

Margaret's Journey to Faith

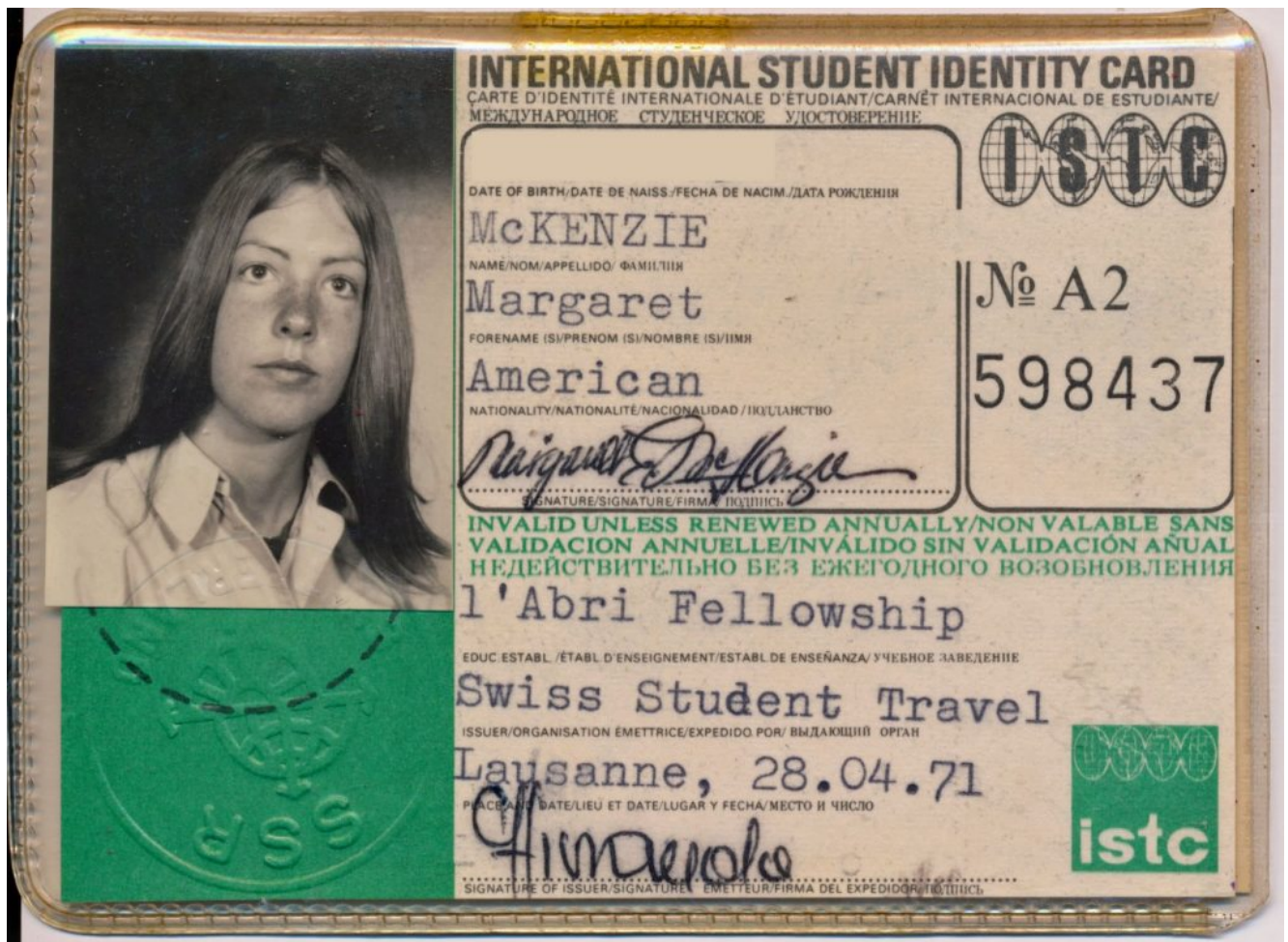
In the last post, I promised that I would let Margaret (nee McKenzie) tell how she was led to L'Abri and to faith in Christ. I will step aside and let her tell her story.

It seems human beings have a tendency to view circumstances, events in our lives as mere coincidence. Based on my journey to faith and 50 years of walking *in* that faith, I am convinced that is not so. I was raised in a culturally Christian home but don't remember regular church attendance until I was about nine. Of that church, I have only two vivid memories. One was hearing the charge before communion: "the one who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." While I didn't really understand this, it terrified me and I refused to take communion from that day forward. My parents were mortified! This same church had a high standard for music; my favorite part of the service. One Sunday's solo was based on Matthew 6:19 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break in and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupts and where thieves do not break in nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." This was a new concept, which I thought about often and which my parents were unable to explain it to me. Our family eventually drifted away from this church and we went nowhere for quite awhile.

Fast forward to 9th grade. One of my musical friends began inviting me to attend her church, the youth group. She was relentless! Finally, thinking that if I went once I could decline thereafter, I agreed. For a small church, they had

remarkably good music. That was good! Then the pastor walked to the pulpit and began talking like God was real, that we human beings were real sinners without hope and without God in this world. He used words I didn't understand but seemed important: substitutionary atonement, grace, faith, mercy, repentance. The youth group kids were fun, kind of quirky, and seemed to think I fit in. So, I didn't run away but kept listening, participating, trying to figure out what was going on. My parents started attending, too.

In my senior year, a seminary intern and his wife arrived at church—Udo and Debbie (Schaeffer) Middelman. I heard about L'Abri from them! That year was difficult as I tried to figure out a post high school direction. My parents wanted me to pursue something in the sciences—painfully puzzling since I had no science, math aptitude. It was a tense year! In desperation, I suggested pursuing nursing (what was I thinking?) at Covenant College in Tennessee, the denominational school.

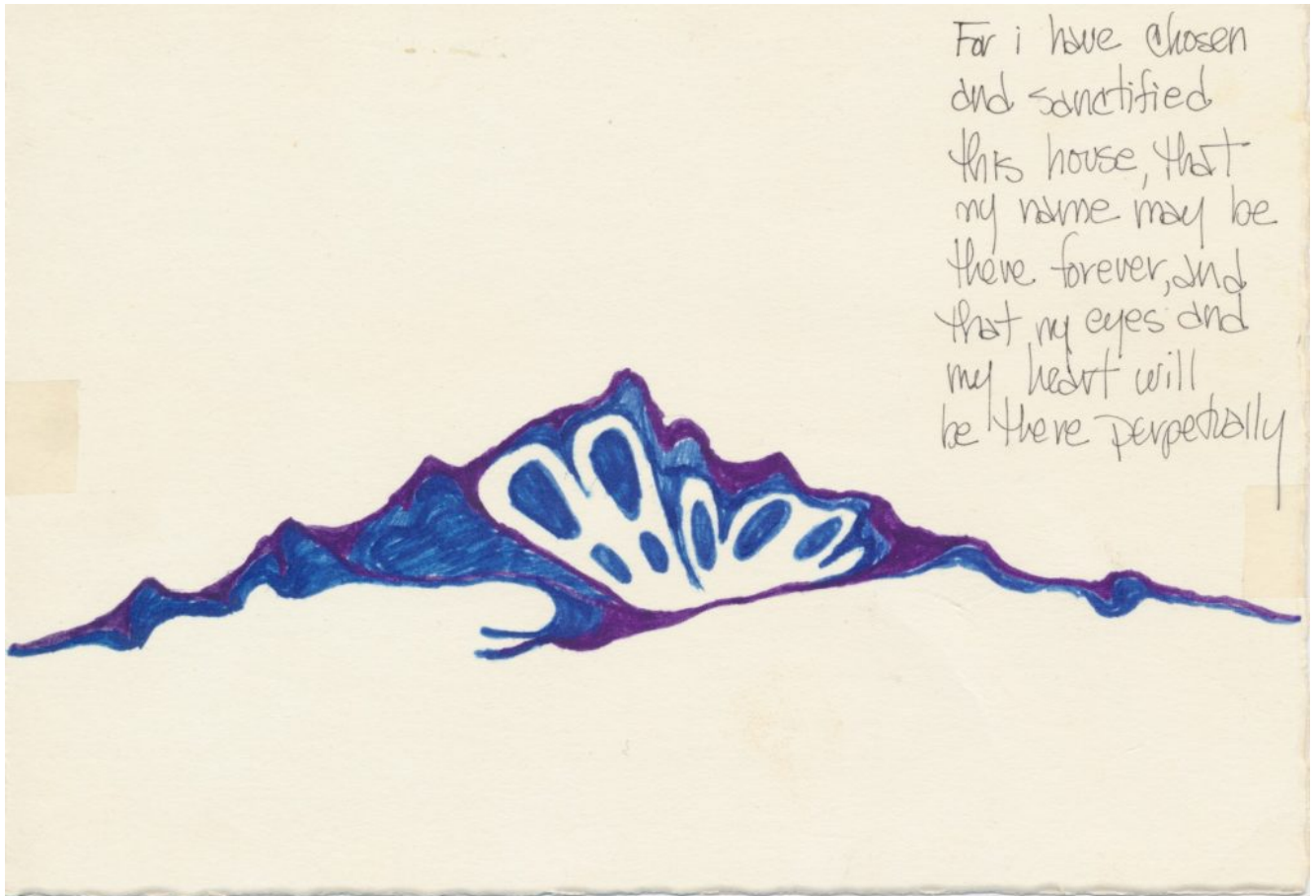


This world's realm is always in turmoil but with the divisive Viet Nam War heating up, the long overdue civil rights movement, demonstrations for or against just about everything, unrest and discord reigned. On top of Lookout Mtn was me having a crisis. It was obvious (duh!) that I wasn't going to cut it in the nursing program. All that science! All that math! More seriously, I was observing some shocking attitudes, behaviors in the dorm. I had no idea how to think about, ask good questions about what I observed, experienced. Doubt about everything I had heard at church led to depression/anger, disillusion, despair. What to do?? To my wondering eyes there appeared an announcement that Francis Schaeffer would be paying a visit to CC! He lectured and made time to interact with students. He graciously gave me some one-one time with him. As I poured out my heart, he listened, asked uncomfortable questions and then said, "I think you should come to L'Abri." OK! Who was I to argue with FAS! At the end

of that year, I joined that famous band, "the drop outs", got a job, my own digs, saved every \$ I could and planned a trip. When I got distracted by "all the shiny things", someone would pop into my life and ask, "So, how are you? How are those plans to go to L'Abri? You NEED to go, don't wuss out!"

The actual getting to Switzerland wasn't nearly as exciting as Paul's. Air Canada Vancouver to Zurich, train to Aigle, postal bus to Huemoz and I was standing in the office at Les Mèlèze . The beauty of Switzerland was so overwhelming, it was difficult to focus on anything else! I was assigned to Chalet les Sapins where the Middelmans were host family. In an earlier post, Paul explained the learning "model" of L'Abri so no need to repeat! My "course of study" included listening to the set of required tapes, attending lectures, as well as delving into areas of particular interest to me; art, music, the use of and impact of the arts on culture. The work of art historian Hans Rookmaaker to which I was introduced was fascinating and thought provoking.

Mornings were spent in study, afternoons in work, most evenings at lectures. After one lecture, a woman I knew was staff (worker) approached me, asked who I was, etc., etc. and said, "I think you need to come see me, when are you free?" So began *my* weekly visits with M. Sheila Bird/"Birdie"! She would offer me a cup of tea, we would settle in, she would ask, "So, Maw-gret, where has your thinking been?" Then she would begin poking, prodding, asking lovingly invasive questions exposing my heart of anger, fear, bitterness, longing for love. Birdie introduced me to the Wonderful Counselor and Healer. The study, lectures, discussions introduced me to the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The marvel of L'Abri was the commitment to heal heart AND mind. *ALL* of life is God's creation! (that may be a Rookmaker-ism) I was not "in the camp" yet, but close!



For i have chosen
and sanctified
this house, that
my name may be
there forever, and
that my eyes and
my heart will
be there perpetually

Invitation to the Dedication of Birdie's Chalet (8/15/1971) –
by Margaret McKenzie Maffin

In May my student status would need to be renewed. My formal course of study was ending and it seemed a good time to take a break. Many of my intellectual questions had been addressed but one thing nagged. Did this God, who I was 98% sure existed, truly love *me*. Birdie had helped me to see some pretty sordid attitudes lurking in my mind, heart. She assured me that indeed the infinite, personal God did love me and was committed to my reclamation. She encouraged me to go awandering. "All who wander are not lost." (Tolkien) God knows exactly where we are! A friend had shared that she was going to "wander" north to Sweden to visit relatives before heading to GB and home to the US. Two being better than one, we decided to wander together.

We headed out on May 3 making our way ever northward. Jo, a

committed Christian, refused to budge in the morning without reading a bit from her Bible and praying for our day. She prayed that we'd be safe, that we'd get rides, find our way, find hostels. I prayed, too, but not aloud: "God if you are there, if you are who the Bible says you are, if you love me, please, please show up today." Remarkably, our daily prayers were answered beyond possibility of mere coincidence. Examples: a history geek took us on a side trip to see Aventicum, a Roman ruin, bought us lunch, and dropped us at the hostel's door. In Germany, we were scooped up by an Italian who took us all the way to Copenhagen, invited us to dinner with his family, and gave us tickets on the ferry to Malmo, Sweden.

In Sweden, rides seemed to dry up, but eventually we got a ride to Halsingborg/Thlassa, our first stop. The area was beautiful, the hostel was great so we thought we'd give ourselves two days to rest. Returning from the beach on the second day, we were told the hostel was full up so off we went at 4pm. Thank goodness for those very long days of northern climes! We got a ride with an elderly man heading in the right direction. As we drove along, I sensed we were in the presence of a really bad person. His actions, eye contact soon proved that we were. I am convinced we were protected. He set us down in the middle of nowhere and we started walking fully expecting to spend the night in the woods. Not too long into our walk and before it was completely dark, a truck stopped. The driver spoke English and was going right through Sävsjö! He even roared around the town until he found Jo's family.

We spent a marvelous week in Sävsjö, visiting Jo's relatives and seeing the area. Then we headed to Oslo, Norway. We spent a couple days in Oslo and visited the Munch museum ('cause everybody has to see "The Scream" up close and personal), the Viking Ship Museum, and the Norsk Folkemuseum. Our next stop

would be Bergen before taking a ship to England. We were advised to take the train from Oslo to Bergen as the terrain was "inhospitable". We took that advice even though it put a strain on our budget. When we saw that terrain from the train, we commented that "inhospitable" was a euphemism! Bergen is a lovely little seaport and we wandered around until time to board ship. Most of the voyage across the North Sea was at night, relatively calm but poor Jo was beset by mal de mer. The morning revealed a gray sea, gray coastline, gray town, gray sky. Welcome to almost Scotland! We hitched as far as the town of Once Brewed and checked into the hostel. We discovered that the hostel backed up to Hadrian's wall. Oh, happy day – I sat on it!!

Sunday morning dawned gray and rainy. Hostels close during the day so we locked up our packs and started walking. Found a tea room, dried out a bit, and Jo announced she wanted to go to church. There was a church in Haltwhistle, about 2 miles away so off we went. Alas, the minister was just leaving as we arrived. He asked if we'd like to accompany him to visit a shut in to whom he was taking communion. "Ummm...", said I. "Of Course!" said Jo. Turned out the visiting nurse was the minister's wife. They invited us to their home for the rest of the day and overnight. Nurse Blakney was a force with which to be reckoned and went 'round to the hostel to liberate our belongings. We spent a lovely evening with them and their red headed children. The Reverend B had read Shaeffer and plied us with questions, and we talked late into the night.

In the pre dawn hours, I was awake thinking about our adventures and remarkable provision of rides, safety, food, shelter, people. Then I thought, God DID show up, every day! Clearly, I *heard* (in my mind) the voice of my Savior say, "Margaret, what more must I do to prove I love you?" I saw clearly the bloody cross, the tomb empty, *empty*. "Nothing! I

am yours.” This was not as emotional an event as it may sound. It was more like being able to breathe after being starved for air. And the air was different air, cold, clear living air! When I told Jo about this, she made a lot of noise which needed explaining to our hosts. They were happy in that subdued British way.

We headed out on the last leg of our journey; first to lovely Wales and then to Southhampton where we stayed with women we’d met at L’Abri. Shortly after, Jo headed back to the states and I to L’Abri. Back at L’Abri, I settled into the job of helper, primarily in the gardens but was also available for whatever. Birdie and I continued to meet regularly and I attended lectures. Life is not just random coincidences. God, who is a good and gracious King, is providentially at work for our good and His glory.

And, then there was this guy...