

The Curator Says... You will admire the vision and courage in Mary Quinn Burkhart's account of her childhood adventure in selling eggs. Her goal was to earn enough money to buy her own horse. Starting from scratch, she first canvassed the neighborhood to find customers, then faithfully carried out the weekly deliveries. Teenage boys called her "The Egg Girl," but she kept a positive attitude. Mary's story is a microcosm of the work ethic and the American dream, told from the perspective of a child. Did she get the horse? Here is Mary to tell you about it.

The Egg Girl

Mary Quinn Burkhart

At the dinner table, Daddy smiles and says, "I heard about an opportunity for earning money. Mary, you are eager to make enough to buy *your* horse." Yes, I sure am! I've been babysitting, pet walking, doing extra paid chores, and putting all of these earnings and almost all my allowance and gift money into my bank. Daddy continues, "A client of mine says his son has an egg route." Egg route? "Each week this farmer from Kennesaw delivers as many eggs as the boy orders. The boy then delivers them to his customers. These are neighbors who pay him sixty cents per dozen. He pays the farmer only fifty cents. Think of that: ten cents a dozen profit! Sell a few dozen eggs per week, and you could earn \$100 soon."

Wow. He was right. Ten cents on a dozen eggs each week would be \$1.50 or even \$2.50 per week. I could make \$72.00, maybe even more than \$100 in a year. Add that to what I have in savings and what I am already earning, I might be able to buy my own horse next year. Susan's horse, Missy, is wonderful. Missy is five years old and came to Atlanta from the King Ranch in Texas. She is beautiful, friendly, and spirited. She's also sweet and behaves calmly in the barn. I get to ride her sometimes, too. Susan and I walk to the stable together most days, morning and late afternoon. In the morning, Missy gets fed and then let out to the pasture for the day. At night, we clean her stall, get fresh water, put grain into her trough, fill her hay basket. We brush her and ride her if there is time and the weather is okay. Then, she gets stabled to eat and sleep in her stall. Once in awhile, I get to take care of her by myself in the afternoon. I am ten, almost eleven. I want my own horse. I am becoming a horsewoman! I ask, "How many people want eggs delivered in Glenridge Forest?" "Oh, no, that's not what I'm talking about," Daddy says. "This farmer has lots of hens who produce plenty of eggs. He wants folks to find customers and sell his eggs. You would need to go around the neighborhood, telling people about this new service, one that's like milk delivery. Your mother says that this price is less than store eggs, and these are fresher," continues Daddy, the lifetime professional salesman.

I think about this egg selling. There are lots of houses on three long curving streets and three short ones in our neighborhood. I wouldn't have to worry about crossing on busy Hammond Road or Glenridge Avenue, with all those fast cars. Still, I don't know all that many grownups, just the ones who live close by us, those whose kids are my friends, the ones for whom I do sitting. Gee...going to strangers' houses and ringing the doorbells,

except on Halloween or during Girl Scout cookie season? But...a horse, money to buy my own horse...!

I decide to do this. Daddy says he'll tell the farmer. He then helps me plan my sales pitch. The rest of the week, I go to the houses across the street, next door, around the corner, the ones where we are warmly welcomed at Halloween. Plans or not, my stomach knots, and I have to try hard not to pick my fingers. "Hi, I'm Mary Quinn. I live at 5465 Greenbrier. I am starting a fresh egg service. Would you like one or two dozen fresh eggs delivered each Tuesday afternoon? They are only \$.60 a dozen and will likely have been laid on Monday." The first few houses aren't scary, since I don't have to introduce myself. The ones after that are awkward. I find out some people say, "Well, we don't eat many eggs" or don't answer their doors no matter what time of afternoon I go. Some just say "No!" without even listening to my rehearsed sales talk.

I do get some customers, though. Mother is on the top of my list, to buy at least one dozen weekly. She helps a lot by saying she'll call the farmer and place my orders. Soon, the eggs arrive, and I load them into the cardboard box set securely into our good ol' red wagon. Off I go, house to house on Tuesday afternoons, pulling the red wagon behind me, up and down the sloping streets. I learn to deliver first to the nearby neighbors and the customers who live on the cross streets, because pulling a full wagon uphill is hard. I learn that delivery has to be done, rain or shine. I learn to wear mittens on top of my gloves as the weather turns colder. I grit my teeth and try to completely ignore those obnoxious teenager boys when they drive by and yell, "Oh, look! It's the E-G-G Girl!" I know sometimes I have to smile and say, "Oh, okay. Do you want any next week?" because Daddy tells me, "No one will buy from an unpleasant salesman." Thank goodness, Mama becomes creative in using lots of eggs. I want my own horse and that takes money.

Thank you, egg money. Satin joined the Quinn family when I was twelve. I earned enough money to buy my own horse!



Mary Burkhart Says...Born in Alabama but moved at age three. Lived in nine other states before returning as an employee of Auburn University in 1974. Attended Lindenwood College and received B.A., M.S., and Ph.D. from Florida State University. Worked with Outreach at AU and was state director for Elderhostel for twenty years. With the help of founding members, started the Auburn University Academy for Lifelong Learners in 1990. AUALL became the Osher Lifelong Institute at Auburn University in 2007. Retired in 2012, Burkhart continues to be an enthusiastic OLLI member. She is married to Barry Burkhart and has two sons, a treasured daughter-in-law, and a fifteen-month-old granddaughter.