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# CHANGE<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE

## **CELEBRATING THE LIVES OF WOMEN!**

**Our Biggest Issue Ever!  
Mary Jane Butters:  
Her Own Personal Idaho  
Artisans of S. Africa, DC-3 Gals,  
Local Women in Business  
and much more!**

MARCH 2008

*Please Read and Recycle!*



# MaryJane Butters

*The Unstoppable, Unsinkable Star of*  
MaryJanesFarm



**By Sue Mayfield-Geiger**

If one were to make a movie of MaryJane Butters' life, the script treatment would read something like this:

Young girl leaves Mormon home in Utah to find herself, getting very-odd jobs along the way like forest ranger scout, carpenter, and ranch hand, as she pursues her lifelong dream of being a simple farmgirl.

Sounds sweet. Maybe a bit idealistic and perhaps a tad unexciting. Let's examine the sub-plot:

Now married with two children and living on five acres in Moscow, Idaho, the farmgirl raises her two children in a house with no indoor

plumbing or TV. Drives old truck with holes in the floorboard, husband leaves, she ekes out a living by trying her hand at organic farming and starts a farm magazine.

Now we have a little drama, but we need some action. The sub-plot continues:

The farmgirl is barely making ends meet and the farm nearly goes under numerous times until a New York literary agent just happens to see a copy of the magazine and his interest is piqued. He calls the farmgirl with a request. He would like for her to write a book (a two-



book deal is subsequently agreed upon for \$1.35 million).

Okay, now we're getting somewhere. The entire plot thickens:

The farmgirl is leery; not sure she really wants to get involved in the writing business because (she says), she's really not a writer and besides, she does not want to have to leave her farm to do book tours. (What? Is she nuts?) Read on:

The farmgirl finally comes to an agreement with the city slicker who even agrees that her book tours will be minimal and sends her an advance of \$400,000. Farmgirl pays off mounting debt, grabs a pen and simply put, writes everything she knows about farming. And do women everywhere really want to know about farming? You betcha, says the farmgirl, because as she coyly puts it: "There's a farmgirl in all of us."

Sounds like a perfect ending to a rags-to-riches fairytale, but the epilogue is the best part:

Today, MaryJane Butters is working on her third book; recently formed a partnership between her magazine (*MaryJanesFarm*) and the publishers of *Mary Engelbreit's Home Companion*; is remarried to the hunky farmer next door who owns the 600 acres that adjoin her property; and her company (Paradise Farm Organics, Inc.) offers a mind-boggling variety of quality products, including her famous dried, organic food (also sold at REI, Costco and Amazon). She has a deal to design clothing and is in negotiations for a line of tools and paints for a home-improvement store chain. MaryJane has been featured in *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *More*, *Vogue*, *The New Yorker*, *Country Living*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *House and Garden*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, and numerous other publications.

Her website ([maryjanesfarm.org](http://maryjanesfarm.org)) will take you hours to peruse: mail order products for the home and garden, patterns for stitching, a line of clothing, candles, jewelry, tote bags, lush organic cotton towels and sheets, rugs, soaps, note cards, calendars, her famous "Budget Mix" (for making and baking everything under the sun) and much more. Many of the items are made by artisans who are a part of Project F.A.R.M. (First-class American Rural Made), an entity founded by MaryJane so that rural folk could lend a

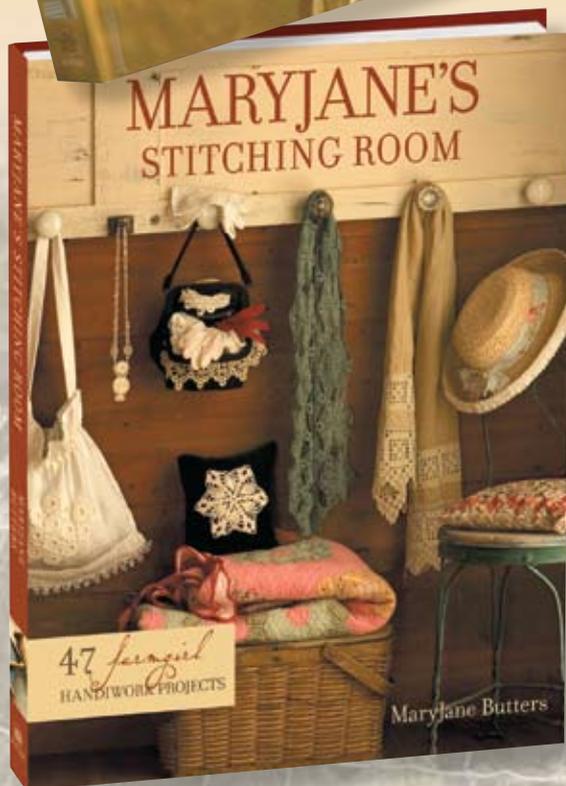
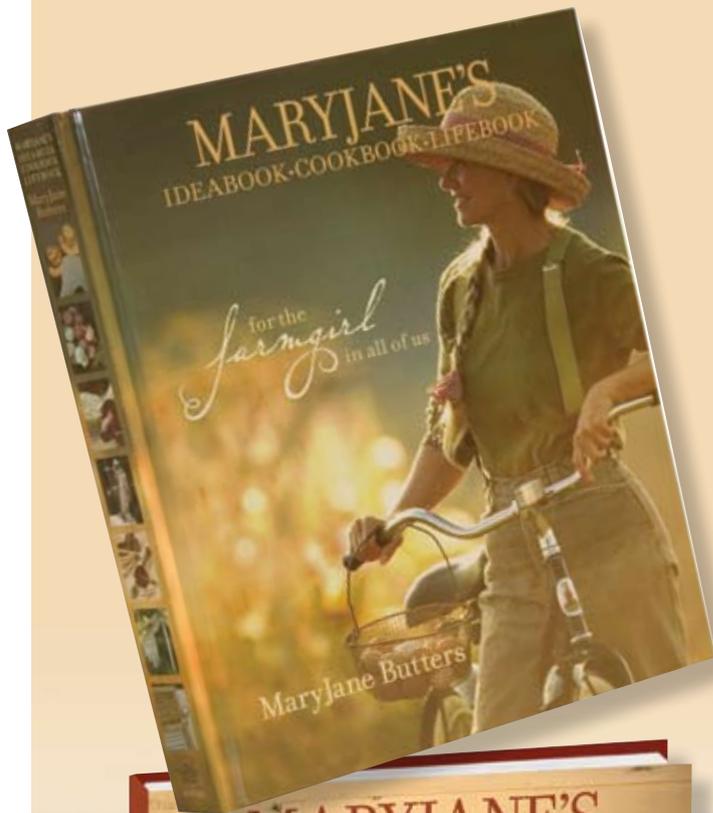
## MARYJANEISMS:

"I believe that destiny has its eye on you and it helps you get wherever it is you're meant to go."

"There are a lot of signs around us that our culture is ill. What we each need to do is look at what we can do to fix it, your own little part. Social change is incremental. I'm in the vanguard of the next wave, but we always come in on the backs of those who came before us. Maybe I'll inspire some of the next wave."

(Regarding her Mormon upbringing)

"I want to be a member of the church of each other. I want to honor all people, all cultures. I can't participate in that 'I'm a member of a church, and I'm right,' thing."



**BOOKS BY MARYJANE:**

*MaryJane's Ideabook, Cookbook, Lifebook –  
For the Farmgirl in All of Us*

*MaryJane's Stitching Room*

**DUE OUT IN JUNE:**

*MaryJane's Outpost: Unleashing Your Inner Wild*

**BOOKLETS:**

*MaryJane's Farmgirl Wisdom: Magnetic Quotes  
and Inspiration*

hand and get paid to supply MaryJane with many of her fine products. You can also become a Farmgirl Sisterhood member (over 500 chapters in seven countries) and chat with other farmgirls online.

The farm itself sits at the end of a dead end road that MaryJane named “Wild Iris Lane” when she first bought the place in 1986. It now includes five bed and breakfast “wall tents” akin to a romantic setting from *Out of Africa*, You Pick Country Club (pay \$100 for the season, May 1-Sept. 30; then pay as you pick) and the Pay Dirt Farm School (learn how to be an organic farmer in one week), which is jam packed every season. A 107-year-old flourmill and historic schoolhouse also grace the property. But, Paradise Farm is still a working farm with chickens pecking, cows mooing, vegetables growing, flowers blooming, and hills rolling in the panhandle area of Idaho known as the Palouse. Fourteen employees keep it running. The original farmhouse was destroyed by fire in 1996, but the new house (still under construction) will be full of MaryJane’s energy and her “farm charm” decorating skills.

With her thick blond braid and sunshine smile, MaryJane is a natural. As noted in one of the many articles written about her, she is an icon that not even the cleverest of marketing gurus could have dreamed up. But her calloused knees and hard-work ethics are proof that MaryJane Butters is not a marketing ploy. She is real.

Called the Martha Stewart of the Pioneer World, MaryJane bristles when she hears the comparison. Not that she has anything against Stewart. She just believes that they each have their own identity.

By the time we at *Change Magazine* discovered MaryJane and knew that we just had to have her on our March cover, it was too late in the year to book a trip to Idaho. Winter had already set in, plus getting to the Palouse area of Idaho takes a very clever itinerary and a lot of wool clothes. So, we opted for email and phone chats with the intention of heading that way soon in more favorable weather to discover our own “farmgirl” within.

**How did you start out as a farmer on the Palouse?**

I started out selling fresh veggies at the farmers’ market. I was growing and selling bulk pickling cucumbers and canning tomatoes as far back as 1979.

**You grew up in a large family – how many siblings? Your value system was formed by the simplicity of your upbringing and the exposure to growing food, raising animals and canning, correct? Who had the most influence on you – mother or father?**

Five kids, two adults. Equal influence – the best of both. Carpentry and organic gardening from my father; homemaking, fishing and camping from my mother. Lots of time spent with relatives.

**I know about your forest service days, etc., buying the farm, then attempting to create a mail order catalogue that became the magazine. Please explain how the New York agent discovered your magazine.**

I sent a copy to Lois Weisberg of Chicago, who I had read about in *Inc.* and *The New Yorker* – notorious connector and actually a friend of Malcolm Gladwell/*The Tipping Point*. She sent it on to her friend who is an agent in NYC. He called me.

**What happened?**

He asked me if I was interested in writing a book proposal so he could

shop it around. I put him off for eight months, but when the last recession of 2001-2002 worsened and my food sales started to tank, I called him back.

**You wrote a 63-page book proposal with no format; just wrote it from your head and heart. I read part of it online. With your permission, I'd like to include it in the article because it shows that anyone (any woman) can put something down and get results.**

Sure. Here it is:

"These days, women are seeking common-sense remedies that rely on classic values. There is a new interest in domesticity that includes the resurrection of forgotten arts like canning and crocheting. When we gather together, we share our talents, tell what we long for and talk about what is missing in our lives. Creating a trail counter to market-driven cultural models can be lonely—and loony—territory.

We want real conversation. We like to share pretty things. We're dreamers. Armed with the 'how' of it all, we become doers—how to mend a sweater, build a greenhouse, restore a grandmother's diamond set, choose healthy table salt and toothpaste, cook with grace once a month, replace a lawn with a double-dug raised bed, mend a doily, start a business, learn to knit, buy a milk goat, raise chickens, braid a rug, dry leftover fruit, live alone, grow a winter garden, choose a water filter, find a non-toxic mattress, share laundry tips, talk about face lifts, faith, calcium."

**You were eventually offered \$1.35 million for two books. Your advance was \$400,000, which allowed you to pay off debt. One source says you were close to losing your farm at this juncture. Is this correct?**

Yup, I was overdrawn at the bank \$15,000. My banker was talking about a sheriff's auction. Half went to taxes because the first installment came in December, before I had any deductions. I actually spent most of it creating the books here, since I provide all the photos and pay to have it designed. All the patterns, instructions, and recipe testing, etc. come out of my advance.

**You made a deal with the publisher that you would write books, but wanted limited touring to promote them. How were you able to swing this?**

My daughter and I actually did some touring once I got comfortable with it. But that's another story!

**How many books do you have under your belt now? Anything new in the making?**

Two books. My third comes out in June, *MaryJane's Outpost: Unleashing Your Inner Wild*.

**I read the comparisons to Martha Stewart. I won't elaborate on that except to maybe say that the two of you could not be further apart. She came from a middle class home and worked her way to her present status, but her energy is different than yours, plus she appeals to a much different audience. Can you define your audience?**

My style certainly doesn't appeal to pretentious people. I think I appeal to the type of person who has been or feels "disenfranchised." There's a whole lot more of US than there are those born with cradle credentials. David Cay Johnston's *Free Lunch* book is fascinating.

**How many copies of your magazine do you print? How many pages? Is there a particular time when the magazine comes out?**

They've been 132 to 196 pages; 70,000 each issue, but going forward I've taken on a financial partner and each issue will be 116 to 132 pages with an initial run next April of 250,000 (our "re-launch"). I haven't printed one for a year now. Four in 2008, then six every year thereafter.

**I am a bit confused about the old flourmill and schoolhouse. You moved the mill to your property after the owner died, but what about the building? Did that get moved too?**

We still maintain the historic building in Oakesdale (Washington).

**Is the schoolhouse on your property? I understand your husband's family attended school there.**

Our schoolhouse sits on 1/2 acre of land next to my husband's house. The school and the land are owned by its members. Members are the neighbors surrounding us. My husband and I, and another neighbor serve on the board.





## WHAT A GAL!

- MaryJane uses a hand vegetable mill to grate or slice all of her cheese, potatoes, carrots — even shelled walnuts. It's permanently mounted in her kitchen and has four different attachments. It's faster and easier than an electric grinder. And it's a great way to involve kids in the kitchen.
- MaryJane has never owned an electric or gas clothes dryer. But she has a beautiful collection of wooden racks. Over the years she has found them in antique stores, or purchased them new from an Amish catalogue.
- MaryJane uses a treadle sewing machine (non-motorized).
- MaryJane has never had a lawn. Americans spend about a billion hours a year caring for lawns, and apply 67 million pounds of pesticides. "When my grandpa moved to the city, he amused his neighbors by turning his front yard into a vegetable and flower garden. Early one morning, when he was around 85, he fell over while picking beans and died in his beloved patch of food and flowers. What a nicer way to go than behind a gas mower!" (For grass that is maintenance free, try knot weed (Polygonum).

You say you built six hoopouses on your farm. Can you explain that to a Texan who lives on the Gulf Coast?

A hoopouse looks like a Quonset hut only covered in clear plastic. It isn't heated per se, but the sun does a nice job of keeping things warm and extending your growing season. Plus the wind blows a lot here on the Palouse. It's nice to walk into a controlled environment and leave THAT part of Mother Nature at the door.

Explain the shareholders' role in your operation. They sound more like soul mates.

They are idealistic people who seek change in the world and believe positive change is best accomplished through hard work and MONEY. They have been endlessly supportive and helpful in a million different ways, everything from coming regularly to help us clean and scour to turning our compost to digging iris to building our facility. It's a fantastic way to raise money and create a cheerleading squad. Team MaryJane!

When will your 2008 Pay Dirt Farm School schedule be available? What is the cost?

We're still working out the 2008 schedule. A one-week intensive is close to \$3,000. An afternoon class on composting is \$15.

Re F.A.R.M. – about how many subcontractors participate in this program?

It varies seasonally. Right now I only have two. Summers are our busy time for Project F.A.R.M. with as many as two-dozen women working at any given moment.

Are any subsidiaries of Paradise Farm non-profit?

Pay Dirt Farm School is non-profit but stands alone.

Are women still the fastest growing group of people buying small farms?

Yes, the latest stats can be found in an AP story that came out Dec. 31. My local paper titled it "Wisconsin women, like women nationwide, play greater role in running farms than in the past."

Is there still pressure to consolidate and sell out to big corporations among small organic farmers?

Not amongst farmers per se but food producers/manufacturers. Yes, and I know why! Running a food business feels impossible at times. Margins are tight, problems and logistics many.

In one interview, you say you are a risk taker. We at *Change Magazine* like to convey that to our women readers. Since March is National Women's History Month and you are our cover story, can you offer just a few sentences on why taking a risk is so important and how to

overcome your fears about taking a risk?

Why live in fear of the “what ifs” in your life? They may never happen. Think of where I WOULDN'T be if I had been risk adverse. Fortunately, I came to earth wired to be a risk taker. My mother says I never crawled, but just got up and started walking when I was only eight months old, banging my head into everything. The doctor suggested they put my legs into braces so I wouldn't walk at such a young age, the theory being my legs might bow out. My mother didn't buy into that, thank goodness. Instead she just nursed my wounds and held my hand and let me go for it.

I liked what you said in another article about “needing money like you need a sharp hoe.” This seems like a very appropriate comment since you state that you will turn a profit for the very first time this year. So, in actuality, you bought the farm in 1986 and now (the end of 2007) you are making a profit. That's 21 years. What kept you going?

I never crawled.

You wanted only to be a farmer; now you are a businesswoman, organic farmer, best selling author, etc. How has this changed your life?

I'll know for sure in another five years. Right now I'm in the front seat of a toboggan (no steering) loaded with friends piled in behind me, laughing. At this point, I have no idea where this run is going. I've certainly enjoyed the writing part of it and the photography and working with my girlfriends and now my daughter. I'm not convinced I'm cut out for being so social though. And I have my doubts about being so wrapped up in the money part of it – pretty tense stuff sometimes. But I know how to live in a 14x14 foot wall tent with five feet of snow piled in around me and my nearest neighbor a hundred miles away if need be. Even now, in the dead of winter, I sleep “out” under two big poofy down comforters with the wind and snow blowing on my face all night, coyotes howling, rabbits scurrying, owls dueling...I just don't NEED all the trappings being in business requires. But I have yet to figure that out. Computer time is a drag. I'm never lonely when I'm alone and I need more alone time than I'm getting these days. My sense of humor about it all is what saves me, and I know I'm providing jobs for a lot of people and injecting positivity into an increasingly negative world.

Your Farmgirls Online has over 4,000 members in seven countries. Would it be correct to assume that “farmgirl” is just an acronym for the sisterhood among women? Although a great number of your admirers are no doubt real farmgirls, I am sure there are many who just jive to the message you have created.

Yup, it's a sisterhood, pure and simple. Check it out on my website.



You say knitting is great therapy. I think this is a totally cool thing to elaborate on since a lot of today's busy women prefer a day at the spa to unwind. Do any of your books come with knitting

**instructions?**

So far, my books are sewing, embroidery, crochet and tatting tutorials. No knitting yet; I think that's been covered. Handwork was the Prozac of my mother's generation. Try it. After just ten minutes of that kind of eye/hand coordination, you'll feel all knitted back together again. It's magic, plus it doesn't make a pharmaceutical company rich.

**Do you still drive the old 1981 car?**

Sure do, but she's parked for the winter. I have a diesel Jeep for winter and a '56 flatbed for glamour.

**You make your own homemade biodiesel. How it is produced?**

In our garage. Oil is pressed from seeds then "washed." Glycerin is produced. Washed again. Put into car or truck or tractor.

**Tell us about Nick (MaryJane's current husband).**

Steady as a rock, like a workhorse with blinders on. He likes to say, "I do ruts well." He actually ate the same kind of salad every night for two years – chopped broccoli, red onions, real bleu cheese crumbles, tomatoes (if in season) and balsamic vinegar. My children LOVE him. Gentle. Super, super kind and considerate. Big and strong. He entertained us at our holiday "office" party this year by perfectly mimicking Julia Child, John Wayne and NPR's Click & Clack, all four engaged in a conversation about food. He even had Julia Child's body language down. John saying to Julia, "Well, little lady..." Our employees laughed until they cried.

**Tell me about your children.**

I have two biological children but two mighty wonderful stepchildren. At this point I say I have four children. My daughter is a true-blue chip-off-the-old-block. She and her husband live here and help me run my business. I am a grandmother by them. Darling StellaJane. Love, love, love her. Son Emil is married and lives in N. Idaho. A diesel mechanic. No children yet. Stepson Sam is married and has made Japan his home the last seven years. Darling Japanese wife, Natsue, who we are madly in love with. I am featuring their wedding in the next magazine. Stepson Brian is engaged to be married here at the farm by my husband next June. Hubby married all three except Sam who was officially married in Japan. He's an official Universal Life Minister. Farm weddings are the best!



**Where do you see yourself in five or ten years?**

Hanging with my granddaughter on a creek bank tossing out a line to see what the catch of the day is, my vintage travel trailer gleaming in the sun. ■