

The farm wife hoists the family flag

by [Shari Wagner](#) in the [September 16, 2015](#) issue

Eve got off the bus in tears the day her third grade teacher scolded her for using a hankie. "It's not sanitary," she said. Miss Pauley had no notion of what a handkerchief means to us: reusable tissue, wash cloth, gripper of lids, wiper of smudgy glasses, emergency bandage, keepsake we carry to the grave. Peekaboo with a hankie triggered Eve's first laugh, and later she sat through sermons watching Grandma Yoder fold a flat square into a butterfly or mouse. Now Eve does that for her sister and knots Ruth's Sunday pennies in a corner like a hobo's sack. She irons and stacks all the hankies in our drawers and brings a bandanna drenched with cold water to her dad who ties it round his neck. Last Christmas she gave me a set of four lacy kerchiefs embroidered by her own hand, each with my initials and a leaf or flower to signify the season. Straight from a city college, Miss Pauley could only count the virtues of a Kleenex. "Like a lot of things, hankies grow softer as they age," I said, using one to wipe Eve's tears.