless moth that both hens chased to its death, a few sure-to-be tasty bugs were venturing into the cage too.

Unfortunately, the warmer temperatures brought something else as well: the apparently inescapable Buffie broodiness.

One sunny late April day, I went to make my regular hen rounds, and found a hen on the nest. Now, if she was laying, she was doing her job. But this girl was still on the nest at three in the afternoon. All I could think was, *Not this again!*

I realized this particular hen, who along with Little Britches had survived all the other predators, was the most determinedly broody of the entire flock. Miss Broody—it was our generic name for whatever hen is broody, and now that we were down to two hens, that would be her moniker forever more—was worthy of her name.

As the days passed, she was hunkered on a nest 24/7, and no amount of coaxing would get her off. As I had done the summer before, I lifted the outside nest box cover to extract a very ornery hen off the nest, take the long way around to the caged pen, and place her in front of the waterer. And hope she would take a drink.

If Miss Broody turned up her nose at water, she was even less interested in food. She would take a peck or two of feed, then just as before, run back to the coop as soon as she could. It was up to me, then, to force the issue: get her to eat and drink enough to stay alive.

Meanwhile, we were dealing with the neighborhood bobcat. One afternoon, I caught it

prowling the woodshed right next to the coop. A few days later, I found menacing the hens on top of the chicken cage! The hens were physically safe in the pen, but what I'm sure their constant, unrelenting fear was affecting their wellbeing.

But no matter what the bobcat got up to, I had to keep Miss Broody alive. Once I extracted her from the nest and put her into the pen, also like the previous summer, it was time to block the hen door. This small act—for her benefit, mind you—soon became a battle of wills. Would the human prevail? Or the hen?

I started off shoving big rock into the hen door. But to completely block the opening, I needed such a big stone that lifting it off the ground was a bit of a strain on my back. I explored the yard near the coop to see if I could find something more convenient.

One day, I stuffed a small cardboard box into the hen-sized opening. When I returned to the compound, it had been pushed aside, and Miss Broody was back on her nest. Another time, I shoved the bottom of a plastic planter into the opening. When I returned to the compound, the planter was askew. Sure enough, there she was, on the nest again.

I don't know how she did it, but Miss Broody was one resourceful hen!

Okay, stronger measures were called for. The next day I not only shoved that planter in the little door opening, but lodged it in tightly. *That*, she couldn't move. Yet she made her displeasure clear, pacing back and forth in front of the blocked hen door, squawking in protest. I could tell she wasn't going to eat or drink anything more, and was just using up hen energy.

I finally relented and removed the pot—which meant we were back to square one.

Through Miss Broody's current "confinement" (the old-fashioned word for pregnancy), Little Britches had been staying in the coop all day. In the past, I would have immediately

guessed that she was broody as well—after all, over the last year and a half we'd often had two Broodies at the same time. But with my frequent coop-checking, I knew she wasn't on the nest. Just milling around inside the coop.

And though I knew she was safe and sound in the coop and caged pen, the Foothills predators didn't give up...

A Lone and Lonesome Hen

Miss Broody lived all by herself now. She was alone because one by one, her four sister hens had disappeared. Miss Broody wasn't exactly sure what had happened to them, because she'd been hiding in the coop—yet she knew it had been scary. So she'd stayed and stayed in her nest box in the dim, quiet coop, safe and cozy.

Only now she didn't know how to leave it...

As John and I adjusted to losing our girl Little Britches, we were also getting resigned to our one-hen homestead. Miss Broody was adjusting too. By apparently taking up permanent residence inside the coop.

This hen had always marched to a different chicken drummer than the rest of our Buffie flock. Most notably, she was the champion broody hen in a flock geared for broodiness.

The year before, her first broody session was typical. Generally, broody hens will go about 21 days, the time it takes to hatch eggs. But as the months went by and Miss Broody cycled in and out of more broody periods, each session lasted longer and longer. And the stretch of time when she was actually eating regularly and laying grew shorter.

I'd always wondered if her broodiness stemmed from being the low hen in the flock's pecking order. Not an enviable spot in the hen world; as I mentioned, the others had bullied her from time to time. By day, they wouldn't always let her get to the feeder, and at night, they often wouldn't make room for her on the roost.

But she was scrappy in her own way. And possibly smarter than I guessed. As I said before, when the other hens would push her away from the feeder, she learned to chase me

around until I gave her a special measure of feed. And when the flock made their danger call, she was always the first one to run into the coop to lay low until the danger was over.

A little animal story: my younger sister, the one who grieved so long for our dog Snoopy in my childhood, is a horse girl. She's owned and cared for four horses most of her adult life, and through thick and thin, has been deeply connected to them emotionally. Now, the remaining two are growing elderly.

Recently, she was feeding her 25 year-old mare Honey, a gentle, well-mannered animal, and wondering aloud if her horse was nearing the end of her life. Honey promptly kicked her in the leg!

My sister limped for quite a few days after, but learned a big lesson: don't talk about that kind of stuff in front of your animal. So like horses and other domesticated critters, it could be that Miss Broody was more intelligent and more intuitive than John and I ever thought.

And maybe her scrappiness was the reason she was the lone survivor of three bobcat raids and one hawk attack. But it sure didn't keep her from being broody.

This past spring, Miss Broody had been the first of our flock of three (at the time) to go broody; on the first warm spring day, she retreated to the coop. Around the three-week mark—about the timeframe we would expect the broody stage to be over—she got a shock.

It was when her only remaining chicken chum, Little Britches was killed. I think at that point, Miss Broody apparently entered a new phase of chicken-ness.

She holed up in the coop and there she stayed.

Each and every day, I would haul her off the nest and try to coax her to take some nourishment—put some feed right under her nose, then carry her to the waterer. *Then* I would

stand next to her until she took a sip. Her drink lasted only a few seconds before she'd run straight back inside the coop.

She had gone through long periods of broodiness before, so long that I thought she'd just wither away. Yet here she was, still surviving. But she'd never been broody *this* long.

Certain that the bobcat was an ongoing threat, I figured she and I needed a new routine, to keep her going for the long run. I started putting her out in the grass and locking her out of the pen. For a little while, I would simply stand over her, and keep her company. Without access into the coop, Miss Broody would actually eat a little clover, and when I put a measure of feed on the grass, she'd peck at the whole grains.

Yet just as she had for several months, between pecks of food, she would look around fearfully. All in all, she was consuming very little food. It finally came to me what the real problem was.

She was lonesome. Maybe she even had some kind of hen depression. Still, all I could do was *make* her stay outside for those few moments.

But after a few weeks, the light and the rich spring grass finally worked its magic. On a warm June day, I looked across the yard and saw a vivid splash of blond on the big maple stump. Miss Broody was roosting outside!

After being broody for over seven weeks, she had finally left the nest of her own accord—easing back to her “henly-ness!”

A couple of weeks passed. She still wasn't laying.

I wondered if laying hens need the presence of other hens to keep their egg-producing hormones up to speed. With Miss Broody living solo, maybe she would never lay again. I could

see she was still very anxious—eating or scratching, she continued to look around constantly for threats. A frightened hen is not much of a layer.

Still, I had hopes, especially one summer evening when our neighbor’s cat ventured into the yard. Miss Broody began making her *buck-buck-buck-bu-GAH!* warning call, just like a “real” hen. So I kept checking the nest every day... only to be disappointed

Our nearest neighbors, Alan and Gretchen, who had sold us our flock, were also down to one hen—the bobcat had systematically decimated their chickens too. Their one hen was still laying, but Alan told us that she was eating her eggs—which is very dysfunctional chicken behavior. I guessed this hen was lonely too.

At any rate, it wasn’t long before Miss Broody relapsed back to broodiness. And despite the warmth and sunshine, the rich grass, and the smorgasbord of summer bugs, she was apparently *done* with the great outdoors.

I wasn’t surprised. Yet with this latest broody phase, my disappointment went deeper than simple resignation. As I mourned Miss Broody’s gone-but-not-forgotten “sisters, I did a lot of thinking about our homestead. And it all came back to me:

Once you start keeping laying hens, your girls are the heart of your homestead. And now that we were down to one nervous little chicken, there was a hole in the heart of our Little Farm.

Don't Stop Believin'

I pretty much gave up hope that Miss Broody would ever again be a happy, productive hen.

As the summer weeks passed, her broody habit was definitely out of control. After two-plus months of it, her comb was a pale, sickly color, a beige-pink, instead of a Buffie's normal bright red. Still, I persisted in my fruitless attempts to get her to be a hen again.

Each day, just like all the other times she'd been broody, I was back to the drill: lifting her off the nest. Despite a little indignant hissing—the only evidence of Miss Broody's life force—I would put her in front of the waterer. Then I'd stick around until she drank, and coax her into having a little feed.

It didn't last long; after a few pecks, unless I blocked the hen door, she would run back into the coop.

I was determined to do everything I could to keep her going. And if she died of malnutrition and dehydration, I would know I'd done everything I could.

August rolled by. I saw the writing on the wall.

This poor little animal was eating barely enough to stay alive. She was going to live out her days alone in the coop, pale and sickly, until she simply gave up on life.

After all this, I would have been *thrilled* if she came out of her broodiness, even more so if she laid an egg. But I would have been satisfied if she simply fulfilled her hen destiny: scratching the ground, enjoying her feed, chasing bugs...and hanging out with John and me.

Yet I was most concerned about her loneliness—as I talked about before, hens are herd

animals, meant to live with others. And without any other hen companionship, whether it was dust-bathing in the daytime, or roosting cozily together at night, I couldn't see any future for Miss Broody at our place—forever under the threat of a bobcat or other predators.

I hated giving up on Miss Broody. But was it finally time to try and find a new home for her?

One day, I heard Miss Broody doing some low-key chattering. Now *that* was certainly new. Usually, broody hens, sunk onto their nest, are utterly silent. Perhaps she'd sensed a predator? But when I went out to see her, she was still as broody as broody can be.

So just like I'd been doing for months, I had to yard her off her nest and get her to eat. I hadn't completely lost hope yet, though. That evening, winding up my chores, I peeked into the coop. Miss Broody was on the *roost!*

This was *big*—a normal hen behavior. And when I rattled her feeder, she actually emerged from the coop and ate a little! And what do you know: the next day, she left the coop to come into the pen *on her own*.

And she briefly hung out on the big leaf maple stump. This was even *bigger!*

Whatever the future held for Miss Broody, she had definitely set a record for the longest broody period by far of any of our hens. And now, all signs pointed to her broodiness being on the wane.

Naturally I had to check the nest.

No eggs. To be honest, I didn't really expect any. Still, I dared to hope that with my encouragement, Miss Broody's "normal" behaviors would stick.

If they did, for more than a few days, maybe she could regain her healthy eating and

hydration habits. It would likely take lots of protein and nutrients, vitamins and minerals to recapture her former vitality. Even more to produce eggs.

But what did eggs matter? Miss Broody had come back to life!

Miss Broody's Personal Best

In late summer, haze from regional wildfire smoke has become a regular feature in our area.

This season was no different—except this year, the haze was more intense and lingered for weeks, dampening my spirits. But Miss Broody's breakthrough was a joyful event.

That first day she emerged from the coop, her outdoor play time didn't last long. Yet August drew to a close, she began to spend longer periods outside. Then one day, she appeared in the run first thing in the morning—and stayed outside until sundown.

Like a normal hen!

Suddenly, she was powering down the feed, and was scratching the ground constantly, like a laying hen ought to. Our previously languishing Miss Broody had a whole new lease on life.

I let myself hope—like, *seriously* hope—she would start laying again.

Each day, when I came to take care of her, she was practically pushing on the door to get out of the run and into the yard. She was pecking at clover and other greens like never before, and emptying her feeder regularly too.

Yet what was entirely new was her energy and feistiness: whenever I opened the gate to the chicken yard, this previously retiring little girl would actually try to escape into the woods.

And she was molting like crazy. As I mentioned before, molting is a normal, cyclical process: a hen loses a lot of feathers while her reproductive system takes a break. It had been many months since Miss Broody had molted, and now, there were feathers *everywhere*.

Piles of blond fluff all around the run. Inside the coop, I had to yard the feathers out by the bucketful. She was definitely setting another record—this time for the most epic hen molt ever.

All I could think was, who *is* this chicken? And what happened to Miss Broody?

After several days of marveling at all the feathers she was losing without going bald, I noticed her molting dialing down. The next time I entered the coop to clean it, there was a surprise.

Lying on the platform beneath the roost was a small brown egg!

It was her first egg in *months*.

However, the fact that she'd laid her egg on the poo-catching platform meant Miss Broody must have forgotten something really important: what the nest boxes were for. So I moved the egg to one of the nests and left it. Two days later, I found a second egg. Right alongside her first one. So apparently the whole nest thing had come back to her.

And thus began Miss Broody's egg laying marathon.

First it was two eggs in four days, then three in a four-day period. Then seven eggs in eight days!

Her eggs started out on the small side—not quite as wee as a pullet egg, but a bit undersized. But they gradually became larger. We filled one empty egg carton, then started on a second. Miss Broody has never laid with this much regularity before—almost daily.

And come to think of it, not one of our Buff Orpington flock ever laid as consistently as this, not even in their first, vigorous months of laying. With all this champion egg production, I thought she deserved a new name. “Let's call her Missy,” I said to John.

It was beyond rewarding to see our girl living a “henny” life again. And with the price of

organic eggs *vrooming* in only one direction—up—it was especially gratifying to have homegrown eggs.

In September, Missy laid nineteen eggs in twenty-seven days! Yet given her history, I knew it couldn't last. She had been broody for most of her adult “hen” life. And in our sixteen years of homesteading, everything I'd learned about animals—wild or domesticated—told me that instinctive behaviors always win in the end.

Still, I would enjoy every moment of Missy being a happy, productive hen...

“Love is a universal language, and anyone who loves chickens knows that they speak it too.” —Melissa Caughey

Long before John and I got chickens, here's where the Little Farm story all began...

Little Farm in the Foothills

A Boomer Couple's Search for the Slow Life

Little Farm in the Foothills Series, Book 1

Here's Chapter 1 of my first homesteading memoir, *Little Farm in the Foothills: A Boomer Couple's Search for the Slow Life*—the story of leaving life in the city to create a small homestead in the woods. It's a warmhearted, true-life tale for gardeners, nature-lovers, and dreamers of all ages!

1 * Seeking Walden

It's said that if you want to figure out your life's passion, look at what you loved as a child. When I was growing up, I loved Barbies. You might think, there's a girl who'll go far, what with Astronaut Barbie and Internist Barbie and Professional Figure Skater Barbie. Actually, I predate all those ambitious, take-the-world-by-the-horns Barbies. In *my* time, back in the sixties, all Barbie did was sit around and look hot and wait for Ken to ask her out.

But I also loved to read, especially fairy tales like *Sleeping Beauty*, and stories about

gutsy, courageous girls like Jo March and Laura Ingalls. And when I wasn't reading or hanging out with Barbie, Midge, and Skipper, I was playing in the woods behind our house. Maybe I was living out fantasies inspired by Sleeping Beauty's forest hideaway, or Laura's "Little House" series, but I found my bliss climbing trees, building forts and riding my bike around Woodland Hills, a new development perched on the rural edge of St. Cloud, Minnesota.

My husband, John, was an outdoorsy kid too, with a childhood a lot like mine. (Minus the Barbies.) Your mother sent you outside to play after breakfast, and except for lunch, you were supposed to stay there until it got dark or dinnertime, whichever came first. But then, you didn't really want to be indoors anyway. Certainly not John—from what I can tell, he *lived* "The Dangerous Book for Boys." He'd roam nearby woods and fields with his little gang of friends, playing Robin Hood or cowboys and Indians, coming home so dirty his mom would have to hose him down.

Later, as a young husband and father, John got his fresh air nurturing a small vegetable plot for his family. But it could be the outdoor activities so many of us love as adults, like camping, hiking, and gardening—and I hear vacations on working farms are getting popular!—are a way to free our inner tree-climbing, mud-lovin' child. To return to a simpler time, when most people lived on farms—or at least *knew* a farmer. A time when you spent far more of your life outside than in.

Whatever it is, I never stopped loving the outdoors, and John never lost his longing for wide open spaces...a love and longing we indulged with our mutual passion for gardening. But there came a time when we both yearned for a deeper connection with the land...for a more peaceful life, one more attuned to nature's pace. Okay, that sounds pretty highfalutin'—all we *thought* we wanted was more room for a kitchen garden, and a little quiet in which to enjoy it.

Regardless of our goal, our journey to that life began the day we reached our tipping point with urban noise and traffic and crowds...when John and I bucked our play-it-safe, risk-averse natures and decided to leave the city. *Little Farm in the Foothills* is the tale of our fifty-something leap of faith, to seek out a slower, simpler, and more serene lifestyle on a rural acreage. And embrace a whole new way of living.

Who'd have guessed how complicated "simplicity" could get. Or that serenity and reinventing your life was no match made in heaven.

Before I hit my Boomer years, I'd never seriously considered living in the country.

Despite my woods-playing, I hadn't spent much time in the true boondocks. In elementary school, I'd been a Campfire Girl, but my group never went camping or sat around a campfire—much less lit one. I'd gone tent camping exactly once in my life, a post-high school girlfriend getaway memorable only for the fact that for the entire three days, we'd frozen our eighteen-year-old tushies off. In June!

Anyhow, I'm all for city comforts. Call me picky (I'm the first to admit I'm annoyingly germ-conscious), but I'd always been sort of revolted by the idea of an on-site septic system. There's all that "stuff" in a tank right next to your house, for Pete's sake. And I liked city water. The only well water I'd tasted was loaded with sulfurous compounds, and the rotten-egg smell wafting up from your glass would set off a gag reflex. I didn't want water from just *anywhere*—it could be unhygienic, okay? I have a B.S. in environmental studies. I *know* about contaminated groundwater. I wanted my drinking water from nice clean municipal water treatment plants.

But water was only a side issue. In my youth, I'd had the kind of country experience that would turn most people off permanently...

Praise for Little Farm in the Foothills

“The Browne’s foray into slower living...is an enjoyable read. Their delightful, yet very real, experiences in making the big leap toward their dreams make for a humorous and charming book.” —Washington State Librarian Jan Walsh

“A delightful account.” —*The Bellingham Herald*

You can find *Little Farm in the Foothills* and *Little Farm in the Henhouse* free at your local library—just put in a request! The books are also available in ebook and print at your favorite online retailer...or you can order them at your local bookstore!