



What I learned in the one-room schoolhouse in Strasburg Ohio – by Chris Long

A friend from church invited me to visit her grandparents in Strasburg, Ohio. She explained that it was a one-room schoolhouse that had been converted into a home in the country, and that we would have to travel down a one lane road, over a rickety old bridge, and over the creek to get there. I said, “Sure, I’ll go.” So off we went to visit her grandparents. It was just as she said. It was a one lane bridge, over the creek, and then up the hill on the back roads to the one-room schoolhouse.

As we parked the car and approached the back door, there was no indication of anyone living there. On the back door was a sign that read, “Prepare to Meet Thy God.” Well, at that moment I had visions of a shotgun on the other side of the door, and I was a little afraid at that point. But as we approached, an elderly man opened the door. It was her grandfather, Roy Dear, a retired preacher. He and his wife Alice lived in this one-room schoolhouse that he had converted into a home. Alice had severe rheumatoid arthritis and was bedridden. Although in pain, she never complained and always had a kind word to share. She would always ask how you were doing and would never mention her own ailments. She was interested in what you had to say. She was kind and gentle and was happy to have visitors.

I sat in the kitchen with Roy while Silvia visited with her grandmother. Roy served me tea to drink and told me about his elder brother’s service in WWI. He was injured by mustard gas in the war and never fully recovered from the effects of the gas. We looked out the kitchen window together as we drank our tea and watched the birds feeding at the bird seed feeders. He shared about the variety of birds that came to the house. We talked about the things of God and about life. He then took me to the basement to show me how he loaded the coal furnace to heat their home. I had never seen a working coal furnace before.

Roy and Alice had lived through the Great Depression and led a simple life as Christian ministers. They raised three children on meager wages. Roy supplemented his ministry income by selling vitamins door to door in the country. Alice, now bedridden by her arthritis, enjoyed watching Christian television. There was a full-time Christian station out of Louisville, Ohio, WDLI Channel 17. Most people had difficulty tuning in to the station, as the signal was not strong, but to my surprise, Alice was able to get the station in crystal-clear. You see, she prayed over it, and was able to enjoy Christian fellowship through the programming.

This sweet elderly couple had a deep Christian faith. They must have known that my friendship with Silvia would grow into something more, as Roy would ask her, “How is your boyfriend doing?” She would reply, “He’s just a friend Grandpa; he's not my boyfriend.” Little did we know that a few years later, Alice and Roy would be holding their great grandson, our firstborn son.

Age and health eventually took their toll on both Roy and Alice. They left the one-room schoolhouse that had been their home for so many years and moved to Akron to be cared for by Silvia’s parents. The home was later sold to pay for their healthcare needs. After several owners it was purchased by an artist who wanted to refurbish the old schoolhouse and make it into an art gallery.

Silvia and I visited the one-room schoolhouse that had now become a pottery art gallery. We spoke to the owner and told him the story, that it was once owned by her grandparents and that they had lived in it as their home. He was intrigued to learn about its history.

A few years later, I was shopping for a Christmas gift for Silvia and stopped by an art gallery in downtown Hartsville. As I looked around the gallery, I saw a painting of a snow-scaped one-room schoolhouse that startled me, and with joy I thought, “It looks exactly like the schoolhouse where Silvia’s grandparents lived! She will love this.” The painting is now hanging in our home next to the window where we watch the birds eating at our feeders. It is a reminder of the gentle, elderly Christian couple who found joy in each other, their visitors, and the simple things of life. What I learned in the one-room schoolhouse in Strasburg, Ohio, is that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” (I Tim. 6:6)