

Trial by Fire

September 1971 was quite a month, filled with delights and challenges. It began in a fairly relaxed way then quickly ramped up to a couple of my most challenging weeks as a young Christian. I enjoyed an amazing day off on September 10 with Birdie, Margaret and Bruce. We drove around all day enjoying the beauty of Switzerland. We ate dinner in the restaurant where Fondue Bourguignonne—skewers of meat cooked in a pot of oil, then dipped in various sauces—was first served. The highlight of the day was a concert in the Armory Hall of the Chateau de Chillon with music from the courts of Elizabeth and Henry VIII played by the Elizabethan Consort of Viols.





The challenging part of September came later in the month. My friends Bruce and Greg were responsible for dealing with new arrivals to L'Abri. Bruce took off for a couple weeks, and the Schaeffers put me in charge of intake. It was a nerve-racking assignment for a young Christian. So many people were wanting to stay at L'Abri, but there was so little room. Some people were booked ahead, but others just arrived unexpectedly (as I had in April). They had be sized up in about five minutes as to whether they were genuinely interested or just looking for a cheap place to crash. One of those who came was the brother of a close friend from my home town. He came with a friend, having got the idea in his mind that L'Abri was a Zen Buddhist monastery. He was understandably quite surprised to discover what L'Abri was all about.

Udo and Debbie left on their annual three-week vacation, so I was also given the additional responsibility of supervising Chalet les Sapins and heading up the table at breakfast. I realized that I needed a kick as far as taking responsibility, but WOW! Fortunately, the students living in the chalet at the

time posed few behavioral problems. There were, however, *some* moments of levity that helped to relieve the pressure of those couple weeks! A couple of German women were students and staying at les Sapins—tall, statuesque, blond identical twins. Both were deeply committed believers. During one mealtime, the twins (we'll call them Emilia and Ella), were sitting on either side of me. I worked with delight to divide my attention equally between them! "You don't say, Emilia." "I couldn't agree more, Ella." Truly, I thought I was the perfect host and conversationalist. Margaret's analysis was, "GACK!"

By the end of September, we were enjoying beautiful fall weather, crisp and clear with daytime highs in the upper 50s and overnight lows in the lower 40s. The mountain peaks had a coating of fresh snow. That meant time to put my garden to bed for the winter—pulling out dead plants and working compost into the soil. My relationship with Margaret was developing into something more than friendship. We were spending more of our free time together. One evening we went out to sit on a bench alongside the back path to our chalet. We were admiring the moon when we heard the sound of hooves quite close at hand. We clambered up onto the bench just in time to avoid a small herd of wild boars (which are not nice critters!) thundering by. We didn't take it as a portent of anything ominous in our relationship but decided it was time to call it a night.

