

## Blest Be the Tie that Binds | BY JULI MILLER

*Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love!  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above. . . .*

(John Fawcette, 1772)

If a dozen of us are present on Sabbath morning at the Wood River Seventh-day Adventist Church, we consider it a good turnout. However, as we pass through the dramatic seasons of the Sun Valley, Idaho, area, we are blessed by a steady trickle of visitors who find their way to our nondescript brown sanctuary next to a discount gas station and no-frills motel.

The faces that appeared in our pews in the past year represent an exhilarating tapestry of culture, talents, and dreams. From Jamaica came young bookkeeper Tammica with the gorgeous voice, after surfing "the Internet for an adventure" somewhere with snow, mountains, and a totally different kind of work. Emanouil, a veterinarian from Bulgaria with a gigantic smile and laugh, was attending an international orthopedic veterinary conference here and checking out the legendary ski runs on Mount Baldy

between sessions. Tianna, who will soon complete her degree at Brooks Institute of Photography in California before moving to Iceland, came here for a short internship with a local photographer whose portraits of horses and Native Americans have an international market. Ben, a pediatric neurosurgeon and author from the East Coast, was in town with his wife for a board meeting of a high-profile retail organization.



Young and restless and ponytailed Abram, escaping from an isolated stop along the river in northern Idaho, is doing a half-year stint with the U.S. Forest Service and revising his short stories during his time off. Mary, who had just spent a season working in Antarctica after living in Alaska, decided to hang out in Sun Valley while her boyfriend was traveling in South America. Not long ago, a New Zealand helicopter pilot who was part of the airborne assault on our Castle Rock wildfire lingered after potluck for a good afternoon visit before returning to the incident base camp. Just last week, a Romanian couple touring Idaho for ten days shared their stories of homeland persecution and pursuit of freedom and new careers in American.

No visitor goes unnoticed. You are quickly engulfed with questions, asked if you can play the piano, read a passage from Scripture, or present a worship hour message. We insist you stay for potluck.







"the work" is advancing in the various publications and broadcasts. The Adventist world also shrinks the space between people. A popular idea today is that there are only six degrees of separation between people in a world flattened by commerce and technology. Having some kind of link with Adventist culture probably shrinks the separation to a mere 1.5 degrees. Within

How would one describe the kind of relationship any of these visitors have with God? With the world? With their own heart or soul? With Adventism? Much remains a mystery after our brief fellowship of a day, a few weeks, or sometimes a few months. Yet there is the immediate sense of kinship no matter the manifested or unknown differences. Each guest's time with our small congregation invigorates us long after the God-be-with-you's have been spoken. Perhaps this is what it felt like for one of the early small churches to get a letter of encouragement from the Apostle Paul. It reminds us of being part of something bigger, without boundaries of place or time.

*Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,  
Our comforts and our cares.*

Once one has a certain exposure to Adventist culture, the world becomes both very large and very small. It expands because Adventism goes to all corners of the earth, and we hear and see the global stories as part of the Mission Spotlight moments at church and the reports of how

a few minutes, we can usually identify someone we both know somewhere on Earth.

I am connected with people who represent a Whitman's Sampler box of beliefs and lifestyles as a result of having lived in many places, worked in numerous industries, and pursued an eclectic variety of personal passions. One thing that has always served as immediate common ground in all these realms of my life: growing up in an Adventist culture. This priceless passport I carry offers me special passage in this chaotic journey through an often heartbreaking and breathtaking world. Discovering that someone else shares even a tiny sliver of the same heritage is consistently a meaningful event, though they may not profess any current connection to those "Seventh-day-in-Venice" folks.

After spying a couple cans of Worthington Choplets tucked behind the tomato sauce in another pilot's pantry, I could better explain why, among the two dozen or so pilots in a multistate group of pilots, she and I seemed to have the most similar approaches to many things related to flying as well as to life. During the years I recruited physicians for hospitals or medical groups, seeing on a curricu-



lum vitae that someone had attended an Adventist school somewhere along the way ensured that it would not take long for us to establish a good working relationship.

When I learn that the person next to me on a commercial flight or conference session attended an Adventist boarding school or college, we always have much to laugh and wonder about together. If someone mentions being in a band or choir in their youth, there is a 50 percent probability they had some connection with Adventist education. Identifying books of Uncle Arthur or Eric B. Hare in someone's library inevitably leads to rich reminiscing about one's childhood and young imaginations.

*But we shall still be joined in heart,  
And hope to meet again.*

Indeed, a good number of my closest friends today attended an Adventist school with me but have not maintained church involvement. I also frequently see these lasting school-formed friendships among people where nobody in the circle would acknowledge any current ties with the Adventist Church. In fact, a common bond is often shared horror stories of school experiences or treatment by church members or institutional representatives.

But there is a tie. And I wish more of these brothers and sisters could feel they are still very welcome at family gatherings whenever and however they are able to be with us. Of course, we understand that as one grows up, one continues to decide what one wants to keep, discard, remodel, or merely remember from one's past. But we miss them. Their total absence is a tragedy.

I met Colleen as a coworker at an international consulting firm in San Francisco in the early 1970s. I admire her

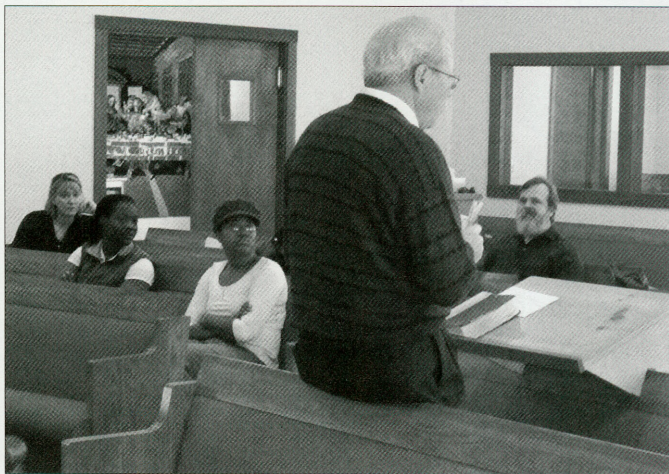


superior intellect and wit, her stunning looks, and gracious charm, her Stanford and Harvard degrees, and her stellar performance with numerous successful Silicon Valley start-up companies.

As we have traveled widely together for more than thirty years, she has witnessed the magical Global Positioning System and common citizenship that the Adventist culture affords me, opening doors and providing an instant sense of familiarity and unspoken understandings. She's never known anything quite like it. I can go anywhere and find someone who knows someone I know or who is familiar with people, traditions, music, foods, or literature, and stories I know, too. Colleen kept wondering how this happened. Could this somehow be duplicated for others seeking a universal sense of belonging?

I finally brought her with me to one of my Takoma Academy class reunions. Because she knew me, she was treated as if she were a Takoman, as well. She loved finally meeting in person so many people she had heard me talk about for so many years. They were even more fun and interesting than she had imagined. She would have traded me a lot of her stock options or some of her degrees for my Adventist heritage.

In this era of social networks via the Internet, such as YouTube and FaceBook, the old-fashioned enduring power of the Adventist network is impressive. Log on! ■



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