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The Wiles of Pammel

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The three and one-half rooms of 1013 Pammel Court contain the Wiles—brown-eyed Nancy, 4; Connie 2½, a blonde curly-haired charmer; blue-eyed mischievous Marcia, 1; and their mom and dad.

The unusual thing about this Pammel family is that both Mom and Dad are full time students at Iowa State. Mom is Virginia Wiles, a graduate student in vocational education. A WAVE officer during World War II, she was graduated from ISC in 1943 in institution management. Dad is Mitchell Wiles taking courses in pre-veterinary medicine. Mitch, also an ex-GI, spent the war years in the Army Air Corps.

Virginia is a native Iowan but after high school graduation moved to Sharon Springs, New York. She first came to Iowa State to school because her father was a graduate. Mitch grew up on an Oklahoma farm. He's always been interested in animals and medicine and for the perfect combination of the two decided on veterinary medicine for his lifework.

After the war the Wiles lived in St. Louis. The idea for Mitch to get into school was always in the background, but one thing and another interfered. Finally they decided that for Mitch to begin work in which he was vitally interested was most important. This was in 1949 and then their hopes were dashed because Mitchell’s high school grades were not high enough for admission to college in the veterinary curriculum. However, Mitch went to night school and the next year the family left St. Louis and moved to Rossford, a town near Waverly, Iowa, where Virginia's family owned a house. Mitch took his freshman work at Wartburg College.

In the summer of 1951, the Wiles were able to get a two-bedroom barracks apartment in Pammel Court. Virginia took work in both sessions of summer school and Mitch started this fall. Virginia is anxious to get an Iowa teacher's certificate which she will have by June. Then she plans to teach while Mitch finishes.

Organizing time

Organization of their time has been the most difficult problem the Wiles have had to face. This fall, after considerable arranging, they were able to get their school schedules worked out so that one of them could be home with the children. Virginia has her classes Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday mornings and Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Mitch’s classes come at the intervening times. Their only conflict comes on Saturday mornings, and then a neighbor cares for the children. Both the Wiles are carrying 13 hours.

Virginia has created a flexible work schedule. If the weather's nice she temporarily forgets the schedule and takes the children outdoors. She plans to give the apartment a thorough cleaning either on Friday or Saturday. The automatic washer gets a workout every other day, but she irons only every other week. Ironing is kept at a minimum by dressing the children in jeans or corduroy overalls and "T" shirts as much as possible. Mitch’s school pants are washable cords and can be dried on pants' stretchers. Virginia tries to do all the two chores whenever possible. Often she sticks in the washing and lets it run through while she does the dishes. The dishes always drain dry on the rack.

Cooking is divided. Mitch fixes lunch the mornings he is home and sometimes fixes breakfast. Mitch also does the routine pick and stick up jobs when he is home.

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Meals are served at regular times each day with the big meal coming at night. The children are bathed and in bed by 7 p.m. All three go to bed right after lunch too. Four-year-old Nancy seldom sleeps in the afternoons, but the other two nap with baby Marcia snoozing longest. Bedtime must come early for the small fry as night-time is study time for Mom and Dad.

When the Wiles considered coming back to school, the fact that Virginia had been in the service was the thing that made it financially possible. Under the GI Bill, both get their tuition and books as well as subsistence checks each month. These amount to $210. Even with the low rent ($18 per month) in Pammel it’s a tough struggle for a family of five.

Virginia operates on a cash and carry budget. She plans for $20 a week to cover their food costs. On top of this they have a $20 milk bill every month. The Wiles get enough milk for each child to have 1 quart a day and each of the adults 1 pint. For cooking Virginia uses powdered milk and uses it in every food possible. The family eats a lot of fish mostly for economical reasons, but luckily they all like it. Virginia makes out menus for a week at a time and with these in hand does her grocery shopping once a week. Rent, electricity, fuel, insurance payments, upkeep of their car, medical and dental bills, and clothing costs take care of the rest of their monthly income. Clothing costs for the kids have been kept at a minimum by the welcome arrival every now and then of hand-me-downs from various relatives and friends.

Sunday recreation

Sundays the Wiles keep for a family day. Nancy and Connie go to Sunday School in the morning. Then in the afternoon the family piles into the car and takes off on a jaunt—a long ride in the country or a trip to the park. Recreation for Virginia and Mitch outside of family fun is practically nil. The budget and the lack of time are both responsible for this.

Every now and then a minor crisis develops—one or all of the kids get sick; or Marcia, who’s at the get-into-everything stage, throws the dishes from the drainer one by one; or the never-ending pile of work looms insurmountable. But before long everything falls into line and the ultimate goal of eventually having and doing what they want comes in sight again. Virginia and Mitchell Wiles feel that the tough grind of the present is worth it.

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