

# A Day With the Amish

*by Linda Egenes*



**W**e turn down a straight, narrow driveway bordered on the left by a half-acre garden, asleep for the winter. On the outside, the large white farmhouse and green farm buildings look much the same as other Iowa farms we have passed on the way, but the two black buggies, resting outside the four

neatly painted farm buildings, assure us that we have come to the Amish home of the Herschberger family.

Mr. Herschberger greets us with a hearty handshake and warm smile. He wears the traditional Amish clothing—white shirt, suspenders, and plain denim pants. Inside the house, we meet



An Amish family farm has many barns for crops, equipment, and animals, as well as a large farmhouse.

Mrs. Herschberger and five of their eight children. Eddie, a shy boy of thirteen, and Andy Ray, nine, look like miniature versions of their father, minus the beard. Mrs. Herschberger and her three daughters—Mandy, age eleven; Erma, age sixteen; and Wilma, age eighteen—wear their hair gathered under white starched caps. Amish

women do not cut their hair and wear the prayer cap at home and in public. Their simple, long-sleeve, high-neck dresses are fastened with straight pins instead of buttons or zippers.

We enter a long, large living room with a large quilting frame. Tiny stitches crisscross the green fabric that is stretched across the



frame. We admire the quilt and a beautiful oak cabinet standing beside a large window. "That was my mother's," Mrs. Herschberger says.

We wonder how the house is heated. In one corner of the living room, an empty metal oil drum stands on its side, propped up by four legs above a bed of white stones. Wood is fed into it to heat the house. "Most winter days, it's almost too hot," Mrs. Herschberger notes.

How do they see at night? Mrs. Herschberger shows us a gas lamp, which she lights with a long kitchen match. The filament gives off a bright, powerful light. In the evenings, the family hangs a lamp from the hooks in the ceiling to light an entire room.

A wide doorway connects the master bedroom to the living

room. Mr. Herschberger explains that he made the doorway purposely large so church services can be held in both rooms. He has plans to replace most of the wall with a sliding door to create one large room for Sunday meetings and other gatherings. Mr.

An Amish father and daughter, Kidron, Ohio.





An Amish family saying grace before a meal.

Herschberger explains that the Amish do not build church buildings for worship. Families take turns having services in their homes, barns, or sheds once every two weeks.

Mrs. Herschberger takes us upstairs to tour the rest of the house. One bedroom is for the two boys; another large one is for the three girls.

The simple, neatly arranged rooms contain beds, dressers, and closets. There are no toys in the rooms, no rugs on the floor,\* and no pictures on the walls. Amish children amuse themselves by reading or playing outdoor games

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*\*Some Amish have simple toys (wooden horses, jump ropes, etc.) and simple hooked rugs.*





Amish boys loading sheaves of wheat onto a wagon.

such as skating or kick the can.

After the tour, we settle into straight-back chairs for a chat, nibbling from bowls of tender popcorn made from the corn grown in their garden. The five children sit on a couch beside their parents. While Mr. and Mrs. Herschberger are outgoing, jovial, and

talkative, the children are shy and quiet. Mandy reads a book while her parents talk.

Mary speaks to Mandy in Pennsylvania Dutch, the mother tongue of the Amish, which is always spoken at home. Mandy sighs, puts down her book, and fetches Mary's glasses. We comment on the polite behavior of the children, and Mr.

Herschberger says with a smile, "Well, they're good around company."

We learn that only Mandy, Andy Ray, and Eddie are still in school; Eddie, grade eight, will graduate this spring. Erma and Wilma help their mother with the farm and house work. Besides furrowing the half-acre garden and corn fields with a horse and plow, they manually collect thirteen thousand eggs twice each day from



Amish children at a one-room school relax during the noon lunch period.

their fifteen thousand-bird hen house.

Mr. Herschberger offers to take us on a buggy ride and sends Andy Ray out to hitch up one of their fifteen horses. After we have all been properly introduced to June, the shaggy black horse that will draw the buggy, Mr. Herschberger heads June onto the highway. The ride is a

little bumpy because the wheels are made of steel.

A small white building is standing by the side of the highway. "That's our school-house," Mr. Herschberger says. He ties June to a hitching post inside the pony shed and leads us inside. Fourteen Amish children from grades one to eight attend the one-room school. The old-



fashioned wooden desks, complete with inkwells and attached seats, look well used. They are arranged in neat rows. A reciting bench is placed next to the teacher's desk, so one class can recite its lessons while others work on assignments. Written on the blackboard is a psalm from the Bible. A sign advises, "If you have something to say about someone else, you should say it as if he were listening." A wood stove provides the heat, and the only plumbing is a sink for washing hands. An outhouse stands at the edge of the schoolyard.

After we return to the farm and take a tour of the barn, Mrs. Herschberger invites us back into the house, where the children have been taking turns churning the handle on the ice cream maker. As we sit with Mr. and Mrs.

Herschberger in the kitchen, savoring the rich flavor of homemade vanilla ice cream, there is a slight commotion in the dining room, and the children begin singing a song they learned in school.

After the singing is over, we get ready to start home. The Herschbergers bid us good-bye at the door as we leave, laden with bags of homegrown popcorn, jars of dill pickles, and a taste of the simple charm of Amish life.



## Thinking About It

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1. You've been assigned to interview the Herschbergers for your school newspaper. What is the first thing you ask them?
2. What are some traditions the Amish parents are passing on to their children?
3. You have traded families with an Amish child for a year. What are some ways your life is different now? What does the Amish child think of life with your family?