

# The TIMES of HALCOTT

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*Russell Bouton, Halcott Highway Superintendent, Photo taken by Greg Beechler*

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## RUSSELL'S ROADS

Last autumn, *The Times of Halcott* ran stories on many of our town officials, to introduce them as well as their jobs to our readers. We left out the Highway Superintendent, figuring that we needed a larger space to cover the works and wonders of Russell Bouton. His story is all about our roads. How often have visitors in winter jumped out of their cars to exclaim. "Boy, your roads are so much better than the ones down below!" It makes me proud. Our roads are well cared for, and it is thanks

to our highway crew and our Superintendent in particular. Russell's winter days usually begin around 3 in the morning when he gets up to check the weather. Often, he doesn't get back to sleep until the following evening. On a very windy October morning before dawn last fall, I was coming out of Halcott. The Town truck passed me, driving slowly along the roads looking for downed tree limbs. By the time the town would be awake and ready for the commute to work, Russell and highway worker Greg Finch wanted to have the roads ready to re-

ceive our traffic.

Summer weather presents its own dangers. Although Russell can count on snow not being a problem, yet heavy rains have consequences as well. Drainage ditches and culverts get blocked and can bring water onto the roadways. Many a morning Russell will be "turning water," unblocking culverts and re-directing run-off. The morning before Irene hit, no one knew quite what to expect, but Russell and Greg were busy moving the highway machinery to higher ground. Because of this safety precaution, Halcott had no damaged vehicles. Throughout the storm the two men were working hard to try to alleviate the situation. As the water coursed down County Route 3, Russell was prepared to rescue affected residents with the loader. Imagine riding to safety in the bucket of a Town machine!

Halcott is blessed to have such dedication. Town Councilman Alan Reynolds commented to me that Russell was a very hard worker, that when problems come up, he's always there. Others, too, have noticed how accessible Russell is. This is so important when emergencies happen. And in the spirit of this small town, Russell gets it done without worrying about the "by the book" procedure. Several times in the past, when a Town machine has been "down," Russell has brought in his own machinery to get the job done.

This has been a brutal winter. You can tell from the Highway fax machine that has run out of ink from all the bad weather reports received. You can tell from the way, way-below-zero early

morning temps we keep waking up to. You can tell from the many hours of overtime that our highway workers are putting in. But you can't tell from the roads. They are as neat and prim as ever, the pride of our Highway Superintendent. **IK**

## A BEAVER TAIL

For some reason Michael decided to cut wood down by the beaver pond that Saturday afternoon in early December, where he's never cut before. But there he was, sawing away, and something dark near the pond caught his attention. Upon investigation he found what turned out to be

a



mud-covered beaver upside-down in a hole at the bottom of a 7' ash tree. It didn't make sense – she was alive, but stuck, and didn't move. Was she somehow caught in a trap? And where was her tail???

He came up to the house for a blanket, a knife, a rope, a shovel, and a camera, and back down the hill we went. After some digging, we were able to flip her over and found that her tail was pinned beneath the ash tree! A closer investigation of the scene revealed the sequence of events: she had been gnawing the ash, which then

tipped into an adjacent tree and got hung up. She then gnawed a second cut about 10" higher, at which time the bottom kicked out and landed on her tail, pinning it to the ground. Judging from the size of the hole she'd dug, the new snow, and the amount of bark she'd eaten – as far up the tree as she could reach – it looked like she'd been there for a couple of days.

Now, to figure out a solution.

How could we cut the tree without having it fall on her? We tied the top to another tree and prepared to cut. Just then Kane came down, and said he thought he could move the tree. So we covered her with the blanket in order to handle her, Kane gave the tree a bear hug and lifted it a few inches off the ground, and Michael slid her tail out. We uncovered her, stepped back, and left her alone. She sat up on her hind legs, clasped her front paws together, and bowed as if to say "Thank you". (Actually, she was cleaning her paws, but at that point it was impossible not to anthropomorphize.) We left her to her own devices, and in half an hour her tracks led back into the pond. **PD**

## Memories

### *Pam Kelly*

Remembering that the first **Times of Halcott** was printed the year Julian Rauter was born, (1997) made me think about him growing up in 'my' house. Jim and Karen bought the home my brother and I grew up in. So Julian started his life there as a newborn, as my brother, Paul and I did. Paul was born at the end of WWII, in May, 1944. I was born in March, 1950. When I was living there and was the same age Julian is now, these

are some things I remember:

...Many, many years of catching the school bus at the end of my driveway.

...My cousin, Larry Johnson, and I taking leisurely summer walks to Uncle Smith and Aunt Ethel's Post Office/store to buy nickel candy. No thoughts of "stranger danger," the shaded Halcott roadway more narrow, the drivers in less of a hurry than



*Thorn Moseman Post Office*

now.

...Bouffant hair dos were in style. Which meant setting our hair with curlers every night.

...We girls were piercing each other's ears, using a needle, a cork or potato, and string, which was pulled through the ear lobe and tied. You had to pull the string through the pierced hole several times a day until healed. This prevented the string from growing fast. My dad had a fit (which was part of the appeal of having them done). I tried piercing them myself. When I couldn't push the needle through the back of my ear lobe, I asked my mom for help. After all, she was an R.N. and I figured nothing could shake her. I still remember her face when I walked up to her, needle sticking out of my ear lobe. She sort of blanched

and quickly called our neighbor and friend, Doris Reynolds. She did an expert job of piercing both my ears. I now felt part of the 'in crowd.'

...The Beatles were 'king.'

... Our school had two sports; baseball and basketball (boys only, of course). I loved looking forward to the winter Friday night basketball games. Doris' husband, Odell, was our bus driver for school in the winter (our regular bus driver, Louie, was in Florida.) Odell also drove bus for the away games. The bus was packed, and it was an exciting time. Sometimes if our team won, we'd stop at the Inn Between restaurant in Margaretville. It was there I first tasted a wonderful new treat... pizza pie.

... My friends Linda Kelly (Armour) and



Missy Haynes (Correia) having "pajama parties". We recall one time having an overzealous pillow fight which resulted in my bedroom window getting smashed. Not to worry, my mom didn't get upset over those things. It got repaired eventually.

...Linda and I making our own version of 'pizza', utilizing whatever we could find

in my mom's cupboards. If we didn't have an Apian Way pizza mix, we'd often use homemade biscuit dough, and one time, a can of vegetable soup as a topping. You can tell, we really took to the 'new to us' pizza pie.

... Riding my horse, Babe, countless miles over the back roads and through the beautiful meadows (wary of woodchuck holes). I'm so thankful I had that opportunity. Nature was already taking over the meadows with saplings and hard hack, but the view was still outstanding. I used to ponder the wonder of the miles of stone walls. How many sore fingers and backs were the result. Works of art meandering through the woods, almost totally hidden now. Even as a goofy teen, I tried to appreciate the work that went into creating them. I now think, yes, "made in America!!" I miss those rides and my



horse, Babe.

...I learned to drive at age 16, using my parents' 1960 Buick Invicta, (too much horsepower), V8 engine, gas 30 cents a gallon. The radio did not work. Oh, the

transmission was not reliable, no reverse gear. Which made you mindful of where you parked!!

...Our antenna TV got one station, NBC. Laugh In and Dean Martin were weekly staples. Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs was on TV every morning when I left for school.

...Best radio station was WABC, out of NYC. Second best was WKBW, out of Buffalo that only got reception at night. Listening to these, as a teen, meant a connection to "the outside world"----groovy!!

...My brother joined the Navy during those years. We took some trips to visit him in Nashville, Tn. and Pensacola, Fl.... a long way from Halcott Center.

...One heavy snow fall my brother plowed the driveway and around our house with the bulldozer. I'm sure it was a great deal of fun for him-and made for some great slide pictures.

...We had a little black dog, Trixie. When I was about 3, I reached into a basket of black puppies, picked her up and handed her to my mom. This basket of pups was placed in back of Bernie Wadler's pickup truck when he and my dad had gone to an auction. They didn't notice the basket until they got back home to Bernie's, up in Elk Creek. So, Bernie was anxious to get rid of them, and we were the lucky recipients of one. We all loved Trixie. She was an important part of our family for 12 years, until she passed into doggie heaven.

...Paul and I both graduated from Fleischmanns High School. He in 1962 and me in the last class to graduate from FHS, 1968.

The memories are priceless, and my kids

and I are so thankful Jim, Karen and Julian have 'our' house. My kids remember it as a haven where grandpa Garold and grandma Lena resided, a magical place with no limits on cookies and soda, no specified bedtimes. A whole new generation of priceless memories began. In those days, there were no high paying jobs in the area, that I knew of, but we could be considered 'rich' in that we had neighbors we could trust and rely upon. Our house did not have doors that locked, and the car keys always remained in the ignition. That's hard to fathom in about any community in 2014.

### **Sleigh bells Marc Neves**

This past February 1st, the Halcott Community Fund, along with the help of Seth Finch, town volunteers and a pair of very able Percheron draft horses, provided horse-drawn sleigh rides to about 20 hardy children and adults who braved a chilly grey winter day to experience winter transportation at its most romantic. While, to many, this winter has provided more than its fair share of snow and cold, this was one day when fingers were crossed for a generous white thoroughfare for Seth's restored vintage sleigh. And Jack Frost did not disappoint. One of the many snow storms we have been treated to this winter had swept through town the previous week and covered the valley with the perfect amount of snow to allow passage. Riders gathered at the Grange where Pete Ballard had assembled a small bonfire to keep everyone warm while they waited their turn for a ride. The sleigh arrived in front of the DiBenedetto's dairy barn, pulled by a

team of horses decked out in tack that could only be described as their Sunday best and, literally, with bells on. One grey dappled and one solid black, the horses, with steam coming out of their nostrils, seemed to enthusiastically anticipate their

task as about 10 riders climbed up onto a vehicle that looked like a buckboard with sleigh runners.

Perched comfortably on hay-bale benches, we pulled out of the barn yard and headed for the flats behind the Grange. Down the hill, over the bridge and past the community garden we went, traveling at quite an impressive speed for a two horsepower sled. Once out in the cow pasture, we drew a broad circle of a route before coming to a stop in the center of the field to take in the spectacular beauty that this simple outing presented. Those of us who had never had the occasion via farming or snowmobiling to see this perspective on our town could only marvel. Here we were, in the depths of winter, in a scene straight out Tolstoy, sitting in a virtual nest of snow-covered mountains. It was a perfect reminder that, in spite of its hassles, its cold, its darkness, winter has its charms and this rare moment of contemplation, sitting out in



the middle of a field on a cold winter afternoon, allowed us to appreciate that. But cold is cold and soon we were heading back to the comfort of hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows by the bonfire. Thanks to everyone who worked to make this happen and to all who contributed to the Halcott Community Fund.

## CUT OFF

Even a brief look at a map of Greene County will show the isolation of Halcott from the rest of the county. We are cut off by a formidable chain of mountains that forbid the building and maintenance of connecting roads. So a trip to our county seat, Catskill, takes over an hour as we go through two other counties, Delaware and Ulster just to get back into Greene. No one seems to mind the trip terribly, and yet there are many Greene County services unavailable to us, that our taxes help to pay for. In an effort to make our situation more fair, County officials have been very helpful in trying to bridge the geographical divide. Halcott has received a stipend to help pay for ambulance service for the last 5 or 6 years. Last June, Bob VanValkenburg, Director of Greene County Solid Waste, helped us

Dear Friends of Halcott:

Every year the Halcott Community Fund, parent to *The Times of Halcott*, asks for a donation from our readers to help fund the expenses associated with printing and mailing this newsletter. With any money left over, we contribute to local causes in our area such as the Fleischmanns Fire Department, the Margaretville Auxiliary, scholarships for MCS kids and ongoing maintenance for our Grange Hall.

Last year, because of your generous support, HCF was able to pay for new flooring downstairs and a new storage cupboard all along the back of the stage upstairs. Both improvements will make the lives of the volunteers who work the various programs and projects at the Grange during the year much easier! Halcott is blessed with many dedicated people and together with a small pot of money, we can keep our town sparkling. Come to the Halcott Fair, always the third Saturday in July, this year the 19th and see the improvements, enjoy good music, wonderful food and grand company. And as always, we thank you for your support.

HCF Presidents,  
Jenn Bouton & Kari Pagnano

to organize a Clean Sweep afternoon, where hazardous household waste was collected down at the highway garage. A steady stream of cars loaded with "bad" trash came through, thankful for the opportunity to get rid of this stuff.

Greene County picks up our recyclables and hauls them to Hunter. And two years ago, they gave us a dumpster for trash haulers to fill. We pay the tipping fee of dumping this trash, about 25 tons a year, but Greene County hauls it to

Hunter free of charge.

Speaking of **TRASH** and also as a result of our being so far from the rest of the County, Halcott is now offering further services to our townspeople. Beginning March 9<sup>th</sup>, the Town branched out even more into the trashy world of transfer stations. Hiring Norika Zellner to oversee the project, the Town Board set up a weekly collection of household garbage for those who do not use a hauler, so that Halcott homeowners and renters can now dispose of their trash them-

selves. From 10 AM til noon on Sundays, Halcott residents (only) may deposit clear plastic bags of trash at \$3.00 a bag at the Highway Garage. Norika will be there to help with questions and punch your card. No cash will be accepted at the site. On the advice of Greene County, we have established a punch card system. Only those with a punch card may use the transfer station. Punch cards are available from Town Clerk Pattie Warfield at \$9 a card (for 3 bags of trash) or at \$10 a card from Sam's Country Store. No punch cards will be available at the transfer station. This is a new project and we ask your indulgence as we smooth out any wrinkles. The timing may be changed if it doesn't suit our "customers," so please watch the Halcott website or call our clerk Pattie Warfield to check that the hours remain the same.

Another service offered through the County that is an awkward fit for the geographic realities of Halcott is the 911 system. Our 911 emergency response system is located in Catskill. Recently, the Town Board requested Greene County to arrange to have all of Halcott's 911 calls routed first to Delaware County. Law enforcement calls would continue to be handled by the Greene County Sheriff's Office. Greene County Emergency Services Director John Farrell and Greene County Sheriff Greg Seeley met with their Delaware County counterparts and began to set the plan into motion. Everyone is in agreement that when an emergency vehicle is needed for Halcott, Delaware County services are closer! Hopefully, the change will be seamless and 911 users will not feel any difference except for a slightly speedier response time.

**IK**

## **NEW TOWN OFFICIALS**

Pattie

Warfield is our new town clerk, taking over the office from Elena DiBenedetto this past January. Pattie has set up office hours in the Clerk's office



located on the lower floor of the Grange Hall every Wednesday afternoon, from 3 to 5, and the third Saturday of the month, from 10AM to noon. Drop by and visit! Pattie is enthusiastic and ready to help solve any problem!

John Mathiesen is our new Code Enforcement Officer. His daytime job is as CEO in Delhi, but he is free most afternoons to visit Halcott when necessary. He can be reached at 586-2074, where you can leave a message for him to call back. Or, you can email him at [mathiesen@catskill.net](mailto:mathiesen@catskill.net) John is a pleasure to work with and brings welcome years of experience to the job. He tells me that even though he's only been our CEO for a few months, he already has contractors calling him for jobs in Halcott. Hooray!

## **PRUDENT OR PROFLIGATE?**

On this wintry day of cold hands and pale sunlight, remembering the growing season brings warmth to the heart. Halcott gardeners have some options when

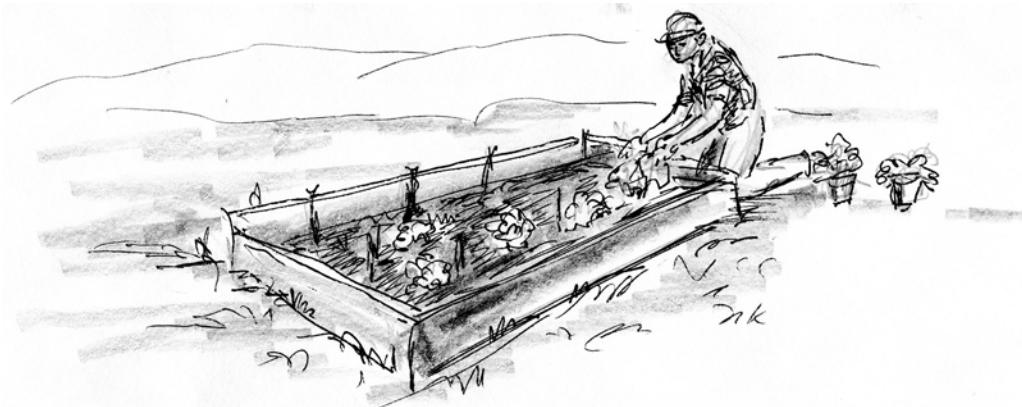
planning their plantings, options which depend largely on our personalities. We can sprout seeds under lights indoors to transplant out after the last frost (cost about \$4 for about 20 plants). Or, we can go to one of the many delightfully tantalizing nurseries closer to planting date for our plants (cost about \$20 for 4 plants.) The most fun is to give yourself permission to do both. You tell yourself smugly that you're saving money when you cast seeds into little plastic pots. (Waiting for them to poke their heads through the soil is interminable. I have been known to dig

through  
the soil  
with  
my finger to  
find out  
if they  
are still  
in  
there.)  
And  
then

you can tell yourself equally as smugly, standing at the parking lot of a nursery, that you have a right to spend all the money you saved. "And besides," you add judiciously, "Who knows whether those seedlings will ever mature?" Perfidious planter!

A gardener's eyes will shine when offered a visit to a nursery. I can say with pride that I am a connoisseur of all the local nurseries. Take Mrs. Todd's, for instance. I can count on her having an artlessly arranged array of marigolds and geraniums to make my heart race. Her

tomato plants are so healthy and local that they hardly bat an eye when I plop them into their new home. I visit Todd's Nursery early and often. This past year, Laura and I discovered a wonderful, undersung, tucked-away nursery that sells only hostas. Oh, hostas! Never mind that my husband sniffs at them, dismissively referring to them as "skunk cabbage." Never mind that they are the preferred dessert of deer. They are the perfect plant for a shady spot. They come in such a satisfying multitude of greens, blue-greens, yellow-greens, crinkled leaves, striped leaves,



tiny leaves, huge leaves. Everyone should have a collection of hostas. Look for the modest sign "Hostas" in Shokan as you go along Rte 28 towards Kingston; the sign is on the left, but points to the right.

Even big box stores such as Lowe's offer solace to the gardener within. They often run sales on amazing amounts of impatiens or begonias, as if they understood the need of the conscientious gardener to create large bright splashes of color in order to please.

How do we choose? I design my beds on paper and dutifully carry my notes to

the nursery. But who am I kidding? Prudence falls away as I make my choices by what delights my eye, not by what is needed for the design. One of my favorite houses of ill repute is Kerns Nursery in Jewett, which carries a collection of enticing gems that beckon like painted women. Treat yourself to a visit to Kerns this spring and breathe in the luxury of being in the presence of a true plant-artist. Pat Kerns spends much of the winter crooning over such delicacies as dahlias and daylilies, forcing them to bloom early enough to create an outrageous display. Her show garden which surrounds her house is a collection of shameless hussies, all assuring me that they would look smashing in my garden. I forget the puny little 4-leaved things I have sprouting at home, that promise to be zinnias and marigolds perhaps by August, maybe. I forget the small price I paid for a packet of seeds. I forget prudence. I pack the back of the GMC Terrain with bold color, delicate stems, and waving Echinacea. This year will be the best ever, my profligate

soul declares as I carefully take the turns back to Halcott. *IK*.

## PASSAGES

There are no births, marriages, or other life passages to report in this issue, but I do wish to pass along to our readers that two of our oldest and most faithful servants here in Halcott, Paul and Lillian Steinfeld, are still happily living in their little cottage up Steinfeld Rd. Paul has contributed to these pages many times, and Lil is a constant source of love and strength. People always ask us, "What do you DO up there?" In his earlier Halcott days, Paul sat on the board of the hospital, ran a charity that supported a Biblical Garden in Israel, and grafted apple trees. Lil edited books for a large publishing house. What do we do up here, indeed! Today, they are "fragiling down," as a friend once said, and with a gentle grace that is such an example! Their continued presence reminds us that it takes a community to support a community, and Paul and Lil are supported by the many and

willing hands of neighbors, a wonderful mail carrier, and phoning friends. They will be ninety-five this year. Isn't it extraordinary that, without fume or fuss, they live each day, loving their Halcott, and being loved by their Halcott? *IK*



*View from Steinfeld living room of "Lake Lillian" and Vly Mt.*



# The Times of the Halcott Methodist Church

## Spring, 2014 *Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*

### 2014 Church Suppers

We will be taking the heat out of the kitchen by moving the Spaghetti Supper to spring and the Super Salad Supper to summer. Do mark your calendars for the:

Spaghetti Supper  
Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, Grange Hall  
Take Outs 4:30 p.m., Sit Down 5:00 p.m.  
Adults \$7.00, Under age 5 Free

### Sunday School

Students had as much fun making Valentines as Mountainside residents had receiving them. Now they want to make Easter cards for their older acquaintances. Along the way, a special Easter egg kit will help students learn about the events of Holy Week. To take part, please call for details.

The Fleischmanns Community Church has offered to hold a combined Vacation Bible School with the Halcott Sunday School again this summer. All are welcome. Details should be available in the next issue.

We are still collecting Campbell's labels, Box Tops for Education and pull tabs from cans for school and missions. Your contributions will be appreciated.

### Lenten Lunch Schedule

Lunches are being held at noon on Wednesdays in Lent. Locations and speakers vary. All are invited. Free will offerings will go to missions.

March 12 – Roxbury United Methodist Church  
March 19 – Halcott United Methodist Church at the Grange Hall  
March 26 – Fleischmanns Community Church  
April 2 – Andes United Methodist Church

The series concludes with a dish-to-pass Lenten Supper on Thursday, April 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. in the Margaretville United Methodist Church.

### Worship Services for Holy Week

"Could you not watch with me one hour?" Jesus asked the disciples who fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed prior to His arrest. Our local worship opportunities are as follows:

March 5<sup>th</sup> – Ash Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., Halcott United Methodist Church  
April 13<sup>th</sup> – Palm Sunday, 6:00 p.m., Halcott United Methodist Church

April 17<sup>th</sup> – Maundy Thursday, 7:00 p.m., Fleischmanns Community Church

April 18<sup>th</sup> – Good Friday, 7:00 p.m., Halcott United Methodist Church

April 20<sup>th</sup> – Easter Sunday, (time TBA), Halcott United Methodist Church

### Three Reflections for Easter

The numeral 3 figures prominently in Biblical narratives including those of Holy Week – 3 crosses, 3 hours on the cross, 3 days in the grave, and so on. So it seems fitting to write 3 brief reflections for Lent.

#### Mary's Ponderings

Several baby cards have been sent from church the past few months. Quite a few parents must have been wondering who their offspring would look like. I'm told that my grandfather carefully inspected each pair of ears that came into the world. We have no idea why, but he seemed to have been satisfied, eight times over! All of this leads me to consider the appearance of Jesus, son of God. Now that's a puzzle, since no one knows what God looks like. Yet since Jesus was also Mary's son, His human family tree contributed heavily to His physical characteristics. Were these among the many things Mary pondered in her heart? Did she recognize something of her parents or siblings in the tilt of His chin or the shape of His eyes? Did she perhaps notice something of herself in the spacing of His teeth or the height of His forehead? Without photographs to consult, could Mary have detected a faint foreign resemblance, perhaps to Ruth the Moabitess? Could she have attributed His height to stalwart forebear, King David?

In like manner, the character traits of God, the Father, were inherited by Jesus. By the time He was 12, Mary noticed in Him the same extraordinary wisdom King Solomon had been given by God. Did Jesus' later deliberations with the self righteous religious scholars of the day cause the pulse of this mother to quicken with concern for His safety? Did she marvel at the level of compassion He showed "the least of these", knowing how exhausting it was to help streams of people day after day? Was she concerned about how long this pace could last? Did she dare to wonder how it would all end?

Each of us is the child of two earthly parents. Yet we also have a heavenly Father. Through faith we become His children. Once adopted by God, Jesus becomes our

brother. As His siblings, we become joint heirs to God's Kingdom – an unbelievable honor; a sobering responsibility. Is it no surprise, then, that we are to study the life of Jesus so that we can follow His example?

#### Jesus Would Never Rise to the Bait

This is the hardest topic to address, because it is so hard to accomplish. The human side of Jesus certainly found such discipline a challenge at times. After all, He was tempted by Satan three times in the wilderness. Even though Jesus' virtuous response was one of steadfast allegiance to the Father, use of the word "tempted" tells us the bait held a measure of attraction.

This time of testing provided important practice for the questions the religious leaders would later use to set their traps. They not only knew of Jesus' comings and goings, they followed Him around. As they scrutinized His behavior, they asked why He ate with tax collectors and sinners. They insisted He provide signs from heaven, scolded Him for healing on the Sabbath and quizzed Him on the fine points of the law. The bolder they got, the more dangerous they became.

Jesus didn't tell them where to get off or curse them out, but he was no milquetoast, either. Instead, He answered each question skillfully in ways these learned scholars could not refute. Such was His intimate knowledge of the scriptures – and His restraint.

Therein lies our own life task – to grow in the knowledge of scripture and to seek Jesus' help as we practice restraint. It's the best way to stare down the bait!

#### A Picture Is Worth a Thousand . . . Comforts?

Physical death may be the natural conclusion of physical life, but the loss of a child is especially painful. As Shirley Bouton would remind us about depar-

ture, "The old must and the young may." Some grieving mothers experience the bittersweet anguish of being present for the last breath, just as they were for the first breath. Others feel the agony of not being present to say good-bye, knowing that Jesus had to offer this final comfort without them. Well, Mary was present. She heard the lies. She witnessed the torture. She was unable to change the course of events.

A contemporary pieta (artistic representation of Mary grieving over the body of Jesus) by Canadian watercolorist, Leszek Forczek, blends the concept of comfort for the dying with comfort for the grieving. Mary's comfort comes from an unusual element in this pieta – a brave friend who does not abandon her in her darkest hour. Equally unusual: both women are encompassed by the light, power and tenderness of the Spirit of God. In contrast to a traditional pieta, Mary is not abandoned in her grief!

We, too, are called to shed our fears and ignore our schedules when friends are grieving. Jesus will be there offering comfort, but we are part of the picture, as well. Former pastor, Ralph Darmstadt, once impressed upon us the importance of leaving no one alone in the final hours. While Jesus is always with us, Ralph felt there should be a human presence, too. He shared beautifully at the recent funeral of Hazel Crosby, how her caregivers had stayed with her throughout a brief hospital stay. Hazel had never been hospitalized and they didn't want her to be frightened. So they surrounded her with love until her leave-taking. This act of kindness was a powerful witness of hope for him.

We probably don't realize the impact we have as hope-givers. Yet each one of us is deeply needed – through our prayers and our presence, even when we can only be there long distance. No gesture of the compassion of Jesus is insignificant.