

Life Changing Relationships

One aspect of community life at L'Abri was (and continues to be) a robust reliance on prayer. Early in the life of L'Abri, the Schaeffers became convinced that they should rely totally on God to meet the needs of the community. In particular, they would not publicize the financial needs of the ministry but would pray to God, asking Him to supply their needs. I heard story after story of how God had worked, often at the last moment, to meet their needs. One day of the week was set aside as a day of prayer. The workers would sign up for hour time slots. They would go to a room set aside for prayer, where there would be a list of community concerns. I later learned that a regular part of that Monday prayer time was prayer for those students who had not yet come to saving faith. I'm sure that my name appeared regularly on that list.

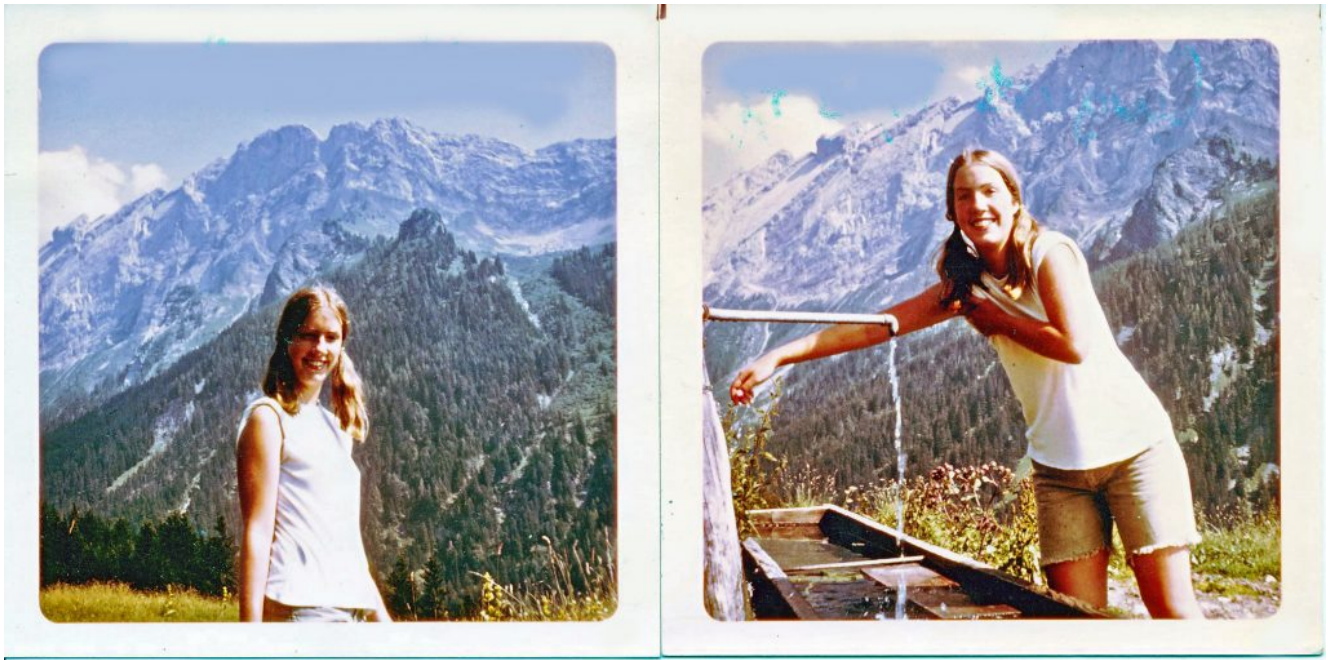


One of the answers to those earnest prayers for my soul came in the person of Sheila Bird, affectionately called Birdie by the L'Abri community. Unlike most of the workers at L'Abri, whose ministries were more visible, Birdie carried on a ministry that was largely unnoticed. Today, it's almost impossible to find any reference to her online. A New Zealander, Birdie was the only trained counselor among the workers, a skilled practitioner of Biblical counseling. It was never clear whether I chose to spend time with Birdie or whether she chose me.

Meeting with Birdie in her cozy chalet, La Niche, was like stepping into an peaceful oasis. She was a very perceptive lady. Even though she could be direct, she was always kind. She helped me sort through my family of origin and how it shaped the adult that I had become. Our discussions always came around to discussing how I was processing the Christian faith. She employed the Bible skillfully to address my concerns. She also took the discussion in a surprising direction, asking me to consider that I might have opened myself to unseen demonic powers through my immersion in Eastern religious practices. More later about dear Birdie.

I've mentioned Margaret's first sight of me as I arrived at L'Abri, fresh from India. She was leaving for a month's traveling in Europe with a friend. Our first encounter after she returned from her travels was on the path from Les Mèlèze to Les Sapins, the chalet where I was living with other students. I will let her tell the story.

"So, let me tell! After a very long train trip from GB to Switzerland, I was back at L'Abri as a worker/student. Delighted to find out that I would again be living at Les Sapins with Debbie and Udo, I was headed there when I heard a voice behind me, 'Would you like me to carry your backpack?' I turned to see a guy grinning at me. Didn't recognize him. Rather ungraciously, I replied, 'No, thanks! I've just carried it all over Europe so I can probably make it to Les Sapins!' Found out later that 'the guy' was Paul with a month's growth of hair/beard and much needed weight. Someone had obviously had a heart to heart with him about his sartorial choices. The green suit had been exchanged for just regular ratty hippie clothes. An improvement!"



From that inauspicious beginning, Margaret and I were spending much of our free time together by July. I wrote about Margaret to my parents. "Have made a really close friend in the person of a girl called Margaret McKenzie. We can communicate quite well, and we do a lot of things together." We coordinated our weekly day off. On one of those days off, I invited Margaret on our first real date, at a fancy restaurant in the Rhone Valley—Le Saint-Christophe. Neither of us had what you would call an extensive wardrobe, so we each spent the first part of the day borrowing suitable clothing.

Someone gave us a ride down to the valley. We had a great evening! Leaving the restaurant a little before 10 p.m., we took the train from Bex to Ollon, where we planned to catch the postal bus back up the mountain to L'Abri. Unfortunately, the last bus left at 10. Since I had "shot my wad" for dinner, even between us we didn't have taxi money. What would we do? Start walking and try to catch a ride! It was dark, beginning to rain, and Margaret was in uncomfortable borrowed shoes.

Fortunately we didn't have to wait for too long. A friendly

fellow in an Austin Mini Cooper stopped for us. The road from the valley up to L'Abri is marked by numbers of hairpin turns. Our driver was actually practicing for an uphill grand prix race. We must have set a time record from Ollon to L'Abri! You might think that having to hitchhike up the mountain could have ruined our classy date. Nope! That ride was so amazing that it just seemed like the perfect ending to our first date!