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I Plunged Right In...

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Six short months ago, I graduated from college. Three weeks after graduation I was on my way East to a new job. Since then I've felt like a freshman again. Moving to a different section of the country has meant readjusting to everything — friends, climate, living quarters, traditions, job, and a new me.

That new me includes shorter skirts, needle-heeled black leather pumps (quite a switch from college sneakers), oversized handbag and a more sophisticated hair style.

Yes, I've lost my collegiate Orphan Annie hairdo and my Iowa State College Press Building pallor, but I'm certainly not citified yet ...

I still run to be on time for work; I find it difficult to get laundry and cleaning done along with housekeeping, job and play; and I've (courageously or rebelliously) neglected to shorten quite a few skirt hems.

For those of you who wonder how I happen to be in Philadelphia in the first place, perhaps I should go back about a year to the end of winter quarter, senior year at Iowa State.

I was in the midst of finals, planning to start thinking seriously about job possibilities during vacation. Of course, Christmas holidays are never conducive to serious thinking of any kind. So, during quarter break in March, I frantically culled through names of magazines, editors and publishers.

I'd already had one lead. In February the editor of Farm Journal, Carroll Streeter, while on business in the Midwest, stopped by Iowa State and interviewed me unexpectedly.

I'd had eight hours of class that day. It was late afternoon, and in the photography lab I was draped in a gloomy chemical-laden rubber apron, stretching from my chin to my toes. I'm sure my hair retained no sign of the one and only combing I gave it during my 8 a.m. dash to class. Lipstick must have disappeared about noon.

When my instructor called to me that I had a visitor, I thought he was clowning, as he often did. Who could be visiting me? So I calmly finished my print, before, still clad in my big black apron, I strolled into the other room and found Mr. Streeter waiting.

We talked, and I liked what I heard about Farm Journal — its opportunities for young editors, its size and location. Though no definite job offer was made, Mr. Streeter said he'd tell his Women's Editor I was available.

With this encouragement and some idea of other magazines I was interested in, I got in touch with the College Placement Office when I got back to school. There were openings on several magazines. Some of them interviewed me. Then I went to visit the home offices of four. I got offers. What a decision that was to make!

I felt sure I wanted magazine (three years of working on our college home economics magazine, The Homemaker, and lovely every squeezed-in minute of it, helped me decide that). What I didn't know was whether I wanted to work in the food department of a magazine, even though I had a minor in food and nutrition.

All the magazines offered me food editorial jobs except Farm Journal. They asked me to join the women's staff in a secretarial-training position.

I took the training position, figuring it would give me a chance to look around, get my feet on the ground and see firsthand what goes on in the kitchens, without getting in too deeply right at first. Besides, I must admit, I also wanted to see the East.

I plunged right in...

by Betty Gregory ’58

Who was editor of the Homemaker and is now on Farm Journal staff.

Three short weeks to say good-bye to friends and family, to paw through a depleted college wardrobe, save what was presentable and pile it into suitcases — rush out to buy another footlocker for the overflow — and I was on my way.

I spent a glorious Fourth of July on the train, watching fireworks above cities I passed in the night. That train was heading for New York faster than any homing pigeon, and I had to step lively to get off at North Philadelphia.

Thirty minutes later, from my 16th-floor room in center city YMCA (which takes women residents, in case you’re puzzled why I don’t say YWCA), I could see nothing but buildings — and a block square park filled with pigeons and people who like to feed pigeons.

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The city was empty over the long holiday, as it was every weekend. How I envied the people who swarmed about me all week, then deserted the city for the seashore, leaving me to haunt movie houses for entertainment and blessed coolness, the Y rooftop to get a tan.

Farm Journal is located in the old section of Philadelphia right on Washington Square. Not far from it are many colonial houses with a rich historic background.

My own place, where I now live with three girls, is one of these tiny structures — over 100 years old, three stories, brick with traditional white shutters, fireplace, spiral corner staircase, and patio the size of a bedsheet.

Within ten minutes walking distance is the famed Academy of Music where the Philadelphia Orchestra performs all winter and where I got my first taste of opera. Close by, too, are the main stage theaters of the city.

The subways, with their tunnels of stale air, are two blocks away, a good escape route to the suburbs. There's a tennis court within 10 minutes of us. And just around the corner are delightful antique shops, wonderful for browsing on one's way to the Salvation Army (which offers terrific buys in furnishings for a quaint old house like ours).

Every day I join throngs of gloved working gals in their march to work. Because it's the old section of the city where there are narrow brick streets, I see early morning street sweepers with handcarts, children playing in patches of dirt no bigger than a small box, dilapidated wooden wagons, still horse-drawn, carrying vegetables to the edges of the city, thin old men setting up their daily flower stands on the corner, soon to be joined by the pretzel men and the hot-roasted chestnut men.

I found that my old school magazine had been set up on a small scale quite similar to Farm Journal. So I was familiar with the routine of staff meetings to present story ideas, deadlines, story writing and rewriting, layouts and proofreading.

But at Farm Journal I found lots to learn. I suddenly realized the responsibilities that a 3,100,000 family readership places on editors. I was amazed at the painstaking sifting and re-sifting of ideas to make sure they could be "borrowed" by readers. My "Slick Tricks" and "Shopping By Mail" columns, which required mainly editing and little writing, took on new importance as I discovered them to be among the best read columns in the book.

At first I helped set deadline dates for stories three months in advance of their scheduled appearance . . . then pounded on editors' doors reminding them of due dates.

I read proofs more carefully than I'd read any college paper. I struggled to relearn basic style and lots more Farm Journal style. I typed letters, trip memos. I kept files.

And what was most fun for me, I sat in on staff meetings, slowly getting the feel of things.

Sometimes I was asked to help in the kitchen; so I had time to study what the food editors do. And when the Women's Editor asked me whether I wanted to try my hand in the food department, I said "yes."

Now I attend all staff meetings, am asked to present story ideas. Most of my time I spend in the kitchen, testing old and new recipes for stories, or developing new food ideas.

Slowly I'm learning what I don't know. I'm setting up a study program to renew my acquaintance with lots of food lore I'd forgotten and to include courses at the University of Pennsylvania in subjects I never had time for at Iowa State. I'm taking advantage of living in an Eastern city to visit New York and Washington, D. C.

Best of all, I'm meeting professionals in the fields of home economics and journalism.

A first year is filled with awe of people who seem so successful in "your" field. But soon that awe blends into a healthy respect for their talents, and you find you can present your own ideas and know they will be listened to.

A first year is important because it's all many girls work — my three roommates, all June graduates, who had no prospects last September, will all be married by next June.

By plunging right into a job, my first year has brought me an assistant editorship on a national magazine, which means I have a coveted space on the masthead. I have one by-line in type (which I hope will appear soon). In June the first color food photograph I helped with will dress the "Farmer's Wife" cover.

It's been fun, and like a freshman year in college, it will be great to have this first year behind me. From the Matrix.