

## Country Living verses City Living

One of my favorite Aesop fables as a child was The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse. Being a city girl who always longed to be a country girl, I identified with the city mouse who wanted to trade places with his country cousin. Of course the mouse's life in the country turned out to be much more difficult than he had imagined and he was glad when he returned to the life he was familiar with. In the original fable, it is actually the country mouse who finds city life noisy and scary and soon runs back to his peaceful, simple life in the beautiful countryside.

As adults, we all well know the phrase "the grass is always greener on the other side," and most of us try to teach this meaning to our own children, while at the same time reminding ourselves of its truth.

Recently, I had my own city and country mouse experience.

This past spring, we took our children to visit my cousin and her family on their small farm in Bell Buckle, Tennessee.

My cousin Jeannie was certainly not a country girl when we were growing up. She lived a stones throw away from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, and my numerous visits to her home almost always involved long excursions to the mall. Although Jeannie was always horse-crazy (and still remains so), in my wildest dreams, I would not have thought my cousin would end up living on and taking care of a farm. That being said, several of my friends have also reminded me that in their wildest dreams I would not have ended up with four children. That is another story altogether.

Bell Buckle is a tiny town, basically just one row of adorable antique shops. Besides a few bed and breakfasts and historic homes, the rest of the area is just one beautiful farm after another. Tennessee walking horses dominate the plethora of horse farms, and the rolling hills and expansive sky is breathtakingly beautiful.

My children, obviously needing just this sort of exposure, were amazed by the scenery. During the last hour or so of the trip, our oldest said, "We are really in the middle of nowhere, aren't we?" And then, when we got off the highway and were within five miles of my cousin's home, he asked incredulously, "Where do they grocery shop?" Coming from a teenager who only remembers the Forsyth County that has a grocery store or two on every corner, I could not help but think how sad that was.

I have been back to Bell Buckle numerous times this summer and I have learned that while I love and appreciate the beauty of a farm, I am somewhat of a bumble when it comes to the actual business of farming.

Goats, for example, are adorable when viewed from a distance. But when my daughter tried to get me to play with the small herd of goats, I felt nervous and found I had no real desire to engage in this sort of goat activity. Their horns are hard and their little hoofs are too. Calves are also adorable. But when bottle feeding calves, which sounds sweet and truly IS to watch, you had better be ready to get slobbered on. Translation: yuck. Horses are beautiful to look at, but mucking a stall in near 100 degree temperatures is no fun to me at all.

Even gardening, something I thought I knew how to do, proved a challenge for me as the mosquitoes swarmed around me and the heat took its toll.

I did find that I truly enjoyed and greatly appreciated my cousin's air conditioned home with its numerous big windows overlooking their land. By my last visit to my cousins, I found I spent most of the time indoors cooking and enjoying the lay of the land via 70-degree air conditioning.

All in all, I suppose I will always long for a farm. But when it comes to reality, I suppose this city mouse will just stay put.