The Big Day!!

The week leading up to our wedding was bittersweet. We were looking forward to our new life together as husband and wife, but we knew that it would mean the end of our time at L'Abri with all the dear friends we had made. We would miss the rich stimulation that lectures and discussions provided. Our final week at L'Abri in 1971 fell on the same days of the week as the celebration of our 50th anniversary in 2021. We enjoyed Christmas on Saturday, surrounded by friends and great music. We worshipped with our church family at the L'Abri chapel on Sunday.

Before our church marriage on Thursday, 30 December, we needed to submit to the required civil ceremony on Monday, 27 December. Our banns had been published and apparently no one objected to our marriage. So, we went up to Villars with Udo, who would provide translation for us. The official before whom we appeared was a very proper Swiss gentleman. He made sure that we understood the serious, binding nature of the commitment we were making. He then conducted the ceremony, having us repeat vows that were more substantive than those found in many wedding ceremonies today. He then filled out the Livret de Famille, which not only contained the official record of our marriage but also instruction on maintaining a healthy marriage. As you can see, the Swiss official had a beautiful, flowing hand.

CONFÉDÉRATION SUISSE

CANTON DE VAUD

LIBERTÉ ET PATRIE

LIVRET DE FAMILLE

DES ÉPOUX

Alfson · McKenzie

Délivré le 27 décembre 1971 sur la base de

l'inscription du vol. 7 page 13 nº 16

du registre des mariages de l'arrondissement

de l'état civil de Villars-sur-Ollon

TIMBRE LIBERTÉ ET PATRIE Fr. 2.20

Mariage célébré à Villars s/ Ollon

le 27 décembre 1971

entre

Epoux Maffen Paul Rees

état civil célibataire

origine ressortissant des Etats Unis d'Amérique du nord

né à Canandaigua (U.S.A.) le

fils de Maffen, Clyde M.

et de Dorothy E. née Rees

Epouse Margaret Eleanor née Mc Kenzie

état civil célibataire

origine précédente ressortissante des Etats Unis d'Amérique du nord

née à Seattle Washington le

fille de Mc Kenzie Delmar Daniel

et de Mathilda Eleanor, née Hagner

CANTON DE VAUD * VILLARS s/OLLON * LIBERTÉ ET PATRIE ÉTAT CIVIL

L'officier de l'état civil :

Duvoy

Margaret: “A last minute detail needing some thought was decorating the chapel. Keeping it cheap, simple, *and* pretty was paramount. Since our wedding was barely a week after Christmas, someone suggested that poinsettias probably would be on sale at the local Migros (Switzerland’s largest supermarket chain). Udo went off to investigate. It was a remarkable sight to behold his little Citroën 2CV filled with red poinsettias toiling up the road! I went out and scrounged interesting greens and ‘seed fluffs’ from the verge and arranged those with the poinsettias. The chapel looked pretty sweet! Paul can talk more knowledgeably about our music selections.”

We left most of the musical selections up to Gini Andrews, a L’Abri worker who was a concert pianist. She made the little Flentrop organ in the L’Abri chapel sing! Two pieces that we especially wanted were the Purcell Trumpet Tune in D for the processional and Widor’s Tocatta as the recessional. The venue could not have been more beautiful. One wall of the L’Abri chapel is built of large windows facing out onto the Swiss Alps. Because it was a Thursday, Udo’s message for our wedding was a required lecture for students.



Bruce (my best man) and I walked to the chapel together before the start of the service. We were very thankful that Franky Schaeffer offered to take the pictures of the ceremony, otherwise we would have had only our memories of that day.



The service began with Purcell’s Trumpet Tune in D. I was overwhelmed seeing Margaret process down the aisle, realizing that I was really marrying this lovely lady.



Udo gave a wonderful message on the Biblical basis of marriage from the Book of Genesis. Udo pointed out that God’s work of creation was not complete until He had made a human partner for Adam. Udo stressed that Margaret and I were creating something unique with our relationship, a lifelong work of art in which we would delight in each other’s uniqueness. He

emphasized the need to forgive each other in light of the great forgiveness that each of us had received in Christ. He encouraged us, when confronted with challenges, to work together to find solutions unique to us. Our marriage relationship must demonstrate our trust in Christ and the reality of His grace.



Dr. Schaeffer led us through our marriage vows. Even though both of us were excited and confident that our marriage was blessed by God, we both experienced our knees knocking as we entered into what we knew was a lifelong covenant.



Margaret had asked Natasha, the elder daughter of Udo and Debbie, to be the ring bearer, a charge she carried off beautifully.



Dr. Schaeffer pronounced us man and wife, and we left the

chapel as a married couple. We stood outside the chapel and greeted people as they filed out.





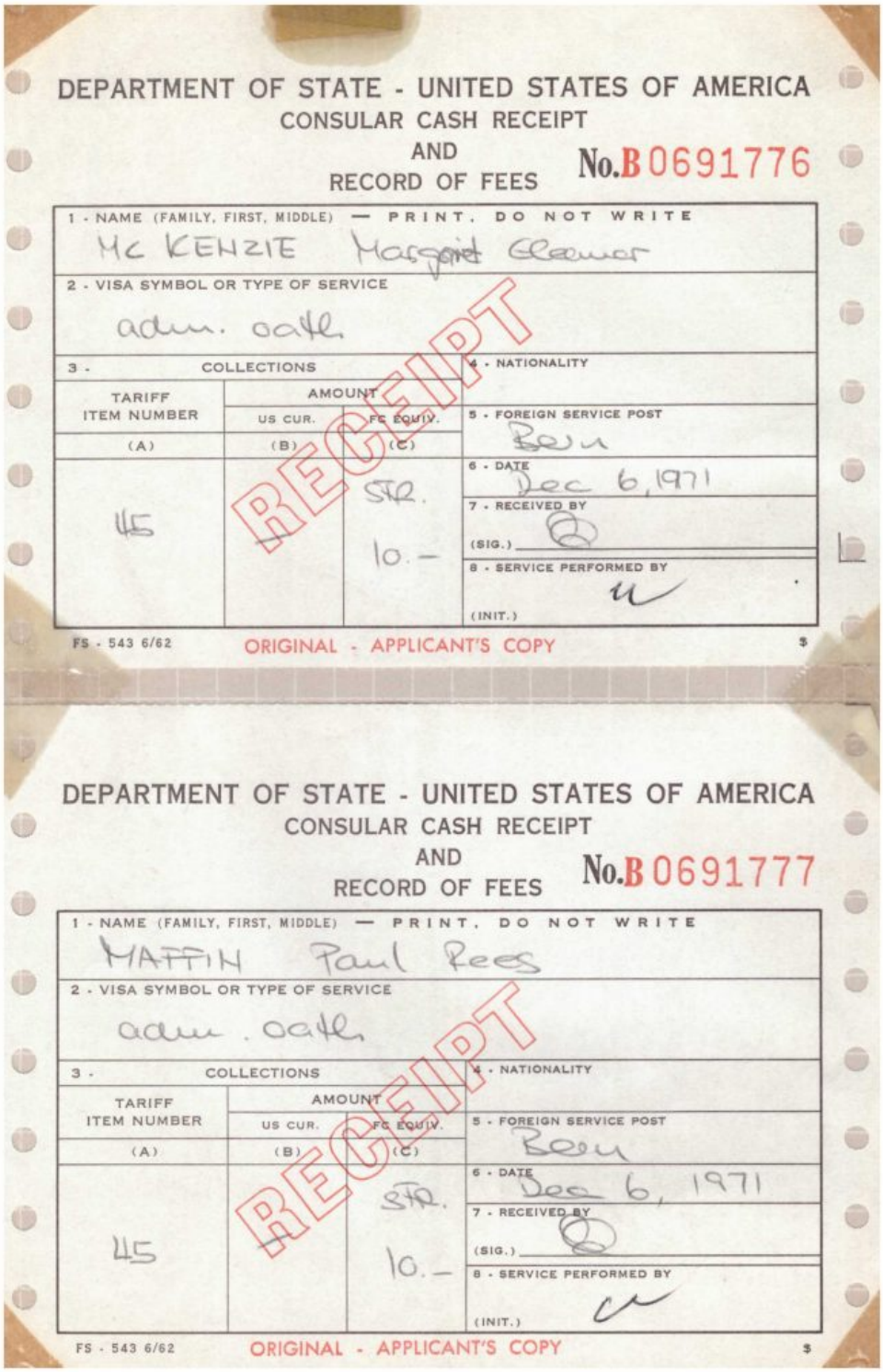
A favorite picture from our wedding day is of Edith Schaeffer, clearly tickled by something that had been said as people filed out of the chapel.



Many in the community of L’Abri worked together to provide a lovely reception for us in Gentiana, the chalet in which we had lived. It was a touching outpouring of love. Once the reception was over, Margaret and I headed off for our honeymoon. I will share a bit more about our last week in Switzerland and our return to the US in my next post.

Preparing for the Big Day

As I mentioned in my last post, once Margaret and I made the decision to marry, we had to go into high gear to complete all the legal requirements to marry in Switzerland. One of our first steps was a trip to the US Embassy in Bern. Because of the amazing post bus and train system in Switzerland, this was just a day’s outing for Margaret and me. We had to appear before a consular official and swear under oath that neither of us were currently married to someone else. We were given the documents that we would in turn present to the Swiss officials in Villars, starting the clock for the remaining legal requirements.



DEPARTMENT OF STATE - UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
CONSULAR CASH RECEIPT
AND
RECORD OF FEES
No. B 0691776

1 - NAME (FAMILY, FIRST, MIDDLE) — PRINT. DO NOT WRITE
Mc KENZIE Margaret Eleanor

2 - VISA SYMBOL OR TYPE OF SERVICE
adm. oath

3 - COLLECTIONS

TARIFF ITEM NUMBER	AMOUNT US CUR.	AMOUNT FC EQUIV.
(A)	(B)	(C)
45		STR. 10.—

4 - NATIONALITY
5 - FOREIGN SERVICE POST
Bern
6 - DATE
Dec 6, 1971
7 - RECEIVED BY
(SIG.)
8 - SERVICE PERFORMED BY
(INIT.)

RECEIPT

FS - 543 6/62 ORIGINAL - APPLICANT'S COPY $

DEPARTMENT OF STATE - UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
CONSULAR CASH RECEIPT
AND
RECORD OF FEES
No. B 0691777

1 - NAME (FAMILY, FIRST, MIDDLE) — PRINT. DO NOT WRITE
MAFFIN Paul Rees

2 - VISA SYMBOL OR TYPE OF SERVICE
adm. oath

3 - COLLECTIONS

TARIFF ITEM NUMBER	AMOUNT US CUR.	AMOUNT FC EQUIV.
(A)	(B)	(C)
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In addition to all the legal steps we needed to take to marry by the end of December, there were many practical details to arrange. I was going to be wearing a “Swiss style” wedding shirt made of fine wool, sewn by a local seamstress. Margaret will share about plans for her wedding dress. There will be pictures of our wedding attire in my next post. “So, the idea of a wedding dress was overwhelming! What style? What could I

afford? Where would I procure such a garment? Fortunately, there were several women who had no trouble at all giving good advice, which I was fervently grateful to receive. Dear Barb Boles not only suggested a style (very simple) and material, she went with me to purchase the yard goods AND volunteered to sew it all up! We chose a lovely fine ivory wool and green and gold embroidered trim. The sartorial splendor came together wonderfully thanks to loving hearts and willing hands!”

Another important part of our preparation was to make transatlantic calls to our respective parents, a process which was more complicated then than it is today. The reactions were vastly different. My parents were quite pleased, even though they were not going to be able to attend the wedding. They were delighted that I was going to be marrying a Christian woman. When Margaret called, her dad was not at home. Her mother kept saying things like, “What will I tell your father?” It is true that I was not a great catch. I was a college dropout, ex-hippie and ex-druggie.

In a letter introducing herself to my parents, Margaret wrote this. “First of all my parents were taken aback and not a little dismayed to find I was really serious about marrying Paul. As an only child, they had many plans and dreams for me to fulfill. Sadly for them, I have pursued none of their goals nor fulfilled any of their plans. Then for me to announce plans to marry was really the final blow. My ancient and dear mother sounded, over the phone, as if she were saying last farewells to a young and beautiful wench about to take the veil. Hardly the case!”

We knew from previous L’Abri weddings (including the one I had been part of) that Edith Schaeffer simply adored weddings. Once we announced our intention to marry and had zeroed in on

a tentative date of December 30, she (with her daughter Debbie) went into high gear. She started running around like a mother hen as she planned the most beautiful wedding that our meagre budget could afford. Fran and Edith also announced that their wedding gift to us would be a few nights in an elegant Swiss hotel in the valley—actually St. Christophe in Bex (where we had gone to the restaurant on our first real date). A truly generous gift!



Winter came to Switzerland with a vengeance. We received about three feet of snow over the course of a couple days. If our little corner of Switzerland was a picture postcard in spring, summer and fall, it was over the top now. For a time, the main road from Villars down to the Rhone valley was closed due to the heavy snowfall. I decided to visit a friend from L'Abri who was in the hospital in Aigle. I borrowed a sled and had

the ride of my life, descending about 3,000 feet in altitude over the course of six miles. I had to be careful about picking up too much speed because of the hairpin turns on the way down. I arrived at the hospital and propped my sled to the side of the front entrance. I got inside and asked for the room number of my friend. The woman at the desk gave me the room number but then asked me to please move my “voiture” (vehicle) from the entrance! After my visit, I got a ride up the newly plowed road on a post bus, which had a rack on the back for skis and sleds.

November 1971 – She Said Yes!

As much as our work schedules allowed, Margaret McKenzie and I spent even more time together in the month of November. It got to the point that I could not picture life without Margaret as part of it, neither could I imagine a more suitable life partner. I shared my thoughts about Margaret with my parents: “One of the most important things to be settled (soon, I hope) is whether Margaret will be included in future plans. Never thought I’d see the day come when I was seriously considering marriage. ‘Lo, how the mighty have fallen!'”

Somewhere in the middle of November (neither of us can remember exactly when), I proposed to Margaret. It wasn’t exactly a Hallmark moment. I didn’t have the money for a ring. I just asked her to marry me, and she said Yes! I was a happy man for about a week until Margaret started getting cold feet

and said that she needed more time to think about the momentous step of marriage. I was very upset. Suave guy that I was, I gave her an ultimatum. She had a week to come to a decision. If she decided not to marry me, our relationship would be at an end and we would go our separate ways.

I will let her tell you what she was going through during that week.

“Well, no one had ever given me quite such an unequivocal choice! I was absolutely convinced that, with few exceptions, marriage was a lifetime commitment. There was so much divorce among my friends’ parents. My father had gone through a very unpleasant divorce. The pain and hardship divorce causes made me need to really sort things out. So, what did I know about Paul? He was a pursuer of truth. He kept his word. His faith was the real deal as evidenced by a changed life. He was tenderhearted (except toward cats). He loved music and was a gifted recorder and French Horn player. He appreciated art even though he couldn’t draw. He was kind and merciful toward others. He thought I was the ‘bees knees’ and ‘got’ my weird sense of humor. He was adventurous. Perhaps this was what really tipped me over the edge! I considered all the interesting things he had done, the cool (and scary!) places he’d been. The thought of him going away without me and doing more interesting things was simply inconceivable! Even though he was mad at me, his pride hurting, the week was a gracious gift. I thanked him sincerely and said, ‘OK! Let’s do this!'”

Now that our wedding was back on, we moved into high gear. If at all possible, we wanted Fran Schaeffer to perform the wedding ceremony and Udo Middelmann to give the message. I was also hoping that my good friend, Bruce, could serve as my best man. Given the Schaeffers’ speaking schedules, we agreed on

some time between Christmas and New Year's. The venue was not an issue; it would be held in the L'Abri chapel. The most pressing issues were the legal requirements that needed to be met before we could be married in Switzerland.

We were both legal residents of Switzerland at the time, so that was no problem. The first step was to visit the US Embassy in Bern, where we each executed an affidavit before a U.S. consular officer, in which we stated under oath that we were both legally free to marry. The next step was to present those affidavits to the civil registrar in Villars and announce our intention to marry. Next, the civil registrar had to publish the banns (our intent to marry) so that anyone could object if they knew any reason we should not marry. Then we would be able to have a civil ceremony and, finally, the church wedding. That all needed to be accomplished in the space of about 5 weeks!



Life did not come to a halt at L'Abri just because we were getting married at the end of December. L'Abri acquired a new chalet in Chesières, a village between Huemoz and Villars. The chalet was named Gentiana after the lovely blue alpine flower found throughout Switzerland (not to be confused with the edelweiss, a flower that figures heavily in The Sound of Music). The chalet was an old pension (guest house). Udo and Debbie would move from Sapins (in Huemoz) to Gentiana with all of the workers and students living with them at the time. As the only worker with any electrical background, I was put to work almost immediately on the chalet's antiquated electrical wiring. Once we moved into Gentiana, I had a single room, pine paneled with a small sink and a balcony looking out on the Swiss Alps. Sweet! One of the balconies in the picture of the back of Gentiana was the one I was able to step out onto for a view of the Dents du Midi.

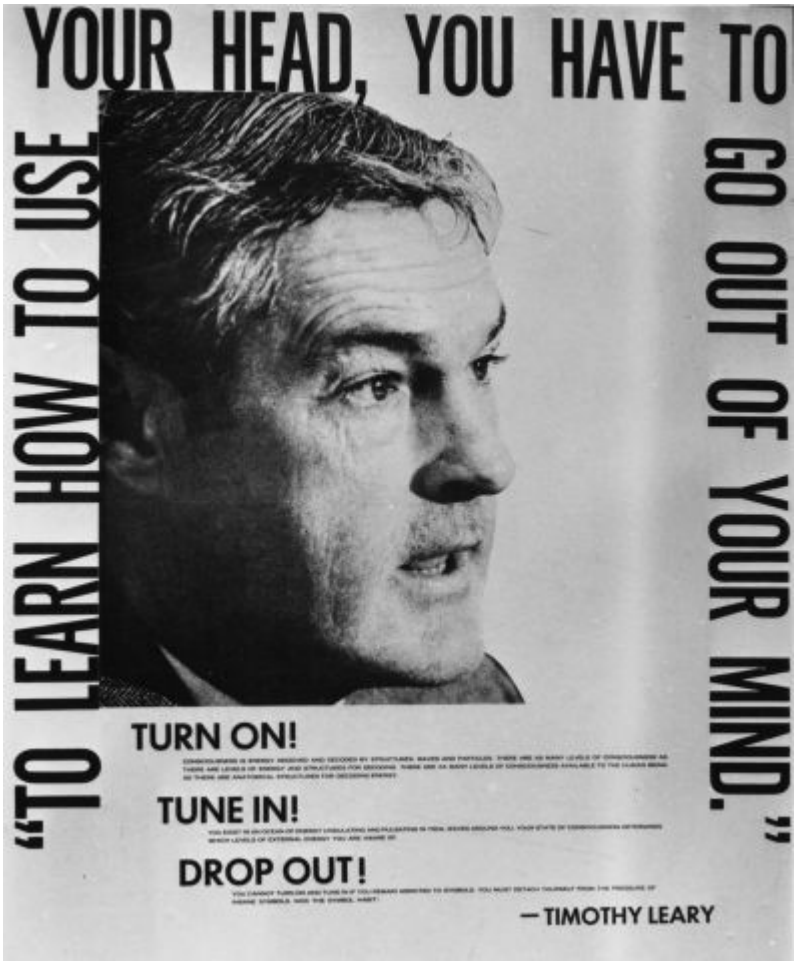
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In the next post, I will ask Margaret to share the unfolding plans for our wedding. For some unknown reason, I wasn't consulted on things like the type of fabric for Margaret's

wedding dress. Oh, there was one more item to attend to—wedding rings. Fortunately, there was a jeweler just down the mountain in Aigle who was also a believer in Christ. We arranged for simple gold bands to be engraved with our names and the date of our marriage—once we knew it for sure.

Tune in! Turn on! Drop out!

Something with interesting worldview significance happened in the month of October. The “high priest of LSD,” Timothy Leary, had been convicted and imprisoned in the US for using and promoting illegal drugs, especially LSD, a popular hallucinogenic drug. President Richard Nixon called Leary “the most dangerous man in America.” Leary had escaped from prison and fled from the US. We had heard that Leary had taken refuge in Switzerland and was living in Villars, just a couple miles away from L’Abri. Apparently, Leary had heard of a Christian community just down the road where numbers of longhaired hippies were staying.



There was speculation about whether there might be a meeting between Fran Schaeffer and Tim Leary. There was a desire that Leary might come into contact with biblical Christianity through Schaeffer but also a concern that Leary might try to use L'Abri as a platform for his views about drugs. That meeting eventually took place on October 2, 1971. My friend Greg recalls the meeting in these words. "At dinner, Leary was very self-absorbed and not a little blown out from all of the LSD he had taken. He proved to be very obnoxious company. But Schaeffer had been compassionate enough to spend an afternoon in conversation with him about the gospel, telling no one of his encounter with this famous man." There's no evidence that Leary's close brush with the Gospel left any lasting impression.

Some of the people who came to L'Abri came out of

circumstances that were overwhelming and difficult for me to relate to. There was a young woman who stayed in the same chalet with Margaret and me. She was a student who had been swept up in the terror following the 1964 military coup in Brazil and imprisoned by the military regime. During her imprisonment, she endured terrible suffering including near starvation. The experience left her a broken woman. Some of the women who shared a room with her would discover food that she had taken at meal times and hidden away in her dresser. We were thankful that she had come to L'Abri (The Shelter). She did come to faith in Christ and began to experience mental, physical, and spiritual healing.

After I had put the garden to bed, I turned my attention to a long overdue indoor project at Chalet Les Mélèzes. Ever since they had moved into Les Mélèzes in April 1955, Fran and Edith Schaeffer's only place of refuge was their rather small bedroom. Fran placed a board at the end of the bed and worked there on sermons, lectures, books, correspondence and other writing projects. The picture by Sylvester Jacobs shows Fran at work in his bedroom with a secretary behind him taking dictation at a small bedside table. If the Schaeffers wished to speak to guests privately, the Schaeffers would invite them to their bedroom.



Photograph by Sylvester Jacobs

On the other side of one wall of the Schaeffer’s bedroom was a small room that was once used by their son Franky. By this time, Franky was married and living with Genie on the first floor of the chalet. It was decided that my friend Greg and I would be tasked with making an opening through the wall and turn Franky’s old room into a proper sitting room and work area for the Schaeffers. Neither Greg nor I had any great carpentry skills, but we figured how hard can it be? You just remove the wood paneling on either side of the wall dividing the two rooms, exposing the studs, then frame in an opening between the two rooms. When we removed the paneling, we discovered not studs, but a wall of solid wood. That’s how the older chalets in Switzerland were built to resist avalanches and heavy loads of snow on the roofs. Looking at the picture of Les Mélèzes, you can see what look like decorative braces under the upper balcony. Those turn out to be a series of large planks that run from the front to the back of the house.



Greg and I discovered that L’Abri owned only antiquated hand tools for the task. We ended up using a brace and bit to make a line of holes through one of the boards, which we then opened up with chisels. We were then able to get a two-person saw into that initial opening. With Greg in one room and me in the other, we managed to saw down through the wall. It was then that we discovered that the boards were also pegged together. I cannot remember how many days the entire operation took. We were able eventually to clean up and box in the opening. We were pleased with the way the project turned out, and more importantly, so were the Schaeffers!

As a worker at L’Abri, I was able to take part in the rich life of the community. I attended lectures, seminars and uplifting worship on Sundays. I enjoyed the far-ranging discussions at meal times. I knew that I was always free to

seek out interactions with students. I remember one such conversation. I was speaking with a young man who, like me, came to L'Abri as an unbeliever but who was seriously pursuing the Truth. He had been reading in John's Gospel. He had just read the text in John 13 that speaks of Jesus stooping down to wash His disciples feet. He said that, if Jesus Christ was truly God in human flesh, as the Bible claims, this was one of the most stunning accounts he had seen in the life of Jesus. I could not agree more heartily.

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 meet 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.



Learning to Walk

During the month of August, an infant in the Christian faith, I was learning to crawl and then to walk. As with kids, this

process was accompanied with plenty of falls (none disastrous, thankfully). I shared with my parents and friends about my newfound faith. Like many new believers, I was less than wise in the intensity with which I shared. One couple, close friends for many years, responded to one of my letters, calling it a “tract”. They saved my letters to them from India and Switzerland and later gave them to me. I have been rereading my letters to them as I have been writing my blog, I see how heavy-handed I was. I’ve recently contacted them to thank them for maintaining our friendship despite my aggressive evangelism.

Two of my closest friends during this time were Greg and Bruce. We worked together at Les Mélèze and enjoyed many great discussions, and some adventures together. In the photo below, Greg is on the left and Bruce on the right. You will see Bruce again, as he was the Best Man when I married Margaret. Sadly, Bruce died in 2010. I have reestablished contact with Greg, who recently retired as a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian denomination. We have had a great time reminiscing about our time at L’Abri and catching up on 50 years of life and ministry.



I continued to meet with dear Birdie. She helped me to examine my relationship with my parents. I was able to understand,

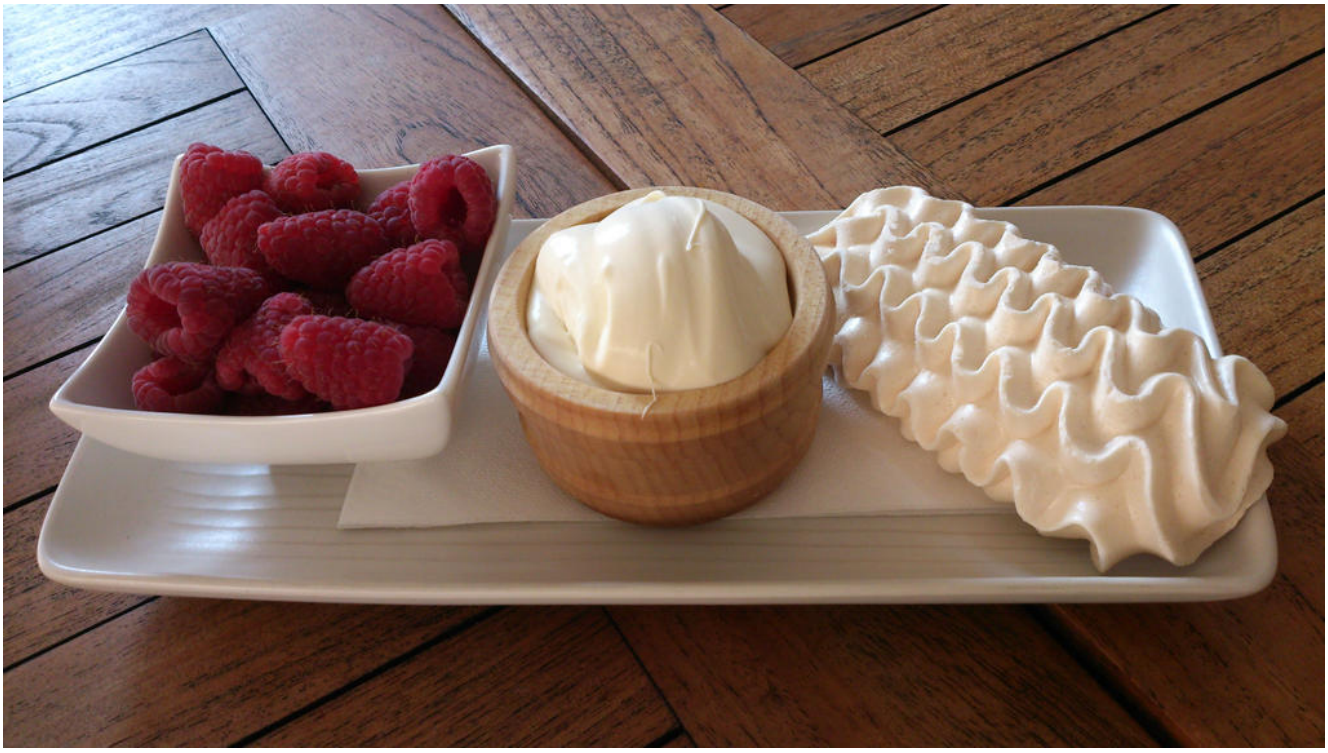
appreciate these dear people while realizing that our interactions, expectations were not always healthy. Those conversations clarified much and reset my attitude about many things! As I wrote to my parents: “The Lord is doing such wonderful healing in my life. I’ve really begun to take initiative and responsibility for the first time in my life. I’m starting to realize many old patterns of thought that have been limiting me and overcoming them with the Lord’s help.”

As a helper at L’Abri, I was mostly working to try to get the plants in the large garden at Les Mélèze to produce! I had nice cukes, zucchini, string beans, carrots and leeks. In the fall I harvested decent broccoli and beets. Even though that was my official job as a helper, much of my time was spent in interacting with people. Almost immediately God was able to use my experiences to be able to make a connection with those who, like myself, were involved in drugs and/or Eastern religions. I was continually amazed at how quickly God was able to transform the minds and hearts of some of the people arriving at L’Abri.

I applied and was accepted to stay on as a helper until the end of October. I was grateful for the opportunity to remain and become more grounded in my new found faith through continued study. During this time period, I was able to make and enjoy music. I became part of a recorder quartet, playing mostly Bach chorales. On Sundays, we were often treated to marvelous sacred music played on the magnificent little Flentrop organ in the chapel.

During this time period, I enjoyed a marvelous day off. Fran and Edith Schaeffer took the L’Abri office staff and those of us who worked at Chalet Les Mélèze on a fabulous outing to Gruyères (as in cheese). We took a series of buses and trains,

arriving in Gruyères in time for lunch. We ate in a posh restaurant where we sampled a number of dishes for which the Swiss are famous. We began with a cheese quiche. The main course was ham with cheesy scalloped potatoes. After enjoying a cheese board with a sampling of the many varieties of cheeses produced in Switzerland, we finished with a dessert of raspberries with double cream and a meringue.



From there we went to the beautifully preserved Chateau. The Chateau is filled with gorgeous tapestries and paintings. What was so marvelous about the day was that Dr. Schaeffer was our tour guide through the Chateau. He wove the history of the Swiss Reformation throughout our tour of the castle. We all had a great time and a good opportunity to get to know each other better. Seldom did we have the time to do that in the daily hustle and bustle of life at L’Abri.



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.

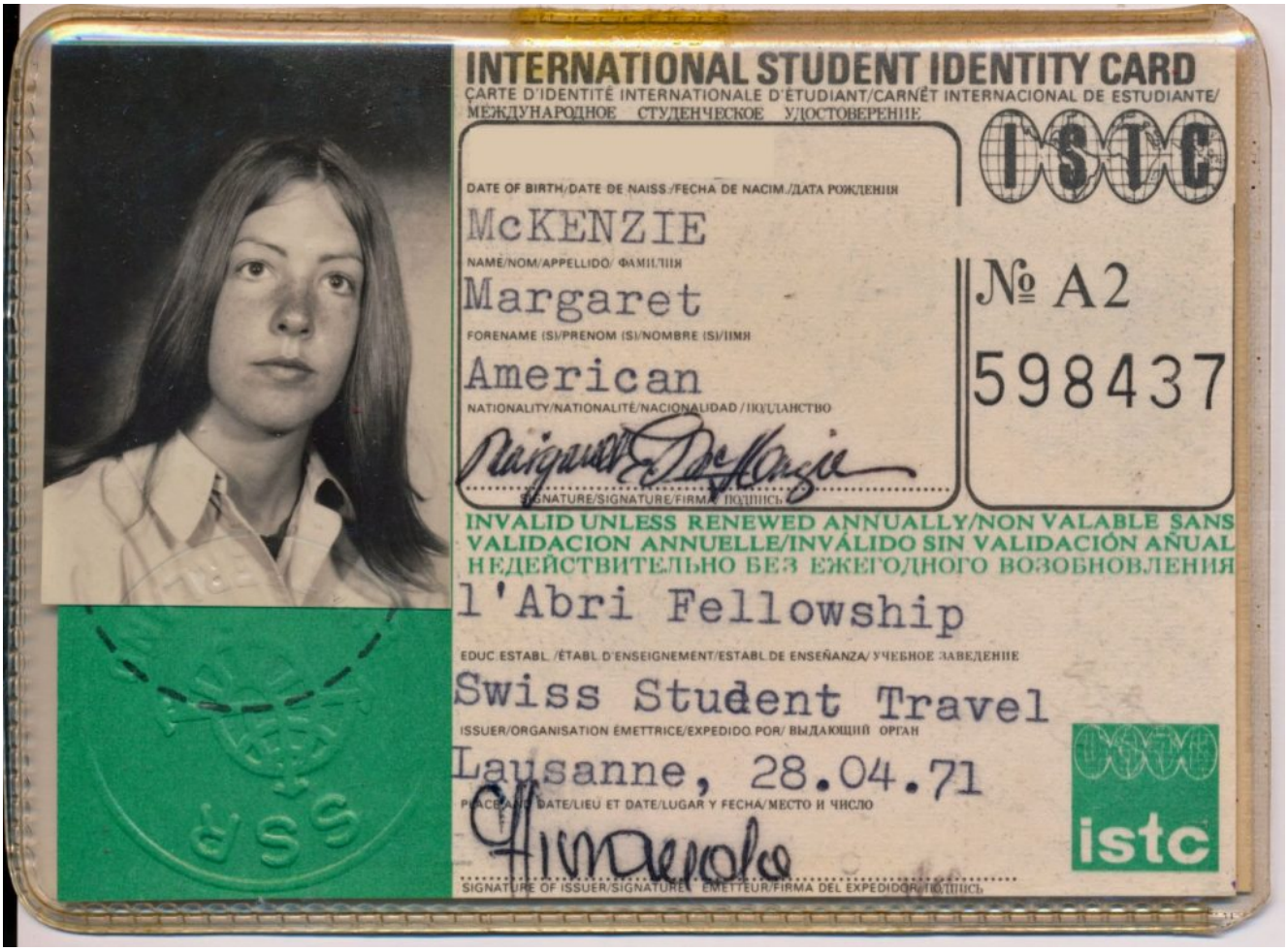
It seems human beings have a tendency to view circumstances, events in our lives as mere coincidence. Based on my journey *to* faith and 50 years of walking *in* that faith, I am convinced that is not so. I was raised in a culturally Christian home but don’t remember regular church attendance until I 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) Middelmann. 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.



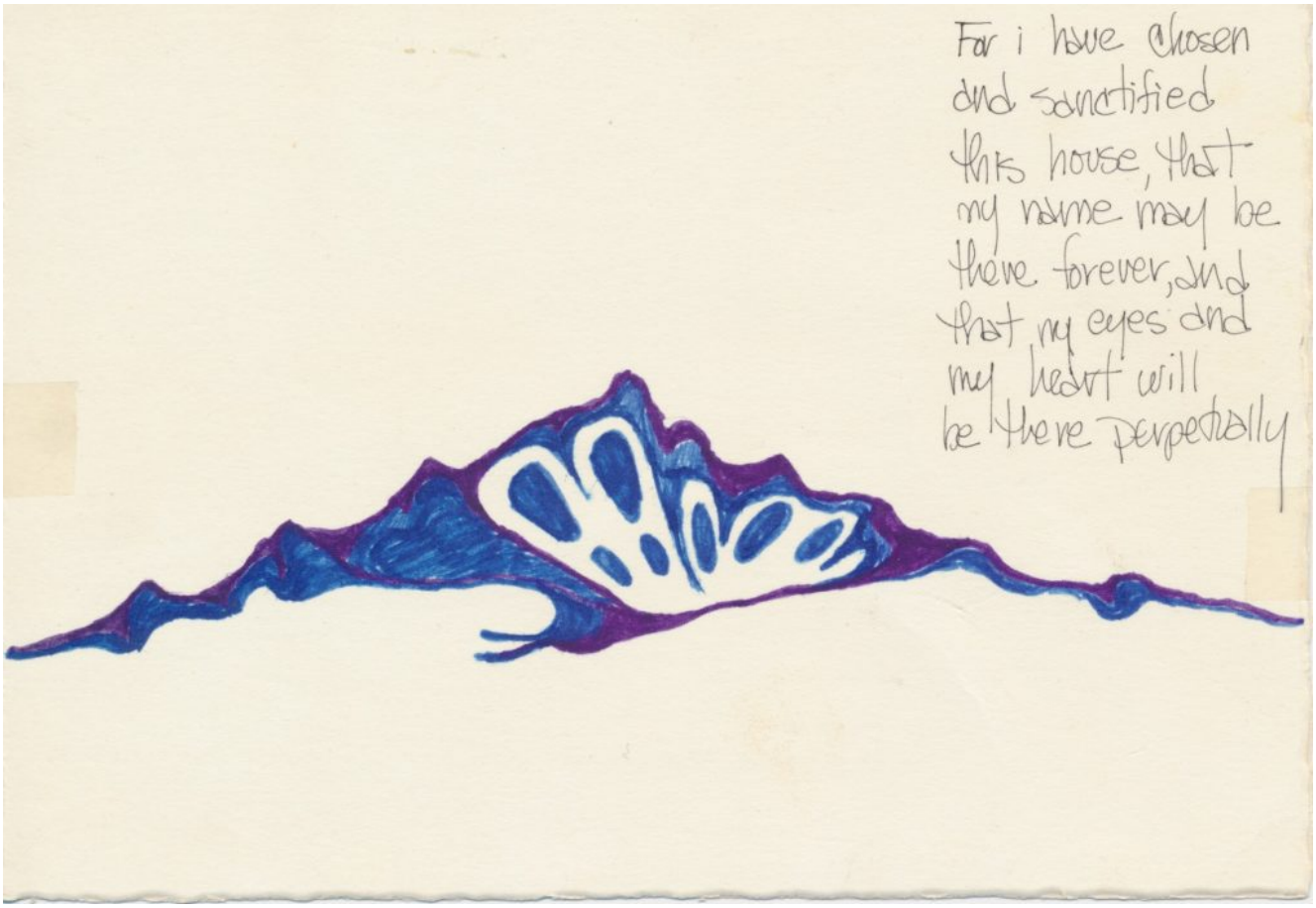
This world's realm is always in turmoil but with the divisive Viet Nam War heating up, the long overdue civil rights movement, demonstrations for or against just about everything, unrest and discord reigned. On top of Lookout Mtn was me having a crisis. It was obvious (duh!) that I wasn't going to cut 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 Mélèze . The beauty of Switzerland was so overwhelming, it was difficult to focus on anything else! I was assigned to Chalet les Sapins where the Middelmanns 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!



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…

Beginning A New Life

July was an eventful month. I've related my first real date with Margaret. In the next post, I'm going to ask Margaret to

tell her own story of what brought her to L’Abri and to faith in Jesus Christ.

In July I also enjoyed an amazing day off. I was asked to be a groomsman for the wedding of Roy and Jane, students at L’Abri. Jane’s dad had provided them with a rental car for the week leading up to the wedding. Roy, some other friends and I piled into the car and drove to St. Nicholas. From there, we took train to the village of Zermatt, where no motor vehicles are allowed. We rode a cable car up from Zermatt to the highest station at the foot of the Matterhorn. We guys all took our shirts off and played in the snow on a hot summer day! Returning to Zermatt, we found the townsfolk in beautiful traditional costumes assembling for a parade.

One of the friends with us from L’Abri was a talented photographer, Sylvester Jacobs. Sylvester, an African American who grew up in Oklahoma in the Jim Crow era. He wrote a book, *Born Black*, which is a candid account of his experiences. After a stint in the US Army, he emigrated to England, where he honed his photography skills. Syl had also become a committed Christian. Two years later, Syl would produce a book of photographs of the L’Abri community—*Portrait of a Shelter*. It was a delight to watch Syl dancing through the folk festival taking roll after roll of pictures. He later gave me a print of one of his photos as a memento of that time together. I have treasured it over the years. It is reproduced here with his permission.



This is my amateur photo showing that day in color:



Roy and Jane’s wedding was spectacular event. You can find photos of the wedding in *Portrait of a Shelter*. It was held in a beautiful candle-lit chapel (parts of which date to the 12th century) in St. Sulpice on the shores of Lake Geneva. Dr. Schaeffer conducted the ceremony. His wedding sermon presented the similarity of the marriage relationship to the relationship of Christ and the Church. Following the ceremony we all piled onto one of the marvelous lake steamboats and spent several hours eating, drinking, and talking while cruising on Lake Geneva.

By far the most significant event for me in July was entrusting myself to Jesus Christ. I did not record the exact date, but the events of the day are etched in my mind. I was becoming increasingly convinced of the Truth as proclaimed in the Bible. I had arrived at L'Abri three months earlier, certain that a synthesis between Christianity and Eastern religions was possible. My study of the Bible had convinced me that those who sought to reconcile the teachings of Jesus and Buddha (as I had) relied on a few seeming similarities based on a vast oversimplification of each system of belief.

I had come to realize that a fair reading of both the Christian and Buddhist texts revealed irreconcilable differences regarding absolutely foundational issues. Such as? Here is a short list: the nature of reality, the existence or non-existence of God, the core problem of human existence and the solution to that problem, the goal of human life (why are we here?), the reality and nature of an afterlife, and the understanding of the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Not trivial matters! In particular, the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ to be the only path to the Father (which first set me on the road to L'Abri) had become impossible for me to reinterpret or ignore.

I was seeing daily evidence of the power of the Gospel (literally the Good News about Jesus Christ) in individuals and in the life of the L'Abri community. I remember praying at the start of that day in July, "Lord, if you are real, please show me today." What did I expect to happen? A message in the clouds? A message in a bottle? I really didn't know. What actually happened to convince me of God's reality? Well, in a sense, *nothing* out of the ordinary! Through the course of the day, several people stopped to greet me and ask me how I was processing what I was learning. Their genuine interest and concern made a powerful impact on me!

Based on study, asking what may have seemed to patient workers like endless questions, deep conversations one-on-one and around dinner tables, it hit me: God really didn't owe me further proof than what I had found in His Word and the community of His people. My "back was up against the wall" and any excuses I could think of to continue hesitating giving my life to Christ seemed flimsy. By "coincidence," I had an appointment with Birdie later the same day. I knocked at the door of her chalet, and she invited me in. She looked at me and said, "You're ready, aren't you?" She reviewed my understanding of my sin and guilt before a holy God and the work that Jesus Christ had accomplished by His life, death, and resurrection. She then led me in a simple prayer of repentance and faith. It was then that Birdie did something that was so wise. She asked me if I had brought any items of religious significance with me from India and Nepal.

I did, in fact, have a fairly valuable hand-painted Tibetan thangka depicting the Buddhist wheel of life. When I bought it, I was told that it had hung in a Tibetan temple. It depicted the Buddhist view of the universe and path to enlightenment. It was the Buddhist equivalent to a evangelistic tract! Birdie asked me to go and get it. When I returned, she had a fire going in her fireplace. She said, "You know what to do." I gladly consigned the thangka to the flames and immediately had a deep sense of freedom and relief. Birdie's deep spiritual wisdom was revealed in her encouraging me to burn that thangka. The Book of Acts records how the new Christians in Ephesus burned their valuable books of magic (Acts 18:18,19) to proclaim they were finished with the old way and committed to the new.

Burning the thangka was a powerful act indicating that I was forever renouncing my quest to become my own god and instead submitting my life to the one true and living God. I had come

to the end of one quest and taken the first step on a much different and greater quest as a child of God. Rather than trying to save myself, I admitted on my knees that only the Living God could save me. I would no longer live trying desperately to earn His favor. Instead, this prodigal son ran into the Father’s arms and, by His grace and mercy, pledged to live my new life in gratitude for His undeserved favor, love, and forgiveness.

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 Mélèze 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!

Letters from India

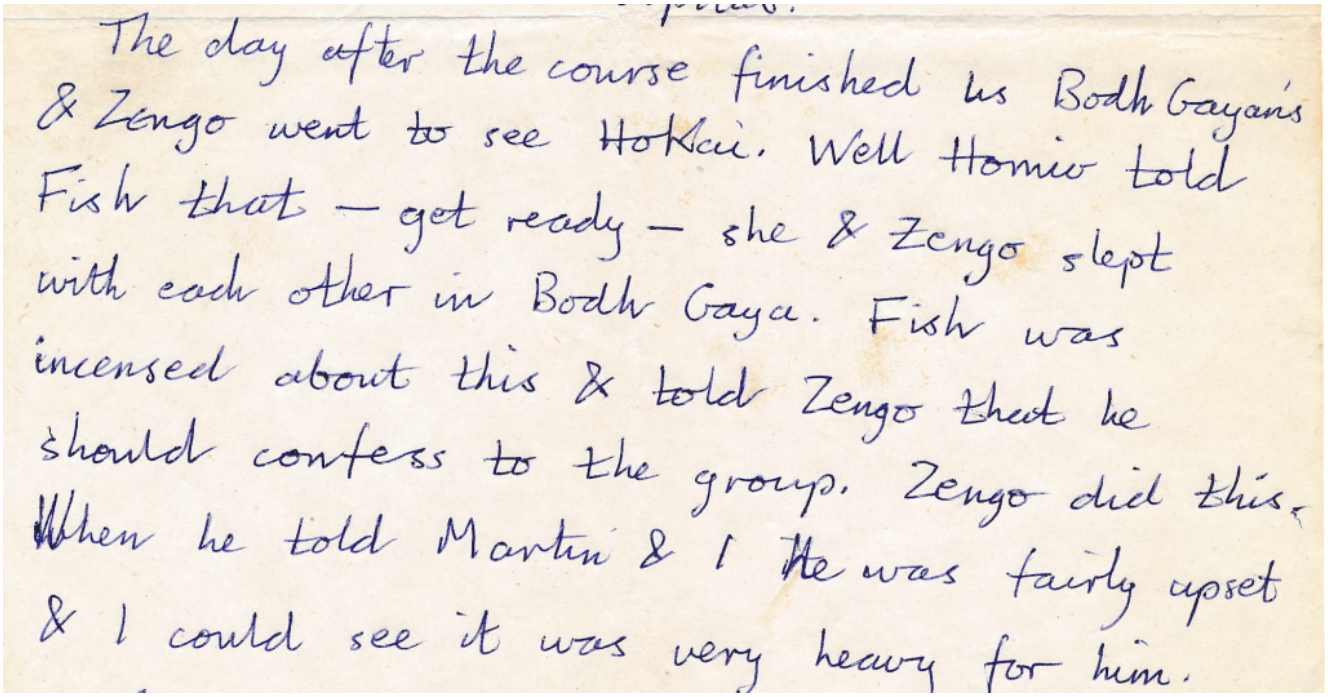
One of the tasks of students and helpers at L’Abri was to make a trip early each morning into the small village of Huémoz. Even though it looked like a picture postcard, it was very much a working Swiss village. Strapping a large wicker basket onto our backs we headed down the hill. We needed to stop at both the boulangerie and the laiterie. At the laiterie, we would fill cans with creamy milk fresh from the local cows. At the boulangerie, we would fill our nostrils with the most delightful smells and the basket with the most glorious loaves of crusty bread. As we left the shops, the shop keepers would bid us adieu in lilting Swiss French (much more singing than speaking), “Au revior, merci!”



Our meals were usually fairly basic fare, but it was all hearty and freshly prepared. The community grew much of its own produce in the summer. Much of the meat came from the local boucherie. A crew of students would prepare each meal, supervised by one of the full-time helpers or workers. Edith Schaeffer insisted that even simple fare be carefully prepared and elegantly presented. During the spring and summer months, there were usually bouquets of cut flowers on the table. During and after the meals, there was a free-flowing discussion on a variety of topics, some initiated by the workers, others prompted by students' questions. If there was more than one table, often there would be multiple free flowing discussions!

I truly regret that I didn’t keep a journal while I was at L’Abri. It would be helpful now to trace exactly how my thinking about Jesus Christ and the Christian faith evolved through the months of June and July. There were no flashes of light or voices from Heaven. There was just the growing conviction in the core of my being that the Good News of Jesus Christ was really true and what I was experiencing in the community was genuine Christian love. Indeed, one of the things that Dr. Schaeffer emphasized repeatedly was the necessity of Truth and love to go hand-in-hand. One of the ways he put it was, “Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world.”

Something happened about this time that caused me to consider the Christian faith even more seriously as a framework for understanding reality (as opposed to something like the Eastern worldview). I had written to the group with whom I practiced Zen Buddhism in India to assure them that I had arrived safely in Switzerland and to give them my initial impressions. Somewhat to my surprise, I received a packet of letters with a personal note from most of the members of the group.


The day after the course finished us Bodh Gayans & Zengo went to see Hokkai. Well Homio told Fish that — get ready — she & Zengo slept with each other in Bodh Gaya. Fish was incensed about this & told Zengo that he should confess to the group. Zengo did this. When he told Martin & I he was fairly upset & I could see it was very heavy for him.

Many of the notes expressed disillusionment. The group discovered that our Zen Buddhist monk who had claimed to have renounced the world had been sleeping with one of the women in our group, thus violating one of his monastic vows. After that revelation, the members of the group began to scatter in various directions, some looking for a different guru and others returning to their home countries. Most of them remained convinced that the reality they were looking for was to be found within themselves and that the right teacher would be able to guide them in their continued search.

It was clear from the letters that Zengo was upset that he had betrayed his monastic vows and had failed those who were looking to him to guide them toward enlightenment. Yet, after that failure, where did Zengo have to turn? Buddhists have no category for true moral guilt before a personal, holy God and no concept of an objective forgiveness available for that guilt. I was beginning to see in the Christian faith not just the reality of guilt and condemnation before a God who cannot tolerate rebellion, but the glory of full and free forgiveness open to all who come to Jesus Christ by repentance and faith.

“[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

At the time, I did not reckon that the moral failure of one Buddhist monk conclusively discredited Buddhism as a whole. However, it further confirmed my decision to focus on the Christian faith. There was something very different about *this* worldview! I was still only “at the edges” of Christianity. But, I had learned enough to realize that *this* faith reveals a Living God, existing before us and outside of us. This God promises to supply the power of the resurrected Jesus to those who place their faith in Him. While it is true that there are professing Christians who have fallen deeply into sin, the Christian claim is that the Holy Spirit provides real believers with a source of power to live a morally upright life, a power found in no other religion. This was mind blowing for me!