

The (wintry) TIMES of HALCOTT

Winter, 2013
Vol 65



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Adventures and Technology *Alan Reynolds*

Greene County received the 911 call. Using his cell phone, the Lowe's delivery truck driver reported that because of poor road conditions and a tree blocking his way he couldn't continue. Somewhere in the conversation Johnson Hollow Road was mentioned so the dispatcher, knowing that Johnson Hollow Road was off State Route 23 in Prattsville, called Dennis Hull at Randy's Transmission. Dennis headed for Johnson Hollow with his wrecker to help the driver. Sometime later, having made several trips over that road, he was unable to locate the problem.

Greene County then contacted Delaware County. Erickson's, in Arkville was called to see if they might be able to help.

Bob Erickson talked to the driver, on the cell phone, to clarify a location

and in this conversation the driver told Bob that he had made a delivery in Halcott and got directions back to Oneonta from his GPS. One of the things he remembered was going past a Tar Paper Shack. Right away Bob knew what had happened.

The Tar Paper Shack, a sort of hunting cabin, has been a Halcott landmark for many years. It sits at the top of Greene County Route 3 in the saddle between Vly Mountain and Bear Pen. The portion of County 3 from Rolf Brunner's, in Halcott, to the Jaeger farm, in Prattsville, once one of the main routes into Halcott, has been largely unmaintained and unused for generations. Although the Halcott side has a fairly reasonable grade and stays in pretty good shape, the Prattsville side is steep. In early town history it was not a problem for horse traffic, but the advent of motor vehicles made the route impractical. Today it gets some use by loggers, who may be working near the road, and some

snowmobilers and ATV users, but little else. Remember, too, that the incident we're exploring took place after the 2011 flood, so the Prattsville side of County 3 had serious washouts.

Bob Erickson and his helper Rob took his wrecker to the Tar Paper Shack and, knowing the impracticality of trying to go any further, started walking down the other side. They were amazed that anyone, especially in a truck, would have gone past Rolf Brunner's place seeing the condition of the road where it starts up grade, and even more amazed that they wouldn't have turned around at the shack after having gotten that far. Once you leave the shack and start down toward Prattsville there's no turning back and they were absolutely incredulous that a vehicle could have gotten very far down that stretch of road that even ATV operators had called difficult, but they were close to the bottom before they reached the stranded truck. The truck driver had been stopped where he was because the truck body had gotten hung up under a tree that was leaning sharply over the trail.

By this time it was getting late and approaching a frosty night. Bob knew that there wasn't enough time to deal with the problem that day so they decided to do it the next morning. Bob and Rob, along with the Lowe's driver and his helper walked back up mountain to Bob's wrecker. Here it became evident that there was another problem. Bob and Rob

had gotten to the top of the mountain in the wrecker, but now there were two more passengers to accommodate. The decision was made that the Lowe's helper would squeeze into the cab with Bob and Rob, and the other driver was selected to make the freezing ride on the wrecker body back to the Hess station in Margaretville where he could make arrangements for a ride home.

Next morning Bob Erickson knew that his equipment wouldn't be able to get to the problem site on the Prattsville side of County 3 so he called a former em-

ployee, Jake Rosa, for some additional help. Jake, now a local logger, is one of those practical, intuitive people who thrive in rural areas and can make real problems turn into mere inconveniences. Jake brought his bulldozer and a chain saw to the Halcott side and headed up over the mountain. At the Tar Paper Shack they were joined, once again, by the Lowe's driver. This time he and his helper had a two-wheel drive compact pick-up. By now Bob, Rob and Jake really didn't want any help from the Lowe's crew, so they were asked to stay at the shack and wait until they got the cell phone call that things were cleared up.

Jake worked his way down the mountain, moving material as he went, just to get himself down the hill safely, all the time wondering how the truck could have made that trip. Finally down to the scene of all the trouble, he hooked to the rear of the Lowe's truck and pulled it back up the hill



far enough to clear the troublesome tree. A little work with the chainsaw took care of the tree, and from that point down the hill the road was in pretty good shape.

Since the truck was so close to the bottom of the mountain, Jake and Bob were about to call the Lowe's driver and his helper to have them go around to Prattsville on good roads and get the truck there. But, you guessed it, here they came down the mountain again, this time in the two wheel drive pick-up. As the two groups were about to part company, the Lowe's driver asked Jake how he could get to Route 23 from where they were. Jake told him "the same way you were going to do it yesterday" and headed back toward Halcott with the bulldozer.

Hunker Down

As the outside temperature begins to flirt with single digits, I ask myself, "Am I ready for winter?" That long dark tunnel from January until April yawns at me. Perhaps it would help to list the joys of winter that serve to chase away the yawns. Well, birds are one. Winter is SUPPOSED to be the season of hibernating bears, so I can hang the bird feeders without fear. My bird feeders bring great joy. There is such a flutter when whole families of finches discover my feeder at once!



And the smug and absolute triumph of hosting a cardinal!
Blue jays

and nuthatches, chickadees and red caps. The jostling, the posturing, the hissing and pecking all prove that human nature is not just for humans.

The season has certain days that seem to dance with their own joy. Crisp with a brilliant winter sun to grace them, they are simply not available in summer. They start with a winter sun that is just for show -- there is no heat involved -- but what a show! It only works part time in winter, and lazily drifts through its day riding close to the horizon. The low light glances off the toast-colored fields and back-lights the poplars on Jim and Karen Rauter's hill behind my house. Each branch is lined with silver. Some beautiful. Who needs tinsel?

Snow-shoes bring joy. I bundle up in too many layers, tuck my camera in my pocket, and strap on my snow-shoes, struggling to bend. Falling down becomes harmless with all that padding. Getting up again is more difficult. Finding my camera in all those pockets is next to impossible. I give up and admire my large, mysterious, Yedi type tracks in the pristine snow. I start to regret the layers as I work up a sweat. Frigid air sears my lungs. The silence is total. It is joyous.

Joy comes more slowly on dark days when the precipitation is always white. I could lie to you and say that these days are spent curled up in front of a cozy fire, poking through the bottom of bon-bons to find my favorites. No. But in between daily chores, I look out the window. If I squint and forget about the shoveling that needs to be done, I can imagine myself in a paper weight of magical swirl.

Evenings can be spent in front of

the fire, toasting my toes. Friends visiting, arriving with bright red noses and chilly cheeks. Less joyful is battling the coat closet when too many down jackets don't compress. Hat hair. That tell-tale grime I wear on my coat after leaning into the back of my winter-weary car to pull out the groceries. Sometimes the joy can be hard to find....

But the joy of joys comes with recounting the journey through the tunnel at the April end. Those of us who pass through a winter in Halcott are winter warriors with bragging rights, perhaps even exaggerating rights. Snow birds shall quail before us. We wear our victories boldly, shrugging off chapped lips and lost mittens. We wore out winter! Never mind that a secret weapon throughout the ordeal was the memory of riding our bike on a hot day in summer. **IK**

Green As Snow

From the window of this small, wood-paneled room, I can see the black-capped chickadees getting down to winter. Looking past a clutch of spider eggs, three tiny gray orbs frozen in the top corner pane, I watch the busy birds in the box of sunflower seeds on the porch. They hunt and peck for the one that speaks to them, then hold the seed between their toes and, using the seeming hydraulic power of their necks, drill a hole in the shell and pick out the oily meat, bit by bit. Back and

forth from the barberry hedge they go to hide other seeds, in scalloped swoops of flight, as if hanging bunting for a Thanksgiving festival.

Meanwhile, we humans have been picking dishes and shopping for the holiday table. Up in Halcott, we are having a dreamy white Thanksgiving this year, and it is difficult, through the swirling snow, to imagine the recent days when filling the salad bowl or the roasting pan was just a stroll to the garden away.

I had my first full-size vegetable garden in San Francisco, where I lived for sixteen years. We were lucky enough to have a big backyard in the city, and since the woman I shared the house with was a landscaper—a flower and shrub expert—I decided to take a crack at a food garden. Thus began a ten year education in West-

ern coastal grow-your-own. When I tell the story now, seven years into the very different book of cultivating in an eastern mountain zone, I emphasize (that is to say, exaggerate) for East Coasters, and especially Catskillians, how in California, I could plunge my arm into the soft earth anywhere and easily, right up to the elbow, and the year-round growing season—leaving them agape at the thoughts.

Not that I could, with the many cool, foggy days in the Bay round any year, grow a decent tomato or a melon to save my life. (Even with the short growing season here, the summer heat can yield



such sweet fruits!) And after a decade and a half out West, the East Coast started calling me home: more and more I missed the seasons, growing or anyway—the cycle from the perfect newborn neon green of pea shoots and ferns and leaf buds pulsing in spring to the ripening rainbow of summer to the stirring Technicolor of fall to this slumbering monochrome of winter.

I moved back. I put in a garden, where I love the challenges of season, altitude, and rock. Next I became fond of the process of “putting food by”—sauces, jams, pickles, and freezer bags of squashes, beans, and greens—tucked into a variety of corners for the long winter, rather like the chickadees’ clever seed caches. But as much as I am motivated by the brisk urgency of the shortening days; and enjoy the sort of drama of pre-winter tasks like putting winter protection around roses and lilies, or giving the fruit trees and bushes one last long, deep drink of water; and look forward to the profoundness of the long winter’s sleep . . . I get pangs for the annual ending of that walk for salad. So when Marc came back this summer from a visit to Eliot Coleman’s famous organic farm in Harborside, Maine, with reports of using cold frames for “four-season gardening,” I kicked up my boots.

Like many gardeners, I fantasize about a full-size heated greenhouse that is very unlikely to ever materialize; and I have been curious about hoop gardens, or a hoop house, from what I hear a great way to extend the fall growing season or protect seedlings in spring by plopping a construction of sturdy metal hoops with greenhouse cloth stretched over them,

Conestoga style, right in the garden where the plants grow. But nothing had yet appealed to me as much as a classic solar-heated cold frame, with its focused function and easy, inexpensive reality—and yet, what a luxury, to be able to pick fresh spinach in January.

A cold frame can be a wood box with a glass or Plexiglas window on top, a hay bale enclosure covered with plastic, or a humble structure of 2-by-4s or bricks topped with an old shower door. Marc and I settled on a simple box design that fits over our raised beds, topped with recycled storm windows. The back of the frame is higher than the front so the window is slanted to capture as much southern light as possible. A hoop house designed for winter growing is another popular option, but I love the idea of the greenery plainly in sight and the easy access of lifting the window on a hinge.

Cold frames shelter plants from ice, snow, and winter winds, and heat up the soil whenever the sun shines by as much as 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Because seeds of many hardy vegetables can germinate in the 50-degree range, a spell of mild weather can coax them to life. Because winter snuck up on us this year, we will have to wait until next year to do it right—much of the planning and seeding for all-winter crops ideally takes place in September and October, and as early as August. But even now, under a cold frame the frozen soil will gradually thaw, and there are some cold-tolerant plants that will theoretically germinate. It’s worth a shot!

For starters, once the soil has thawed, we will add half a foot of fresh horse manure to the bottom of the bed; the rotting

of the manure will generate heat through the cold months. Next come the seeds, limited to the very heartiest, low-growing plants: spinach, mâche, radishes, lettuce, maybe kale and arugula. Starting earlier, carrots, beets, scallions, and leeks are among the other exciting crops that can thrive through a Halcott winter under the protection of a cold frame. After seeds have begun to grow inside the frames, the plants can survive even 10-degree nights (an insulated blanket on top or hay bales around the sides of the box will help when the mercury really dips).

One of the beauties of winter, of course, is that we get to take a break from gardening. But Coleman points out, with winter gardens you can “have your break and eat it too.” With few weeds and critters to contend with, all a cold frame requires is occasional watering, venting—on a hot day, the frame can get hot enough to fry the plants, so the window should be propped open during the peak hours—and harvesting.

Like the chickadee leaving its cozy winter nest in search of seeds and suet, it can be hard to leave our little homes for another trip to the supermarket on a bitter cold day, especially if the fresh vegetables we find there are limp and road-weary. But if a walk through white drifts leads to fresh, edible leaves—the most “local” of greens—the gardener’s heart will take wing. *CBN*

Hot-Buttered Fun

There’s nothing like a cup of hot something to even out the bone-chilling, face –freezing winds of winter, and if that

something has just a bit of relaxing spirit to boot, how much the better. Or butter, as I’ve discovered. I’ve heard of hot—buttered rum my whole life, but have only just recently begun to gather recipes and experiment with this lovely idea. Warning: it’s not for the faint or clogged of heart. I cannot stress enough that if you are seeing a cardiologist, this drink may not be for you. However, if you are the arterial age of a kindergartener and have the requisite LDL and HDL levels, give it a go. I’m still tweaking this one. Too watery? How about a little half & half instead? Can we incorporate some dark chocolate? Send in your improvements for inclusion in the Spring edition... it takes a village. Or a town. A cold, snowy, wonderful town.

HOT – BUTTERED RUM

With an electric mixer, blend together: for 1 minute:

1 stick of softened unsalted butter
½ cup packed dark brown sugar
¾ tsp ground cinnamon
¾ tsp ground ginger
½ tsp ground nutmeg
1 tsp. freshly grated orange zest

Place 2 tbsp of the spiced butter into a mug.

Add 1-2 shots of rum (1.5 oz. or so, depending on taste),

¾ cup boiling water, and top off with squeeze or two of the orange

Stir, sit down, drink up, and feel the warmth.

(The butter mixture will last in your refrigerator for 2 weeks if necessary, but, really, why?) **PD for both!**

The Little Red Hen

Isn't it interesting what can become of seemingly small, random beginnings? All of us can point to events that shaped the course of our lives, piquing our interest in things that perhaps we never really considered before. Christl Johnson's amazing, colorful flock of chickens is a beautiful example of this. From one red hen found by Tim and Christl's son Ben several years ago in the parking lot of the A & P, the flock has grown to some 100 birds today and, along with it, Christl's interest in different breeds of chickens. Indeed, Christl's knowledge of and enthusiasm for her chickens is revealed whenever she discusses them; she is a treasure trove of information!

How did the flock grow from one to a hundred? For several years now, Christl has been purchasing groups of day old chicks from Meyers Hatchery in Ohio. She said that this particular hatchery carries a good selection of some of the more rare breeds and she chooses which breeds to order by studying the Meyers Hatchery catalog to see what looks interesting. Shortly after the order is placed the chicks arrive in the mail in large, special boxes all ready to go into the chick pen at the Johnson's farm where they grow rapidly under Christl's watchful eyes. She estimates that she has at least a dozen different breeds or crosses including Blue Splash Marans, Black Copper Marans, Golden Cuckoo Marans, Brahmas, Rhode

Island Reds, and Golden Comets in her current flock.

The breeds chosen are for egg production and Christl does sell eggs when the hens are laying well. (She said her flock now includes quite a few older hens that no longer lay many eggs.) Her favorite breeds are the Americanas, which lay blue eggs, and the Marans, which lay beautiful dark brown eggs. Christl noted how lovely these blue and brown eggs look when mixed together in cartons.

As with any kind of animals, a few individuals always stand out as being especially memorable for different reasons. One mentioned was, of course, the red hen that started it all. Christl said the hen was very tame and was probably someone's pet before it ended up loose in the A&P parking lot. Another hen mentioned was a Silver Spangled Hamburg that recently hatched out eight chicks against the odds in the bull pen containing two bulls. Apparently the bulls were agreeable to sharing their pen with the setting hen! A final hen mentioned was "Reeb-a-Cheep", a chick that was raised in the house during a cold spell. Christl said "Reeb-a- Cheep" used to sit and watch evening TV with her and Tim before she was big enough to go to the barn and today she remains one of the friendliest chickens on the farm. Best wishes, Christl, to you and your growing flock! **JD**

Celebrity in the House! (And in Halcott...)

Halcott's own Carrie Bradley Neves has spent most of 2013 on a worldwide reunion tour with The Breeders – a pretty famous Alternative Rock band from the 90's. I re-

cently spent an afternoon with Carrie and asked her a few questions...

PD: Who are The Breeders, and how did you become one?

CBN: The Breeders came together through Kim Deal of The Pixies. It's three women, one male drummer, and myself as the violinist as needed. They've had double-platinum success with a song called "Cannonball" and a cover of "Drivin' on 9", which I had done earlier with another band called Ed's Redeeming Qualities.

PD: Ok. Let's back up. You were trained as a classical violinist, right?

CBN: Yep. Started at 8 years old in my school orchestra in Guilderland, NY. I was always 1st chair, 1st violin, and then my family moved to Minneapolis and at 15 I was studying privately and played with the youth symphony. While I was at Williams College I quit, because playing sports became more important to me. Eventually, though, I joined a bluegrass band and learned to "fiddle" and spent 6 months on tour, which was so bad I decided to pursue a writing career – and grad school – instead. But of course, on the first day of classes, I met the people that would become my next band, Ed's Redeeming Qualities, and over the next 10 years we recorded 4 records and had 8 national tours. It was amazing. And then Kim approached me and I joined The Breeders.

PD: So what kind of a response have you received on this reunion tour? Anything weird or outrageous happen?

CBN: The response has been great! We have multi-generational fans at all of our concerts, from age 12 to 85. The strang-

est thing was getting bumped out of the Copacabana Hotel in Rio de Janeiro by the Pope! We'd booked it, but when we got there we found he'd taken over the whole place – it was a real bummer. The scariest thing happened at Brisbane, Australia when I came VERY close to being dinner for a shark just off the beach.

PD: What's the biggest, or best concert so far?

CBN: We played to 70,000 people in Mexico City, which actually used to be pretty common for us. The best one was Barcelona. There were 25,000 there, and it was a spectacular night.

PD: The soundtrack of the movie "Juno" sounds like your style.

CBN: Dozens of people have told me that. I actually met the woman who wrote those songs, and she told me that "Drivin' on 9" saved her life, and that it was the first song she learned on her guitar. I felt very honored by that.

PD: Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, right?

CBN: Yep; it's true.

PD: You just recorded an album with Bernie Jungle, who has spent a lot of time in this valley. When will it be released, and how can I get it?

CBN: Probably around Valentine's Day 2014, released by Atom Records, and it will be available on iTunes and Amazon.

PD: You have been a musician on both coasts and traveled around the world; how'd you end up here in Halcott?

CBN: I'd met Marc several years ago, and then re-met him in San Francisco. Friendly e-mails turned into courtship. I was tired of living in California and had always wanted to live in Manhat-

tan. Marc convinced me to come out for a visit. We fell in love, and he brought me to Halcott. From the very first, I could not believe how wonderful this place is. Every time I go away, I can't wait to get back. Every time I drive into the valley I experience the same feeling I felt the first time; this is home. **PD**

SCOUTS IN THE GARDEN

Boy Scout Troop #80, led by Scout Master Terry Lehn came to the Halcott Community Garden this fall to plant bulbs.



Although the efforts can be used towards their horticultural badges, we're told that the Scouts did it for community service. They had a ball, according to one mother. Since many of them had been responsible for planting the shrubs and trees that were subsequently washed away by Irene in 2011, it was wonderful that they could take part again in a hopefully more successful effort. They are looking forward to seeing what blooms this coming spring. Alex Brock reports, "They did a phenomenal job and we got all planted in the front of the entry area." **IK**

SLEIGH RIDE!!

Seth Finch will give sleigh rides to kids of all ages on Saturday, **February 8th** from 2 to 4PM, meeting at the Grange Hall. Seth promises fun and adventure, snow or no snow, but of course we all hope for snow. He is being sponsored by the Halcott Community Fund. We will light a bonfire down by the stream, in honor of the afternoon, roast marshmallows and serve hot chocolate. Come in warm clothes and share warm hearts as Seth whirls us around the Halcott fields. **IK**

PASSAGES

On November 22, 2013, **Jean Louise Wells**, 90, of Kingston, NY, formerly of Ulster Park and Rhinebeck, passed peacefully at Golden Hill Health Care Center, Kingston. She was born March 19, 1923. A native of Halcott Center, Jean Kelly Wells was the daughter of the late Chauncey and Lula Kelly. In her obituary, the family wrote: "Quite recently, Jean had begun writing stories of her childhood as a country girl. These were published in her hometown newsletter, The Times of Halcott." She was a wonderful and faithful contributor to these pages and we will miss her!

Walt Miller got his buck! A juicy 10 pointer. Good hunting!

Marilyn and Wayne Gallant



celebrated their 50th Anniversary on Thanksgiving Day, on November 28th, 2013 in Arcadia, Florida with their family including: Lorraine and George Fuller and children Kaitlyn and Jacob of Ocala; Dean and Teri Gallant and children Josh and Sonni Ritch of Nocatee; and Jacqueline and Brian Harris and children Rebecca and Briana of



Arcadia. Wayne and Marilyn were married on Thanksgiving Day on November 28th, 1963 at the Halcott United Methodist

Church. If anyone wishes to send them a card, their address is the following:
Wayne and Marilyn Gallant
2692 NE Highway 70 Lot 626
Arcadia, FL 34266

HITCHED!: **Sophia Bernhardt and Catheranne Wyly** were wed on September 1, 2013, at the Bernhardt home, with Tim Mulvaney officiating. The ceremony was outdoors, on a mostly clear afternoon, and was attended by the couple's families and by friends from near and far.

AND

Suzanna DiBenedetto – born and raised in Halcott - **and Eugene Cronk** of Roxbury, were married on August 18th at the Shepard Hills Country Club in Roxbury. The date was originally August 17th, and the place was originally Suzanna's parents' hay field, but things happened, and all of the guests showed up at the right place at the right time, and a great time was had by all. Various nieces and nephews of the bride and groom were flower girls and ring-bearers, respectively. The bride was gorgeous in an elegant strapless dress of lace, and the groom was dashing in his tux and new work boots. Reverend Ralph Darmstadt conducted the ceremony with joy, and Suzanna and Eugene's laughter and love permeated the day. Congratulations Suzanna and Eugene! **PD**





The Times of the Halcott Methodist Church

Winter 2013 *Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*

Winter Worship Hour

Evening services are being held at a new time this year – 6:00 p.m. Morning services will resume in the spring – date to be announced. All are welcome.

Prayer Ministry

Prayer is powerful. We continue to receive notes expressing appreciation for cards and prayers. Since we don't always hear of needs, readers are encouraged to share prayer requests with us.

The Next Dinner

Maybe we'll surprise you! Whet your appetites and stay tuned.

Community Food Pantry

Staffed entirely by volunteers and now serving over 275 households, your donations of goods and money are needed more than ever. Helpful items that might not occur to us are cooking oil, cereals, jelly (to go with peanut butter) and rice. However, all kinds of foods are needed. Low salt, low fat and low sugar items are an important part of the equation. Also appreciated are toiletries, such as soap and toilet paper.

Mission Kits

Pouring of donations has recently allowed us to put together mission shipments on an unprecedented level. At last count, there were 48 sewing kits, 25 school kits, 14 Christmas shoeboxes and over 25 pillow case dresses. Helpers included the Sunday School, community members and several ladies from the Margaretville United Methodist Church. In a time when disasters

abound with lingering effects, we are grateful to be able to help. Financial donations can still be made to the church to assist UMCOR in the wake of recent storms in the Philippines and our own Midwest. UMCOR stands for United Methodist Committee on Relief and 100% of receipts are always put to work on site.

Old Roots, New Year

(or, From Ancestral Roots to New Beginnings)

The concept of New Year's resolutions can tell us something revealing about society. Collectively, humanity messes up on a regular basis and frequently feels the need to make a fresh start. A clean slate, therefore, is both necessary and desirable. Since this has always been so, we're all descended from a bunch of folks with a somewhat checkered past.

When Jesus was born, he didn't just make the humble shift from heavenly palace to lowly cow stall, he acquired a human family tree with all of the embarrassment that goes with it. To be sure, the gospel writer's 42 generation genealogy of Jesus, as listed in Matthew, is not without righteous men of faith, like Abraham. Even so, they had their moments. Factor Jesus' hometown into the mix – "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) – and Jesus had a lot to overcome in life.

Curious about the skeletons in Jesus' closet? Let's take a look at a few: Abraham – a great patriarch of the faith who yielded to wife, Sarah's, bidding that he father a son with servant, Hagar, rather than wait for Sarah, herself, to conceive the son God had promised. Results included family strife that persists today, 4000 years later. Descendents of son, Ishmael, are Arabs. Descendents of son,

Isaac, are Israelites. That about sums it up. Isaac – lied about the identity of his wife, Rebekah, rather than place his trust in God for protection.

Jacob – an opportunistic deceiver who obtained his brother, Esau’s blessing as well as Esau’s inheritance from father, Isaac, under false pretenses.

Tamar – impersonated a prostitute and became an unwed mother, a capital offense in Bible times.

Rahab – a foreigner and a harlot who, nevertheless, helped Israelite scouts escape from Jericho.

Ruth – a foreigner in the family tree, even though intermarriage was generally forbidden. David – a great king of Israel who committed adultery with Bathsheba, then arranged the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite, to cover the deed.

Mary – the mother of Jesus who was righteous, yet dishonorable in the view of society for being pregnant outside of wedlock. (This experience surely must have given her insight for raising her Son to weather the false accusations that would be made about Him later in life.)

Despite the questionable deeds attributed to these folks, it is interesting to note that God gave each one a make-over. While they had the potential to go down in history as losers, their faith – and repentance where needed – allowed God to make winners of them instead. It is never too late to turn over a new leaf and amount to something in Kingdom terms.

So, what does all of this mean to us? Long before Jesus was born, His human forebears came to acknowledge God’s presence and purpose in their broken or misunderstood lives. As they yearned for reconciliation or service opportunities, God heard and accepted their offers. Setting aside their flaws and including them in the lineage of Jesus demonstrated how completely God forgives, how deeply He loves and how thoroughly He encourages all of our feeble efforts to honor Him. Regardless of our past, we are each important to our heavenly Father. With God, we can start anew each year, indeed, each day. What an incredibly humbling and, at the same time, powerfully freeing realization!