is not enough
say the campbells
by isabel campbell

If I could bring myself to believe in ghosts, I would say, in answer to queries of my friends as to how it feels to be a novelist, "I don't know—I never wrote a novel—that book in the yellow cover named 'Jack Sprat' was written by some woman named Isabel Campbell. The name seems familiar but the book looks just like any other novel to me." If it weren't for the memory of those three months I spent in Connecticut pounding away at the typewriter four, five and six hours a day, I should state in all seriousness that someone else wrote, so complete is my present detachment toward it.

I felt the same way toward my first baby. It took me some months to realize that she was mine. Anyway it seems that the novel is here to stay.

One novelist in a family is bad enough, but two novelists, writing at the same time, as Mr. Campbell and I did during the summer of 1927, is awful. We were living in an old colonial country home in Connecticut. My husband generously insisted that I take the only study, so he had to do his work on the dining room table, which was a long refectory table. Our schedule was rather strenuous. After breakfast our little girls attempted to do the dishes for us, I shut myself into the study and Mr. Campbell shut himself into the dining room. Only the horrible clatter of our Underwoods kept our thoughts from being distracted by the cries coming from the kitchen "Mother, Malory is splashing dishwater on my—Mother, Dorothy won't dry the forks properly." There was only one way to keep thinking about the project on hand, and that was to keep the typewriters going full tilt all morning.

After the dishes were finally washed, the children waded in a stream running through the property and visited three little friends up the hill. At twelve o'clock, I dashed into the kitchen, threw some potatoes into the oven to bake, cooked some steak and prepared any green vegetables we could get from the huckster who drove past every day. Incidentally, our green vegetable man brought us food in a Packard while we modestly took the air in a Chevreul. But we consolled ourselves with the thought that we had satisfactions of the mind and spirit that the green grocer knew not of. Whether the satisfactions of the mind really do compensate for an eight cylinder car, I am not prepared to say. I have never had a Packard.

After dinner and another bout at the dishes, we went back to more writing. During the afternoon as our daily stints neared completion, we were both anxious to get an opinion on what had been written and it often happened that we collided in the doorway, each with a sheaf of yellow, single spaced pages grasped in the hand.

"Listen," I would cry at the same time that Mr. Campbell would shout, "What do you think of this?" and we would both begin to read at once. Then we would straighten the tangle out and read to each other what we had written.

This would be about four o'clock in the afternoon. Then we would get in the Chevie, drive the three miles to town and buy our food for the next day's rations.

After supper we scandalously wasted an hour sitting under the big maples that lined the brook, which was a gurgling one, of course, and nine o'clock saw us sound asleep. Oh, it was a great life, it was one of the happiest summers I ever spent.

One of the nicest things about the New England country life was the total absence of window and door screens. The outdoors seemed to come right into the house. There was no shed wire to blur the beauty of the round green wooded hills. Even the bumble bees were friendly. One big yellow fellow regularly flew into my study door, buzzed curiously around my table and then flew away again. One day two iridescent humming birds flew in, but they were so frightened that they tried to fly through one window that was closed and were about to batter themselves to death. We captured them in an old felt hat and turned them loose.

It's lots of fun to write, particularly when there is a wise and sympathetic ear to listen. Contrary to the belief that it is the sight of the name in print that is the lure, I think the most fascinating part of the whole business is the actual work at the typewriter. Writing takes intense concentration, full use of every ounce of available energy and continuous application. In other words it gives one a chance to function fully, and that is my definition of happiness.