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HE NEVER-ENDING CHORES OF A SMALL FARM MOTHER (Annie Verigin)

(as personally experienced by her son Elmer Verigin)



For many years, I wanted to explain to my children just what it was like for the struggling farm women on the small farm.....how their grandmothers and great grandmothers survived and were still able to provide the family love with which Marilyn and I had received throughout our lives with them..

Marilyn and I were born to second generation Doukhobours that migrated to Canada in 1899. More specifically, all our grandparents were born in Georgia which was part of Russia in 1899.

Our grandparents spoke Russian as the language in the household. Our parents were able to speak English as they had taken a limited amount of schooling in Canada.

My mother poses here in Pelly, Saskatchewan where we had moved in November 1947 from Veregin. I permanently left home in June 1958. So these are my recollections of what my mother's responsibilities were throughout those eleven (11) years. This knowledge was passed on from generation to generation as they all came from Agrarian roots (essentially small self-sufficient farms).

This way of life was how she was able to raise our family. She shared discussions with her neighbours who in turn, shared their experiences with "modern" techniques of that time.

Baba then taught her children all that she knew. As always, we, her children, felt that we were "hard done by" when we were instructed to do these chores. Today, I am blessed that Baba insisted that we do our share of the chores as our family needed many different things in our lives to survive as cash was very limited.

Again, young people (my offspring is no different) are very busy people and have little time to hear all these stories until the Story-Tellers are not with them anymore. So it was with my parents and grandparents. Those of you who get to read it now, "hello and God Bless you."

A) Mornings

1. Daybreak

Light stove in chamber on the left and top off the water reservoir on the right of the cooking stove/ oven. Firewood had to be carried in from a exterior wood pile along with kindling (split as required). The reservoir warmed the water for washing in the sink (grey water pail collected under) and for dishwashing. The stove required wood to be added so that the fire never went out during the day and the reservoir stayed warm. The kettle was filled full and set on stove fire side to heat faster for preparation of tea, hot breakfast cereal or boiled eggs. All cooking was conducted in this area. If a utensil was keeping food warm, it was moved right to a cooler part of the stove top.



2. Breakfast

Breakfast was started and a variety of foods were on the menu as those in the family that needed to work the farm had to be physically fit and so they required substantial sustenance for their efforts. Some of these items would include:

- a. Hot and cold cereal with milk
- b. Bacon or pork chops
- c. Cold meats like sausage
- d. Bread, mostly raw as toasters were not available (and would take too much time) with butter and Jam. Sometimes peanut butter was available
- e. Eggs cooked in many ways as desired: fried, boiled, etc.
- f. Yogurt
- g. Normally no fruit as it was not affordable
- h. Usual preferred family beverage was tea as coffee was served only when company came

The table was always set and whoever was at home would be called to eat together at the table. This was a family habit.

Dishes would be washed by hand in a shallow tub using water from the reservoir and set in a baking pan to drain before drying with a dishtowel. All dishes and cooking utensils were immediately put away in cupboards or storage areas designated for that purpose. This was her natural habit that was instilled in her children.

3. Chores

- a. Milking cows involved many separate tasks which I will now outline, using the six (6) milking cows normally in the family herd as the example:
 - i. Walk to the pasture, locate cows and herd to farmyard. Sometimes they would come in by themselves (they are a habitual animal). All the more reason for milking at the same time each day, morning and evening as their teats fill up and naturally need emptying
 - ii. Hobble (at times as some cows will not patiently stand through process)
 - iii. Wash teats
 - iv. Milk by squeezing the teat. This takes some practice but soon the Milker learns to do this efficiently so the cow stays relaxed. (problems take place if not careful)
 - v. It takes about 8 to 12 minutes per cow depending on length of time from freshening (giving birth to a calf)
 - vi. Depending on the weather and the cow, this can take place in the barnyard without tying the cow in a stall. They usually stand chewing their cud, (food processing system in this type of animal). Baba could "stretch" the ability of the cow to produce milk to January. There were no milk products till May. A difficult time for the family.



- vii. Usually all the cats gather round as they would be treated by directing a spray of milk from teat to open cat mouth. (fun to watch)



b. Separating the whole milk using a Cream Separator

- i. Save a portion of whole milk for family use and cooking
- ii. Assemble Cream Separator that was washed (after each use morning and evening) before and is now dry for use. There are about 20 discs in the actual separator as well as the ducts that conduct the cream and skim milk to separate containers. So washing and drying are very important to control harmful bacteria.
- iii. Empty pail of milk into reservoir at the top of Separator
- iv. Milk runs through separator by gravity
- v. Hand crank to force the milk through a series of discs that separate the heavier cream from the lighter skim milk via 2 troughs into separate containers



c. Skim milk use

- i. Calves, born to each cow, were rationed milk (about an ice cream pail full). Calves were separated (into pens) from their mothers at birth so that the entire cow milk production could be utilized. To teach the calf to drink milk, several fingers were inserted into the mouth, to encourage the natural sucking instinct. The head is then directed into the pail and the calf begins to suck and drink at the same time.
- ii. A portion was saved to produce Yogurt for family
- iii. A portion was saved to produce Cottage cheese



d. Cream

- i. Some was saved for daily house needs
 - 1. Hand churning for butter was a lengthy process that took patience. The youngest child was usually given the honor of being "Head Butter-Maker". Butter is then cast in one pound maker and then wrapped in a special wrapper.
 - 2. Save buttermilk for family use (see item 26 below)
- ii. Balance store in Cooler (See item 5 below)



4. Work on other Chores as time permits

B) Noon

- 1. Dinner (on the farm, the noon meal was always called "dinner" as it was a large meal)
 - a. Prepare meal
 - i. Bread and butter
 - ii. Homemade vegetable soups
 - iii. Chicken soup with chopped up chicken and vegetables
 - iv. Chicken pieces, sauer kraut and some vegetables into a Borsch-like Soup
 - v. Large peerahee (at bread baking usually) with melted butter

- vi. Peerahee with vegetables and melted butter
 - vii. Whole green onions and radish (in season), eaten raw
 - viii. Other
 - ix. Tea
 - b. Set table
 - c. Call all to table
 - d. Eat
 - e. Wash dishes and put away
2. Work on other Hobbies or Chores as time permits

C) Afternoon

1. Work on Chores. Usually a priority is set by need. Special attention is taken to deal with preservation of foods that will spoil. I.e., butter, cottage cheese, yogurt and meats have priority due to the fact there were no freezers, nor fridges.

D) Dusk

1. Supper
- a. Prepare meal
 - i. Bread and butter
 - ii. Borsch (starts with Saturday large pot and continues until finished so as not to spoil)
 - iii. Varenekee (maybe once every 2 weeks)
 - iv. A milk soup with rice (every week or so)
 - v. A custard type consisting of cream of wheat and milk (every week or so)
 - vi. "Sernick" (Baked casserole with cottage cheese as base) (once every 2 weeks)
 - vii. "Kartoshnick" (Baked casserole with potatoes as base) once every 2 weeks)
 - viii. "Varenickee" (Perogees with cottage cheese, potato usually. Sometimes filled with berries (in season))
 - ix. Fried chicken, meat (whatever was butchered at that time) about 2 times a week
 - x. Potatoes, boiled, mashed, etc., (every day)
 - xi. Baked fowl (chicken, turkey, goose or duck) (once a month). Potatoes, and various vegetables would be baked together to make a meal. Kidney was a special treat
 - xii. Fried potatoes and onions
 - xiii. Baked sliced potatoes with cream and garlic sausage on top
 - xiv. Liver and onions (when animal was butchered)
 - xv. Boiled whole chicken (water is saved for making soup)
 - xvi. Sheppard's Pie (once a month)
 - xvii. Whitefish, fried whole or from canned stock
 - xviii. Beef Stew (once a month)
 - xix. Salad (in season)
 - xx. Desserts:
 - 1. Canned fruit

2. Jello
 3. Berries with cream (in season)
 4. Cake, pies and cookies seemed to be a staple
 5. "Plov" (a dessert made with rice and raisins)
- xxi. Tea
- b. Set table
 - c. Call all to table
 - d. Eat
 - a. Wash dishes
2. Repeat process for milking cows and all the other responsibilities associated with that
 - a. Usually this set of chores precede Supper
 - b. With sharing, the Supper preparation can take place while this chore is being completed
 3. Work on other chores

E) Evenings

1. Work on Hobbies

F) Worry

1. Baba used to worry about financial issues on the farm
2. Dad's alcohol problem
3. Her children
 1. Sickesses
 2. Clothes needs
4. Later, all her grandchildren
5. Baba was a professional "Worrier"
6. She was always worried about something. This had a psychological effect on her children.

G) Special Projects (not daily)

1. Baba's Hobbies
 - a. Knitting, using wool yarn produced on the farm from farm animals
 - i. Knee socks and Ankle socks
 - ii. Mittens
 - b. Knitting sweaters
 - i. Pullovers and buttoned at the front
 - c. Embroidery with purchased cotton or silk floss
 - i. Dish towels
 - ii. Table coverings
 - iii. Pot holders
 - iv. Aprons
 - d. Crocheting needlecraft with purchased crochet cotton
 - i. Doilies
 - ii. Living Room Table Coverings
 - iii. Glass holders
 - e. Sewing with foot propelled sewing machine



- i. Dresses
 - ii. Hats
 - iii. Shirts
 - iv. Pillow cases
 - v. Aprons
 - f. Darning
 - i. Socks
 - g. Pine Needle Craft
 - h. Other Crafts
 - i. Letter-writing (usually once a month)
 - i. All 7 of her brothers and sisters
 - ii. All her 3 sons and daughters after they left home
 - iii. Many of her friends
 - j. Reading
 - i. Somehow she had a stash of True Stories which she re read
 - ii. Kamsack Times
 - k. Listen to Radio
 - i. Soap stories
 - l. Learn Psalms
 - i. Attempted to teach her children Doukhobour Psalms
 - m. Learn Songs
 - i. Sing some songs with her family
 - ii. She was mournfully humming most times as she meditated
 - n. Story-telling
 - i. About her youth and her parents and grandparents
 - ii. How she helped horse farming with her Dad
 - o. Patching shirts and pants
2. Poultry
- a. Raised Ducks, Geese, Turkeys and Chickens for food
 - b. Incubator (once a year)
 - i. Gather and grade eggs (usually chicken)
 - ii. Rotate eggs daily until hatched
 - iii. Check to see if any have "died"
 - iv. Fill lamp with coal oil regularly
 - c. Order a batch of hatched chicks from Hatchery
 - i. At least 100 roosters
 - 1. This was a source of food
 - 2. On arrival of unexpected company, a rooster would be "sacrificed" for soup
 - ii. 100 chickens
 - d. "Clucking" hens were more reliable for natural incubating:
 - i. Duck
 - ii. Geese
 - iii. Turkey



- e. Training Poultry in some habits
 - i. Ducks and Goose eggs that are hatched under a Clucking Hen, naturally believe the Hen is their mother. The hen does not have a natural instinct to take her "brood" to water but the "brood" has that instinct. Many times the Hen is standing by a slough, "calling" her "brood"
- 3. Cream marketing
 - a. Send cream can (5 gallons) to Creamery
 - i. Creamery is located at Norquay the next stop West along railway track from Pelly
 - ii. Gather all cream from Cooler and fill Cream Can
 - iii. Hitch horses to Buckboard and transport cream can to Pelly
 - before 4:00 PM when freight comes by.
 - 1. If too early it may sour
 - 2. If too late, can will stay a day and will destroy itself
 - b. Income in 1957 was about \$10 per 5 gallon can



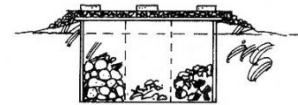
4. Lamp and Lantern Care

- a. Ensure that Coal Oil and Hi Test gas is available as required for Coal Oil and Gas Lamps
- b. Fill lamps and lantern tanks and check if full on regular basis
- c. Clean smoke dirtied glass globes as required



5. Construct "Cooler"

- a. Excavate a 10 to 12 foot deep well in a wooded and secluded area for shade
- b. Construct wooden cover with a small opening
- c. Fill full of snow in spring
- d. Snow will settle and so continue "topping off"
- e. Place layer of sawdust over to "insulate"
- f. Lower containers with ropes to lift up or lower as required
- g. Sketch illustrates cold storage in the ground without snow to understand better



6. Grazing Cattle, needs a Herder in most instances

- a. Depending on season, pastures are depleted of green grass
 - i. Green grass grows abundantly along road allowances
 - ii. Cattle need to be tended so as not to wander to neighbours farms or walk away too far from home farm
- b. On open farmland (320 acres) before seeding and after harvest. Again farms had a limited amount of fencing but there was always edible fodder



7. Meat Processing

- a. Head Cheese, periodically in a single batch to utilize portions of meat (i.e. heads and thus the name) not used for meals
- b. Bacon
- c. "Holadeyst" (Head Cheese and Jellied Chicken)
 - i. Batch for immediate use

- ii. Can in sealed jars for summer use
 - d. From November through April, meat can be stored in an unheated building as it can stay frozen
 - e. Can meat products (see item 22 below)
- 8. Coffee Break / Lunches to Workers in the Fields
 - a. Usually during seeding or harvesting times and a welcome snack / break between Dinner and Supper delivered out to the area where work is being conducted
 - i. Coffee
 - ii. Sandwiches
 - iii. Donuts or fruit tarts

9. Make Soap

- a. Excess fat was gathered and never wasted for this particular purpose
 - i. Pork and other animal meats
 - ii. Duck and Geese had excess fat
- b. Once a year event
 - i. Usually a large steel barrel
 - ii. I cannot remember how much but recipe was in Baba's head
 - iii. Mix with a wooden paddle
 - iv. Here is a Google recipe



".....Ingredients For homemade lye soap

- 10. 5 lb. pure white, salt free lard.
- 11. 2 pt. water.
- 12. 1 can. lye.
- 13. 1/2 box. borax.
- 14. 1/2 c. ammonia....."

15. Shear Sheep

- a. Once a year event
 - i. Sheep are tightly hobbled and laid on side
 - ii. Handle shears carefully not to puncture skin underneath
 - iii. Wool was very dirty



16. Feather processing

- a. Pluck feathers from butchered fowl (use smaller feathers)
- b. Washing and drying
- c. Create
 - i. Pillows
 - ii. Mattresses
 - iii. Eiderdown (from duck) pillows and mattresses

17. Wool Processing

- a. Washing
 - i. Usually in a large, round laundry tub
 - ii. Use wooden paddle to mix
 - iii. Remove cleaned wool and hang on fences

- iv. Repeat until all wool is washed (usually 3 times) once for every sheep (3 in flock)
 - b. Carding for future blankets
 - i. Hand carders
 - ii. Mechanized rotary carder
 - c. Spinning into yarn for knitting
 - i. Spinning wheel unto spool
 - ii. Wind balls of yarn from spool
18. Laundry
- a. Every week on Monday
 - i. Haul water with pails from well to barrel in Baunya
 - ii. Heat water by starting stove in Baunya
 - iii. Scrub very dirty clothes on wash board
 - iv. Wash all clothes in washing motor powered machine
 - v. Hang clothes on clothesline
 - 1. Clothesline is typically about 40 feet in length that stretches between 2 trees
 - 2. Raised platform from which clothes are hung
 - vi. Challenge in the winter as clothes will freeze
 - 1. Need to gather and dry on clothes rack in house
19. Clothes Care
- a. Every week on Tuesday
 - b. Everything needs ironing on ironing board as Wash & Wear was not available at this time
 - c. Needs to be put away
20. Bake Bread from white flour
- a. Every week and as required at full family of six (6)
 - b. Usually in a large Basin (semi globe)
 - c.
 - d. Usually 10 loaves in each batch
 - e. Mix in morning and knead as required, bake in afternoon
 - f. Take some mix to bake large Peerahee (potato and cottage cheese)
 - i. Lunch on bread baking day
21. Make Borsch
- a. Every week, usually Saturday morning
 - b. Special treat for family on weekend and also prepare for visitors on Sunday
22. Wash all floors in the house
- a. Usually Saturday mornings
 - b. Use a rag as hard to access under beds on hands and knees
23. Baba enjoyed Visiting (Usually once a week on Sundays)
- a. Travel to a relative or friend
 - b. Expect visitors
 - c. Unexpected visitors
 - d. At least one meal is always served
24. Shopping to nearby Town (Pelly)



- a. Saturday noon
- b. Hitch up horses to buggy
- c. Usually about 20 minutes 3 1/2 miles each way
- d. Baba purchased essential grocery list (maximum \$5.00 total)
- e. Wait for Dad to conduct his meetings with buddies as they get progressively drunk
- f. Disappointing experience for Baba as it took place every time

25. House Painting (once every 5 years or so)

- a. Some rooms

26. Clay Mud plaster log buildings (once every 5 years or so)

- a. Chicken coop and Cow barn
- b. Usually mixed on ground near building
 - i. Select special clay (Baba had feel for it).
 - ii. Procedure taken from Ukrainian process on the Internet:

".....Clay, straw, manure and water made up the plaster. Topsoil was removed from a sizeable area to ensure access to clean, humus-free clay. Clay and water were mixed in a shallow pit dug into the ground about six inches (15 cm). To break down the clay, the settlers trampled it with their feet or led an ox or horse repeatedly through the pit. To this mixture straw and dung were added. Cow dung was preferred as it was a stronger binder. Finely chopped straw prevented the plaster from cracking upon drying. The mixture was thrown by the handful with enough force to wedge it into the spaces between logs, then smoothed with a wet hand....."

- iii. Family used small pails to carry the "mud" to the buildings and applied by hand to walls

27. Canning in glass jars

- a. August and September
- b. Products
 - i. Pickles from cucumbers
 - 1. Dills
 - 2. Sweet
 - 3. Hungarian
 - ii. Pickles from beets and relish
 - iii. Pickles from green beans
 - iv. Pickles from carrots
 - v. Tomatoes
 - 1. Whole
 - 2. Juice, regular and V-8
 - 3. Green tomato pickles
 - vi. Wild Fruit
 - 1. Raspberries
 - 2. Strawberries
 - 3. Saskatoons
 - 4. Pincherries
 - 5. Gooseberries
 - 6. Mossberries
 - 7. High bush Cranberries

- vii. Purchased Fruit (when money was available)
 - 1. Peaches
 - 2. Apricots
 - 3. Pears
 - 4. Cherries
 - viii. Meats
 - 1. Beef
 - 2. Pork
 - 3. Chicken
 - 4. Venison
 - 5. Hamburgers
 - ix. Fish (Whitefish)
28. Cellar storage under house
- a. Cabbage
 - i. Make 45 gallon barrel of Sauer kraut
 - ii. Hang cabbages by the core
 - b. Potatoes
 - i. Store in bin with dirt floor
 - c. Beets, Parsnip, Winter Radish and Carrots
 - i. Store in bin with dirt floor
 - ii. Usually in dry sand
 - d. Sunflower Seeds, Beans, Peas. Poppy Seeds
 - i. Shell and dry
 - ii. Fill Cotton or burlap bags (no plastic)
 - iii. Place in dry place
 - e. Whole Green Tomatoes
- Copied from the internet as this is what Baba would do

".....Place a single layer of them in a basket, crate or cardboard box. Place a sheet of newspaper over them. Put down one more layer (no more 'cause the bottom ones will bruise) of tomatoes. Many people suggest wrapping each tomato individually in newspaper or tissue paper but if you have more than a few tomatoes that might be a bit too time consuming. Bring them inside and store in a cool room....."

29. Make Yogurt

Baba followed something like these 6 Basic Steps to Making Homemade Yogurt

- a. Heat the milk to 180 degrees fahrenheit. ...
- b. Cool the milk to 112-115 degrees fahrenheit. ...
- c. Add your yogurt starter – the good bacteria. ..(saved from a previous batch).
- d. Stir the yogurt starter with the rest of the milk. ...
- e. Pour the milk into jars and incubate for 7-9 hours. ...
- f. Place the jars in the fridge to cool and set.

30. Make Cottage Cheese

- a. Baba used something like
- b. this procedure

EQUIPMENT

- Large pot
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Slotted spoon
- Cheesecloth (or clean kitchen towel)
- Colander
- Medium bowl

INGREDIENTS

- 1 gallon whole milk NOT ultra-high temperature processed or "long life"
- ¾ cup white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tbsp heavy cream (optional, see step 7)

INSTRUCTIONS

Pour milk into a large, heavy-bottomed pot. Heat slowly to 190°F/88°C stirring regularly so the milk doesn't burn on the bottom of the pot.

1. Remove from heat, pour in vinegar and stir a few times. Cover and let rest for 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, line a colander with a clean piece of doubled cheesecloth or a tea towel. Place the colander over another bowl to catch any liquid (whey) that drips out.
3. Spoon the solids from the pot into the lined colander. Let drain for 30 minutes.
4. Gather the ends of the cloth tightly together and form a cloth-wrapped ball of cheese. Holding this in one hand, run cold water over the ball, kneading and squeezing it with your other hand until the entire ball of cheese is cool.
5. Dump the cheese out of the cloth into a bowl and use a spoon to break it into small curds. Stir in salt to taste.
6. For creamy cottage cheese, stir in the heavy cream 2 tablespoons at a time until it reaches the desired consistency. Check taste and add more salt if needed.
7. Chill for at least 1 hour then stir before serving.

31. Make Buttermilk

- a. The residue milk from the butter churning is butter milk

32. Berry-Picking

- a. Usually early Summer, June and July

33. Gardening

- a. Planting Late May
- b. Watering only tomatoes and cucumbers. The rest was seasonal rains
- c. Weeding biweekly
- d. Hilling potatoes, beets, carrots and other root vegetables about twice a season

- e. Harvesting September. Gather all vegetables and store in Root Cellar (See item 28 above)
34. Family Picture Albums
- a. Baba had a "Brownie" Camera and enjoyed taking pictures
 - b. She carefully "posted" them in picture albums
35. Cooking "Bees" to prepare for future use:
- a. Vareniki
 - b. Peerehee
 - c. Cabbage Rolls
 - d. Saladooha (a pudding from a mixture of dried fruit)
 - e. Fish Processing
 - i. Dad and John Sookochoff, (Sister Lillian husband), would travel to a First Nations site in Manitoba, to obtain a pickup load of Whitefish
 - ii. This would be canned and have similar consistency as commercially processed fish like Salmon
36. Family Counselling and Education
- a. Sobriety
 - b. Non-smoking (my Dad did not smoke)
 - c. Honesty
 - d. Idleness breeds contempt and leads to trouble
 - e. Willingness to help neighbours and others
 - f. Share food and make sure everyone is treated equal
 - g. Share chores with family members
 - h. Cleanliness is Godliness
 - i. Courtesy to others
 - j. Respect elders
 - k. No need for Profanity use
37. Sickness and Health Issues
- a. Colds
 - b. Dental
 - c. Doctor visits
 - d. Superstitions
 - i. Cure for hiccups
 - ii. Absolutely no sleeping at dusk
 - iii. Never pass an article or a baby through a door
 - iv. Dogs eating green grass is a sign of rain within three days following
 - v. New Year's Eve ritual
 - 1. After dark proceed to the farm gate to yard
 - 2. Facing road allowance kick loose fitting boot forward
 - a. Boot will point in direction of future girlfriend / boy friend
 - 3. Invert cups and place string, coins, other articles
 - a. Cups are moved around while the next person has back to cups
 - b. Cup chosen foretells the character of the future partner
 - 4. Vareniki are served at midnight

- vi. There were many more but when I interviewed Baba and her two (2) sisters Polly and Lillian in later years, they refused to repeat the actual superstition and said that they never practiced any of them. Interesting regarding their beliefs and yet they were Christians, true and true.

38. Story Telling

- a. Helping her father to Farm with horses
- b. Recount story of her grandfather Somma and his brother Eloosha Morozoff serving a prison sentence in Irkurst, Russia from 1895 through 1902 as penalty for Burning their Arms in 1895
- c. Recount story of the trying time that her grandfather had upon eventual joining his family already in Canada
- d. How her grand uncle Eloosha asked that she name her 4th child to bear his name Eloosha (Elmer)
- e. Events surrounding her mother's untimely death in 1927 from the "Asian Flu"
- f. Challenges to adapt to her stepmother
- g. Teachings of her grandfather Somma
- h. How her uncle George Morozoff went blind

The above story about Baba Annie Verigin relates to contemporary women in the 1930 to 1958 era who had to live in a similar fashion to survive. She used all her traditional learning to provide her children the methods to live on a small mixed farm. These duties were taught and distributed, fairly to her children. This knowledge provide them with the basis for their journey through away from the farm as none remained in the Agriculture business.

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