

*Flora's Story*



## Introduction

I, Flora, am a living spark of Light,  
a child of the Cosmos,  
come in a human body  
for a pilgrimage on earth.

I am a spirit flame  
birthed by the Creator  
with a fire not of my making,  
but with opportunity  
for willingness to become -  
aware.

In reflecting on my life, I am aware and awed by how the affairs and experiences of this embodied spirit journey can and do "work together for good", ultimately.  
And so in sharing my story as an observer, I begin with a poem by Donna Faulds.

## Witness

*When I can be the witness,  
all manner of miracles occur:  
old wounds heal,  
the past reveals itself to be released,  
and present dramas play themselves out  
without sinking emotional talons into my soft skin.*

*The witness welcomes truth  
and dares to meet reality on its own terms.  
It is the ground in which the seeds of transformation  
take root and finally flower.*

*When the witness is awake,  
the lake of mind is still,  
and in the mirrored surface  
I see my own true face  
as Spirit smiling back at me.*



## **Flora May Sherwin's Life Story**

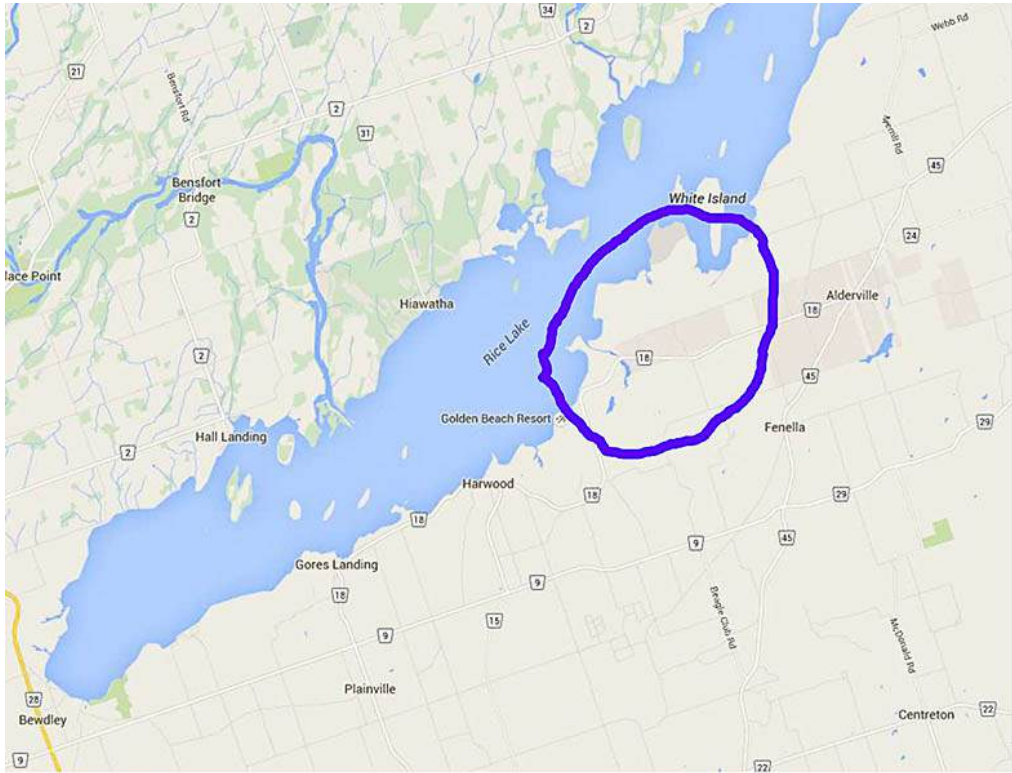
### **Before My Time**

Before there was "me" in the family, Oliver Austin Sherwin (born Oct. 2, 1885) and Ezma Grace Baptist (born Sept. 8, 1889) were married on April 23, 1912 at Ezma's parents' home in Baltimore, Ontario.

In 1918 they came to Aldershot, Ontario, by train, with their 3 year old son, Binnie Edgar (born January 14, 1915).

They brought, by train, all their worldly household belongings, and a few animals, to begin a new life on a farm in Wentworth County, West Flamborough Township, on the escarpment north of Hamilton.

They had managed a down-payment on the farm, registered April 22, 1918, to a Mrs. Lyons, the former owner.



MAP

They had come from a farm home high on a windy hill overlooking Rice Lake near Harwood, north of the town of Cobourg, Ontario.

The farm was owned by my Grandfather William Edmund Sherwin, who, after the death of my Grandmother Jane (nee Edington) at 38 years of age, married Adeline (nee Bush). No doubt, one factor in this marriage was the care for the two younger children, Austin age 6 and Edith May age 4. The oldest, Robert Earnest, was age 16.

My grandfather W. E. Sherwin died May 15, 1911. My father brought my mother to the Sherwin homestead after their marriage. They lived in the house with step-mother Adeline for 6 years.

I gather that Adeline was not an easy person with whom to live. The only story mother ever told me concerning living with her mother-in-law was about a lemon pie. Apparently, the first time mother made a lemon pie, the meringue fell. Adeline must have criticized her, for she told me she remembered going into the pantry, putting her apron over her head, and crying. To this day, whenever I make a lemon pie and the meringue falls, I recall her story. I never remember my mother criticizing me for anything I cooked. Thank you mother!

Although living with her mother-in-law may well have been a difficult and rather unhappy time for mother, she must have been glad when their first child Binnie Edgar was born January 14, 1915.

According to grandfather Sherwin's will, my father had to provide a home for the step-mother, Adeline. I was never told the details, but eventually the farm had to be sold to provide for the care of Adeline who, as far as I know, ended her days in Cobourg in 1931, at 82 years of age.

And so it was that, with very little money, Mother and Father had the opportunity to make a new life for themselves, and, they thought, on better farm land!

# GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY SYSTEM

## LIVE STOCK SPECIAL CONTRACT

Nos. of  
Cars

*G.P.P.  
303 545*

*Keewauwin* Station *Amherst* 1915

The GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY COMPANY has received from *O. A. Sherwin*

the following property *1 Car Live Stock  
Containing 8 horses 7 cows 1 calf. 2 cubs 8 Pigs  
2 cubs Hens*

consigned to *O. A. Sherwin*

to be transported over the GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY (and if necessary over its connections) and delivered at *Amherst, Ont.* Station, at the rate of

*Prepaid \$43.87*  
under the terms of this SPECIAL CONTRACT

The Company being willing to undertake the transportation of the said property as aforesaid either at the said rate on the condition that its liability shall be restricted as hereinafter mentioned, or at a higher rate without its liability being restricted, the shipper hereby elects to have it carried under this Contract at the said lower rate, and on the said condition, and he declares that, of the property covered by this Contract, no horse exceeds two hundred dollars in value; no colt under one year of age, mule or pony one hundred dollars in value; no head of cattle, except calves, eighty dollars in value; no hog fifteen dollars in value; no other domestic animal ten dollars in value, and that the contents of no car horses from one shipper to one consignee exceed two thousand dollars in value, or car livestock other than horses, from one shipper to one consignee, twelve hundred dollars in value.

### RESTRICTIONS OF COMPANY'S LIABILITY

The Company shall not be liable for any loss or damage in respect of the said Live Stock by reason of delay of trains, or of escape or loss of any stock from cars, or injuries to animals arising from the bruising or wounding themselves or each other, or from crowding in the cars, or by reason of the manner of loading or unloading of the said stock, or of any other injuries happening to said stock while in any railway car, except such as may arise from a collision of the train or the throwing of the cars from the track during transportation; and shall in no case be responsible for an amount exceeding two hundred dollars for the loss of any one horse; one hundred dollars for any one colt under one year of age, mule or pony; eighty dollars for any one head of cattle, except a calf; fifteen dollars for any one hog; ten dollars for any one other domestic animal, and two thousand dollars for the contents of any one car horses from one shipper to one consignee, and twelve hundred dollars for any one car livestock other than horses, from one shipper to one consignee or a proportionate sum in any one case for injuries to same.

Said stock is to be loaded, unloaded, fed, watered, and while in the cars, cared for in all respects, by the shipper or owner, and at his expense and risk. In case any of the Company's employees load, unload, feed, water or otherwise care for said stock, or assist in doing so, they shall be treated as the agents of the shipper or owner for that purpose, and not as the agents of the Company.

The Company is not to be liable for anything done or omitted to be done off the lines of the Railway operated by the Company on its own account, and where the destination to be reached is not on the lines which it is so operating on its own account the Company is to act only as the Agent of the owner or shipper in handing over the said stock to connecting carriers without being in any way answerable for any of their acts or omissions; and all connecting carriers taking charge of, or transporting the said stock towards its destination, shall be entitled to the benefit and protection of the provisions of this Contract.

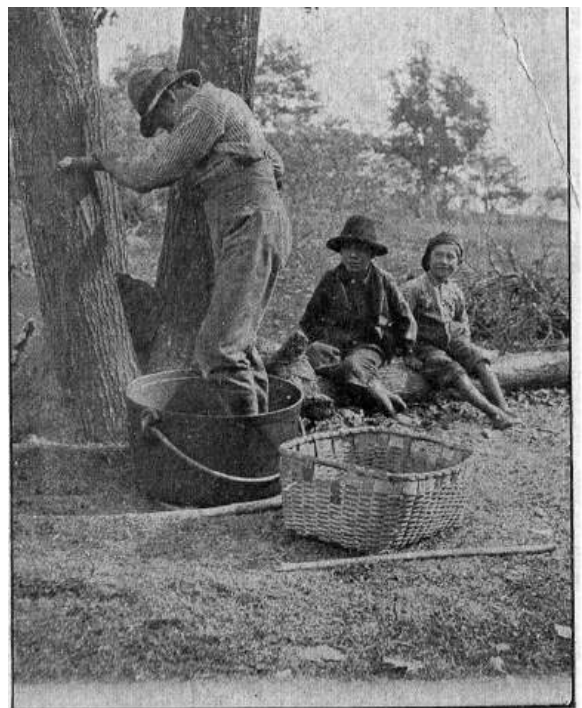
In case of any loss or damage arising for which said Company shall be liable, the same shall be computed and paid on a basis of the actual value of the stock at the place of shipment under this Contract, but not exceeding in any case the respective sums above mentioned; and the Company shall not be liable for any loss or damage which may happen to the said stock, even while on the Railway operated by the Company, unless a written notice with the full particulars of such loss or damage and of the claim to be made in respect thereof is delivered to the Station Agent of the Grand Trunk Railway at or nearest to the point where the said goods or property were delivered or handed over to the connecting carrier, within twenty-four hours after the said property or some part of it has been delivered.

In case of the Company granting to the shipper or any nominee or nominees of the shipper a pass or a privilege at less than full fare to ride on the train in which the property is being carried, for the purpose of taking care of the same while in transit and at the owner's risk as aforesaid, then as to every person so travelling on such a pass or reduced fare the Company is to be entirely free from liability in respect of his death, injury, or damage, and whether it be caused by the negligence of the Company, or its servants or employees or otherwise howsoever.

It is further agreed that under no circumstances shall any officer, Agent or employee of the Company, waive verbally or otherwise the provisions of this Contract or any of them.

*G. F. Holland* Agent

*Feed in car  
owner in charge free.  
Prepaid \$43.87  
500 m. Amherst 1915*



3. "Dancing" wild rice to separate the rice from the hulls,  
Sugar Island, Rice Lake.





W. E. Sherwin and Adeline



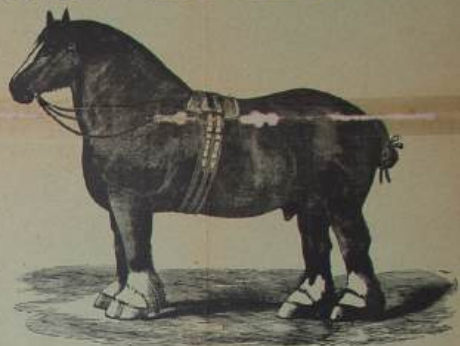
Robert Baptist and Sarah

# FARM SOLD

## CREDIT AUCTION SALE

OF

# FARM STOCK



### IMPLEMENTS

HAY, GRAIN, ROOTS, CORN AND HOUSE-HOLD EFFECTS.

# MR. ROBT. BAPTIST

Has instructed the undersigned to sell by Public Auction on his premises, Lot 27, Con. 9, Township of Haldimand.

2 MILES WEST OF FENELLA, ON

# TUESDAY, SEPT. 26. '11

### THE FOLLOWING VALUABLE PROPERTY

Brown Mare 7 years old  
 Bay Mare 4 years old  
 This pair of Mares are much admired and are bred to Dr. Water's Montrose Rouser  
 Bay Horse 9 yrs old  
 Sorrel Horse 5 yrs old  
 Brown Colt 1 year old by Chancellor Second  
 Black Colt 1 year old by Black Pete  
 Spring Colt Chancellor II  
 Spring Colt, Pride of Bute  
 5 Cows, supposed in calf  
 5 One Year olds

6 Calves  
 10 Store Hogs  
 Brood Sow due in Dec  
 McCormick Binder  
 International Spreader  
 Massey-Harris Cultivator  
 Hamilton Seed Drill, 14 hoe  
 Mower Pulper  
 Rake 10 foot  
 One-Horse Cultivator  
 Set Harrows, 5 sections  
 Set Pan Harvesters  
 Roller Stoneboat  
 2 Champion Plows

Wilkinson Double Plow  
 Drill Plow  
 Disk Superior  
 Straw Cutter  
 Set Scales, 1500 pounds  
 Hay Rack Cutter  
 Champion Fanning Mill  
 Wagon Springs  
 Set of Trucks  
 Double Carriage, Mather  
 Set Sheboggans  
 Set Light Sleighs  
 Single Buggy Cart

Quantity of Timothy Hay  
 Quantity of Mixed Grain  
 Quantity Mangolds, Turnips, Corn  
 Magnet Separator, Soap Kettle  
 Cradle Churn  
 Cook Stove  
 2 Bed Mattresses and Springs  
 2 Larders 3 Tables  
 3 Rocking Chairs  
 6 Dining Room Chairs  
 A Number of Other Chairs  
 Coal Stove  
 12 Yards of Carpet  
 Number of Pictures  
 And many other articles too numerous to mention

# SALE SHARP AT ONE

TERMS. \$10 and under, cash. Over that amount 12 months' credit on approved joint notes with interest at 5 per cent.

My mother's parents were Robert Alexander Baptist born 1843, and Sarah (nee Coyle Brown), born Feb.29, 1846. They had five children: Hattie, Mary, James, John and Ezma.

When mother was 22 yrs.old, the family moved on March 15, 1911, from their farm home on Packer Rd. two miles west of the village of Fenella, to a house on the main street in the nearby village of Baltimore, Ont.



Mother and father were married in the Baltimore house, went on the train to Guelph, Ontario, on their honeymoon, (maybe also Niagara Falls), and returned to live on grandfather Sherwin's farm. (They are pictured above on their 35th wedding anniversary). My grandfather Robert Baptist died in the Baltimore home on March 4, 1919, and grandmother Sarah on April 29, 1932.



Oliver Austin Sherwin and Ezma Grace Baptist on their Wedding Day



It had been in 1918, when my brother Binnie was age 3, that my parents left family, neighbours and friends behind, and their church, (all very important to them), to come to the farm in the Hamilton area. They may have felt like Abraham leaving his home for an unknown county! It must have been a difficult move for them in many ways, and Hamilton probably felt far away in those days.



Binnie and Flora

Their story, (little I really know of it), included a struggle to keep the new farm mortgage paid, (especially in the middle of the depression years). And they had to care for the family about to become five, with two little boys, Binnie Edgar and Robert Theodore (born March 29, 1920), and a baby now on the way (me). Perhaps they were both surprised and concerned when they discovered that news!





# Certificate of Baptism

Waterdown April - 27<sup>th</sup> - 1930  
PLACE AND DATE



**This Certifies**

that Flora May Sherwin  
was this day **Baptized** by me in the name of the Father, and  
of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and is thus acknowledged as a member  
of the Church, to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Place and Date of Birth July - 18<sup>th</sup> 1929

Father's Name Oliver Austin Sherwin

Mother's Name Ezma Grace Sherwin

Minister George H. Knighton 7128

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## My Time Begins

There is an old song that says , "Where do I begin to tell the story of how great a love can be . . . ?"

I began my life story in this dimension called `earth' with my first breath on July 18, 1929. And this in a downstairs bedroom on my parents' farm home on #5 Highway. It was one-half mile west of what was then called Clappison's Corners, the intersection of #5 and #6 highways north of Hamilton.

I highly suspect I entered life with a huge wail. My mother, being told she had a baby girl, may have found that somewhat pleasant news, even though the two boys were now 14 and 9 yrs. old! So I was an `after-thought' as the saying goes.

I was named `Flora May'. I have no idea where the `Flora' came from, but as my father's sister `Edith May' did not have children of her own, I was given her second name.

Mother's pregnancy at 40 yrs. of age was no doubt a disconcerting surprise, and in depression years on top of that. Although I get ahead of myself here, I know the timing of my coming into this world, and mother's mixed feelings, did have an influence on me.

Mother, not having enough breast milk, perhaps due to her age and maybe worry, had to resort to cow's milk. Plenty of cows there, all with pedigrees! (I remember seeing the wonder of a calf born in the barn stable).

Ours was a `mixed' farm depending on grain, income from the dairy herd, and about one hundred egg-laying hens, to provide ready income badly needed in those years.

The milk was stored in cans, and cooled in a cold-water sunken cement vat in the milk house. Every morning before 8:00 am, it was hauled to the road side on a horse-drawn stone-boat (like a big sled on runners), It was picked up by truck and taken to the Hamilton Dairy for pasteurizing, bottling and home delivery (by horse-drawn vehicle in those days).

The milk cheque came once a month, the amount dependent on the butter fat content in the milk. That is why there was a beautiful brown Jersey cow in the barn (whose milk was high in cream) among the Holsteins. She was a gentle creature and I loved her.

The eggs, gathered daily in the four hen houses upstairs in the barn, were then taken to the farm house, washed and candled (held one by one before a light to detect any blood spots). Then each egg was weighed for grading, packed in baskets, not mixed brown with white, to be taken by my father on an `egg route' in Hamilton. This provided weekly income for groceries which he bought on the way home.

From my birth, my digestion could not adjust to cow's milk and I cried and cried. I've been told I was a very fussy baby, probably because of stomach pain, and maybe hunger. I guess there was no Similac or other substitutes about which my mother knew. But survive I did. Having agreed to be here, what else was there to do? But I sucked my thumb in self-comfort and hence the protruding teeth!

My two brothers were amazed at this tiny creature - me. Not having any relatives in this part of the country, they would not have seen many infants and certainly not held one. I was but a few hours old when Binnie, my oldest brother, came carrying me from the downstairs bedroom, where my exhausted mother may have been sleeping, into the kitchen. I have been told that he had a big smile on his face, although the onlookers, whoever they were, were afraid he might drop me!

They needn't have worried, for Binnie, my big brother of 14 years then, never dropped me during his whole lifetime, nor has he from the Other Side (Heaven). Binnie's gentle, kindly and supportive presence in my life was important, to say the least. He never directed a cross or angry word to me, but in his quiet way was ever protective and caring. My brother Robert Theodore (known as Ted in adult years), was 9 years old when I arrived in the family. He was different in nature, being more out-going, and I soon learned it was fun to follow him around.

Unlikely as it may seem to me now, I must have been a bit of a 'chatter-box' in early life. I remember asking Ted lots and lots of questions, and on one occasion, having his ears burned long enough, I guess, he said to me in reply to yet one more question, "Just keep your ears and eyes open, and your mouth shut, and you'll find out!" Over the years of life I've learned there was wisdom in that advice, frustrating as it was to a curious child. Like Binnie, big brother Ted was a truly a wonderfully loving and caring presence in my life throughout the days to come, and until the end of his days on this earth.

My father, concerned that mother have the recovery time needed from giving birth, had a young woman come to live in our home to help with child care and housework. Her name was Francis Sova, a polish girl from Hamilton. In delivering eggs in the north end of Hamilton for many years, my father had got to know her family, and so Francis, a daughter, had come to the farm for the time of my birth, and intermittently for some years after. I remember her well, for she was a pianist, and she had a long pretty dress that hung in our guest room closet. She must have played at concerts sometimes, and she played our piano, and I loved that. She later married and lived in Toronto. I visited her when I attended Normal School (Teachers College) there.



Little Flora



## Early Childhood Years

Once the digestion condition was somewhat under control, I describe my days from age 2-5 as mostly happy, for I was oblivious to family concerns. Yet in retrospect, I realize I sensed a tension, for ours was a solemn rather than a light-hearted household. As already mentioned, my maternal grandmother in Baltimore died in 1932 when I was 3 yrs. old. I remember going with my mother on the bus to Cobourg, taking a second bus which went part way to Baltimore, and walking the rest of the distance to the village, with mother carrying a suitcase, and sometimes me too!

She was so sad. I remember seeing this old lady, my grandmother, who I did not know in life, lying in a coffin in a little front parlor where a candle was kept burning. My father and brothers came the day of the funeral which was held in the house. Since I was not allowed to attend, my brother Binnie took me for a walk down the village road. Later I saw a vehicle, pulled by horses, take the box, with my grandmother's body in it, up a hill to the village cemetery. From there it was taken to the Cobourg cemetery. It is not a good thing to leave even a young child out of a funeral!

The only other relatives I remember were my father's brother, Uncle Robert, his wife, Aunt Kate, and his sister, Aunt Edith. Robert and Kate lived in a village called Orono after they retired from their farm near Rice Lake. They had no children.

Aunt Edith was one of the first United Church deaconesses. She went west to Winnipeg, Manitoba, and happily worked there in All People's Mission. She came home to Ontario occasionally, and visited our farm. But, by mail, she always sent me a big, beautiful Easter Egg, decorated with flowers by the Ukrainian women at the Mission where she worked. It was so exciting to receive it!



Aunt Edith



Aunt Kate and Uncle Robert

Sadly, when her sister-in-law Kate died, Aunt Edith felt she had to come home to Orono to look after her brother (Uncle Robert) whose cataracts were such that he was almost blind. They did not operate to remove them in those years. Aunt Edith was lonely and unhappy in Orono, and I felt this whenever we visited. But I knew she loved me, as did Uncle Robert, and whenever we got away from the farm to briefly visit them, it was a special time for me. I remember that she collected poems in a book. Some of these I still have.

At home, I was read to each night. Often it was a story about the adventures of Uncle Wiggley (rabbit) from the daily Hamilton Spectator, which my father usually read to me. I loved the Thornton Burgess animal books. In my imagination I could see Jimmy Skunk, Chatterer the Red Squirrel, Sammy Jay, Reddy Fox, and their friends. Also there were fairy stories, (my favourite being Sleeping Beauty), Bible stories, nursery rhymes and poems from 'A Child's Garden of Verse' which my mother read to me. My active imagination was well nourished, and much of what was read I remember still.

From my buggy days under the tree, I had much time alone. That suited my nature, as long as I knew mother was not far away.

A little older, I particularly loved Sunday afternoons in winter when my father had a sleep in the bedroom, and my mother would cut up a spy apple and read my Sunday School paper to me. Then I sat at the little desk in the corner of the kitchen, the desk Santa had brought the Christmas before I became 6 years old. I cut out the pictures from the Sunday School papers, and later, when I could read, the little poems, while mother rested on the couch in the kitchen. I still have some of those little clippings I had pasted in a scribbler. It was a special time for me, and maybe for her too.

In summer Sunday afternoons, mother and I went to the front verandah where there was a couch and a hammock. I could swing in that and listen to the cars going by on the road while mother rested.

As well as church activities, mother was always busy working at home on the farm, feeding the chickens, washing the milking equipment, planting and weeding vegetable and flower gardens, as well as all the housework, canning and cooking. As soon as I could toddle, I was toddling after her. I enjoyed the good farm smells, fresh fruit and vegetables, and lots of sunshine. Mother put an old warmed flat iron wrapped in newspaper and a towel in my bed to keep me warm on cold winter nights, although I could blow steam circles in the bedroom air in the morning!

In winter after dinner, always at noon, Mother had time to knit or sew. Perhaps she might write a letter, prepare a Sunday School lesson or a devotional for the Women's Missionary Society meeting, or go upstairs to quilt. On a morning when she planned to quilt, she would open the register in the spare bedroom upstairs where the wooden quilting frame was set up, so that heat from the furnace would warm the room. Then after dinner was cleaned up we went upstairs, she to quilt and me to play with my dolls or with extra little pieces of material, creating my own quilt-block patterns. I still have one of her quilts.

When she could find time, mother would use the treadle sewing machine to make an apron, a dress for herself or for me, or outfits for my dolls. I liked to play with the contents of the machine drawers: interesting buttons of all sizes and shapes to sort, spools of thread to unwind and rewind, mending yarn to roll in little balls, and bric-a-brac of all colours to wrap around little pieces of cardboard. These quiet, companionable times with mother were wonderful.



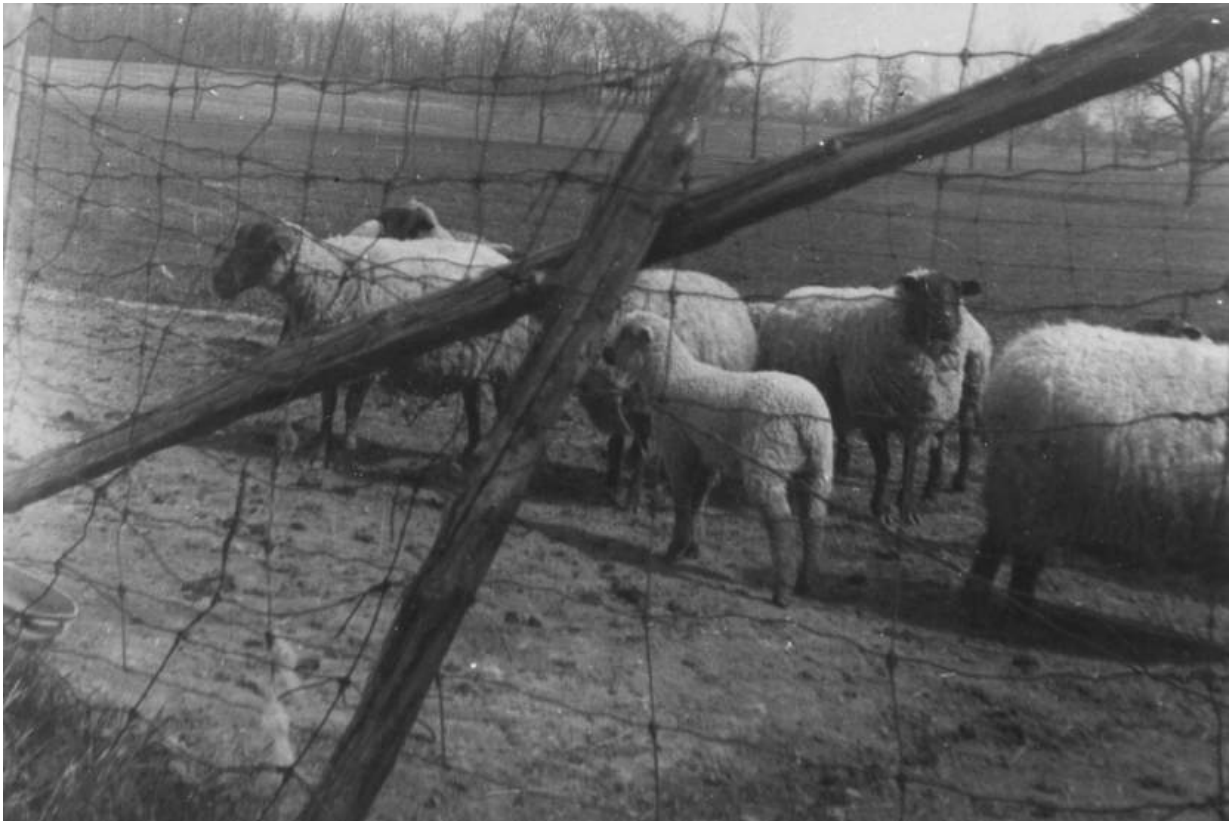
## Living Close to Nature

I grew up more outdoors than in. As a little girl, I made mud pies and cookies on fat, furry burdock leaves, baked them in the sun, and delivered these to the back kitchen door to trade with mother for her cookies! I made dandelion chains to wear, and picked white and red clover, or wild carrot bouquets for mother. I was allowed to go outside to play as long as she could see me from a window. I liked to take a blanket and lay it down in the shade of the house to play with my dolls.

The woodshed attached to the summer kitchen was an interesting place. I remember a wringer washing machine and wash tubs there on Mondays. Clean laundry always had to go on the outdoor clothes lines early in the morning, and be sparkling white so that it did not raise the eyebrows of any neighbourhood women who might perchance pass by. I always thought it was very funny when in winter the men's long underwear would be frozen stiff on the clothes line, and had to be brought back into the house for thawing. Mother said freezing cold weather killed germs!

In winter there was a huge woodpile in the yard to climb, or nice clean snow to make a snowman or snow angel. In summer, on many a hot night, I lay on the front lawn for a while to watch the stars, and occasionally see the magic of the Northern Lights.





The swing in the yard was a favourite place from which to see what was going on around the farm. We had a farm dog, and cats, but they were not house pets. I liked all the animals in the barn, but one in the yard I did not like! He was a big gander, and liked to chase me. One day, hissing and with huge wings outspread, he backed me into a corner where the main part of the house met the summer kitchen.

I was terrified and yelling at the top of my lungs. Mother opened the pantry window above where I was cornered and lifted me inside. I was rescued, but never forgot that day, needless to say. He would have bitten and hurt me I know.



Year 'round, I had to go upstairs in the barn with mother to feed the chickens every morning and evening. To me, the hens peck-pecking on the floor as they picked up the grains to eat was like music. But I never liked helping gather the eggs, for the leghorn hens would peck my hands, if they were in the nests.

Sometimes I stayed in the barn when my brothers were milking the cows by hand, before we had milking machines. I sat on a milking stool at a safe distance from the cow's back legs or swishing tail.

Occasionally brother Ted would unexpectedly send a stream of warm milk from the cow toward my mouth. I no doubt hollered, but actually it was fun! The cats were meowing and impatiently waiting to have their dish filled with milk too.

But the barn was a warm though acrid, sweet-smelling place because the ensilage, (fermented finely cut corn blown into the silo in summer), would be forked from the silo into the wheel-barrow for distribution to the cows' mangers. I would hear the cows mooing in anticipation.

In summer, while the milking was being done, I used to climb the sweet cherry tree near the barn, and many a time I heard a voice from the barn door saying, "Flora, you come down from there, before you fall down!"

After morning milking, I was sent to open the gate to the clover field as the cows would be headed down the back lane behind the barn toward that field. I was to stay in the field with them until my mother, outside the barn door, waved her apron up and down as a signal for me to herd the cows out of the clover. before they ate too much.





I loved being in the field in the summer mornings, just sitting in the clover while the cows contentedly munched nearby. I saw God's beauty in the clover, so purple-headed and sweet smelling, with the morning dew white and sticky in the notches of the stems. (I think of it now as being like the 'manna' God sent to feed the Israelites who were starving in the desert.) As well I felt wonder at seeing the sun shining on a new-born spider web, so amazingly woven. The cows would make their way down the lane to the mountain brow where they spent the rest of the day.

I loved the wild weed-flowers of field and roadside: dandelions for bouquets and bracelets or necklaces made from the stems, waxy yellow buttercups, brilliant purple chickory, pristine white daisies, Queen Anne's lace (wild carrot), and the goldenrod. On the farm mountain-brow, I picked May flowers (hepaticas) and violets. I often wandered there, or sat near the brow looking out at the scene before me.

I am now going to digress, in a way, to include in my saga some writing I did in a group recently. It will tell you more about my innate need for solitude, quiet times, and nature, even as a 6 year old little girl.

*"I sat on my rock, my big warm rock on the mountain brow overlooking the valley where Dundas lay below on my right, and Hamilton on my left. In the distance, I could even see the 'big bridge' and the smoke-stacks of the industries which puffed out black clouds. I thought about the red glow in the sky at night from the hot stuff (slag) poured into the bay waters. But the day was sunny, and quiet. I was alone, but not lonely. Birds sang to me, and bees buzzed as they visited the wild honeyuckles beside my rock. A cow mooed in a nearby field, and our dog barked in the distance. They were all my friends: the rock, birds, bees, wild flowers, especially the shy violets beneath the trees behind me, and yes, the dog, now quiet too. I sat, and wondered about how all this had come to be, and to be so beautiful. And I dreamed about when the time might come to go down the curving, steep hill road that I knew wound to Dundas. My mother had said that when my father went there to get something fixed, we would go also, and look in the big Grafton's store, maybe at some dresses. And maybe too, if there was time, we could go to the ice-cream parlour to wait for father. That would be so good, but for now, it felt just right to sit, and listen, and dream."*

There is an old saying, "You can take the girl out of the country, but not the country out of the girl!" Certainly true for me. Also, little did I know, as a child, that one day I would live in the valley town called Dundas, in a condo building called Grafton Square, named after the big store owned by that family.



## Getting Ready for Sunday

I learned early that Sunday was a special day for church, dinner, rest, visits or perhaps an evening car drive. But we got ready for much of that on Saturday. Mother did extra cooking, not only as preparation for a nice Sunday dinner for the family, but because some company might drop in on Sunday!

I sometimes helped by climbing the steps to the workshop in the upstairs of the garage to crack walnuts with a little hammer for the nutmeats for baking. This task usually included hitting my fingers! Ouch! But more often I had less challenging chores to do like washing up bowls and pans.

Mother's frequently-used adage was, 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'. Especially on Saturday the house had to be well cleaned. I was to do the dusting, including all those spiral posts on the banister of the steps which led upstairs! I had to make sure my room was tidy and most toys put away. When I was old enough, I polished my father's and brothers' shoes, as well as mother's and mine, and lined them up on newspaper by the kitchen door ready to be put on for church.

I soon learned to iron shirts and handkerchiefs for Sunday. The white shirts were starched, had to be dampened, and were hard for me to iron without scorching them. Sometimes I did just that! But mother was still appreciative of the help and I was not scolded. I loved to help, and happily did anything else my busy mother asked.

She enjoyed flowers, and in the summer I was often allowed to pick bouquets from near the house, perhaps from the lilac or snowball bushes, or nasturtiums, asters or zinnias from her flower beds. She always sent me to pick some to put on the kitchen table for Sunday. Also, we would put a nice table cloth over the oilcloth for that special day.

Baths were on Saturday night, and when I was little my bath was in a tin wash tub on the floor in the kitchen beside the cook stove. My night clothes would be warmed by the fire.

If my father had not got the lesson ready for his Sunday School adult class earlier, he often did that sitting at the table on Saturday evening. The only work that would be done on our farm on Sunday was milking the cows, and looking after the animals.

## Christmas as a Child

Our Christmas tree was always a freshly-cut one, and not put up in the parlour in a pail of coal until the day before Christmas. I remember when it was lighted with little candles, their metal holders clipped to the branches. Later, there were strings of electric lights for the tree. We had a wreath on the door, but no other outside decorations.

As a child on the farm, my stocking, long and brown, was hung on a chair by the furnace register in the dining room. Yes, we had a furnace using wood and coal which was started and kept burning as needed, but always at Christmas. Cookies and a glass of milk were left on the chair for Santa. In the morning, I was allowed to get up and open my stocking before breakfast and see what Santa had brought. The stocking would have a big orange in the toe (a treat in those days), nuts in the shell, and hard candy. Unwrapped gifts were there, perhaps a doll, doll-case, doll-carriage, top, new mittens, a tiny sewing machine, a game or a book.

One year the doll was a black one, and she was my favourite doll of all. I loved Topsy with her dark eyes, skin colour and two little braids on top of her head. I had never seen a black person, but easily loved them when I did, because of loving Topsy. In older years I began to see my guardian angel as a statuesque black woman, and called her Elba.

My father and brothers always made certain that on Christmas morning they had the barn chores finished, and were in the house to get cleaned up well before it was time for the Queen to address the Commonwealth by radio at precisely 10 o'clock. We all sat down to listen. This was a big event, and I had to keep quiet!

Then, mother put the goose or ducks for Christmas dinner into the oven. Of course, the cakes, puddings, tarts and cookies had been prepared weeks before.





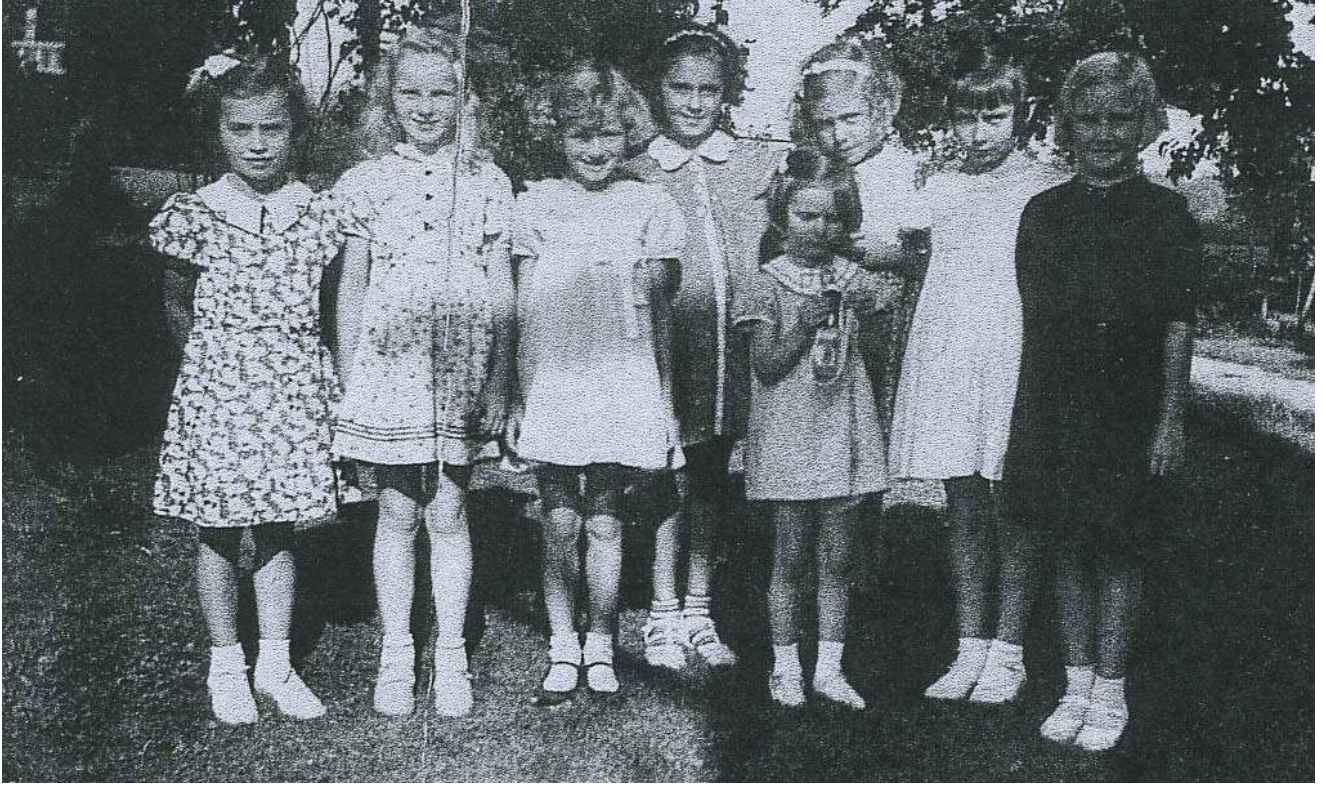
## Neighbours and Friends

Having left relatives and friends behind in the Rice Lake area, my parents did not have couple friends apart from those at church in Waterdown. These were seldom visited. My parents knew the farm neighbours, and they always helped each other, particularly in harvest and threshing times. But my parents did not visit much with them for the Sheppard, Mann and Chapel families near us had many relatives in the community.

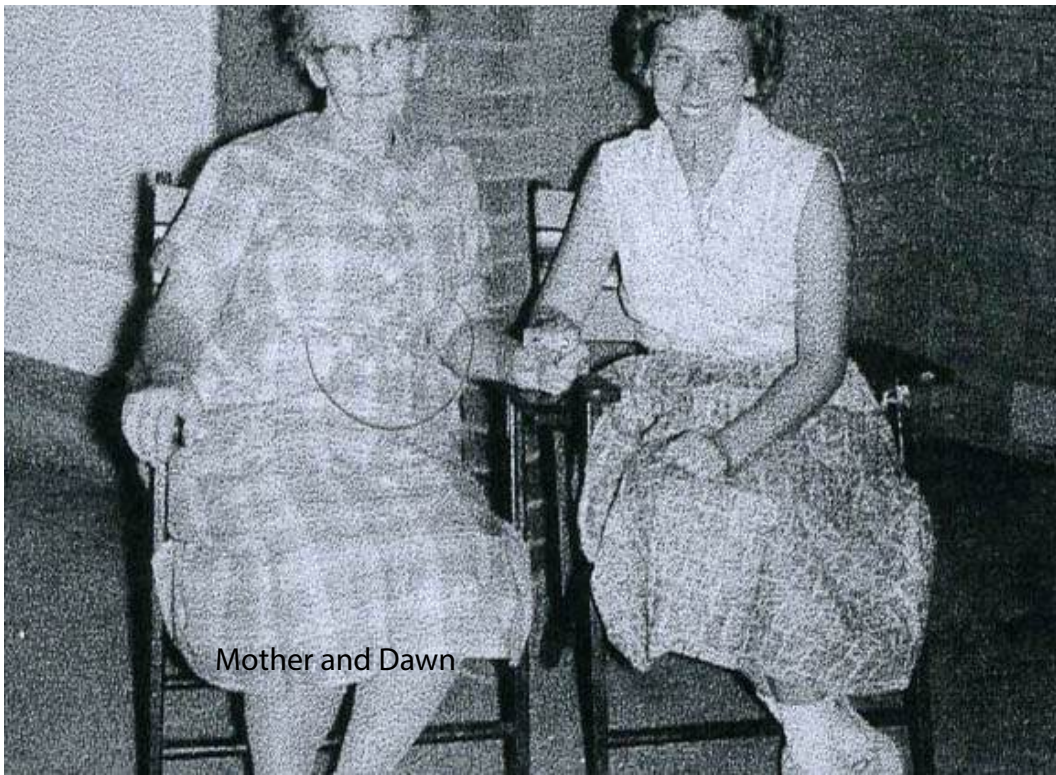
I did have two special friends from early childhood. One was Gloria Sheppard who lived on the farm across the road and with whom I often played as we grew up. Not knowing any grandparents of my own, I thought it was very special for her to have grandparents living in the other half of their house. That house had a large porch just right for Gloria and me to stage the plays we wrote and performed for anyone or no one to watch! Also there was a two-hole outhouse where I kept Gloria company when she was sent there 'regularly' after noon dinner each day.

Another wonder was that in one of the Sheppard's farm back sheds, there was a blacksmith shop and a fire-pit with bellows to fan the fire when needed. And most wonderful of all, in Gloria's mother's bedroom there was a pretty box of powder on the dresser! I had never seen one before, and it smelled so nice. As well, their farm had a little muddy creek behind the barn, and we were warned to stay out of it. I learned by experience that a girl could have blood-suckers attached to arms and legs from disobeying!

Gloria's family, and many of those on neighbouring farms, went to Rock Chapel church just across the fields from our farm. It had been Methodist before becoming a United Church. As earlier mentioned, my parents, upon moving to our farm, had started attending the Presbyterian Church in Waterdown and then the United Church. And so it was that besides the neighbour children I knew from the public school we attended, I made Waterdown church friends in Sunday School and shared concerts and picnics with them.



Dawn Hollamby was my special church friend and lived in the village. We often went to one of our homes after church, had dinner, played for the afternoon, and after supper were returned to a parent at the evening church service. Dawn's family was from England, and her mother was a soloist in our church choir. At their dinner table they ate in a special way with knife and fork, would pour cream on their fruit, and had great ginger cookies in a red tin (former tea) box in the kitchen. They were always very good to me, the little girl from the farm.



Mother and Dawn



## Public School Years

Turning six years old in July, I started to attend the one-room school on the corner opposite the now old Plainsman restaurant on #5 highway.

As a shy child, this was a very scary experience as my friend Gloria, whose birthday was in May, could not begin with me. Maybe that made her a little sad too, for she would sit at the end of their farm driveway and wait for me to come home to tell her what happened at school that day. Then we played after I got out of my school clothes.



I walked the distance of about 3/4 mile to school by myself. When it was time for me to return, Mother would often stand at the kitchen window where she could see me come around the corner near home. I never remember being driven to or from school by car.

In winter when the snow was piled up to 7 feet high on the sides of the road, and it was very cold, I do remember being taken to school, on Father's large, horse-drawn, flat-bottom sleigh.



There was straw on the sleigh floor, and, covered with a buffalo robe or old woolen blankets, Gloria and I were cosy and warm. Stay home because the weather was bad? Never. If the teacher could get there from the farm where she boarded next to the school, so should we. I know she sometimes came across the field on snow-shoes to get to school.

I had only women teachers in public school, and so it was a nice lady teacher who, on the first day, directed me to a little seat just my size. The seats were graduated in size to fit students of all grades 1-8. There were only a few of us in each grade, and we moved up a row to a bigger seat with each grade we passed. As well as neighbourhood children, big boys from the Boys Home in Dundas came to our school, and often their behaviour was a problem to the teacher. I was afraid of them.

But, as I settled into this strange school setting, I came to enjoy the first lessons, the alphabet letters, words, and soon my first book, 'Mary, John, and Peter'. I can still see the pictures in my mind. Reading opened up a new world to me, then and forever. Printing, and later writing, even with the penmanship practice of ovals and lines over and over, copying the cursive script from over the blackboard, I did manage to learn. Any literature or written work was easier than numbers and arithmetic for me, and remains so to this day.

I always looked forward to the day the itinerant music teacher came to our school to have us practise the 'doh ray mi . . .' scale, and learn new songs or hymns. We had a short bible reading, a hymn, and the Lord's Prayer to begin each day.

Our little school was red brick, and near the school yard entrance, there was a well from which we pumped by hand to get drinking water. Tied to the pump was a tin cup so anyone thirsty could take a drink! Of course, we were all sent to school neat and tidy, and our fingernails were inspected every morning after the National Anthem and the salute to the flag. I wore long brown stockings to school held up by a garter belt, except after the 24th of May when I was allowed to wear ankle socks. I also wore brown oxford shoes, and usually a little jumper over a blouse, and a sweater as needed. Every day I carried my books to school in a bag with a strap over my shoulder, and in my hand I carried my lunch in a little rectangular tin box with a handle. I ate lunch at my desk or outside. I remember that Laura Chappel, an older girl who lived down the road, often had store-bought cookies in her lunch, big round chocolate ones with raspberry filling in the centre. My mother always made me a nice lunch, but Oh how Laura's chocolate cookies made my mouth water. I still love them even that now they are only half the size!

I met another little girl, also in first grade, Lorene Mann. She lived on the farm just across the corner from the school. I also met Elsie Morelli, one of the Picone family whose shop is still on King St. in Dundas. Elsie lived on a farm on Sydenham Road which, surprisingly to me, had many grape vines. When older, I skated on the pond on her farm. There would be a huge fire of piled-high old tires providing warmth for the skaters. This was great fun, and there was hot chocolate when I got home.

Our school had a big bell on top, two entrances and two 'cloak rooms' with toilets, one for boys and one for girls. Inside there was a small wood and coal furnace with pipes along which we could lay wet mittens in the winter, and sometimes our galoshes (the ones with the buckles worn over our shoes) if these needed drying out too.

There were two large glassed-in bookcases along the back wall with encyclopedias, seldom used, and other uninteresting-looking dusty books. Between the book-cases there was a door leading into a little kitchen where, in winter, hot lunches were prepared by the big kids and the teacher. I can still smell the scorched tapioca pudding (fish eyes) and cocoa!

At the front of the classroom were the blackboards and the teacher's desk. Wall maps, pulled down for lessons, were in rolls over the blackboards and above that on the wall was the alphabet in printed and cursive letters.

In those school days there was lots of "readin' an' writin' an' 'rithmetic . . ." (but no hickory stick). However, the teacher's desk held a big leather strap, which she whacked on top of the desk when a warning was needed. I never had it used on me, but I heard it used on big, lippy boys who she strapped in the woodshed adjoining the back of the school. Even hearing it terrified me. I had never in my home had a hand laid on me in discipline, let alone a leather strap. At home, whenever I was considered 'not good' for whatever reason, I was either scolded or given the 'silent treatment' to show disapproval. That was hard for me to understand, and more damaging than words.

I enjoyed most things at school. On Fridays, there was art, but I was not very good at drawing the lunch box or the flower set in a jar on the teacher's desk. I did like to colour, and weave paper strips, and I used my paint box at home sometimes. I liked being able to read the poems in the 'readers' (books) of the older grades, but not memorizing them. I would rather write a rhyming couplet myself.

We had what was called Arbour Day in spring when we cleaned up any paper in the yard, and dug up the dandelions. Other pupils dug, planted and weeded what was called a 'victory garden' (in war time), and at other times it was just 'natural science'. Our school projects included insect collections, tree, leaf and weed naming and mounting, and identifying grains, wild animals, and different kinds of hens, cows or horses, for us country kids. We needed to know such things. We made scrap books of important events, cutting pictures from the newspaper or country magazines.



At Halloween, a few children came to our house and mother would give them a brown bag of popcorn or a candied apple. Some of the neighbourhood teen-age young people were invited in for cookies and cake. I did not go out trick or treating until I was about 12 yrs old. But I remember hearing stories about the pranks of some of the young men on Halloween night. One of their favourite things was pushing over outhouses, or putting a piece of machinery like a hay rake on top of the school, or a pail of water just over an outer door so that it would fall on the teacher when she opened it. They apparently thought this was funny. Of course no one ever admitted doing it! My father and mother were not amused! I do not think my brothers were involved, but do not know for sure.

Christmas in that one-room school meant a concert to which our parents came. It was a break from the usual routine of reading lessons, times tables, and spelling lists. For weeks, it seemed, we practised traditional carols and songs, and readings: the birth of Jesus from the gospel of Luke, or the Night Before Christmas. There might be a star drill with memorized movements, and plays for which we wore costumes.

We were taught to speak our parts in plays, or in other readings, very clearly, and my friend Lorene was exceptionally good at elocution. This training was such a benefit later in life whenever I had to speak before a group.

All we did at the concert was exciting. A curtain was hung on a wire across the front of the classroom, and performers waited behind the curtain on the sides for their turn to appear 'on stage' as the curtain opened and closed between numbers. Of course our performances were well applauded. Then we were each given a new book, (paid for by the school board, I think), an orange, and a little bag of candy. What a big night that was!

At recesses we played outside, sometimes a group game like Rover - Rover, Hide and Seek, Bury in the Leaves, or baseball. The teacher came out, rang a hand bell, and we lined up to enter our separate doors.

It was good at school, except when someone got measles, mumps, chickenpox, . . . and then we all did!





Theodore, Flora and Binnie

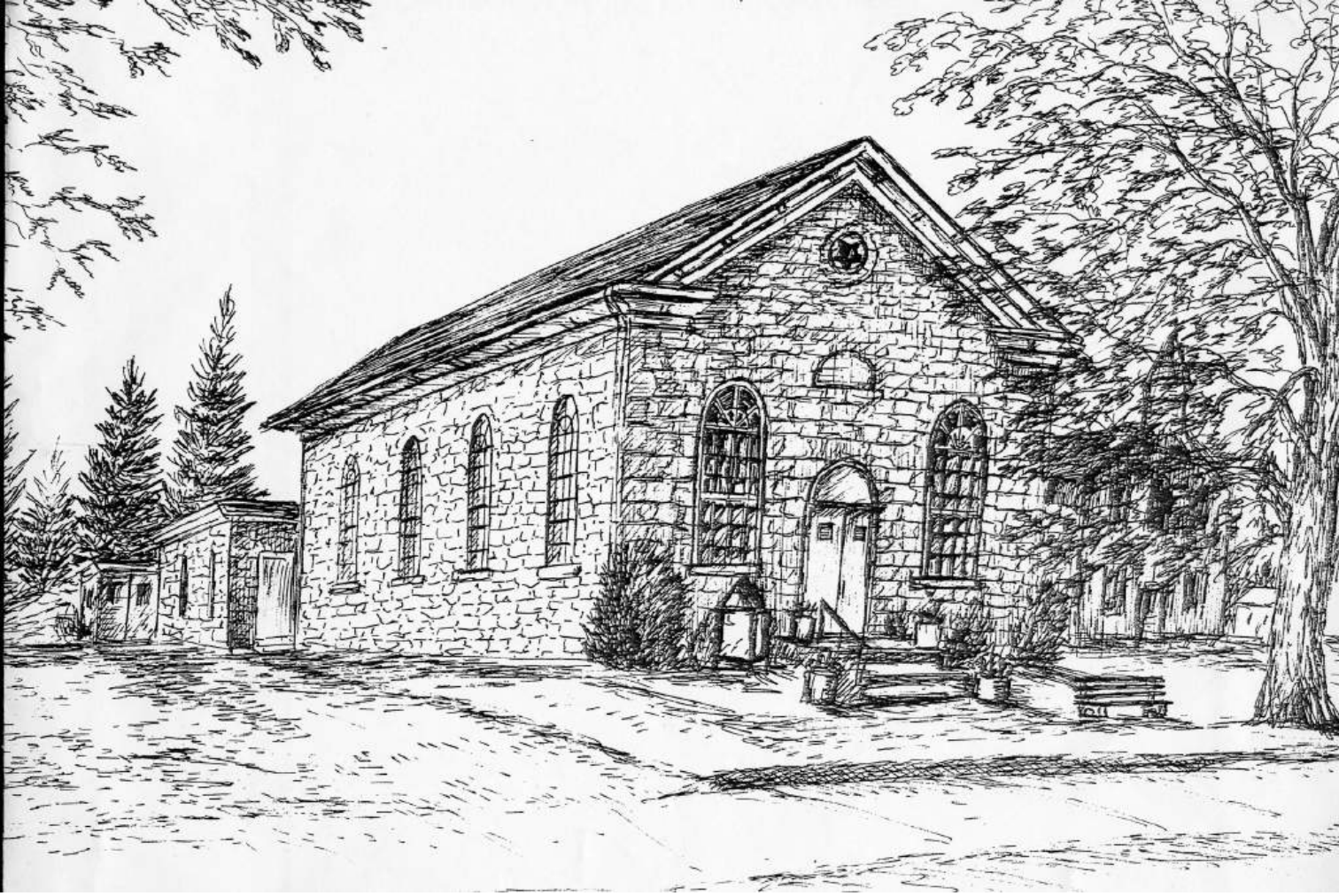
Before going on with my story, I want to digress here to say that when I was 10 years old, baby Marguerite was born to my brother Binnie and sister-in-law Kay, who was actually our cousin. The marriage of cousins was not acceptable in my parents' view, and caused a break in relationship with them. When I heard a baby had been born, I kept asking to see the baby, and was finally allowed to visit their place in the Hamilton Beach area, but alone. My parents did not go in then.



However, we eventually began to visit them again. But from the first time I held Marguerite, she was like a little sister, and I loved her dearly. My earthly relationship with her lasted until her untimely death. (More about this later). To this day, I deeply miss having her in this life with me.



Marguerite and Binnie



## Sundays - Church Days

As children and young people, my parents had been faithfully brought up in the church, and remained very active after marriage. For as long as I can remember, we never missed church on Sunday. My father had been brought up Methodist, attending Centenary Church not far from their farm near Harwood. That church had first met as a Methodist `class' in a log school house and it was called "Sherwin's Appointment" on the Methodist circuit.

When services began there, Anthony Sherwin, my great-grandfather, was a member/leader. His family was English, having come from Yorkshire in England, sheep-shearing country, hence the name altered from Shearing or Shearwin to Sherwin in this new world.



My mother's heritage was a mixture of Scottish and Irish, and her family was Presbyterian. As a young couple living on the farm near Harwood, my parents attended the Presbyterian church, perhaps as a support for my mother. That is probably why they, in coming to the farm in Wentworth County, joined the Presbyterian church in Waterdown.

In 1925, the union of Methodist, Presbyterian (part) and Congregationalist churches formed The United Church of Canada. My parents left friends behind in the Waterdown Presbyterian Church, and with my brothers walked in procession with others down the street toward the former Methodist church, to become part of this new United Church of Canada. Since their families had been Presbyterian (mother) and Methodist (father), the church union was welcomed by them personally.

I was baptised as a baby in this new United Church in Waterdown on Mill Street. Later, a new church called St. James U.C. was built on Parkside Drive. On Sundays, from babyhood on, I was always in church with my family.



My first mystical experience was when, as a very young child sitting in a pew beside my parents, I felt gathered up into a beam of light streaming through a stained glass window of the angel outside the empty tomb of Jesus. It is wonderful to know that window, with the others, was moved to the chancel of the new St. James United Church in Waterdown.

In later years, after our parents died, (Dad in 1952, age 61 and Mom in 1978, age 83) my brothers and I placed a new Communion Table in St. James in their memory. Since my parents had been well-churched from their infancy, so were we to be. We dressed in our 'Sunday best clothes' for we were going to the Lord's house. Looking our best honoured the Lord and set that day and time apart from the rest of the week. In winter, if the lane was deep with snow, chains were put on the car tires, and if that was not enough to get us out to the road, the horses pulled us out. As I have said, they never thought of staying home because of the weather.



35th Wedding Anniversary Celebration



I attended Sunday School and Mission Band regularly, and, before being in school, I went with my mother to the Women's Missionary Society meetings held in homes. Sitting quietly, I absorbed the content of those meetings: the discussions, concerns, work and worship of those devoted women. I still have some of the prayers my mother wrote for those meetings, and they inspire me. She was the Women's Missionary Society President for twenty-five years, and I have the Life-Membership pin presented to her.

Mother taught Sunday school, and helped me to memorize the bible verse assigned for each Sunday, for which I got a star on a chart. Memorizing was never easy for me, and I was always afraid of forgetting what I had practised, but persevere I did. I have many verses stored in my heart and mind to this day, as well as words of hymns. For this I am very grateful, as words or tunes arise from my deep memory bank just when I most need their message.



I remember that when we graduated from one class, we walked through a decorated arbour to the next class room. My father was Sunday School Superintendent for some years and Clerk of Session for many. At age 12, I began to play for the hymns and songs in Sunday School. My brother Theodore often ran the projector for our singing, inserting 3x3 inch slides with words. Years later these went to the U.C. Archives.

That year I was confirmed in Waterdown U.C., given a Bible of my own, the first of several, and from Mother a book, "A Girl's Practice of the Presence of God" which I still have and cherish, as I do those Bibles. I have been an active member of the United Church ever since my confirmation.

In early church years, I attended Sunday School and church in the morning, the evening service, and Mission Band mid-week. I enjoyed the evening service particularly, for it was quiet and I learned to love the hymns only sung at that service.

When there was a special supper in the church basement, my friend Dawn and I, as young children, helped set the tables and fill the salt and pepper shakers, but we had to stay out of the kitchen while the women prepared the food.

Christmas at church included a concert in Waterdown Town Hall. One year, when I was 6 or 7 years of age, I was to sing "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" by myself. I was so scared but managed to get up the stairs to that big stage. I began to sing, only to completely forget the words! I bolted from the stage, ran to my mother and promptly threw up in her lap, humiliating us both no doubt. I remember that night still.

Father taught a class of young women before church as well as being Sunday School Superintendent. Having been given piano lessons on a farm near Waterdown, at first for 35 cents and later in Dundas for 75 cents an hour, I happily played for singing at home and Sunday School, for friends, and Isometimes for the church Young People's meetings.



Young People's Outdoor Church Service at Camp



## High School Years

In some ways, my high school days were not too happy. I often walked the two miles to Waterdown High School, or, with Gloria and Lorene, rode my bicycle in good weather. When old enough, I sometimes drove the others to school in my father's car. It was on one of those days that, due to an accident, not my fault, my two front teeth were broken off through hitting my mouth on the steering wheel. The car had slid under a Department of Highways truck which had driven through a stop sign. The dentist stuck my teeth back in with airplane glue. It tasted awful! Eventually I had the teeth pulled and a bridge put in.



I was not good at sports or in gym, and often not able to hit the ball in baseball. But I could get under the arms of the guards in basketball and pass to someone taller who could get the ball in the basket.

Upon graduation, I was the Valedictorian at the High School commencement. I had a new red dress with a white flower, and was both nervous and excited. I remember twirling around in the kitchen to show Mother how I looked. She just said, "Pretty is as pretty does!" I heard from her a moral adage when I was needing a word of praise.







My Picture of the other Golden Girls: Gloria, Lorene, Mavis, Doris, Verna

Through the high school years, six of us, girls, became close friends and stayed that way: Gloria Sheppard and Lorene Mann from my public school days, and Doris Hood, Mavis Gaddy, and Verna Willis from High School. We later named ourselves 'The Golden Girls'. When I started High School, I did not know much about town life, except church. I had never danced, and did not have the penny loafers or the brand-name sweaters that Ruth Winder had. But I had friends, and that was a real blessing. I was the shyest of the lot, but really loved having lunch times together, sharing secrets as well as assignments, and visiting each other's homes when we could. You will read more about these dear ones later.

In my teen years, I often attended the Young People's group of Rock Chapel U.C., and sometimes we met together with the Young People's from Millgrove and Strabane churches. Occasionally, we gals would make a 'box lunch' for two, and decorate it so it would be as attractive as possible. Then each box would be given to the boy who was the highest bidder at the auction. Hmmm! The girl who brought the box got to eat with him.





Young People at Ryerson Beach Camp

The summer of completing my Grade 13, I worked as maid and cook at the cottage of the Grafton family of Dundas whose summer home was on an island off Port Carling. I would not then have believed that in later life I would live in the Dundas condo named Grafton Square after that family who had for years owned the Grafton store where mother had brought me shopping as a child and teen. That summer, as usual in those years, the Grade 13 results were printed in the Hamilton Spectator for all to see. The clipping was mailed to me on Grafton's island by my mother, and to my relief I had passed my subjects and could go to university.

During the years of high school, I had two country boyfriends, one special to me. But of that one, being five years older, my parents did not approve, and thought he would be leading me 'down the garden path' to wherever. That no doubt influenced their decision to arrange for me to go to university in Toronto after graduation, and stay with a church family known to the wife of our then minister, Rev. J. B. Moore. I had worked in the Moore household when their late-in-life baby was born, and so they knew I could work, and of course knew my parents well.

## Toronto Years

So I was off to the big city which was a totally new experience in itself. I was registered in Victoria College (University of Toronto) and had some of my courses there. I was to live with the family in Rosedale. It was within walking distance of the University.

I discovered I was to sleep in a room on the third floor, and fulfill clearly defined duties: some of the food preparation, weighing the food for one of the children who was diabetic, eating in the kitchen myself, and always doing the cleaning up.

Again, I wore a little white half-apron and served at their dining room table. as at the Grafton cottage. This was to happen daily, as well as attend classes and do my homework.

I knew nothing of city life and rich homes. Although I understood that I was to work for my room and board, I had expected to be treated as one of the family. This was a prominent Rosedale family, and the lawyer father was the Sunday School superintendent in a large United Church on Bloor St. (no longer there). But it did not work out well, for they would not allow me to go home week-ends or attend church with them, for they wanted their Sunday noon meal ready when they got home.

I reported the situation to my father, and when I could not go home at Thanksgiving, my father was not at all pleased. Meanwhile I had met a friend at `Vic' who was living with her aunt and uncle in the city. She said I could board with them, so I moved there. We shared a bedroom and that worked for a time. I was not very happy, and went home week-ends on the bus. However, I left their home, and ended that first year living with the sister of another friend. She went out to work, and so it was quiet for me to study during the day. It is a miracle that I passed that first year.



A quote of Mary Oliver asks  
"What do you plan to do with your one, wild and precious life?"

Trying to figure out what God wanted me to be doing with my life, I had inquired in the Toronto head office of The United Church of Canada about options for women to work in the church. It was suggested to me that I spend the summer on a Home Mission Field, meaning a pastorate in Canada which needed a summer student as supply.

I agreed, and was told to go to a three-point charge in Prince Edward County, south of Belleville. I was to live in the manse with the minister's family in Cherry Valley, one of the three points on the charge, and be there from May 15 -Sept.15. The settled minister, Mr. Lewis, was a layman, and as such was required to take summer courses in Toronto.

I remember arriving by train at the Belleville Station, and wondering as I stood on the platform with my little trunk, whatever had made me think I could possibly do whatever would be next! The kindly minister's wife met me, and settled me into their home.

I soon found out that I was to do just about everything needed on those three charges. And the first responsibility I had after arriving was to do a funeral for a baby who had only lived a few days.

I had only brought a service book, my Bible, and a couple of books with sermons which had been given to me. Although nervous beyond words, I prepared as best I knew how. When meeting that young family in their grief, I quickly got over my own feelings and did what I could to support them, lay their baby's body in the grave and commit the little one back home to God. A power beyond me enabled me to do that funeral!

On that three-point charge, an ordained minister from Picton had to do the quarterly Communion and any weddings there might be.





I was lovingly cared for by the Lewis family in the manse, and became good friends with a daughter, Peggy, who was close to my age. She is still my friend. I was happy there, and celebrated my 18th birthday that summer. I felt that what I was to be doing with my life was coming clearer.

But I had to quickly leave a week early because my brother Ted's wife, Barbara (King) suddenly died. It was a sad time for our family. However, that summer was to influence the rest of my life.

## Becoming a Teacher

Realizing that my parents could not afford to keep me in university, paying tuition, books and board, I decided I had to change course and go to Normal School (Teacher's College) on Pape Avenue in the east end of Toronto. In the newspaper, I found a bedroom to rent not far from the school, in the home of a retired policeman and his wife. It had a hot plate and a little table. I kept some food in their kitchen refrigerator. They were good to me and I felt safe there, again going home week-ends.

My father gave me money for each month which I divided up in weekly envelopes. I only opened one on the Monday of each week - \$20 dollars to cover food, streetcar and bus fare, supplies for school, stockings etc. I made it be enough, and never felt deprived. It was a sacrifice for my parents and I knew that. In the summer, I worked part time in the Simpson's Motor Grill, a fast food lunch place on Richmond St., behind the Simpson's store in Toronto. In the afternoons, I went to summer school, continuing to work on my B.A.





I finished Normal School in June, 1949, and was amazed to be hired by the Toronto Board of Education. It was a big thing, for that year the salary for Toronto elementary teachers went from \$1500 to \$1800. We were the best paid in the province. Then I found out that, although assigned to a school in east Toronto, I and other graduates were being placed, along with the Vice Principal of that school, in an emergency housing complex school in Scarborough. I soon discovered that the school in the complex was in two of several long low buildings which had housed military personnel during the war, formerly the site of the General Engineering (GE) Company of Ontario. The school was named Geco Elementary School. Behind the school and the housing buildings were mounds of earth that had held munitions during the war years.

The people who lived in the buildings which had only short wall partitions between the apartments, and common bathrooms, had all been evicted from places in Toronto and housed there on welfare. The Geco facilities were closed ten years later when Regent Park Housing was built in Toronto, and the people moved there. The philosophy was that in better surroundings there would be fewer adult and youth social problems: crime, alcohol, violence, abuse . . . but the problems moved with the people.

I had made a friend at Normal School whose home was in Toronto, and she too was hired by the Toronto Board and into the same teaching situation. Not wanting to live at her home where there was a lot of drinking, Mavis (Evans) and I rented a basement apartment together where we could get a bus to school. We enjoyed living together, and I learned more about her Welsh, fun-loving, but either drinking, singing or fighting family. Their life-style was certainly different!

A few boyfriends came, and went in Mavis' and my life, as we figured ourselves out. My teaching years at Geco school were a real eye-opener for me. The situation and life for the children was heart-breaking. School was the cleanest, safest and most attractive building in the whole complex.

As teachers, we worked very hard for and with those children, and at the end of a school day, we could hardly get the K-6 children to leave. Sometimes if a child did not show up for school, we would go and knock on the door where he/she lived, for no one had wakened the child for school..

Once, Mavis and I mailed a pair of running shoes to a child who had none to wear to come to school. Of course we had to do things like that anonymously. One year, I had a Grade 1 class with forty children. Parents' night was not easy. I remember once a drunken father backed me into a corner of the classroom because he did not like something I had done. Another year a Grade 8 student of mine let all the air out of the tires of my car, and another, when discovering I had a boy-friend, gave me a present - a baby's bib! The Grades 7-8 pupils were hard to manage to say the least. Still, those were among the happiest years of my teaching.

There are too many stories to relate from those years, including having our heads checked every Friday when the Public Health nurse came to check all the children. Teaching there, we teachers became close to each other. We were young, just out of Normal School, and all A teachers, probably placed there because it was thought we could handle it. Our Vice Principal was a capable, kind but firm, and caring Christian man, and together we tried our best to 'make a difference' in the pupils' lives. I think, for some, we did.



Following the years at Geco, I taught for a couple of years in a west Toronto school, Pauline Ave. There I learned what it was like to have a regular classroom, a nice staff room in which to eat lunch, reasonably well-behaved students and parents. I also learned about absences because of Jewish holidays. Another good experience.

A further life-shaping experience was teaching an ESL (English Second Language) summer school to children (Vietnamese 'Boat' people) who had virtually no English language. My task was to help them learn enough basic words to enable them to enter a Public School program. I loved them. One especially I felt I had known before, and years later, he saw me in a bus terminal in Oakville and called me by name. Very special.





## Life's Further Unfolding

My brother Ted remarried in 1949 and I had a new sister-in-law, Kathryn Eve (nee Young). They lived first in Waterdown and then in the subdivision on our farm.

While teaching, I worked at my B.A. by taking summer and winter night courses. I was not a great academic student, and certainly found 'multiple choice' psychology exams particularly difficult. Economics was also a challenge. While I took three years of French, it was mostly literature, so I did not learn to speak with any confidence. I enjoyed Psychology, Sociology, English and Spanish, but my best subject was Philosophy. I found myself critically reflecting on the philosophy of such as Descartes, Nietzsche, and J. S. Mill. I somehow knew there was more to be reflected upon, and I have never stopped doing just that. Forming a personal life philosophy began in those years, and I am grateful for them. But I had to live through many more years of ongoing learning through experience to even begin to articulate my philosophy of the amazing mystery of the gift, privilege and responsibility of life, and of the Power of Love. My Christian faith was always 'the ground upon which I stood'.



I finally completed my B.A., course by course, and in one of my last summer courses at U. of T., I met Edwin David Litt. He was a teacher in Scarborough at that time. His family home was in Hanover, his father of Pennsylvania Dutch descent, and his mother of English.

My next life segment began when Ed and I became engaged, and a wedding was planned for the Christmas holidays of 1952. But my father's health was becoming uncertain because of heart trouble. He was being treated for angina, and could no longer do the work on the farm. He suddenly had a severe heart attack, and died on May 28, 1952 at age 62.

An auction sale was eventually held at the farm the following November, but mother meanwhile was living alone there. Binnie was going daily to see to her needs, and the farm. All this was along with his work at Westinghouse in Hamilton. It was not an easy time for mother, Binnie, or my sister-in-law Kay. Although my father's death had been a shock for us all, it was finally decided that the wedding should proceed in the coming December as planned.





## Married Years

Ed and I were married on December 27, 1952 in the Waterdown United Church on Mill St. At the wedding, my brother Binnie walked me down the aisle, and a reception was held in the Scottish Rite in Hamilton, since my brother Ted was a member of the Masonic Order there.

Mavis, another teaching friend Dorothy Pamerter (from Geco days), and my niece Marguerite were my attendants at the wedding. It was an alone-feeling time for my mother, but she was brave and supportive although I think a little sad for a couple of reasons: being without Dad, and not really knowing Ed very well, or his family at all,

After a week's honeymoon in Bermuda, as both of us were teaching in the Toronto area, Ed and I began married life in an apartment at the corner of Coxwell and Danforth Sts. in Toronto. Mavis and her husband Bryce Thornton, had left that apartment in moving to Windsor. The next year Ed and I both transferred to schools in Etobicoke. I taught in Islington Public School. We lived in an apartment in Humbertown and attended a United Church which was meeting in a school at that time.



We were present at the opening of the new Humber Valley United Church, and I like to think one brick in that church has our invisible name on it. When we managed a down payment, we moved to a newly built house in Rexdale at 39 Kingsknowe Rd.

We attended the United Church there which had begun to hold worship services in a school. Soon the new Rexdale Church was built, including another brick with our invisible name. We were charter members.

We watched our new house being built, and enjoyed living there. A neighbour across the street, Marguerite Coates, became a loving and life-long friend.



## Children Arrive

My dear friend, Marguerite Coates and I had our first babies about the same time. To my great joy Warren John Litt was born in Weston Hospital on Sept. 7, 1959. Having previously had two miscarriages, I had spent the last two months of that pregnancy in bed, praying every day that I might keep our baby. Although born 6 weeks early at 6 lbs. 11 oz. he was a strong and healthy little one.

Warren was an easy baby to look after, only wanting to be fed, loved, and dry (in that order)! He was a loving, gentle child who needed his sleep and to be played with quietly. He was baptised in Rexdale U.C., crying the whole time, maybe because of the disturbed routine or feeling his mother's nervousness.





Then on Feb. 7 1962, in Weston Hospital, Sandra Grace Litt arrived in the world, a bubble of activity and smiles from early days, preferring to play rather than sleep! Like Warren, she was born in Weston Hospital and baptised in Rexdale U.C. I was busy, but loved my two little ones. Marguerite, across the street, was a nurse as well as friend and mother, and I was glad of her advice as needs arose.

We walked our children in strollers to the mall together and shared a morning coffee in one of our homes or yards when we could. I was so glad of her companionship in those days

Sadly, Marguerite Coates died to this life in 2012 and I miss her to this day.

Ed had been commuting to Milton where he was then teaching, so when Sandra was 5 months old we decided to move there. It was not an easy time to get the house sold and us packed up with a new baby and a little boy. But we did it.

We went to live in our next new little house on Bell St. in Milton. Of course, neither Warren or Sandra were concerned about which house they lived in as long as they were loved and cared for, so that was not a problem.

They were healthy, busy and happy children. Warren loved his books, toys, building with his Lego, and going outside to play. Being shy like his mother, he was a little nervous about starting kindergarten, but once he got used to school, he enjoyed it. He learned easily and quickly, and discovered interesting new things which engaged his bright mind. He happily participated in the games, and particularly enjoyed being outdoors playing baseball or soccer.

Sandra could sing before she talked very much. She loved me to sing her to sleep, for settling down at night was hard for her.

One hot night in summer, taking Sandra (age 4 yrs.) outside in the dark with me before her bedtime, she looked up at the sky and asked, "How did God get the stars up there, Mommy?" And not waiting for me, she answered her own question saying, " God must have just used a ladder and went 'Poof!,'" She had figured it out to her own satisfaction, so I just left it at that.

To this day, she is wondering about the cosmos and asking questions, hearing answers from inside herself.

Having a vivid imagination and much artistic creativity, Sandra wanted to go to school with Warren. She missed him. But with crayons, scissors and paste, and her toys, she amused herself quite well. When she did start kindergarten, she came home singing every song she heard!

Warren and Sandra played happily together. Their school report cards were excellent, and prolific papers adorned the door of the refrigerator displaying the achievements of Warren and the artistic creations of Sandra.

I so enjoyed the children and seeing the development of their innate gifts.



We soon discovered while living in Milton that anyone moving into town was considered a `newcomer' for the first ten years, as someone told me. It was true at that time, with most of the town being retired farmers or original town dwellers. But I made friends through the St. Paul's U.C., and through a very active University Women's Club. I enjoyed those meetings and the book discussions. I was also invited to join the Curling Club, and I did. But I was not competitive, and always worried I would let my team down by doing badly. So curling did not last long for me!

On March 30, 1965, Bryan David Litt was born in Milton Hospital. I was 36 years of age and now had three children to keep me plenty busy. Bryan saw to that from the beginning. I did not have a night's sleep for the first year or so as he was very wakeful and had a lot of indigestion. Otherwise, Bryan was a happy child but hyper-active, curious, adventurous and daring, and had to be watched at all times. At a few months of age, he could rock the play-pen across the floor - wanting out, of course! I had my hands full, as the saying goes.





When Bryan was old enough to play outside, I had to be there at all times, for he would either head for the street or the little creek behind the house. Ed's niece Linda Diemert, (now Lin Johnson) was then in Toronto taking her nurse's training. She would come to help me when she could, and I was always grateful. Ed was busy in the High School, being head of Guidance, but was good at being with and playing with the children when at home.

Living in Milton, I was closer to mother who was still alone on the farm, except for a boarder she took in to help with expenses. I would take the children to visit as often as I could. However, as she got older, it was not easy for her to have us for long visits. I had a lady who did occasional baby-sitting, so I was able to visit mother with less stress, and I also chose to get back into my profession by supply teaching when I could.

For a time I taught music in the Milton School for the Deaf. Yes, music! The students, by putting their finger tips on the grand piano, could feel the rhythm of songs, and make vocal sounds accordingly. It was in the years when the deaf were encouraged to be vocal. Their gym had a sensitive wood floor which enabled them to feel the beat of the music, so I could teach them to dance.



As early parenting years passed, Ed took a Guidance job in Aldershot High School and we moved again, this time to 521 Ann Ave. in Aldershot. Warren went first to King Rd. Public School and then, after the early grades, to Plains Rd. P. S. Sandra also went to King Rd. school, and met a new friend, Debbie, there.

We all attended East Plains United Church, and again I was active in UCW, Sunday School, and a guitar group, as well as others.



I became a member of Halton Presbytery Christian Development Committee and the Hamilton Conference Christian Development Committee. I enjoyed this work, and the people I met through it. I continued to do occasional supply teaching in the Aldershot area.



By this time, mother was having more trouble with a lung condition. Twice she was hospitalized from fluid in her lungs, and then returned home to the farm. On one occasion, she stayed for a time with us until strong enough to go home. But on the last trip to the hospital she was transferred to Extencicare Oakville where she died on June 19, 1972 at age 83.

From a young age, Mother had always called me her "little rascal" for some reason! Usually those words were affectionately spoken. I am sure it had not been easy for her having to work hard on the farm and look after me. I know I had given her more than a few headaches in my growing-up! The last day I saw her before she died, I said, "Here is your little rascal come to see you, Mom." And she answered, "That little rascal is worth her weight in gold".

All my life, she had never told me in words that she loved me. I had always wondered if she, pregnant in her middle years, and working hard to help keep payments made on the farm in those depression years, really had wanted me. I knew for sure that moment at her bedside that she was glad I had been born, and she loved me. The words she spoke were healing for me and are embedded in my heart.

She died peacefully that night and was buried with my father in the Garden of the Last Supper in White Chapel Cemetery in west Hamilton. For her, it may have been a release from loneliness, but certainly a loss for us. It was a difficult task for the family to clean out the farm house, and the things that told much of the story of her life and our own. But it had to be done so that the house and the rest of the property could be sold.



My brother Binnie died July 11, 1976 at 61 years of age, having taken a surprise heart attack in the barn on our farm. And what a loss that was to Kay, Marguerite, and to the rest of us in the family. "Uncle Bunny", as he was called by my children in their young days, was dearly loved by us all.

Although Ed and I enjoyed our home on Ann Ave., things in the marriage had not been going well for some time. It always `takes two' and so between the two of us much had changed. It was no one thing, but rather many differences between us from the start, differences which had been either unknown or unacknowledged. But as the years went on the gap widened.

Over time I had become very unhappy, and lonely. Ed was a good man and husband and father in many ways, but he was unwilling to see there was a serious difficulty, and we had three young children we both dearly loved. As a young girl, I had mistakenly thought that once one got married, the dream, along with the `white picket fence home', would last for all my days. Counselling did not help us, and eventually, either I was going to come apart or the marriage had to, and so in desperation I finally moved myself out of the house into an apartment.

Warren at age 12 could decide what he would do, and out of caring and loyalty to his father decided to remain. Sandra and Bryan went with me. A very sad and difficult time. My heart was broken at leaving Warren, my longed-for first-born, but thankfully the love between mother and child is powerful and eternal. He came to see us when he could. I had to keep things together for Sandra and Bryan who were naturally, as hurt, lost and confused as Warren, each in their own way.

I will not go into further details here, only say that it was very difficult for all of us.

Warren and Sandra have their own memories, and for their love for me I will be grateful until the day I die to life on this earth, and then my gratitude and love for them will continue from the Other Side.

## Years Living Alone

Now on my own, I first found part-time work as Secretary for the Burlington Social Planning Council, housed then in Port Nelson United Church, Burlington. But this was not enough income, although Ed generously supported the children, so I applied to get back into teaching.

God opened the door, for because of a mid-summer resignation, a teacher was immediately needed and I was hired to team-teach a Grade 4 in Ryerson Public School, Burlington, that fall, Sept. 1971.



It was indeed a gift, as was Bernie Flemming, my teaching partner, who integrated me back into teaching after my being out of full-time teaching for so many years. Bernie spoke at my retirement staff party in 1991.

We did creative work in our team-teaching which I enjoyed very much. Bernie and his wife Alice were a wonderful support for me personally in those years, and their friendship remains important to me.







Sadly, in 1992, my dear sister-in-law Kay died. She had been like a second mother to me in many ways, and always so loving to me and the children. I felt the loss deeply as did her daughter, Marguerite. We had the difficult task of clearing out that home.



During the teaching years, the children and I left the apartment and moved to a rented house. Then, when I had a down-payment for a home of my own, we moved to 5138 Idlewood Cres. in Burlington. I was happy to have our own place again and enjoyed the little house, garden, grass, and flowers.

During the first years of being a single mother, Bryan was a serious concern in many ways, in school and out. He was very bright and the school work was no problem for him, but he began making choices that were not good, and I was very worried. He dropped out of school in Grade 11 and went to work, first in a restaurant, and then in a factory. He was still living at home with me, more or less!

I taught Junior Grades 4-6, choirs and recorder groups at Ryerson P.S. until my early retirement in June, 1991. A window of opportunity for retirement had come that year: a combination of age and years of teaching.

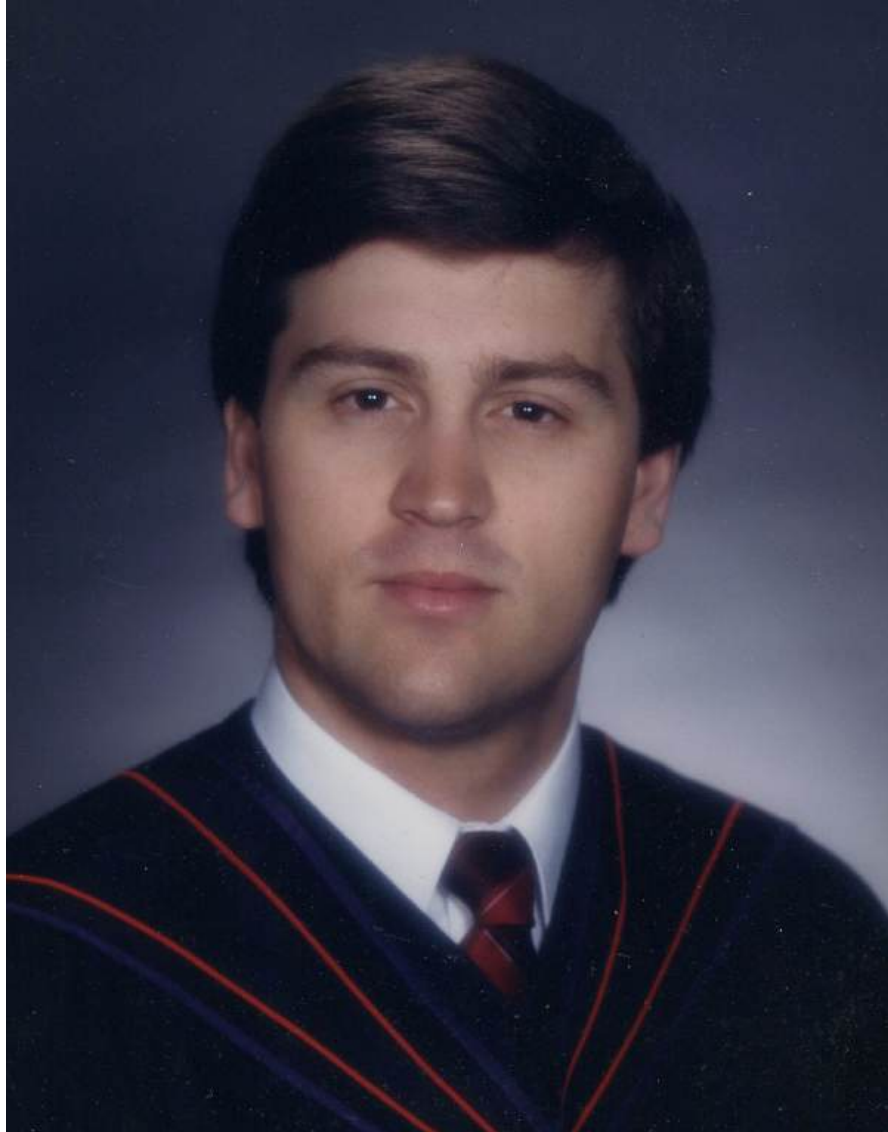


But then Bryan found Tammy Arsenault. She was often at our place, or riding around on the back of his motorcycle. Tammy did not have an easy home life. Like Bryan, she was adventurous, but had a caring and loving heart.

Eventually, they moved into an apartment together. I knew they really did love each other, but I was not happy to see them begin their `together life' in that way. On the first Sunday after they moved, I invited them to dinner. When we sat down at the table, before I said the table grace, I remember clearly hearing a voice in my mind which said, "Bless them for me!". I knew that was a word from God, the Spirit of Love, and so I did. I have no idea of the words I used, but I remember the moment, and for me it was a moment of `Grace'. Perhaps for them too.

Bryan and Tammy came to one of my school Christmas concerts, and to my retirement party, all dressed up, and seemingly, maybe, even proud of me! Warren and Sandra were `out West' at that time.





I will never forget those dear people who supported us during the years after separation. The children and I, had joined Appleby United Church, and feeling the need for personal support, I had asked the minister if there was a prayer group there or in any nearby church. He replied that there was not. I must have looked downcast, for he said, "Why don't you start one?" I answered, "Who, me?" to which he replied with words that began a change in the direction of my life, "Why not you?" And there followed a conversation which led to his putting a notice in the next Sunday's bulletin with a date to begin a prayer group. On that date, to my amazement, 12 people showed up. The minister met with us a couple of times and then left me to lead the group which I did every week for three years, including a time of meditation in the hour. Two women from that group, Barb Beamish and Mandy Jesudian remain my good friends. During those years, I was invited to help begin prayer groups in Port Nelson U.C. and Wellington Square U.C. in Burlington. Also I had begun to work with adults, through the Hamilton Conference Christian Development Committee.

Warren had finished high school at Aldershot High and taken a year off to travel before going to McMaster University. Then, supported in his call to ordained ministry by Appleby U.C. and Rev. Alan Harley, Warren went to Emmanuel College in Toronto.

Spending a summer in Saskatchewan before ordination into the United Church of Canada, Warren met a prairie rose, Shelley Dawn Martsch. Eventually, we attended their wedding on July 9, 1988 in Eston, Saskatchewan as Shelley became my first daughter-in-law. She was always, and is, a real blessing in my life.



Together they gifted me with my first grandson, Braden John, born December 12, 1994. I flew west to meet and hold him soon after his birth.

Then three years later, his sister Brianne Alexandra was born, September 29, 1997. Two beautiful souls had come to earth!

Sandra, who graduated from Lord Elgin High School in Burlington, had followed Warren to Mac., worked in insurance for a time, and eventually travelled west. There she met Blair Belch in Calgary and returned home to be married by Rev. Wayne Irwin in Lowville U.C. September 5, 1987.



Under the arbour outside the church at Lowville, Bryan and I had a special moment, as did Warren and I at Sandra's and Blair's reception at the Old Mill Restaurant.



Sandra transferred her University and Teaching certificates to Ontario, as did Shelley later.

Sandra and Blair birthed two children: Stephen David, born May 5, 1995, and Christina Grace, born October 3, 1998. Now I had two more beautiful souls to bless my life.

From here on, the unfolding family story will be told one day by the next generation, for their children, and grandchildren!



## Moving On



I had first seen Rev. Wayne Irwin in the summer of 1973. He was on the stage in Central Park, Burlington, at an open-air worship service which he was leading for the Burlington International Games. I had never heard a voice like his, so deep and clear and resonant! Then, I got to know him through the Halton Presbytery Christian Development Committee and later the Hamilton Conference C.D., and other Conference events.

A ten-week Developing Spirituality Series had been planned for the Conference, and as a quiet, central location near the Conference Office, Wayne had offered Lowville Church. I was still teaching and could not attend at that time.

At the end of a second series however, a group of regular attenders wanted to continue to meet.

Realizing that there was a need and desire by some in Conference for more teaching and support in the ways of prayer, meditation, and growth in the spiritual life, Wayne agreed that a group could continue to meet in Lowville Church, and he undertook to provide leadership.

With several members of this church having attended the past series and continuing in this emergent group, eventually there came the time to provide a structure for an ongoing prayer ministry, as an outreach program of Lowville United Church.



In 1983, Moderator Stan McKay installed the Board of this new prayer ministry of The United Church of Canada called 'Lowville Prayer Centre'. This ministry became federally incorporated and had strong membership support. For the next twenty years, it was active with teaching and retreats across the country, with Rev. Wayne Irwin as Executive Director, and me as Program Manager. The LPC office was set up in my home., which at that time was 5138 Idlewood Cres. Burlington.

When the minister of Appleby U.C. departed, I decided it was time to move my membership to Lowville. I was then retired and able to attend, teach, or facilitate some of the programs of LPC. I loved the work.

After retirement from teaching in June 1991, I had begun to look for courses in spirituality, finally finding my way to Regis College (Jesuit supported) in Toronto where the courses I wanted were offered. As a part-time student, I went to Toronto once a week over a couple of years. I enjoyed the lectures, assignments, and writing reflection papers for the courses, and eventually earned a Diploma in Spiritual Studies.





As I have said, I had always found reflection and philosophy more natural than regurgitation of factual knowledge, other than spiritual knowledge that is, so I really enjoyed the courses at 'Regis' and did well.

I had thought that perhaps I was called to ordained ministry in the church, but God, through circumstances, indicated that lay ministry was for me, and I am grateful. I know I would have been one who lay awake after any contentious church meetings!

One fall, Dr. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, who was the Hamilton Conference Christian Development Staff person, asked me to help with a Sunday School Teachers event at Five Oaks (U.C. Training and Retreat Centre near Paris, Ontario) by leading a workshop with Sunday School teachers on helping children learn to pray.

Although I had teaching background, and experience with helping children to pray at church as well as at home, it was with much trepidation that I agreed.

I prepared carefully and did that workshop, but was not really happy about how it went. However, she asked me to do the same the next year. By then, I had realized what the problem was. Many of the teachers themselves were not comfortable with prayer. Discussing this with Dr. Ng, she suggested that we add to the event an opportunity for personal prayer with any teacher who wished to come to the chapel after lunch.

Doubting that anyone would come, I agreed to be there anyway. To my surprise, one woman came. After sitting quietly together for a time, I asked if she would like prayer, and she nodded. So, asking if I might hold her hand, I prayed a simple prayer from my heart. She began to cry. I wondered what I had said to upset her, but decided to just wait a little. Soon she dried her tears, looked up at me and smiled. And then she said, "I have been in the United Church all my life, and this is the first time anyone has ever held my hand, called me by name, and said a prayer for me."

We talked a little and she left, but I have never forgotten that experience. It helped start me on a new life path.

Retelling the story to Dr. Ng, she suggested that I consider taking the training program in Spiritual Direction then being offered at the Vancouver School of Theology.

As she explained what this program involved, I became very excited, but realized I could not go to British Columbia. However, that very year, the program for Spiritual Direction was moved to Toronto School of Theology, and I was accepted into the two-year program. I learned much from the books on the reading list, enjoyed every paper I had to write, and every retreat week in those two years. In 1990, I graduated from the Toronto-Shalom Program in Spiritual Direction and began appointments in my home. This is the ministry to which God called/calls me as a lay person, and it is such a holy privilege to be engaged with persons on their sacred journeys.



"COME," MY HEART HAS SAID, "SEEK GOD'S FACE."  
YOUR FACE, HOLY ONE, I WILL SEEK. PSALM 27:8

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**FLORA LITT**

HAS SATISFACTORILY COMPLETED  
ALL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE

**TORONTO-SHALOM PROGRAM  
IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

FIRST CYCLE (1990-1991)

DONALD GRAYSTON

CO-DIRECTOR, TSPSD  
THE SHALOM INSTITUTE  
VANCOUVER, B.C.

WILLIAM D. LORD

DIRECTOR FOR  
CONTINUING EDUCATION  
TORONTO SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

MARY M. MCCANN, IHM

CO-DIRECTOR, TSPSD  
REGIS COLLEGE  
TORONTO

DATE

1 Sept 1991



Bryan and Tammy had finally been married in Lowville U.C. by Rev. Wayne Irwin on Sept.5, 1992. They were very happy, and so was I.

But not very long after they had been married, Bryan suddenly became ill and was soon diagnosed as having cancer.

It proved to be a fast developing Non-Hodgkins lymphoma, and, in spite of all that could be done then, he died within two years on July 26, 1994 at age 28. It was a heart-breaking loss for us all, and indeed a tremendously sad and difficult day when Wayne conducted the funeral service on July 28 in Lowville U.C. where they had been married by him.

To lose a child, I believe, is one of life's most devastating experiences. I knew then, and know now, that Bryan lives on in a spiritual body in the dimension we call 'Heaven'. My Christian faith affirms the truth that just as Jesus the Christ left his physical body at the time of his execution to return to the spiritual realm from whence he had come, so did Bryan, when he left this dimension we call 'Earth'.

Although I have not had resurrection experiences like the disciples in terms of seeing Christ in his physical or spiritual body again, yet I have had, and have, experiences of awareness of Bryan's presence: impressions in mind and heart, signs, and symbols.

To this day, these also affirm that the one I knew in this life, as Bryan, lives on, loves and helps me from 'the Other Side,' for spirit life is eternal. I am convinced that he, like me and all of us, come to this plane of existence in a physical body, to this school-room of life, with an intention to learn the lessons of Love, and offer our unique gifts of creativity and service to those presently on earth with us and to the world. In so doing we can leave a Christ-like imprint for those yet to come, and we can leave this planet a better place.

My life has been intricately interwoven with my children. And the same was true for Wayne, with the weddings and funeral. When he separated from his marriage and also ended his Lowville Church pastoral relationship, I remained a member at Lowville. For a couple of years, the Lowville Prayer Centre work went on with us working together on many workshops in other churches, and at Five Oaks. There, we used the main building at first for programs and retreats, and later the house-on-the-hill (the former Five Oaks Director's house). The office for the Lowville Prayer Centre ministry continued in my home.

However, after 20 years of being a catalyst for the renewal of the prayer and healing ministry in our tradition, it became clear to Wayne that he could not continue as Executive Director of the Prayer Centre. He was stretched to the full being the lead minister for Centenary United Church in downtown Hamilton. It seemed that we had maintained the mission of the teaching and practice of prayer and healing in the wider church as long as the Spirit intended.

Some of the Prayer Centre program was taken on by a Hamilton Conference Week of Guided Prayer Network, where it remains to this day.

Memorial Funds for Bryan, along with residue from the Prayer Centre funds and monies in memory of the parents of another Prayer Centre member, Ralph Laidlaw, built the large labyrinth at Five Oaks. Bryan's name is on the labyrinth memorial plaque there.

## Other Life Changes

July 1997 was a life-changing month, for Wayne asked me to become his wife. I had been on my own for over twenty years by now, and thought I would remain so. It was a huge step for Wayne, and an amazement to me, that he chose to risk commitment again, and with me, a woman 15 years older than himself!

Besides being amazed, for he was my best friend and such a wonderful man in so many ways, I was apprehensive, and full of "what ifs?". He set about dealing with those in no uncertain terms! So, if God and Wayne were in accord, would I turn away from such a gift in my life? And, bless my Warren and Sandra for being happy with me, and for me. I will never forget their love shown to us at that time, and ever since.



Soon after we became engaged, I decided it was time to move from the house at 5138 Idlewood Cres. in Burlington, and managed to find a condo just off Governor's Rd. in Dundas on Pirie Drive. It was not far from Wayne's parents who were living in their own home on Governor's Rd. We knew this would be a good location for us. Wayne was an only child, and it was evident that before long his parents, then in their 90s, might need more support from him. Meanwhile, he had moved to their home from his downtown apartment and was living with them until we were married.





After moving to my condo, once again with the help of Lin and Ken Johnson, who must have wished I'd stop moving, I left Lowville Church to attend Centenary U.C. There began a 'steep learning curve' for me in many ways, but I did find myself warmly welcomed and accepted by Centenary people. Maybe some were relieved that their minister was 'attached', but I think maybe some of the female singles were disappointed! As I gradually began to share in some of the prayer ministry and other groups at Centenary, I realized what a diverse community it was.

There was still a small group who had attended that church for many years, and held responsible board and other positions, but there were also persons less 'well-off'. It took me a while to get past being a little nervous with some of the folks who might wander into service or coffee time. Being an inner city, downtown church, there were many persons needing ministry, physical, social, and spiritual. Wayne's ministry at Centenary soon included not only teaching, preaching, healing services, and pastoral care in the core church community, but also an outreach ministry to gay and trans-gendered persons, the homeless, addicted, and just plain hungry people.

Although, while teaching, I had gone into the Hamilton jail with the Ryerson Public School vice-principal to teach a course to women, and had done some regular visiting at the Women's Correction Centre in Brampton for the Elizabeth Fry Society, I had no other experience in being with street or otherwise marginalized people.

Wayne was busy in ministry, and I was gradually feeling more comfortable with this new life reality. We both were happily thinking about a wedding date.

## Married Life Again

Following an evening rehearsal party at the home of Marguerite and her husband, Sam Cino, Wayne and I were married Saturday July 31, 1999 in Centenary United Church by Rev. William McKinnon, Wayne's colleague in ministry at Centenary, and my son Warren. Sandra stood up with me, and Wayne's son, Aaron, with him. Gail Rappolt, best friend of niece Marguerite, took wonderful pictures for us, in Marguerite and Sam's back garden and at the wedding itself.

It was an eventful beginning to the service in that there was a heavy storm with lightning, thunder and pounding rain. Even as we wondered if the power would stay on and the organ be able to play, and even though the presiding minister mixed up the order of "William Mercer Wayne" in the vows, we were married. And for us the raindrops were showers of blessing! Our good friend, Alan Whitmore was organist (his wife Denise also present), and Pippa Loch sang Mozart's "Alleluia" like an angel.

Warren presided at the reception in the church hall, making a wonderful speech himself into which he must have put much thought. It meant so much to me. It was so good to have Mom and Dad Irwin present, some of Wayne's cousins, my brother Ted, sister-in-law Eve, my niece Kathryn, my nephew Claire, his wife Mary, their family Keith and Grace, and many of our friends.

After that, the family went to Lo Presti's at Maxwell's Fine-dining Restaurant, then co-owned by Sam Cino. (Warren had, a few years earlier, presided at Marg and Sam's wedding in the garden of their beautiful home on Hillcrest Ave. in Hamilton.) Although at the time of our marriage Marguerite was struggling with cancer and was not at all well, she was at the church service and restaurant; but her condition was a deep concern for me on that day. Wayne and I spent our wedding Saturday night in the Hamilton Sheraton Hotel, but returned to Centenary on Sunday morning when, at the end of the service, Rev. Mary Hamilton blessed our marriage before the congregation. We all went downstairs for another cake! We had felt it was necessary to be with the congregation in a new way.

Finally, we took off to be 'alone at last', and enjoy an overnight stop at a motel on the way north, before heading to Manitoulin Island for a week. In our motel room, we found a very thoughtful gift from dear friend Ann Fleming: two stemmed glasses and a bottle of champagne! Mmmmm! Next day, we continued on to Manitoulin Island and our honeymoon time.



Alan and Denise



Gail



Ann



Heather





Then, for Wayne, it was back to work at Centenary. I continued to have Spiritual Direction appointments in our home, and get used to the Dundas community. But peace was short-lived in a way because niece Marguerite became critically ill. With a sorrowing heart, I visited her often. I was called to her bedside while my family sat at our first Christmas dinner in our Dundas home.

My dearly loved Marguerite died to this earthly life that evening, December 25, 1999. Wayne officiated and I was one of many who spoke at the funeral service held in Centenary United Church. Some days later, Marguerite's closest friend Gail Rappolt and I assisted heart-broken Sam to deal with Marguerite's personal belongings. And once again, Wayne was my support.



We were happy in life together and in ministry. As well as appointments, taking care of our home and visiting Wayne's parents, I was trying to keep up with my children and grandchildren, brother Ted, sister-in-law Eve, niece Kathryn Ann, nephew Claire Austin,, as well as getting to know Aaron better.



Aaron



I was helping in various ways in Wayne's ministry in Centenary. We were welcomed into people's lives there. After Wayne's retirement, several people remained personal friends.

We had decided to move from Dundas to 54 Whitton Ave. in Westdale (west Hamilton) and we began many repairs to that home. We enjoyed having a 3-storey home and a back yard.

Gradually we quite filled the place from basement to attic, not only with our original belongings but with accumulated and inherited items, to our later chagrin. But it was great to have space for family or friends to come and 'stay over', and to be able to entertain the church choir and other groups.

I was also happy to have a little garden again. Nothing like fresh lettuce and beans or a warm, ripe tomato for supper!

My childhood friend Dawn (now Fraser) lived on her own in the house behind us, and Wayne took down a piece of the fence between so we could come and go easily to visit. And we greatly enjoyed being able to do this.

Wayne's parents and Dawn were often with us for Sunday dinner, and it was always a special time to be together with them.



However, there was to be more family loss, for my brother Ted died August 20, 2002 in St. Mary's Hospital, and Eve found life without him very difficult. Son Claire, his wife Mary, and their children, and daughter Kathryn, did their best to support her. We tried to visit her as often as we could.

Then Wayne's mother, Jean Irwin had a fall at age 97 and spent her last two and one-half years of life in Blackadar Nursing Home in Dundas. Dad Irwin was quite lost without her, and it was not long before he decided to move to Blackadar Retirement Residence. We visited him often. Then Mom Jean died April 26, 2006. We visited him often. It was time for the family home on Governor's Road in Dundas to be cleaned out and sold. Wayne and I spent the time needed to look after this.

Life went on for us, with some holidays and trips, but always with family in our hearts, and ministry not far from Wayne's mind. Then came Sunday March 1, 2009. Dad Irwin was very ill and for the previous four days had been in St. Joseph's Hospital, Hamilton. He had attended worship in Centenary church, as was his custom, just the previous Sunday. I stayed with him in the hospital, while Wayne was in church leading worship. Sweet, faithful man that Dad was to the end, he would have been pleased had he consciously realized where Wayne was. Dad passed from this life that very hour while Wayne was preaching. Sandra, and Rev. Lynn Godfrey, who had served for a time in ministry at Centenary with Wayne, came to be with me at the hospital, until Wayne could get clear to come.

The funeral services for both Mom Jean, earlier, and now Dad Mercer were held in Centenary church with Rev. Lynn Godfrey presiding. The interment of Dad's ashes was beside Mom Jean's in White Chapel Cemetery, in the Last Supper section, just one plot removed from where my family members' earthly remains are also buried.

Wayne and I often remember Mom Irwin saying, "Well, that was quite a day!" In retrospect we could say that 2009 was "quite a year!" In June, Wayne retired from Centenary and full-time active ordained ministry in The United Church of Canada, after a total of 41 years (2 in Saskatchewan, 26 in Lowville U.C. and 13 in Centenary U.C., Hamilton).

Wayne was well respected in these congregations, but also in the Hamilton community. There was a large reception following his last service, with many people wishing him a blessed retirement, and saying Good-bye to us. Wayne was presented with an Internet gift, and I was given two lovely pots of Hibiscus plants for my garden.

After the last farewell, we packed our bags and left for Vancouver to board a ship and begin an Alaskan cruise. It was a wonderful way to begin to relax into retirement, whatever that future would hold.

## After Wayne's Retirement

At first, Wayne was a VAM (Voluntary Associate Minister) in St. Paul's U. C. Dundas, and I too joined that congregation. Wayne had attended there as a child before his family decided to help begin the St. Mark's U.C. congregation in Dundas, becoming charter members there. So worshipping in Dundas was like coming home for Wayne, and we both greatly appreciated and respected the ministry of Rev. Rick Spies in St. Paul's church.

Wayne and I enjoyed being able to sit in the pew together to worship for we had not had this opportunity since our marriage. We knew we needed to take our time in getting involved in more than short-term events at church, for both of us were still feeling a deep tiredness.

Wayne did some occasional supply preaching, but soon decided he did not feel drawn to much of this, although he is known as a gifted preacher. He also began to test the idea of again leading travel groups, but nothing seemed to indicate that was the route to go. He began to take some courses in photography which had long been an interest, and enjoyed this, but I sensed this was not enough for his keen intellect.

He also enjoyed research and genealogy, and we happily took some trips to Scotland, Wales and England to look up places from which ancestors from both our families had come.

Wayne's interest in learning soon included the Internet in new ways, which delighted him. I decided that there was nothing like having a man happy in retirement! Being a person who taught himself, for the most part, he spent hours on the Internet developing skills to such a degree that a website interest expanded into a business in which he is still engaged as a church website builder and administrator.

It has been interesting for me to watch how Wayne's new ministry for churches in this electronic age has evolved, and to see his energy and excitement in doing this work. Meanwhile, I appreciated our having no church meetings for a while. I continued to enjoy my Spiritual Direction practice, and tasks inside and outside our home.

Retirement was at first a more peaceful time than we had known for quite a few years. There was more opportunity for visiting, entertaining and travelling. It has always been good to have time with Wayne's cousins in Orillia, where Wayne was born, and with other cousins in the Acton area, as well as my family. It has also been great to catch up with some of our old friends.



Warren and Shelley were, and remain busy in their own professions, Shelley as a Special Education Consultant for the Lambton County Board of Education, and Warren as an Administrator for the Chaplaincies in the London Ontario hospitals. He is also involved in training ministers for the hospital aspect of their work.

Sandra has continued working for the Halton Board of Education. and at present is teaching a Grade 6 class of 'gifted' students, and enjoying it very much. Her personal life and family situation changed, as separation and divorce took her and Blair down different life paths. Sandra is now rebuilding her life.

Wayne and I also appreciate the gifts and talents each grandchild has to offer to the world, and enjoy seeing these four dear ones pursuing their dreams. We care deeply for each and want to continue to support them as their life unfolds. We love to be together with them when possible.

Braden has always been a fine student as well as athlete. He has spent several summers as a counsellor or a lifeguard and swimming instructor at a camp. He is now continuing to pursue his education and teaching career goals in Brock University.



Brianne has always enjoyed music, community choir, sports, and theatre in her growing up years. Upon graduating from Sarnia High School she has begun to follow her learning goals in the University of Waterloo.



After graduating from High School in Waterdown, Stephen began to work with Wayne in the Internet field in which he, Stephen, is naturally gifted. Together they build and maintain sites for churches across North America. Stephen also explores other Internet possibilities for the future.

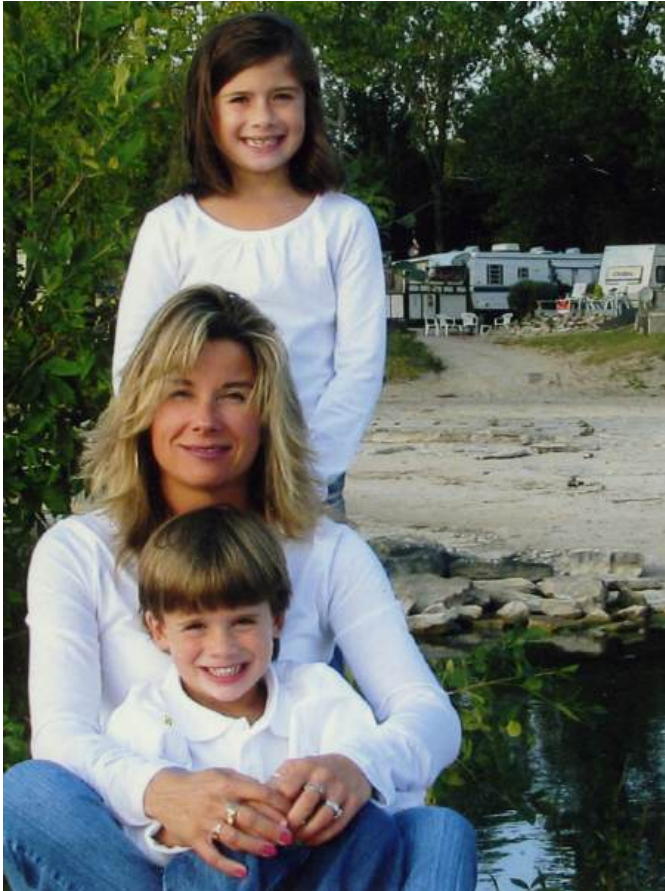


Christina, an excellent academic student, has graduated from Grade 11 this year. She has a passion for music, dance, and ballet in particular. She has been attending a Ballet Academy in Michigan USA while doing her high school work 'online'. Her future dreams may well unfold in untold ways.



I have known Tammy since she was 15 years old. Over the 21 years since Bryan died, I have kept in touch with her, and appreciate her loving and joyful spirit .

We are thankful that Tammy and her two children, Hailey and Connor, are well and happy together.





Wayne and I also care for Noel, a young man in Nicaragua we have helped for several years through the Christian Children's Fund. We would like to meet him one day.



This picture show my sisters-in-law, Kay and Eve, sharing some time with me.



My sister-in-law Eve's death on March 19, 2014, and the interment in White Chapel Cemetery, beside my brother, Ted, made me realize that now I am the only one left in my family from that generation.

It is pause for thought that I am getting older.



Mark Strashun, Marguerite, Olga Strashun, Sam Cino

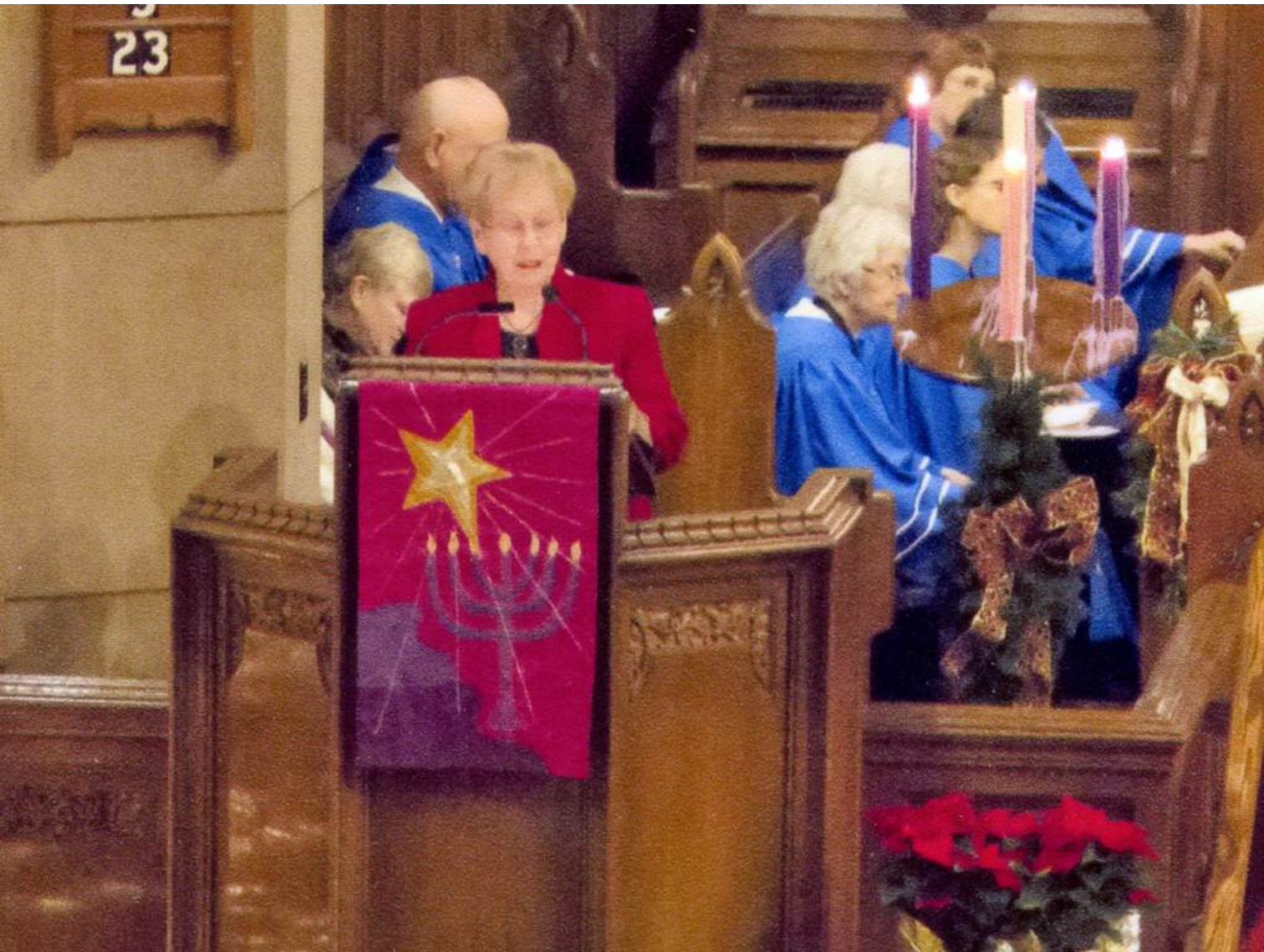
I have been blessed with good health in my life for which I am thankful (although first hearing and now eyesight do present some challenges). Dr. Olga Strashun has been my Wellness Counsellor and friend for many years. She has helped keep me in health - in many ways. And for her I am very thankful indeed.



In my prayer, I ask God, "How do I best use these present days that are mine here on this earth?"

I have always enjoyed being with persons listening for God's answers to similar questions about this spiritual/human journey. A sense of calling to the ministry of Spiritual Direction, as a lay person, has remained dear to me, and clear for me. For the last three years I have been very happy to be offering this in St. Paul's U.C. in Dundas, with the support of the Board and church community.

During many past years, I longed for this opportunity, and am grateful to the Rev. Rick Spies, St. Paul's minister, for his support which has enabled me to do Spiritual Accompaniment within the church, rather than on the periphery as I have done for almost twenty years, and continue still in our home. Although I have always been faithful to attending Peer Group gatherings, meeting with my Spiritual Director, and attending conferences to keep abreast of developments in this ministry, to now be able to practice within the church setting with a few persons is a real blessing to me.



Ever since I learned to write in school, I have enjoyed writing narrative and poetry, probably for myself, as a means of expressing life observations, experiences, feelings and reflections. Only once have I written a public letter. This was sent in December 2001 to the editor of the Dundas paper in response to a carol printed in their Christmas Carol sheet: *Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer*.

I have been told that I have no sense of humour, which I do not think is entirely true. But I did write that letter in strong and clear words, saying that, in my opinion, this so-called 'funny' song did not belong alongside the carols of Jesus' birth, and that furthermore it was offensive to Grandmas like me who took special care and effort to have Christmas be a holy and meaningful time with family, friends, and for those in need.

I never did get an answer to my letter, but I noticed that particular song did not appear in their next Christmas song sheet.



Meister Eckhart has given us these wise words:

*If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is 'Thank You' it will be enough.*

Beginning to close my incarnation story, until this present day, I include here an adapted version of a poem by Elizabeth, Countess of Craven. She says what my heart knows:

*I thank you, God, that I have lived  
in this great world, and known its many joys:  
the song of birds, the strong, sweet scent of hay  
and cooling breezes in the secret dusk,  
the flaming sunsets at the close of day,  
hills ablaze with autumn colours  
and lonely places, meadows of solitude.*

*I thank you, God,  
for music at night, and moonlight on the sea,  
the beat of waves upon the rocky shore  
and wild, white spray, flung high in ecstasy.*

*I thank you, God,  
for the faithful eyes of dogs, and treasured books,  
for the love of kin and fellowship of friends  
and all that makes life dear and beautiful.*

*I thank you too, that there has come to me  
a little sorrow and, sometimes defeat,  
a little heartache and the loneliness  
that comes with parting, and the word 'Good-bye.'*

*I thank you for the dawn breaking  
after dreary hours of pain  
when I discovered that night's gloom must yield  
and morning light break through to me again.*

*Because of these and other blessings  
poured unmasked upon my wondering head,  
because I know that there is yet to come  
an even richer and more glorious life,  
and most of all, because Jesus the Christ  
once sacrificed Love's loveliness for me -*

*I thank you, God, that I have lived.*

Life has been described as walking on the edge of mystery, a mystery that is not meant to be explained but respected in awe and wonder, as a gift of grace. This mystery is certainly beyond my present knowing or understanding. But I do know that it has been, and is, a privilege to share the amazing journey of life with others.

I have precious memories of my birth family, and relatives, those here and those departed. And I am thankful for my present family: my children and their partners, my grandchildren, nieces, and nephew. It has been said that children are the ones who mark the passage of time for us. This is very true in my experience, and particularly so at this time in my life.

I value other dear ones near and far, and the friendships of the years. Gloria Sheppard/Oakes and Dawn Hollamby/Fraser were my first friends, as I have told you. Three of my six High School friends are now passed to the Other Side of life, but three of us, Gloria, Doris and me, are still here loving and supporting each other. Some pictures appear in this writing, but the circle of special people in my life is wider than shown here.

It has been said that the only constant in life is change. I have experienced the truth of this in both inner and outer changes. In pondering this, I recall words of an old hymn  
*Through all the changing scenes of life,  
in trouble and in joy,  
the praises of my God shall still  
my heart and tongue employ.*

Changes in situations or directions, and challenges and choices come in any stage or age of life. But we are not alone in the midst. God is with us now and always, for God is Love.

These words penned long ago by Alfred Lord Tennyson, say it so well:  
*The old order changeth yielding place to new,  
and God fulfils Himself in many ways . . .  
. . . the whole round earth is every way  
bound by gold chains about the feet of God.*

As I write, I feel so very blessed by Wayne with whom I celebrated our sixteenth wedding anniversary this year, as well as my eighty-sixth birthday. I am very grateful for his support over the years, in so many ways, for our love and life together, our cosy condo home, the view out over the rooftops of Dundas, the escarpment, and Sydenham Road winding up to #5 Highway where my life began in my farm home. Life is indeed a circle!

In the preparing of this writing for you, I am indeed grateful to Wayne for the work he put into the pictures I gathered, and for his help in putting this booklet together. I admit that writing my life story, for family and friends, has felt a lot more public than writing that letter to the Dundas newspaper, and it is! But I share this with much love.

An ancient Australian Aboriginal proverb expresses this wisdom:

*We are all visitors to this time, this place;*

*we are just passing through.*

*Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love . . . and then we return Home.*

Sensing that it may not yet be the time for me to return Home, I close the story of my life, up until now, with two more pieces of wisdom which speak to me.

John Greenleaf Whittier

*No longer forward nor behind I look in hope or fear,*

*but, grateful, take the good I find, the best of now and here.*

Jonathan Swift,

*May you live all the days of your life.*

And I want to live, as I am able, whatever days are gifted to me here, and as a symbol of that, Wayne and I are planning some more travel in 2016, and visits with many of you!

