

The Journal



A SHEPHERDESS INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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*"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith." —2 Timothy 4:7*



Ellen Louise Hendrickson Bresee 1928 - 1997

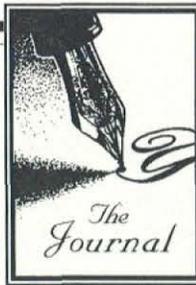
The Journal

- 3 Ellen Remembered
- 4 Marriage Growth
- 5 Christmas Without Grandma Kay
- 7 The Number One Priority
- 8 Making a Difference in the Real World
- 10 The Longest Day
- 12 Six Months on a Desert Island
- 15 Mediation on Luke 2:1-7
- 17 SIEMA: What It Means to Me
- 18 Greatest Things Ministers' Wives Should Know
- 19 Joys and Trials
- 20 Praise God for Problems
- 22 The Child-Friendly Church
- 23 Happy Ending to a Dog's Tale

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Editor's Musings

It is with sadness and a keen sense of loss that this issue of *The Journal* begins with an article remembering the ministry of Ellen Bresee. How can so many years of her love-filled service be summed up in a magazine article? It is impossible. The assurance of Jesus' glorious return, to get Ellen and all of the rest of us, is the comfort that sustains us.

Between the covers of this last issue of 1997, you will discover articles from many parts of the world. May you find Jesus, His blessings, and His love for you within them.

Several of the articles in this issue focus our attention on the King of the Universe coming to our earth as an infant almost 2,000 years ago. His entrance then was quiet, and for most peoples' lives, unnoticed.

As the last days of this year pass all too quickly, it is my prayer that each one of us will find a renewed relationship with our best friend, Jesus Christ. He loves us so much. May He not pass through our lives unnoticed.

Your friend,

The Journal A SHEPHERDESS
INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR

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Ellen Remembered

Sharon Cress

Ellen Louise (Hendrickson) Bresce was born in Puyallup, Washington, USA, January 15, 1928, and died peacefully in her sleep, July 13, 1997, after a twelve-year battle (including 60 months of chemotherapy treatments) with cancer.

Ellen met her husband, Floyd, former Secretary of the Ministerial Association at Walla Walla College and joined her life and ministry with his on September 5, 1948. Together, they served as instructors at Columbia and Laurelwood Academies and in pastorates throughout Oregon; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Keene, Texas. There, Ellen served as Family Life Director for the Southwestern Union. They also served on the staff of Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, for 16 years.

For ten years, concluding with their retirement in 1992, Ellen and Floyd served the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists where she, along with Marie Spangler, founded Shepherdess International, the entity of the Association which provides nurture, encouragement, and training resources for ministers' wives. In fact, it is fair to say that Shepherdess International would not exist if it had not been for Ellen's determination and tenacity.

Ellen received the President's Award from the Association of Adventist Women in 1992, and she was chosen as Woman of the Year for Church Life in 1995. The plaque which honored her reads, "for undaunted spirit, validating and

enhancing the work of ministers' wives, worldwide."

Ellen, a mother and homemaker at heart, is survived by her husband, Floyd; her mother, Opal Hendrickson; her only brother, Larry Hendrickson; one daughter, Tamara; three sons: Terry, Ted, and Tim along with his wife, Wendy; and two grandchildren: Katie and Lily.

During memorial services, July 14, at Medford, Oregon, Ellen was eulogized by Bruce Johnston, former president of the North Pacific Union. Special tribute to her ministry was presented by current Shepherdess Coordinator, Sharon M. Cress, and Ministerial Association Secretary, James A. Cress. Alf Birch, of the Oregon Conference, also paid tribute to her influence in the conference where Ellen and Floyd had retired.

Only in eternity will the full impact of Ellen's selfless life and devoted ministry be fully comprehended. Until that glad resurrection, the influence of her life will be continually felt in the lives of pastoral families around the globe. "Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

Sharon's Tribute at Ellen's Funeral

"On behalf of pastors' wives around the world, I would like to pay tribute to Ellen.

Shepherdess International would not exist if it had not been for Ellen's vision. Along with Marie Spangler, they began the uphill struggle to bring Shepherdess International into a regularized ministry. As a pastor's

wife herself, Ellen knew the unique challenge these special women face everyday, and she sought to organize a nurturing entity for them.

It took tenacity and fortitude, and she related to me that there were deep valleys of frustration and discouragement when some church leaders did not share her dream.

Ellen persevered. Shepherdess International was officially organized and became the tool to enable these special women to become "paraprofessionals," a word she loved to use.

In the last four years, I have followed Ellen's footsteps and around the world, pastors' wives always express their love and appreciation for her ministry to them. She was a mentor and role model to so many.

On a personal note, when Ellen retired and I was asked to assume the work of serving these thousands of clergy spouses, I had no idea what to do. Gracious, unselfish, Ellen spent a couple of days tutoring me. She left me all her files, notes, records, and seminar outlines. And she never looked back to judge how I carried on her dream. She also told me who some of the snakes were and how to avoid being bitten and poisoned by their venom!

I'm looking forward to seeing Ellen again at Jesus' great fellowship dinner—the one where the pastors' wives neither cook nor clean up! Who can find a virtuous woman? We found Ellen, and she was worth far more than jewels. The sparkle of her life lives on in the faces of the women she met and inspired." ❀

Marriage Growth

Ellen Bresee

*We must take
Christ with us to
tidy the house.*



Ellen Bresee (1928-1997) was co-founder of Shepherdess International.

Here we share with you Ellen's last article.

A new marriage is like a lovely, new house. Fresh paint, neat lawns, flowers blooming. Inside it is lovingly decorated. Laughter and love abound, a cheery fire burns in the heart and warms us.

Then, ever so gradually, the spirit of bitterness and unforgiveness seeps in—the weather of time starts chipping away at the exterior paint. The damage of neglect sets in. The windows jam, the doors sag, the rooms begin to settle under the mantle of dust and darkness.

Perhaps a spouse has been unfaithful, an in-law brings pain, promises were made and not kept, sharp words have left a crack in the foundation. Our expectations or demands were more than the spouse was capable of delivering. We begin to board up the windows and eventually the house stands empty and locked. The spiritual dwelling place of God is shut up.

"We cannot live in a broken, barricaded house."

So often when I used to do marriage counseling I would find people harboring things in their hearts that were destroying their marriage relationship. We cannot live in a broken, barricaded house. We have been dwelling on the unpleasant past, or worst yet, told ourselves we have buried it, and will not allow ourselves to acknowledge it exists. Still, the haunting ghost of remembrance whispers painful memories in our ears.

"To have happy homes we need

to confess our sin and ask for forgiveness."

Karen Maines in her book, *Key to a Loving Heart* suggests that when this happens we have alienated ourselves from Christ, the only one who knows and understands the territory of the subconscious. But we do not want to answer His knock at the door. We know forgiveness is costly. It is an agony of submission. Each time we forgive, we are participating slightly in the all-inclusive suffering of Christ. It must be offered even when it has not been requested. When Peter asked, "Lord, how often shall my brother (spouse) sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Christ replied, "Seventy times seven!" Christ taught we must forgive again and again.

To have happy homes, we need to confess our sin and ask for forgiveness. We must repaint and clean the old house, unboard the windows and release our souls from the bonds of a darkened and unforgiving home. We must take Christ with us to tidy the house. Let Him look under the sofa, open every small closet, every cupboard to His view. Tell Him, "Here is the dirt, here is what I have been harboring." He will sweep every corner clean and forgive us even as we are forgiving our spouse. "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 44:22, NIV).✻

Christmas Without Grandma Kay

Robin Jones Gunn

"Ok," I agreed with my husband, Ross. "We'll invite your family here for Christmas. But you know it's going to be hard for everyone since your mom passed away."

"I know," he said. "That's why we all need to be together."

I sort of agreed with him. But I knew I couldn't take Kay's place as hostess. I was still grieving myself and didn't feel I could be responsible for the emotional atmosphere on our first holiday without her.

I made all the preparations—cookies, decorations, presents—then welcomed Ross' family on Christmas Eve with open arms as I braced myself for a holiday punctuated by sorrow. That evening at church, our clan filled the entire back section. Afterwards, at home, the kids scampered upstairs and Ross shouted, "Five minutes!" The adults settled in the living room and Ross began to read from Luke 2.

At verse eight, our 6-year-old, Rachel, appeared at the top of the stairs wearing her brother's bathrobe, a shawl over her head and carrying a stuffed lamb under her arm. She struck a pose

and stared at the light fixture over the dining room table, as if an angel had just appeared.

My father-in-law chuckled, "Look at her! You'd think she could really hear heavenly voices."

Next came Mary, one of my nieces who'd donned the blue bridesmaid dress I wore in my sister's wedding. I knew then that the kids had gotten into my closet. The plastic baby Jesus fit nicely under the full skirt of the blue dress. My son, appearing as Joseph, discreetly turned his head as Mary "brought forth" her firstborn son on the living room floor, wrapped him in a dish towel and laid him in the laundry basket.

We heard a commotion as Ross turned to Matthew 2 and read the cue for the magi. He repeated it, louder: "We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

One of my junior high-age nephews whispered, "You go first!" and pushed his older brother out of the bedroom into full view. Slowly the ultimate wise man descended with Rachel's black tutu on his head and bearing a large bottle of canola oil.

Robin Jones Gunn keeps busy taping a new program from KNIS, a local Christian radio station near her home in Reno, Nevada.

Virtue, November/December 1993.

The adults burst out laughing and I did, too, until I realized what he was wearing. It was a gold brocade dress with pearls and sequins that circled the neck and shimmered down the entire left side. Obviously the kids had gone through the bags I'd brought home after we'd cleaned out Kay's closet. Bags filled with shoes, hats, a few dresses and some scarves that still smelled like her.

The laughter quickly diminished when my father-in-law said, "Hey! That's Kay's dress! What are you doing wearing her dress?"

Rachel looked at Grandpa from her perch at the top of the staircase. "Grandma doesn't mind if he uses it," she said. "I know she doesn't."

We all glanced silently at each other.

I didn't doubt that Rachel had an inside track into her grandma's heart. Kay had been there the day she was born, waiting all night in the hospital, holding a vase with two pink roses picked from her garden. She'd carried the roses through two airports and on the hour-long flight, telling everyone who she was going to see: "My son, his wife, my grandson and the granddaughter I've been waiting for."

I'd slept with the two pink roses on my nightstand and my baby girl next to me in her bassinet. When I awoke early in the morning to nurse my squirming, squalling infant, I noticed a red mark on her cheek. Was it blood? A birthmark I hadn't noticed before?

No, it was lipstick. Grandma Kay had visited her first granddaughter sometime during the night.

It was Grandma Kay who taught Rachel the three silent squeezes.

A squeeze-squeeze-squeeze of the hand means, "I-love-you." My introduction to the squeezes was in the bride's dressing room on my wedding day. Kay slid past the wedding coordinator and photographer. In all the flurry, she quietly slipped her soft hand into mine and squeezed it three times. After that, I felt the silent squeezes many times. We all did.

When we got the call last year that Kay had gone into a diabetic coma, Ross caught the next plane home. Our children and I prayed this would only be a close call, like so many others the past two

*I was still grieving myself.
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years. But Kay didn't come out of it this time. A week later, we tried to accept the doctor's diagnosis that it was only a matter of days. The children seemed to understand that all we could do was wait.

One night that week, Rachel couldn't sleep. I brought her to bed with me but she wouldn't settle down. Crying, she said she wanted to talk to her Grandma.

"Just have daddy put the phone up to her ear," she pleaded. "I know she'll hear me."

It was 10:30 p.m. I called the hospital and asked for Kay's room. My husband answered

at her bedside. I watched my daughter sit up straight and take a deep breath.

"Ok, Rachel," my husband said. "You'll have to talk loud because there are noisy machines helping Grandma breathe."

"Grandma, it's me, Rachel" She shouted. "I wanted to tell you good night. I'll see you in heaven."

Rachel handed me the phone and nestled down under the covers. "Oh," she said, springing up. "Tell daddy to give Grandma three squeezes for me."

Two days later, Grandma Kay died. She had left clear instructions to the family: she wanted to be cremated and her ashes scattered over the Pacific Ocean, whose waves she had gazed at every day from her kitchen window.

Rachel sat with her cousins during the memorial service and I couldn't help but notice her unusual calm and poise. She told everyone, "Grandma is going to see Noah and the real Rachel and David, but not Goliath, I don't think."

When we boarded the chartered yacht in Newport Beach to carry out Kay's wishes, the cousins all sported pudgy, orange life jackets and nibbled chips and M&M's. It was a painfully gorgeous summer evening and I missed Kay so much. But saying goodbye to her as the sun set and the brisk ocean wind flew against our faces was much sweeter than huddling around a sealed box. In her death, as in life, she thought first of what others would enjoy.

Earlier that afternoon, with a dozen flower baskets sitting all over, Rachel had secretly instructed her cousins to "pick a bouquet for Grandma to take on the boat." As the yacht sped out to sea, the cousins retrieved their

flowers and tossed them into the water in turn, saying goodbye to Grandma Kay that sun-kissed Southern California evening.

I bit my lower lip when I saw Rachel's bouquet. It was centered with two pink roses. She tossed it overboard, the last one to say goodbye.

Now, Christmas Eve, in our snow-covered house, Rachel was the first to welcome Grandma's memory into our celebration.

"Really, Grandpa," she continued to plead, "Grandma wouldn't mind."

We all knew Rachel was right. Grandma Kay wouldn't have cared if her grandchildren found delight in anything that belonged to her. If the dress had been embroidered with pure 14-karat gold, Grandma Kay wouldn't have minded a bit.

Grandpa nodded. The pageant continued. The next wise guy paraded down the stairs, stumbling on his too-big bathrobe, a towel wrapped around his head and bearing a jumbo-sized Lawry's Seasoned Salt. He laid it at the laundry basket.

My husband read about the shepherds returning, "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, just as they had been told."

Then the cast took a bow and scrambled for the kitchen where they fought over lighting the candle on Jesus' birthday cake.

When we started singing Happy Birthday to Jesus, I looked down at the little shepherdess standing next to me. *Maybe Grandpa was right. Maybe she really did hear heavenly voices.*

Then Rachel's small, warm hand nuzzled its way into mine. I knew Grandma Kay was there, too, when I felt three silent squeezes. ❀

The Number One Priority

Marah Courteous

Family must be number one,
No matter what the cost,
Or else the very heart of the church,
Our children, may be lost.

Ministry can be particularly hard,
For what do children see?
A big bad church run by a God,
"who took my Dad away from me."

Resentment builds within their hearts,
When Dad is never there.
Especially on those special days,
When he could have shown he cared.

God designed the very first family,
And errors He doesn't make.
The church came later in His design,
A planned priority, not a mistake.

So don't feel guilty over your choice,
When time with family you take.
After all you are following His Word,
And a better minister you'll make.

Marah Courteous is a pseudonym.

Making a Difference in the Real World

Andrea Kross



Andrea Kross is a trained occupational therapist and health educator, but presently is a full-time homemaker and mom. Her husband, Nick Kross, is Assistant Youth Director for the South Queensland Conference. The Kross family includes two children: Nicholas (4) and Caitlin Rose (18 months).

I was talking about you to some friends of ours last night."

"Oh yes?" I said, paranoia beginning to set in. "What about?"

"Well, I was using the illustration of putting your hand into a bucket of water and pulling it out. When your hand goes in, the water moves up about it. What happens when you pull it out?"

"The water goes back to the way it was before," I replied, wondering what on earth it was about me that reminded her of a bucket of water.

"That's right. The water shows no sign of change. Many people move through life like that. Very few people make any lasting impact on a situation. I was telling my friends about how you were one of those people who had made a lasting impression on our work situation and the people you work with."

I was stunned.

For the past twelve months I had been working on a part-time basis in a government work rehabilitation unit, doing my best to be a shining light but feeling like a pencil torch with a flat battery.

I worked in an office full of avid "new-agers," surrounded by subliminal "energy" and

"healing" tapes, room ionizers, crystals, new-age books, posters, philosophies and therapists, and the attitude that "if it works, use it." Chris was right in the middle of it all.

When I first met Chris, I was somewhat in awe of her. A core member of the "inner circle," Chris dressed with class, was extremely professional, sat on inter-departmental panels and had a typical social worker's view of Christianity; that is, if you evaluated why you held your Christian beliefs, you wouldn't hold them. And here she was saying I had made a lasting impression.

As I thought of Chris's words, I contemplated the goals I had set for myself when I began work.

Be genuine.

One of my primary goals when starting work was to form genuine friendships with my fellow employees. While I saw this as the first step towards sharing my faith, I wanted it to be clear in my own mind and to my fellow employees that our friendships certainly did not hinge on their ultimate conversion.

Most of my fellow employees had many barriers against Christianity. Christians were seen as negative, unrealistic,

boring "shalt not's" who were totally unaccepting of the beliefs of others "less holy." In order to break down some of those barriers, I concentrated on being genuine and natural, ignoring the pre-existing group barriers and treating everyone the same.

A common comment that was fed back to me was that I could move freely between the sub-groups where others couldn't. I also believe that taking a humble, ready-to-learn approach helped to defuse a lot of the stereotypical pictures my colleagues had of "know-it-all" Christians.

Be consistent.

One of the most damaging things to a Christian's credibility is when actions don't follow words. To make any sort of impact on others, behavior needs to reflect beliefs, especially under pressure.

My decision not to swear was quickly noticed, but not really commented on by my fellow employees as being something different. My ability to go blind-folded through a team-building rope course without swearing, however, became a major topic of conversation . . . at work and at home! The team even discovered they could really enjoy a clean joke!

Take responsibility for your beliefs.

Many Christian clients had refused therapies offered to them because they conflicted with their conscience, but still expected their case managers to find them a cure without any tools. While making that good decision to stand up for their beliefs, many Christian clients had actually shed poor light on Christianity because they were not then taking responsibility for the fact that one

of those therapies may have been their "cure."

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I was unable to attend several training programs and staff incentives/rewards because of the Sabbath hours. I made it clear to the staff I was quite happy to do this rather than compromise my beliefs. The staff also knew I was turning down a lot of work which would have really helped us financially, rather than put my son into daycare with someone who I could not be sure would uphold my beliefs in Christian child-training.

Present your beliefs in a positive manner.

"But you can't be. You're so normal!"

This was the reaction of a fairly new staff member who had just finished berating Christians and then been told that not only was I a Christian, but a minister's wife as well!

Christianity needs to be presented as a credible and desirable option, emphasizing the benefits rather than the "shalt nots," and even presenting the "shalt nots" as a positive choice or a price worth paying rather than a millstone around the neck. "There is nothing appealing about a critical or negative Christian."

While it is important to express honesty regarding life's problems, it is also important to express confidence in a future that really matters and to demonstrate that Christianity works and gives practical help in achieving a fulfilling, complete life here and now.

Finally, thought-out reasoning for beliefs carries a lot more weight than standard Christian clichés. ❀

December 1997						
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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Between December And December

*Between December
and December
we lose our way
sometimes.*

*Detours and
roads not taken
tantalyze for sure.*

*A star appears,
a lure*

*toward truth
we can hold fast,
legacy from every
Christmas past.*

*Doors which were
never locked
are open*

*starshine is real
at mystery we kneel.*

—Sharon Blessum
alive now!

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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

A Book of Christmas, copyright © 1988 by
The Upper Room.

The Longest Day

Marinela Peicu



Marinela Peicu is the Shepherdess Coordinator for the Oltenia Conference in Craiova, Bucharest, Romania. Her husband, Virgil, is President of the Oltenia Conference. They have two children: Abigail, 18, and Rares, 14. Marinela is a nurse at the Neurogycall Hospital in Craiova. She loves the outdoors, curling up with a good book, and popcorn, and knowing that she is useful in ministry.

Translated by Frank Dernoncourt.

Sometime ago, before the revolution that brought about religious liberty for the Adventist church in Romania, our family (my husband, our 9-year-old daughter, our 5-year-old son and myself) made up a good pastoral team. We volunteered to accomplish several tasks as services to our members. One of the greatest wants was religious literature, especially Sabbath school questionnaires. Seven or eight copies for about one hundred members were not enough. So they had to be photocopied and duplicated. However, that was forbidden because all copy machines belonged exclusively to the government. Nevertheless, some people of good will wanted to help us. Of course, they ran great risks because the secret police were ubiquitous.

This is how a kind of network came about. There were people who worked for the government but who wanted to help us; church members would dispatch the photocopies to them. At one time a man who went by the name "Uncle Mike" was doing a marvelous job. (We knew nothing more about him, neither his real name nor address.) We would meet him at some prearranged

location, give him the original material, and arrange to meet him at another time. Later he would bring us "the merchandise"—thousands of pages ready to be bound and distributed.

Winter 1988 was cold. My husband was driving home after meeting "Uncle Mike." He was 13 miles from home when all of the sudden he was stopped by policemen. The policeman asked my husband to open the trunk—it was full of the "dangerous" materials. My husband was then escorted to the police station, questioned and threatened.

While at the police station my husband remembered an earlier situation that had taken place a few months before. He was carrying the precious treasure in his car. Because of the presidential parade downtown, policemen were clearing the streets and preparing for the arrival of president N. Ceausescu. Every vehicle had to withdraw to secondary streets and wait until the presidential convoy was passed. Unfortunately, my husband's car broke down before he could leave the main thoroughfare. Policemen then rushed to push the car out of the way of the presidential parade. Did they know they were pushing a

chariot of the Gospel?

That story bolstered my husband when he was at the police station for he knew God had been looking after him. As he was thinking of God's care, another miracle took place, the policemen released him temporarily.

Immediately, he rid our home of some books that could have given us away and he instructed the children on how to answer questions they were probably going to be asked. The pursuit was not over.

In May, as I was at work in the office of a stomatologist, the door was suddenly thrown open and a few policemen came in and told my boss they were taking me home. My husband and my son were waiting for us there.

The policemen produced a search warrant and started searching the house, claiming they were after weapons, drugs and foreign currencies!

The three rooms of our apartment were scoured for seven to eight hours. They particularly focused on the bookcase. They removed some typewritten and some photocopied books, letters from abroad, audio tapes and personal or worship service notes. They also searched our car.

All the while, I, my husband, my son, and later my daughter, who had arrived in the meantime, remained in the kitchen, quietly minding our instructions given by those particularly intrusive policemen.

In the evening of the same day, my husband and I were taken to the police station where the questioning continued in separate rooms. We were tired and famished. We were asked questions over and over. The policemen wanted to know the origin of our multiplied books.

The questioning ended around midnight thanks to an officer who decided to let us go. We were weary and exhausted, but happy to be back home with our frightened and anxious kids.

Normally such an investigation entailed a lot of trouble: a permanent pursuit, jail, a never-ending surveillance. . . .

For us, however, it did not happen. Though all this happened

in the past, there is one moment I will never forget. I remember the tears running down my children's faces from their frightened eyes, looking at me anxiously yet full of wisdom. The look in their eyes will remain with me forever.

May God be blessed for all these extraordinary experiences. May He be praised for his intervention full of kindness and love.



We Give Out Love in Boxes

*We give out love in boxes
wrapped, tied, tagged.
But the first Christmas gift
was a love
that needed no adornment
or disguise;
a love
that wrapped itself
around our tired hearts forever.*



*—Kari Sharp Hill
alive now!*

A Book of Christmas, copyright © 1988, by The Upper Room.

Six Months on a Desert Island

Hannele Ottschofski



Hannele Ottschofski's husband is senior pastor of the Tübingen District in the Baden-Württemberg Conference in the South German Union. They have four daughters between the ages of eight and 23. Hannele loves music, sewing and writing. She is on the editorial team of the local Shepherdess Journal, Team.

Some time ago we had special meetings at our church on the theme "Adventist Identity." The guest speaker mentioned something in one of his presentations that made a bell ring inside me. He spoke about education and nurturing and quoted Ellen White as saying, "Mothers . . . bear a greater responsibility than does the king on his throne" (*Child Guidance*, p. 71). Wasn't that exactly the stuff I had been reading as a young girl? Oh yes, it was. In my thoughts I went back twenty-eight years and started musing about my life.

I had read many books by Ellen White while I was a young student. I was studying modern languages. Ellen White said a person shouldn't read novels. How can you study English and French literature and not read novels? I almost left the university because of the conflict I felt. I had already given up my dream of studying music because I felt Ellen White disapproved of a career as a concert pianist. I got the impression that ambition was a sin. If ambition was bad, I decided to forget all my ambitious projects.

I had taken Ellen White's remarks seriously and decided to be a good wife and mother and

support my husband. I had said no to a career of my own. I was convinced that was the right thing to do. I had always wanted to do something for God, and since my husband was a pastor, I thought I was serving God in the role as his helpmeet.

We enjoyed ministerial life, and I hadn't felt anything was missing from my life. We had considered ourselves privileged to be able to serve six years in the mission field. Life was interesting and good. I had been a useful part of a team. The years passed happily.

When one of my daughters went to kindergarten, a get-together for the parents was planned. We were supposed to draw a picture of ourselves and answer a few questions so that we would get to know each other. We were asked questions about our favorite food, color, etc. The last question was "What is your greatest wish?" I didn't have to think much, I knew what I wanted most: six months on a desert island! I was a busy wife and mother and life was just getting a bit too much for me. There were so many things I would have liked to do. But I didn't have enough time or energy. Oh yes, I did a lot of things, but somewhere deep down inside me there was this

secret wish to get away from it all, at least for a while.

I didn't want to go to that desert island in order to do nothing. I wanted to write a book, learn to paint, practice the piano for hours without being disturbed, do all the crafts I longed to do, maybe even sew a beautiful quilt. But most of all, I wanted to find myself.

I had been happy as a pastor's wife for so long, placing God's cause on the top of my priority list, but somehow I wasn't quite sure any more if I was satisfied with my life. I felt bound to the turf as we still had a preschooler when the oldest of our four daughters was leaving the nest. I was getting restless.

By now I was not so sure any more if my decision had been right. More and more women had careers of their own, and I was just a plain "housewife." When I visited my friends, I realized that I was a completely archaic model. Nobody stayed at home any more. Everybody else was working outside the home. I was still quite content but started wondering if it was such a great deal after all. People would ask, "And what do you do?" and I would feel embarrassed when I had to say that I was just a stay-at-home mum.

My husband took the call to become an administrator and spent each Sabbath in a different church. I didn't know what was going on in all those committee meetings and I had no idea what his administrative duties were. We had been used to working together, and now he didn't need me any more. Somehow everything I had built my life on started crumbling. To compensate for this, I became more actively

involved in our local church work while my husband spent his energies on conference business. We practically started living separate lives.

It took me quite a while to realize that I was in the clutches of a mid-life crisis. I hadn't thought my physical malaise had anything to do with an approaching menopause. I had always been a cheerful and optimistic person. Now I didn't recognize myself any more. I was physically and mentally exhausted. I would sit down at the piano and not be able to bring up enough energy to play seriously. I took a day off to go and see my sister who was

*Somewhere
along the road I had
thought that Ellen White
had betrayed me.*

in transit at the airport. We spent the day talking, and I could hardly keep the tears back. When I told her I couldn't play the piano any more, she was aghast, "But that's your soul!" she exclaimed. "What has happened to you?" But it helped to be able to talk to somebody.

I was able to put some pieces of the puzzle together again. I had been so bewildered because I didn't know what was happening to me. I started reading books on the subject and realized that what I was feeling was normal.

A friend who was a few years older invited me to come over for an afternoon. She knew just what I was going through because she

had been there too. We went for a long walk and talked and talked. It helped. I felt much better.

One day I decided to do something for myself. I got a part-time job teaching music at the local music school. I need some recognition from outside my home and enjoyed teaching. It helped soothe my discontent.

Finally my husband and I decided to move back into pastoral work because we both wanted a more rewarding experience. We had to move and that meant I had to leave my teaching job. But by that time, I wasn't so keen on teaching music to untalented kids any more! I had realized that working outside the home is not so much better after all. But I

was happy to have had the experience. We moved into a new home that had plenty of scope for new experiences: landscaping and planting a garden, carpentry, brick laying, and so on. I was quite surprised at how much fun it was to do new things like that. I decided I would not yet look for another job. Life was becoming a challenge again. I was busy. I didn't have the time to mope around. But the main difference was that I was enjoying life again. Once more my husband and I were doing things together.

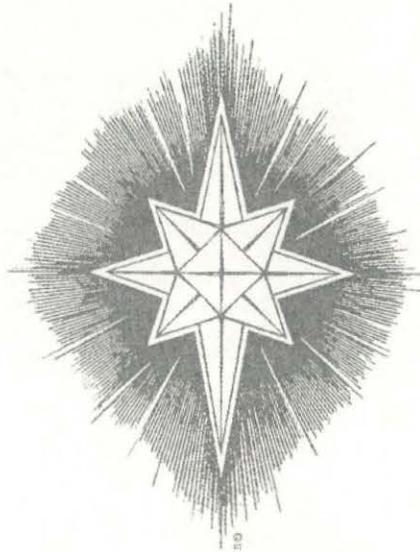
I sat there in the meeting and wondered. Somewhere along the road I had thought that Ellen White had betrayed me. Of course, she hadn't. She had only said that the work of the mother is more important than that of a king. She had not promised that we would be rewarded for it in this life! But it would be so much easier if you didn't have to face this pressure from society that your worth is only measured by the money you

earn. Of course, my worth is more what I am as a person than what can be measured in my achievements. But we need somebody to tell us that now and then. Somebody who will support us and lift us up when we are discouraged. And that means more than just presenting a fine program for Mother's Day once a year.

When my family was away for a week, and I was all alone, I thought I had arrived at my desert island at last. First of all, I had to catch up with all the things I had not had the time to do previously. I worked like mad and didn't have the time to enjoy my solitude. After three days I started missing my family. I realized that six months would be much too long on any island!

I could still do with six months extra time to complete my many projects. I would like to have more solitude now and then. But I think I've got my life back into balance. There are things I still have to work on. But I do not now regret not having a career of my own. I appreciate the freedom I have to plan my activities without the stress of rigid working hours. I have indulged in the life-long luxury of working without pay and have found my rewards, although not in financial form. Of course, I realize that I probably belong more to my mother's generation than to this modern world. My mother just said a few days ago: "We were told the Lord would pay for our efforts. Now I realize that I never will be paid for all the work I did for the church as you can't earn your salvation in any case!"

My six months on the desert island may still come some day, but right now I am in no hurry to get there. ❀



The Work of Christmas

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:*

*To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*

—Howard Thurman
alive now!

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Meditation on Luke 2:1-7

Ken Gire

For the census, the royal family has to travel eighty-five miles. Joseph walks, while Mary, nine months pregnant, rides sidesaddle on a donkey, feeling every jolt, every rut, every rock in the road.

By the time they arrive, the small hamlet of Bethlehem is swollen from an influx of travelers. The inn is packed, people feeling lucky if they were able to negotiate even a small space on the floor. Now it is late, everyone is asleep, and there is no room.

But fortunately, the innkeeper is not all shekels and mites. True, his stable is crowded with his guests' animals, but if they could squeeze out a little privacy there, they were welcome to it.

Joseph looks over at Mary, whose attention is concentrated on fighting a contraction. "We'll take it," he tells the innkeeper without hesitation.

The night is still when Joseph creaks open the stable door. As he does, a chorus of barn animals makes discordant note of the intrusion. The stench is pungent and humid, as there have not been enough hours in the day to tend the guests, let alone the livestock. A small oil lamp, lent them by the innkeeper, flickers to

dance shadows on the walls. A disquieting place for a woman in the throes of childbirth. Far from home. Far from family. Far from what she had expected for her firstborn.

But Mary makes no complaint. It is a relief just to finally get off the donkey. She leans back against the wall, her feet swollen, back aching, contractions growing stronger and closer together.

Joseph's eyes dart around the stable. Not a minute to lose. Quickly. A feeding trough would have to make do for a crib. Hay would serve as a mattress. Blankets? Blankets? Ah, his robe. That would do. And those rags hung out to dry would help. A gripping contraction doubles Mary over and sends him racing for a bucket of water.

The birth would not be easy, either for the mother or the child. For every royal privilege for this son ended at conception.

A scream from Mary knifes through the calm of that silent night. Joseph returns, breathless, water sloshing from the wooden bucket. The top of the baby's head has already pushed its way into the world. Sweat pours from Mary's contorted face as Joseph, the most unlikely midwife in all Judea, rushes to her side.

"Meditation on Luke 2:1-7" from Intimate Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire, published by Zondervan.

The involuntary contractions are not enough, and Mary has to push with all her strength, almost as if God were refusing to come into the world without her help.

Joseph places a garment beneath her, and with a final push and a long sigh her labor is over.

The Messiah has arrived.

Elongated head from the constricting journey through the birth canal. Light skin, as the pigment would take days or even weeks to surface. Mucus in his ears and nostrils. Wet and slippery from the amniotic fluid. The Son of the Most High God umbilically tied to a lowly Jewish girl.

The baby chokes and coughs. Joseph instinctively turns him over and clears his throat.

Then he cries. Mary bares her breast and reaches for the shivering baby. She lays him on her chest, and his helpless cries subside. His tiny head bobs around on the unfamiliar terrain. This will be the first thing the infant-king learns. Mary can feel his racing heartbeat as he gropes to nurse.

Deity nursing from a young maiden's breast. Could anything be more puzzling—or more profound?

Joseph sits exhausted, silent, full of wonder.

The baby finishes and sighs, the divine Word reduced to a few unintelligible sounds. Then, for the first time, his eyes fix on his mother's. Deity straining to focus. The Light of the World, squinting.

Tears pool in her eyes. She touches his tiny hand. And hands that once sculpted mountain ranges cling to her finger.

She looks up at Joseph, and

through a watery veil, their souls touch. He crowds closer, cheek to cheek with his betrothed. Together they stare in awe at the baby Jesus, whose heavy eyelids begin to close. It has been a long journey. The King is tired.

And so, with barely a ripple of notice, God stepped into the warm lake of humanity. Without protocol and without pretention.

Where you would have expected angels, there were only flies. Where you would have expected heads of state, there were only donkeys, a few haltered cows, a nervous ball of sheep, a tethered

camel, and a furtive scurry of curious barn mice.

Except for Joseph, there was no one to share Mary's pain. Or her joy. Yes, there were angels announcing the Savior's arrival—but only to a band of blue-collar shepherds. And yes, a magnificent star shone in the sky to mark his birthplace—but only three foreigners bothered to look up and follow it.

Thus, in the little town of Bethlehem . . . that one silent night . . . the royal birth of God's Son tiptoed quietly by . . . as the world slept.

Dear Jesus,

Though there was no room for you in the inn, grant this day that I might make abundant room for you in my heart. Though your own did not receive you, grant this hour that I may embrace you with open arms. Though Bethlehem overlooked you in the shuffle of the census, grant me the grace, this quiet moment, to be still and know that you are God. You, whose only palace was a stable, whose only throne was a feeding trough, whose only robes were swaddling clothes.

On my knees I confess that I am too conditioned to this world's pomp and pageantry to recognize God cooing in a manger.

Forgive me. Please. And help me understand at least some of what your birth has to teach—that divine power is not mediated through strength—both through weakness; that true greatness is not achieved through the assertion of rights, but through their release; and that even the most secular of things can be sacred when you are in their midst.

And for those times when you yearn for my fellowship and stand at the door and knock, grant me a special sensitivity to the sound of that knock so I may be quick to my feet. Keep me from letting you stand out in the cold or from ever sending you away to some stable. May my heart be warm and inviting, so that when you do knock, a worthy place will always be waiting. . . . ❀

SIEMA:

What It Means to Me

Evelyn Omana

SIEMA stands for International Society of Adventist Ministers' Wives, which is the name of SHEPHERDESS in Spanish and French.

My first contact with SIEMA came during the General Conference Session at Indianapolis. As the meetings for the ladies came to a close, every day a special meeting for the SIEMA (Shepherdess) coordinators was announced. Since neither I nor my friends from Inter-America knew what SIEMA stood for, we wondered what the meetings were about.

A year went by and I was invited to participate in a committee established to revise Sabbath School programs for children. This meeting took place at the G.C. headquarters in Washington and while there I asked a friend about SIEMA. With a surprised look on her face she said, "Come, I'll take you to the person who can best answer your questions." It was then that I met Ellen Bresee. With love and patience, she took the time to explain what SIEMA stands for and what it seeks to accomplish for the pastors' wives. I could see the sorrow in her eyes because of those of us who did not have this wonderful program which provides the support and spiritual growth so specially designed for us.

As I went to my room that night I knelt by the bedside and prayed and wept. I wept for myself and for all others who, like me, were in need of SIEMA. I begged my Lord to help me tear down any barriers that could be responsible for this program not being implemented in my territory. I asked for strength and wisdom in order to find the most direct route for solving this problem. It was not easy. I had to convince the administrators of the urgency of this need. But God began opening doors and in less than a year we had established five SIEMA chapters in our territory. The receptiveness and enthusiasm displayed by those who share this ministry with us is amazing. I have been surprised as I hear some pastors say that SIEMA has been instrumental in getting their wives more involved with their ministry and to become more identified with their church and its saving mission. Many say:

- They are happy and so are we.
- My wife now displays more enthusiasm and has very good ideas for working with our church members very efficiently.
- My wife is another person; you have helped her to take a big load off her shoulders since she now realizes she can share her burdens with other



Evelyn Omana is a SIEMA Coordinator for the Inter-American Division.

ladies who have the same problems.

I have summarized what SIEMA means to me with the following acrostic:

- S Smiles, loving greetings and support in times of need. It means feeling accepted, valued and understood by my friends in ministry.
- I Identification with the mission of the church and training for ministering in a way that will nourish our congregations.
- E Experiencing the joy and satisfaction of being a pastor's wife.
- M Ministering beside my husband, as we work together in soul winning, is being motivated to face struggles and to discover my personal gifts so that I may polish them.
- A Affection and friendship for my husband, my children, my church, my fellow pastors' wives, brothers and friends (who may admire or even criticize me) and for all of God's children who need a friendly hand to help them out in this world of grief and pain. And especially lots of love for Jesus, my best friend.

Four years have gone by since SIEMA was established in our Union. Thanks to the efficient support of the Local Field administrators, the wives of our pastors feel they are a part of the ministerial team. They have become leaders by coordinating, training and providing support to all the church programs in the church. Such leadership has been a great blessing throughout our entire Union. The churches are visibly more identified with the ministerial couples and the bonds of Christian love are becoming ever more binding.

I thank God for SIEMA! ✨

Greatest Things Ministers Wives Should Know

Drs. A. & L. Gensolin

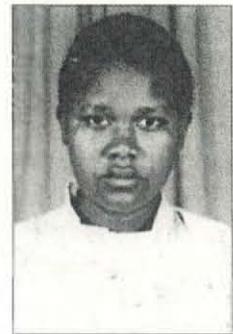


- Greatest evil—ignorance
- Greatest need—knowledge
- Greatest gift—time
- Greatest problem solver—laughter
- Greatest killer—gossip
- Greatest loss—discouragement
- Greatest sin—ingratitude
- Greatest temptation—appetite
- Greatest height—excellence in God's service
- Greatest tool—education
- Greatest waste—revenge
- Greatest act—forgiveness
- Greatest weakness—pride
- Greatest expense—wasting time
- Greatest exercise—meditation
- Greatest medicine—sleep
- Greatest lack—hard work
- Greatest institution—marriage
- Greatest thief—procrastination
- Greatest teacher—experience
- Greatest legacy—example
- Greatest revelation—nature
- Greatest tragedy—war
- Greatest goal—peace
- Greatest doctrine—righteousness by faith
- Greatest shame—not trying
- Greatest mistake—giving up
- Greatest kindness—correct criticism
- Greatest joy—gospel
- Greatest book—Bible
- Greatest friend—Jesus Christ
- Greatest fellowship—prayer
- Greatest day—today
- Greatest age—your age now
- Greatest father—Heavenly Father
- Greatest need—guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Greatest speaker—stands up, speaks up, and sits down ✨

Drs. A. & L. Gensolin are a retired dentist and a retired administrator at the Adventist University in the Philippines. From the Shepherdess Bulletin, Central Luzon Conference, January-March 1994.

Joys and Trials

Agnes Musyoki Nzioka



Life as a pastor's wife and mother living in Kenya has proven to be both challenging and uplifting. The challenges that sometimes face my family can often be overwhelming but the knowledge that we are doing God's will fills us with joy and peace.

Five years ago my husband and I began our ministry in Africa. Pastoring in Kenya has presented some hardships and we have encountered many disturbances in our lives. Still God has blessed us and we trust in the Lord. My daily prayer is, "Thank you, Lord, for calling my husband and me to work for You. You always make him prosper through your power."

Communication is difficult for the pastors in the Central Kenya Conference. Pastors oversee several churches and the distance between the congregations are often 50 km to 90 km. The pastor is expected to cycle or walk to meet the church members, conduct church board and business meetings and tend to the various needs of the church members. Being away from his

family greatly impacts the pastor and his wife and children.

During the long times when my husband is away, I have no one to share my problems with. I often feel so alone, and I eagerly await his return. Perhaps if we could have something like *pikipik*, the work would be easier and ministers' wives would not feel so stressed when their husbands are away.

Being away from home for extended periods of times also has a negative effect on pastors. Many of our pastors die young, and it has been suggested that the travel and unavailability of family, in particular a comforting wife, has hastened the deaths of many of these men. The distance to the church meetings are often so far that a pastor must stay away from home three or four days at a time.

The people of this area say everything that comes to mind; if they are unhappy, they write accusing letters, speak in abusive language and even do abusive deeds. When we begin to feel overwhelmed by the actions or words of others, my husband and I get down on our knees and talk to God about our concerns. We are comforted by the knowledge that God is preparing a heavenly

award for us and when my husband gets to heaven he will forget the tiredness that never seems to leave him.

There are many off-shoot movements in and around our community. Many times we have prayed, "Lord, if You called us, surely meeting these off-shoots is part of the call. We praise You for giving us strength and words from Your Bible to talk to them." Progress is being made in this area. God has shown us how to do His work; many members of the off-shoot movements have been baptized and are now attending our churches.

Though we are young in the ministry, the Lord is holding our hands firm in His. We are still ministering in these tough, remote areas. We really need your prayers.

Let us imagine the journey of Jesus from heaven down here as we serve as pastoral wives and pastors. Let us have courage to bring more to Him, even as we face hardships.

May God bless all of us as we work for our Lord in His vineyard.

Please keep my husband, Pastor Nzioka, and our daughter, Jammimal Mueni, and me in your prayers. ❀

Agnes Nzioka is a pastoral wife in the Central Kenya Conference.

Praise God for Problems

Kathleen S. Bostrom

*A pastor discovers
that giving thanks
turns Thanksgiving
into thanks living.*

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice . . . Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.—Philippians 4:4-7

I was having one of those days. You know the kind—when nothing seems to go right. I had not had a good night's sleep for weeks. Every muscle and bone in my body ached with fatigue. The children were crabby, whining and fussing and being as uncooperative as possible. The house looked as if a hurricane had swept through recently, but there was no time even to begin the monumental task of putting everything in order, let alone to get ready for the Thanksgiving holiday. Juggling the jobs of wife, mother, homemaker and copastor was just too much. By the time I got to my office at church, I was frazzled and depressed. The papers that sat in patient little piles across my desk only added to my feeling of being totally overwhelmed. Their accusing faces did nothing to alleviate my mood.

I sat there, feeling sorry for myself and pondering what I should do first. The best I could manage was to group and regroup all the pieces of paper and notes, hoping that by doing so my life could at least have the appearance of a little order. I told myself that I did not have time to begin a big project because I was scheduled to take communion to the homebound members of the church that day. I knew there would be little time for anything else, even though I had so much to do.

More than anything, I wanted to curl up in a quiet room and be alone. I wanted peace and quiet. I wanted to wallow in my bad mood. Yet I did not have the luxury of following my impulse to withdraw from all contact with the outside world. Homebound church members were counting on me. I did not believe I would be very good company, but dutifully, I set out. As I packed the communion kit, I breathed a deep prayer, "Dear God," I sighed, "I feel so lost and blue right now; help me to serve you and to forget my problems for a while."

The first house I came to sat at the end of a long, steep driveway. I had never been there before, but I knew that the Perrys had lived

Kathleen S. Bostrom is copastor with her husband, Greg, at Wildwood Presbyterian Church, Wildwood, Illinois.

This article appeared in the November/December 1993 issue of Horizons, the official publication of Presbyterian Women of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

there sixty years. As I stepped through the back door, I saw right away that the house looked as if it had not been cleaned for at least half those years. The kitchen floor was so worn down the linoleum was nearly gone. The walls were cracked and peeling and smudged with dirt that had long ago become a permanent part of the decor. The air was so stuffy that it took all my willpower not to choke as I tried to breathe. But above the smells of poverty rose a more pleasing aroma. A pot of fresh, homemade soup sat bubbling and simmering on one of the burners of the run-down stove.

Love Shines Through

Lucas Perry greeted me with a smile so cheerful and gracious it was like a ray of sunlight in the grey dimness of the kitchen. Following him into the living room, with its worn carpet and saggy furniture, I greeted his wife, Emma, who sat peacefully in a wheelchair. Despite the decrepit state of the room, two things immediately caught my eye. One was the crackling fire in the fireplace, giving the room a comforting warmth as only a hearth can do. The other was the pure love and devotion on Lucas's face as he looked at his wife. It warmed my soul with the divine warmth that only such love can bring.

The three of us sat together, talking and laughing. I listened to Lucas and Emma reminisce about their youth, how they had met, the children they had raised. It was obvious as the minutes passed that despite their poor living conditions, despite the fact that Emma was rapidly becoming more and more unable to do anything, despite the effort it

took for her husband to care for her, these were people who were thankful. They were thankful to still be in their home. They were thankful that with the help of visiting nurses and family he could still care for her. They were thankful for the soup that would be their meal for the day. And as we took communion together, they were thankful for the tiny, broken wafers of bread and the thimbles of grape juice that represented the body of Christ. We joined hands and prayed, giving thanks to God for the holy meal we had shared, giving thanks to God for the blessings in our lives, giving thanks to God for the presence of Christ in that home and in our hearts.

As I stood to leave, Lucas's eyes filled with tears. These were difficult days for him, and he knew that soon the time would come when he would no longer be able to care for his beloved Emma at home. Still, he was grateful for their earlier years and for the time they were sharing then. He thanked me for coming, and I felt his gratitude was so deep and so sincere I knew my visit had meant more to him than just a friendly call. The short time I spent there had let the Perrys know the church had not forgotten them. Lucas thanked me, but I should have thanked him. As I left the house, I did not notice what was wrong with it as much as I noticed what was right. It no longer looked as depressing as it had when I first arrived, for the glow of God's love shone with a holy light from within.

Attitude Is All

By the time I arrived home that evening, after a number of other visits—each as meaningful as the

first—the sky was dark, the air chill. Soft snowflakes fluttered in the black sky, dancing like fireflies in the brightness of the streetlights. I clumped up the back steps to my home, opened the kitchen door, and stepped into the warmth and brightness of the house that had caused me so much distress earlier that day. The children greeted me with squeals of delight, oblivious to the turmoil and bad tempers of the morning. I bent down and felt the delightful softness of their cheeks pressed against mine as they threw their welcoming arms around my neck. The house was still a mess. My Thanksgiving turkey was still unstuffed. The neatly arranged piles on my desk at the church were still awaiting my attention. I had not yet spent the time alone I had so craved hours before. Yet instead of curses, all that had so distressed me earlier seemed to become blessings. I thanked God with a heart that had been renewed that day.

I learned something on that bleak, winter day. I learned to rejoice in the Lord. I learned to offer prayers to God with a thankful heart, not a grudging one. I discovered that God's peace comes when we most need it and least expect it. I learned that instead of griping about my problems I should thank God for them, for my problems were actually blessings. I learned that God is present in poverty and suffering and that sometimes the people with the least in life are the most apt to give thanks to God for what they have. Most of all, I saw once again how God's love for us in Jesus Christ has the power to turn even the darkest days into sunlight. ❁

The Child-Friendly Church



Virgie Ponsaran Baloyo

Regardless of the endeavor, humans are result-oriented. Clothed in pride for self-achievement, *homo sapiens* cheer statistics, medals, plaques, records. The larger the trophy case, the better.

For soul winners, the number of baptisms count as stars in their crowns. But to my fellow Sabbath School teachers in the Children's Division there seems to be no "stars" to present.

So when the preacher in my church challenged the congregation to bring souls to Christ and stars to one's crown, I silently cringed, whined, and whimpered at the impossibility. The children I taught were too young to be baptized. My fellow teachers and I could show no results for our work.

I didn't give Bible studies then (and still can't, even after being married to a pastor for eight years). I only know how to tell stories, lead a song service, and distribute offering baskets. I do have the limited ability to make

tiny tots (already coaxed by their mothers) respond to my "altar call" to give their crumpled paper hearts to Jesus. After several years of enthusiastic existence in this department, I became despondent. I couldn't count results.

Working with our Sabbath School children may seem less important than working with adults, but this should not be so. Mrs. E. G. White herself recognized that "molding the minds and characters of [the] children, to train them for usefulness here, and to fit them for the future immortal life" is a "solemn and important" task.

The Sabbath School class is a missionary place where children discover, or learn by experience, ideas of holiness, sweet fellowship, church, and how to know God. Also the parent's teachings at home are enhanced by the Sabbath school. The children look forward to the Bible story lessons in pictures and their sweet personalities bloom in the joyful atmosphere.

"From a child, Timothy knew the Scriptures (his memory verses) and this knowledge was

a safeguard to him against evil influences surrounding him" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 212, parentheses supplied). Our Sabbath School children need the same safeguard. While Eunice, young Timothy's mother, and his grandmother did their part, it is also the work of "Christ's ambassadors to the little members of the congregation to see that the children are properly instructed in the word of God" (*Ibid.*).

Let us also encourage our local churches to leave a little corner of their sermons for the children's benefit. (Why have we forgotten the children?) Play the piano or sing children's songs while they tip-toe up front (on children-friendly non-slippery floors) for their sermonette or homily. Give a special time for the children to shake hands with the preacher, be he a visiting pastor or the church elder or a lay member.

Think of ways your church can be a place where children can worship God. While you can't turn over these six-year-old innocent souls for baptism yet, constant "practice" makes them perfect. Make your church a child-friendly church. ❀

Virgie is a pastor's wife in the Philippines. Mizpa, March-April 1994.

Happy Ending to a Dog's Tale

A ministry family shares joy at Christmas.



With not a dry eye in sight yesterday, Mitchell and Elissa McMurry threw their arms around Ragamuffin, a little "shaggy put-together" of a dog just meant for the two youngsters.

"Someone spared this dog for those children," said Claudia McAmis.

Doing double duty as president of the Tuolumne County Humane Society and a Santa's helper for The Junction shopping center, McAmis was at the center of a Christmas story she said she will remember for the rest of her life.

Over the period of a couple of weeks, which included the December miracle storm series, Al Novelli, owner of Sonora Feed off Tuolumne Road watched a little "mop dog" near his business, but couldn't snag it.

"We just couldn't catch her. She took off every time. Finally, we threw some food out and she ate it. Then we threw some in a fenced area and finally got her in," Novelli said.

The dog was near starvation and covered with fleas and ticks. "She was a mess," Novelli said.

Jim and Betty McMurry pastor in Sonora, California. Published in The Union Democrat.

He called McAmis. "I got her in a blanket warmed in the dryer and took her to a vet to get her shots. She was just skin over bones," said McAmis.

Wes Wittman at Sonora Veterinary Group also spayed the dog before McAmis took it home to nurse it back to health.

Enter the Jim and Betty McMurry family. The couple moved from Hawaii to Tuolumne County about four years ago.

A couple of years ago, said Jim, they were living in a trailer with no room for a dog, and gave theirs to a family in Mi-Wuk Village.

Now living in a home more conducive to raising a pet, Betty went on the hunt about three weeks ago. She mentioned her search to the veterinarian's office, who hooked her up with McAmis.

Betty and Jim both fell for the floppy little Ragamuffin, and worked out a plan for "Santa" to give the dog to the children.

As if rehearsed, the excited siblings greeted "Santa" and promptly said they wanted a puppy for Christmas. The person playing "Santa" excused himself and returned a moment later with the ribbon-adorned Muffin. The kids responded with huge smiles, a few squeals and then took turns hugging the dog and "Santa."

"I had fluffed the dog all morning," said McAmis, "and put a brand new red collar on her."

Their mother and several others watching got teary eyed and everyone applauded as the family left with their new dog.

"I wish you could have seen the look on Mitchell's face," said McAmis. "It was utter non-belief—thrill and joy."

McAmis, who portrayed "Santa" at The Junction for the second year, said she would never forget the experience. "That little dog should have been dead, if not from the elements, then from being hit by a car on Tuolumne Road. Twice I went running down the road after it."

Dog, aged about one and kids, aged five and three, are a match made in heaven, according to everyone involved.

"The kids are just thrilled," said Betty. "They were watching TV last night, and the dog just turned over tummy up across both their laps and went to sleep. The dog really listens and is so responsive."

Jim McMurry said the proof was in the sleeping. When he awoke this morning, kids, dog and all were in bed with him and his wife—"all five of us." ❀

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