



1944 A Cow Is Born

1944

I wonder what you would think if on your way home from high school as you turned the corner on Old Turnpike Road by the Brays, you heard strange and terrible noises. Actually, it was 3:30 or so on a quiet afternoon and not terribly warm as we all wore jackets. At this point there were 5 of us making the 3-mile trip to the bus for MHS and we were curious.

Well, as you or anyone else would do, we searched for the noises. The only thing live was a cow in the corner lot. It was making a racket and we stood there wondering what the heck was going on and should we call the owner.

Suddenly we saw something exiting from the cow's rear end underneath the tail. Wow! We were totally mesmerized. And what to our wondering eyes should appear (after a great deal of noise and effort) was a baby cow (calf). By then, Mr. Bray had run over to the lot and shooed us all home.

Even the boys, allowed in the barn, as the girls were not, had never seen a live birth, or any other kind for that matter. We couldn't wait to get home and tell our mothers. And when we did, there was a lot of confusion in my house. My mother simply wouldn't discuss this great event and my grandfather, living with us as he often did, wanted to tell me all about it. My mother put a quick stop to that.

Strangely, not one of us made any connections to humans or to any other animals. We just thought that that was a peculiarity of cows. And aside from kid discussions, it was never talked of again.

And no one ever explained the difference between passages!

It's interesting that we had no knowledge of our bodies, no biology of farm animals, and not a whole lot of curiosity either. These things were simply not discussed.

By now, I was in my second year of high school and one of my courses was biology. But the textbook discussed only amoebas and one-celled beings and then we moved on to dissecting frogs. Well, with my background, there was no way that I was going to do any such thing. First of all the poor little frog smelt badly of formaldehyde, I believe, and secondly, it was dead.

My partner was a Greek girl and she was as brave as anything. She did all the physical labor and I did the writing. I studied and could pass all the tests. But, never try to fool a good teacher. The teacher knew all along that I had never done my fair share of the frog and I was marked down a whole grade.

I was also in my second year of French and had no place to practice except in the schoolroom and I never developed an ear. We were still doing all kinds of patriotic things like writing letters to our lonely servicemen. I don't remember ever getting an answer. I think they were too busy.

Town of Coventry
1712 Main Street
Coventry, CT 06238
(860) 742-6324
www.coventryct.org





Birthplace of Nathan Hale

We knew the French had surrendered to the Germans to save their history, architecture and artifacts. We knew nothing of the true story and little of the ongoing situation. But one thing we all knew was The Resistance.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, our president in a wheelchair, had regular fireside chats on the radio, and from him we learned what he wanted us to know. The French Resistance was led by General Charles DeGaulle, a very brave man and a great hero. But I didn't understand why he wasn't out on the front lines like our generals. Later, I learned that generals, as a rule, don't spend a whole lot of time on frontlines. DeGaulle and The Resistance were helping the English to fight against the Nazis. There was also a Polish resistance based in England but we knew very little of that until long after the war ended.

And because of The Resistance, we were encouraged to write to pen pals in England and in France. These letters were written in class time and were overseen by the respective teachers. Later on, when they were assured that we knew what we were doing, we could write them from home.

We were encouraged to send chocolates and gum. We were told that the English (never known as the British, by the way) had a shortage of sugar.

Well, we also had a shortage of sugar but that was in the household. We could buy candy in the general store down in Mansfield Depot. It's interesting to note that our mother never made desserts and we thought they were just for rich folks. We didn't understand the shortage and the trading of stamps that went on. Someone had to decide if it was to be shoes or sugar. As a result, none of us children care much for sweets.

I had good luck with one pen pal and to this day we are still in touch. Don became a nuclear physicist and, after the war, he was asked to move to this country so that he could work at a nuclear facility in Maryland. Sylvia became a teacher though she did this at age 18. The English system was different from ours. We had Normal Schools and the education lasted four years even back then.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Thibault Castagno

Town of Coventry
1712 Main Street
Coventry, CT 06238
(860) 742-6324
www.coventryct.org

