

Nothing's Sacred in Hilarious New Local Novel

by LAUREN GIANNINI
For Middleburg Life

It's not quite "Green Acres" (that 1960s sitcom starring Eva Gabor and former vaudeville star Eddy Albert), and it's a very far cry from the "Beverly Hillbilies," but in terms of being a country cousin, "Confessions of a Counterfeit Farm Girl" by Susan McCorkindale deserves five John Deere tractors, an appropriately rural equivalent of five stars.

The author is edgy and funny, and pulls no verbal punches. She leaves absolutely no doubt that she found a therapeutic outlet, both pre- and post-trauma, in writing about the ongoing cultural shocks she experienced when her husband's desire to become a farmer triggered their massive uprooting and re-planting in Loudoun and Fauquier counties.

Yes, Susan lived in both for a while, because the working farm, located on Rokeby Road near the Mellon estate, wasn't ready for habitation, but that's another tale, best told by Susan herself.

Only a New Yorker would think that the inquiry "Do you ride?" meant the subway (another topic that merits greater detail).

But Susan's urban experiences allow great opportunity, along with great verbal ammunition, for a compare-and-contrast of country versus city. Her descriptions of her trying to control the daily damages wrought by two sons and husband (known as Hemingway throughout this witty tome) border on hysterical.

The McCorkindales camped out at her brother-in-law and sister's designer home, on a much smaller farm (only 90 acres) than their ultimate destination: A spacious, agricultural Mecca that would unleash and allow full fruition of Hemingway's aspirations.

Her first foray into book publishing rings clear as crystal bells on the strength of Susan's point of view and her ability to manipulate language like a verbal gymnast training for the Olympics. You totally get the pictures she paints so pithily in prose.

"Being on a 500-acre farm, you'd think I might like to know the answers to such questions as, What the hell is a skid loader? Do you spell bush hog as one word or two? And how should I respond to someone who calls about the hay elevator and asks what kind of shape it's in? My reply: 'It has its ups and downs.'"

In terms of country-lingo deficits, Susan isn't alone. Many of us RCs (rural converts) haven't the foggiest clue what a skid loader is, and we often spell bush-hogger as one word, because hyphenating makes real words of just about anything.

What's fun about these "Confessions" is that they will bring fresh and dewy-eyed images of what becomes complacent and everyday so that even diehard country lovers will be reminded of why it's so important to



Susan McCorkindale, a sweeter but self-admitted sound-alike version of Carmella Soprano, hugs her first published work, "Confessions of a Counterfeit Farm Girl," in front of the Fauquier Livestock Exchange, a favorite haunt of her husband-turned farmer and the home of Kevin's Livestock Grill, where the author enjoys tying on the feed bag, so to speak.

keep the country, well, country.

Lest you think that "Confessions of a Counterfeit Farm Girl" is superficial, involving a sling-fest of diatribe against free-ranging chickens, a large herd of heifers and bulls destined to produce grass-nourished steaks, burgers, ribs and roasts, or even a lament for horizons lost in the madness of the Big Apple, where the author worked as marketing director of Family Circle, think again.

She holds a mirror up to everything we love (and loathe) about country living, including the obligatory recital to visitors of Rural Rule #1: At the first sign of a thunderstorm, fill up the tub – not for bathing, but for flushing.

There's a lot of common ground, even if her idea of sensible footwear involves such buzz-names as Choo, Manolo, and Prada. At some point you'll wonder if she ever comes up for air during normal sociable conversation, because she's about as subtle as a rampaging bull when it comes to hitting the proverbial nail on the head.

This Carmella Soprano-like person (who attacks her curls with the regular ministrations of a stylist wielding flat iron, round brush and blow dryer) is as sharp as her beloved stiletto heels.

You just need to have handy a hot beverage with a complicated name, frothy latte cappuccino mocha java whatever (or stronger), and a box of tissues for when your funny bones start to ooze out of the corners of your eyes.

Nothing's sacred: Country customs and traditions, testosterone's affects on adolescents and grown men, Southern women, people who wear tight riding pants when they should think twice, roosters and their job descriptions, as well as other earthy manifestations of country life.

Susan McCorkindale might make you crazy with her zingers, but by the end of the book, you'll want her as a friend, and many readers will be hoping that she and her husband do not ever hit the lottery so they can buy that dream house by the lake and start a new life as salmon farmers.

Read it, laugh till you cry, share it with your friends, and send it to your relatives who still can't figure out why you live out in the back end of beyond.

Smile smugly that yet one more unsuspecting, stiletto-wearing, repartee-tossing, quick-witted, uber-friendly city slicker has become a card-carrying member of that mystical tribe of Rural Converts.

Susan's one of us, and she's here to stay.

By the way, Susan McCorkindale will be signing "Confessions of a Counterfeit Farm Girl" at Books & Crannies, Middleburg, on Oct. 11 from 3 to 6 p.m. You can order your copies in advance by calling Books & Crannies at (540) 687-6677 or visit her Web site at www.susanmccorkindale.com – capeesh?