

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LIFE?
AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITINGS

Joyce Herrmann



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EDITED BY WILL J. HERRMANN

What Makes a Good Life?: An Anthology of Writings

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*To the five grandsons of Joyce Herrmann
May they know their grandmother better*

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Foreward

Lorena Joyce Herrmann was the New Member Chair for Kansas Authors Club when I joined as a member in 2001. We were both members of District 7, and she was the welcoming voice I needed as a young mother and young writer. I had the pleasure of working closely with Joyce when she served as secretary for our district in 2003 and I served as treasurer. We also ran the bookroom together at the convention in Hutchinson that year. It was a pleasure to work with someone who was so conscientious and thoughtful about a job well done.

As a state officer of the club—*the* welcoming committee of one, in fact—Joyce was presented with a service award to Kansas Authors Club in 2002. Her example inspired me to continue with the club and to contribute my own time to the organization. I will have completed more than fifteen years on the state board at this writing. Though my membership has moved from District 7, to District 1, to District 2 (where I reside now), I have stayed in contact with Joyce over the years, once via attendance at annual conventions and also through letters exchanged each holiday season. Writers make the best pen pals, and the letters from Joyce were wonderful. I loved receiving her annual note to family, and also enjoyed her personal responses to my own notes and musings.

I was absolutely delighted to hear that Joyce's grandson was putting together a collection of her writings. Many of these pieces I had read before as she shared them in letters we exchanged over the years. As a western Kansas native, I have always appreciated and found kinship in Joyce's words. I read them now with a sense of coming home. This collection is a treasure, capturing the wit and wisdom of an amazing woman.

Tracy Million Simmons

Author of *Tiger Hunting, a Novel; A Life in Progress and Other Short Stories*, and publisher, Meadowlark Press, Emporia, Kansas

Formation

What Makes a Good Life?

Do good ancestors help?

My paternal grandparents came to Kansas before it became a state in 1861 and were proud to help it remain free of slavery. There was no talk about difficulties but except the story of a night when an Indian or Border Ruffian looked in their window, but left quietly while they continued family devotions with Bible reading and prayer.

For better farming they moved west near Bunker Hill before 1873 living in a dugout when my father was born. Again I heard only that my grandmother served as a midwife and shared homeopathic medicines with other new settlers. For many years she played a reed melodian – a one keyboard pump organ which was easily moved in the back of a wagon – for church services wherever they were held.

When we asked my father about his childhood, his standard story was about the time when he and his older brother camped out along the banks of the Smoky Hill River catching fish, and watching an owl go in and out of a cave on the river bank.

Before 1900 the family moved to Abilene and my father had the honor of ringing the church bell at midnight to welcome the new century. After he died, I found among his

few keepsakes a program verifying that he had taken a train from Abilene to Lindsborg to hear a concert by a woman vocalist. While he always encouraged musical education for my sister and myself, I was surprised that he'd been a concert attendee so many years earlier.

Does mastering adversity help?

My maternal grandparents came to Kansas later and lived long enough that I heard more about them. My grandfather helped haul supplies to build the Capitol in Topeka and later did odd jobs in the Valley Falls and Atchison areas.

My grandmother proved that illness and hard times need not ruin one's outlook. At 13 she contracted red measles which left her partially deaf for life. Because of her mother's serious illness, she became chief cook and caretaker of her younger siblings, but she accepted that as a normal activity. Later when two of her own 12 children died before age 2, she accepted that as God's will while raising the others to become good adults.

Because she lived to be 94, her many grandchildren and great grandchildren were aware of her kindness and boundless love, as well as her expectation that we should obey her and behave properly without being reminded.

We all knew that Grandma Hodson read her Bible every night before going to bed, and that she attended church every Sunday if at all possible. When radios became common, she tuned in each week to hear "The Lutheran Hour", especially if the family where she was visiting did not attend church.

Does faith in God help?

From all my ancestors as well as from my parents, I learned that their calmness in a time of trouble or want was definitely the result of a deep faith in God, a lifelong familiarity with the entire Bible, and an understanding of its clear examples of how to handle any problem in life. From

them I learned that God does take care of His followers. I am very thankful to Him for placing me in obscure, unpretentious surroundings where I could absorb their attitudes and beliefs which have since made it possible for me to handle illnesses, deaths, adversity, and minor successes as they occur in the course of everyday life.

I know that whatever happens in the future will be more interesting than the past.

Memories of a Day of Infamy

What was I doing on December 7, 1941, and how did I hear about the bombing of Pearl Harbor? In the middle of the U. S. attending an Honor Band Camp at Emporia State Teacher's College (the name changed later), we high school students never expected what was about to change our lives.

Ten or twelve of the best students from Atchison High School had been chosen by our band and orchestra director, William G. Altimari, to join others selected from many Kansas schools to rehearse for two or three days under nationally famous conductors culminating in a concert in the Emporia Civic Auditorium at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday afternoon for parents and the public.

It was a wonderful experience musically that was enhanced socially by having an Atchison graduate, Charles Byers, as one of the college mentors during sectional rehearsals. Evening entertainment by a college dance band provided welcome relaxation.

At the Sunday concert each student wore the band uniform of his school and all honor groups were in various sections of the floor, so we could see and hear each group as it performed.

About half way through the program, I noticed a commotion in one of the entry ways and recognized “Prof” Altamari as part of the group. During a break between numbers by another group, he came over to our band and asked my flute player classmate, Alice Roper, to come outside with him – an unheard of interruption from “Prof”, but we knew better than to ask questions then.

When she did not return for the rest of the concert, we thought maybe she’d gotten sick. After all groups had finished we finally heard news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. That was interesting but not until we returned to our rooms a block away to change from band uniforms into traveling clothes did we realize the full impact of that day.

Alice was doubled over crying and mumbling something about her brother being in danger because he was in the army in the Philippines. Efforts to assure her that Pearl Harbor was far from the Philippines only slightly calmed her. When all our clothes were back in suitcases ready for the trip home, we saw “Prof” again. He assigned the Atchison students into two separate cars with 6 or 7 in each in the days before mandatory seat belts.

Out of Alice’s hearing those in our car were ordered not to turn on the car radio, not to talk about the news, and to keep her mind on other things. The drive from Emporia to Topeka where we stopped at a restaurant for supper seemed terribly long, but we did as instructed.

Once inside it was harder to avoid the forbidden question, “What’s happening now?” but “Prof” kept us under control with a simple statement that not much was known yet. The best information came while alone in the rest room with someone who’d been in the other car listening to updates on the radio.

The real news came on Monday morning about 11:00 a.m. CST when our journalism class had the then rare privi-

lege of listening to a small radio brought in by our teacher so we could listen to President Roosevelt's live speech declaring war on Japan including the famous words "Day of Infamy". His rich, solemn voice held the entire room silent and spellbound throughout the entire speech.

Class discussion after its conclusion was lively, speculative, and woefully unaware of the events to follow. Some boys volunteered immediately and did not graduate with us, others waited until they were drafted, and some chose the opportunity to earn a college degree before doing their compulsory service.

War efforts even touched such remote towns as historic Atchison when high school students were allowed a day off to go out to neighboring farms and help pile scrap metal into trucks for recycling into weapons. During that winter we adapted to mandatory Daylight Savings Time as we walked to school under street lights in the morning. Gasoline rationing caused lots of walking – even more than commonly done by all. Food rationing caused less sugar for baking. Silk hose were mended carefully for special occasions until the eventual development of nylon hose.

All those inconveniences seemed inconsequential when I began my freshman year in college and discovered there were only six boys still attending the small liberal arts College of Emporia – Presbyterian related, not the state school which had hosted us on Pearl Harbor Day. Upper class girls talked all the time about their boyfriends who'd left college to join the Army or Navy and everyone in the dorm heard when one received a V-mail letter. At compulsory chapel services we often sang the Navy Hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save".

Since the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad ran frequent trains through Emporia, I traveled it back and forth all during the war years. Often I had to sit on my suitcase

in a cramped space because so many soldiers were being transferred back and forth by train. Conversations were always interesting, but remained impersonal and as brief as the time between stops.

The follow up to that “Day of Infamy” has never ended. On the day of President Roosevelt’s death, Dr. Francis Flournoy, the C. of E. history professor who had worked in Washington D.C. earlier, talked to students gathered in the dorm lobby after supper. He assured us that the world would continue to operate well, and that Harry Truman would make a good president in spite of his reputation in Kansas City politics.

Other memories involve Atchison reactions on V. J. Day, news of the loss of Glenn Miller in a flight over Europe and how his music recalls war memories 60 years later. There is even a direct correlation between a funeral at Larned, Kansas, in 2005 and my experience in Emporia on Pearl Harbor Day.

Alice Roper’s terror that afternoon was a true premonition of the fate of her brother because Charles Eugene Roper later was forced into the Bataan Death March and died before reaching a prison camp in Japan. After the war his body was returned to Atchison for burial, but that’s only the beginning of the story.

Another brother, Bueford Roper, was an excellent trumpet player, and became a band director at several Kansas schools. After retiring from teaching, Bueford opened a music store in Larned in the 1960’s and 1970’s. My children remember that Kinsley High School was one of many schools in the area that were on his regular route to service band instruments and provide supplies such as new reeds.

When I learned that Bueford’s funeral this summer would be held in Larned, I drove over hoping to see my former classmate Alice for a few minutes. During the memo-

rial service the presiding minister read a verse marked by Charles in the Bible he had taken with him into the Army.

Afterwards, while visiting with Alice, her remaining brother, Dick, and sister Pat, I saw that well-traveled Bible. Not the ordinary pocket size Bible distributed by the Gideon Society, this was a generous 5" x 7" by 2" or larger. The frayed leather cover still protected the contents. On the fly leaf in bold, very legible cursive writing was the name: Lt. Charles E. Roper, followed by his army address. When I asked, "How did it survive the war?" the family told me this amazing story.

Knowing he was about to be captured, Charles gave the Bible to his sergeant for safe keeping. Later the sergeant passed it on to another soldier before he too became a captive. Similar transfers continued throughout the war until the Bible finally came back to the U.S. in custody of a soldier from New England who never heard of Atchison.

In the days before computer generated yellow labels saying "Addressee Unknown", that custodial soldier contacted the Atchison Post Office for assistance in finding relatives of the original owner. While it is a large town, postal employees then were very helpful and did learn of living relatives who were overjoyed to have it back and have cherished it ever since.

To me, the respect shown that Bible and the widespread belief in its teachings explain the attitudes that led to the development of what is now called "The Greatest Generation". A common wartime expression was "There are no atheists in fox holes".

Yes, we remember Pearl Harbor, we survived the Great Depression before experiencing World War II, and we've seen many changes since. Only with God's help can we remain optimistic about the future.

Written for the *Edwards County Sentinel* on December 2, 2005.

When Not to Play Bach

Because I'd "goofed off" a little during the second semester, I needed to take classes during June and July to finish some term papers and to play my graduate organ recital which took the place of a normal thesis.

I had already borrowed money for tuition, so it was with great relief that I heard about a rent-free scholarship apartment in an off-campus 12 unit building that usually rented to older adults. One of the current scholarship holders was leaving, so I applied to fill her spot during the summer and was accepted.

While I already knew the girl with whom I'd be sharing the scholarship unit, I was happy to learn that she shared my tastes in classical music even though she was working for a Master's in Biology. Many days I'd return from class to hear the record player going full blast with a complete opera performed by top vocalists. My roommate was equally happy to listen to my orchestra, piano, and organ recordings. Music by the great Johann Sebastian Bach was a favorite for both of us.

We seldom saw any of the other building occupants, but we did know that our next door neighbor was the world-famous British opera star who came to teach voice at the University of Oklahoma after retiring from active solo work. She and I often met in the backyard on Saturday morning while hanging out laundry on the shared clotheslines.

During the previous semester, while accompanying a student in her senior voice recital, I developed the highest respect for Eva Turner's skill as a voice teacher. Even more thrilling was the night the University Orchestra accompanied Miss Turner in some of her most famous opera arias. The packed auditorium remained almost breathless as she demonstrated superb mastery of the great classics. The au-

dience erupted into a resounding, heartfelt standing ovation as she finished.

There were no such concerts during the summer session, but one Sunday night my friend and I decided to attend a non-university concert as a relief from studies. Hearing average musicians playing music we knew reminded both of us how much we missed playing in the student orchestras we'd known in high school.

Quite often my roommate had commented how much fun she'd had playing the Bach "Double Concerto for Two Violins" with a classmate. As an organ major I played lots of Bach, and was concentrating on the "Fantasy and Fugue in g minor" as a major work on my graduate recital.

In fact my teachers had all said, "When in doubt, play something by Bach."

Even though my roommate was a much better violinist than I was, and I'd never heard or attempted to play that "Concerto", I did enjoy the challenge of sight-reading something new, so that night I let her talk me into getting out my instrument and joining her in a new Bach experience, even if it was 11:00 p.m.

After setting up a music rack, tuning both violins, and deciding that I would attempt the easier second violin part, we launched into a hearty, if very imperfect, rendition. Before we reached the second page, we were interrupted by a loud knock on the door.

As we admitted our next door neighbor, we heard a firm British voice ask, "My deahs, do you know what time it is?"

We nodded a sheepish affirmation.

She continued, "I always like the music of Bach, but not when I'm trying to sleep at midnight." As she'd commanded her audiences, Eva Turner's every word at any time was polite but firm and not to be questioned.

We stammered some sort of feeble apology as she

turned, walked back to her own apartment, and loudly shut her door.

Hardly daring to say anything to each other, we meekly put our instruments back in their cases, folded the music rack, put everything back in the closet, and never again attempted to play Bach's marvelous "Concerto".

Fortunately at my graduate recital, the Bach "Fantasy and Fugue" went perfectly and Miss Turner was extremely generous in her praise, even joining with my friends at the nice reception afterwards in the scholarship apartment, but she did teach me "When Not to Play Bach !"

The English Teacher We Made Fun Of

At 8:00 a.m. on Monday morning I did not want to read or talk about literature assigned from the heaviest text book on my desk, but for all college freshmen in 1943, Composition 101 was a required course And what did this teacher mean when she said to "write a precis" of what we'd just read? Looking at her face did not help. She was very short, had white hair, seemed very old, was very thin, and almost bird-like.

Our morning stupor vanished when she rose to talk to us. She stood on one spindly leg, and then twisted the other leg around it to rest her free foot on the edge of the wastebasket next to her desk. Would she fall? Would she knock the wastebasket over? How long could she maintain that position? Is it surprising that I remember little about what she was saying?

We showed proper respect for her status as professor while in class and in the halls, but away from her we made bad jokes about her strange behaviors. Perhaps most cruel was our nickname of "Miss Shaky" in reference to an ob-

vicious tremor which required use of both hands to steady a book as she read from it.

In those years all boarding students and a few faculty members ate three meals a day in the basement of the girls' dorm with eight people in assigned seats at each round table. As a sophomore I agreed to wait tables as payment for my room and board, so when it was my turn to serve the faculty table, I learned another of "Shaky's" peculiarities. The other teachers took full cups of coffee and usually seconds or thirds, but "Shaky" would ask for "just one inch" with her dessert. It took only one or two reprimands to realize that she really meant "only one inch". (Now that I'm a senior citizen I finally understand her enjoyment of coffee and the need to limit caffeine.)

That sophomore year I received an ordinary envelope from "Shaky" with a brief note saying, "The enclosed gift is from an anonymous person to help with your education. You may give your thank you note to me and I will pass it on." Inside were four one dollar bills – a large amount during WWII. I desperately needed some new music for my piano and organ lessons, so my thank you explained what pieces I would purchase. (I still wonder who was the anonymous donor!)

Later that year with several friends I planned to see a Shakespearean play in Topeka starring famous actor John Gielgud. The night before our jaunt, "Shaky" asked me to stop by her off-campus apartment to get something. I was speechless when she loaned me a tiny pair of gold opera glasses with gorgeous inlays of mother of pearl. Her comment was, "You'll be able to see the stage better with these." I hope I mumbled an appropriate "thank you" as I took the very valuable glasses in their protective case.

What prompted such generosity and thoughtfulness by a faculty member? The only reason I knew was that dur-

ing the previous year she'd seen my difficulty in reading assignments before a local Optometrist prescribed totally different lenses which made reading easier than I'd ever known it could be.

Gradually most of us became more respectful even as we wondered if "Shaky" would blow away in strong Kansas winds, but it was in my junior year that this teacher finally gained my utmost respect.

The student who played school songs for assemblies and pep rallies had graduated with no one to replace her. My piano teacher set up a required meeting of four girls who had enough skill to do the songs, but none of us would attempt to play them. We weren't even sure we knew the tunes, and none of us played by ear.

When we arrived at the meeting, we were amazed to see "Shaky" there, and were totally flabbergasted when she sat down at the piano and played all the school songs without any music. Where did she learn them? How can she control her shaky hands well enough to play the piano? Does she actually know anything besides English?

Worst of all were her words as she stared directly at me, "If I can play these, so can you, if you're willing to learn from me."

What could I say, but "I'll try"?

My piano teacher obviously set me up, as none of the others present were willing to try, but she also knew me better than I realized. After only a few sessions under "Shaky's" guidance, I could play all the songs. More importantly I learned that appearances can be deceiving and that one must respect another person without knowing why.

Later my piano teacher explained that "Miss Miller" trained to be a concert pianist before World War I. When her fiancé was killed in action during that war, the shock and sorrow devastated her so severely that she was unable to

pursue her musical career and she eventually turned to the profession of an English Teacher. Her example still guides me today.

Haiku Menu

Crystal clear water,
No ice, no lemon, no germs –
God's best thirst quencher.

Vegetable platter:
Radish, beans, tomato, corn –
Vitamins galore.

Mashed potato hills,
Brown gravy trickling onto
Rimless Corelle plate.

Cranberry sauce on
Carefully sliced turkey breast –
Thanksgiving entrée.

Golden pumpkin pie
Topped with genuine whipped cream –
Delicious dessert.

Jonathan apple,
Firm and tangy, red and white –
Fall's crunchiest treat.

Hot cappuccino,
Mildly rejuvenating –
After dinner joy.

Why am I a Church Organist?

Why do I continue to practice regularly and play for services when I might have retired long ago? Why have I continued to play on a very small 3-rank pipe organ in an equally small rural church when I could make much more playing on a fine multi-rank 3 manual organ in a nearby city? Why continue in a job where people seldom say anything about what has been played? There are many reasons:

First, I actually enjoy playing where I am. Why? Because of the theological and spiritual atmosphere of the denomination and of the members who attend so faithfully. How can I be sure there is not a more exciting place to play? I had many experiences during my early youth.

When growing up, my parents played a major influence in my spiritual and musical development by taking me along to every event they attended. If our own church did not have a service on Thanksgiving Day, we went to another church that did, often the Christian Science Church near downtown. Many other times we visited other denominations when a special speaker was in town, or even just on a Sunday evening when our church had nothing to offer.

Does that seem strange to you? Even stranger is the story of my mother and her three older sisters living in a tiny farm town with little for them to do except attending church wherever and whenever it was held? Some Sundays they attended their Lutheran Church in the morning, a Christian Church in the afternoon where a Song-Fest was featured, and then a Baptist Church in the evening. All four loved to sing and enjoyed the variety of hymns in the various churches.

As adults both my parents moved to Atchison where St. Mark's Lutheran Church was provided with the splendid musical talents of faculty and students from Midland Col-

lege which was established in Atchison until 1919. Mother sang in the choir most of her years in Atchison, and often sang in a women's trio. She was so eager to improve her musical knowledge that she sent away to Chicago for a series of voice lessons and worked on them at home when there was no teacher available.

Those voice lessons included a fine cross-section of vocal literature, and when she needed a piano accompaniment, I was encouraged to learn to play it. Not only did that expose me to great music, but it was excellent preparation for a later need to accompany soloists and choirs.

Experiences in high school when I was asked to play a hymn at a Luther League meeting were rather disastrous since I had never learned to sight read well. They simply could not sing with my playing and someone else was asked the next time. Somehow I was convinced to play piano for the Sunday School's Kindergarten Department class with simple songs like "Jesus Loves Me", and I began to improve slowly.

Again my Mother forced me into new experiences when our church organist was leaving. Mother decided that, because I could play piano solos well, I could learn to play for church in a couple of weeks! How wrong she was, but she did start something that has continued throughout my life. She secured the services of a local teacher who proved to be exactly right for me. While I took an organ lesson once a week for a year, I realized that I loved the organ because it was like playing an entire orchestra at one time.

When our own church wanted to charge me 25 cents an hour to practice on the organ, my teacher arranged for me to practice on the Methodist organ without charge if I promised to substitute occasionally as organist for Sunday evening or summer services. Financially that was ideal during the hard times of the Great Depression. The Methodist

Church was just a block from the High School so it was easy to practice there for an hour after school each day.

When my teacher moved out of town, I continued to practice and substitute as requested until I graduated from high school. Another organist in town knew I was interested in organ study and arranged an interview with her former teacher. When he offered me a scholarship to attend the College of Emporia, I was torn between that and an offer from the University of Kansas. The final decision was easy after my high school band and orchestra teacher said, "It's better to be a big frog in a small puddle".

At C. of E. I was exposed to much great music, especially from the Presbyterian Hymnal with its many Welsh tunes, and from the musical standards of exceptionally well-trained and caring faculty members. By my junior year I improved enough to be appointed as Chapel Organist with an additional scholarship stipend granted for playing an organ prelude, accompanying any hymns sung, and doing whatever else was needed each day as students took their assigned seats for attendance checks at the compulsory gathering. The biggest benefit of the job was the opportunity to practice all I wanted to on the huge 4 manual Moller organ with an antiphonal organ in the auditorium ceiling. There could have been no such experience at the state University.

When graduation approached, I knew I would have to secure a teaching position to make a living, but I really was more interested in playing the organ somewhere. A trustee of the College came to ask if I would interview at his Presbyterian Church in Ponca City, Oklahoma, with my expenses paid for the trip. What a wonderful opportunity, especially since a mid-winter graduate friend lived just a few miles away from there.

The interview was scary, but the minister and the men on the Session were nice, and offered me the unbelievable

sum of \$100.00 per month to play for all services and choir rehearsals, along with allowing me to teach full time in a Ponca City elementary school during the week. Again choirs and soloists added to my musical education, and the organist from the Christian Church next door befriended me.

She and the city Music Supervisor talked me into attending a Saturday Music Workshop at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. There I met a marvelous teacher, who agreed to give me lessons on an occasional basis – mainly because she had heard about me from her good friends who were members of the Church. That one day event proved to be the most important in my musical life, because Mildred Andrews became the best organ teacher in the U.S. and I was able to study with her for my graduate degree of Master of Music Education with an Organ Recital in lieu of a thesis.

In addition to the stimulation of a fine Music Department, I had new challenges as my teacher recommended me for Sunday jobs. For a few weeks I played piano for services held in a South Campus building where families living in old barrack housing were encouraged to attend. At that time any income was desperately needed, so I did my best, even if it was not a favorable situation.

In October or November I received another opportunity – to be organist and choir director for the Unitarian Church in Oklahoma City with a much bigger salary. Musically, it was a great experience and I enjoyed the people in the paid quartet sang at all rehearsals and services. Spiritually it was a major shock to find that familiar hymns were rewritten to eliminate any reference to Jesus as the Christ or Saviour. Never before had I heard readings from Confucius or Buddha presented in a church pulpit!

When Christmas came, my astonishment continued

when they made a major event of having a crèche, and singing traditional carols along with more English type social celebrations. Because it paid well, and musically was a fine job, I continued until the end of the school year, but it was a real relief to be asked to substitute at a Methodist Church for six weeks during the early summer. Another of my teacher's students took the Unitarian job in the fall, but was extremely unhappy there, so much so that my teacher would never recommend another student to that congregation.

When job offers were slow in coming after graduation, I was very worried until one day I received a call from the Superintendent of Schools in Guthrie, Oklahoma. He was willing to hire me sight unseen based on the recommendation of my former Superintendent in Ponca City. Since time was short, I agreed. Upon arrival in Guthrie I was ushered directly into the Superintendent's office while a Negro teacher from Pittsburg State University was sent to a bench in the hall and I never saw her again. (Those were the days when Oklahoma still had signs everywhere "Reserved for Colored", and segregation was still practiced in most places.)

Along with my "Welcome" interview came the strong hint that as an unofficial part of my employment contract, I was expected to accept the position as choir director at the Christian Church where the Superintendent was on the Board. Again, the extra pay would be helpful, and I accepted. This choir job proved to be a new challenge, but also a joy because of the wonderfully faithful nucleus of members in each section. New hymns, new service formats, and directing the congregation on hymns brought more learning during my three years there.

When a college classmate came to Oklahoma for a few organ lessons so she could play for their church, her brother

and I met, were interested in further acquaintance, and we were married the next May. Then I learned of the differences in various branches of the Lutheran Church, but decided to join the one nearest our farm home, and I'm still a member there.

Substituting in various congregations has been interesting. Teaching high school students to play for church has been a rewarding experience, and led to my being offered a job teaching an organ student at St. Mary of the Plains College in Dodge City when my youngest child was in Junior High. That first student did well enough that I was given more students the following year, and remained on the faculty for 24 years until the college closed in 1992. Playing for special masses at the Catholic College brought new experiences and opportunities as well as challenges. Many adult students from several different denominations came to take organ lessons bringing with them unique needs and musical opportunities.

When offered the position as full-time organist at the Methodist Church in Dodge City with its fine 3-manual Moller pipe organ, I was seriously tempted, but said, "No, thanks" because I felt my three children needed me at home to be sure they got to Sunday School and Church each Sunday at our own church. I have never regretted that decision because many things are more important than money.

"What is?" you ask. The Bible oriented Sunday school lessons, the Catechism classes and Confirmation, and the fine sermons from several dedicated Lutheran pastors who have served faithfully at the small rural church. I still enjoy playing small but adequate pipe organ and choosing good music that fits the service. Most of all I enjoy accompanying the enthusiastic congregational singing on the tried and true liturgical responses, and the wonderful time-tested hymns, many of which come from the German Lutheran

tradition. Sharing in praise to God with these people is better than any pay check or fancy job title. God has blessed me with many opportunities right here, and I'm glad to show my appreciation and thanks to Him by continuing to serve as long as He enables me. That is why I'm a church organist here.

Farm Life

When farmers meeting
Talk field work, weather and crops,
They exaggerate.

1st place Senryu
2004 Kansas Authors Club District 7 Contest

Who Enjoys the Kansas Wind?

“Not I,” says the woman just leaving her beauty shop
with perfectly styled hair.

“Not I,” says the mail carrier struggling to prevent letters
and papers from blowing out of a rural mail box.

“Not I,” says the tornado victim with nothing left except
the clothes he was wearing when the storm struck his home.

“I think I do,” says the farmer waiting for fields to dry
out so he can plant milo before it’s time to cut wheat.

“I think I do,” says another farmer whose hay was
mowed into windrows, but is too wet to put into bales.

“I guess I do,” says the athlete trying to hit a baseball
into the stands so he can score a home run for his team.

There is no answer from a dozen turkey buzzards rising
up after a night’s rest in the protection of an aging shelter
belt planted in 1936. Their actions speak more emphatically

than any words. First one, then another, cautiously tests the direction of the wind for a short distance.

The most venturesome rises higher, then circles wider in effortless swoops. Soon another bird joins the leader but follows no noticeable pattern. Before long more buzzards add their widespread wings to the random flights in higher and wider circles. With an occasional tilt of wone wing, they alter their direction. The tiniest flip of a wing tip steers their flight higher and higher.

Do these elusive raptors possess an innate type of GPS or anemometer that can “read” invisible wind currents high above the ground?

Does a gust that threatens to blow me off balance provide these giant birds with recreational pleasure similar to a human’s thrill on an amusement park ride?

The birds seem to have no destination. They rest only a moment on a high power wire or the top of an upright silo, then take off again. Frequently switching directions, they rise higher and higher until they take a sudden plunge down before resuming their leisurely aerial ballet.

How long have I watched them? Five minutes or ten? My neck is tired of twisting to follow their irregular arcs. My eyes complain of the bright mid-morning light although my back is to the sun.

Looking away from the sky I notice tree branches waving wildly in this normal Western Kansas 30-40 mile per hour gale. Petals from old-fashioned rose bushes near the house are blown wildly across the grass.

As I gladly return to the wind-free sanctuary of my sturdily build two-story house, I must admit that this very strong wind seems to bring joy to one of God’s most unusual creatures. These large turkey buzzards appear whenever there are rotting animal carcasses to nourish them, then fly elsewhere to repeat their clean-up work.

Today I discovered one benefit of the drastic changes we observe—and protest—about how strongly the wind blows in Western Kansas. It entertains one of the least appreciated of God's special and most useful creatures.

Honorable Mention: Inspiration Category
2008 Kansas Authors Club Literary Contest

Black steers graze green wheat
Peacefully fattening,
Juicy choice steaks soon.

1st place HM Haiku
2004 Kansas Authors Club District 7 Contest

Would You Have Stayed In Kansas Before Electricity?

Do you realize how dependent we are on the modern convenience of electrical appliances? What do you know about life in Western Kansas before 1900?

As a native Kansan born in the early, progressive border town of Atchison, I grew up assuming everyone had electric lights and indoor faucets and toilets with limitless quantities of water pumped out of the Missouri River.

In the 1930's, the biggest worry for most Atchison residents was that severe cold weather or blizzard conditions would limit the pressure of natural gas for their cook stoves and furnaces. When gas ran low, our friends enjoyed the heat from my parent's old-fashioned coal burning stove and new electric cook stove.

It was a drastic culture shock when I married a farmer who had a fine home near Dodge City. I was bored with

all the tales of “early days” after completion of the Santa Fe Railroad through this area. Reality hit where it really mattered the first time a thunderstorm damaged power lines, and for two days we had no heat, no light, and no water except what was pumped by a windmill. While waiting for lines to be repaired, my husband and his parents had plenty of time to explain how the earliest settlers survived by relying on God’s providence and their own adaptability.

A letter written in the 1870’s to relatives in the East reveals how one man got off the Santa Fe train at Offerle and walked more than 5 miles south through endless tall grass prairie before finding a stream with enough water to provide for a family, a milk cow, his horse, and a few chickens.

With no trees for lumber, a dugout cave on the creek bank was the best shelter he could find. Later, early settlers learned to cut blocks of native sod and to stack them into walls to make a one room home with either a sod or a thatched roof . The thick sod protected a family from heat in summer and cold in winter, but various insects and small rodents also enjoyed the good shelter.

At least once a rattlesnake worked its way through the grassy roof and dropped onto a bed near a sleeping child. Praying for God’s help, the pioneer mother slowly and deliberately walked from the bed to the door, and the rattlesnake followed her back into its native outdoor territory without causing harm.. Land ownership was encouraged by the Federal Government which deeded small free acreages to anyone who resided on and improved a tract.

With no roads, no telephones, and only a horse and wagon for transportation, each settler became self-sufficient by planting a garden for food. The only fences at that time surrounded each small garden plot to protect the family’s precious crop of peas, corn, green beans, carrots, onions,

and beets from roaming cattle and horses. By fishing in the creek or by trapping a jack rabbit or a quail, a man could provide meat for a better diet.

Jelly was made from the plentiful native sand hill plums and chokecherries if sugar was shipped in on the railroad. Native weeds like dandelion, lamb's quarters, and plantain provided a tasty and vitamin-rich supplement for the meager menu. Some even learned to make wine from dandelion blossoms.

Obesity was unknown because of much hard work and few calories. The best and most plentiful fuel for cooking came from dried buffalo chips left earlier by the wild herds of bison that supplied food and clothing for Native Americans.

Life's sleep cycle was determined by the rising and setting of the sun unless a traveler came with a precious supply of candles for use at night. Even coal oil for a lantern was an unknown luxury. The erection of wooden windmills provided a reliable water supply for homes and livestock on land farther away from the small streams used at first.

When farmers began to raise more cattle, a young son was assigned the job of herding them several miles down to the Arkansas River by noon, then herding them back home before dark while allowing them to graze freely along the way on the nourishing native grasses.

South of Offerle there were deep ruts made by Prairie Schooners following the Santa Fe Trail to the promised riches in New Mexico and California, but none of those travelers stayed in "The Great American Desert". Their greatest legacy was tales of ambush by Indians which forced some travelers to bury gold and other valuables under a tree a mile or so away from the trail. The landscape has changed drastically and early landmarks were destroyed long ago, but tales of buried treasure persist into this 21st century.

When an interested amateur geologist approached a local resident asking permission to use his state-of-the-art metal detector on her property, she involuntarily laughed in his face before politely informing him why. A century ago this farmer's grandmother spent many days walking near the trail ruts and along creek banks searching for lost treasure where there were known remnants of dugouts once inhabited by would-be residents. Those who could not survive the hardships of bad times abandoned everything in their rush to return to better conditions they'd known in Ohio, Indiana, or Pennsylvania.

When the 21st century visitor repeated his request to seek buried gold, the resident assented with a stipulation that he report his results back to her. She warned that any metal now in the vacant wheat field was probably a plow shear or blade lost from a machine and covered over before the farmer knew it was broken. Such losses were seldom recovered during a century of farming the same fields, but once in awhile a lost bill fold did reappear unexpectedly. Later this recent visitor reported, "No luck".

Pioneer life had many hazards, especially when hunger led to eating a poisonous plant or berry. Because doctors were rare and had none of today's equipment, each homeowner kept a small medicine chest filled with powders and pills for use as needed. After studying the accompanying "medicine book" which described symptoms of common illnesses, a parent selected the most likely cure and carefully weighed out a powder for an ill child. Many common home treatments of that time are passed on in families today, and some work better than expensive antibiotics.

Infectious diseases like scarlet fever, measles, typhoid fever, smallpox, and diphtheria caused deaths of both children and adults whose graves were marked by crude, soon deteriorated wooden slabs in family cemeteries. Women

often died in childbirth since the only help was a neighbor acting as midwife, and sanitary conditions of today were unknown.

Because there were specific corridors designated for Native Americans to travel between Oklahoma and tribal reservations in northern states, early settlers were often surprised when a lone Indian approached a home to request a cup of water or a piece of bread before continuing his journey. Those incidents were extremely scary, but results were usually peaceful and uneventful.

Most dangerous of all were occasional prairie fires when lightening hit the abundant native grassland flames were fueled by numerous uncollected buffalo chips. If there was time, a farmer plowed a wide strip of clear ground as a fire break to protect his house and garden, but far too often, strong winds caused the fire to leap over the cleared area and burn everything in sight. Because he had a wooden leg, one man who lived south of Offerle was unable to get away quickly enough and died in a prairie fire.

Survival in those difficult, primitive conditions seems impossible to us today. How could people live in this inhospitable, unsettled part of Kansas? How did they survive so many hardships? What made some stay when many others were leaving?

Perhaps we should consider more carefully their attitudes and the reasons why settlers came here. Many had a strong stubborn streak that would not admit they'd been wrong to attempt such a risky venture. Others thrived on the unexpected challenges of each new day. Most enjoyed the open space and clean air. Some preferred to farm rather than to work in huge factories that made rugs or cloth.

Because they had the courage and flexibility to adapt to changing conditions, all enjoyed the freedom to attempt new things and to improve the impossible. Not only did

they stay indefinitely, but they urged relatives and friends to join them, and shared the tricks of survival they'd already mastered.

Much is written about the gun-toting cowboys, saloons, and dance hall girls of the "wild and woolly west", but little is told of the tenacious, God fearing solid citizens who established the stable communities we have today.

Every family owned and treasured a large leather-bound family Bible in which were recorded the dates of each person's birth, marriage, and death. This Bible was read daily for help, inspiration, and encouragement. Chapters of history told how other countries survived threats and hard times. Chapters of poetry and prose developed an appreciation for fine literature. Chapters of parables and advice showed how to understand people and how to cope with the problems of daily life. Exciting stories were read and reread long before anyone had access to libraries, daily newspapers, radio or TV.

Most importantly this solid foundation in each home developed a lasting and steadfast faith that led to the establishment of small rural churches, then to circuit riding pastors who started mission churches throughout the entire area, and eventually to the founding of larger congregations as cities grew with increasing population.

After our electric power was restored so lights, air conditioning, and water were again operating normally, I asked my in-laws, "Would you have stayed in Western Kansas without electricity?"

My father-in-law said, "Yes", because he was born here in 1887 and saw all the changes as they happened. Although my mother-in-law was born in Iowa, she lived in Ford County for many years before the federal Rural Electrification Program allowed construction of the dependable transmission lines we now trust for our electricity, so she

also said, “Yes”.

I remember that my paternal grandparents moved to Kansas in 1860 to vote for a “Free State”. Ten years later they moved to a dugout near Bunker Hill and helped progress reach that area. From their example, my father developed a calm attitude in any crisis which demonstrated how his deep faith applied to daily life.

While I might not have survived as a pioneer, I’m extremely thankful for all of those who stayed in Western Kansas before electricity and helped to make things better. Because of them, I now have a wonderful place to live.

Farm Haikus

Snow flakes falling fast
Blanket bone-dry pasture land,
Provide good moisture.

Unintentional
Snow tracked in makes fine design,
Brightens my drab day.

Brave yellow crocus
In zero temperature
Has freeze-dried petals.

Yellow crocus bloom,
Lilac buds shrouded in snow,
Early spring delayed.

Bright yellow crocus
Opens each day with the sun
First greeting of spring

Fluffy seeds blown down
Cover grass like snow flakes from
Cottonwoods in bloom!

Prairie sentinel
Warns as danger approaches
With insistent chirps.

Rain, hail, stay away,
Spoil our wheat some other day;
We need money NOW!

Light'ning, thunder bring
Heavy rain for hours, but then
Half moon beams, "All's clear".

Summer fallow wheat
Using deep sub-soil moisture
Grows green despite drouth.

Dandelion blooms,
In spite of driest weather,
Promise better days.

Full moon rising high
Winter, summer, spring, or fall
Shines as bright as day.

Sending and Receiving Letters

Thinking back to my childhood in the 1930's – before we had TV and only a little radio – the biggest event of a summer day was to watch for the postman who brought a weekly handwritten letter from my maternal grandmother with news of her other nine children scattered across the western part of the U.S.

As my Mother shared that news with us, we learned that most earthquakes in Los Angeles were very brief ones that caused only minor inconveniences. In other letters we heard about the new jobs that were accepted in Denver by older cousins who had graduated from high school. Even more exciting was news about a baby daughter born to an Aunt and Uncle in Wichita, or the engagement of another older cousin in Cheyenne.

Over many years those letters from Grandma and other family members were an essential way for widely separated family members to keep in touch and be aware of each others' activities. Travel was expensive, time consuming and very infrequent. Because of their prohibitive cost, long distance phone calls were used only to inform someone of a death or serious illness of a family member.

My Mother relied on similar newsy letters to remain in touch with youthful friends who'd moved away from Kansas to such places as North Carolina and India. Once again information shared from their lives helped us understand geography and different life styles.

When I became bored with reading books from the library, Mother suggested that I start writing letters to pen pals through a column in our Sunday School paper.

That broadened my knowledge with new correspondents in Florida, Pennsylvania and other states as we compared our schools and summer hobbies. Such pen pals changed periodically, and letters were less frequent as I got into junior and senior high school with numerous other activities.

After World War II drafted many classmates, V-Mail letters were a good way to send encouragement to someone in Europe even if they were unable to respond with any hint of their whereabouts or battles.

A few very special letters were saved during those years such as ones of sympathy when my 70 year old father died unexpectedly at home. Another unusual one written by my father a few months earlier provided a rare glimpse into his personal feelings as he expressed sincere but concise sympathy for the loss of a close friend.

During college years, there was little more than essential family correspondence to parents and sibling, but after graduation, several college friendships were strong enough to demand occasional “keeping in touch” letters.

Only after I was married, did I finally appreciate what my Grandmother and Mother had shared for so many years. It was exciting to hear about a friend’s wedding or the arrival of a new baby. Occasionally plans for someone to come visit us were made by a series of letters working out the details.

Later as our own children grew and we became more involved in community events, time for letter writing seemed hard to find. In an effort to keep in touch with the ever increasing list of names in my trusty address book, I resorted to photocopied annual “Christmas” letters to report our own news.

Even if famous newspaper columnists vigorously condemned “form” letters, I was pleased that both friends and relatives let me know that they enjoyed receiving my letters

even if they were irregular. Soon many others began using similar tactics to share what was new in their lives.

For me the greatest benefit of lengthy Christmas letters was the fact that I could reread them later when the holiday rush was over, and often I would record important dates and events in my notebook of family history.

That “save until later” habit seemed great then, but too often the time to get rid of old letters never materialized. This past spring as I began sorting accumulations from many boxes, it became apparent that I hardly ever destroyed any letter, even if it had been answered promptly.

Now I appreciate the ease with which e-mail messages can be deleted and sent to the recycle bin, but I have pangs of sadness that some excellent prose will never be shared by my grandchildren because they text daily news to their cousins and will never accumulate the boxes of letters that still haunt me.

I’m very glad that many people still take time to send handwritten thank you notes after receiving gifts. I’m glad others feel the urge to write notes of encouragement after a special event. As this generation assimilates the marvels of technology, let us hope they also develop a deep appreciation for the achievements of previous generations, so they can benefit from the wisdom left for their descendants.

Excerpt from “Are Personal Letters Obsolete?” written for the *Edwards County Sentinel* on December 2, 2005.

Communication –
Most difficult of the arts –
Essential today

Marriage Is Like a Kansas Sunset

How can a marriage be like a Kansas sunset? Let me tell you the ways that a normal and ordinary experience can develop into a truly amazing memory.

There's nothing new about the introduction of a boy to a girl, yet an acquaintance may become a friend. A casual meeting may lead to an exciting conversation that develops into a lasting love.

There's nothing new about the rising and setting of the sun, and in many locations all days look the same. With the hills and trees in Eastern Kansas, one can see only limited views of the sky directly overhead. The wide-open spaces of Western Kansas, with 180 degree panoramic views, allow the full appreciation of nature's richest tapestry. A bride-to-be is totally involved in the process of planning, and a Kansan easily becomes addicted to watching sunsets.

After the wedding ceremony and the delights of a honeymoon, life settles down to more mundane lifestyle at home. Still there are many new thrills and discoveries as husband and wife become father and mother. Likewise many evenings have boring skies, with only occasional bursts of blazing color.

Cloud designs are ever-changing. Colors deepen or brighten as one watches, changing from pink to brilliant red, to gold, shifting from one cloud to another. So life's experiences bring constant flux in moods and intensity of feelings.

Gradually sky tints and true colors give way to muted shades, then grays, and storm clouds often form. Over the years young love matures into stable companionship and comfortable routines, checkered with illnesses, difficulties and disappointments.

As intense colors high overhead begin to recede, one

notices pure gold and bright orange on tiny flecks of cloud appearing as precious gems nearer the horizon. Against a clear blue sky, their brilliance is overwhelming.

Life's memories include such gems as birthdays, anniversaries and the special successes that bring joy to break life's drudgery.

As a tell-tale contrail reveals a plane flying high above, one remembers the monochrome beauty of clouds seen from above, and pities the passengers who miss the colorful underside display. Suddenly another jet trail turns golden as it reflects the rays of a sinking sun, and reminds us that life is what one does, not what one might wish could be.

Flying to distant locations is fun and good recreation, but staying at home can be even more rewarding visually. The temptations of infidelity look inviting and may be hard to resist but the reward of faithfulness cannot be matched for its ultimate and lasting beauty.

Gray clouds darken and obscure a half moon, the clear again. Infirmities of aging emerge, then retreat, then dominate more than before. Just before a sunset finally disappears, the colors reflect brilliantly in windows and ponds, just as lives of a couple are reflected and glow in their children and friends of many years.

The blackness of evening finally descends, but a sunset vision is indelibly etched into the mind's eye for endless reviewing. No photo or painting can catch the subtle variations of color, just as no book can adequately capture the conversations, legacy, and impact of a marriage.

Some marriages are short, lackluster, and seemingly uneventful, yet leave lasting memories for those involved. Others may be long and celebrated, yet hide bitterness, pain, or tragedy never revealed.

Sunsets come in many sizes, durations and colors as do

marriages, and the infrequent truly great ones are especially noticed. However each sunset and each marriage include special reasons to be remembered and celebrated.

If earthly marriages are to be examples of our eventual union with Christ in eternity, we must remember the lessons from sunsets. While times of great joy and beauty are mixed with sorrows, trials, and despair, it is the beauty that is longest remembered. We always hope for future beauty in both marriages and sunsets.

Barren dusty earth
Welcomes gently falling rain
Promising new growth.

1st place Haiku
2004 Kansas Authors Club District 7 Contest

Family

Trying on Hats

My Mother is coming to visit,
What do you think we should do?
She loves to shop in the City.
Why don't you come along too?

Aren't you tired of walking?
I'm ready to sit for a spell.
I see some stools over there –
We can try on hats as well.

What color shall I try?
Which one looks best on me?
Why not just try them all
And then we'll be able to see.

This style is outlandish –
Makes me look old as the hills.
You're likely to die of shock
When you see the bills.

I've had a marvelous time,
I'm not a bit bored;
I just wish a hat that looks good
Is one that I can afford!

The Many Stages of Motherhood

In recent months there has been much discussion about whether life begins at birth or at the moment of conception, but I'd like to propose another question: When does Motherhood begin and end?

For many women the first realization that something new is happening comes on that morning when the first taste of a breakfast egg or the mere smell of bacon frying causes a mad dash for the bathroom to regurgitate everything eaten in the past three days. It may take several days of "It must be something I ate" or "I have a touch of the flu" before the truth becomes clear and the reality of pregnancy emerges.

In anticipation nine months seems a long time, but with regular visits to the doctor, looking for baby clothes and infant furniture, repainting or repapering the room for a nursery and many conversations with friends who already have children, the early months pass quickly. Today's expectant parents are busy with childbirth orientation sessions, Lamaze classes, breast-feeding instructions, and tours of the maternity section of the hospital they have chosen. My daughter is so very conscientious about all she has learned there.

Were parents less prepared in the first half of the twentieth century without these classes, or did they get their preparation in the more "old-fashioned" way from their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or brothers and sisters who considered pregnancy, childbirth, and rearing children as one of the natural events of life? I know I was less anxious than my daughter is about the entire process. I did not worry about things so much in advance and was happy to wait until the appropriate time to experience for myself the various stages.

While our daughter and son-in-law were shopping for a

baby bed in Oklahoma City, my husband and I were totally amazed at all the items for sale (and at the prices!) Baby beds have a foot lever to assist in raising and lowering one or both sides. Designs vary from plain slats to elaborate spiraled rungs and many have canopies. On some models, the height of the mattress can be adjusted as much as four levels. One bed was built with a set of drawers on one end and more drawers in the base under the mattress.

Before moving on to another area so they could discuss the various models in private, we had to examine a strange box-like contraption on the side rail of a bed. Noticing our perplexed looks a clerk showed us how to turn on the switch so a battery-operated mechanism could rock the bed at a slow or a fast speed whenever the baby wakes and cries, so, hopefully, the baby will go back to sleep!

Is Motherhood to be replaced by gadgets? I certainly hope not! All parents have stories about walking the floor for hours with a crying baby and this gadget was probably invented by such a person, but what will today's parents be able to tell their children if they never experience a sleepless night? And will the child grow up without learning the comfort of being held close to soothe pain and fears?

Motherhood implies the art of being there whenever needed – for feeding, changing a diaper, patting and burping, codling and learning to read the body language of the little person too young to talk. Rocking chairs have been around for generations for a very good reason. Not only is the back and forth motion soothing for an infant, it also provides a good excuse for a weary mother to rest and relax with the baby. I could have never survived those early months without a sturdy rocker. Often I prolonged my period of rocking after the baby was sound asleep, especially if I had a new magazine or a good book to read.

While exploring further in the baby department of the

store, my husband tried out the newest style of “Gliding” rockers, and we had to pry him out of one when it was time to load up our purchases. Old style rockers left marks on the linoleum flooring and eventually “walked” across the room. Today’s version has a solid square base with another frame under the seat attached to springs that move back and forth above that base. There are even matching footstools that move the same way as the chair for more comfortable relaxation than in a Lazy Boy. Padding on seat, back and arm rest cushions are extremely soothing and may well put the mother to sleep before the child. After promising to buy our daughter one, my husband wants to get one for himself if we can find a fabric or finish that is compatible with the farmer’s work clothing.

Being parents may have a specific beginning with a first child, but I doubt if it ever ends. We continue to be interested in all that our children are doing and find they are more likely to ask for and listen to our advice now than when they were growing up. Yet it is reassuring to see them make wise decisions on their own, assume responsibility as adults and become alert to the needs of others around them. Watching our son-in-law play with his niece, we are certain that he will make a great father. Knowing that our daughter-in-law and both our sons enjoy spending a day with our three-and-a-half-year-old grandson at the children’s museum or at the zoo is ample reward for the hours we spent years ago taking them to such places.

As our daughter becomes a mother, I am more involved as a grandmother. This time I live close enough to help care for the newborn when it arrives and to cook, wash, vacuum and do whatever else is needed in those first weeks. Our daughter has always enjoyed babies and been around many of her friends’ children, so we know she will do well as a mother. The question is: Can I be a good grandmother,

mother-in-law, and mother all at the same time? It will require some mental and physical adjustments, but if my Mother and Grandmother managed to do it so very well, perhaps I've inherited the genes that will make it possible. Entering this new stage may be just as natural as was passing through all the earlier ones!

Appeared in the *Southwest Kansas Senior Beacon* – May, 1994

Over-crowded home
Sends youngsters across the road
Seeking bigger space.

I Begin To Understand My Mother

As a child I knew that my Mother was a little different than other people. I knew she belonged to Women's groups at church, taught Sunday School, was active in many ways and seemed always to have plenty of energy for working in the yard, canning fruit, and pollinating new varieties of iris.

She always sang to us at home, in the church choir and with two other women as a busy trio. As a young girl she enjoyed going to various churches in the evening with her three older sisters just so they could enjoy singing the hymns. She even enrolled in a correspondence voice course to learn new songs. My first piano lesson was given by her as she pointed to printed notes on a page of music and showed me which key on the piano should be played. During the 1930's there was always money for lessons from a nearby teacher even if we could not afford to see the latest movies.

In sixth grade some classmates and I joined a new Girl Scout troop, and learned many new skills. About that same time, my Mother took a course in Administering First Aid, and then taught the basics to several other troops too. She jumped into a crisis at a church event when a young woman fainted, and no one else attempted to help her. A few minutes later Mother was commended for the proper procedure by a new man in town who became our new Medical Doctor.

Her energies went to various efforts during World War II including sewing overalls. When money was needed for my tuition in College, Mother heard about the need for school teachers and met the basic requirements to fill a position in a small rural school. Over the next years she continued to take College classes every summer, and finally had enough credits for a bachelor's degree but was denied that honor because they would not accept her experience as credit for the student teaching requirement.

After I married a farmer and needed help with three children during harvest, Mother spent time with us to help as needed. I really could not understand why she could not unscrew a jar lid, or do many other normal kitchen tasks she'd always done, and I was not very polite about it.

One year she became ill, was hospitalized, and our doctor recommended that she be moved to a new nursing facility in a nearby town. Fortunately we had good luck moving her belongings and selling her home, but she never really liked the new location. Her first roommate was in early stages of Alzheimer's and every 5 minutes would say, "Can you bring me a cookie?"

A year or so after she moved, I was surprised to have her give me letters she received from a lifelong friend while saying; "I don't want to hear from her anymore". I often read her bits of special news from such a letter, but she

wanted me to tell her not to write anymore.

The real shock came when I showed Mother a large group photo of 80 relatives who attended a wonderful weekend in Denver, Colorado. No matter what I tried, Mother was unable to identify anyone. That indicated a prompt trip to the optometrist I saw frequently, and his diagnosis was "severe macular degeneration" – a disease we'd never heard of in the 1970's, and at that time there was no treatment available. Due to other ailments, my mother died a month later which solved her vision problem.

Forty years later I find myself needing help opening jars, picking up things, and being clumsy at times. Even worse is the fact that after several years of minor problems with the dry form of macular degeneration, I suddenly developed the wet form also, and I know how effective certain injections are in reducing cloudiness. One month ago, I had a sudden blurring of one eye which proved to be blood seeping into what should be the clear vitreous fluid. I'm extremely thankful that God has taught eye specialists how to use new technology in eye surgery to clear out that unwanted blood.

As I now recuperate, I begin to understand the frustration of my Mother so many years ago. I pray that I can be patient with anyone who develops a new disability.

The Man I Married

Persistence: No matter how bad the wind, rain, or snow, the man I married would feed cattle, drive to the mail box, or fix a flat tire on my car so I could drive to my club meeting.

If the lavatory faucet developed a leak, he would spend as many hours as needed to clean the corrosion off the defective unit, hunt a replacement in town, and, when all else

failed, he'd carefully study the instructions that showed how to install a new one correctly.

Determination: Once a job was begun, the man I married was never satisfied until it was done properly. He'd try his best in spite of arthritis, and he'd never stop because of a nasty scratch from the rough edges of materials being used.

Perseverance: The man I married never gave up in spite of adversity. He weathered years of extreme drought, wheat crops obliterated by hail, trees and roofs damaged by fierce winds, and the fatal spread of brucellosis throughout his herd of milking cows.

When quitting seemed to be the easy way out, the man I married researched other options, chose the most logical one, and continued doing his best.

Ingenuity: Anything that had broken could be fixed by the man I married, often in an ingenious way. The favorite repair tools of the man I married included baling wire, twine, and duct tape.

When the antique ornamental yard fence was accidentally broken, he devised a way to splice the break so it is unnoticeable unless closely inspected.

Curiosity: The man I married retained a boyish desire to know how everything worked, and to figure out why something went wrong. He read newspapers and magazines to learn what was new, who was in trouble, which neighbor filed for bankruptcy, who was in the hospital, and to keep up on national politics.

By poring over the ads he learned who was selling a machine he wanted, who was holding a dispersal sale, and who might want to buy the antique he was ready to sell. Curiosity might kill cats, but it provided life-infusing stimulation for the man I married.

Compassion: When an elderly widowed neighbor slid

her car off the road into a muddy ditch, or got stuck in a snow drift, the man I married donned overalls and boots, plodded out into the storm for a tractor and log chain, drove to where she was stranded, crawled on mud under her car to hook the chain onto a safe place, then gently used the tractor to pull her car back onto the road. He'd watch the tail lights enter her garage before parking the tractor, peeling off his slimy clothes, and returning to the comfort of the house.

If a neighbor had an unexpected grass fire, he again used the tractor to plow a firebreak to protect other land from danger. While driving to inspect fields, the man I married noticed cattle that had broken through a fence, notified their owner, then mounted his four-wheeler to help chase the wanderers back home.

He joined others in harvesting a ripe crop for an injured neighbor or for the family of a recent cancer victim.

Love: The man I married loved his family and prized them even more than friends. He played with his grandsons because he had more time for playing than when his own children were little.

The man I married loved his children enough to force them out of bed at 6:00 a.m. in summer or in bad weather to help milk the cows. Every evening the children had to finish their chores before attending a school ball game or had to complete their homework before watching TV. He saw each one grow into a self-sufficient and successful citizen.

Because the man I married was a natural "lark" and I am a confirmed "night owl", he allowed me to stay up to finish what I considered necessary, and let me sleep late the next morning. He even set out the breakfast cereal for me, then ate alone because his stomach remained on the old "crack of dawn" milking schedule.

Where would you see this man? At any meeting the man I married sat quietly on a back row saying nothing until he had an important comment to add.

He worked daily at his normal job as a farmer without publicity, and seldom entered an exhibit in the county fair or the local antique machinery show.

You might meet the man I married in church, at a Coop meeting, at a farm sale, in the local hardware store, or helping me buy groceries.

The man I married needed to retire when age and health dictated a change, but he was so accustomed to activity that he continued to mow grass, “zap” weeds, and tinker in his repair shop. As a lifetime practitioner of the fine art of being a “jack of all farm trades”, the man I married never developed the hobbies that most city retirees find enjoyable.

Exactly Who Was This Man I Married? He was a life-long Kansan following the lifestyle of his pioneer grandparents who fled persecution in the Old Country, then moved west to find better fields for raising crops. Like so many others, they made opportunities for their children by building churches, schools, Coops, and working to bring electricity to underserved rural areas of Kansas. The man I married assured that such institutions continued to serve this area.

While his face never appeared on a magazine cover, his name did appear in the local newspaper when he was born, when he was high school valedictorian, when he married, when each child was born, and for other local events.

What Did the Man I Married Do? His name was not on the sports pages because he hurried home after school to do farm chores such as moving hay bales and shoveling manure. He mastered the finger dexterity needed to coax a steady stream of milk from the udder of an uncooperative cow years before the invention of electric milking

machines.

His muscle building exercises included carrying five-gallon buckets full of warm milk from the barn to the well house, dumping the whole milk into the separator, then moving the cans of thick cream into a refrigerator to cool. After carrying heavy buckets of skim milk to the corral to feed the weaned calves, he exercised other muscles by opening corral gates and urging the calves to return to their pasture.

Skills unique to his vocation included the proper application of a smoking branding iron to the hind quarter of a young calf, the ability to force an older calf to hold still while he touched a hot dehorning iron to each side of its head, the technique needed to apply castration bands to young steers, finding the right location and angle for digging holes for fence posts, and knowing how tight to stretch barbed wire so cattle could not squeeze through the fence.

Everyday repairs around the farm required his expertise in hammering nails, tightening nuts on bolts, welding broken machinery, changing oil in motors, and using hundreds of special tools.

The man I married never raced cars, but he expertly maneuvered all sizes of tractors and tillage implements across narrow bridges to reach distant fields. He adroitly gauged the depth and speed needed for a combine header to harvest the most grain from a field of wheat.

Why did I leave a good job to become a farmer's wife? Love can be blind, and adjusting from city life was not always easy, but I'm glad I made that choice over 50 years ago. The man I married opened a world of new opportunities to me, and we shared many wonderful experiences. He provided for his family a secure and comfortable home in the house built by his great grandfather over 100 years ago.

The man I married lived his entire life in the house in which he was born until illness forced him to spend time in hospitals. A new heart valve and by-pass surgery permitted him three extra years as an active person who could enjoy a ride to the top of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis.

Did we ever disagree? Quite often, but we learned to discuss things that mattered and to ignore those that were inconsequential. When our marriage did not go well, it was easy to “wish I’d done it differently”, yet I always knew that when we promised “till death do us part”, we both really meant it. Much good came from the bad times – knowledge, compassion, patience, and understanding.

In retrospect I clearly see that God was very good when he introduced me to the special man I married – the man who was persistent, determined, curious, and helpful, who persevered, knew how to fix things, and loved his family.

Why has all this been written in past tense? After 82 years, the man I married could no longer fight off the effects of arthritis, diabetes, and all their complications. We could not wish him further suffering. Remembering all he did helps to adjust to new life **without the man I married**.

Originally written in 2002 with the title “Pride of Kansas: a Man Who”

They Shall Be One

*Composed for the wedding of Martha & Randy
Gabriel*



They shall be one be - cause of God's love.



They shall be one be - cause God cre - a - ted



man and then he cre - a - ted



wo - man for a hel - per and friend.



This is why a man leaves his fa - ther and



mo - ther and loves his wife. Yes, they shall be



one be - cause of God's love.



They shall be one be - cause of Christ's ex -

am - ple, yes they shall be one as they
give up their sep - ar - ate lives and
pledge to love each ot - her as
long as they both shall live then they shall be
one be - cause of Christ's ex - am - ple.
They shall be one with the
help of the Ho - ly Spir - it to
guide them through life and to
help them to re - main faith - ful as

long as they both shall live. So
they shall be one with the help of the Ho-ly
Spir-it. Be-cause God cre-a-ted
man and wo-man, and
Christ's ex-am-ple taught
love that is pa-tient and kind. Now
with the help of the Ho-ly Spir-it they shall be
one. Yes, they shall be one! _____

The musical score is written on ten staves in G major (one sharp, F#). The melody is in treble clef. The lyrics are written below the staves, with some words hyphenated across lines. The final line of the score ends with a long horizontal line, indicating a continuation or a long note.

Faith in God

Is There a Perfect World?

Does current TV show a perfect life? What about “The Biggest Loser” or “Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader”? Do the latest fashions, parenting ideas, and ways to improve your marriage that proliferate on so many talk shows bring happiness, or do they merely add to one’s voluminous “I wish I could do that” list?

My own life has had as many ups and downs as a soap opera, but everything turned out well because each problem was handled promptly with common sense and good advice from others.

Perhaps the most dramatic example comes from the time when my paternal grandmother lived in a western Kansas dugout about 1874. Her youngest baby was asleep on the bed when a rattlesnake dropped down from the sod ceiling into the single room. Very calmly my grandmother began walking toward the door to attract the snake’s attention and the snake followed her through that door averting a possible tragedy.

How did she know to do that? The only explanation ever given was that she trusted God to take care of any problem that arose. Because she died before I was born, I never knew her, but the strong faith that created calm-

ness in any situation was something my father inherited and demonstrated to me as I grew up.

Any cut, scrape, or bee sting was promptly and expertly treated by my father with the best of home remedies as one of life's normal experiences. When I stepped barefoot onto a small nail that ran up through my little toe, he was very calming as he applied a poultice of antiphlogistine to draw out any infection that might be in a puncture wound. He just made sure I learned the name of the medicine.

Through my childhood diseases, adult allergies, many challenges and frustrations, family mental illness, forced early retirement from a job I enjoyed, even widowhood and a minor stroke, the examples and strong Lutheran faith of my ancestors were a stabilizing influence. With the passage of time, I can see that each apparent setback turned out to be a most valuable and stimulating experience.

My life now is good – not as glamorous as seen on TV, not the wealth of a Bill Gates, no limousines, no caviar, BUT...

I have many good relatives and friends, enough food, clothing, shelter, and the ability to do many things even if less well than when I was young. I am now more content than ever, and begin to understand what Paul meant in Philippians 4:11 (ESV) when he said, "...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."

After living through the Great Depression, World War II, and all events since, I know many changes will come, but I am certain that the future will be more interesting than the past if I remain calm and learn from new experiences while I wait for God to reveal His final "Perfect World".

When I Prayed...

After a lengthy and discordant discussion by church members, the Pastor was asked to offer a payer before a vote would be taken to settle the controversy.

*“Seek ye first the Kingdom of god,
and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

I prayed, “Lord, speak through the Pastor to soothe those who disagree, and to promote healing and accord between the two opposing sides.”

The Pastor began his prayer very slowly and carefully, saying what I’d expected.

*“Ask and it shall be given you,
Seek and ye shall find,
Knock and it shall be opened unto you.”*

Then I realized his words were *not* what I’d anticipated. His words applied to my outspoken comments during the meeting. These words required a change in *my* thinking also.

I know that God *always* answers prayers, but I didn’t expect Him to give the Pastor words that would affect *me* as well as all those with whom I’d been disagreeing.

“God knows what you need before you ask Him.”

My own prayer changed quickly: “Lord, may I *always* recognize Your Will. Help me to wait for Your help and direction in how best to do what You want us to do. Amen.”

God Doesn't Shout

Refrain

God doesn't shout
His voice is gentle and quiet.
He waits for me to listen,
Listen to His still, small voice.

Verse 1

When I pray, I demand God's instant help,
For the future is so terrifying now.
What am I going to do about it?
And why did it happen this way?
Why won't God hear me?
And why is He slow to send His answer? (*Refrain*)

Verse 2

Once again I will pray for Him to hear.
Surely God has not forgotten I exist!
Jesus has promised to be with us
When we truly trust Him each day.
Why can't I hear Him?
And why is there such a long delay? (*Refrain*)

Verse 3

If I pause now and listen quietly,
Read the Gospel words He left for us today,
Then I will understand His teachings
To learn what He wants for me now.
When I reach toward Him
His love takes away my fear and anger! (*Refrain*)

Refrain

f *mf* *mp* *p* *fine*

Verses

f-mf-mp

Trusting God Is Like Driving in Dense Fog

As a child I had recurring nightmares of being lost in a dense fog unable to find my way through it. Not until years later did I understand how to interpret those horrifying dreams. When my youngest child was in Junior High School, I accepted a teaching position at a small college thirty miles from our home.

During the ensuing years, I encountered various forms of weather on the early morning drives to class. Even in good weather the roads in western Kansas offer long stretches with little visible change of scenery. In heavy fog I'd lose all sense of direction. Because of driving much slower than usual, I also had a distorted sense of time and of the distance traveled.

The road I traveled most frequently was bordered with miles of telephone lines which were reassuring guides. I described each fog as "one-pole", "two-pole", or "four-pole" visibility. One December "two-pole" morning, I had read from my daily motto calendar of the "Need for help to see beyond the events that surround me." Scanning the edge of the road for the minutest change to provide a clue to my exact location, I realized that God was taking care of me. There was nothing more to fear from my childhood nightmares about fog.

With plenty of time during the slow drive, I pondered how much the troubles of everyday life close in to focus attention on our own small concerns just as the fog closes off the normally wide vistas of God's creation.

In fog it is hard to find a corner where I need to turn. If I drive too fast, I miss it and go too far on the wrong road. Stop signs and road markers don't show up until I am almost on top of them. In life's foggy climate I must remember God's rules – the 10 Commandments and other

teachings – to avoid clouding my judgment and to remain alert for indications that I may take a wrong path.

Driving in fog at night is much harder than in daytime. Headlight high beams are brighter, but in fog they create a false sense of motion and direction. Low beams that focus closer to the ground reveal the edge of a road, proper lane markings, bumps, ruts, and danger of separated tire treads or animals that have wandered out of their fences. In life I must beware the danger of conflicts, illness or tragedy that can cloud my view of God's beauty and light. Through fog at times I can see lights in a farm yard or house and know I am nearing my destination. Jesus is a light that is always visible when I draw close enough to Him. Reading God's Word illuminates the road of life.

Often heavy fog occurs in waves – dense for a mile, then clear a ways, then dense again. Associating with different people I see waves of reaction more varied than the fog. As His disciples traveled with Jesus, they saw every form of human behavior and attitude, and learned from Him the many different ways in which people can get along with each other. As I search the Old and New Testaments, I find an answer to every problem.

If I have a choice, I take a familiar road in foggy weather because I can recognize such seemingly insignificant things as a certain kind of weed, tree, or fence, an unusual bump, or the feel of climbing or descending a small hill. Of special help is an occasional yellow or silver reflector at a culvert or on a bridge.

I mentally thank the residents who put out a red reflector at the entrance to a driveway, or put red reflective tape on a corner post or a mailbox. As I progress through life, I remember how God has guided me through previous crises, and turned them into learning experiences. Most especially do I value a friend who quotes an appropriate Bible verse

or hymn during a moment of fear.

When I reach the college and can see things more clearly, I give a big sigh of relief, and silently say, “Thank you, Lord, for bringing me here safely.” There is equal anticipation that I will eventually see the glories of Heaven in Jesus’ eternal light.

If I drive out of fog into clear sunshine, the brilliance of God’s creation reveals infinite details of changing seasons and reminds that trials are temporary. God has a Master Plan for me even if I think he’s neglected or abandoned me. If I complain or try to bluff my way through, life will be much more difficult, and I may end up in a ditch.

When I have patience to drive through life slowly, watch carefully for signs, be alert for reflectors that reassure me, I know I will reach God’s goal. I can trust Him to lead me out of fog in His own time.

Passover Moon

O, giant equinoctial moon
Rising in the east,
Did you shine this bright
Two thousand years ago
When twelve disciples joining Jesus
Shared the seder meal?

Could your rays peek through the trees
As Jesus prayed alone?
Did a passing cloud then shield
From view a betraying kiss,
But move aside so you could see
The healing of a servant’s ear?

Could you see the drops of blood
Beneath a crown of thorns?
Did you witness false conviction
Of an innocent man?
Were you spared the gruesome sight
Of public crucifixion?

Since you still shine strong and bright,
What message do you bring?
Will you just remind us of
Such horrible events?
Or should your brilliant beauty now
Direct our thoughts beyond?

Resurrection Morn brings joy,
The hope of life renewed,
A promise of yet greater things
For those who will believe.
Your beams now strengthen us,
O, brilliant Passover Moon!

Mastering Adversity

Conquering Fear at Christmas

What do you fear most this Christmas? Increasing violence? Stock Market fluctuations? Widespread layoffs and downsizing? Internet piracy and viruses? Rumors of wars in unknown places? Corruption in government offices? Incurable illness? Continuing loneliness? Widespread immorality? Hunting for exactly the right Christmas gift? Having the electricity go off before you've punched the "save" icon on your computer?

How odd that a season of happiness is marred by that strongest of emotions: FEAR – an emotion as common as eating and sleeping, and as unique as what one does today! If we drive to a large city to visit an elderly uncle and aunt, will we be in danger of random gunfire or of a reckless driver ignoring a red light?

Greater terror plagued me on my first airplane flight in 1950. Each Christmas I visited my family in Atchison, but this time my job as a paid choir director required my participation at all Christmas services including midnight on Christmas Eve. The usually fine Santa Fe train schedules did not help this time. My only option for spending Christmas with family was an airplane flight in late afternoon from Oklahoma City.

The excitement of flying vanished as the twin engines roared to life. This plane was much smaller than a railroad coach. There were no parachutes that I could see. The cabin was nearly empty. Stories of plane crashes rose from memory. Fear grew uncontrollably!

As I puzzled over the seat belt fastener, a man in military uniform sitting behind me offered the needed instructions. "Is this your first flight?" he asked.

"Yes," I admitted fearfully.

Calmly he explained the take-off procedures. "See the wing flaps move up and down?"

"Did you feel a 'bump' as the wheels retracted into their wells?"

"Don't worry when your ears 'pop' because of the change in altitude. Just chew this gum."

As he kept me totally involved in the workings of the plane, I soon relaxed in my seat. From many previous flights, he knew the terrain and pointed out the towns below. Visiting with such an interesting and knowledgeable person made the two-hour flight pass quickly. (On that short flight in a small plane there was no stewardess to serve peanuts and pop.)

It was dark when we saw the lights of Kansas City's Fairfax Airport. My mentor assured me that the pilot could land safely between buildings that seemed so close the plane's wings would scrape them.

We never exchanged names, and I've forgotten his branch of service and rank, but on every flight since then, I mentally thank the kind man who cured my fear of flying on that long ago Christmas.

Fear is not new. It's presence was very real at the first Christmas nearly 2000 years ago. The dangers of a long journey to Bethlehem at the command of a Roman ruler were certainly uppermost in the minds of Mary and Joseph.

Without a modern credit card to guarantee motel reservations, they had to worry where they would sleep until a kind innkeeper offered them shelter in his stable.

The shepherds on a hill were terrified when an angel appeared to them (long before science fiction portrayed U.F.O.s and extra-terrestrial beings). As he said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people”, the angel calmed their fears, aroused their curiosity and gave them courage to see if the message could be true.

The Magi, who traveled from afar to find a new-born king, were wary of King Herod’s intentions and wisely ignored his request for information by returning home a different way.

Joseph, knowing his young child’s life was in grave danger, obeyed God’s command to flee into Egypt.

Fear is as old as Adam and Eve, and as new as the unknown future. What matters most is the way in which we deal with our fears.

Herod, afraid of losing his throne and power, caused one of the greatest massacres in all history, yet he did not lose his fear.

The Shepherds, after listening to an amazing message, verified its truth, then “spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child”. (Luke 2:17 NIV)

Mary, the one most completely involved in this unusual event, “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”. (Luke 2:19 NIV)

Each individual in each generation faces fear at one time or another. Many books and articles suggest methods of overcoming phobias. Laws are proposed to restrict use of guns and drugs. Prisons are enlarged and penalties are increased for those who break the laws. New medicines promise miracle cures. Still fear continues to dominate

headlines.

Is it so difficult to realize that a baby born 2000 years ago could, and did, quietly revolutionize a corrupt civilization? Change does not happen instantly. It took many, many years for Jesus' influence to become apparent in the lives of men like Constantine, Charlemagne, and Francis of Assisi.

Only very slowly were Jesus' teachings accepted widely enough to allow for a King to sign the Magna Carta, or for ordinary people to join in the Crusades. It took even longer for the changes brought about during the Protestant Reformation, for the development of a system of education for all, and for the adoption of our oft-quoted Bill of Rights.

Each change had shortcomings and detractors, but the accomplishments must be acknowledged. Each leader and each participant conquered fear in one of its many guises.

From the humble shepherds of long ago, we learn the best antidote for fear. After visiting the stable, they "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told". (Luke 2:20 NIV) Every individual who passes on the good things that are heard, seen, and experienced, will be helping another person – whether infant, child or adult, whether relative, friend or stranger, whether at Christmas or any other time of year.

In spite of wild rumors, rampant violence, increasing corruption, hidden danger, terminal illness, boring loneliness, annoying frustrations, public immorality and endless worries, we are assured of the greatest and best Christmas gift ever – the infant Savior of the world.

As the unknown companion on my first airplane flight cured my fear of flying by his calm and informative conversation, will you share your own experiences and faith to help someone else conquer fear this Christmas?

Christmas Article for the *The Spearville News* December, 2000.

A Neglected Law

Early descriptions in books and movies contributed to the common stigma associated with mental illness but the recent movie, *A Beautiful Mind* showed that even severe schizophrenia can be treated. After reviewing the problems throughout the life of Nobel prizewinner John Nash, the movie states that he “still hears voices but chooses NOT to listen to them”.

Today there are many schizophrenics who live successfully while being treated with appropriate medications, but laws about hospitalization and medication vary greatly from state to state. Today’s greatest need is for open and non-judgmental discussion of the improvements in medication and treatment similar to the current deluge of information about diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

How can an individual help in educating about mental illness? What can be done on a local level to prevent or offset future disasters? Has modern technology with cell phones, “I-pods”, “My Space” and “U-Tube” turned us into self-absorbed “robots” who ignore the individual standing next to us?

We know there are many caring people in the U.S. when TV news shows the tons of food and clothing sent to aid victims of the Greensburg tornado and Hurricane Katrina. Why does it take a disaster to bring out the best in us?

How can we recognize the quiet person who needs help? What if every pre-school caregiver had enough patience to encourage all children to talk about their feelings? What if an elementary school teacher had made Cho Seung-Hui [perpetrator of the 2007 Virginia Tech Shooting] feel good about his command of English and his ability to put his thoughts into writing? What if high school classmates

had included him in their social life? What if his college roommate had found some way to include him in chat sessions? Legislation can do none of this.

My challenge is that we must treat each person we meet in every situation with the same kindness, patience, and consideration that we want to receive ourselves – an altruistic, unselfish form of love.

If someone wants to talk a long time, then be a good listener, even if you are bored by the topic. By asking a question or two you may guide the conversation and help the talker to a better assessment of an annoying situation.

If someone's body language shows frustration or anger, then ask, "What is bothering you today?" and patiently listen to a short or lengthy recounting of problems. If someone is moving painfully, then ask, "What happened to you?" and listen to the medical history of injury or chronic illness. Are there obvious signs of fatigue, then ask, "Why are you so tired today?" and ignore your own fatigue while you listen.

Questions such as these show willingness to listen and to share concern. Often, advice is not needed, but a willing listener can offer encouragement and the strength to continue a better way of living.

Time spent in listening can take many forms and may prevent arguments with a spouse, physical abuse of children, or an angry tirade at a store clerk. It may simply make the talker feel better about him or herself.

Every subject is important and serious to the talker. The listener must avoid any hint of ridicule or punishment. A low grade on a test should suggest studying harder or in a different way. Clumsiness and dumb mistakes happen to everyone sooner or later, and do not need to be announced or broadcast.

In recent years much has been done to help people with physical disabilities or low IQ's to achieve their maximum

potential. Now is the time for equal compassion in helping to prevent and treat full-blown mental illnesses, especially schizophrenia. As with all illness, education and awareness of warning signs are a beginning. Early, proper, and continuing treatment can pay immense bonuses by improving the quality of life for patients and by providing support for the families and friends of those with any type of mental illness.

Never neglect the law to “LOVE THY NEIGHBOR”.
All else grows from that law.

Snowbound Aftermath

The snow was beautiful
But the wind was violent
Creating very deep drifts
Across the drive and yard -
Much too deep for a car or four wheeler.

Only a four-wheel drive pickup
Could get through to reach
A tractor with front end scoop
And enough size and power to make
Numerous passes needed to shove snow aside.

I am warm inside while watching men work
In sub-freezing cold and wind
Using shovel and muscle to open paths for me.
I give thanks for those who help
So I can stay inside today.

After an hour, they're off to repeat their work
On another landlord's farm.
I'm glad their parents brought them up
To respect and help older citizens,
So I'm willing to admit that I'm past 80.

Change Compels Choices

Can anyone live without change? A baby becomes a toddler, then walks and runs, grows taller and heavier, learns to talk, goes to school, advances each year while learning new facts, developing new skills, exploring new hobbies, making new friends, until becoming an adult.

Change continues as a job is begun, often requiring a move to a new location. Marriage brings major changes with children. New challenges and responsibilities multiply each year. Some changes seem easy and natural but others require long and careful deliberation before a final choice can be made.

Why does it become more difficult as a person ages? Do we lose the enjoyment of a new adventure? Are we too satisfied with the status quo? Or are we lacking the energy required to try something new?

We admire the octogenarian who celebrates by making a first parachute jump from an airplane. We applaud an author who pens a first book at age 75. We attend movies to see a 60 year old actor in the starring role.

What motivates anyone to try something new? A woman is eager to try on the latest new fashion or hair style. A man is eager to drive the latest fast car. Everyone wants better gas mileage when it becomes available. A small child may refuse to taste a different vegetable, but most adults flock to the newest restaurant to try a chef's special concoction.

Are we constantly combating a fear of boredom or trying to escape routines?

Where do we get this desire for newness, surprise, or excitement? How does it become so important to us?

Where else but in all of God's creation? Each sunrise and sunset presents unique patterns and colors. Each

day has some variation in temperature, wind and humidity. Summer heat changes to chilly fall, and then winter's freezing days.

The first yellow crocus in spring is followed by tulips, iris, then pansies, roses, and later sunflowers and chrysanthemums.

Early grass grows so fast it requires frequent mowing. Blooming fruit trees later bear pears, cherries or apples which are picked and eaten. Field crops sprout, grow, and mature before they are ready to harvest. Heavy rain causes flooding. Extremely dry weather produces dust storms. Throughout all of life we observe changes.

Those changes compel choices such as: "Is it cold enough to wear a coat?" "Will I need an umbrella today?" "Is it too hot to play tennis?" "Is the lake warm enough for swimming?"

Other choices are more difficult: "Is my cough bad enough to need a doctor?" "Can I walk to work or will I become exhausted before I get there?"

"Are my eyes getting bad enough to need bifocals even if I'm not very old?"

"Are my kids really right when they think I need hearing aids?"

Will such choices compel us to do things we don't like to do? What are the options when a simple "yes" or "no" is not sufficient? Maybe we are fortunate that difficult dilemmas come to us in our later years when previous experience has taught us to take time to consider carefully which is the best way to accept a forced change and to know the problems that could arise if a wrong choice is made. When the obviously best choice seems very undesirable, we must then say, "God always know what is best for us so we should follow His directions."

As we state that conclusion, we are on the verge of

new discoveries. We will experience new challenges and responsibilities. Change will bring new experiences and life again becomes exciting. Let us always thank God for renewing our minds through change.

Recovering from a Stroke

If there was a warning sign, I did not recognize it, but when my left hand was totally useless at 6:00 a.m. I immediately thought, *"I'm having a stroke"*. When I tried to pull down my pajamas in the bathroom, my hand was limp and helpless. Attempts to uncurl my tightly closed fingers were futile. *"Did I sleep crooked and my arm went to sleep?"*

"No, that only lasts a minute or two". My mind raced over the options. *"This is Labor Day when no doctor has regular office hours. I live alone so no one will check on me for hours. Should I call my neighbor who's a nurse?"*

After struggling to pull up my pajamas with only one hand, I went to the telephone. *"Oh, no. I can't hold the book to look up the nurse's number."* Thank goodness my speakerphone had frequently-used numbers stored in memory so I could dial with only one hand.

Since it was a holiday weekend, my niece was at her mother's home and promptly responded to my request for someone to drive me to the hospital emergency room. By the time she arrived here, I'd managed to don a house coat over my pajamas, and gave up any idea of other niceties except for the sturdy flip-flops I usually wear. *"How wonderful that this is a sunny and warm day."*

Because I had my niece call the Hospital Emergency Room to expect us, we were ushered right into a newly remodeled treatment room. The doctor on call checked my vitals, tested for skin sensations, read my pocket card listing

allergies and current prescriptions, then ordered the proper medications.

Over the next three hours a CAT scan and other tests were performed. During lulls there was ample time to tell my niece what was needed at home, where to find essential toiletries, and whom to call when we heard results. I did ask that she wait until evening to alert distant family so they could plan accordingly.

During this time I felt quite alert and could walk and talk normally, but someone thought I was too “hyper” and ordered a sedative shot which slurred my speech badly. With tests completed, I was moved to a bed in I. C. U. where the day nurses were caring and competent. They were great at explaining the procedures and the purposes of various monitors.

By the time my usual physician came in, my niece had to answer his questions, and he noticed that my smile was a bit crooked. When I showed him that my hand and arm were totally floppy and useless, he said that I’d definitely be in the hospital for several days.

Later my sister-in-law and niece brought requested items and reassured me all was taken care of at home. Next day, as word traveled the local grape vine, visitors and cards began arriving. My Pastor was extremely helpful because of his vast experience with hospital patients. My daughter from Oklahoma arrived shortly after lunch to give welcome help.

Not so fun was my first experience at having a recently trained male nurse on the night shift. He wanted to do things correctly, and I tried politely to be patient, but he couldn’t place a bedpan comfortably under me. It was a big relief to move to a regular room in a couple of days, even though I had to ask other male nurses for help to walk to and from the bathroom.

My daughter took care of getting me a membership in Senior Friends so I'd qualify for a private room at the price of a double room. One day in that privacy began to restore my sanity.

Without warning the next day in mid-afternoon, when I'd just begun to visit with company, nurses came in to say, "We're moving you to the Skills Unit immediately in a wheel chair."

My visitors helped carry flowers and items not piled into my lap, and followed in the elevator to see where I'd be next. I was told, "There are no private rooms in the Skills Unit" as my possessions were deposited on shelves assigned to me. The new roommate and her visitors seemed as surprised as I was at this sudden move.

Attitudes of nursing staff in the Skills Unit were a drastic change from those in other areas. If I said, "*I can't do that*", they'd promptly reply with a firm, "*Yes, you can.*" Gradually I realized that this "tough love" approach was a key element in my path toward recovery. A nurse's aide would do essential tasks like opening a carton of milk or a plastic fruit cup, but would let me find alternative ways to feed myself. They even refused to cut my meat, so I remembered that fingers could be used.

Far more annoying and less pleasant was the difficulty aides had in putting my eye glasses correctly on my face. One treated the ear pieces like oxygen tubes that go in one's nose. Others could find only one ear correctly. It was a great day when I succeeded in putting my glasses on all by myself using only one hand.

For a couple of days I could wear the pajamas and robe I'd brought with me, but soon the staff insisted that I wear normal casual clothing for walks into the hall or to the therapy rooms. One therapist brought me a large booklet titled "One-Handed Living". When I'd read it, she added sugges-

tions that fit my special problems such as applying a roll-on deodorant under both arms using only one hand.

Finally she explained a way to put on a bra all by myself: lay it on my lap to hook the fasteners, then put the weak arm in, put the head through, then the other arm, and finally wriggle it down into a comfortable position. Her persistent patience rubbed off as I learned not to complain when it took five minutes to complete what used to be a simple task.

Therapy sessions were tiring and difficult until I realized how effective those exercises were in restoring muscle tone and strength. Working on shoulder muscles seemed very tedious, especially with an extra weight strapped around my wrist. Over many weeks with many devices and tools, I developed extreme patience and a new appreciation for the training required to become a physical and occupational therapist.

Mental concentration became a primary part of new exercises. One day when I could not release something I'd picked up, the therapist's command to "*Open your hand*" brought immediate results. Other days I asked him to show me how his hand looked while doing something, then I could imitate his motion successfully. Tasks that were impossible in early sessions became easy several weeks later.

Therapists said that progress came unusually fast for me. Within ten days of hospitalization I was ready to move to an assisted living facility near the hospital. I always hated nursing homes when I visited, and went now only because there was no better choice and this one offered short term rates.

Staff there was very friendly and helpful. Meals were excellent, and the cooks even catered to my food allergies. Adapting to a slower paced lifestyle was unpleasant at first. My interests did not match those of residents who were eager to play Bingo, to sit in the lobby reminiscing about

early days, or to watch TV nonstop.

It was wonderful when friends gave me a ride to a meeting, to church, or to a concert. Even better was permission from my physician to begin driving myself again. My weak hand was now able to operate the turn signals, and my attention to traffic was better than many I've seen driving around town holding a cell phone to one ear while maneuvering their car around a corner or into a parking space.

Once I'd convinced my daughter and the doctor that I could manage again at home alone, I was very eager to do so. That proved to be the best therapy ever because there were so many jobs to accomplish by adapting or trying new techniques. Even putting dry cereal and milk on the table for breakfast was a challenge the first day. My weak hand remembered its former part in this simple chore, but only the strong hand was able to do it.

Microwave cookery is a lifesaver for the disabled. Stores offer so many "ready to heat" foods that maintaining a proper diet is no problem. Many other chores like sweeping and dusting were rapidly demoted to occasional status. (Living alone does have its advantages.) However I could never get along without help from my nephew and others who carry out trash, check my tires, change a burned out light bulb, and reach things higher than I can manage.

One of the most frustrating adaptations was trying to type with one hand when I'd used both hands on the correct keys from the first day a typewriter entered our home. Because computer geniuses made correcting typos so easy, and because I think easily while typing, I decided to learn the "Columbus" system haphazardly.

Before long I could feel errors and make fast taps on the delete key. Things became easier when one finger of the weak hand reacted correctly in using the shift key. Today, as I type this, I discover that those weak fingers do remember

where the correct keys are and can accurately type words if I have time for them to do each letter slowly. It is easy to eliminate unwanted repeats. There is hope!!!

Time blurs certain inconveniences but I vividly remember the first day I tried to put in my hearing aids with one hand and to install a needed battery. Such difficult nonessentials often are postponed after one attempt, tried again later, and finally become possible.

When cold weather arrived, I tried putting on ankle socks, but they were not worn very often because luckily my feet stay warm most of the time. Much later I became brave enough to try panty hose. It took many attempts to master that task, and they are worn only for special events. I'm most thankful for Velcro strap fasteners and slip-on shoes that are comfortable as well as easy to put on.

Since reality must be accepted, each day I think about what may happen in the future. How long can I continue to live alone? What if I have another stroke? "What if..." is too easy to say. Instead I must concentrate on the positives as I was urged to do at the hospital.

Continuing my medications, regular checkups with the doctor, and remembering to do the therapy exercises on my own are essential steps in my recovery. Equally helpful are the many get well cards and offers of assistance. Always I am aware of the healing power of the numerous prayers offered by family and friends over the past six months.

Daily I thank God that my stroke was a mild one, and that He provided such excellent care when I needed it. Only He knows the extent of future recovery or problems, yet each day I notice some bit of progress.

Having a stroke is not fun, but even partial recovery is a wonderful stage in life. Today is the day which the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.

What Do You Hear?

Talking with others,
Understanding what they say,
Learning what's new
Is Great!

Admitting deafness,
So common among seniors,
Bothers others,
NOT ME?

When they're working right,
Hearing aids are wonderful,
But when they don't
Watch out!

It takes skill and time
To balance volumes and tone
So all will sound
Just right?

When words are muffled
Because batteries are dead,
Grab some new ones
At once!

Hate them or love them,
I must admit, hearing aids
Help me enjoy
Each day!!!

Surviving The Nightmare of Moving!

When was the last time you moved to a different home? Was it forced upon you?

For years my daughter said, “Mom, I hope you’ll clean out this house before I have to.” I always said, “It will take 20 years to sort through everything in the rooms and full basement of this 107 year old house”. But I never started.

In July, 2008, my daughter-in-law cleared out 315 *Reader’s Digest Condensed* books we’d accumulated in 50 years. Later my daughter’s family hauled away unused furniture and clothing. I did not recognize the hint and still slept well.

An early October car accident brought constant nagging from my children: “Mom, we think you should move off the farm NOW!”

Where could I move? What about all that “stuff”? I’d hate to “vegetate” in a nursing home watching TV all day while waiting for the next meal.

When nightmares increased, I began serious inquiries. In January I agreed to tour a continuing-care complex with town homes and traditional nursing facilities. The room size, nice cabinets, large closets, and new carpet were wonderful. Still I did NOT want to move.

I worried how the furniture would fit each room. After considering the financial arrangements, I admitted that “The Commons” in Enid, Oklahoma, was best with many activities and good medical care.

After paying the basic deposit to put my name on a waiting list, I anticipated less stress, but questions increased. What do I do with so much furniture? So many years of business items? Letters? Family photos? School scrapbooks? Something left by everyone who ever lived in this house?

It was a huge relief to complete a successful auction of antiques and items others could use, but when a moving company was contacted and a final date set, sound sleep vanished. Work seemed endless even with help from family. Every letter read evoked poignant memories of the writer and events we'd shared. It was easier to throw away such items after I accepted the harsh reality of less space in my new home.

Much remained undone by moving day, but essential furniture, clothing, and kitchen utensils were taken to Enid. Acting like a zombie, I decided where to put what, and then tried to remember what had been done. It helped to hear other residents say they still have unopened boxes in their garages two or three years after moving. Too many boxes did not make the first move or a later trip when a car was fully loaded.

After three months here I'm enjoying nearly everything. I do tasks almost automatically. Most nights I sleep very soundly with occasional enjoyable dreams and no nightmares.

Thanks go to God for guiding me to this friendly and caring community where I live in the newest and nicest home I've ever had. I'd hate to leave here, and hope my health remains good.

Moving is a nightmare, but the result is fine.

Never Give Up!

What do we learn watching football games? What do those players teach us? How do they act when the score is lopsided? In recent games many players NEVER GAVE UP and the final score was decided by which team held the ball in the last few seconds.

Are we tenacious when life becomes confusing? Do we stick with a task until it is completed? Residents in a Retirement Community offer many examples of patience and persistence.

A woman using a walker for support and safety remains very cheerful. One day she told that she had several surgeries to remove cancers, and takes medication regularly. Tests last week showed that she is now cancer free. Like a football player who scores the winning point of a game, this woman is overjoyed at these results. Like football players who review films of previous games and continue daily practices, she hopes that continuing medication will destroy any new cancer cells.

People whose lives are interrupted by illness show the persistence of young second string players who suit up for each game but seldom play. They cheer teammates and are ready to play if needed. In a Retirement Community one meets many who encourage each other, like a woman who speaks in whispers because of throat problems but knows all residents and their home towns. Many who eat in the Main Dining Room notice who misses a meal and wonder if they are ill or just on a trip.

A former surgeon whose career was ended by blindness uses a white cane to walk the area and exercise a neighbor's dog.

When a football player is injured and sits on the sideline, he watches intently for ways the team can improve.

One self-sufficient resident using a "scooter type" wheelchair moves around a new restaurant or museum more easily than most other people. She NEVER GAVE UP after her career as a physical therapist was ended by a car accident.

During my recent eye exam, I complained about seeing double at times and that I could never distinguish the sep-

arate notes while playing keyboard music. After routine tests, the doctor showed letters in two boxes on different levels and far apart. When he got the two boxes to combine into one he said, “You need a prism in your lenses”. For me that diagnosis was as exciting as for a football player to find a new scoring technique. The lenses with proper prisms give miraculously improved vision for music and at the computer.

I’m very glad that I NEVER GAVE UP, even after two years of problems, because these new lenses give back a portion of my life that I thought was lost forever. I thank God for sending me to a doctor and technicians who knew how to provide exactly what I needed so I now can resume regular practices as football teams do.

The Burden Bearer

Child of my love, lean hard,
And let me feel the pressure of thy care,
I know thy burden, child. I shaped it,
Poised it in Mine own hand: made it in proportion
In its weight to thine own unaided strength.
For even as I laid it on, I said,
“I shall be near, and while she leans on Me,
This burden shall be Mine, not hers:
So shall I keep My child within the circling arms
Of My own Love.” Here lay it down, nor fear
To impose it on a shoulder which upholds
The government of worlds. Yet closer come:
Thou art not near enough. I would embrace thy care
So I might feel My child reposing on My breast.
Thou lovest Me? I knew it. Doubt not then,
But, loving Me, lean hard.

Author Unknown.

The above verses were given to me, handwritten on a small sheet of paper, when I was still in college by the mother of a very close friend. That woman had health problems for many years but always remained alert and cheerful.

While I have no date to verify the year, I think I received it in the fall of 1946 after the death of my father. Since re-

ceiving it, I reread the original many times when problems arose, and I kept it in my first Bible from then on.

Recently while looking for other items, I rediscovered my own later handwritten copy of the original. This typed version is being prepared in 2011 so that I may share the message with others. I pray that it it will help someone as much as it has helped me throughout most of my life.

L.J.(B.)H.

"This collection is a treasure, capturing the wit and wisdom of an amazing woman."

—Tracy Million Simmons

Author and publisher



Born in Atchison, Kansas in 1924, Joyce Herrmann married a farmer and moved to their country home near Offerle. Over the course of the next 53 years, she wrote about her experiences as a student, wife, mother, teacher, organist, and community volunteer. Joyce currently resides in Enid, Oklahoma.