

Holy Cows

Anyone who has taken the highway from Chicago, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri knows the ride is interminable. Cut through the rich farmland of the eastern plains, the view from the window is mile after mile of soybean and corn fields. This is the route the Olsens took to enroll Judy at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Convent High School.

The drive took forever. The drive was over too soon.

The car turned in through the open gates of the Motherhouse of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Help. Sitting in the backseat of the family car, Judy felt her throat constrict. Her head swiveled from window to window as she gawked with disbelief. This was not exactly what she had been expecting. The car had just taken a quantum leap from 20th century suburbia into an agricultural wonderland. *What have I gotten myself into? Oh, what have I gotten myself into* became her silent refrain as her brain slowly gave meaning to the kaleidoscope of images unfolding before her.

There were cows lazing, grazing in a pasture. There was a nun driving a tractor, her sun-dyed habit billowing in the tractor's updraft looking for all the

world like a giant, jungle-green canopy. A group of white veiled young women came into view carrying buckets filled from freshly milked cows.



Speechless with wonder, little did Judy realize that in less than twenty-four hours she would begin to contribute strength and brawn to the maintenance of the Franciscan farm. Lovingly, efficiently and passionately cultivated by Sisters Michaline and Narcissa, the farm was a proving ground for growth in the spirituality of St. Francis.

Driving past a cemetery, Judy spotted nuns with shovels standing by an open grave. *Are those nuns digging a grave?* Judy found herself repeating her refrain faster and faster: *What have I gotten myself into?*

Finally the car stopped. Judy gazed at the building that was to become her now and future home. With anxiety and trepidation not completely conquered, she said farewell to her parents and began the walk that would take her from childhood into a womanhood consecrated to God.