



THE TIMES OF Halcott

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Gordon's Farm

Linda Siegel Reis

Before my memory began, we spent a week every August at Gordon's farm on West Settlement. For a modest sum, we were guests at a working dairy farm in the rolling hills of the Northern Catskills. We would pile into a station wagon and make the long nighttime journey up the Thruway and then west across the winding, unlit Route 28, singing all the while. I would fight sleep, so I could be awake to see the house as it loomed large after that last curve in the road after the place where the spring flowed out of rock and there was a tin cup chained there so anyone could have a drink.

We slept in two of the many linoleum-floored bedrooms up the dark and creaky staircase from the front rooms. Ancestors with severe expressions stared out of dark frames up both sides of the walls of the stairs.

Our beds were high, lumpy mattresses in iron bedsteads, with layers of musty quilts and dank

pillows. I thought it was heaven. The bathrooms were in the hall, but there were only a few other families there, so it seemed private. We ate in the dining room if there were other guests, but, sometimes, if we were the only ones, we ate in the kitchen with the family of the house.

Grandma Gordon, in her early eighties when we first came to the farm, was the ruling matriarch. She was tiny, wrinkled, and her skin was like old linen. She wore her yellow grey hair pulled back in a small tight bun, fastened with old fashioned hair pins. For all the time that we knew her, she never left the house.

She was a skillful baker; her apple pies were legendary in three counties. She had never heard of cholesterol.

Once, my mother gently suggested to her that melting butter over the fried eggs and bacon



with which she began each morning might be unhealthy. She was then in her eighties. She laughed, "The doctor used to tell me that and he died back in 1944!" Her children, Laura and Percy, lived and worked on the farm. Laura was divorced and lived under the vigilant eye and iron rule of her mother. She was a tall woman with short, permed russet hair. Under her mother's watchful eye, she cooked, did housework, and followed Grandma's bidding.

As unyielding as Grandma was, Laura was quiet and good-natured. Laura sighed as she washed vegetables for dinner or lifted large pitchers of still warm milk onto the table before dinner. In the evening, she would iron in the front room, or sit with needlework on her lap to watch "Lawrence Welk" or whatever else her mother decreed. I liked Laura as much as I feared Grandma.

I remember the pleasure on Laura's face when my mother presented her with the carefully embroidered handkerchief she had made for Laura's birthday. My mother had a soft spot for Laura.

Percy was one of the two Gordon sons, and he did most of the farm work with Simy. He rarely spoke; I have no memory of the sound of his voice. The other family resident was Uncle Otie. He was Grandma's brother, almost as ancient as she, stooped over after a lifetime of hard work. He possessed the most gnarled hands that ever washed a dish. For health reasons, he was relegated to kitchen duties which he considered demeaning. These he performed grouchy, with much complaining and muttering, "Uncle Otie!!!" my father

would shout. "Why don't you roll up your sleeves?" After some low grumbling, Uncle Otie would shout back, "AAAHHH! They're dirty anyhow!"

Laura's daughter, Dorothy, came frequently on weekends with her two interesting sons, Ronnie and Michael. They were equally adroit at frog catching, tree climbing, and swimming in cold creeks.... things to which we aspired and in fact, were here to learn. Our favorite occupation was standing barefoot in the cool fragrant mud in the stream that ran alongside the house. The stream wended down from deep in the wooded hill above and wove through the fields, past the house, to the road, where it disappeared into a culvert and reappeared on the other side in the pasture where thirty-five or so Holsteins grazed. The mud on the house side of the road had an earthy organic smell and it teemed with life: tadpoles, spotted pickerel frogs and delicate skinned green frogs with their unblinking golden eyes, fragile green water newts and in season, the elusive red efts. Juicy stalks of jewelweed with their bobbing, little orange slipper, and clouds of ethereal blue forget-me-nots. The honey smell of clover, purple and white, that we crushed beneath our feet as we hunkered there looking for little creatures that we could bring back to the city. We gathered



armfuls of wildflowers which we put into vases and jars on all tabletops and in our bedroom on nightstand, dressers and window sills. We picked Queen Anne's

lace, black-eyed Susans, phlox, asters, daisies, wild roses, violets, yellow hawkweed and Devil's paintbrush and pearly everlasting. We made big and small bouquets, and yards of daisy chains. We stuck our noses deep into scented purple milkweed, although it did not last at all in a jar of water. At night, everything would be named.

We would always come up to Gordon's singing, but we would bundle sleepily into the cars with our jars of newts and tadpoles, wildflower bunches with their cut ends wrapped in wet paper towel and aluminum foil, our drawings, everything nestled into a corner of the car for the long, less boisterous ride back to New Jersey.

When I was six, and Danny newborn, we bought Judd Hill. For a long time, before we built a house and whenever it was too cold for camping, we stayed at Gordon's.

Grandma outlived her son by eight years. She was ninety four when she died. She was tough, she outlived everyone but Laura and her great-grandsons. She could be funny and generous, and God knows she made the best apple pie in three counties. Uncle Otie faded away before Grandma; it's hard so say exactly when.

For about ten years, Laura continued to live in the old farmhouse. She closed down all the rooms except the kitchen and the front room into which she had moved her bed and television. The cows were sold off after Percy's death, and Laura sold the barn and fields.

I couldn't go to Laura's funeral; I was away at college and it was too far and too

difficult to get away. I comforted myself a thousand miles away that we had gone to visit her whenever we could, and even though at times she seemed not to know us, we would sit and talk to her and gently try to remind her of our summers there.

The last time we saw Laura, she sat silently in her chair. My mother and I talked to her, but she appeared not to hear. We spoke about the old summers, but she seemed far away. As we were about to leave, Laura silently arose from her chair and slowly walked out of the room. When she appeared a few moments later, she held out the embroidered handkerchief that my mother had made for her so many years before.

Finding Grandma

Halcott's Town Justice, Vic Pagano is the son of Italian immigrants. He was stationed in Italy during World War II and while there, decided to look up the grandmother he'd never met. This is a letter he sent home:

January 10, 1944; 9:45P.M. Monday

Dear Pa,

I wrote you a short V letter* last night telling you in brief about my visit to Grandma. Now I shall try to give you as much detail as possible. Grandma's town is about four miles from the main city. I got directions and started walking. It was all up hill. I came across a few people and asked them if I was on the right road. They said yes and then I asked them if they knew a Carmella Pagano, about 75 years old who had children in the States. Well, as we walked along, everyone

* Vic explains that this was a small letter sent over the wireless during WWII, similar to a telegram.

was asking someone else, and before long, I had quite a collection of people following me besides the people staring at me. One fellow finally said he knew an old lady by that name and then it was finally decided that this Carmella was the person I was seeking, so with my escort of about twenty people we went to the house, entered the small courtyard and this fellow called for Carmella. A little old lady came out and wanted to know what they wanted. They said someone was here to see her, her grandson from America, Angelo's son, and well, by this time I had mounted the stoop and was beside her.

I then asked her if she had three sons in America. She said yes, and went to a drawer and produced a package of letters and sure enough there were some from you. That made it final. She was now convinced and so was I. She got kind of excited and her eyes filled with tears. She didn't know what to do. I guess neither did I for that matter. The people in the room saw that there was more or less of a stalemate and left. I closed the door, took my bag off my shoulder and sat down beside her. I felt kind of funny. I was in a way a stranger and yet I realized here was my Grandma you always told me about. It seemed like a dream. We talked about everything. You and all the rest. Well, it was getting late, so a lady next door came in and

they both made up my bed, two mattresses, nice clean sheets and two pillows, plus enough blankets. She had some cooked onions for her supper.

We sat around one of the "circle" pots containing charcoal, set in a platform. Then some guys came barging in and wanted to see Angelo's son. Quite a few people seem to have known you and the rest. Well, boy! There was sure a lot of ear-bending. Your ears must have been burning. They all send you their regards. Grandma sure was in her glory. You still are her favorite son, which made her that much happier in seeing me.



Vic Pagano, 1944

Well, soon everyone left and we went to bed. I slept nice and warm and in the morning Grandma had some hot water for me. I had taken with me lots of chocolate, candy, cigarettes and some canned food. The night before I made her a cup of hot chocolate and boy, she sure enjoyed it, so in the morning, I had the same. She put on her best dress and we took off for the town. We walked a small part of the way and everyone stopped her and asked her a million questions. She sure was happy. She hung on to my arm. I soon hired a horse and car-

riage and we went to the market in town and bought her a heck of a lot of stuff. She sure attracted a lot of attention. The carriage was filled with cabbage, onions, etc. On the way to town I stopped, had her wait in the carriage and I went into an American camp. I found the mess sergeant and obtained coffee, sugar, milk, bread, fresh and canned fruit. I bought 4 pounds of chestnuts, figs, apples and then we started back again. Boy! That's some hike, all up hill.

Well, that night (Saturday) we sat around the "pot" of heat and really had a talk. You would think I had been there for years, the way she listened to me and told me her troubles, etc. She told me that she often prayed that maybe some day she would see one of her grandchildren and now that she has, she really could leave this world happy. The day that I took her shopping must have been one of her happiest days in all her life. It certainly made me feel good. She had a nice large table shawl and I asked her for it to keep in remembrance of her. She quickly gave it to me. I told her that I would use it in my home when I got married and tell everybody that my grandmother in Italy gave it to me. That made her happy, too. She was kind of broken up when I had to leave but I just couldn't stay longer. I left her some pictures of you and Jackie... Well, it's very late, been writing for some time, so I'll say good night and give my regards to everyone. Goodnight



and love to all,
Your son, Victor.

Snow – Are you ready??

Al Doubrava is the Halcott Snow-Measurer and he reports that the snowfall total for the winter of 2002-2003 was 115". Al also told me that if you thought there was an awful lot of snow hanging around all winter, you were right. Unlike other winters, there was no thaw last year – the snow cover



was constant throughout the winter. Measurable snow fell on November 1st, 2002 with 3" and ended on April 7th, 2003 with another snowstorm of 3". In between, we had 19" for November; 36+" for December (wow!); 21" for January; 23" for February; and 13" for March. Wonder what this winter will bring... *IK*

Super Highway Superintendent

"I like to help people out," says Russell Bouton, speaking of his job as superintendent of the Town of Halcott Highway Department. However, the simple phrase typifies the generous Bouton family spirit that many of us in Halcott are lucky

enough to know and love.

Russell Bouton began working with the highway department part-time in 1987, worked winters until 1995 when he started working full-time, and came on as the superintendent in 2001. His department is responsible for eighteen miles of town roads, and, though Routes 1 and 3 are technically Greene County thoroughfares and we are not responsible for maintaining them, Halcott signs a contract with the County each year to conduct winter plowing.

Maintaining old country roads requires some old-fashioned know-how. The paved roads in Halcott are maintained by a periodic stone-and-oil refinishing. (Russell says that the frequency depends upon the weather—a late-spring snowstorm that requires plowing can wreak havoc on a road—but that once every four to five years is the average.) This treatment is very interesting-looking to those who have never seen it: A large oil-company truck comes and sprays the entire width of the road with a coating of oil, then crushed stone is distributed on top of it, and the whole thing is flattened by a roller. Dirt roads are maintained by first using the grader and rake machines to even out the ridges and ruts. Then, the road is rolled flat using a tow-behind roller (though Russell has dreams of procuring a vibra-roller for the town



from his favorite source, Army Surplus). A recent dirt-road renovation was the spring-time re-grading of Turkey Ridge Road, wherein bankrun gravel was laid down the center of the road.

Everyone in Halcott knows how wonderful our highway department is at plowing in the winter—in fact, the roads here are often much more passable after a

big storm than Route 28 or the Thruway. Russell has a few simple requests for residents to help his department keep up the great work.

Throughout the upcoming winter—"I haven't read the Farmers' Almanac in a few years, but someone just told me that it's supposed to be as snowy as last year," he says—he asks that weekenders do the following. First: If your home is on a secondary road that is not normally plowed and snow is in the forecast, give the department a call a day or so in advance so that they can get your road cleared; the number to call is 845-254-5736. Secondly, if there has been snow, you should make sure to arrange to have your driveway plowed before you arrive—Russell points out that leaving cars in the road during the winter can be very hazardous.

Russell Bouton is a very busy man.

In addition to his full-time job, he also raises baby heifers. Each year, he buys six calves to sell to dairy farmers when full-grown. Though small, his farming operation keeps him connected to a family legacy. "I hate to see all the farms go out," he says. And, though hard work, the farming keeps him happy. "I love it; it's in my blood, I guess."

When I marveled at the personalized service that our highway department offered, and joked to him that he might "forget" to plow the road of someone he disliked, Russell said quietly, "No—I try to treat everyone about the same." That is the essence of the spirit of our beautiful valley, and the people—especially the Bouton family—that make it so extraordinary. *Laura Vogel*

The Dipper Triumphant

Readers will remember the traumatic tale of Camille Vickers' and Greg Beechler's dog Dipper and his tangle with a coyote. (See *The Times of Halcott, Summer 2002*.) The Dipper has never fully recovered the use of his back legs from this awful encounter. However, he has all the help of modern technol-



ogy, and as Greg reports, he is one happy little fella' who keeps rolling (literally) along. We wish you the best, Dip! *JK*

Highlights From A Guy Abroad

(This summer, the Town of Halcott was represented in international soccer games by our very own Kane DiBenedetto. Below are some excerpts from the journal he kept during his travels.)

Iceland. First of all, it doesn't get very dark. Won some games, but lost more, so we didn't make it to the finals. Incredible fun parks—bumper boats, in-ground trampolines, go-karts. Food is quite expensive, and the ATM machine ate my card. Swallowed it whole. Had to take a bus a long way to get it back. ... **Scotland.** Bought new cleats! Played good games, traded my really ugly jersey for the rival keeper's nice one. Bought new goalie gloves! Forgot to take pictures until we were on our way to the plane. The best soccer of the whole trip was in Scotland. ... **Spain.** Our connection from Scotland was late, and the airline waited a half hour just for us! The clubs

here are great! There's a heat wave; glad we have a pool on the roof. The clubs here are great!! People here are so unpredictable; they just take their clothes off whenever the urge hits them! It's cool to see how much soccer means to people outside of the states. P.S. - The clubs here are great!! ... **The Netherlands.** Our coach here is a ref for national games, as well as a player and

trainer; he really knows his stuff. Oh yeah, I have to drive half the team wherever we go because we have 2 vans and one driver, and nobody else drives standard. Slept through **Belgium**...it was an optional trip, so a few of us ended up at the beach instead. Yes, the Netherlands has a beach, and it is very nice. We've played well as a team, and the trip has been great. But it will be really good to be home. (*Peg and Michael and Suzanna were happy to have Kane home, and got to see him for about 5 minutes before he left for college...*) Kane Dibenedetto.



Pumpkin

Patrick Pagnano

This is the story of Pumpkin's first adventure and how she came into our lives.

It was a beautiful crisp autumn day in October of 1992. A perfect day for my work in the yard. I gazed in the direction of Ben and Judy's house and saw Goliath (the wonderful dog belonging to Dot Reynolds) acting on his natural instincts and scratching at an old stump of a tree for what I imagined to be a mouse or

two. When I went over to see what Goliath was up to, I was dismayed to discover he had dragged out not mice, but kittens only a few days old. I chased Goliath away and blocked the access of the tree stump with a huge rock — leaving enough room for the mother cat to get back in to her two remaining kittens. The mother was nowhere to be seen. Feeling I had done a good deed, I went back to my work. But in a short time Goliath had gone to the back of the tree stump and just carved out another hole, snatching another kitten. My next vision was of Kari running back to our house hunched over and cradling something in her hands. I found Kari in the kitchen with what looked to be a ball of sawdust on the kitchen counter. After a little cleaning, I saw a tiny fuzzy being, no ears and eyes closed tight. Not knowing what to do, Jennifer, much younger versions of Jamie and Lucas, and Susie Benedetto came over to offer assistance and advice.

Jennifer told us about Bonnie and Scott Moroff — who generously offered us expert advice on how to care for the newborn. They estimated that she was only 5 days old, and that her chances for survival might be slim. It was decided that the mother cat must have been killed, as it was unlikely she would have left such young kittens for such a long time. We immediately fell in love with our little find and decided to try our luck. After taking a vote on names, being close to Halloween, and being influenced by the Bouton children and their penchant for naming pets after a food product,

we decided on Pumpkin.



Kari Pagnano with 11 year-old Pumpkin

With much care and regular two hour feeding with a bottle, Pumpkin made it. She is better known for her feisty personality — a trait that no doubt helped in her struggle to survive. But here in the picture with Kari is her other side: secret and unknown to most. We like to compare our Halloween cat to the moon. She has a dark side and a light side.

Passages

On June 16th, Halcott lost Jim Benedetto to cancer. His brother-in-law, Ben Patrusky wrote the following:

I started as Jimmy's brother-in-law but it wasn't long before I came to think of him and to love him as a brother. He was a man of uncommon generosity, kindness,

gentleness, modesty, gallantry, humor, intelligence, honor, conviction, sophistication, grace and spirit. He jumped at life with a special kind of exuberance. He was a man of refined taste. He knew food, and he certainly knew wine. He was a man of song. There was nothing to compare to a balmy, firefly-lit summer's night on the deck of the Benedetto home listening to Jimmy on the guitar as he belted out his awesome rendition of Rocky Raccoon to the squealing delight of all, young and old, fortunate enough to be in the vicinity.

He was a man of antic wit and playfulness. The household was always one teeming with pets: an ever-changing menagerie of turtles, cats, birds, fish. Here's how Jimmy broke

the news to his daughter Emily of the death of her goldfish when she (and her sister Katy) were all of about six or seven. He had the children line up and asked everyone with a cat to take one step forward. Giggling, all stepped forward. "everyone with a turtle...take a step forward." All did. "Now everyone with a goldfish, please step forward...not so fast Emily."

He was a man of great courage and nobility. To have watched Jimmy deal with the cancer that took his life was to have borne witness to what bravery — what grace under extreme pressure — really means. This magnificent man touched all of our lives. We love you, Jimmy, we always will. So farewell — but not goodbye.

Gordon's Farm

Judith Siegel (Lief), July 1976

Laura introduced us to porridge.
Every morning she'd serve us
After the boys went out to milk the cows.
We savored the steaming spoonfuls
Topped with Laura's special "sugar-butter."

Grandma Gordon rocked
After having baked four apple pies,
And served the farmers
Eggs and sausage
After milking.

Uncle Otie stood at the sink
Elbow-high in dishwater.
He said his cuffs needed washing anyway.
His pipe hung limply from the corner of his mouth
Glued to his lower lip.

There were always
Stray cats
And nervous dogs
Nipping at our sneakers,
Which were drying by the wood stove
After our early-morning romp in the field.

Upstairs
The walls were papered
In tiny pink flowers.
The rooms... simple,
Furnished with tall wooden bureaus,
Hard brass beds
On polished wooden floors.
And patchwork quilts,
Back again in mothballs...
And apple pie and porridge.

Later that night
We zigzagged the pasture
Seeking the perfect site
For a roaring bonfire,
Toasted marshmallows,
And ghost stories.

Grandma Gordon would have been asleep
For hours
In her first-floor bedroom.
She avoided climbing the stairs,
Protecting the tender, swollen legs,
Stuffed into black tie shoes.

When I grew up,
And we stopped visiting
Gordon's Farm
Because we had gotten a place of our own,
We lost touch...
Until we heard Grandma was dying.
Then we came and saw her.
A fragile head
Trimmed with a sprinkling
Of wisps of fine white hair,
Raised high on a pillow.
Below,
A slight body,
Barely visible under the covers,
Except for two feet,
Protruding shyly,
At the end of the bed.
She remembered me,
And renewed our old joke:
Did I still suck my thumb?
And what flavor was it?
I had forgotten the taste.

Two of the dogs died
And the cats
Strayed to another farm.

Uncle Otie never much got out of the rocker,
Except to wash the dishes.
His cuffs were still pale and worn,
Reminiscent of milking days.

Mommy promised we could have porridge
Once in a while.
But,
In suburbia,
Years later,
Cooked on a modern stove,
Even sugar-butter wasn't enough.



THE TIMES OF THE HALCOTT METHODIST CHURCH*

PATTIE KELDER, CORRESPONDENT

It's our anniversary! **The Times of The Halcott Methodist Church** is one year old!

A couple of reminders:

- Worship service is at 9:00 and Sunday School is at 10:30 on Sunday mornings. There is the possibility that the Worship time will be changed to an evening service around Thanksgiving and continue through the winter.
- Any member of our congregation can take requests for prayers and greeting cards for anyone.
- The interfaith Halcott Bible Study meets twice monthly and is open to all. For information call 845-254-5589.
- Pastor Bill and Kay Hawes are getting settled. Their phone number is 607-326-9366.

Upcoming events:

- The Sunday School plans to visit

some of our shut ins during September.

- Watch for details of a special music program to be held around Columbus Day.
- The Election Day Bake Sale will open at 10:00am at the Town Grange Hall.
- Watch for the time, date, and location of the Community Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.
- The Community Christmas Program this year will be held on Saturday, December 6th at 7:30 p.m. at the Town Grange Hall.

Update on Christianity in China

The Killians were introduced in the Spring, 2003 issue. This update illustrates the importance of their work in China, and the ongoing need of prayer support for persecuted believers around the world.

When the Boxer Rebellion forced

**The Times of Halcott makes this space available for items of community interest from the Halcott United Methodist Church.*

Christian missionaries out of China in 1948, the Church was driven underground. Like the early Church described in the Book of Acts, it continued to meet secretly in houses. Christianity, in the face of adversity, spread deep into the Chinese countryside. Persecution was vigorously renewed in 1966 when the Great Proletarian Communist Revolution sought to destroy old ways, including belief in God. It has been reported that keys to this campaign of terror included Bible burnings and torture. Whisper campaigns about these atrocities were started in Hong Kong churches even before the 1997 takeover by China.

In her book, *The Battle for the Chinese Bible*, Nora Lam writes, "Why risk world condemnation at a time when [the Communists] wanted to look reasonable and humane? Partly ... because they know that the UN is powerless to stop them. And the United States is more

interested in promoting trade than protecting human rights ... if the world doesn't care how Chinese police treat minorities and Christian prisoners, why not brag about it? But the real reason ... is simply because they know that terror works... Today, more people remain in prison for their faith in China than any country on earth. Over 1,100 loagai concentration camps house 170 million slave laborers." This short book, containing gripping stories of two Chinese Christians, can be borrowed from me at any time. Also available is a social conscience book list (which my sister valued) compiled by the United Methodist Women. In addition, reviews of faith-based literature can be accessed free of charge from the United Methodist Publishing House by emailing pastorrecommends@cokesbury.com. Any of these books can be read and discussed in book groups.

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