

Contents

1. Norma Louise	1
2. Where Your Treasure Is	11
3. Schoolgirl.	19
4. With God's Help.	27
5. Dairy Farm Summer	37
6. Quarantined	47
7. To Trust or Not	55
8. "Show-and-Tell" Grandmammy	61
9. Content to Watch?	69
10. Trouble With Dots	77
11. Grandpa and Grandma Moore	83
12. Answering the Call	91
13. Learning to Pray	99
14. To Virginia and Back.	105
15. Sociable Seventeen	113
16. Servants in Love.	121
17. Providence	131
18. In Every Change.	139
19. Unto the Hills	147
20. Making Do	155

21. Gittin' Adjusted	163
22. Opportunities	169
23. What Things Ye Have Need Of	177
24. Abundance Enough.	183
25. Reactions Observed	189
26. Ohio Interlude.	197
27. Carried Across.	207
28. Resolution	213
29. Daily Exchange	221
30. Close Encounters	227
31. Under the Influence	233
32. What Neighbors Be Good Fer	243
33. Curriculum Changes	249
34. Family Co-op.	261
35. Building Up the Temple	269
36. Valley of Decisions	279
37. Praise After Tears.	287
Epilogue	297
Afterword	301

Chapter 1

Norma Louise

“Ray!” Mama Brenneman called across the yard. “I’ve got the Shenks’ laundry finished.”

“Okay, Mama,” Ray called back. “Should I harness the pony to the cart?”

“Yes,” Mama answered. “I’ll soon be ready to go.”

“Oh, goodie!” squealed Melba and Myron, the twins next younger than Ray. “Can we go along, Mama? We can walk—it’s not far.”

“Of course you may,” Mama said. “And, yes, you’ll need to walk. There’s not room for you to ride in the cart with these full baskets. Where’s Norma? She’ll want to go with us too.”

“Oh, she’s out with the animals, like usual.” Melba sniffed. “She just about lives outside! I like it so much better here in the house.”

Norma was on top of a small chicken coop, shelling an ear of corn for the chickens. Brownie, the family dog, sat beside her. It was such fun for the four-year-old to toss down kernels and watch the hens hustle to gobble them up! When she spotted the pony and two-wheeled cart being taken around to the porch, Norma slid from her perch and ran for the house.



Brownie and Norma

She scooted up beside her mother who was carefully loading the cart. "Mama?" she asked, brushing back a wisp of blonde hair. "May we stay to play for a while?"

Mama smiled into Norma's eager eyes. "Yes, I think we'll stay a bit. Barbara Shenk has to spend a lot of time in bed since she had a stroke. I want to encourage her if I can. And you can play with the children."

After securing the baskets, Mama spread a clean sheet over the load. Ray chirruped to the pony, and the load began to move.

Mama and the children walked alongside, watching to be sure that nothing toppled onto the dusty ground.

Sunshine warmed the little group as they left their small house near the town of Elida, Ohio. They walked along Sherrick Road and then turned down the long lane that led to their neighbors' rambling farmhouse. Norma skipped beside the cart, twisting to see if her own feet made tiny puffs of dust like the pony's hooves did. As the cart rattled into the yard, many of the fourteen Shenk children streamed out to greet them. Ray tied the pony to a fence post and helped Mama carry in the laundry.

One of the Shenk girls skipped over to Norma. "Oh, come an' see, Norma! We're havin' all kinds of fun playin' Follow the Leader! We'll show you—watch this!" She trotted over to the edge of the yard and ran up a long board propped against a large white-washed rock. It made a springy bridge under her thumping feet. "Wheee! Feels like flying!" she shouted, pretending to flap wings as she bounded to the highest point. She leaped from the rock to the ground and ran around to repeat the action. "C'mon! Try it!"

It looked like fun, but scary too. But the Shenk twins about her age were doing it, so Norma got up her courage and went. Flapping her arms, she bounced up the plank. It did feel like flying! And what fun to sail off the top! Laughing merrily, the children circled again and again, running and jumping by turns.

Then it happened. The board slipped and flipped over as it slid off the rock, and with a flutter and a fall, Norma's flight as a pretend birdie ended. She landed just where the sharp tip of a rusty nail was poking through the board. When she tried to rise, the plank was stuck to her leg! She let out a horrified scream, and several of the other children began to blubber in fright.

Mama heard the hollering and came running. Bravely she pulled the board away from Norma's leg, revealing a puncture

wound below the knee. She picked up the wailing girl and carried her into the house.

"Oh, my!" Barbara Shenk said, clicking her tongue in sympathy. "Someone should have checked that plank before the children played with it! Who knows how long that spike's been in there. Was it rusty? Sure hope she don't get lockjaw."

Melba's face turned pale, and Mama looked concerned. What was lockjaw? Norma didn't know.

"Do you have any medicine I could put on this puncture, Barbara?" Mama asked. "It would be good to treat it right away."

"Oh, yes!" Barbara said. "There's iodine in the cabinet. By all means, help yourself. And I hope the poor little thing heals up good as new. You'll need to watch her real close, Viola."

Mama thanked Barbara and managed to apply the iodine. It stung fiercely, and Norma cried harder. Ray brought the pony and cart, and the Brennemans left. With the laundry delivered, there was room for Norma to ride in the cart. Melba trudged on one side behind Mama, and Myron on the other. A row of Shenk children soberly watched them go.

"Mama?" Melba asked in a worried tone. "Will Norma get lock-jaw and never be able to open her mouth again?"

Norma stopped whimpering and stared at Mama. How could a hurt on her knee make her mouth go shut for always? That would be terrible!

"We hope not, Melba," Mama replied. "We'll do the best we can for her, and we'll trust God to take care of our little girl. He knows we can't afford any more doctor bills right now."



On Monday morning Norma sat on the floor, her leg still bandaged and sticking out in front of her. Mama stood at the washtub,

swishing their own dresses and pants, sheets and towels in the sudsy water. She scrubbed each piece on a scrub board hooked to the tub and put them through a tub of rinse water. Then she lifted the heavy soaked pieces into still another tub, where they waited to be wrung out.

"How does your leg feel today?" Mama asked kindly, pausing to wipe sweat from her brow.

"Okay," Norma said. "It only hurts when I bend it."

Mama's relief showed. "Oh, I'm so thankful it seems to be healing without infection. No trouble with lockjaw."

Norma opened and closed her mouth several times to be sure. Everything seemed to be fine.

Mama smiled. "It's different staying inside so much, isn't it?"

Norma nodded. She missed roaming about with Brownie and the chickens.

"Shall I tell you my baby stories again?"

"Oh, yes!" Norma loved to hear how the Brenneman children had come into the world.

"Well, your brother Ray came first. He was nine years ahead of you. A fine young fellow he was, and we loved him very much. But as he grew, he was sometimes lonely and wished for another child to play with. When he was five years old, he got his wish! But it wasn't just one child God sent—"

Norma broke in, "I know! It was three babies, wasn't it, Mama?"

"Yes, there were three! Do you remember their names?"

"Myron Jay, Melba Fay, and Margaret May!" Norma recited without a second's hesitation.

"That's right. Your brother Ray was so happy. He declared, 'I'm glad we finally got some babies once!'"

Mama stopped to shave slivers of homemade lye soap into the water before scrubbing some more. She chuckled, remembering.

“Your Grandma Moore, my mother, always helped me when my babies were born. This time, after Dr. Roebuck had given her two new babies to wash and wrap up, he asked if Grandma wanted another one. She said, ‘No, Doctor, two is enough.’ How surprised she was when he handed her a third! All together, those babies weighed eighteen pounds.”



Brenneman triplets: Margaret, Melba, Myron

“Then they got sick,” prompted Norma. “And Margaret May died.”

“Yes.” Mama sighed. “The triplets were only seventeen months old when they got spinal meningitis, and little Margaret didn’t make it. There were so many doctor bills. And then funeral expenses. Your papa didn’t know how he was going to pay for it all.

“And I didn’t always know how I could care for three tiny babies at once! One day my mother and sister come for a visit. As they were leaving, all of my babies were crying. So I plopped my weary self down and cried with them!” Mama’s hands in the washtub slowed.

“Next came me!” Norma crowed, interrupting her mother’s reverie. “Norma Louise!”

Mama’s face brightened. “Yes, you were next! Four years after the triplets, God gave us you. A little over seven pounds—just nice size. And your papa liked the name I suggested. Do you remember your birth date?”

“November 2, 1929,” Norma said. “How much did I costed?”

Mama smiled. “I don’t remember exactly. Maybe five dollars. Times were hard for us—for many people. Those years were called the Great Depression. We had no extra money to buy new blankets or baby clothes.

“You were a precious baby anyway, and you looked sweet wrapped in a clean old blanket. You didn’t get as much milk as the other babies, and you would never take a bottle, so you stayed rather thin. But we were so glad you were healthy.”



Norma’s earliest photo



L-R: Norma, Ray, Myron, Melba

Mama pulled the last piece of clothing from the rinse water. "Now I must wring these clothes and hang them out to dry."

"Papa's home!" Norma sang out, scrambling up from the floor. She hardly noticed her sore leg. "Look! He's bringing a big thing with him! What is it?"

The big thing turned out to be a used washing machine with a gasoline motor. After that, when Mama did laundry, she started the motor by stomping on the pedal, sometimes several times. The motor turned a big tub where the laundry swished and swirled. The attached wringer held two hard rubber rollers that had to be cranked by hand.

One evening at the supper table, Mama said, "Earl, that washing machine is such a great help! I don't need to wring out all those overalls, blankets, and sheets by hand now. I'm so thankful you insisted on getting it. I don't dread doing the Shenks'

laundry anymore. And we really do need the extra money we get from them.”

Papa’s eyes shone. “Viola, I’m glad your scrub board days are over and that the new washer pleases you. It’s a wonderful invention. But I shouldn’t wonder if someone will invent an even better washing machine someday.”

Norma and the other children stopped eating and stared at Papa. Could such a thing be possible? Surely not!