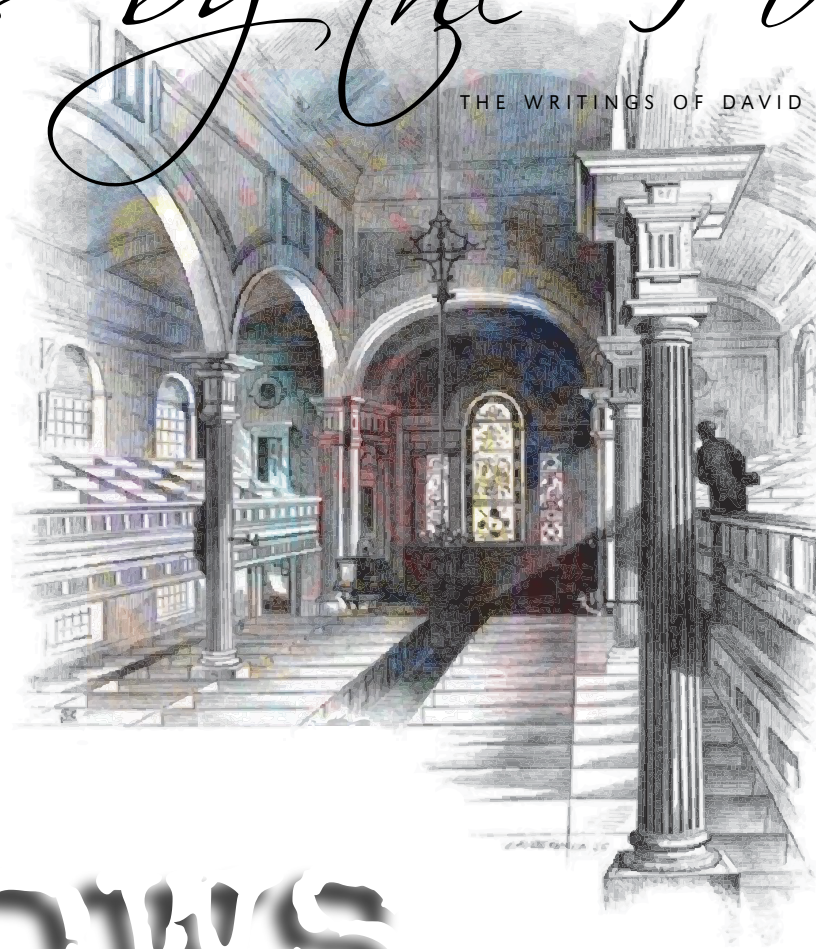


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



Windows

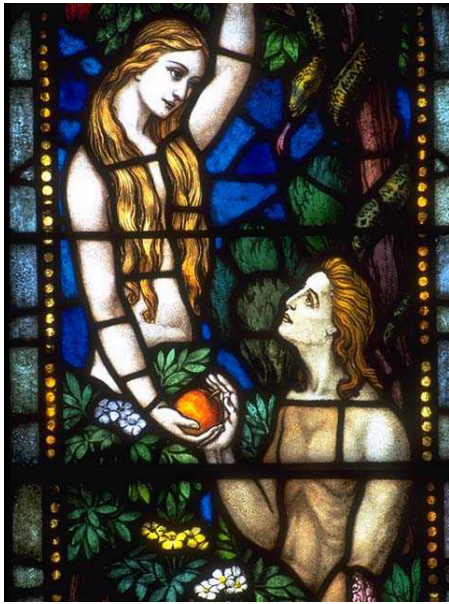
There is hardly ever a complete silence in our soul. God is whispering to us well-nigh incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear these whisperings of God. He is always whispering to us, only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on.

Frederick W. Faber

Issue #828, April 2019.

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There was about the place that heavy stillness peculiar to an empty church. The only light sifted through the colors of stained glass spilling across the tops of the vacant pews. The familiar odors filled my nostrils: new dust scattered across old oak, cracked varnish mingled with fresh paint, and carpet that had known too many Sundays.

SHE WAS SITTING NEAR THE BACK of the cavernous room, and I would have missed her but for the reflection of colored light off her glasses. She said nothing, wasn't praying, but was quietly staring toward the front of the room, where the preacher delivered his sermons every Sunday morning at the massive, dark oak pulpit with the choir sitting respectfully behind.

I tried to check my breathing but that only made it louder. She knew I was there, but made no move, no gesture, spoke no word.

She was listening to her God. And from her face I could see He was saying something important to her. The old woman shared a singular relationship

She was listening to her God. And from her face I could see He was saying something important to her.

with her God: while others might spend much time praying, Edna Mae spent much time listening.

She had been there from the beginning, before the church building had even stood, before there were even people to buff the seats of the pews.

She had outlived everyone else of her generation, growing old with grace and dignity, and had, over time, become the matriarch of the congregation.

Edna Mae gave a quiet strength to anyone with whom she came in contact. She couldn't abide self-

importance—either in herself or others. Without purposeful design, it was her humility that made her great.

Her God, I had learned over the years,

was her friend—not her pal, but her friend. She knew Him as she had known her husband for so many years: strong, reliable, intimate. As with good friends, I imagined there were no secrets between them. She spoke of the Lord as one would speak of a revered uncle who had taken over raising someone—and had done a good job of it.

But now her husband had gone to meet the Lord in person, and I wondered what now would change. Would the loss of her life's companion change her affection for God? Would she be drawn even more intimately to the One who now shared company with her Harold, or would she nurse a newfound animosity toward the One who had taken him away? Frankly, I couldn't imagine anything, no matter how traumatic, coming between Edna Mae and her God.

I didn't want to bother her, to intrude on this communion, but she turned her head and smiled at me in a way that said it was okay.

"Where are the roses?" I said, sitting a respectful distance from Edna Mae.

"They were extra special, weren't

they? I took them out to the hospital after lunch. Gladys Endicott is in for gall bladder, you know."

"I heard. But I thought you might take them out to the cemetery."

"Oh my, those people take good care of things out there. Don't think they need my help."

"But the memorial—"

"Is brightening the room of a sick friend. Poor Gladys," she clicked her tongue like a perturbed auntie, "surrounded by all that chrome and plastic and rubber Jell-O. She needed a piece of God's garden in there. I expect Harold's got plenty of the real thing."

I studied my old friend's face, one lined with so many memories, so many trials and pieces of well-earned wisdom. Passing this face on the street it would blend in with all the rest. Just another old lady to be ignored. But seeing it painted by the soft, pastel light of the sanctuary, gazing at the person deep within those radiant eyes, I saw the evidence that some people know a deeper, more personal relationship with their God than do others—not through any special dispensation from Him, but because of the character of their own heart.

"How have you been, Edna? Has it been a long week?"

"You know, Reinhart, I keep telling myself it doesn't matter. He was here for a time—now he's with the Lord. And it won't do my heart any good to count the days. But I have. I just can't keep my brain from ticking off every one of the days since Harold went."

"That just keeps his memory alive," I protested.

"I don't need a calendar to remember Harold," she smiled. "Practically everything he was is still alive in here," Edna said, patting her wrinkled hand upon her chest. "No, it's not a good thing. Harold always told me: 'Edna Mae,' he'd say, 'whoever's left shouldn't cry over the first to go. Just remember the good times and think about the ones to come.'"

"It's not that easy though, is it?" I said, realizing too late that my remark sounded smug, and more than a little presumptuous coming from someone so much younger. But Edna was gracious as always, and ignored my poor choice of words.

"I keep thinking about that passage early on where it says that a man and

wife will become one flesh," she said with a sigh. "When that really happens—when two people become as close as God intended—it can be a hard price to pay, when one is taken and one is left behind." Edna stared over my shoulder, out the colored-glass window that filtered the harsh sunlight into the tranquility of the sanctuary. I could only imagine the pages of memories she was now sifting through in her mind, all those many years with her husband.

I had known both of them for all my life. Growing up in the church, they had always been there. My mom told me that Edna Mae was one of my earliest baby-sitters, volunteering for those rare occasions when my parents would be out for an evening. Harold was an usher, later a deacon, and Edna Mae was active in the women's groups that called on shut-ins and organized food for funerals. For years I thought it just an accident that Edna always sat in the pew in front of my family's. But later I learned that she sat there because she enjoyed hearing me sing the old hymns.

"Where've you been, Reinhart?" Her voice snatched me back from my thoughts, and into the pew we now

shared. "It's been a long time."

"In California," I answered, thinking she already knew that. "I've been living in California."

Edna stared at me a moment, then a broad smile split her face. "Ah yes, now I remember. You married the Wellison girl. Oh, she was a pretty little thing.

**Harold was an usher,
later a deacon, and
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for funerals.**

Never could figure her settling for you," she said with a twinkle in her eyes. "Always thought she could do better."

"Thanks, Edna," I said, wryly. "Apparently she thought so, too."

"You don't mean—"

"Yeah. Last year. A cop pulled her over one day for making an illegal left-hand turn. They got to talking, swapped

phone numbers, and a month later I'm eating TV dinners in a studio apartment."

Edna silently mulled over my tale of woe. Then she asked me how long I'd been back.

"Six months."

Her eyes widened. "And I haven't seen you in church?"

I hadn't meant to talk about this with Edna. The day of her husband's burial was no time to be airing all the dirty laundry from my failed marriage and presently miserable life. "You don't want to hear all this, Edna. This isn't the time."

"Don't you tell me what it is I want, young man," she snapped with a frown.

Part of me wanted to get up and leave. The better part, however, wanted to spill my guts to maybe the one person who could listen with the right blend of sympathy and stern good sense. For me, the last nine months had seemed an eternity. I'd felt like I had been stumbling through my days like the living dead: bloodless, disemboweled, lobotomized—yet still breathing. My head felt as if it had been wrapped in cotton, my body numb.

"I was angry at first," I said. "No—that's not right. First I was hurt. All that trust invested in someone who had been living a lie."

"Maybe not," Edna countered. "People change."

"A woman who really meant the things she said and did all those years—she couldn't have so easily betrayed me. It was so easy for her." This is why I didn't want to bring it up. I sounded like some whining little boy who'd had his ball taken away. "Anyway, I came back home to escape the memories."

"And have you?" Edna's gaze was unblinking, direct.

"No. Of course not. I just carried them back with me."

"Let it go, Reinhart," she shook her head. "The anger will burn you up—and she won't know anyway."

"The anger isn't for her," I muttered, feeling suddenly claustrophobic in the high-ceilinged sanctuary. The overhead beams seem to sway and bend down toward me, looking for my head.

"Ah, yes," she said quietly, nodding. ♦



Colored shadows had moved across the rows of wooden pews as the sun outside descended with the day. Purples and reds and soft greens passed over us, tinting everything in their path, until true color had become only a thin recollection.

“HAROLD AND I GOT MARRIED during the Depression, don’t you know,” Edna Mae said. “A lot of people said it’d never last—so many troubles in our lives back then. Life was hard—the real thing—and we knew goin’ in that starting a marriage in all of that would be tough. We were young—I mean *real* young. We didn’t have money for a house, naturally, no furniture or much of anything else. All we had was Harold’s beat-up Chevy and,” Edna leaned toward me and lowered her voice, “enough love to keep us warm at night.” Her eyes twinkled with the memory.

Was it so different back then? Was there some quality to love or life back in that time that colored people’s behavior or aspirations?

“So your love was enough,” I offered.

“Love’s never enough, Reinhart,” Edna said quickly. “During the Depression a lot of people thought that starting something that was supposed to be permanent, in that time of uncertainty, was just compounding troubles. A lot of people, instead, struck out on their own, staying away from others, running away from their troubles and responsibilities. Men and women both rode the rails, lookin’ for a life without sorrow. But everywhere they went, they just brought their old sorrows along with them.

“I won’t throw any stones,” she said. “When your babies are hungry, when you have to walk the streets lookin’ for a job until you feel the pavement through the soles of your shoes, when you stand in soup lines until your legs and very soul ache—it all piles up and does something to your reason. Makes

you a little crazy in the head—like the sky itself is closing in around you.”

“Why weren’t you and Harold like that?” I asked.

“We didn’t see things that way. Getting married was our lifeline *out* of our troubles. We didn’t want to run away from life, but to join together to meet it head-on! Oh, the troubles were still there, of course, but through it all we had each other—to lean on, to cling to.”

The idea of such a life—two people meeting life together—appealed to me. It was a pattern built into me by my parents, by the slow-paced ways of my Midwestern hometown, by years of Sunday School lessons and sermons. It was a comfortable ideal. But, by its very nature, it takes two—it takes two people mutually agreed, and now I had joined the ranks of those for whom that ideal had broken down. The two that had become one were now back to being two—which meant they probably were never one to begin with.

But it wasn’t just a return to the same single life of before. Before my marriage, life was filled with fresh expectations, I could imagine anything, because anything was still possible. The doors and

windows of my life were swung wide, there was free passage in all directions. Marriage was a part of that. While common culture described the union of two souls in a snickering way as something akin to imprisonment, I saw it as the logical continuation of the same journey; while others described it as the demise

We were two individuals made stronger by uniting as one. There were no bars or chains, only wider windows and doors.

of personal freedom, I always imagined it as empowerment. And for awhile that’s what it was. Life with Andrea was all that and more. We were two individuals made stronger by uniting as one. There were no bars or chains, only wider windows and doors.

“People today think living should have a straight path,” Edna Mae said, breaking into my thoughts. “They think you begin

at point A and go straight on to point B without any detours or delays. And heaven forbid any show up! They expect it all, and if they can’t have it, all bets are off.”

“Were people really so different back when you got married?”

Edna’s laughter sprang out of her and ricocheted around the cavernous room like a rubber ball. “Gracious no! There were just as many fools back then—maybe more. People left each other right and left because of the hardships. Men would say they were heading out to California to find work, then begin a new life and never fetch their wife and kids back home. Young wives would have a little security flashed in their face, and leave everything for a pipe dream.”

“So what made you two different,” I asked.

Edna Mae thought about it awhile, running back through the pages of her married life. Then she answered, “Maybe one difference was that some men and women—like Harold and me—were more willing to trust in those days.”

“Trust in what?”

“Just about anything. There’s both sides of it: The same trust that leads

you to a good thing, can lead you to a bad thing. Those days, everyone trusted in Roosevelt to get us out of the fix we were in. And he pretty much did—though some say the war did more for that than any of FDR’s new programs. That trust in Roosevelt was a good thing, I suppose. But then I noticed that people got used to trusting in government for just about everything. They lost some of their own good sense waiting for Washington to bail them out. It atrophied—just withered up and shrank, like a broken arm never used again. And that was a bad thing.

“Harold and I, from the very beginning, weren’t afraid to trust each other. You don’t see much of that today. I mean *real* trust.”

“But it takes two,” I protested.

“Sure does,” she nodded her head, “and that’s the scary part.”

As the colors stretched further across the room, across the orderly rows of

wooden pews, my sour mood deepened. I had been working over the last few months to shake my anger at Andrea, and the depression her leaving had created in me. Visiting old haunts around my hometown had been refreshing after being away so long, and the youthful memories they dredged up seemed to edge me away from the painful reality of today.

But now the cold weight of reality was once again pressing down on me. The conversation with Edna Mae had yanked me back into emotions I had been willing to forget. Maybe she had had the perfect marriage, but the truth was that I had not—and no rosy-hued recollections would change that. I had trusted in another human being, and in return she had ripped out my heart and handed it to me on a platter. Maybe there was someone new out there who would be worthy of my trust, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to make the effort. ♦



Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, “Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!” But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.” So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.

2 Samuel 12:18-20

EDNA MAE WAS A REMARKABLE WOMAN. Earlier in the day she had buried her husband of somewhere around sixty years, and now here she was wasting her time talking to the likes of me. A more normal person would have been home feeling sorry for herself, tending her own aching heart. Instead, she was here tending mine.

“I guess I haven’t forgotten all those Sunday School stories I heard growing up here,” I said. She said nothing, but turned and smiled at me, and once again I had the feeling I had just interrupted another moment of communion between Edna and God. “I was just thinking about what King David did after Bathsheba’s child died,” I explained. “His servants expected him to continue mourning, but instead, he got up and washed, and went into the temple to worship.”

Edna smiled again, as if drawing comfort from a pleasant thought. “To be honest, Reinhart,” she said, “I don’t know if how I’m feeling is right, or proper. I only know it’s how it is. Maybe I *should* be mourning; heaven knows I’ve lost the best part of my life. Harold and I had something precious—and rare. But even with that, it feels as if I’ve lost only one of my two husbands.”

My surprise must have been obvious, for she was quick to explain.

“Now, don’t look at me like that. I haven’t run off and joined a cult. I only mean that, while I’ve lost my earthly husband, I still have my heavenly one. It takes nothing away from Harold to take comfort in Jesus—and, having Jesus means that I haven’t really lost Harold! I don’t know all that waits for me in the hereafter, but I’m sure hoping to

see Harold when I get there, because I know that's where he's at."

She drifted back into her thoughts again. Part of me wished to be inside those thoughts—to be somehow privy to the contemplations now passing through her head.

"I sometimes wonder, Reinhart," Edna continued, revealing some of her thoughts without my asking, "if, as we get older, we seem to slide closer to heaven—which, I suppose, means that we slide further away from things here on earth."

"Do you think that's why you aren't, well, mourning for Harold very much?"

"I honestly don't know. It's as if there are tides in the body that have an ebb and flow—like the ocean's tides. Through most of our lives they go up and down, just like the ocean—up and down, back and forth. Sometimes we're drawn closer to God; sometimes closer to people here, and things on earth. But as we grow older, the tides change. You don't notice it at first, but then one day you realize that you care more about the life after, than life now. The Spirit seems to work you steadily along toward God, until you eventually reach a

point where He becomes more important than anything—or anyone—else. Maybe I've reached the point where things here on earth—even important things like friendships and family—have now become secondary to things of God."

"Is that where you're finding your comfort?"

"I sometimes wonder, Reinhart, if, as we get older, we seem to slide closer to heaven—which, I suppose, means that we slide further away from things here on earth."

"It's just the way it is," she answered with a shrug of her bony shoulders.

"I think what I'm saying is that I've reached the point where I don't *need* so much comfort. The Spirit of God has become such a part of me that I no longer feel the need to reach out to Him for help. He's in my veins, every part of me."

"When you're younger," I posed, "you seem to lurch forward in life from one

crisis to another. Living seems to consist of survival—surviving between the peaks and valleys. In the valleys, you reach out to God for help; on the peaks, you think you don't need Him."

"And what I'm saying," Edna said excitedly, "—and, mind you, I think I'm just realizing this myself—is that some people who live with God for a long time reach a point where the peaks and valleys level out to a consistent, higher place. Not more righteous or good, just steadily closer to God.

"Don't get me wrong, Reinhart. I miss Harold terribly. I'd give just about anything to have him back with me."

"I believe you. I knew him."

"Better than having him back, I wish I'd gone with him. How perfect it would have been to enter our rest together."

Edna's face was painted with the warm glow from the windows, and if I didn't know better, I'd say she was stepping through the portals of heaven that moment. There was about her a warm aura of eternal light. It was contagious. I was jealous of what she had; without knowing it, I had been looking for a long time for the peace she described. ♦



The light in the church sanctuary was fading to that awkward level where one either had to turn on a light or leave. The window colors were deepening, being absorbed into the heavier shadows. It had been a long day for Edna Mae, and I imagined she was weary from both the physical and emotional strain of the funeral and burial. She seemed content to stay, however; her presence in the room was as organic and natural as the pulpit and baptistery. She belonged there. Regarding my own presence, on the other hand, I wasn't so sure.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE OR WHEN it had happened, but at some point the confines of God's house had become uncomfortable to me. Somewhere along the journey I had lost my connection to this place—and the God it was built to worship. Oh, I hadn't lost my salvation; the Spirit was still somewhere, buried deep inside. But it was as if I had lost my Father's phone number: He was still living in the same place, I was still living in the same place, but I had mislaid that slip of paper that told me how to reach Him.

I longed to be as Edna—so firmly rooted into this place that I not only knew the number to call, but the line was always held open, ready for immediate communication. I longed for God's house to be more familiar to me than the other dwellings of this world—hous-

es, cars, stadiums. I longed for her kind of faith, one that grew only stronger over time, more intimate with its Author. But I wasn't sure I could ever get back.

Her breathing changed, and when I glanced at Edna she was staring at me.

"I'm worried about you, Reinhart."

"Aw, I'll make it all right."

"You sure?"

"No." I could never lie to Edna Mae.

"I don't know much about your generation, Reinhart. I've never understood them. I wish they—I wish *you* could learn how to depend more on something outside of yourself."

"I did," I told her, "and I got burned."

"I don't mean other people," she shook her head, "although that's necessary too. No one ever makes it on their own; we need other people to hold us up. And I don't mean like the people in

the thirties came to think they couldn't do anything without the government's help. I don't mean that. But people who go through life refusing to reach out to anyone else eventually turn into dried up prunes who hate the whole world. They end up as grumpy old men who sit on their porches throwing rocks at dogs, yelling at kids who run across the corner of their lawn. They end up as sour, long-faced women hunched over their wheelchairs in nursing homes—friendless, angry, and out of their heads. I don't want you to end up like that, Reinhart."

"Oh, I'll get through this. I've learned a lot from having Andrea leave me. Maybe I'll do better the next time. I'll come through it. Besides, I love dogs," I chuckled with too much effort.

Edna took my hand in hers. Her eyes pierced through the fog and into my very soul. "Reinhart, trust *Him* again. You won't come through it on your own." She still gripped my hand tightly, as if reaching over the side of a boat to hold me up above waves threatening to pull me under. "I understand your anger, but you can't be mad at God."

"Why not?" I answered indignantly. "I thought He was supposed to be on my

side."

"Don't you think I want to be angry at Him over Harold? He's just taken half my life away! Don't you think I have the right?"

"Yes! And here you sit just taking it!"

She released my hand, and the air was cool against the damp left behind by her strong grip. I was immediately sorry for my last remark. Edna turned back to face the front of the church, and I wasn't sure whether she did so to turn back to God, or to turn away from me. We sat there, both staring forward in the dim stillness of the room, silent with our thoughts.

After quite a long time, Edna finally spoke. In a quiet voice, she began, "When I was a very little girl, one day our family visited some cousins out on their farm. It was all so new and fascinating for me, a city girl. The pens of hogs, the many cows out in the pasture, the huge barn filled with hay up in the loft, the shiny, red-handled well pump sitting in the middle of the farmyard—I thought it was the most wondrous thing I could imagine. I spent the whole day running here and there, discovering

new and wonderful things.

"Near the end of the day, about the time we were to leave, I discovered an old abandoned well out behind the house. I thought it was lovely—just like in the storybooks—made of old stones arranged in a high circle, an old wooden crank to raise and lower the bucket... Somehow I worked myself up on top of those stones, so I could look down into that well. Oh, it was a frightful thing! Below me yawned this bottomless black hole. I couldn't imagine anything more horrible. It seemed to be something living, breathing, that wanted to suck me down into it.

"I was so afraid—almost petrified with fear. I turned to jump down off the edge of the well—but somehow my foot slipped, and I fell backwards, down *into* the well. It all happened so fast! I can't tell you how, but somehow I was able to grab hold of a thick tree root that had grown through the rock wall of the well, just at ground level. And I hung there, dangling over that blackness, screaming my head off.

"My father heard my screams. It seemed an eternity at the time, but I'm sure he was there in mere seconds. I

was so scared. I couldn't move. But I heard him call my name. He kept telling me to look up at him. 'I'm right here, Edna. I'm right here, Honey,' he kept saying. I was too scared to move, but I forced myself to look up at him. Oh, I was never so glad to see anyone in my life! But he seemed so far away. My father was hanging over the stone wall, reaching his arm down toward me, but he still seemed so far away. He couldn't quite reach me.

"Take my hand, Edna. Just take my hand,' he told me, but I was petrified. I was gripping that tree root so tightly, I couldn't let go. And after playing all day, I was so tired—my arms were so tired. His big hand was just inches above mine, within easy reach. I could see his strong, sunburned arm, and I knew that if I could just take hold of him, I'd be safe. But I also knew that I needed both hands to hold me up—I just knew that if I released one hand to reach up to my father, I'd slip off that tree root, and plummet into the black pit. So I didn't dare let go!

"I was stuck, and didn't know what to do. But then my father spoke again. With a very calm, reassuring voice, he

said, 'Edna, look up at me.' I did—I looked up into his face, his eyes. They were warm, and comforting, and seemed to lift me up by their power. I loved my father so much, and I just knew he would take care of me. 'Now Edna,' he said, again in a strong, controlled voice, 'I want you to take my hand. Don't think about anything else.

"Take my hand, Edna. Just take my hand,' he told me, but I was petrified. I was gripping that tree root so tightly, I couldn't let go."

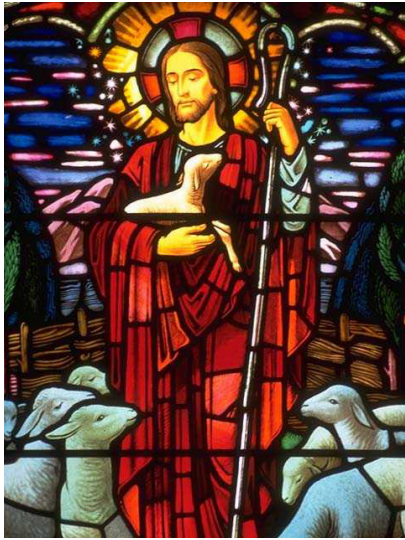
Just take my hand.' I did what he said. Without another thought I let go of the tree root that had been holding me up and reached for my father's hand. In an instant my small weak hand was taken into his powerful hand, and before I knew it, I was up and out of that pit, huddled in his strong arms, crying my heart out."

Edna Mae once again took my hand into hers. "Reinhart, for me that mem-

ory has always been the picture of the trust I must have in my heavenly Father. He really isn't interested in all my excuses, my small fears—even the foolish things I've done that got me into trouble. He doesn't want me to worry about all the things that might happen to me. He just wants me to look up into His face, let go of every earthly crutch holding me up—and in total, absolute trust, take His hand." ♦

The LORD also will be a stronghold for the oppressed,
A stronghold in times of trouble;
And those who know Your name will put their trust in You,
For You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.

Psalm 9:7-10



“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”

John 10:11, 14-16

MY HEART ACHED from the force of my emotions. I so much wanted to live like that, to take His hand and keep hold of it, to once again plant my feet on His foundation. But over the years my pride had built up like a thick shell over my skin, so that all expectations were fulfilled by the one *inside*, rather than anyone else outside. Like the little boy in the plastic bubble, I had built my own little world about me, one which no longer could include someone greater than myself.

But living in that bubble had sapped all my energy and hope. Having nothing available to replace spent power, I had run dry—I had used up everything I had. Unlike me, Edna Mae never ran out, because she had always stayed connected with the power source. She had never let go of His hand. She had just

lost her closest earthly friend, but she still had hold of her heavenly one—and the stronger of the two. And what I now realized was that Edna had remained closer to the One who was left. She had trusted them both, but had always trusted her God more.

I wanted to know that trust again. I desperately needed someone stronger than myself. Living on my own strength had been a futile exercise, stupid, and self-defeating. I wanted to carry around with me the same kind of peace Edna knew, that internal connection to the God with the strong arms and loving hands, the God we could trust to never let go.

With my heart so full, there was little I could say to Edna. With my hand still clutched in hers, I said, in a hoarse whisper, “Thank you. Thank you, Edna.” She

smiled, and for the first time that day I saw a tear leave her eye and spill down her wrinkled cheek.

“Thank *Him*, Reinhart,” she said. “Thank *Him*.”

We left together, feeling our way down the darkened aisle. The colored lights had faded from the room, left now only upon the surface of the heavy, leaded glass. The images they created there, so high up the walls, back lit by the dying evening sun, receded into themselves, no longer sending their light into the room. The strong timbers holding up the ceiling were back in place, no longer threatening to descend upon my head. The dry, old air of the church

seemed once again familiar, comfortable—that smell of old hymnals and tiny rooms where little boys and girls in miniature chairs learned about Jesus.

I could trust Him again, and that, too, felt comfortably familiar. He had never left my side, but had remained close by, stretching out His strong arm, begging me to trust Him again, to place my hand in His. I had been dangling over the black hole of despair, holding onto the rotting roots of the earth, and through the old voice of a dear friend I had heard His voice calling to me to let go—to trust.

And it was good to be back in His arms. ♦

***Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh;
His sight is never dim.
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.***

Anna Laetitia Waring