



A Faith Community

by Ellen Michaud

As I carefully drive across the tumbling Baldwin Creek and turn up a dirt road toward the 200 year-old church high in the Vermont mountains, the early morning frost sparkles across meadows stuffed with spiky milkweed, exuberant goldenrod, and gone-to-seed Queen Anne's lace. Trees line the road as it twists up the hill through the woods, and a rich, golden sun turns the swirling piles of leaves along the road into bits of maple fire.

Swinging into the clearing in which the church sits, I turn off the engine and listen. Far off across the hills to the north, the faint buzz of a chainsaw tells me that someone's cutting wood. To the south, a dog barks.

But here there is no sound. As it has for nearly two centuries, this simple country church sits in a profound stillness rich with a sense of Presence. I close my eyes for a moment, as its peace gently settles into every cell in my body.

There are too few moments like this in my life. Instead, like women everywhere, if I'm not working, I'm usually frantically running from one place to another as I pick up groceries, drop off pets, swing by schools, and run through the bank's drive-in.

But once in a while when some chore or another brings me here alone to weed the flowerbeds, cut back the hydrangeas, or make sure there's enough wood stacked in the woodshed, the silence allows me to hear—to sense—that still, small voice that whispers the truth about what's important in life. Like the joyous sound of a brook that's always present but usually obscured by the larger and louder sounds of a fast and angry world, it expands in silence and fills my mind with thoughts of the remarkable people who gather here to worship.



Grabbing my gardening gloves and trowel out of the back seat, I think of Jane, an elderly woman who has been known to march across our well-trimmed lawn, pause beside a car stopped to watch our festivities, open up a conversation with its passengers, then lead them into the paths of righteousness before the driver can get his foot off the brake.

I think of Peggy's softly ferocious caring as she quizzes Jane and her husband Sam to make sure they've been eating well, dressing warmly, getting to their doctor's appointments, and getting phone calls from their globe-trotting children.

I think of Joy, who always comes early to make sure a fire has been built in the woodstove, and of Greg, her beloved husband, who carefully checks to make sure the mice haven't taken over the vestibule.

I think of Kerry, who's always ready to tighten a step so our old folks won't trip, or hold a flower sale so we can pay the awe-inspiring insurance bill that arrives regular as frost this time of year.

And I think of Jill, who so recently lost her brother. Of Robert, who's lost his mom. Of Jim, who's fighting to save his. Of Elise, who misses her Ted. Of Tim and Marie and Douglas and Patty, who...

By the time I've finished weeding and pruning and thinking, piles of weeds and branches are around my feet, my heart is alive with love, and I realize that this small community of faith—this tiny little church half-way up a mountain and filled with ordinary people—is a tiny microcosm of all that's right with the world.

And that's a blessing.

Award-winning author Ellen Michaud frequently writes about the everyday blessings we all tend to overlook. Share your stories with her at ellenmichaud@gmail.com.

©2006 Ellen Michaud

