

## COPPER FLASHING AND CHICKEN NECK BONES

When you have a passel of children you never know where they will send you. I had no intention of going to the Durham Businessmen's Association auction that Friday in fall a few years ago. But my son Duffy, who was serving on the Durham Town Council at the time, called me on a Friday afternoon and asked me what I was doing that evening. I confessed that I didn't have anything going on, and he suggested that I go to the Durham Businessmen's Association's fancy "do" since he had tickets for a "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me" show in Boston that he hoped to take his wife to. I guess he thought I could represent him at this function. And I did.

I dressed up quite specially since I knew he'd never go to such a function informally dressed. I wore one of my plaid kilts – anyway, I tried to look respectable. I really don't recall where this affair took place, but I do remember that there was good food and drink and a silent auction as well as live auction items set aside to be viewed and to be bid on later. There were a couple of Jane Kauffmann's raku sculptures for the silent auction and since I've never seen a piece of Jane's work that I didn't covet, I bid and rebid on those as time wore on. I didn't end up buying any of Jane's pieces, but I did end up with gift certificates for a Christmas tree and a nature walk along the Salmon Falls River.

Despite the variety of items on view for the live auction, none of them really said to me: "Take me home!" The trip to Africa sounded interesting (there was a video of the scenery in Africa running) but I knew I'd need lots of time and lots of shots if I bid that one up. The paintings and silver platters weren't my style, either. But I did notice that Walter Rous had created three tiny steers out of copper sheathing and chicken neck bones, with drool being glue. Pretty clever.

I sat and sat and sat through the live auction, not bidding once. I sort of felt like I was letting Duffy down; surely he'd have bid if he'd been there. One can bid without buying – if one is lucky, at any rate.

The last item to be put up was Walter's menagerie. The auctioneer, a nice lady, must have been tired: she asked if anyone would bid \$5. She had insulted Walter Rous' creativity! Walter had just paid over \$100 to have a kayak trip down the Lamprey River with Dick Houghton! And his steers were worth only \$5!

No way! I immediately bid \$10 and then others began to challenge me. By the time the bidding got to \$60 there were several people in the fray and I stopped bidding. But when the bidding got to \$100, only one person was left – so I bid \$110. I couldn't see who I was bidding against, but I kept on bidding and my opponent let me have the steers for \$150.

When I was in line to pay and retrieve my prizes, my opponent came up to me and blurted out "You're a hard woman! My wife wanted those cows!" Well, it was Dick Houghton and it seems that Gail collects cows and she had told him, before she left earlier, that she really wanted those steers. Since I really didn't have any use for the steers, I told Dick: "They'll be for sale until Christmas, for \$200, and I'll give the money to the library." Dick stomped off; I paid my bill, took my prizes, and went home.

The next day son Duffy called to see how things had gone. I told him I had a Christmas tree for him and about the steers – and all about Dick Houghton. He and Dick have about the same sort of sense of humor and he appreciated the story. But his parting remark to me was: "You may get a reputation for having a loose wallet; Mother."

So much for that. Time went on. Christmas Eve came, bringing with it Dick Houghton who bought the steers. Gail cherishes them. Dick's had a great time telling everyone what a hard woman I am, and I've enjoyed his compliments.

The library got the money and I assumed that was the end of the story. But Walter Rous heard about the transactions, of course, and Walter made me a baby steer and brought it to me.

And he made another trio of steers for the next Durham Businessmen's Association auction, which Duffy bought and presented to me the next Christmas.

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Dick Houghton