



Winter Time

By Cristina

WINTER TIME AGAIN. For most my age it means Christmas vacation. That wonderful time when you have no homework and can just relax. But it's just the opposite on a farm. Winter time is one of the busiest, and one of the most rewarding times of the year. I live on a mink farm. My dad runs the farm, but when winter time comes around, all of us family members help out.

The very first thing on the list of things to do is grading the mink. Each one must be graded individually. The biggest and best ones are kept for next year's breeding stock. The rest are harvested to be sold at the auction house.

For some, like my dad, the job has just now started. At this point the harvesting and processing becomes really hectic. My dad owns and operates his own processing plant. We not only do our own mink and foxes but sometimes other people's too. In addition to the normal feeding and watering, he has to work in the processing plant and make sure that everything runs smoothly.

There are separate rooms for each part of the drying process. This is where my job comes in. A few years ago I started out with the easiest job first. That was putting paper sleeves over the stretcher boards. Since then, I've learned how to put mink on the boards, tack them down, and hang them on the air wall. Our air wall holds approximately 350 stretchers. The furs usually take three to five days to dry, depending on size. When they're dry, dad takes them all down and ships them out. It's quite a time consuming job when you have a couple thousand mink to do. It usually takes up the majority of my Christmas vacation.

Just this past year I've learned how to skin mink. I'm not very good at it yet, but I'm glad my dad was willing to teach me. Since we first started out, I learned how to do many jobs in the processing plant. It's hard work, but after it's all done we get to go to the sale in February.

Going to the sale makes all the work we did over the winter seem worth while. I enjoy all aspects of the sale: the ride to New Jersey, the atmosphere, the people, and the entertainment. It's all so much fun.



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I enjoy listening to foreign people speak in their own languages. There is quite a diversity of nationalities all brought together under one roof. I also like to sit in the balcony and watch the buyers place bids on the furs they want to buy.

If the market is good, NAFA might sponsor a dinner cruise around Manhattan Island. A couple years ago we rode on the *Spirit of New Jersey*. That was a lot of fun. I enjoyed standing at the stern of the boat and watching the waves roll out and disappear behind it.

My favorite part about going to the sale is the show room. As soon as I walk through the large set of double doors, I am immediately hit with the potent smell of fur. It's one of those smells that I will remember for a lifetime.

There is a wide variety of furs. So many to look at. There are wild furs such as bears, sables, fishers, bobcats, and my favorite, the timber wolf. I like the timber wolf because of its immense size. And there are the ranch furs such as mink, fox, ferrets, and my favorite ranch fur, the chinchilla. I especially like the chinchilla because of its powder soft fur.

It is such a wonderful experience to watch the sale and see the results of all our hard work and effort. What a great reward after giving up my Christmas vacation!

Cristina is a second-generation mink farmer from the eastern US. She is a junior, and hopes to be a teacher one day. Her hobbies are reading, martial arts, and gardening. The loves of her life are three pet dogs, a pet cat, and a pet ferret who lives down in the minkyard and sleeps in her own hammock. She wrote this story in March 2000.