
Pro Rege

Volume 26
Number 2 Arts Issue 1997

Article 20

December 1997

Keeping the Record

Lorna Van Gilst
Dordt College

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Recommended Citation

Van Gilst, Lorna (1997) "Keeping the Record," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 26: No. 2, 20.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol26/iss2/20

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Keeping the Record

Lorna Van Gilst

Mother's basement fruitroom shelves
 lined one tiled wall
 from floor to ceiling
With rows of mason jars
Packed with windfalls from the orchard,
Sealed in boiling water bath,
Set out to cool on dish towels
Till each individual jar
Let out a little pop—
 like a contented baby's burp—
And metal sealing rings could be removed.

Thirty quarts of puckered crabs
 skin-to-skin in sweet nectar;
Twenty quarts of golden, slivered peaches—
 purchased at Holub's Market
 for too high a price—
 gleaming now inside the glass;
Seven precious quarts of dark red bings—
 jewels from the West—
 to be doled out on winter nights,
 seven cherries to a bowl
 in little pools of dark red juice
 slurped from the dish when
 Mother's eyes were turned away.

A dozen pints of concord jelly,
 pure and clear,
 the frothy bubbles skimmed off
 till only the essence of grape remained.
All carefully recorded in Mother's spiral canning book.

But on the middle fruitroom shelf, all the way across the room,
 thirty-one gallon cans of applesauce—
 Dad's railroad salvage bargain buy—
 mere filler, packed in bulk
 in opaque dented metal cans
 earning a common place on the supper table,
 but not a single line in Mother's canning book.