

A Lonely House

One of the families in our community that was always in the thick of things when it came to church affairs were the Canfields. Henry Canfield was a “truck” farmer; that is, he grew vegetables for the grocery market. He owned forty acres about a quarter of a mile from our small church, and on those forty acres he fed and clothed his family until the early 1950’s.

His was a large family. Besides his wife Bethany, there were five children: Rob, Liz, Anna, Beulah, and Paul. Bethany was the youth leader at church, and their home was always open to any of the children in the neighborhood. She was a marvelous cook, as were all the girls in the family. I knew they all were devout church members from the way they acted. They were, to put it simply, God’s people, and they didn’t have to announce it – it showed in the way they lived their lives.

I’ve thought about them off and on as I lived my life, musing over how things seem to work out. Rob was a few years older than I was, but he was always ready to play catch with the younger children. He went on several church sponsored events when in his teens, and when I came home from college one year, I wasn’t at all surprised to learn that he had become a missionary somewhere overseas. He was married, too, to a nurse.

Where Rob clearly had his father’s looks, Liz did not fare so well. Her mother wasn’t beautiful, but she was a good looking woman, self-assured and at peace with the world. Liz, to be blunt, was not pretty. I recall that she had a decent figure, but she wouldn’t win any beauty contests. Liz, too, was older by two or three years, and we rode the bus together – I to school in town, and she to work. I recall her talking about the people she worked with, especially the men.

I mentioned that to my mother one day, and she remarked that it was sad. I asked what she meant, and she replied that poor Liz had never been on a date, and she was prone to make things up. I had never thought that anyone couldn’t have a date, even though many of our “dates” were group affairs, and as much for safety as for companionship. Still, Liz finally married, a preacher no less, although I was told later that it never worked out well.

Anna was nearly my age – she was a grade behind me, and a bit of a tomboy. In fact, she was the best shortstop in town, although the coach wouldn’t let her play with the boys. We wouldn’t have minded, either, for she was also a good hitter. I don’t know what became of Anna. She left home and as far as I know, stayed gone.

Beulah was three or four years younger, and she was gorgeous – blue-eyed, blonde, and a personality to match. She had polio when she was six or seven, and that left her with a leg brace and a limp. It didn’t slow her down a bit. Last I heard, she was a successful builder and realtor and had never married.

Paul was nearly a decade younger and I never knew him, at all. I remember hearing about him from both his and my mother, but I don’t know that I would have recognized him if I ever saw him. He ended up a pharmacist and doing reasonably well in a nearby town.

I last saw the Canfields together shortly before my mother’s death. I had come to visit one Saturday, and my father had mentioned that he thought the Canfields were going to be stopping by. I guess it had been nearly ten years since I had seen either of them, and other than a few age lines and some gray hair, they both looked much the same as when I had last seen them. I asked about their children and got a report on each of them, except Anna. I decided that maybe I shouldn’t ask. Then, Mrs. Canfield said that she missed having all of us come around; that is, she missed the ones who had grown up with her children. No one came anymore, and the house was lonely.

There are no sadder words than “the house is lonely.”

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