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# Home to HARMONY



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By Philip Gulley

When I was in the second grade, my teacher, Miss Maxwell, read from The Harmony Herald that one in every four children lived in China. I remember looking over the room, guessing which children they might be. I wasn't sure where China was, but suspected it was on bus route three. I recall being grateful I didn't live in China because I didn't care for Chinese food and couldn't speak the language.

I liked living where I did, in Harmony. I liked that the Dairy Queen sold ice cream cones for a dime. I liked that I could ride my Schwinn Typhoon there without crossing Main Street, which my mother didn't allow.

I liked that I lived four blocks from the Kroger grocery store, where every spring they stacked bags of peat moss out front. My brother and I would climb on the bags and vault from stack to stack. Once, on a particularly high leap, my brother hit the K in KROGER with his head, causing the neon tube to shatter. For the next year, the sign flashed ROGER, which we considered an amazing coincidence since that was my brother's name. He liked to pass by at night and see his name in lights.

I liked that we had no curfew and after a certain age could wander anywhere in town we pleased. My parents were not lax; this was the usual order of things in our town. Harmony presented so few temptations that it took a resourceful person to find trouble, and we were not that clever. This was a burden to us. We wanted to wreak havoc and be feared as hoodlums, but the town would not cooperate.

Most of all, I liked that Harmony sat on Highway 36, which began in Roanoke, Ohio, near the Cy Young Memorial and ran west through Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas to Commanche Crossing, Colorado. There was a map at the Rexall drugstore that showed all the towns along Highway 36 with a gold star stuck on Harmony. Most folks

don't know about us because, when you open the Rand McNally map to our state, we're hidden underneath the left staple. That's fine with us. We're modest people, inclined to shun attention.

On summer days I would sit on the bench in front of the Rexall and eat Milk Duds and watch the license plates. Then I would pedal home and eat Sugar Pops cereal down to the bottom of the box, to the free license plate in every box! I would reach down, pluck out that license plate, blow the sugar off, then hang it from my bicycle seat and pretend I was from Rhode Island or Arizona or wherever the license plate dictated.

But pretending was as far as it went. I never wanted to live anywhere but Harmony. When I went away to college and other students asked me where I wanted to live after school, I would tell them Harmony. They said I lacked ambition, which wasn't true. They confused contentment for stagnation, a common mistake. Even at that young age I knew contentment was a rare gift and saw no need to seek it elsewhere when I had found it in Harmony.

On my first Sunday back after college, Dale Hinshaw, an elder of the Harmony Friends Meeting, asked me what I was going to do with my life. I had given considerable thought to that question but hadn't reached any conclusions. I told Dale I wasn't sure, but when I found out I'd be sure to let him know.

That was when Dale prophesied that God was calling me to the ministry.

"Sam Gardner," he declared, "the fields are ripe for harvest. Go ye into the fields."

I took him seriously, for Dale Hinshaw was rumored to be wise, though I would learn later that rumors of his wisdom were circulated only by persons who did not know him well.

I went to seminary, despite Dale's warning that theological training would be my undoing. He said, "You don't want to go there. That's a nest of atheists at that school. They talk about God being dead. Boy, won't they be surprised."

According to Dale, God was going to surprise a lot of people.

But I went to seminary anyway, graduated after four years, then took a church in the next state over, where I pastored twelve years before leaving for health reasons: I was sick of them and they were sick of me.

I had met my wife in college. Her name was Barbara, and she was the first woman besides my mother to show the faintest interest in me. It took six years to persuade her to marry me. What I lacked in charm I made up for in persistence, and I finally wore her down. We had two sons, Levi and Addison.

Now I was taking my family to live with my parents in Harmony. I was sorely depressed. Thirty-eight years old, married with two children, and living with my parents.

I began praying God would provide a job. I prayed every day. I wasn't picky -- any job would do. In the thick of my prayers, Pastor Taylor of Harmony Friends Meeting died. Both his parents had died of heart problems, which he feared would happen to him, so he'd begun to jog and was hit by a truck. This was not the answer to prayer I had envisioned, and I went to Pastor Taylor's funeral burdened with guilt.

He was buried the week before Easter. The church held a meeting to decide what to do. Fern Hampton, president of the Friendly Women's Circle, seemed less concerned with Pastor Taylor's death and more concerned with his poor timing.

"For a minister, that was pretty inconsiderate of him to go and get killed during Lent," she...