

The Times of Halcott



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Editors: Innes Kasanof; Peg DiBenedetto; Judy DiBenedetto; Carrie Bradley Neves; Art: Nina Kasanof

CHAT WITH TIM

I sat down with Tim Johnson on one of those fine, endless summer evenings a few weeks ago. He was mowing the field below my house and I wanted to snag him to get an interview for this final issue of TTOH. So he agreed to come by after he had finished. He warned me that he didn't have much time; that the cows expected him back for evening milking and they tended to complain when he didn't show up promptly at 6pm.

We had a wonderful chat, remembering this and that. Tim started by declaring that Halcott is Halcott, and it's not changed over the years and will not in the years to come; it's the newcomers who will change to fit into this gentle, friendly valley. We agreed that the major farming families like the Boutons, the Johnsons, the Reynolds/DiBenedetto's have supplied Halcott, over the years, with strong solid pillars of reliability. Then we got to laughing about past characters. I loved Iris Faulkner, Tim's grandmother —what a corker! — who asked me once when the wind was rushing around the valley, if I liked the sound of "the trees singing." Yes I did. I did indeed.

Tim remarked how many people in town seemed to drop by his barn in the mornings. I am a little envious of a life-style where that can happen. Mine is very fast-paced and filled with time-sensitive obligations. I'm still a newcomer. We spoke of the importance of the

mountains. Tim declared he could never live any place that he didn't have a mountain at his back. And I have come to treasure the mountains' intimacy with this little valley. They seem to hold us in the palm of their hands, protecting us from all manner of ill-will. Of course someone from Colorado would snort with scorn, calling them "hills," but in our Halcott, we have mountains.

We touched lightly on the political scene these days and agreed that it's bewildering to contemplate the atrocities that happen, but they are pretty much outside of Halcott. Here, life seems to be regulated by an unspoken decency that is only broken by us newcomers. Over time, the town with its mountains seems to wear down our city edges, folding us into its bosom of seasonal rhythms, haying in summer, shoveling in winter.

I felt renewed when Tim got up to leave. I had written down nothing of importance on my pad of paper, in fact I had written nothing at all. It was much more a visit than an interview. He promised to return with Christl, but I'm pretty sure that won't happen. Like any member of a Halcott founding family, Tim seemed to have all the time in the world to sit and reminisce, but I know better. I hope the cows didn't moan too piteously. It was close to 7 when he started up his great orange farm machine he had parked across the road. **IK**

Bears and Books

Over the years, Dave and Missy Runyan's Friends of the Feathered and Furry Wildlife Center has seen a lot of bear activity. Within days of completing work on the 80-foot-long concrete bear enclosure in 2018, the bears started coming in. A few were adults, injured by encounters with motor vehicles, but most were orphaned cubs. Throughout the fall, winter, and spring, we took in over 23 bear cubs. Most came in

malnourished, a direct result of losing their mothers and not yet being able to fend for themselves. We caught most of them by using a simple wire cage and bait. Once a cub was in the trap, the door sprung closed and we then transported the cage, with bear inside, to the center. A few of the cubs were so weak that they could be

picked up by hand and placed into a dog crate. (Caution: Do Not Try This At Home due to risk of severe bodily injury! Even at a young age, cubs are able to inflict extensive damage with their razor-sharp claws.) The fact that we could approach and capture them so easily was evidence of their extremely poor health.

Missy was a miracle worker. Her expertise and instinctive treatments saved a majority of the cubs that came to the clinic. Some needed physical therapy, some needed special diets. After a stint of intensive care inside the clinic, we moved them to the outside den where they formed a large family unit. We could not release them until they gained back their body weight and until spring vegetation provided enough sustenance for their survival in the wild.

All winter long we watched their daily lives and antics on closed-circuit cameras. Always

amusing and often touching, the cubs would climb up the trees, hay bales, and other enrichments placed inside the enclosure to keep them active. They'd fall down, fall off, hang upside down, and tumble into each other like frolicking children. Their enthusiasm and joy was evident. They took turns at the food troughs, played in the water tubs, established a pecking order and bonded in specific groups.

They went through a lot of food, and they

were a lot of work. Every day we schlepped food and water to them, all winter long. Often we couldn't drive up the hill to the den because of the deep snow and had to drag the food tubs up by hand until a generous funding allowed the purchase of an ATV.

All of those cubs at the Center were a result of human error. Without

realizing it, people had caused the sows to be killed by "inviting" bears where they shouldn't be—too close to human habitation. Bears are drawn to garbage cans and dumpsters, bird feeders, outdoor pet food, and other food sources. The more comfortable bears are around humans and buildings, the more frequently they will cross roads and get hit by vehicles.

As in everything, education is the key, which is why I decided to write a book called *Ebony Bear, A Nurturing Ursine Learns A Lesson*. *Ebony Bear's* purpose is to give children an appreciation for bears in the wild, as well as to educate the kids and their parents about inappropriate human behavior. If Mom and Dad understand that feeding birds only in the winter can reduce bear visitation, maybe negative human/bear interactions will be reduced. Tragically, Missy died before *Ebony Bear* was

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printed, but I believe she'd have liked the book and its message.

Ebony Bear is the first in a series of wildlife books and is available at thewildlifestories.com

Also, soon to be released:

* Silver Dollar Girls — a fictional story that takes place in a dead-end valley in the Catskill Mountains, featuring a certain female WWII pilot

* The fourth Times of Halcott Book, Volumes 76-100

All books will also be available at The Great Times of Halcott Centennial Party and Book Blow Out at the Halcott Grange on December 3rd from 5-7pm. **PD**

Belarus to Halcott

Elizabeth Bernhardt

In 2006, my family bought a house in Halcott Center, the first house and land we ever owned. This act changed our lives in a way I never imagined. Among the many things I am grateful for, in 2010 I had a fateful encounter that could have happened only here.

That summer, I was planting in the Halcott Community Garden when I overheard two handsome young men speaking what sounded like Russian. They were planting in a plot near mine. Thinking they were immigrants, and wanting to welcome them, I introduced myself, and asked if they had been speaking Russian. They replied, "No, Belarussian." I responded, "My grandparents came from Belarus!" My paternal grandparents, Aaron Farber and Anna Ellentuch Farber, did not speak about their childhoods. I had grown up always living with them, in a three-generation household in Brooklyn. I understood that Aaron and Anna's families had known each other in Belarus, but they met in New York, as adult immigrants, in the 1890's. They never spoke of their childhoods – it seemed it was a painful subject, best forgotten. But they were part of a self-help group

of "landsmen" that met periodically, sometimes in our living room, and this group eventually incorporated as a non-profit organization, The American Brotherly Aid Association.

The two Belarussian men were friendly. They were brothers, it turned out, and they urged me to tell them where my grandparents were from. I thought, how could these young men know the name of a tiny Jewish village that my grandfather left over 100 years ago? But I finally said, "Chonama." (note: This is not the real name of the village. I have changed all of the Belarussian names, but none of the other details.) When I did so, they shouted together, "Chonama!!! We've been there!" It turned out that their aunt had taught chemistry in the high school in Chonama and they had visited her there. I could not believe this coincidence, and I began to think of Chonama as a large town, not a village. I asked them if Chonama had a hotel I could stay in. They responded with laughter – NO! But they said they could put me in touch with someone, a high school English teacher who lived there.

Ultimately, through one of the brothers, Oleg, I met Margarita Shelfyland, also a Belarussian, who was living in Fleischmanns. Margarita and Oleg helped me understand what it would mean to be an immigrant from a Communist country – how meaningful American freedom was. In addition, Oleg put me in touch with Natalia, the English teacher, who would warmly welcome and generously host us in Chonama. At the same time, Margarita connected us with Fedor, a history teacher who would help us travel within Belarus. The following summer, my husband Bill and I flew to Minsk.

Chonama is a small and lonely, but lovely village, surrounded by forest and fields of flax. It is about fifty miles from the capital, but a world away in development. It is not on any of the Belarussian maps that we bought. The nearest place to Chonama that does appear on the maps

is the town of Slivovsk, where my grandmother had grown up. For me, this was fortunate, because development had not irrevocably changed the village or destroyed landmarks. In 2011, Chonama had only one paved road.

The Chonama houses are made of wood, fenced in, and painted in lovely pastel colors. Natalia's house was beautiful, full of books and plants, and had a large expertly tended garden, where Natalia grew the produce she would need for the winter. The house had electricity but no indoor plumbing. Natalia would pump water, and then heat it.

Natalia showed us the Jewish cemetery, which was overgrown but still existed, despite the absence of a Jewish community. She also pointed out the "Jewish houses" – visually distinct from the other houses in two ways. First, the Jewish houses had wooden shutters, which could be nailed shut for protection during "pogroms" (anti-Jewish violence). Second, the Jewish houses had two doors – a side door for the family to use, and a front door for the public to use. This was because the Jews were craftspeople – tailors, blacksmiths, shoemakers – in the village. My grandfather, like his relatives, had been a tailor (a trade he also followed in New York).

Given the history of Belarus, it is easy to imagine the despair of young people growing up there – frustrated, and seeing no justice and no future for themselves. In returning to Chonama, I learned something about my grandparents and what inspired their deep love and gratitude toward the United States. I also gained a new friend, Natalia. She and I have been writing to each other faithfully for the past eleven years, exchanging photos and chatting about books and our lives. I look forward to her letters and the photos of her friends and her village, and she is full of praise for the photos of my family and of Halcott Center.

And our home in Halcott:

Much as I have loved it, our house has been a mystery to me. Who designed such a peculiar structure? When was the house built? Why was

the house designed this way? Happily, Pam Johnson Kelly has supplied the answers to these questions. Pam's late father, Garold Johnson, was the carpenter who built our house, following the design of the original owners, the Ewalds. Garold's family was one of the early settlers in the valley. Both Garold and his father, LeRoy Johnson, were born and grew up in Johnson Hollow. (Garold was born in 1922 and LeRoy in 1892.)

Garold set out to do dairy farming, but difficult economic conditions forced him to give up farming and enter construction. LeRoy had been a carpenter, and Garold became a carpenter as well; he was a meticulous craftsman - a perfectionist. At the time that Garold built our house, he and his wife Lena lived just across the road - in the house that Jim and Karen Rauter now own; Pam and her older brother Paul, grew up there. Pam now lives in Bloomburg, Pennsylvania, but before the pandemic hit, she returned to Halcott for a visit, and spoke to me about her memories..

Pam recalled her father's working on the house, and her visits to the site when it was still under construction, around 1971. When it was finished, the Ewalds invited Garold's family to have a look. Pam remembered that it was an "upside down" house -- with two bedrooms downstairs, and a single large room upstairs. She also recalled that although the Ewalds had children and grandchildren, they were determined to have only the two bedrooms, wanting to discourage guests and preserve their privacy. Although Garold did not build them, Pam recalled the vast stadium stairs in the back of the house, which were added on later. I had always wondered who put those stairs in, and why. Pam didn't know why the Ewalds wanted stadium seating attached to their house; she didn't recall performances taking place there. (Similarly, in the past 16 years, the Bernhardtts have made no use of the stadium stairs -- except for grandchildren walking up and down the stairs for fun.) Because of the stairs, the

house looks large from the outside, but inside it's small - just as the Ewalds wanted.

The property may have attracted the Ewalds because it is set back from the road, enhancing the privacy they valued. Pam recalled that, when the second story was added to the house, she saw another unusual feature: in addition to the front door, there was a second entrance at the side of the house -- just a few feet away. Though my family now enjoys the house, I can't help but wonder what Garold thought of its peculiar design, which he executed so skillfully.

Pam gave me some photographs taken on her family's property in the fifties and sixties, well before the Ewald house was built. You can see Garold and young Pam with her horse, with the house now owned by Erik Johanson and Fernando Delgado in the background -- vivid mementos of that time.

HALCOTT'S BALLERINA

In March of this year, Teagan Enck (12) had the opportunity to audition for a children's part in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" put on by the NYC Ballet in Saratoga this summer at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC). The audition was a great experience, with well over 100 children competing for 24 parts as the "bugs and fairies" in the ballet. At the end of a long audition process (more than 4 hours!) of measuring and dancing and dancing and more dancing, Teagan was thrilled to learn that she had gotten a part. The children began rehearsing for four hours daily on July 3rd with the NYC Ballet Children's Repertory Director, Dena Abergel. By the time of their performance two weeks later, they were flawless! Her sibling Aubrey (also known these days as Koi) interviewed her about the experience afterwards.

INTERVIEW

Q: (Koi) When did you start ballet?

A: (Teagan):2015 [Age 5].

Q: Why did you choose to do ballet?

A: I saw the nutcracker when I was little and the dancers were amazing and I wanted to be like them.

Q: What are your favorite parts about ballet?

A: I love the dancing and performing and the friends I make.

Q: What did you do to prepare for the New York City ballet performance?

A: I took private classes with my ballet instructor twice a week for two weeks before going to Saratoga.

Q: What went on during your practice for the performance?

A: I spent two weeks in Saratoga to learn the choreography and timing.

Q: Would you do it again, and what were your favorite parts?

A: Yes. My favorite part was performing the dance on stage!

Q: What's it like being on stage with so many people watching you?

A: Kind of scary but really fun!

Q: What do you hope to accomplish moving forward with ballet?

A: I hope to be a professional ballerina and dance in the nutcracker as a professional.

In the short term, I'm hoping to take a ballet summer intensive next summer.

(Teagan currently dances at the Decker School of Ballet in Oneonta. They will be performing the traditional version of The Nutcracker at SUNY Oneonta December 16th and 17th)

grown up more towards the mid-west, I had always thought of Mrs. C. as the classic East

Life Along the Five Roads Over the Mountains, *continued* Pattie Kelder

Note from the author: Bill Johnson took three scrapbooks of pictures to a recent Halcott Fair and returned home without them. He is eager to hear from anyone who knows their present whereabouts.

Billy [Johnson] remembers assisting with the cattle drive to Eldon Kittle's farm in Red Kill the fall morning after Stanley Kelly's barn burned (see Part 4). The teenagers, including Billy and Stanley's nephews, were put in charge of the yearlings. When they got to present day Bruce Scudder Road, a car full of deer hunters proceeded to weave its way through the herd. One of the young cattle broke loose and ran right across the hood of the car! When the driver asked what they were doing, Billy's father, Earl, quipped that they were driving the cattle to market.

Gloria Sadowski recalls hearing how an Indian woman from the old Indian homes on Hubbard Road (see beginning of Part 6) would sneak into Ros Miller's barn (current owner Tim Johnson) for milk. She milked a cow on one end of the barn while he was busy milking at the other end. He always knew when she was there, though, and hollered at her as she slipped away. Being part Indian himself, he never took action because she needed the milk for her children.

Shirley Bouton once said county roads were numbered in the order acquired. Therefore, Routes 1 and 3 in Halcott were Greene County's earliest official roads (see Part 5).

Corrections to beginning of Part 6: Gloria says the berry picking expedition on Hubbard Road was for blackberries, not blueberries. Marilyn Gallant says the building papered with newspapers was the old log cabin, not Abner Bouton's house.

Part 6: Life on Johnson Hollow, "Halcott Mountain",

Hubbard and Steinfeld Roads (continued)

Gloria tells me of an early time when all residents of Johnson Hollow were Johnsons. Just below the Deemer farm was the Art Mead place, where Essie Johnson later lived with her husband, Byron Hauver. Once when Byron was walking home after drinking in Fleischmanns, he thought it would be interesting to jump off the dam at

Lake Switzerland. He proceeded to do so, and nearly froze to death walking the rest of the way home. Gloria says he never drank again.

Up Steinfeld Road and over the stream from that house is where Sylvester and Polly Johnson's farm was located (see related story in TTOH, Vol. 29, p. 12). A ways past the Jenkins (later Beers) place was another road on the left (now gone) that led to Bed Hollow in Vega, referenced in No Cats in the Catskills (TTOH, Vol. 70). It crossed the Delaware County line along the ridge. Gloria and Artie routinely hear trucks on Route 30 and a fire siren, possibly in Halcottsville. Access to Bed Hollow was steep, making it a good vantage point as a look out during the Anti Rent Wars. The "Indians" slept there after nefarious dealings with the tax collector. The house where Artie and Gloria live was built in the '30s by Herb Johnson, who supplemented his farm income by selling fruit trees and berry bushes. The foundation of his parents' home is next on the side lawn and that of his grandfather, Dick Johnson, is across the road, *en route* to Bed Hollow. Herb's mother, Gertie, was last on the Halcott telephone line. In order to phone Vega, the caller had to crank the phone to ring Gertie. She then threw a big switch to get phone service to Vega. This was necessary because the terrain was too rocky for many poles to be put on the mountain. Gertie was also well known for her bathtub gin during Prohibition.

Part 7: Life Along Lower County Route 3

Greene County is largely responsible for maintaining Route 3. In recent decades Halcott has been landlocked from the rest of the county, so the need for repairs and maintenance has not always been noticed. By 1960, Route 3, was full of potholes. Any remaining blacktop consisted of patches on top of patches. To avoid breaking a spring in the vintage family car, Dad (Amos Kelder) started winding his way around the worst holes. As he drove past the cemetery on the left

side of the road one Sunday, the pastor, a British gentleman, passed Dad on the right with a toot and a wave. He must have felt like Dad was back in England!

During and after the war, Route 3 from Willie Griffin's farm to the Turk Hollow Bridge was impassable for a different reason. Twice a day, that mile doubled as a cow lane for herding livestock back and forth between pasture and milking parlor. [Incidentally, this summer that mile is dotted with bear scat rather than cow manure!] Ellen Todd, who grew up on Turk Hollow, tells me people further up the valley didn't mind. They were used to this routine and scheduled errands around milking. Once, however, my Aunt Helen Myers was out for a walk at the wrong time and had to hide behind a tree with the baby to get out of the way.

Willie's and Alena's daughter, Arlene Needleman, recalls an incident involving her brother, Jimmy, when they were children. They had a pony and Jimmy often teased Arlene for being afraid of it. The tables turned one day when he wrapped the rope around his hand just as the pony bolted. Down the hill from behind the house and across the road to the barn flew Jimmy, straight out behind the pony, scraping his shins along the way. And Arlene never heard another word from him about the pony!

Early in the 20th century, Alexander Van had a grist mill near a large hotel across the creek from the Maples, a boarding house later owned by Jim and Blanche Peet (see Deborah Morse's photo of the "Town Hall and bridge to Van Mills" in [A Halcott Album](#)). Gloria Sadowski says the house below the Maples (originally on the other side of the road) was part of his business operation as a wainwright and a cooper. The double doors high up on the end of it accessed his wheels and barrels. The house was moved when one of the Maples boarders purchased property next door. Sybil Peet Margaritis learned from Diane Galusha that the Town Hall dated back to 1855 and was used for elections. The owner, Austin Chase,

charged \$5 in rent. Later, the building was converted into accommodations for guests of the Maples. It succumbed to fire sometime between 1958 and 1960 while young Warren Reynolds watched from the shoulders of Ward, his father.

Life at the Maples resembled life at other boarding houses. The Peets' granddaughter, Sybil Peet Margaritis, Helen Finch's daughter, Karen Hull, and Bessie Ballard's daughter, Ellen Todd shared many memories. In its heyday, all rooms at the Maples were booked a year in advance by two dozen or so boarders. The layout there consisted of a side lawn crisscrossed with clotheslines, then a driveway with a drinking fountain in the middle, a two bedroom cottage, the main house, and the Annex (former Town Hall). [Incidentally, the cottage was later purchased, moved and expanded into a blue house above the county line by Steve and Helen Pandas.] There were twelve bedrooms, most with sinks, in the main house and eight in the Annex where there was also a large shower room. Every summer three or four 'girls' including Helen Finch (who later became Halcott's mail carrier), Bessie and Ellen Ballard, Norma Kelly, Emma Johnson, Iris Faulkner, Shirley Bouton and others across the years. Each morning, the yard, picnic tables, game room (containing a piano and card tables for puzzles, checkers and cards) and bathrooms in both buildings were cleaned before the 'girls' served breakfast (cooked by Jim) in the two dining rooms. Sybil says, "There were French doors separating the two rooms that my dad would re-hang when the season was over . . . The breakfast was extraordinary: hot and cold cereals, pancakes made to order on a special gas griddle, bacon and sausages, all varieties of toasts, milk and creams, coffees and teas, butter and margarine . . . The stove was purchased from the Home Economics Department when the school got a new one! As soon as the boarders finished breakfast, the tables were cleared, dishes

were done in the two large sinks in the kitchen and then the prep for lunch. The 'girls' would go upstairs to do the chamber work, my grandfather [Jim Peet] would either do the laundry [in the back kitchen, which was basically outside under an overhang] or head to town for provisions [from] Solomon's, the fish market and the A&P. Lunch was always a roast and then pies . . . Blanche Peet was famous for her pies.” After lunch, the 'girls' rested in the other cottage bedroom before dinner. In 1944, Jim did the top of the garage over into living quarters for newly married Helen and Buck Finch. Much later, Bessie and Ellen lived there for a summer. By then, the bridge to Van Mills was gone, but the creek was still dammed below the garage. Karen remembers the boarders taking her swimming in the *very cold* water of that swimming hole. She says the water was three feet deep and extended around eighteen feet upstream. Sybil says the “kids loved going on hikes with my dad [Vic] when he was here.”

On down Route 3, diagonally across from the Grange Hall, Billy Johnson could tell which farmer's milk truck was heading toward the creamery (current highway department) just by hearing its unique squeak or rattle. When old enough, he walked up to Stanley Kelly's barn on Elk Creek for the family's milk. Playing with the Kelly kids was fun, but not walking home after dark. Convinced that a tiger lived in the pitch-black stand of pines, he'd run like the dickens, easing off on the other side near his grandparents, Roy and Neva Johnson, next door. Billy's father, Earl, had the only bomb shelter in town during the Cold War. I remember being shown the windowless, cement cellar with its well-stocked larder and subterranean spring.

Dad, known for practical jokes, worked at the creamery where Earl was a milk tester. Earl's room had no windows, so the big wooden scrub brushes used for cleaning vats really made him jump when Dad hurled them at the steel doors. Earl discovered that after rinsing things

down, Dad would sling the hose over the big swinging doors along the truck bay and shower off before going home. You guessed it; Earl shut off the hot water on him! There were other instances of turn about being fair play. One time, Dane Scudder while at the creamery with his father, Leighton, saw Dad removing a door from its hinges. Intrigued, he asked for an explanation. Dad had recently been *locked* in that room, probably as payback for some other prank. He didn't care to repeat the experience.

At that time, Mike Morse, who wintered in Florida, owned the farm across from the Grange Hall. His sap house stood strong for many years across the creek from the Community Garden on the edge of Route 3. Mike began courting schoolteacher, Mae VanValkenburgh, when they were about 60. Mae once told me it all started with a greeting card. Soon the town was abuzz about “that old batch” and “that old maid” as Mae put it. One morning late in the fall, they awakened the minister at 5:30 a.m. and got married on the way to Florida! By the time they got back, gossip had died down.

Just as boarding houses had “girls”, farmers had “boys”. Arnie Weisshaar (see story in TTOH, Vol.42), who summered at Renny Van's with his parents until his father died, came up solo by Trailways bus during his teen years. He roomed on the third floor at John Van's while working on Louis Crosby's farm. He figures six cans of milk was the most any farm took to the creamery. John took two cans and Renny took four or five. The “boys” at Leighton Scudder's farm told Renny's son-in-law, Jean DeMott, he had more kids than milk cans! Marilyn Gallant pointed out that the cans weren't all full. The morning's warm milk could not be mixed with the previous evening's cooled milk. Milk at many farms was cooled in big spring fed vats.

Now you have toured the Halcott of yesteryear. It's been a pleasure to visit with so many readers and weave your stories together. Yet there are gaps and more stories to be told,

whether shared in the pages of TTOH or recorded just for your families. Keep up the good work of preserving our shared heritage!

PASSAGES

[Earlier this year, Halcott lost Mary Chesire. We print this tribute from her daughter-in-law, Christine Chesire, a contributor to TTOH.]

Mrs. C. & The Grand Gorge That Is My Heart

The day I met her, she was on her feet. It was a Saturday morning on a sunny day on Capitol Hill. Not the kind of Capitol Hill meeting most people think of. It wasn't some swanky DC lounge. It wasn't tapas and drinks at some District insider's hipster townhouse. That wasn't her. She was happy, smiling, her hair in a tidy French twist. She was relaxed and alert, taking in all of the sights and smells of an open air market. I would later learn that she, just like me, loved eclectic markets and flea markets.

She had come to DC to visit her son, Paul, who would be my future husband. She and her husband, Dan, (the two would later be affectionately known as "Mr. and Mrs. C.") took in the warmth and breeze of a southern afternoon. Paul had driven them there from his home in Maryland. We walked around, we shopped, stopping at incense and trinket vendors. The fact that she wanted to come to my turf to meet me at the place I frequented meant something to me. We chatted in the way that people who meet for the first time do and even though this was my town, she made *me* feel welcome. She had that infectious smile and those rosy cheeks that I would grow to adore and that everyone around her, who knew her, adored. Little did I know that I was on the precipice of meeting someone who would change my life forever.

After the market, the four of us drove to Virginia and ate pizza at a mom and pop shop where the décor was dreadful but the pies were to die for. The conversation was light. Mrs. C. was down to earth. This was the first time I had met my future in-laws and as is typical, I was trying to

make a good impression. At one point in the conversation, someone mentioned a person they knew who was pregnant. There was a brief pause in the conversation and then, Mrs. C. said to me, "Him". I didn't know who or what she was talking about, but she clearly was speaking to me. Confused, I looked at her. Then, she pointed to a portly fellow, with a protruding stomach, who was slowly moving past our table. Mrs. C. leaned in close and whispered, "Do you think *he* is pregnant?" We both burst out laughing. It would be the first of many laughs we would share for the next twenty-five years.

After the DC trip, there would be many trips, made by Paul and me, mostly in the 1990's, to Randolph, New Jersey. Mr. and Mrs. C. lived there and Paul and I would drive there for various holidays. Mrs. C. made the best Thanksgiving stuffing I have ever had (big apologies to my own Mom). The stuffing was flavorful and moist and loaded with sage! Mrs. C. introduced me to sage, just like she introduced me to knitting and blackberry pie making and practical thinking and a deeper understanding of faith and religion. She taught me things about her native Canada and she was "green" before the green movement was green. She recycled spent spools of thread and used them to prop up pieces of furniture, she recycled old egg cartons and gave them to neighbors who had egg-laying-chickens to reuse and distribute. She turned the shower caps you get in hotel rooms into toppers for refrigerated food items so that the food would not get stale. She had a common sense about her that I never had. But I learned from her.

Mrs. C. had an extremely strong bond with her friends in New Jersey. Over the years, I got to know so many of them, including their children and grandchildren. Having strong friendships was very important to Mrs. C., as she was an extremely gregarious person. She met many of her friends through the church, through groups and activities, and by living in her local neighborhood. Having

Coast woman. She amazed me. And even though she enjoyed the simple luxuries of belonging to bridge clubs and mahjong clubs and frequenting community theatre, she knew how blessed she was and she always gave back. She never forgot those less fortunate. On those trips to Randolph, NJ, Paul and I would share dinner, not only with my in-laws, but with several individuals who had no place else to go on holidays. Many people talk of feeding the homeless. Mrs. C. actually did it.

Mr. C's job took him all over the world and Mrs. C. gave birth to and raised her boys in various cities. As the boys got older, Paul told me that his parents wanted them to continue to see the world and so, they took them places. In addition to owning a home in Randolph, NJ, the Chesires bought a property in Halcott, NY in 1974 and then, in 1993, they built the home that still stands there today.

In 1999, my in-laws left Randolph, NJ. After years of making Halcott, NY, a place where they would vacation, it became their permanent home. There was a certain kinship between Mrs. C. and the Catskill Mountains. It was a type of symbiotic co-existence that combined her faith, spirituality, and allure with the mystique, beauty, and free spirit of the mountains.

I remember right from the beginning, she wanted to be part of the Catskill community. One weekend, when Paul and I visited, Mrs. C. baked and wrapped a cake as a donation to a local event in Fleischmanns. The weekend was a quintessential Summer weekend in the valley. It was filled with warm weather, old time baseball, ice cream, Robert's Auction, and festivities. For the event, tents were erected down on Fleischmanns Field. Mrs. C. had baked one of her famous Bundt cakes. As I was leaving my in-law's home and heading down to the event before everyone else, Mrs. C. handed the cake to me and said, "Take this to the tent. Tell them Mary Chesire sent it". I did as I was told.

Over the years, Mrs. C. became an integral part of the local scene. Once again giving back to the

community, she volunteered at venues like The Museum in Fleischmanns and she joined and participated in the Sacred Heart Womens group in Margaretville, NY. She attended and prepared food for luncheons at The Fleischmanns Senior Club, the Roxbury Senior Club, and the Shandaken Senior Club. Because she got to know so many people in Ulster, Greene, and Delaware counties, she often joined them on various bus trips like to Rockefeller Center or Herkimer or Thousand Islands. Mrs. C. went all over. She often made trips to her native Canada to see family. She visited her son Dennis, his wife Sandy, and her two grand-children, Stephen and Evelyn, in the various states they lived in, whether it be Utah or Texas or Delaware. She often visited and had lunch with her son, James and his wife, Melissa, in New Jersey. Mrs. C. orchestrated family reunions in Quakertown, PA, where her son William still lives. She visited Paul and me at our home in Pittsburgh, PA. She loved her family and we loved her.

Hands down, though, the best gatherings were at the Chesire home in Halcott - Summers on the deck, listening to the roar of the water, catching glimpses of wildlife, and enjoying great food and family time. Mrs. C. loved the sunshine on the deck and she loved to watch the hummingbirds that came to her feeder. When dinnertime rolled around, we would set a table on the deck and bring food and drink outside. There was always an extra table setting or two or three because Mrs. C. always extended an invitation to someone in her wonderful group of friends in the Halcott area. Virgil and Genelle, Hazel, Karen and Barbara, just to name a few. Because of Mrs. C's love of people and her social nature, our family benefitted.

It would not be uncommon to drive past the corner of Route 3 and West Settlement and see Mrs. C. and Genelle sitting side-by-side, on their chairs, chatting, laughing and sharing stories. The two of them had a special friendship. I received many summer time telephone calls from

Mrs. C. while she was relaxing with her dear friend, Genelle, as they watched the deer in a field or watched the cars go by.

Mrs. C. loved fireworks. Every 4th of July, the trip to Margaretville to watch them was both mandatory and enjoyable. She loved the parades in Fleischmanns and she fulfilled her patriotic duty every Memorial Day by attending. One 4th of July weekend, the West Point Jazz Nights were playing at Belleayre Mountain. It was an unusually cold and rainy summer holiday, that year, but Mrs. C. had tickets. She rounded up the family and away to Belleayre we went. She had the power!

Had Amazon been around, back in the day, Mrs. C. would have made a great warehouse supervisor. On one trip to Upstate NY, I was asked to pick her up in New Jersey. The plan was for me to meet her at a point in northern New Jersey and then, I could quickly get back onto a major northbound artery and we would both head up to New York in my car. When I got to New Jersey, the plan had changed. I was to travel to and pick up Mrs. C at her friend Nancy's house in a town that I had never been to before. I did as I was told. After I loaded some Costco items (a lot of Costco items) in my car at Nancy's house, Mrs. C. and I got in my vehicle and we started out for Upstate NY. We hit abundant traffic on the New York Thruway. Mrs. C. was on the phone the entire time, in constant contact with other family members who were traveling to the Chesire house for the weekend, as well. When we got up to Route 28 just a little west of Kingston, Mrs. C. had me drop off various Costco products to people in the Catskills. Little did Costco know that they had a retail distribution operation going on in the Hudson Valley! Once we got closer to the Chesire house in Halcott, Mrs. C. sprung into action. She called the house and any available Chesire who was there was to immediately report to the basement for the unloading of my vehicle. When I pulled the car in, there were no less than five Chesires (including grandchildren) unloading

Costco items and stocking various shelves at the instruction of Mrs. C. Did I mention she had the power?

In November 2014, Paul received a disturbing call from his Dad. It was a Sunday. Mr. C. had attempted to wake Mrs. C. for church that morning and to his shock, she was unresponsive. Mrs. C. was taken by ambulance to Margaretville Hospital and then subsequently by ambulance, to Albany Medical Center. She had suffered a stroke with bleeding on the brain. I often think that if it had not been a Sunday, a day on which she had a scheduled Mass to attend, would Mrs. C. have been found so quickly? Did the Lord save her on His day? But whatever the reason, we were the oh-so-fortunate beneficiaries of eight additional glorious years with her! After she had been admitted to Albany, the doctors brought the family up to speed. We were told that her speech had been affected. Not knowing whether or not I would ever again be able to carry on a conversation with her, I was obviously saddened. Along with the rest of our family, I worried about her heart and her health moving forward. The next day, Paul received another call. After a minute or two, he handed the phone to me. "My Mom wants to talk to you", he said. I think those were the seven most magical words anyone has ever spoken to me. "Christine! Christine!" she exclaimed when I picked up the phone. She was so happy to be alive. Deep in my heart, I knew she was going to be ok. Then, Paul and I drove to Albany Medical Center to see for ourselves. She came home with a pacemaker. But she came home.

Mrs. C. and I did a lot of things together. She was not just a Mother-In-Law to me, but a friend - something that the younger generation today calls a BFF (Best Friend Forever). Through the years, we went to dinners and gatherings in places too numerous to mention. We went to community theatre in Phoenicia, Margaretville, and Tannersville. We went to the Sight and Sound Theatre near Lancaster multiple times. We took a

bus trip together to Manhattan to see the Rockettes. We went to produce markets and distilleries. We always had something planned. Back in Halcott, she took me to house parties that her friends threw. We went to flea markets and community days. One day, she was leaving for a local senior luncheon. "C'mon," she said. "You are coming with me". Not knowing if I would know anyone at the luncheon, reluctantly, I went. It turned out to be one of the best times I have ever had in the Halcott area. I still have pictures of Mrs. C. from that day basking in the group chatter, laughing, and enjoying the comradery.

Years ago, a few individuals in Andes held a monthly event called Circolo Italiano. It means "Italian Circle". Being Italian, I liked to attend on some of my trips to Upstate New York. On one or two occasions, I brought Mrs. C. with me. I remember that when I invited her to come, she, in typical Mrs. C. style, invited several of her friends. Off we went to the Italian Circle. On one occasion, when we arrived, the topic for the evening was "trips to Italy and things you did while traveling there". Now, one of the places Mr. C.'s job took the Chesire family to was to Italy. They had lived there from mid-1966 to mid-1967. As was typical with the circle, the conversation went around the room with each person speaking of their own individual Italian experience. Most individuals spoke of their tours, the poetic nature of the language, the architecture of the homes, the cooking and the incredible foods they sampled while over there. When it came to Mrs. C.'s turn, she told the group that she lived there with "My William and my Stephen". In other words, she talked about her children. She didn't go into any fanfare about the great cheeses or the dry wines or the sweet gelato. She didn't boast of the place where she lived or gush over the countryside like she could have. Her family was the experience that was important to her in Italy.

Around 2019, her health began to decline. We all noticed it. The time we spent with her became

less about the places we would go, but instead more about the family time we would spend with her at the house in Halcott. There were still occasional trips to Mass and we still went on the annual birthday dinner to Hickory in Kingston (for Mrs. C.'s and Paul's October birthdays) but the family could tell how strenuous these things had become for her. Knee and foot pain, amongst other ailments were becoming hard for her to overcome. Mr. C., who had always dedicated his entire life to his family, was now dedicating all of his time to his loving wife.

Eventually, a woman named Pam was brought in to help with day-to-day care as Mr. C. needed a little extra help. Pam and Mrs. C. laughed together and enjoyed the Halcott nature through two seasons.

One of the last days I spent with Mrs. C. was Easter Sunday of this year. The plan was to go to church and then grab a bite to eat. Pam styled Mrs. C.'s hair in curls and she dressed her in a striped jacket and pants and I picked out her jewelry. Mrs. C. was stunning. Mr. C. was elated that he and his wife would be attending Sunday Mass in Margaretville. It was a happy day. Because of Mrs. C.'s limited mobility, we sat in the back of the church, which was also near its entrance. I will never forget the look on her friend Kitty's face when Kitty walked through those church doors and saw Mrs. C. sitting in the back pew. I never saw anyone rush to a person as fast as Kitty did and she promptly sat next to her good friend. The two cackled like school girls and it was such a welcome and pleasant sight. After Mass, Mr. C., Mrs. C., Pam, and I drove to Roxbury, where we had a late breakfast. I had mentioned that one of the lessons I learned from Mrs. C. was her practical thinking. Well, it was put to use on this morning. Perhaps, she and I were more similar than I thought because we both ordered the same item, off the menu, which was a breakfast skillet. The meal came in a diminutive skillet with home fries on the bottom and two sunny-side up eggs on top of the potatoes. My

eggs were runny and at one point, I looked over to discover that Mrs. C.'s eggs were not runny. In fact, they were sunny-side *down*! "Why are your eggs the opposite of mine?" I asked her. "I flipped mine over," She said. "That way, the hot potatoes will cook the eggs." "How brilliant," I thought. "Common sense," she said. When I tell you that I never stopped learning from her, I truly mean it. I never did.

Paul received word of her passing from a hospital in West Chester County. Mrs. C. passed on May 11, 2022. As a lot of folks know, she had been in and out of various New York hospitals. After showing remarkable strength and courage on multiple occasions (perhaps from her Northwestern Canadian roots), she pulled through time and time again. But a body can only take so much. Much to the shock and disappointment of those who knew and loved her, she succumbed to complications from an infection this year. For the first summer in a long time, she didn't get to watch, for months on end, her beloved hummingbirds buzz to and from the bright red hanging feeders on her deck. And our family never got the chance, in 2022, to share a meal with her, on that deck, in the Halcott summer sun. Pam said "She was the light". And that pretty much sums it up. What she brought to everyone she met was unmatched and quite honestly, may never be matched. She loved people and she loved being with people and we all loved her. We still do.

When I was asked to write this article, I knew that it would be a difficult and not a "happy ending" type of article, but I have tried to make it as light-hearted as I could. I can tell you that the news of her death cut through me like a laser. There is a hollowness in me that will be there for some time. That hollow, that gorge, is what was carved out of me when she passed. I have to believe that the darkness of that crevasse will someday be replaced by an illuminating reunion with Mrs. C., who will once again, be the matriarch, in charge, smiling, walking, and talking

of the splendors of Heaven. I look forward to that day when we can all see her again and the size of my own gorge is not so grand.

And Finally...

[Ed. Note: This issue, our 100th, marks the passage of the Halcott newsletter from one set of editors to another. We found Nemo!]

A Message from Nemo

As many of Halcott's unpaid volunteers will attest, one often finds—as one year melts into the next, and then the next—that one has bitten off more than one can chew. So let my first order of business be a grateful shout-out to the Halcott Times Team for keeping this little local gem of a newspaper polished and published for a full twenty-five years. It's been a remarkable achievement, a true labor of love for this community. As a newer member of that community, I bow to those whose historical roots here I am only beginning to disentangle (with the help of many eager tutorials). I have my own web of connections that I hail from, having traveled extensively in my life, but about five years ago I put away my suitcases and chose to settle down here full-time, with my partner Julio, in the old stone Crosby farmhouse. It seems only fitting that I engage in a way that contributes something to the community . . . and so the *Times of Halcott* will continue under my stewardship.

What can you expect of the new *Times*? Well, change is inevitable (as we all well know). The seasons here in the Catskill Mountains are our greatest teachers of change, utterly transforming our world four times a year. Yet there is a rhythm to those transformations, there are things that remain, things that remind us of past days, patterns, echoes, even truths. So, think of this change in editorship in a similar seasonal way—there may be some surprises, but also many familiar reverberations from past issues, whether they be beloved writers or time-honored subject matter.

I confess the task seems somewhat daunting at the moment, but I have received nothing but encouragement from friends and neighbors. Above

all, I don't want to be one of those outsiders who merely speeds through town for a weekend here or there, and then vanishes, leaving no trace of contact. My intimate involvement with the *Halcott Community Garden* has taught me the value of interaction with my neighbors, neighbors who, like the DiBenedettos on the farm adjacent to our property, prove every day the warmth of the Halcott Community even toward its newer members.

Speaking of the *Community Garden*, I should mention what a rousing success our recent plant sale was. For two days, folks converged from all corners of Halcott and surrounding towns, chatting and laughing with one another, some of them introducing themselves for the first time, some of them enjoying pleasant reunions, all the while shopping for local heirloom perennials and seedlings, as well as baked-goods from the Methodist Church table managed by the indefatigable Pattie Kelder. Structurally, the garden is in need of maintenance, and thanks to the generosity of our shoppers we'll be able to make some substantial improvements this summer, including a water pumping system, a revamped toolshed, and much-needed repairs to our perimeter fence. Despite the toil involved, there is talk of making this an annual event if we can find more souls to share the workload—especially now that the annual Halcott Fair seems in permanent hiatus. So, stay tuned. And thank-you to Alex Brock for shouldering so many of the tasks that make this garden even possible. If you might

be interested in getting involved, either gardening or helping with events, please contact us at halcottgarden@gmail.com. We'll also be looking for donations of perennials this autumn, for next

spring's sale—so if you want to thin out your garden beds, or spread some beloved heirloom plants around, let us know. All contributions are welcome.

One of the distinctive features of our town is the way individual independence and community, the private and the public, are united in our daily life. For those who have fled here from urban areas there is a real concern for solitude after the hustle and bustle of the city, whether it be complete retirement or just a quiet weekend. And for the natives, even though a sense of community has always been necessary to survive here, there is also an independent streak, a sense that if there is

something to be done, one should simply get on with it and do it oneself. Community, it seems, is always strongest when its individual members can stand alone. We seem to have the best of both worlds here: the peace of self-reliance, and the warmth of fellowship. Events like the plant sale rely on both, as has the *Times of Halcott* which will continue to celebrate us as individuals *and* as members of something larger.

So, let the *Times* continue to be a reaching-out into every corner of this community, the new and the old, for many years to come. I will do my part. If you like what you read, let us know, and if you don't like it, well then let us know that as well. You might even try penning something you like better, and sending it to us. We're all in this together.

But that's enough said, for the moment.
Nemo

Thanks for the Memories...

A quick poll of some of our townsfolk revealed what they have enjoyed reading in the Times:

Multiple favorites: Nina's illustrations and Judy DiBenedetto's farm and Border Collie stories!

Also:

Shirley Bouton's adoption story

How NYC's immigrant Greeks discovered Halcott

Helping nighttime salamanders cross the road

Historic tales of the valley

Passages. Births and deaths and the accompanying histories and memories.

The chronicling of our life stories as we grow older

And, from Diane Galusha: I can't begin to pick favorites from 25 years, I'm just very glad you have compiled them in book form.

The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Autumn 2022 *Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*



Bake Sales and Church Suppers

It was encouraging to be able to visit with friends and neighbors at the Community Garden Plant Sale and Halcott UMC Bake Sale in June, our first fundraising event since 2019. Thank you one and all.

Mark your calendars for a **Soup & Chili**

Supper at the Grange Hall on Saturday, October 1st. In addition, the **Election Day Bake Sale** may also be making a come back!

Substantial Property Upgrades

We have a lovely new church sign from Boyer Sign Company of Phoenicia. Flowers from Half Fast Farm are standing up to the dry weather. Some of the cane bottom chairs have been repaired by Herb Blish.

It was a blessing to have site visits from two men with backgrounds in engineering. Necessary work is to begin with a drainage project along the upper (north) side of the church and realignment of foundation stones under the sill before continuing with ramp and driveway repairs, an exterior paint job and anything else that comes up. Meanwhile, we've been told to prime parts of the siding. Money and materials, along with offers of labor, have begun to come in, but further help will be necessary. Please inquire about the particulars and share your thoughts.

Congratulations!

One member of the MCS Class of 2022 received the Janet Kelder Riss Memorial Graduation Award in June. Congratulations go to Sydney Asher, who was also the class Valedictorian!

New Name

Restructuring within the denomination resulted in the formation of an expanded parish of 22

churches in and around Delaware County. four of these area churches, including Halcott, are now known as the Upper Catskills Charge rather than the Upper Catskills Larger Parish.

New Pastor

Pastor Donna LeRoy has been moved to another church and Pastor Taeho Kim has been appointed in her place. His primary pulpits will be in Margaretville and Roxbury UMCs. While Pastor Debb Judisky is still in the Halcott and Andes UMCs, her credentials as a Certified Lay Minister do not permit her to serve communion or perform baptisms and weddings. For these needs, we turn to Pastor Kim, who will serve communion in Halcott one Sunday every other month.

Pastor Kim and his lovely wife, Hyerim, grew up in Christian families in South Korea. After coming to the US to further his college education, he served as a young adult group pastor in New Haven, CT. His heart for ministry extends to people of all ages. The couple has a sweet toddler named Roy. They are both skilled musicians. Currently the Kim family lives in Margaretville. (See related article and photo in July 1, 2022 issue of [The Catskills Chronicle](#).)

Final Exam on Campus

As some seminarians arrived for their final exam, they found a sign on the door telling them it had been moved to a different location at the opposite end of campus. Knowing the exam room door would be locked once the exam started, the concerned students hurried off. Almost immediately, they came across a visiting family that was lost. Time was short, so they kept going, assuming others would happen by to give them directions. Before long, they

encountered a child crying over a scraped knee. Her bicycle chain had slipped, throwing her to the curb. One worried glance at the clock tower propelled them forward. A detour for sidewalk repairs held them up, but a short cut regained valuable lost time. There was hope! Eying their watches, they rounded a corner, only to find a jogger who could hardly hobble. He had pulled a muscle and needed assistance getting back to his car. With no time to spare, they broke into a run, arriving at the alternate exam site just as the clock struck the hour.

The professor was there to meet them. He informed them that all would receive an exam grade of F for ignoring the needs of the actors he had stationed along the way. The students had studied the life of Jesus without acquiring any of His compassion.

What does this legend teach us? Are we too busy to notice the needs of others? Do our tight schedules keep us from helping in emergencies?

Jesus spoke about this.

“When the Son of man comes . . . he will sit on his glorious throne. . . . [H]e will separate [the nations] one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink . . .'

“Then the righteous will answer him,” Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? . . . ' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say unto you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' . . .

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me . . . into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink . . .

And [the goats] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
Matthew 25:31-46

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