

Stories of a Brethren in Christ Childhood

By Charlotte Brechbill White*

Editor's Introduction

Charlotte Brechbill White began writing stories about her early life for herself and then shared them with her sisters. She never expected that they would be published. Eventually, however, she sent several of them to Morris Sider, a former professor and the editor emeritus of this journal, who encouraged her to contact me. Over the next year we worked together to create this collection of stories. The stories fall in the category of "creative nonfiction," meaning that while every word or every conversation is not literally true, the stories faithfully represent the overall truth of Charlotte's memories and feelings of her experiences as a child and teenager. They are mostly arranged in chronological order and each one is self-contained so that readers can dip in and out at any point.

Christmas Memories

Christmas 1953

Christmas 1953 dawned sunny with snow sparkling on the ground. I snuggled under the covers, luxuriating momentarily in the early morning sun, then bounded out of bed. It was Christmas Day! Presents would be under the tree. I hoped we wouldn't have to wait until after breakfast to open them. I threw on my clothes and, sliding down the banister, arrived on the first floor. Mother was already in the kitchen preparing breakfast and Daddy was stoking up the stove. Oh well, breakfast wouldn't take too long.

Christmas music was playing on the radio. Everyone was in high spirits. Love filled the air. Sisters Faye and Leola and brother J. Albert made their appearances for breakfast. Then into the living room we piled to gather

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around the tree. It was decorated with old fashioned bulbs we'd had for years, icicles, colored lights and a paper chain my sisters and I had made. At the top was a bright star. Red crepe bells hung from the ceiling light here in the living room and in the kitchen as well.

We heard again the Christmas story, which Daddy read from Luke 2, and had a family prayer. Then Daddy began handing out gifts; we opened them and showed them around. Finally, a big box was presented to Faye and me, a gift we were to share. Today, Christmas Day, was Faye's birthday (she was turning nine), so she got to open the present. Inside the box was a beautiful doll in a pink flowered dress with light brown hair and blue eyes that opened and shut. We ooh-ed and ah-ed and took turns holding her for a while. Mother and Daddy looked at each other, smiling, pleased that we liked our present. Then Faye took her off to play with her because, after all, it was *her* birthday. But I wanted to hold her—she was so beautiful! There followed a time of negotiation: who would get to hold her and play with her and for how long. Then it would be the other one's turn.

It was Christmas Day and peace may have been reigning on earth somewhere but not in the Brechbill household. There were tears and complaints and begging and more tears. The happy parents began to see that sharing a doll this precious between two little girls was not going to work. But what to do? Money was scarce, or else this arrangement would never have been attempted.

Two days later, Saturday, was another crisp and sunny day. Daddy didn't work on Saturdays but he left home right after breakfast; he said he had some errands to do. It was snowing just enough to be beautiful but not so much as to impede getting out the lane. When he returned, he had a package wrapped in brown paper. He said it was for Faye and me, and he and Mother gathered round while we opened it.

It was another doll! And to my eyes she was even more beautiful than the first. Her hair was dark brown, her eyes a soft hazel. She wore a bonnet and dress of red plaid taffeta, white anklets and black patent leather shoes. I was in awe.

Then Daddy spoke. He said he and Mother realized yesterday that sharing a doll between us girls would not work so he had gotten us another. He said that since it was Faye's birthday, she could choose which doll she wanted to keep. The other one would be mine.

I waited in tormented silence. I couldn't breathe. It took Faye forever to decide. She held first one and then the other, remarked on the special features of each, touched their hair, cradled them in her arms. "Please God," I prayed, "don't let her pick the doll in the red dress." Mother and Daddy said she needed to make a decision but she could have a little time. Oh agony! Nothing to be done but go off and amuse myself with some other pastime. Finally, Faye said she had made up her mind and she picked up the doll in pink and declared she wanted that one. I hopped up and down. "Goody, goody," I



The doll in the red dress.

cried, "that means I get the doll in the red dress," and I rushed over to take her in my arms. What a beauty she was, and now she was all mine.

Eventually I began to wonder where Daddy had gotten the doll and how he could have paid for her. I learned that he had gone to Stickell's General Store. This was the country store in Upton where pickles come from barrels, big rounds of cheddar cheese sit on the counter and flour could be bought in large cloth sacks of fifty pounds or more. People could get their groceries here on account when there was too much month left at the end of their money. We bought most of our groceries here.

I loved Stickell's Store. There were always bins of interesting things to browse through and Mr. Stickell was nice to children. He let us select a piece of penny candy for free when we were leaving. I had seen the dolls sitting high up on display shelves in the store. They were beautiful and I had wanted one but I knew that was impossible. We didn't have that kind of money. But now a miracle had happened and I had a beautiful doll from Stickell's Store!

Even then I had a dim awareness of the sacrifice my parents had made to provide both Faye and me with dolls that Christmas. As a child, I didn't worry too much about it but I was grateful something could be done. That something I'm sure was a purchase on account that took some time to pay off and required my parents to do without some other things for a while.

Such is parental love, Christmas love, God's love.

Christmas 1954—Michigan Memories

Excited and a little nervous, I huddled with my fellow third graders backstage. I was eagerly awaiting my chance to shine on the stage. Our teacher reminded us to be very quiet. Then we heard the words, "And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host. . . ." and hurrying onto the stage, we the multitude stood shining in our dazzling white angel costumes and gold tiaras.

Our time in the spotlight was all too brief. After the audience finished singing "Angels we have heard on high glo-o-o-ria in excelsis Deo," we trooped off stage, our time in the spotlight over all too soon. I was disappointed that our role turned out to be so small. But it wasn't small really, just short.

I had been so excited to be an angel in the Christmas play but I had also worried about it. I needed a costume appropriate for the occasion and I didn't know how I was going to get one. I had no white dresses; how could I dress up as an angel? Perhaps we could use a white sheet, but we didn't have any extra sheets. The sheet could not be cut up as we would need it again after the play.

When I told Lolly about it, she said she could make me an angel costume. She said it would be very special; all she needed from me was a white slip and my parents' permission for her to make it. Lolly was a seamstress and our neighbor in this little village of Hillman, Michigan.

We had moved here just a month before so Daddy could pastor the small congregation at Maple Grove Brethren in Christ Church. I guess Daddy and Mother had decided to accept this call because they had so much enjoyed their six years at North Star Mission in Saskatchewan. Living in the far north where the growing season is short and the winters long and bitterly cold was not a thing to be feared. So we had left our home in Upton, PA and

traveled more than seven hundred miles northwest to this small village of Hillman, not far from Lake Huron.¹

We lived in the parsonage near the church, on the edge of a woods of pine and maple trees. A path through the woods led to a number of summer cottages. Lolly's place was the first one on the left.

Somehow Lolly and I had become friends, and I often went to see her after school. I chattered away about school or my brother or whatever, and Lolly listened and encouraged me. She was warm and welcoming and fun to be around. She made me feel special. Lolly was divorced and lived alone but she had a boyfriend who visited. Lolly was "backslidden," Daddy said, and he was trying to get her to come back to church.

I ran home and told Mother what Lolly had offered to do. After some discussion, Mother and Daddy agreed that it would be all right for Lolly to make me the angel costume. Because I didn't have "extra" slips, the costume would have to be torn apart after the Christmas program. But at least I'd have an appropriate costume to wear in the play.

A few days later, after school, I took my slip to Lolly. I didn't know how this could possibly become an angel costume but Lolly reassured me that it would be beautiful and I would be the loveliest of angels. She would be using white nylon net to create it.

From then on, whenever I visited Lolly, I asked her about my costume. I saw no sign of it and worried it might not be done on time. Lolly was occupied with other sewing projects but assured me it would be ready—not to worry, but still I worried.

Then a few days before the program, Lolly called Mother and asked her to send me to try on my costume. I eagerly ran up the path and burst into her house breathlessly. Lolly was waiting for me and smilingly brought out the costume. It was all frilly and oh so beautiful! It had angel wings trimmed in gold tinsel! Eagerly I put it on; it fit perfectly. We added a halo of gold

¹ According to Dr. Asa Climenhaga's *History of the Brethren in Christ Church* (1942), between 1875 and 1900 several Brethren in Christ families moved from the Waterloo District in Ontario to settle in St. Clair County in Michigan. He notes this as the beginning of the work of the Brethren in Christ Church in Michigan. Places of worship begun in the late 1800s by these Canadian families that are still operating in 2023 are Carland-Zion BIC Church (built 1915), Elsie, MI, and Mooretown BIC Church (first church building circa 1880), Sandusky, MI.

tinsel and I was convinced I really did look like an angel.

The school Christmas program was a community-wide event, and the auditorium where it was held was packed. Every kid in elementary school had a part, unless they had declined to be in it. My sister Faye, a fifth grader, had a part as a shepherd. She was on the stage for a longer time but she didn't shine like I did. Instead, she wore rough clothes and carried a staff.

Both Faye and I went to one-room schools in Michigan. Faye's classroom had grades, 4, 5, and 6 and was in a separate building from mine, which held grades 1, 2 and 3. Our desks seemed quite antiquated and I was bored much of the time. My class was behind what I had been learning at Lemasters School in Pennsylvania. With only one teacher, who needed to tend to little first graders, there wasn't much time for challenging the older third grade students. I looked forward every afternoon to my third grade class going to the front of the room and sitting in a circle for reading. I liked reading.

My school room had a pot-bellied stove at the front of the classroom, our only heat source. We "older" students helped keep the fire going, bringing in wood from the outside woodpile during recess and emptying ashes at the end of the day. Only the teacher or her assistant stoked the fire. Water was available at a pump in the school yard, and we filled pitchers of water at recess to have water available inside. Our lunches were eaten at our desks.

Much more interesting to me than school was the time we spent in church activities and with church people. We visited in the homes of church members as Mother and Daddy got to know folks. An older couple living next to the little country store near the parsonage were like grandparents and often gave us fresh fish from the day's catch. One home had knotty pine paneling in the library, pine that came from the local woods. I had never seen such a beautiful room before. We all exclaimed over it, and I thought these people must have lots of money to have such a beautiful room in their home.

We lived in the church parsonage, a small ranch house near the church. We were thrilled that it had a bathroom, a telephone, a modern kitchen, and central heating. We would be comfy for the winter. We three girls, ages 8, almost 10 and 12, shared one bedroom, and Mother and Daddy had the other one. J. Albert, now 14, was away at Niagara Christian College (NCC) in Ontario, Canada for his freshman year of high school. Leola, also a freshman, went to the local high school.

We missed our brother. He was a lot of fun and a big tease. I was really proud of his good looks, and when we visited in the homes of parishioners, as Mother and Daddy got to know people, I would beg Mother to show them his picture which she carried in her wallet. The picture had been taken the previous year in Pennsylvania when he was in eighth grade. To me he was the handsomest boy I had ever seen—and he was my big brother. Daddy said J. Albert would not be coming home for Christmas because we didn't have the money for him to make the trip. He would be staying at NCC for the holidays. This made us very sad.

Mother and Daddy decided that one way to get to know the women of the church better was to have a Christmas party for them at the parsonage. We moved the furniture around to make room for a big Christmas tree. Daddy put up a white pine taken from the woods nearby, and we girls under Mother's supervision decorated it for Christmas. We made a paper chain to go around it from red and green construction paper and hung popcorn balls we made as well as our usual glass Christmas ornaments. We finished it with silver icicles and, at the very top, a star. We hung red tissue paper bells from the ceiling lights and put an electric candelabra in the window. Mother made lots of Christmas cookies, a batch of fudge, and a spice cake she decorated in Christmas colors. Daddy brought over some extra folding chairs from the church so there would be seating for everyone.

The night of the party arrived and we had so much fun! All the church women came; of course they wanted to get better acquainted with the pastor's family and see how we had settled into our new home. Mother amazed me with the games she had planned for the evening. My favorite was the passing of a round tray on which were twelve to fifteen small items—a thimble, a button, manicure scissors, a spool of thread, etc. The game was to have a good look at the tray and after it was taken away write down on a piece of paper as many items as one could recall. The person with the most correct items got a prize.

As the evening progressed and refreshments were served, it was clear everyone was having a great time. We felt the warmth of friendship and were pleased that all was going so well.

The next Sunday Faye became a hero. We had the usual Sunday School classes in the church basement and the worship service followed in the sanctuary. As we were preparing to leave the church, Faye went down to the

basement to get the Sunday School papers she had left behind and found that one of the curtains which separated the classrooms was smoldering, not yet fully enflamed. A space heater had been left on and was too close to the curtain. She came running upstairs calling, "Daddy, Daddy, there's a fire in the basement!" Dashing downstairs, Daddy was able to extinguish the fire. It was quite a scare and many times Daddy remarked in the following days how blessed we were that Faye had gone downstairs after church. Much of the church was built of wood and the whole building would have gone up in a blaze once the fire got started. That would have been a horrible disaster just before Christmas.

On the Sunday night before Christmas we had a special program at church. Daddy had been practicing on the church organ for some time to be able to accompany the singing of Christmas carols, and he had been working with a few members of the church to put on a play about how the carol "Silent Night" came to be. The story was essentially this:

The organ of the Church of St. Nicholas in Obendorf, Austria was broken and could not be used for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in 1816. Father Josef Mohr, the parish priest, needed something special for the service and was inspired by the beauty of the evening before, December 23, to pen the words for *Stille Nacht*. He asked his friend Franz Gruber to set the words to music and Gruber wrote a simple melody. At the Christmas Eve service Father Mohr and Mr. Gruber sang the song with guitar accompaniment. People thought it was beautiful; it would become the most beloved Christmas carol in the world.

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh! Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Hirten erst kundgemacht
Durch der Engel Halleluja,
Tönt es laut von fern und nah:
Christ, der Retter ist da! Christ, der Retter ist da!

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Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Gottes Sohn, o wie lacht
Lieb' aus deinem göttlichen Mund,
Da uns schlägt die rettende Stund'.
Christ, in deiner Geburt! Christ, in deiner Geburt!

The program was a great success. People enjoyed it and liked singing the carols to organ accompaniment. Usually singing was a cappella as the church did not have an organist. Come to think of it, in 1954 it was unusual for any Brethren in Christ church to have an organ or piano. How this little church in the far north of Michigan came to have an organ, I do not know.

Christmas Eve arrived; we had just finished supper when there was a knock at the door. We were surprised that anyone would be coming around on Christmas Eve; we hoped no one was in trouble. Daddy went to the door and opened it and there stood J. Albert. We were amazed and dumbfounded and filled with joy. Our brother had come home for Christmas! Daddy had some scrambling to do to scrape together enough money to pay the taxi that delivered J. Albert to our door. Fortunately, the offerings during the Christmas season had yielded more than usual, and he was able to take care of this unexpected expense. We gathered around J. Albert, eager to hear how he had managed this miracle and how he was doing at boarding school. He was the best Christmas present ever.

The days flew by when J. Albert was home with us. All too soon he had to return to Ontario. Before Daddy took him in the 1947 Pontiac to where he would be meeting his friends to return to school, we took a picture. At 14, J. Albert was 5 feet, 11 inches tall, as tall as Daddy.



J. Albert Brechbill (age 14) and Rev. Earl D. Brechbill outside Rust Brethren in Christ Church parsonage.

BRETHREN IN CHRIST
HISTORY & LIFE

With the Christmas season over, we settled into a slower pace. People at church often gave Mother and Daddy gifts of eggs, milk and cream from their small farms in lieu of money in the offering plate. I learned to churn butter by holding a jar of thick cream and shaking it until it thickened into butter. That was the idea anyway; I didn't have enough patience to finish the job; I just wanted to participate for a while.

Many families in the area depended on fishing for their livelihood. We often received gifts of fresh fish when they had had a good day. Living so far north, not far from the Upper Peninsula, ice fishing in winter was common. The lakes in the area froze solidly by early December, and the fishermen set up their shanties on the ice where they knew from experience that schools of fish lived. Cutting a sizable hole in the ice that was at least fifteen inches thick, they baited their lines with something tasty, dropped them into the hole and sat down on their stools to wait. A little heater in the shanty kept them comfortable, even when temperatures dropped to ten below zero, and for hours they enjoyed the quiet.



Going to watch ice fishing in Michigan. Left to right: Faye, Leola, and Charlotte Brechbill.

Daddy told us about the ice fishing in the area. He was quite taken with being able to drive his Pontiac weighing 3,000 pounds onto the ice. One Saturday, he suggested we take a ride out to the lake where men he knew were ice fishing. We had to get all bundled up because it was very cold outside. Arriving at the lake, we were amazed as Daddy drove our Pontiac right onto the lake, over the ice, to the shanty where one of the men from church was fishing. Other shanties were nearby—a little fishing village. We got out of the car and entered the shanty and looked down the hole to where the fisherman's line was dropped in the water below. We saw how thick the ice was; a power drill had certainly been used to cut the hole. Before leaving, Daddy had us girls stand in front of the Pontiac to document the outing. Later that week we enjoyed some fresh yellow perch.

From time to time, I overheard Mother and Daddy discussing money matters. The little church's members did not have money to spare, so Sunday offerings were small. While Daddy occasionally worked as a mechanic at a local garage, the steady employment he had been promised did not materialize. He had known the small congregation could not support a pastor, and the promise of employment at a local garage had been one of the deciding factors in his agreeing to leave Pennsylvania for this remote part of Michigan. Mother and Daddy were good at managing with a small amount of money, but there had to be enough to buy groceries and gas, pay electric and telephone bills, and pay for J. Albert's tuition and clothing for four growing children. Even with Mother's skill at making things over and our use of "hand-me-downs," some new items needed to be purchased.

It became apparent that continuing to pastor the church at Hillman was not viable. After much prayer to discern God's will, Daddy and Mother regretfully decided we must return to Pennsylvania. We could move to a farmhouse near where we had lived before, Daddy could return to his job at Grove Manufacturing Company and again be a part of the ministerial team at Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church. We three girls could return to our same schools, to the same classes we had been in only three months before. And best of all, we could get our beloved Rover back from the Sollenberger family with whom we had left him when we moved. (Read on to learn more about Rover in a later story.)

A Christmas Carol, 1955

Excitedly I took my place in the second row of seats that had been arranged at the foot of the auditorium stage for the choir. I felt important—a blonde nine-year old in pigtails with a brand-new dress. It was turquoise taffeta with a collar edged in lace. I liked the way it flounced when I walked. My mother had made it for me on her treadle Singer sewing machine.

It was thrilling to be a part of this Christmas program at Lemasters Elementary School (Mercersburg, Pennsylvania). We were putting on a staged production of Dickens's *Christmas Carol*. Our choir would be singing Christmas carols to open the program and also at intermission. There was a part in the first half of the play where we would sing as carolers for Scrooge and again at the end. I was proud that I knew all the words to the carols by heart: "O Come All Ye Faithful," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear," "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," "Joy to the World," and, of course, "Silent Night."

I knew the carols because we sang them at church, a cappella and in four-part harmony. We didn't have a piano or organ in our church; they were considered worldly instruments. Singing was what I loved most about being in church. Sometimes we had hymn sings on Sunday evenings where we sang hymns all night; people called out numbers and we turned to that page in the hymnal and sang the first and last verses, unless the requestor had specified different verses. Sometimes we had special music from small groups interspersed with congregational singing. Now here at school I was in a choir for the first time. We would have a piano accompanying our carol singing.

My sister Faye, a sixth grader, was also in the choir; she sang alto while I sang soprano. She had a new dress too—a dusky rose taffeta with a dropped waist, swishy skirt, double-breasted large black buttons and little black velvet bows on the lapels of the large collar. I remember how insistent she was that she wanted those bows on the collar—they were her idea, not part of the pattern, and I thought the dress was stunning. With her dark hair and eyes, the dusky rose color suited her. Mother had made her dress too.

I hadn't seen the play before the night of the performance and I didn't know the story. It was all so magical as it unfolded on stage. The sets were colorful and mostly made by students at the school. I remember a scene

where Scrooge was in bed in a white nightshirt, cowering and whimpering, while various people came in and performed. I thought this was supposed to be scary in some way but I didn't know why. I realize now these performers were the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet-to-Come, trying to scare Scrooge straight. One of these performers was my best friend, Linda Nair. She had a part where she sang while she juggled.

I was amazed that she could sing and keep the two balls going in the air, never dropping them. She had a nice voice, too. Her twin Larry had a part in the play as a tiger. I wondered how they were selected for these roles—they were perfect for them. Such talent! I was enthralled. It was as if my best friend was a movie star!

O Christmas Tree, 1955

“We aren't going to have a tree this year,” Mother said.

“What?” Faye and I exclaimed in disbelief, “No tree?”

We couldn't imagine it. How can there be Christmas without a tree? Last year at Christmas time in Hillman, Michigan we had had a gorgeous tree, decorated with balls and tinsel and lights, and we had had a lovely Christmas party in the parsonage for all the church ladies. Our house and the church were surrounded by evergreen trees and covered in snow. It had been beautiful, just like Christmas is supposed to be.

Apparently, this year money was tight and the expense of purchasing a tree was more than the family budget could manage.² But here on the Sollenberger farm in rural southcentral Pennsylvania we had a woods on our property, and the woods had deciduous trees and evergreen trees. Well, the property was not ours exactly. We didn't own the farm; we were renting the farmhouse but we had the run of the place.

So Faye and I discussed it and decided that we would have to provide a tree for the family. We would go to the woods and find a tree we could cut down and bring it into the house for Christmas. We knew it would be a small tree; we were only kids after all: Faye was almost 11 and I was 9.

Saturday dawned sunny and clear. Snow was on the ground. Today

² J. Albert was in his second year at Niagara Christian College in Ontario, Canada. The tuition, while modest, was a lot for our family.



Faye and Charlotte dressed for winter.

was the day we were going to get our tree. We dressed for the cold: galoshes, coat, scarf, warm hat, mittens. Off we trudged, axe in hand.

Arriving at the woods we walked around looking for a good prospect. It had to be small enough that we could cut it down with the small axe we had brought along but big enough to have some presence in the house. None of the trees we could possibly cut down were proper Christmas trees like firs or pines; our evergreen would be a little cedar. A cedar is not well shaped for hanging decorations on it but it would be better than no tree at all, we reasoned. As we searched for our tree, I noted they were all pretty scruffy looking. The only feature that commended them was that they were evergreen.

Finally we saw it—a tree about three feet tall and not too big in girth, one we thought we could chop through and drag home. We set to work with our axe. Blow after blow, we tried to bring it down. We struggled to hit the trunk in the same spot with each swing of the axe. Then we tried to push the axe deeper into the trunk by wiggling it in the cut that had been made with the first blows. I tried pushing the tree over while Faye continued chopping at the cut.

It was slow going. I began to think our idea of chopping down our own Christmas tree was a pipe dream. We needed someone stronger and more skilled at wielding an axe. If only our brother were here. He was 15 years old and surely he could have brought this tree down. But he was far off in Ontario at a Christian boarding school and wouldn't be home until just a

few days before Christmas.

“Do you think we really can do this?” I asked. Faye insisted we could. After all, Christmas Day was her birthday and she was not going to celebrate it without a tree. We bent to our task again, laying the axe on the cut we had made. The tree began to lean; there was some movement in the trunk.

“We’re gonna do it!” I shouted with glee. Excitedly, we worked and worked and Faye made the final blow that felled the tree. Triumphant, we took hold of the trunk and dragged the tree down the hill and across the fields to the house.

It was so small we set it up on a table in the family room. We strung one strand of colored lights, put a star on the top, and decorated it with our usual Christmas bulbs. The tree was much smaller than Christmas trees we had had in previous years and it didn’t branch out like Christmas trees are supposed to do. The branches all rose upward forming a cone shape.

We had to agree it wasn’t all that pretty but the effort to get a Christmas tree made us proud. Faye and I looked at each other and grinned—we hadn’t been stopped by our poverty, we had a tree, and we would celebrate in style.

Mr. Traveling Salesman

He arrives at our door one warm August morning in 1955 wearing a jaunty hat, gray trousers, and a plaid shirt open at the throat. There is no doorbell, so he knocks. Mother looks out the kitchen window to see who is there.

A strange car sits in the driveway between the barn and our house, not the bread truck or the black 1950 Chevy of the Fuller Brush man. We always looked forward to the bread man bringing his delivery. He would bring a basket to our door, filled with fresh loaves of Wonder bread. But the most exciting things in the basket were the sweet rolls and sticky buns. Occasionally we would get a package of those. Once we were even allowed to board the truck and see all the tasty things he had. No, this is not the bread man.

The Fuller Brush man had been around not long ago. His visits were always fascinating. He would whisk out the latest brush that would lighten all our housework, put a skip in our stride, help us sing while we worked. He had a whole suitcase full of brushes, all shapes and sizes, some with

black bristles, some cream-colored. Some handles were wooden, others tortoiseshell plastic—all beautiful and shiny and smart looking. Oh yes, this brush was just the thing to take the drudgery out of cleaning.

We must have it!

But this man at our door is neither the Fuller brush man nor the bread man. Well, who is he then? He knocks again, louder than the first time. We three girls, ages, 13, 10 and 9, crowd around Mother as she opens the door somewhat cautiously to this stranger.

“Good morning,” she says.

“Good mornin’, ma’am,” he says, tipping his hat.

He seems pleasant and harmless enough. Still Mother does not invite him in. He explains his business. He is traveling around the area demonstrating a wonderful musical instrument. “It’s just the thing,” he says, “for all the family to play, particularly these little girls. It’s so easy. Can I play it for you, ma’am?”

Mother hesitates, but he doesn’t really wait for an invitation. He already has it out of the case. Balancing it against the door jam and drawing the bow across the strings, he begins to play “Nearer My God to Thee.” Sweet music at full vibrato fills the summer air. We are enthralled.

He has taken our measure correctly. Devoutly Christian, as members of one of the “plain sects”³ of Pennsylvania, hymns are definitely our music. No doubt traveling all over this southcentral Pennsylvania region, he has visited many homes of Brethren and Mennonite groups. Mother, with prayer veiling on her head, and we three girls in pigtails, are clearly part of these plain folks.

Finishing up, he segues into another hymn, “Abide with Me.” We girls gather around to get a better look. I am the youngest and shortest. Standing on tiptoe, I try to see what he is doing; how he is playing the instrument. I have never seen anything like it before. He is using a bow in his right hand and playing chords with his left.

“What is it?” Mother asks, puzzlement edging her voice.

“A ukelin,” he says proudly.

³ Plain sects, often referred to as Plain People, are Christian groups characterized by separation from the world and by simple living, including plain, modest clothing with a head covering for women. Many Plain People have an Anabaptist background.

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The ukelin obtained from the traveling salesman.

By now he is playing “My Faith Looks Up to Thee.” He can see our mounting excitement. Each hymn brings us closer to ecstasy.

He settles into his pitch. The instrument is quite simple to play. No lessons are needed. There is a booklet—he has it out now—with simple instructions that even a young person can follow. He looks at me and smiles. The booklet contains familiar songs notated with a numbering system. One doesn’t need to be able to read music to play the ukelin, he says. I proudly inform him that I can read music.

We move into the kitchen and Mother clears away the cookie sheets on the kitchen table. He places the ukelin on the table and shows us how to draw the bow with the right hand over the strings. “Always play the bow squarely across the strings,” he says demonstrating. “Draw the bow evenly and steadily. The larger strings require more pressure from the bow to make them sound. The left hand plays the bass chords,” he says. “Each group of four strings is tuned to produce harmony when the thumb or forefinger picks them.”

He plays “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” as we stand around gripped by

the sweet beauty of the music. How wonderful it would be to have this music in our home! How easy it would be to play! What fun we would have gathered around the living room at night taking turns playing hymns, oh so exquisitely, on this ukelin.

Mother finally asks the dreaded question, knowing all along there is no extra money for such frivolities.

“How much is it?” she says.

“Only \$28.75,” our salesman says.

Twenty-eight dollars and seventy-five cents! Goodness gracious! We don’t have that kind of money! That’s more than we pay for a month’s rent!

Mr. Traveling Salesman points out that the regular price is really \$55.00. This is a fine musical instrument, very well made. The price quoted is a special advertising rate for a limited time only.

“Oh dear,” Mother says, “I wish Daddy were here.”

But he’s not here and he won’t be for several days. Daddy is a long-distance truck driver for Grove Manufacturing Company. He’s off somewhere in Indiana delivering a load of wagon beds to a farm equipment dealer.

“Oh dear,” Mother says again.

We girls look pleadingly at her. Three pairs of eyes beg for a miracle.

Mother looks at us imploringly, “Are you sure you would play it?”

“Oh yes, Mother, yes,” we all promise fervently.

“Well then,” and now Mother turns to the salesman with determination in her voice, “I have a guitar I could trade. Would you be willing to do a trade?”

I’m excited. A guitar? I didn’t know we had a guitar! Mother is going to make the miracle happen—for her family, for me, for the love of music. Mother is going to get this amazing ukelin for us. Oh joy!

Mother runs quickly and gets the guitar from underneath the bed in her bedroom. It was her sister Elda’s guitar, she says, and she is willing to trade it for the ukelin. But I feel conflicted. What about this guitar? I’d never had a chance to play it. It was Aunt Elda’s. Perhaps it is a fine musical instrument too. I look at it with awe and a little remorse. Its dark wood glistens.

Mr. Traveling Salesman inspects the guitar. It is a Spanish guitar in excellent condition, no scratches, all strings intact. Yes, he says, he can take it as a paid in full trade. He whips out his contract and writes across the face of it, “Paid in full \$28.75, August 16, 1955, C. E. Hess.”

A quick trip out to his car, Mr. Hess returns with a box containing a ukelin, a bow, a box of rosin and an instruction booklet. "Thank you kindly, ma'am," he says, "I'm sure it will bring your family many hours of enjoyment."

I taught myself to play the ukelin but never progressed to being an accomplished player. I wore out the bow and we didn't know how to repair it. The ukelin now sits in my living room, a constant reminder of Mother's love.

Remembering My Baptism

Gathering on the banks of the Conococheague Creek one Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1956 is a small band of members of Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church. They are coming to witness the baptisms of three soon-to-be members. Among those assembling are Deacons Wilbur Martin and Aaron Myers; my parents, Reverend Earl and Ellen Brechbill; Sister Rhoda Eberly, my Sunday School teacher, and, of course, my pastor, the Reverend J. Lester Myers, who will preside.

Someone starts to sing "Shall We Gather at the River" and others join in:

Yes, we'll gather at the river;
The beautiful, the beautiful river-
Gather with the saints at the river,
That flows by the throne of God.

It will take a while for everyone to assemble. Cars are being parked near the barn of the Olin Hess farm (Rural Route 1, Greencastle, PA) and folks must then walk across the covered bridge that spans the creek and down a path through the woods to the clearing where the baptisms are to occur.

I'm excited and a little nervous. I am one of those who is going to be baptized. I know this creek and enjoy wading in it upstream at the swimming hole on hot days, but I don't usually put my head under water as I don't know how to swim. I'm not afraid of drowning, really; my bigger worry is to do my part right. I will have to wade into the water and kneel down. On this spring day the water will be cold. Then I will be pushed forward under the water three times, what my church calls "trine immersion."

The founders of the Brethren in Christ church spent quite some time thinking through just how baptism should occur, basing it on their

scriptural understanding. The three separate dippings are in recognition of Jesus's Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt.28:19 KJV).

In addition, being immersed in the water three times forward symbolizes union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Going forward down into the water is a dying with Jesus as he bowed his head on the cross and died (John 19:30) and coming up is a rising to new life in Christ. I am glad we don't baptize like Baptists do. They lay people out in the water backwards; the whole body goes under. I guess if you know how to float, it's no big deal but to me it is very scary. The Baptists baptize this way to symbolize dying to the old self and coming up out of the water born anew—same concept as we Brethren in Christ, just a different way to express it.

Almost ten, I have been pestering my parents for a while about being baptized. It is expected in our church that at the first opportunity after one is saved baptism will occur. Baptism is a symbol of one's decision to follow Jesus and a necessary act of discipleship in order to join the church. I had been saved as a child of six but my parents thought I might be responding to the emotion of the revival service rather than really knowing what I was doing. I had walked down the aisle of the Montgomery church to the altar railing where I had knelt and given my heart to Jesus. After I am baptized today, I will be able to join the church and will begin wearing a covering, an outward sign of my membership among the Plain People of Pennsylvania. Best of all, as a church member I will be able to partake of communion in the fall when the church has its Love Feast.

My sister Faye, who is a year and a half older than I, is also being baptized today. She, too, has been longing for this day to come. We are not wearing anything special; just dresses that we normally wear to school. Our hair is in pigtails and we will be barefoot when we go into the water.

The people are now singing "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us" as Brother Myers wades into the water with a long stick, poking about to find the best spot for conducting the baptisms. He is wearing a white shirt with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and today the hook he often wears where his left hand is missing is replaced by a stuffed black leather glove with plastic over it, protecting it from getting wet. He has on gray trousers, black suspenders, and hip boots. The water cannot be too high; it should come up no higher

than the chest when the ones being baptized are kneeling. And since we will be kneeling, it is best to find a sandy bottom or an area where the stones are relatively smooth.

The only other person being baptized with Faye and me is Dorothy Myers. She is married to Brother Myers' oldest son Lyle and is the mother of Dennis, a boy in my Sunday School class. This is a big deal since Lyle is backslidden and Dorothy is stepping out in faith without him.

Dorothy goes first, having the double burden of being the oldest and the most courageous. As she enters the water, the people sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." All of us feel the poignancy of her being baptized by her father-in-law and making a stand for her faith without her husband's support.

Faye goes next, every bit as nervous as I. As the older sister, it is expected that she will precede me. I watch her carefully so I will know what to do. She does well enough—only a few tears although it is clear she is afraid.

Now it is my turn. I step gingerly into the water, testing it with my toe, anxious but not wanting to show it. As I anticipated, the water is cold. I wade into the center of the creek to where Brother Myers is standing and kneel down. The water comes up to my chest. I wriggle to get comfortable on the stony bottom on my bare knees and look up into the kind, ruddy-complexioned face of Brother Myers.

Brother Myers whispers, "Are you ready?" I nod bravely. Then putting his right hand on my forehead and his gloved left hand on my back, Brother Meyers says, "Charlotte Kay Brechbill, I baptize you in the name of the Father. . . ." Down I go, holding my nose, completely immersed in the water; up I come, struggling to gain my composure, swallowing hard, wiping water out of my eyes . . . "and of the Son . . ." Down again . . . and up . . . snuffle, gulp, weak smile . . . "and of the Holy Ghost." Down for the third time.

As I come up out of the water Mother, standing near the water's edge, gives me a towel with which to dry myself off and then wraps me in a large blanket. The church folks sing "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow:"⁴

Where He leads me I will follow,
Where He leads me I will follow,

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all hymns and songs referenced in these stories are from the *Brethren in Christ hymnal, Spiritual Songs & Hymns*, 8th ed. (Nappanee, IN: E.V. Publishing House, 1935).

Where He leads me I will follow,
I'll go with Him, with Him, all the way.

Yes, yes, I think, that is my heart's desire. I am now entering the grown-up world of my brothers and sisters in Christ. My next step will be membership in the fellowship of Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church.

Love Feast and My First Communion

My home church, Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church near Upton, Pennsylvania, is hosting a Love Feast this fall (1956) and I am especially excited about this one. I *love* Love Feasts—a whole weekend of church services and meals with my church family. But this one will be particularly special. I was baptized in the spring, now wear a covering to church services, and have become a member of the church. For the first time, I will be able to participate fully in the Saturday evening service of Feet Washing and Communion. We have this special service on Saturday night rather than Sunday morning because Jesus initiated the Lord's Supper in the evening when he was observing the Passover with his friends. We want to follow his example as closely as possible.



Charlotte at the age of her first communion.

It isn't feet washing that I am excited about. That is kind of embarrassing, a ritual that is solemn and dutiful. But communion! That is special. We sing hymns of the cross a cappella in hushed four-part harmony as we share the bread and the cup. The communion bread is unleavened, a special bread made by the wives of the deacons and it is so good. In previous years when the service was over, my sister Faye and I would go up to the front of the church and ask the deacons' wives, Sister Martin and Sister Myers,

Communion Bread

2 lbs. flour (3-4 cups per lb)

1 stick unsalted butter, 1 pt cream

Work butter into flour, add cream, making a stiff dough.

Put on floured board.

Knead with hands; the more you knead, the smoother
the dough will be.

Roll ¼ inch thick. Place on cookie sheet.

Cut in strips 1 inch wide. Bake at 350; do *not* brown.

if we could have some of the left-over bread. They always gave each of us a generous piece.

Now I will be participating in the service for real and there are things I need to learn, like the words I will say to the “sister” next to me as I break off a piece of bread from the long strip and give it to her. I also need to learn what to say when we pass the cup.

In the kitchen we are doing the dishes, and Mother begins to teach me the words for sharing the bread and the cup. “My beloved sister,” . . . “this bread which we break,” . . . “is it not the communion” . . . “of the broken body” . . . “of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?” There are similar words to learn for passing the cup: “My beloved sister” . . . “this cup of blessing which we bless” . . . “is it not the communion of the shed blood” . . . “of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?” The parallel construction of the two sentences makes it a little easier to learn these words but to my ten-year-old mind I struggle a little to make sense of “this cup of blessing which we bless.” I practice it several times in the two weeks before the Love Feast weekend while we are doing the dishes. I must get it right; I don’t want to stumble over the words or have someone help me get through it.

Other preparations also need to be made. Our pastor, Bishop J. Lester Myers, is preaching about what we need to do to be ready to observe the Lord’s Supper. He reminds us of our need to love one another as Christ commanded and to be right with one another before we participate in Communion. Turning to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians where he gives

instructions for how the Lord's Supper is to be observed, Brother Myers gives particular attention to the following passage:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:27-29 KJV).

It is important to have all wrongs made right; all strained relationships mended before Love Feast. We are getting a heads up—two weeks to examine ourselves and make our wrongs right. I'm not worrying about this. I think I'm doing okay.

Love Feast weekend arrives. The air is crisp, the sun is shining. We hurry with our breakfast; the first service starts at 10 a.m. Mother gathers together the things she has made to contribute to Saturday's lunch and dinner—mincemeat pies, pickled beets, bread and butter pickles, ham for the split pea soup, and saltine crackers. Most church families will be contributing something to the menu that has been planned by the church sisters for the weekend. There will be visitors from other churches coming. Love Feast is a joyous occasion and people from other Brethren in Christ churches are invited to attend. We never know how many will show up, so we need to be sure there is enough food for everyone. The meals are served in the main room in the church basement. Long tables taken from our Sunday School classrooms are set up in rows in the main room of the basement to accommodate as many people as possible. An overflow crowd will require using the side rooms we have for Sunday School and there are extra folding tables available for use, if necessary.

The Saturday services are rather boring. There are long sermons, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The services begin with testimonies and hymn signing, and then the preacher preaches on the required texts. Daddy is a minister and he has a manual for Brethren in Christ ministers that says what the subject of these Saturday sermons should be.

The first sermon is to be about unity, based on Ephesians 4. I've memorized the last verse of that chapter: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32 KJV).

The sermon in the afternoon is to be about 1 Corinthians 11 where women are told to have their heads covered when they pray. I know all about this scripture; it's why I now wear a covering to church. The second part of this chapter is about how we are to observe the Lord's Supper and that we shouldn't partake in an unworthy condition. The preacher will again remind us that all wrongs must be made right before we come to the table of the Lord.

I don't have to sit through these services if I don't want to; they can get a little tedious. Sometimes a preacher comes who is really interesting—he tells stories and jumps around a bit, “filled with Spirit.” But there is no one particularly interesting this year so in the morning I go for the testimonies and hymn singing, then skip out before the sermon. I go downstairs to see about lunch. I help the church sisters by setting the table with knives, forks and soup spoons, a napkin, and a glass at each place. Then I prepare baskets of saltine crackers for each table. The choice of soup—split pea or vegetable—will be made by each person when they come down to eat, passing through the soup line. Other things are on the tables too—several kinds of pickles, pickled beets and red beet eggs cut in half, hunks of Longhorn cheese, plates of Lebanon bologna, white bread, whole wheat bread, freshly made apple butter, and peanut butter. There are cookies and canned peaches or pears for dessert. It's a hearty lunch and so many wonderful home-made things. I'd like a piece of Mother's mincemeat pie right now but that will have to wait until supper.

We hear the last hymn being sung and know the people will be coming down the stairs soon. They go through the soup line and choose a place at the tables to sit and eat. There is happy chatter as members greet one another and members of other churches are welcomed. Some folks talk about the sermon of the morning but most catch up on family news. The sisters are pleased to see they have enough soup.

The afternoon service begins at 2:00 but I stay downstairs to help clean up after lunch. Once the dishes are done, the tables need to be set all over again. No other girls my age are here other than my sister Faye. My church girlfriends aren't baptized yet, and since they can't participate in the evening service, none of them comes to Love Feast. It's a long time until supper at 5:00 p.m.

Supper goes well. It's pretty much the same routine of going through the line for the main course with additional food on the table to be passed

around. I finally get my piece of mincemeat pie. But really, I am excited about the evening service. I practice the words for communion again in my head—yes, I’m okay, I know them.

At 6:45 p.m., people begin to go into the church sanctuary for the 7:00 p.m. service. Deacon Martin and Deacon Myers and their wives are up at the front of the church, directing people to their seats. We have a special seating arrangement for this service; we don’t choose a seat anywhere we like. We will be sitting right next to one another in rows, women on the right, men on the left.

The service begins with the singing of the hymn, “Extol the Love of Christ.” I know this hymn because we sing it sometimes on Sunday mornings. I guess it was chosen because of the last verse:

Let poor, vain man example take
And from his pride repent;
For Christ, far greater is than man,
Or servant that is sent.
Example, worthy, Christ has giv’n,
And happy shall they be
Who wash each other’s feet, and love
As deep and true as He.

Pastor Myers now reads the scripture from the Bible that tells the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. (John 13:1-17). He says Christ showed love in a practical way, washing the disciples’ feet, teaching Peter, and us, how to live humbly. Christ set an example for us that we should be servant to all. This act of humility when we wash one another’s feet is a way of preparing our hearts for the bread and cup which will follow. Brother Myers also reminds us that the Apostle Paul in several of his letters urges the brothers and sisters to greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26, 1 Pet. 5:14). The kiss is to remind us that we are to love one another. We will observe this commandment during our feet washing.

Now Deacon Martin and Deacon Myers and their wives begin the preparations for our feet washing. They pour warm water into large basins that will be passed in the rows. Men and women begin removing their shoes and stockings. I’ve worn bobby socks with my shoes so this isn’t very hard,

but the older sisters have worn long stockings hooked to girdles or garter belts. To protect their privacy, a sister stands at the end of each row, so the men can't see us removing our stockings. The men of course are being respectful and not looking at us anyway.

There are a number of white towels with strings attached piled on the altar railing. These are passed to three or four people in the front row on both sides of the aisle. The sisters and brothers who receive them tie them around their waists. A basin of warm water is placed in front of the second sister, and the first sister, girded with the towel, kneels down and washes the feet of her sister. I can't really see what is happening now but I know I'll have plenty of time to watch how to do this when the basin reaches my row.

Someone starts singing "If You Love Me." This hymn is in the feet washing section of our hymnal and has four verses about discipleship with the following chorus:

If you love me, if you love me,
Keep the precepts that I give;
Thus, in love, the Lord is speaking,
That the soul may hear and live.

The basin has reached my row and Sister Myers gives us a fresh basin of water and fresh towels. I guess the water has gotten kind of cold and the towels wet. I watch how the feet washing is done. Oh, it's one foot at a time! I will wash one foot and dry it with the towel that's tied around my waist and then wash the other foot and dry it. When I am done, we will both stand up and join our right hands as if shaking hands and kiss. Then I will take off my towel and hand it to the sister whose feet will be washed next; that way she'll be ready when her turn comes.

The basin comes to me and my feet are washed and it's okay; the water is nice and warm. After my feet are dried, we stand and kiss one another. I turn now, get down on my knees and wash my sister Faye's feet, one foot at a time. I feel self-conscious more than humble, and a little anxious. I want to get this right. I don't want to take too long, but drying the feet is a little tricky. If the feet aren't dry between the toes, it won't feel very comfortable to put stockings back on.

I go one toe at a time. Faye smiles and nods that it's okay, her feet are dry enough. We stand up and join right hands, like a handshake, and kiss one

another. Phew! It's good to have the holy kiss over with.

Once the basin has passed on to other women down the row, we take off our towels and pass them down the row, then begin putting on our stockings and shoes. Again a sister stands at the end of the aisle so we have privacy. Someone starts a hymn:

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

The brother and sister who are last to have their feet washed in the pews walk to the front of the church and wash the feet of the brother and sister who began the feet washing. They stand and kiss. The circle is now complete and the feet washing and holy kiss portion of the service is over.

Some sisters and brothers help the deacons to clean up at the front of the church. There are piles of wet towels and basins of water to put aside. They are preparing for the next thing: a white washcloth that has been dipped in hot water is passed down the rows. We are to cleanse our hands with this wet washcloth and pass it to the next sister; we dry our hands on a small towel that follows. When the washcloth gets cold, we are given a fresh one and we continue until everyone has cleansed and dried their hands.

The deacons are setting the table now with plates of communion bread, pitchers of grape juice, and two tumbler-size cups to be ready for the Lord's Supper. These elements had been on a table in front of the altar rail, covered with a white tablecloth. The communion bread is the special unleavened bread made only for communion. As I said earlier, it's my favorite.

Brother Myers reads from Luke the story of Christ's suffering and death on the cross (Luke 23:1-49). He has asked Daddy to give a brief exposition on the scripture. I usually like to hear Daddy preach; he's a storyteller. But tonight his remarks are very sober, about the suffering and death of Jesus for us. Thankfully, it's not too long. We are getting closer to the observance of the Lord's Supper, the highlight of the evening.

Brother Myers asks us to stand. He prays a blessing on the bread. Then taking one of the long strips of unleavened bread, he turns to Deacon Martin and says loud enough for all to hear:

My beloved brother, this bread which we break, is it not the

communion of the broken body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

Deacon Martin answers clearly and solemnly, "Yes, it is." Brother Myers breaks the bread and gives a small piece to Deacon Martin, then hands him the remaining part of the large piece of bread. Deacon Martin proceeds to the men's side of the church, ready to begin sharing the bread with the men. Brother Myers then gives Sister Martin a strip of bread, and she goes to the first sister in the front row and says:

My beloved sister, this bread which we break, is it not the communion of the broken body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

The sister answers, "Yes," takes the piece offered her and then taking the whole strip of bread turns to the sister next to her to begin the sharing of the bread with the sisters. Someone starts to sing:

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock with-in a weary land;
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day.

We all join in. This is the part of the service I love best. Our singing is quietly reverent and in beautiful four-part harmony. We do not need hymnals; these are the beloved hymns of the cross we know well. We have no piano or organ in our church; those instruments are considered worldly. We make music with the natural instruments God gave us, our voices.

As the bread continues to be passed one sister to another, one brother to another, the music continues:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for ev'ry one,
And there's a cross for me!

The murmur of the words spoken and assented to is heard softly as the bread gets closer to me, and then, here it is. I am now engaged in this sacred act. As the sister to my left says the words, I listen carefully and at the end I nod. "Yes," I say. She gives me a small piece, then hands me the whole strip.

Now it's my turn. Facing Faye, I look at her briefly, then down at the bread; "My beloved sister," I say (funny, Faye is my sister, but she's also my sister in Christ), "this bread which we break. . . ." I go through the whole

thing without a mistake. I'm pleased with myself as I break off a piece of bread, hand it to her, then give her the whole strip of bread to share with the next sister. I sense the sacredness and solemnness of this moment. Christ loves me and died for me. I feel warm inside and somber.

When everyone has received the bread, the leftover elements are placed on the communion table. Bishop Myers directs us to sit down. "The body of Christ," he says, holding up his piece of bread, "Take and eat." We eat in silence and deep meditation.

After a time, Brother Myers asks us to stand again. He pours grape juice from a large pitcher into two cups that are on the communion table. He takes one of the cups in his hands, asks the Lord's blessing upon it, then says to Deacon Martin:

My beloved brother, this cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the shed blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

Deacon Martin says, "Yes, it is," whereupon Brother Myers takes a drink from the cup and hands the cup to Deacon Martin. Deacon Martin goes to the men's side of the church. Sister Martin is given the second cup. She goes to the first sister in the front row and says the words we all know, drinks from the cup and gives it to her. The sharing of the cup among the brothers and sisters begins. Again the hymn singing starts while we share the cup, one to another. I do okay with this too. I'm glad I do all right this first time. I feel so grown up, a real part of my church family, my community of Plain People.

When everyone has been served the cup, the cups are returned to the communion table and, along with the communion bread, covered with a white cloth. We all sit down, and for a time there is a deep quiet. Then someone begins the singing of my favorite hymn of the evening, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." There are four verses and we sing them all.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my Lord;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice to Jesus' blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The harmonies are beautiful and the melody has a sweet solemnity. Some people have their eyes closed, as if praying while singing. Our service of the Lord's Supper is coming to an end. We won't observe this holy meal again for a whole year. I look around. Everyone looks sad, as they contemplate Christ's suffering and death on the cross for us.

We again observe a time of silence. Then Brother Myers offers a closing prayer of thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice. The service is ended. People begin to leave, quietly. There aren't the usual conversations after the service. We are all caught up in the holiness of what we just experienced.

Tomorrow our Love Feast will conclude with the usual Sunday service and a shared meal afterwards. But for me the highlight of Love Feast is our Saturday night communion service. I wish we had these services more often.

I ask Daddy about this on the way home. "Why can't we have Love Feast more often? Why can't we observe the Lord's Supper more often?" "Oh," Daddy says, "This is a very sacred ordinance and we don't want it to become commonplace. We don't want it to be taken for granted. So the church leaders have decided we will only observe the Lord's Supper at Love Feasts."

I know Love Feasts are a lot of work; I guess that's why we have them only once a year. Many churches don't have Love Feasts at all. I'm glad my church does.

Sixth Grade and Scatter Pins

(Christmas 1957)

Sixth grade was one of my favorite years in school.

I liked my teacher Mrs. Snyder very much. She was kind, told us stories, and was married to the man who owned Snyder's Men's and Boys' Shop in Greencastle. The name of her husband's store became a teachable moment

about plurals and possessives and I have never forgotten it.

Mrs. Snyder read stories to us after lunch. This was my favorite part of the school day. Some stories continued from one day to the next, entire books being read one chapter at a time each day. Occasionally we begged for the story to be continued, reading the next chapter, and she would accommodate us. I think she wanted to know how it all turned out too.

Sometimes Mrs. Snyder shared personal stories, like the time we were studying oral hygiene and she told us about her favorite toothpaste. She said her son had come home from college and told her about Crest. He had said it was the best toothpaste and after she tried it, she had to agree with him. So she switched to Crest. "I'll never use any other toothpaste," she said. I went home that day and told my mother I wanted to use Crest. I think we had been using Colgate but we switched to Crest and sixty-four years later, I still use only Crest, and I often think of Mrs. Snyder when I purchase toothpaste.

I remember geography class, in particular. We learned about many countries in Europe—their capital cities, their major imports and exports, rivers and major ports. All information we copied from the blackboard into our notebooks and memorized for tests. My favorite country was Czechoslovakia, mostly because I liked the sound of the name and enjoyed mastering the difficult spelling.

In sixth grade I began to be known for my singing ability. I had a wide voice range and often sang special high parts in our music class. Fred Stahl, a boy in my class, sang high soprano parts with me. Fred's voice had not yet changed and he had a clear, high boy soprano voice. In time he would become a second bass! Mrs. Snyder liked to have us come up to the front of the class to sing our special parts.

I had a particular liking that year for Rodney Shoup, a boy in my class whose home was on my school bus route. I thought he was handsome and he also had an interest in music. He didn't sit with me on the bus but his little brother Ricky did. Ricky was in first grade, and when he climbed the stairs of the bus several of us girls would call out to Ricky to come sit with us. I loved it when he sat with me. I hoped Rodney would like me because I paid attention to his little brother.

At Christmas that year Rodney gave me and one or two other girls in our

class a present. I was thrilled to receive it from him and a little disappointed I was not the only one. His present was a scatter pin—a type of jewelry that was popular at the time. The pin is worn in a set with other similarly sized pins, usually flowers, insects, or birds. My scatter pin was a poodle groomed in high fashion poofs and pompoms and linked by a chain to a fire hydrant. The pin was silver and black with some small red stones for the poodle's eyes and collar. I thought it was so cute and was so pleased to receive it.

When I got home, I proudly showed my gift to Mother. “Look what Rodney gave me,” I said, holding the pin out for her to look at. She peered at it. “Oh!” she exclaimed and a giggle burst forth and then she began to laugh outright. Surprised, I asked what was so funny. She demurred; she would not say what had amused her. Instead she said the pin was very nice and since I had a crush on Rodney, she was glad he had given it to me.

I proudly wore that pin, feeling special because Rodney had given it to me. When we went to visit Grandpa and Grandma Kanode that December for their fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration (December 19, 1957), I wore a gray wool suit with my scatter pin on the lapel. A family picture was taken by a professional photographer that day so my pin is documented in history!



Charlotte wearing her scatter pins.

Now that I am wiser in the ways of dogs, having observed what they do at trees, fence posts, and yes, fire hydrants, when they are walked on a leash, I know why Mother laughed and I wonder: did Rodney know the meaning of the pin? Did he even pick it out, or perhaps his mother shopped for the presents he gave us girls that Christmas. I think the pin was meant to be amusing but I am not sure it is the type of gift a boy would give a girl in whom he had a romantic interest. Still, when we had our square-dancing lessons at school, Rodney chose me as his partner. We had a great time holding

hands, sashaying and do-si-doing. In our spring concert Rodney sang a great rendition of Harry Belafonte's "Banana Boat Song." I was really proud of him.

The pin eventually came to a violent end. Two or three years after I received it, the Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church was holding revival meetings which I attended with my family every night. More than once the evangelist preached against the sin of pride and women adorning themselves. The scriptures were clear, he said, that a woman's adornment was to be modesty and purity of heart, not worldly gold and silver.

I felt convicted about the pride with which I wore my modest pieces of jewelry. Talking over this sermon with Ruthie Martin, a friend a year older than I who was living with our family for her freshman and sophomore years of high school, we developed something of a fervor to do away with our prideful, sinful pieces of jewelry. So one Saturday Ruthie and I gathered up our small trinkets, which consisted mostly of pins, my poodle and fire hydrant scatter pin among them; kneeling on the linoleum of our kitchen floor, we hammered them to bits so we could never, ever wear them again.

Rover

We got the cutest collie puppy in the summer of 1953. Daddy named him Rover and said he would sleep in the wash house at night rather than in the house with us. We all went to bed to the sound of his crying and whining—it nearly broke our hearts, and by the third night Rover was allowed to sleep in the house. We fussed over him, brushing his beautiful long hair. He gave back lots of love. We played with him in the yard and he chased our car down the lane whenever we left home.

Daddy wanted to break Rover of the car-chasing habit but Rover seemed not to get the message. We knew nothing about training dogs with commands and treats. We lived in the country and Rover had free reign of the place. He was never tied up or leashed. One Saturday as we were leaving to visit Grandpa and Grandma Kanode in Martinsburg, Rover was hit by the car, breaking his leg. We children were horrified and crying and relieved that he wasn't dead. Daddy said he would have to go to the veterinarian and after a few hours came back with Rover, his leg set in a cast. Now what to do? We didn't want to leave him alone all day while we visited our grandparents

sixty miles away so after some discussion, we took him with us.

With Daddy, Mother, and my brother in the front seat and we three girls in the backseat, Rover lay on the floor of the car in the back. Martinsburg was over the mountains, so our route was up and down and around many bends, and poor Rover got sick, throwing up right there on the floor of the car. We stopped, cleaned up the mess with whatever we had, and continued on. There were no more mishaps, and after our visit with Grandma and Grandpa we returned home. Rover had his cast on for several weeks and we had to be careful playing with him. Thankfully his leg healed well and before long he was running and playing with us again, but he no longer chased our car.

In October 1954, Daddy and Mother told us we would be moving. Daddy had taken a position as pastor of a small church in Hillman, Michigan, known as Rust Brethren in Christ Church. That was a long way from Pennsylvania! We would have to say goodbye to our church friends and our school friends but the hardest part was that we would have to say goodbye to Rover. As a child of eight, I didn't have much of an opinion about the move; I went wherever my parents went but I did care that we were leaving Rover behind. "Can't we take him with us?" I pleaded more than once. "No," Daddy said, "It's just not possible." "Why not?" we asked. We begged. We pleaded. But to no avail. We all knew Daddy loved Rover, too, so there must be a good reason he could not come.

So what was the good reason? Our new home in Michigan was 650 miles from where we lived in Pennsylvania. To get there we would be traveling two-lane highways for several days (there were few interstate highways in 1954), pulling a heavily-loaded trailer with our 1947 Pontiac. Rover was a country dog and we were country people. He lived outdoors and only came in the house if he wanted to, which was usually on cold winter nights. He had not been trained to walk on a leash or follow commands. We did not take him with us in our car when we did errands around town. The one time he had gone in the car with us was when his leg had been broken and we took him to our grandparents, a trip of sixty miles, and he threw up in the car. Having him travel with us in the car for several days was unimaginable.

Before long we learned that a new home had been found for Rover. He was going to live nearby on the farm where the Jacob Sollenberger family, our church friends, lived. They liked dogs, had had collies of their own



Faye and Leola Brechbill playing with Rover.

and promised to take good care of Rover. In fact, the Sollenbergers had introduced us to the breeder from whom we had gotten Rover as a puppy. The Sollenbergers had two daughters younger than I, Margaret and Barbara, and an older daughter Marie, close to Leola's age. There was also Stanley, a boy about Faye's age and two-year old Billy. Now these Sollenberger kids were going to have the fun of playing with Rover and brushing his beautiful hair. We were sad but relieved that he would have a good home.

The trailer that had hauled all our worldly goods from Saskatchewan to Pennsylvania three years before was put into service again for the move to Michigan. Daddy had made the trailer himself using a car axle for the base. The day of the move, it was all loaded and tarped and ready to go. Daddy put Rover up on top of the loaded trailer and took a picture. We tearfully dropped Rover off at the Sollenberger farm and continued on our way. It would be several days before we would reach Michigan, way far north in the "mitten" of Michigan near Alpena, a town on Lake Michigan.

After our three-month venture in Michigan did not work out, we made plans to return to Pennsylvania in March 1954 and resume our life there. The Sollenbergers had bought a farm about twenty-five miles from where we had lived near Upton and the farmhouse on the farm where they had lived was empty and available for rent. So there we moved, back into the old neighborhood. And joy of joys, we got Rover back! He was so handsome and seemed to have grown a lot in three months. I was proud of his good looks, as if I had something to do with it!

Rover had the run of the farm. He caught groundhogs and ate them—nobody minded. Burrowing groundhogs are not welcome on a farm, and we had a large vegetable garden that, without his knowing, he was protecting. He and the red Hereford cattle got along famously. He romped with us on the lawn and entered into our games of hide and go seek. All seemed right with the world, except that J. Albert was away at Niagara Christian College in Ontario. We missed our brother but we girls were back in our same school system with our old friends.

In less than a year the farm we were living on was purchased by Bethlehem Steel, which had big plans for the land. No longer would there be a working farm with a farmhouse and barn. All would be torn down to build a plant. So Daddy was on the hunt again for a place to live.

A farmhouse on land owned by a Mennonite farmer was found near Greencastle. This place was less than five miles from where we lived but was in a different school system. We would still attend the same church, but we again had to say goodbye to our school friends. This time, however, we would take Rover with us. We moved in April 1954 to the farm we called “the Eshleman place.”

Rover had fields to roam and he accompanied us on all our errands



Rover with a Hereford cow behind him.

around the farm, taking the trash to the dump, chopping wood, and loading it on the trailer to haul back to the house where we unloaded and stacked it in the woodshed. Rover was a constant companion outdoors, and he still liked to chase and catch groundhogs.

As an 11-year-old I was especially fond of roaming the fields and woods with Rover by my side. Late on many Saturday mornings, after my chores were done, I would pack a snack and head out with Rover for the afternoon. We walked together down the lane, Rover's tail high and wagging. He liked these excursions as much as I did.

First we headed to the field where the honeysuckle grew wild along the fence row; the fragrance was heavenly. Then we crossed the lane and entered the woods, Rover trotting along beside me. Eventually he would go off by himself, following his nose. When I lost sight of him, a call would bring him bounding back. Rover was my buddy.

Circling back towards home, we entered a pasture across from the house where a small stream flowed. If the cows were in this pasture we didn't stay long but usually on Saturday afternoons they were not there. We walked along the stream and eventually I found a log to sit on to eat my snack. I played with stones in the stream, creating small pools of water, imagining myself a female Huck Finn out for adventures on the Mississippi River. The stream never lived up to my imagination. As the afternoon sun lowered in the sky, I knew it was time to return home. A wooden fence ran alongside this pasture by the lane next to our house. I mounted the fence and climbed over it while Rover squeezed under it. Home again—after a lovely afternoon.

While Rover was a family dog, he was especially close to Daddy. I guess Daddy was his alpha male, although we didn't know anything about such things. Daddy was a long-distance truck driver, his day job, while he continued to be part of the pastoral team of Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church. He was away from home several days at a time. When he came home, Rover was ecstatic to see him.

We knew Rover felt protective of our family because occasionally he would growl at male visitors—mostly Deacon Wilbur Martin. We couldn't understand why Rover growled at him because Deacon Martin was the nicest person ever. Deacon Martin was a little afraid of Rover which probably made Rover all the more insistent on growling. A strong word

from Daddy would end the growling but it troubled us that Rover greeted some people this way.

The farm we now lived on had Holstein cows at the barn that were let out most days into the pasture across from our house, the same pasture where Rover and I walked together by the stream. Rover was used to cattle from the Sollenberger farm. There the cattle had been Hereford steers, grown for meat; here the cattle were milk cows. The cows were tended by the Hummer boys, hired help who lived in another farmhouse on our lane, also rented from the Eshlemans. More than once the Hummers spoke to Daddy about Rover. They said he chased the cows. This concerned Daddy. He had grown up on a dairy farm and knew the importance of cows having a calm life to facilitate their milk quality and quantity. Daddy asked us if we had ever seen Rover chasing the cows. We hadn't; still the Hummer boys insisted it was so.

Then one day Daddy told us that Don Hummer had complained to him that Rover not only chased the cows but had jumped up on the back of one of them and had bitten her. Could this be true? We had a hard time believing it, but if our neighbors who tended the cows said it was so, who were we to deny it? None of us had ever seen Rover chasing the cows, much less doing this. Daddy was disheartened. It troubled him considerably. He wanted good relations with our neighbors, and he knew our family pet should not be running their cows. What to do? Keeping Rover tied up on a chain just didn't seem right. What kind of life would that be for a dog that was used to having the run of the place, who loved to chase, kill and eat groundhogs?

Finally Daddy came to the conclusion that Rover would have to go. He couldn't live with dissension with our neighbors and the thought that the cows were not giving the milk they were capable of because our dog distressed them. Rover was very much "our" dog, a one-family dog, so Daddy did not think there was anyone we could give him to. He told us, sadly but determinedly, that he was going to have to kill Rover. He felt it was the only way to keep the peace with our neighbor farmers. He said he would watch for the next time Rover got a groundhog and was happily engrossed in eating it and then he would shoot him. Daddy was not a hunter and he didn't own a gun but J. Albert had become interested in hunting and had recently purchased a 22 rifle. Ironically, Daddy had not wanted J. Albert to buy this gun and they had had quite a row about it. Now Daddy was going to use this rifle to kill our beloved pet.

The sadness of it all still runs deep: Rover, our sweet beautiful collie whom we had raised from a puppy, whom we had lost for a time and then reclaimed; Rover, my companion on walks in the woods and in the pasture by the stream, who listened to my woes with soulful brown eyes; Rover who loved to play in the yard with us and retrieve sticks we threw for him; Rover who mostly liked to sleep outdoors under the stars but who would come in and sleep by the wood stove on cold winter nights; Rover who was so handsome, I proudly carried a picture of him in my wallet; Rover who adored Daddy most of all. He was going to be betrayed by this same love.

One Saturday, not too long after Daddy had told us how the problem of Rover's chasing the cows was to be solved, he came into the kitchen and announced that Rover had gotten a groundhog and was in the field next to our garden. Faye and I looked at each other with heavy hearts. We knew there was nothing we could say. Daddy had made up his mind; peace with neighbors was more important than our beloved pet. Each in our own way was grieving and, I suspect, Daddy grieved most of all. He loved Rover, and he wasn't a hunter. He felt the burden of taking careful aim and hitting his target well, that Rover would not suffer. The relief he felt was evident when he returned after having carried out the deed. Rover, he said, was happily engrossed in his groundhog, never looked up, never knew what hit him. He died instantly. Small comfort. Daddy buried Rover in the field where he died, near our garden. We did not mark his grave.

Many years passed and one day Daddy saw Don Hummer in town. Don had long since moved on from farming the land where our farmhouses stood. Talking with Daddy that day, Don confessed that he had made up the story about Rover chasing the cows and jumping up on the back of one and biting her. He said he had never intended for Daddy to kill Rover; he just wanted the dog chained up or kept in the house because he was afraid of him.

With his confession, Don Hummer must have felt relief. He had carried for years the knowledge of his falsehood having caused the death of our beloved family pet, and it must have troubled him. What a relief to have this off his chest. He could feel better for having made his confession. And Daddy being who he was, certainly forgave him.

But now Don Hummer's pain was transferred to Daddy who had been living all these years with the knowledge that he had killed our beloved

family pet to keep the peace; that he had fulfilled his Christian duty as a good neighbor. He had felt the horror of it and the necessity of it. He had consoled himself that at least he had done right by his landlord and these hired hands who made their living by dairy farming. From now on he would live with the knowledge that he had killed our beloved Rover unnecessarily, for a falsehood.

The Covering Store

It is Saturday morning and we are scurrying around to finish our tasks: dusting, mopping, vacuuming and “redding up,” as we say. By 11:00 we are ready. We are going to the covering store, always a delight.

Sometimes we go to Maugansville, Maryland, just over the Pennsylvania state line, where a Mennonite lady has a store, but today we are going to Myers’ store. Mrs. Norman Myers is Brethren in Christ like us. She and her husband are farmers, raising dairy cattle, and Sister Myers has her store in the farmhouse. There is a special outside entrance to the store. When we enter, a bell rings and Sister Myers shortly comes into the store through a door behind the long counter.

“What can I do for you today?” she asks with a smile. Behind her are oak shelves exhibiting different styles of coverings, and below the shelves are multiple wooden drawers that contain quantities of coverings—more styles than are on display. The drawers are labeled with letters and numbers, indicating the style and size of the coverings within.

“Oh,” Mother says, “some coverings for the girls and a bonnet for Charlotte.” I’m excited about the bonnet. This will be my first one. I’m an early teen and haven’t yet made the full commitment to be a plain girl. I only wear my covering to church, not to school or community events. Still, Mother is getting me a bonnet.

A bonnet is worn over the covering when one wants to be especially dressed up, like going to a wedding or funeral. Bonnets are stiff like a hat, usually made with black material but one can also get them in navy blue or beige. The bonnet fits over the covering which is made of white nylon net. The style of the bonnet depends on the style of the covering. My covering is relatively flat with just a few pleats, a little “pancake.”

I wear my hair below shoulder-length and gather it in a barrette at the nape of my neck. The covering fits on the back of my head and is secured

with straight pins. The bonnet must fully cover my covering so that no part of the covering shows around the edges. The bonnet will be secured with hat pins that have a black bead on the end. These special pins are also available at the covering store.

Not all coverings are like mine, of course. There are so many styles! The style of the covering depends on one's hair style. A typical Brethren in Christ woman wears her hair wound up in a bun on the back of her head with a covering over it. A woman who has long hair that has never been cut, that falls to her waist when she takes it down at night, will have a large bun and she will need a deeper covering to fit over it. The same is true for a woman whose hair is thick in texture. Coverings are normally made of white nylon net but there are a few women around who wear an opaque, white cotton covering that is starched and has strings attached on each front corner. These coverings resemble an old-fashioned bonnet and are worn by Brethren in Christ women who come from the "Yorker" or "German Baptist" traditions. The covering strings are usually tied under the chin and the bonnet for this covering is really large.

Wearing your hair in a bun on the back of your head is a sign of your commitment to the plain way. Mother wears her hair like this and my sister Faye, who is only a year and one-half older than I, began to wear her hair this way two years ago. Their coverings are also made of white nylon net but Mother's covering is a little more old-fashioned, I think—bigger than what younger women wear.

More and more Brethren in Christ women are experimenting with different hair styles—French twists, French rolls, or braided buns at the back of the neck rather than a bun on the back of the head. The coverings worn by these women are getting smaller and smaller, kind of like the one I wear. Reportedly, some of these women have even stopped wearing their coverings altogether, except for church services.

All the many covering styles are categorized with letters and numbers, making it possible to purchase the same style over and over again without having to spend a lot of time trying on coverings in the store. Sometimes a style is discontinued because it doesn't sell well. The owner of the store keeps a record in a customer card file of the styles you have chosen before.

Once the style is chosen, several coverings of that kind are purchased. It is considered bad taste to wear a limp or dingy-looking covering in public, especially to church. As a covering becomes "old," one wears it only around

the house and saves the newer ones for going out in public, especially to church. It is possible to refresh a covering by washing and ironing it for a time, but eventually it just gets too worn-looking, necessitating another trip to the covering store and perhaps the choosing of another style. For me, a trip to the store is always an occasion to see new styles and chat—our word for friendly gossip—with the storekeeper.

Mother tells Sister Myers that she wants the same style of covering as she's been wearing and Sister Myers pulls her card from the customer file, checks the number, and opens the appropriate drawer.

"How many do you want?" Sister Myers asks.

"Three will be fine," Mother says.

Meanwhile Faye is fussing over a few choices trying to make up her mind. First one style and then another is tried on, and using a hand mirror, she looks at the sides and back of her head in the large mirror on the wall to see how she likes it.

"I don't know," she says. "Maybe I like the first one better."

She turns to me, "What do you think?"

I agree with her that the one she tried on first looks a little more up-to-date. She puts the first one on again and looks with the mirrors at her profile. She decides to take this one, and Sister Myers gets three for her, noting her selection on her customer card.

I begin trying on different bonnets that will fit over my covering. It would be fun to have a beige one for summer but I can't afford to have two bonnets, and a black one would be more practical. There's one in a lovely black brocade, not too fancy; I decide on this one. I also get three coverings of the style I've been wearing.

We are all set now. Sister Myers writes down all our choices on her receipt pad with the corresponding prices and adds up everything.

"That will be \$11.75," she says. Mother pays her in cash and we leave the store, happy with our purchases. It will be quite a while before we will need to visit the covering store again.

Spring Revival

Standing in the back of the church sanctuary, I look around for where my friends are sitting.

It is Saturday night and the last service of our two-week spring revival meeting at Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church. The church is well-filled. Eventually I see the row of teenage girls seven rows from the back and hurry down the side aisle to join them. Now that I am fifteen, I no longer sit with my parents for services. I am allowed to sit with my girlfriends. The teenage boys usually sit in the row behind us girls.

The organ prelude is just ending. My friend Nancy Hess is our church organist. We got an organ in our church just a few years ago. That was a big decision—lots of discussion about its being a worldly instrument and concern that the use of an organ would detract from the quality of our congregational singing. I admit I love a cappella singing. We have good singers in our congregation, and the four-part harmonies during our hymn singing are so beautiful! And it is fun singing a cappella. Still many felt an organ would enhance our worship services. The General Conference of 1951 had voted to allow the use of instruments during worship and many churches in our district were beginning to get organs. Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church voted to purchase an organ in 1960 and we got an electronic Hammond. It was only natural that Nancy would be one of the organists. She had a Hammond organ at home and had been taking organ lessons for several years. Our other organist is Sister Eberly but tonight Nancy is playing.

I settle into my seat with the girls just as our song leader comes forward and announces the first hymn. On Sunday mornings our opening hymn is usually from the front of the hymnal, a hymn of praise. In evening services the hymns tend to be more personal. Tonight's opening hymn is #64 in our hymnal, "O How I Love Jesus!" It's a congregational favorite. We all stand to sing:

There is a name I love to hear,
I love to sing its worth;
It sounds like music to mine ear –
The sweetest name on earth.
Chorus: O how I love Jesus,
O how I love Jesus,
O how I love Jesus,
Because he first loved me!

We sing all verses and our song leader asks us to be seated while we sing a second hymn. He has chosen # 74, "The Comforter Has Come." We sing it heartily:

O spread the tidings round, wherever man is found,
Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;
Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound;
The Comforter has come!

Chorus: The Comforter has come, The Comforter has come!
The Holy Ghost from heav'n, The Father's promise giv'n;
O spread the tidings round, Wherever man is found,
The Comforter has come!

When we finish singing, our pastor, Brother Myers, says a few welcoming words and then invites us to kneel for prayer. We turn and kneel facing the back of our pews; Brother Myers kneels facing the congregation. He prays for the Spirit to be in our midst, for the evangelist to fearlessly preach the Word he has been given, for souls to be saved and saints to draw closer to God.

Rising after prayer, we resume our seats and a mixed quartet from the congregation goes to the pulpit to sing. The song they have chosen to share is "When I Met My Savior." This is not in our hymnal. In the past special music was taken from the hymnal but more often now quartets, trios, and soloists are choosing music from recently published books of gospel music that can be purchased from Christian Light Bookstore. We have a Christian Light Bookstore in Chambersburg that is managed by the son of our bishop, Charlie Byers. I like browsing through the music they have to sell, as well as a variety of gift items.

As I listen to the quartet, I think their choice of music is really appropriate for our revival meeting and the harmonies are lovely too:

My heart was sad 'till I met Jesus,
My friends were gone and life seemed vain.
I sought for riches and for glory,
Each joy had turned to grief and pain.

Chorus: Then one day I met my Savior,
Met Him in the twilight dim;
Joy o'erwhelmed my soul and sorrow vanished,
And I'm happy since His love came in.

As the quartet sings the second verse and chorus, several people are saying “Amen” and “Thank you, Jesus.” Our congregation is often moved by special music.

Once the quartet finishes its first piece, they turn to another, “Each Step I Take.”

Each step I take my Savior goes before me,
And with His loving hand He leads the way.
And with each breath I whisper, “I adore Thee.”
Oh, what joy to walk with Him each day.

Chorus: Each step I take I know that He will guide me;
To higher ground He ever leads me on.
Until some day the last step will be taken,
Each step I take just leads me closer home.

This gospel song stirs several people who begin praising God. There is a feeling of the Spirit coming upon the congregation, a feeling of warmth and love for Jesus and of anticipation for the word the evangelist will bring tonight.

Brother Harry Hock, our evangelist, steps forward and asks us to bow our heads in prayer. He prays briefly for the anointing of the Spirit, for hearts to be open to hear the Word, and for no one to leave tonight without being right with God. Then he announces his text: Acts 26:24-29. The key is verse 28, “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’”

Brother Hock is a dynamic preacher. He doesn’t come from a historic Brethren in Christ family; he has an interesting personal story to tell of being saved and sanctified at a revival meeting held in a dance hall in Roxbury before the tabernacle at Roxbury Holiness Camp was built. He tells good stories. His message is clear tonight; don’t be like King Agrippa and pass up the opportunity to be a follower of Jesus. If you are not saved, there is no better time than tonight to seek God’s forgiveness and yield your life to him; if you are saved but not sanctified, now is the time to seek this second work of grace, the infilling of the Holy Spirit that will enable you to live a life free from sin. Don’t put off fully surrendering your life to God.

I flash back to the service last Sunday evening when a sister of our church went forward during the altar call to seek this experience of sanctification.

Mother was one of the altar workers along with other sisters who knelt around her to offer encouragement and counsel. They urged her to confess everything that stood in the way of her completely surrendering her life to God, of giving up any pride or desires of her own. It seemed like a long time there at the altar praying. Some like me sat in the front pews watching what was happening. The altar workers encouraged the seeking sister to put everything under the Blood, to die out completely, surrendering her life wholly to God. Someone started to sing and others joined in: "I surrender all, I surrender all; all to thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all."

Prayers and tears continued. Finally it seemed that the seeking sister felt completely empty of any desires of her own, totally yielded to God. One of the altar workers started another song:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, Yielded and still.

The seeker was now lying full length on the floor, saying over and over, "Yes, Lord; Yes, Lord." Then suddenly she rose to her feet and began jumping and shouting, "Glory! Glory!" She ran down the side aisle to the back of the church and then up the center aisle, all the while waving her handkerchief and shouting "Glory! Glory!" The altar workers were smiling, even laughing, in their delight at the victory the seeker was experiencing. Some said "Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!"

Eventually the praise time ended and folks began to gather up their things in preparation for going home. It was getting rather late, after all, and the next day was a work day for the grown-ups and a school day for me.

Now here we are in the final service of the two weeks of revival meetings. Tonight is the last chance for anyone who wants to respond to what they have heard in these meetings, the last chance to be saved or sanctified. Brother Hock invites everyone to stand and for those who want to seek God to come forward and kneel at the altar of prayer. He asks that we sing "Softly and Tenderly."

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;

See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me.

Chorus: Come home, come home;
Ye who are weary, come home.
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

This hymn of invitation always gets to me. The melody is haunting and the words are full of emotion: "Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading," and "Tho' we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon, Pardon for you and for me." Standing there singing I wonder if I should be going forward. My Christian walk is not perfect; I haven't been sanctified. But I don't want to be one of those people who is always "running to the altar."

As children, my sister Faye and I often felt the emotion of revival meetings during the altar call and sometimes we went forward. There was always something we needed to confess, like being unkind to one another or being prideful in some way. We weren't perfect. But several years ago, a child went forward during the altar call and the evangelist said, "God bless the children. Their hearts are tender." I was so glad that child was not me! I felt a certain shame at being an "altar runner" and I never went forward after that as a child. I got the message; I didn't need to be going to the altar for every little wrong I might have done; besides, it was the adult sinners and backsliders that the evangelist was hoping to reach.

Brother Hock speaks again, pleading with people to "go through with God." He asks that we sing hymn #65, "Almost Persuaded." This is another hymn of invitation that gets to me, and of course it fits well with the sermon Brother Hock has preached.

"Almost persuaded" now to believe;
"Almost persuaded, Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say,
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way,
Some more convenient day
On Thee I'll call."

Still no one is going forward, so Brother Hock tells a story, a story I have heard before. It's about a young man who with his friends attends a revival meeting. He is not living right and he knows it but he resists the Spirit and

does not go forward to be saved when the invitation is given. That night on his way home, a terrible rain storm comes up and a tractor trailer skids and collides with this young man's car. He and all his friends are killed in this accident. The message is clear. We never know when our time will come to stand before the judgment seat of God. We need to be ready at all times.

Brother Hock asks us to sing one more hymn of invitation, "Just As I Am." This hymn is very emotional for me and pretty much everyone here.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

On the second verse, two people step out and go forward to kneel at the altar rail. We sing two more verses of the hymn. Then Brother Hock makes a few closing remarks and invites the saints to come forward to help these two individuals pray through. I know my parents will be helping at the altar. I decide to go outside and hang out with my friends until it's time to go home. Some of the guys have a great sense of humor and the stories they tell can be hilarious.

And so another series of revival meetings comes to a close. I feel a little sad that the meetings are over. I like going to church and being with "my people." There's a feeling of belonging, of being in community, for we are Plain People, different from the world, and it is in our gathering together that I feel most at home.

Vignettes of Roxbury Holiness Camp, 1956-1962

Children's Camp, August 1956

We arrive at Roxbury Holiness Camp at 9:30 a.m. As soon as Daddy gets the car parked, I jump out and hurry through the trees to the Sunbeam Center. I love Children's Camp and I don't want to be late for the morning program. I like to sit near the front so I can see everything, and there are so

many children coming to the programs that I need to get there early to get a good seat.

I love everything about Children's Camp—the songs, Bible stories, skits, and object lessons, and especially Joey. Joey is a monkey that Sister Sollenberger talks with every time we gather and he has the cutest things to say. Of course, I know Joey is a puppet and not a real monkey but the conversations are so real. It looks like he's really talking with Sister Sollenberger. When I first started coming to Children's Camp a few years ago, I thought Joey was actually talking. Now that I'm ten years old, I know Sister Sollenberger is saying Joey's part of the conversation in a different voice but the conversations are such fun. It's definitely my favorite part of the program. Sometimes I watch to see if I can catch Mrs. Sollenberger's lips moving. I'd like to figure out how she does this.

We always have a mission project for which we raise money. The fun part about this is that Brother and Sister Sollenberger have set up a competition between the boys and girls as to who can raise the most money. This year we are raising money for medical supplies for Macha Mission in Northern Rhodesia [now Zambia] in Africa. There's a poster on an easel at the front of the Children's Center that charts our progress with a graph. Right now the girls are ahead. I got Daddy to give me a whole dollar for the offering today. I want to be sure the girls win.

I find a seat in the third row and before long the program starts. We begin with singing "Heavenly Sunshine," followed by "Jesus Loves Me." I'm excited when one of my favorite songs is announced. I like it so much because it has motions to it. We all jump up to do the motions as we sing:

Head and shoulders, knees and toes
Knees and toes, knees and toes,
Head and shoulders, knees and toes
Clap your hands and praise him!

Today's Bible Story is about Zacchaeus, a man Jesus meets on the streets of Jericho. I understand Zacchaeus's predicament in not being able to see Jesus over all the people who gather around him; I'm little too. I hope I'll grow taller. Sister Sollenberger tells the story in such an interesting way with flannelgraph. I wonder what Zacchaeus's wife thought of his giving away so much of their money. No one talks about that.

When the story is finished, Sister Sollenberger asks us all to stand because she wants to teach us another song that has motions. It's a song about Zacchaeus meeting Jesus:

Now Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he
He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.
And when the Lord came passing by, he looked up in the tree
And he said, "Zacchaeus, come down!
For I'm going to your house for tea.
For I'm going to your house for tea!

Our time in Children's Camp is coming to an end. The offering baskets are passed and I put in my dollar. I'll have to wait until this afternoon's program to find out if the girls are still ahead.

Teen Camp, August 1960

It's that time of year again—the first week of August—and that means Roxbury Holiness Camp. It is always fun to go to Roxbury. We don't plan vacation time for the first week of August; we save it every year so we can attend as many Roxbury services and programs as possible. It's only a forty-minute drive from our home in Greencastle, and if we can't go every day, we almost certainly get there every evening for the revival meetings. The brochure has been out for a while, announcing who the Bible teachers and special speakers will be. This year the evangelist is Brother John Rosenberry. That's exciting because Brother Rosenberry is an entertaining preacher. I also think he's handsome and he is so very tall!

I'm old enough now to attend Youth Camp at the Berean Center. Brother Simon Lehman Jr., pastor of Mechanicsburg Brethren in Christ Church, is our Youth Camp Director and he has interesting programs for us young people. The Berean Center was built just two years ago and is a very nice tabernacle just for us (we used to meet in a tent and this center is so much better). It is located through the woods not far from the Sunbeam Center. We have a piano to accompany our singing, and John Hess is a fantastic piano player. His fingers go up and down that keyboard in the most amazing way, all improvised.

We sing a lot at the beginning of the service. A favorite is "Since Jesus Came Into My Heart."

What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
Since Jesus came into my heart;
I have light in my soul for which long I had sought,
Since Jesus came into my heart.

Refrain: Since Jesus came into my heart,
Since Jesus came into my heart;
Floods of joy o'er my soul like the sea billows roll,
Since Jesus came into my heart.

Our song leader marks time for us and holds out the first “Since” in the chorus for a long time, varying it each time we sing it. We never know how long he will hold it so we have to watch. One time he held the note so long, we all broke down laughing. Teen Camp music can be a lot of fun. Another favorite is “The Love of God.” When we heard the story of how the last verse was written, it made singing this hymn all the more special. The words to the last verse were found on the walls of a mental hospital. That someone with mental illness could know the love of God in such a special way was really moving. He wrote:

Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from
sky to sky.

Refrain: O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song.

We sing choruses too. Favorites are “Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen in Me” and “His Name Is Wonderful.” These choruses have beautiful melodies and especially when we sing “His Name is Wonderful” there’s a hushed reverence as our hearts fill up with love and gratitude for Jesus’ love and sacrifice for us.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me
All his wonderful passion and purity!

O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

His name is Wonderful, His name is Wonderful,
His name is Wonderful, Jesus my Lord;
He is the mighty King, Master of everything,
His name is Wonderful, Jesus my Lord.
He's the Great Shepherd, the Rock of all ages,
Almighty God is He;
Bow down before Him, love and adore Him,
His name is Wonderful, Jesus my Lord.

There is always Bible study. Our morning Bible studies get deep into the Word. My Bible is full of underlined verses as a result of these Bible teachings. Sometimes congregational Bible Quiz teams who are preparing for the Allegheny Conference playoffs are on the program. This gives teams a chance to practice and is great entertainment for us. It's not just recalling the scriptures they have memorized that makes a winner. Team members need to practice jumping fast because the first one up gets to answer the question. It's quite an honor to represent your conference at the General Conference playoffs.

Often our services end with the hymn, "When We All Get to Heaven." What I love most is the way our pianist John Hess is all over the piano keyboard on this one. It also has a joyful message of what's to come in the next life, pearly gates and streets of gold and all that.

Brother Lehman started a poster campaign two years ago for the opening of the Berean Center that continues. Each church youth group that wants to participate prepares a poster with a theme of their choosing. Brother Lehman has the posters put up all around the Center. Some of the artwork is truly exceptional; it's fun to walk around the center and view all the posters.

I said earlier that I was pleased that John Rosenberry is our evangelist this year. That's because you never know what might happen in the meeting. One night while giving her testimony, a woman got "happy" and began running around the tabernacle, up and down the aisles, shouting "O glory!" and waving her handkerchief. Pretty soon more folks began praising the Lord, some getting out of their seats and running the aisles too. The Holy Spirit really fell on the whole assembly, and I know you aren't supposed to

say this but it was quite a show. This is part of the fun of revival meetings at Roxbury; you never know what's going to happen.

Later in the service when Brother John was preaching, he got so enthused about the Lord that he jumped so high that his feet showed above the pulpit. Since Brother John is over six feet tall that was quite a feat. I learned later that he used to be a baseball player and could have played in the big leagues. I guess he was pretty fit physically.

August 1962

Roxbury again. This year Mother and Daddy have given me, along with my sister Faye, permission to stay in the Ladies' Dorm for the whole week. I'll be able to take in all the services and spend more time with my friends from churches far away. The Ladies' Dorm is on the second floor of the Dining Hall, and stairs leading to the dorm are on the outside of the building to the right.

As I enter the dorm, I feel a little overwhelmed. The Ladies' Dorm is one long room with rows and rows and rows of bunk beds. If the bed is made up, that means the bed is taken. Some women have beautiful handmade quilts or crocheted afghans on their beds. One of the ladies points out a few beds near the front of the hall that are available. I choose a top bunk and Faye takes the bunk below me.

I make up my bed and unpack the skirts, blouses, and dresses I have brought for the week. There's a clothes line strung along the full length of the dorm with hangers for hanging clothes. My underclothes and PJs stay in the suitcase, which I push under the bunk. There is a long mirror near the door. I guess I'll use that to make sure my slip isn't showing below my skirt. The ladies' bathroom is in a separate building across from the Dining Hall. That's where I'll go to brush my teeth and comb my hair. I now wear my hair in a bun on the back of my head with a covering over it. Most but not all women who attend Roxbury Camp wear coverings. There is even a covering store in the back of the tabernacle.

The adult programs at Roxbury always include Bible studies in the morning. One day a week is devoted to missions and there is a healing service on Tuesdays at the end of the morning session. I'm thinking I might attend this service and go forward for a healing prayer. Four years ago when I was twelve, a strange condition emerged in my body that physicians

have not been able to diagnose. It progressed slowly and appears to involve muscle wasting on my right side; while I suffer no ill effects, it does concern me and my parents. What if it gets worse? What if I become handicapped or disfigured in some way?

So on Tuesday I attend the youth program at the Berean Center, then rush to the tabernacle to be present for the healing service. The preacher is finishing up his sermon and soon people are invited forward to kneel at the chairs that line the front of the tabernacle where they will be anointed for healing. Feeling shy and self-conscious, I go forward and kneel at a chair on the left. A number of ministers are involved in anointing people and praying with them. The whole front of the tabernacle is filled with people kneeling for healing prayer. As I kneel down, I hope healing will occur for me. When the minister praying with people in my row reaches me, he speaks to me briefly about my need and then anoints and prays with me. He moves on to the next person and after a time I get up and go sit on the front bench, thinking about what just happened. It would be nice to believe I have been healed but what if that is not God's will? What if for some reason God intends for me to have this condition, a kind of "thorn in the flesh," as the Apostle Paul writes.

People are leaving the tabernacle, the healing service is over, and it is time for lunch. I sit a little longer, pondering my anointing, plagued with the thought that God might not want to heal me. When I get up to leave, I notice Brother John Rosenberry near the front of the tabernacle talking with someone; I walk over to join in the conversation. At an opportune time I ask Brother Rosenberry, "What if it isn't God's will that I be healed?" Smiling kindly and with full confidence, Brother Rosenberry says, "It is always God's will to heal." I am surprised and heartened by his answer. So God isn't out to punish me with this condition; his will is that I be healed. How wonderful!

Prayer undergirds everything that goes on at Roxbury. There is a twenty-four-hour prayer chain every day for both men and women. Men and women have their separate tents for prayer. I decide to check out the sign-up sheet; maybe there is an opening that needs to be filled. Sure enough, on Wednesday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. there is an open slot. I write my name on the line next to this time. I will have to be in the prayer tent praying for an hour.

At the appointed time I go to the prayer tent and kneel down at a bench. No one else is there. For a time I pray for all the people who have responsibility for programs and services at Roxbury, I look at the clock—only five minutes has gone by! I pray for the missionaries who were at camp this year, then all the missionaries in Northern and Southern Rhodesia [now Zambia and Zimbabwe], India, and Japan. I know most of them because I have a booklet produced by Women’s Missionary Prayer Circle that has a picture of each missionary and their family, where they are from, where they are serving and for how long. I can’t remember everyone, of course, but I remember many of them. That takes up ten minutes; now what? I pray for the revival services, for the organist and song leader, for the evangelist that he may feel the anointing of the Holy Spirit, for souls to be saved and sanctified. Time drags. I feel obligated to stay in the prayer tent until my hour is up, even though I don’t know what more to pray for. I decide to read my Bible which I have with me. I turn to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Time drags but finally my hour is up. I feel a little guilty that I didn’t pray the whole time. I wonder how the “prayer warriors” do it. Clearly, I’m not one of them, not yet anyway.

Thursday is the day my home church, Antrim Brethren in Christ,⁵ is scheduled to serve lunch and dinner. The meals are all prepared by a staff of dedicated sisters and brothers but the serving is done by local congregations. I hurry to the Dining Hall and take my place in the serving line. I’ll be offering succotash this noon. Our biggest meal is at noon; supper is of lighter fare.

When I have finished serving and have eaten with my fellow servers, I still have some time before the afternoon service. I decide to check out the Christian Light Bookstore, located at the back of the tabernacle. I love browsing this store. There are a variety of items with Bible verses or religious art on them: mottoes, bookmarks, notepads, as well as coin purses, pretty handkerchiefs, and books like *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon. My favorite area is the sacred music section; here there are piano books of hymn

⁵ In 1962, the Brechbill family changed membership from the Montgomery church to Antrim Brethren in Christ Church. Rev. Earl Brechbill had been serving as interim pastor for Montgomery following the untimely death of Rev. J. L. Myers. Once Rev. Paul Hess was called as pastor and settled into the new parsonage at Montgomery, the Brechbill family chose to attend another Brethren in Christ church to allow Rev. Hess to establish his pastoral ministry.

arrangements and books of modern gospel hymns which can be used for solos, duets, trios, quartets, and even choirs. I now sing with the Gospel Tide Hour Choir, in addition to singing duets and in mixed quartets with my sister Faye. It's always good to find new music. Back to the Bible Broadcast has a series of songbooks of favorite gospel songs called Songs You Love and Singspiration has a series of music books too. Finding a new song book for my collection, I purchase it and hurry off to the Berean Center for the afternoon program. This afternoon we are taking a walk in the woods and having a worship service by the brook.

The outdoor service really lives up to my expectations. The walk is beautiful. There are newly created paths in the woods behind the Berean Center. For me the highlight is singing "How Great Thou Art." The second verse is so perfect for our setting:

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

Nancy Parmelee and I look at each other and smile as we take the high ending note on the last verse. I met Nancy at District Chorus last year and now here we are together at Roxbury Camp. Her father is a minister too. It is times like these that are so special, that keep me coming to Roxbury Camp year after year.

My Pakistani Pen Pal

The return address on the air mail envelope reads "Karachi, West Pakistan." How thrilling to get a letter all the way from the other side of the world! I open it excitedly.

"Dear Charlotte," the letter begins. "I was given your address by Judy Bohlen through my friend Shabbir here and she said that we should be friends because 'they are so much alike.' I don't know how she could say

that. But I guess she analyzed my writing and got what information she could from the letters of Shabbir.”

The letter is dated April 17, 1964. I am a senior in high school and my high school friend Judy Bohlen has been writing to Shabbir for some time. She often shares his letters with me and I thought it would be fun to have a pen pal of my own from Pakistan so Judy and Shabbir hooked me up with Sajjad. Now here is his first letter.

He says he is 19½ years old, a Libran as his birthday is October 5, and therefore “just,” and he illustrates his justness with a small scale that is the sign of Libra. His introduction continues as he tells me he is in his third year of college, studying for a B.A. degree, and will graduate in a year. His full name, he says, is Ali Sajjad Abbas but I can call him anything I like. He asks if I have a short name or a pet name because Charlotte is just too long and reminds him of Charlotte Brönte.

With this comment he notes that he has taken English literature in college beyond the required course, reading Victorian fiction and Hardy, Dickens, and Eliot. “Have you read any of their works?” he asks. He says he wouldn’t have touched them if they weren’t required reading. “Why not have works by Henry Miller in the course!” he writes with an exclamation point. I know of Henry Miller’s novels *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*.⁶ They are all the rage now but I am not sure I will ever read them. Still, it is fun to have Sajjad mention them as if I am a sophisticated member of the sexual revolution.

I am not sexually sophisticated, of course. At 17 years of age I am totally repressed, proud of the fact that I haven’t kissed any of my boyfriends! But Sajjad doesn’t know this and I certainly don’t tell him about my being a very chaste “plain girl.” We don’t write about religion.

Sajjad mentions in this first letter that his father is a famous Pakistani writer, a very nice man, and that they are good friends. “Friends” is not a term I would use for either of my parents and I wonder what he means. He

⁶ First published in the 1930s in Paris, Miller’s novels were banned in the US until 1961 when Grove Press published them, leading to a series of obscenity trials that tested American laws on pornography. The trials went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1964 which ruled the books are works of literature.

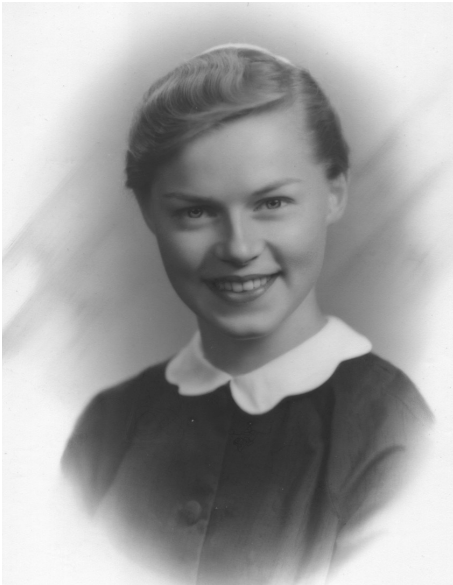
says he has two older sisters and two younger sisters; the two older ones are at the university while the younger two are in secondary school. He says nothing about his mother.

In a postscript to this first letter Sajjad adds, "Have there been any more shotgun marriages?" The word shotgun is not here—he draws a picture of a long barrel gun. Apparently Judy had written to Shabbir about someone at school having to get married because she was pregnant. Locally we call these "shotgun weddings." That idiomatic expression clearly caught his fancy. The little drawing is amusing—he has a sense of humor!

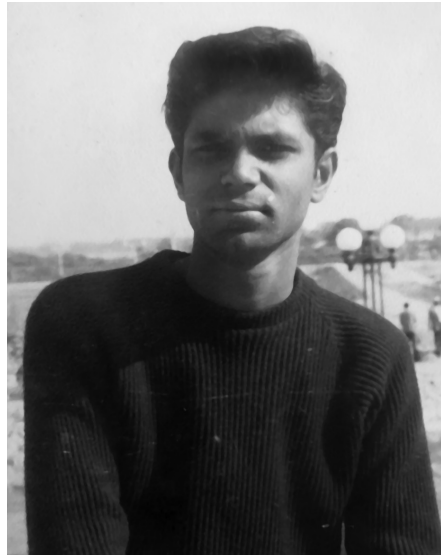
In his next letter Sajjad sends me a photo of himself, printed on quality paper. As I look at his picture, I think him very serious and quite handsome. I proudly show his picture to my family and to my friend Judy.

Sajjad asks me for a picture and I send him my senior high school picture. I wonder if he will notice the tip of my covering, barely visible on the top of my head. I wonder if he would still write to me if he knew I was a "plain girl."

During the summer, Sajjad writes of his sister's wedding. The party was held at the Banquet Hall of Hotel Metropole⁷ and all the distinguished writers and poets were there, as well as Shabbir's father who never attends



Charlotte's senior high school photo.



Charlotte's Pakistani pen pal, Ali Sajjad Abbas.

such parties. His sister's wedding must have been a pretty fancy affair! He closes this letter by mentioning that another sister, Sheherzade, is going to New York in August by way of Canada and he is sending me "a small trinket" that she can carry easily in her purse and send to me from New York.

I wonder what it could be. A small trinket? I am eager to get this present, imagining it will be something exotic; after all it will be from Pakistan! I have seen lovely things from missionaries in India—carvings, pretty boxes. Leora Yoder, now a missionary in India, is a good friend of my mother's; they served together in the Kentucky mission field before Leora went to India. When Leora visited us a few years ago she brought with her Gulabi McCarty, an Indian woman who wore such beautiful saris.

I wait expectantly through the rest of the summer but the present does not come. Perhaps it got lost in the mail. I'm a little disappointed.

But other exciting things are happening. I am off to Messiah College. I'll be rooming with my childhood friend Norma Helfrick who moved to Florida some years ago. I send Sajjad my college address. We will continue writing. In early September a letter comes from Sajjad in which he explains that his sister was not allowed to enter the US from Canada so his present to me is delayed. It is being sent to my home address.

In time, Mother writes that I have a small package from Pakistan awaiting me. When I get home I eagerly tear open the package. Inside are lovely silver filigree, dangling earrings such as I imagine Sajjad's sisters wear when they want to dress up. The earrings would look great with their dark hair piled up on top of their heads.

I too wear my hair up, but not in a fashionable French twist. My hair is in a bun on the back of my head with a nylon-net covering over it. As a plain girl I can never wear these silver earrings. Jewelry is an adornment forbidden in 1 Peter 3:3-4:

Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.

Still I am pleased to have the earrings as a sign of Sajjad's playful regard for me and somewhat wistfully, I wish I could wear them.

I write Sajjad, thanking him for his present; I don't tell him I cannot wear



Sajjad's gift of earrings.

the earrings. When he writes again, Sajjad says he is getting too busy to continue the correspondence but he has a friend who would like to write to me. I am disappointed but, hey, I have another Pakistani pen pal.

Shortly after this new correspondence begins, I receive a letter in which my new pen pal says he is coming to the US or maybe Canada and he hopes to see me. Perhaps we can meet in New York.

I feel uneasy about this letter and show it to a fellow student friend, Premnath Dick. PD, as we call him, is Indian and the adopted son of Brethren in Christ missionaries to India. After reading the letter, PD advises me to stop writing to my Pakistani correspondent. He says young men from India and Pakistan want to come to the US and marry citizens so they can become citizens. For me, marriage is not yet something I want to do and definitely marriage to a Pakistani Muslim is out of the question.

I stop writing and feel guilty that I just drop my pen pal without explanation.

Postscript

Fifty-nine years later, the earrings still lie in my jewelry box. No longer a plain girl, I have no prohibitions against wearing them but, really, they aren't my style.

Re-reading Sajjad's letters brings back memories of a youthful time when my world was circumscribed by innocence and a lack of sophistication. It felt a little risqué to be writing to a young man in a country whose culture and religion were so different from mine. I subconsciously fantasized about being romantically involved with him, rescued from my simple rural life to a place of elegant refinement. Sajjad was my knight in shining armor. I wanted to experience the wider world, to leave behind the simple, plain existence of the Brethren in Christ of Central Pennsylvania. Without being fully conscious of my desires, writing to Sajjad gave me a window into this wider world, just as pouring over the booklet I had of our Brethren in Christ

missionaries in India, Japan, and Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) caught my imagination. I thought perhaps I would become a missionary in a foreign land one day.

In March 2022, as I look through old correspondence that has been saved, I find Sajjad's letters. Re-reading them I am surprised to note that he says his father is a famous short story writer. I hadn't remembered this; given my interest in literature, I am now eager to look into it.

I only have his father's last name, Abbas, but a search on the internet easily turns up Ghulam Abbas who is considered one of the pillars of the Urdu short story tradition. In Wikipedia, Ghulam Abbas has his own page, and he is also listed in the article on Pakistan as one of several writers who represent the golden age of Urdu literature.

Two of his stories, "Overcoat" and "Anandi," earned him international fame and the latter story was the source for a Bollywood film, "Mandi," produced in 1983. On YouTube one can listen to lectures on the short story "Overcoat" and watch a video dramatization of it. Some think it is his best story. Of course, I read it—a story about a very poor young man who wears a well-made camel-colored overcoat with a silk scarf that disguises his poverty and allows him to enjoy an evening out at a mall, being treated like a person of means. He gets hit by a truck while crossing a street, is rushed to the hospital where in the emergency room as he lay dying, his overcoat and scarf are removed, exposing his dirty body and raggedy clothes and revealing his poverty to the raised eyebrows of the staff. I found the story sadly moving.

Ghulam Abbas's stories are not action-based. He is known for writing about human nature and how people respond to stress and emotion. He never makes fun of people for their shortcomings or hypocrisy. His knowledge of human psychology is deep and his observations keen. Irony is his main literary tool. One critic says Abbas spent hours on a single page of writing, culling and culling and cutting and cutting. His goal was a page without one unnecessary word or, for that matter, punctuation mark. Another critic writes that Abbas would "pick tiny things from life and like a painter create stories out of them with minute detail."

While proud of his Muslim tradition, Abbas was not an ardent practitioner. He disliked theocracy of any kind, believing it would eventually lead to political dictatorship and intellectual darkness. Given what has

happened in Pakistan, I would say his insights were prescient.

But is this really Sajjad's father? How can I be sure? Perhaps Abbas is a common Pakistani name. The dates given for Ghulam Abbas's life are 1909-1982. That time frame seems plausible. The biographical information for him states that he died of a heart attack (age 73) and mentions his family—four daughters and a son by his first wife, Zakira, and a son and three daughters by his second wife, Zainab. The article says all of his children but one daughter who lives in Pakistan and founded a school there are residents abroad, mostly in Canada. It concludes by stating that the eldest son, Dr. Ali Sajjad Abbas, M.D. died in 2007 in western Canada of a heart-related ailment.

Ah, there he is, son of the first wife, with his two older and two younger sisters. Yes, Ghulam Abbas is my pen pal's father. I do the math and realize Sajjad was only 63 when he died. I am sad he is no longer alive. Not that I would contact him, but it is awe-inspiring to know I corresponded for a time with the son of a great Urdu writer.

Putting on and Taking off the Covering

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man (1 Cor. 11: 3-9 KJV).

Baptized at the age of nine, I joined Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church in Upton, Pennsylvania (Franklin County) and began wearing a covering to church services. Still in pigtails, my covering was small, made of white nylon net and worn on the back of my head, secured with straight pins on the sides. I was excited to be wearing a covering. It demonstrated

that I was a grown-up part of my religious community of Plain People.

In 1956, most women who were members of the Montgomery church wore coverings. As a girl became a young woman, it was something of a rite of passage to change her hair style and begin wearing her hair up in a bun with a covering over it, like the adult women did.

But the Brethren in Christ Church was changing, slowly becoming more accommodating to the culture around it in matters of dress. Most men no longer wore plain coats but had yet to begin wearing ties with their suits; most women no longer wore cape dresses or strings on their coverings but still wore coverings and dressed modestly—no sleeveless dresses, no pants or shorts.

My two older sisters began wearing their hair up under a covering in ninth grade, wearing their coverings to school as well as church. I equivocated. In ninth grade I maintained my long hair, gathering it in a barrette at the back of my neck (too old now for pigtails). But I still only wore my covering to church. There were some discussions at home about my choice in this matter but I was told it had to be my decision.

Leola, my oldest sister, had graduated from high school in 1958 and was attending Messiah College. Many of the women students no longer wore coverings, except to church, and more modern hair styles were appearing. Leola was thinking of doing the same until her boyfriend at Messiah told her their relationship would have to end if she stopped wearing a covering. She said if it meant that much to him, she would continue wearing a covering, and she did.

When Leola brought her boyfriend home to meet the family, I was enthralled. He was tall with blonde good looks and had a great sense of humor. He sang bass in the Messiah College male quartet, along with my third cousin Stan Hoke. That spring when I went to a program at Hollowell Brethren in Christ Church where the male quartet sang, I was again quite taken with my sister's boyfriend.

As I got to know him better, I enjoyed our long talks about all sorts of things, including the biblical mandate that women should wear coverings. When he and my sister married in the summer of 1961, they insisted that all female members of the wedding party—my sister Faye, a college friend of Leola's who no longer wore a covering, and I—wear coverings. There was considerable discussion about whether Leola's bridal veil could suffice

as a covering; notably the veil which fell well below her shoulders covered her head much more than a traditional covering. In the end, Leola and her fiancé agreed that she would wear a covering under her veil, lest anyone should think she was discontinuing the practice.

By the fall of that year, influenced no doubt by my father and my brother-in-law, I decided it was time to follow the custom in my family and put my hair up in a bun under a covering. If I wasn't going to get my hair cut in a modern style, which was not seriously imaginable, I needed to do something with my hair that was more suitable for my age. Also influencing this decision were my experiences attending Roxbury Holiness Camp every summer for the previous five years. The young women I met at Roxbury Camp who were saved and sanctified wore their hair up; certainly the older women did. There was even a covering store in the back of the tabernacle so women who did not wear a covering could get one right there. It was a relief to have finally made this commitment to my community of Plain People.

In the spring of my junior year in high school, Richard Besecker, the director of the Glee Club who was also my voice teacher, told me he was thinking of putting on the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, "The Mikado." Four years before he had directed the "The Pirates of Penzance" to much acclaim and he thought it was time to do another operetta. As the school's lead soprano soloist, I would be the natural selection for Yum Yum, the leading female role. He wondered if I would be willing to play the role without wearing my covering.

I was stricken. How could I do that? I excelled at singing; it was the one thing I could do in the broader community as a "plain girl." Wearing a covering had never been an issue until now. I said I would have to talk it over with my parents.

The discussion at home was difficult. My parents were proud of my musical talents and achievements and wanted me to be able to accept the part, but my covering was a witness to the community of my commitment to Christ. How could I not wear it at all times? They suggested perhaps my costume would require something on my head—perhaps a hat or a scarf or cloak—and I could wear my covering under it.

At my next voice lesson I asked Mr. B (as we fondly called him) about Yum Yum's costume and what, if anything, she wore on her head. It turned out that traditionally there would be flowers in her hair, not much of a cover

for a covering. Set in Japan, the operetta needed to reflect that culture; coverings of course were not part of it.

In the end Mr. B decided not to put on the operetta and chose instead to host District Chorus. I tried out for it and “made it,” as I had the previous three years, achieving the rank of #1 in the second soprano section.

Meanwhile, the Plain People were continuing to become less plain. None of my girlfriends at church wore their hair up under a covering; in fact, none of them wore a covering except to church. Most had “worldly” hairdos, hair cut short and permed! Even my sister Faye who was now in nursing school had altered her hair style. While she still wore a small covering in church with her hair in a bun at the nape of her neck, on the hospital floor her hair was usually in a French twist, no covering at all!

The boys I dated in high school were all from Brethren in Christ churches in the area; no “worldly” guy would date a “plain” girl. That was mostly all right with me; I expected I would meet a first-rate Brethren in Christ boy when I got to Messiah College.

Arriving at Messiah College in the fall of 1964, I found college to be all I had hoped it would be as far as academic and extra-curricular interests were concerned. I auditioned for Choral Society, became part of a college trio with Doris Moyer and Lynda Osburn, and signed up for voice lessons. During an extended weekend that first year at Messiah, our trio, along with some male students who would be speakers, was sent to present programs at Brethren in Christ churches throughout southern Ontario. I heard that my trio was specifically chosen because Doris and I both wore coverings and this would go over well with conservative churches in the area.

For the first two years at Messiah my roommate was Norma Helfrick, a childhood friend from the Montgomery Brethren in Christ Church whose father like mine had been part of the ministerial team there, along with the senior pastor, Bishop J. L. Myers. Norma had moved to Florida before we entered high school and we had stayed in touch, arranging to room together at Messiah. Norma, like me, still wore a covering but her hair was in a more modern style.

I was one of the few women who wore my hair up in a bun under a covering. The girls in my class who were English majors like me all had modern hair styles and put on chapel veils for church services. This was true for most female students at the college. Even female faculty members

BRECHBILL: A Brethren in Christ Childhood



The Brechbill family, 1964. Standing left to right: Charlotte, J. Albert, Leola, Faye. Seated: Ellen and Earl.

and wives of male faculty members, for the most part, wore more modern hair styles and chapel veils or hats to church services. I wondered about this—how did they get around the biblical mandate that women should have their heads covered when they prayed? After all, the scriptures say one should pray without ceasing, not just in church. I wished I could find a way around the scriptures and had some long but inconclusive discussions with fellow students Lucille Sider and Bob Stoner when on our Choral Society spring tour.

As for finding a suitable boyfriend at college, none of the boys I found interesting asked me out. I had male escorts to important functions like the music lectures series and the spring banquet but I didn't date anyone. I was pretty sure this was because I was a "plain girl." Not even Brethren in Christ boys at college wanted a girlfriend who was "plain."

In my sophomore year, Lois Engle, a fellow English major, chose "A



Photo from the 1966 Clarion (Messiah College yearbook) showing two different styles of coverings. Left to right: Wanda Wright, Norma Helfrick (Mateer), Mary Walters (Ebersole), and Charlotte.

Man for All Seasons,” which had had a successful Broadway run in the early 1960s, for the Platform Arts spring production. In developing her cast, she attempted to recruit me to play the part of Lady Margaret, Thomas More’s daughter. She said I would need to wear my hair down for the play (no covering), in the fashion of sixteenth-century girls. She brought to my dorm room the dresses I would need to wear. I took down my hair and tried them on. Enthusiastically Lois declared that I really looked the part; with rising excitement I agreed to take on the role.

Acting my part in the play felt liberating. I enjoyed for a time not being a plain girl. I began to contemplate doing the unthinkable—discontinuing wearing my hair in a bun under a covering. I had no biblical rationale for taking this step; discussions I had had with fellow students had been quite unsatisfactory. But there were many Christian women at Messiah College who did not wear coverings. How they finessed this I didn’t know. When I pointed out these facts in discussions with my father, he said I would be held accountable for “the light I had been given.” But hadn’t these Brethren

in Christ faculty women and fellow students also been given this light? I had no answers but I was pretty sure there must be some acceptable biblical interpretation; I just didn't know what it was. Rebelliously I thought to myself, "I don't care if I burn in hell, I'm not going to wear a covering anymore." I had reached my limit; I was no longer willing to sacrifice my social life to be "a plain girl."

That summer I asked my sister-in-law who was a beautician to cut my hair to shoulder length. I bought curlers and wore my hair in a pageboy style. I bought a chapel veil. Working in a local grocery store in my hometown of Greencastle, Pennsylvania that summer and living at home, I regularly faced my father's unhappiness with my decision. He reported that people in the community who were not Plain People were disappointed to see my transition. He often added to his mealtime prayers of thankfulness for the food a prayer that I would see the error of my ways.

In late summer, Leola and her husband visited us for a few days. They now had two little ones that I adored. My brother-in-law was very unhappy with the choice I had made and told me we could no longer have the close relationship we had enjoyed if I persisted. Before he and my sister left, he asked if he could pray with me. My heart was not open to the possibility of change but I said yes. As we knelt in the living room and my brother-in-law prayed, I steeled myself against any thought of rescinding my decision. When we rose from prayer, I was in tears; not because I was sorry about not wearing a covering anymore but because I was filled with grief, knowing a relationship I valued and enjoyed was ending.

In spite of the opposition of my father and brother-in-law to my no longer wearing a covering, I was relieved to have finally taken this step. I didn't understand how to get around the scripture in 1 Corinthians 11 but I trusted God that somehow it would be all right. And yes, that next year at Messiah College, I had all the dates I wanted.

What Are the Things That Tell You Who You Are?

Reflections on Identity

"You'll have to come to the sale," my mother said when I phoned her. "There's going to be a big sale; perhaps you'll want something," she said, sounding a bit wistful. I felt impatient. I didn't want to take a weekend and

drive all the way from Connecticut to western Pennsylvania for a public sale. My aunts, my mother's younger sisters, were selling everything and moving to Messiah Village (now Messiah Lifeways), a retirement community in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. They had never married and still lived in the house in Martinsburg to which my grandparents Kanode had moved in 1932 when they sold their farm. I already had a number of things that had been passed on to me from my grandmother and great grandmother. I didn't really need anything more. Still, this was the third time mother had mentioned this sale. She really wanted me there.

I recalled my recent visit to my parents' home in Greencastle, Pennsylvania the month before. Mother had taken me into her bedroom and opened up the blue metal trunk with the brass fittings that sat at the foot of her bed. The trunk had been purchased in Saskatchewan when my parents were serving the North Star Mission; I had always admired it. She carefully took out three quilts and one by one spread them open for me to see. Each pattern was quite different; one was appliqued and the needlework was very fine. "One of these quilts will be yours one day," she said. They had been made by my great grandmother Ellen Feather, after whom my mother was named. Mother handled these quilts with loving care, almost reverence. "I have one for each of my daughters," she said with satisfaction, rubbing her hand over one to smooth it out. "They've hardly been used."

Then she took from the trunk two boxes and a



Charlotte in 2022.

bundled blanket. The boxes each contained a doll. She handled them gently. The first was a very dainty young lady with a pink and beige flowered dress trimmed in lace with beige underskirts and pantaloons and charming pink slippers. Her face was hand painted porcelain and she wore a lace bonnet over her fine, light brown hair. The second was a larger doll, all porcelain with a white face and dark black wavy hair, wearing a navy velvet cape over a white cotton lace dress. “I didn’t play with these dolls much,” Mother said. “They were too fragile.” Then she opened the bundled blanket and held a third doll. This one had medium brown hair which had obviously been combed too much. She wore simple handmade clothes of 1915 vintage. “I liked this one,” Mother said, “because she sleeps. See, her eyes open and shut. I played with this one.” She fussed over the dolls for a few minutes, then carefully re-wrapped the bundle and closed the boxes, placing them all in the trunk. “Someday each of my daughters will get one of these dolls,” she said.

We looked at other things in the trunk: Mother’s wedding dress and shoes, a blue sailor suit Mother had made for my brother when he was three, three matching yellow nylon crinkle dresses she had made for each of her daughters to wear to our Uncle Joe’s wedding in 1952, some towels that she had crocheted around the edges. At that visit, Mother gave me a box of mementos: a composition book she had prepared in grade school on birds of the area, old postcards, a pin cushion, my Aunt Elda’s high school graduation announcement of 1936, a calendar from 1939 (the year my parents were married), my baby book, letters I’d written Mother years ago, my graduation announcements from high school and college, programs from school concerts I’d been in—all carefully kept through the years. These things contained stories to reminisce about, coming to know my mother through them, and thus discovering who I am.

Something about these memories told me I should go to my aunts’ sale. After all, the house in which my parents were married, the place my mother at age 87 still called “home,” was being cleared out. The house and the apple orchard behind it had already been sold. Now all those things that fill a house and make it home were going as well. I told mother I would be there.

Friday, August 23, 1996 found my mother; her sisters, Aunt Leora and Aunt Elda; and her daughters, Leola, Faye, and me sitting in a tent at a public

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auction in the backyard of my aunts' home. My brother and his family were also there. There was excitement in the air. A large crowd had gathered. Many dealers from Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia were there.

The ritual began. "What am I bid? Who'll give me \$10 . . . 10, 10, 10, all right 5? I've got \$5 now, who'll give me 8, I got 8, who'll give me 10. . . ?" The auctioneer's sing-song voice took up the challenge. Everything had to be sold. My aunts had never gotten rid of anything. The sale, which began Friday afternoon, would continue through Saturday.

Reflecting on the meaning of identity, I have a new appreciation for what happened on that August weekend in 1996. The family gathered to be together, to go through this rite of passage together. It was preparation for



The Kanode-Brechbill famiy in the apple orchard in earlier days. Seated: Cora Feather Kanode, holding great grandchild Perri Ann Brechbill. Front row, left to right: Charlotte, Ellen Brechbill, Mary Louise Brechbill, J. Albert Brechbill, holding daughter Brenda. Back row, left to right: John Kanode, Leora Kanode, Faye Brechbill, Elda Kanode. Photo taken by Earl Brechbill.

a “crossing over” from this life to the next. My aunts, then seventy-seven and eighty-four, were simplifying their lives, getting ready for their final passage. My mother, the oldest of her family, wanted us all to be together one more time to celebrate who we are and from where we have come. She especially wanted her daughters around her. The home is a woman’s domain and she wanted her daughters’ love and support as the home of her youth was dismantled. She wanted us to walk through the rooms one more time and hear the stories of her wedding there in the front parlor and the delicious chicken dinner served in the dining room afterward on Grandma’s china. She wanted to walk with us in the apple orchard and recall the family pictures we always took in the spring when the apple trees were in bloom and to remember the superb apples Grandpa harvested each fall. It was her way of saying to her daughters, “Never forget who we are and where we come from.”

The second day of the auction, five of the best quilts my great grandmother had made were hung on a line by the chicken house for viewing before being sold. Each of us daughters had a least one or two quilts that Great Grandma Feather had made and we knew Mother had the quilts in her trunk that she would pass on to us. Yet the thought of strangers buying these exquisite quilts and talking about the quaint plain folks who had made them was difficult to bear. People walked up to them and inspected them carefully, commenting on the high quality of the stitching. I imagined my great grandmother, bent over her quilting frame, making these quilts for her family. I never knew Grandma Feather; she died the year I was born. These quilts, the elegant red basket one and the others so colorful, so carefully pieced together and finely quilted by hand, were what I knew of her.

Great Grandma Feather also made rag rugs. She had made one for her daughter Cora, my mother’s mother, that had Grandma’s name prominently worked into it. It also had the date August 1922; it had been made in celebration of my grandparent’s purchase of their own farm. When this rug came up for sale, Mother, sitting in the front row, began to bid. We daughters urged her on, beseeching her not to give up if she really wanted it. When she got it, a general cheer went up from the family section.

There were many things sold that day. Our family history, told in ball jars and bedding, dishes and farm sale bills, furniture and garden tools,

passed before our eyes. Three generations of things bought or handmade and saved over the years were disposed of—some to family members, much to strangers. These things being sold at public sale—which at one time I had thought of as lovely, useful, outdated or junk—the things in my mother’s trunk and the things in my own memento box all represent the Stern-Feather-Kanode family. They carry family traditions and family stories. They speak to me of who I am as a “Plain Girl,” coming from a people with a simple, rural tradition.

Stories are another key to maintaining a sense of self. Stories told again and again pass on family culture and traditions. My father was the storyteller of our family. Every Sunday after dinner he would push his dessert plate away from the edge of the table, lean forward with hands clasped, elbows on the table and begin to regale us with tales of his courtship of Mother when she was a home missionary in Kentucky, of their ministry in the far north of Saskatchewan, of us children when we were small and said or did amusing things. He told stories of his boyhood living on a farm in Indiana and of his closeness to his grandfather John Brechbill. He’d tell of his family’s move east to Pennsylvania so his father, Grandpa Albert Brechbill, could teach at the nascent Messiah Bible College (now Messiah University) and of his Great Aunt Frances Davidson’s living with the family for a time after she returned from the African mission field. Sunday story time was a time I loved, a time to absorb who I was as an individual and who we were as a family.

For people of the Brethren in Christ, religion provides one of the strongest connections to identity. My extended family has taken different roads spiritually and our theologies vary. Discussions about religion seldom take place at family gatherings; instead we remember ourselves as a family by telling stories and singing hymns of old. For me it was the high point of family reunions for many years to come together around the piano and sing hymns for two or three hours, hymns that can be found in the 1935 Brethren in Christ hymnal, *Spiritual Songs & Hymns*, known to many as the “Brown Hymnal.” As the numbers of Brethren in Christ in my extended family have dwindled and members of my parent’s generation have died, this hymn-singing tradition is slipping away. My extended family now includes

United Methodists, Evangelical Lutherans, Episcopalians, Missouri Synod Lutherans, Mennonites, independent Baptists, Holiness churches, agnostics and atheists, Quakers, and my own denomination, the United Church of Christ. We no longer have a common hymnody.

What are the things that tell you who you are? The importance of identity cannot be overestimated. Having a sense of identity, a sense of self, enables one to be comfortable with oneself and thus able to value the other. Losing touch with one's roots diminishes a person and gives rise to bigotry and racism. Looked at in this light, identity is necessary to salvation, for it is only as we come to know ourselves that we can be whole. The lived experience of being "saved" is the experience of knowing our individual location in the human family and knowing ourselves as a people constituted and loved by God, joined together in God's family.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:10).

Our identity as God's beloved children is our ultimate identity—the identity that won't let us down, the identity that never fails us.

At the end of the sale, Mother, her sisters, daughters and son took one last walk through the house. The rooms were bare now. The familiar pictures on the walls were gone. The large oak sideboard that always held the sitting hen candy dish with pink peppermints was gone. Only the sturdy, upright piano remained in the front parlor, waiting for the many hands required to move it. We gathered on the front porch. "We need a picture," someone said. "We won't be here together again ever." We arranged ourselves on the front steps, with Mother in the center.

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The Kanode-Brechbill family on the front steps after the sale. Front row, left to right: Elda Kanode, Ellen Kanode Brechbill (Charlotte's mother), Leora Kanode. Back row, from left to right: J. Albert Brechbill, Leola Brechbill Herr, Faye Brechbill Shelly, Charlotte Brechbill White.