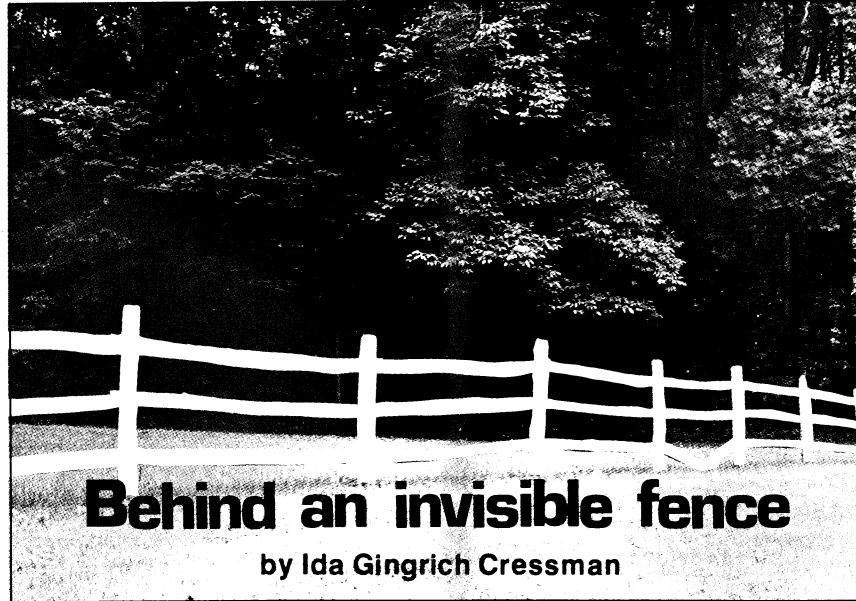


Purpose

May 1979

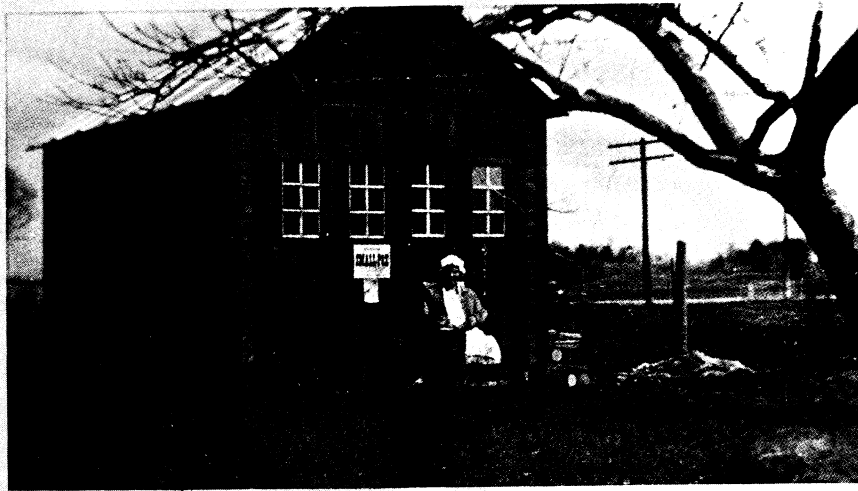
Part 2 for May 13, 1979



NEARLY SIX DECADES is a long time to remember something, but for Myra Shantz and I, the winter of 1920 wound up in an unforgettable way.

Recently, I saw Myra sitting in the corridor of Fairview Mennonite Home, Cambridge, Ontario, where we now both live, and decided to stop for a chat. Our conversation soon turned to the events of that dreadful winter almost sixty years ago when I worked for Ben and her on their Freeport farm. Myra is twelve years older than I.

The story began on a frosty March morning in 1920. It was butchering week, the biggest week of the winter. We did not go to the supermarket for our supply of meat in those days. There were no freezers or refrigerators, so when winter set in on the farm, meat was prepared in various ways for the rest of the year. A steer was slaughtered and hogs were dressed in readiness for the big week. Beef and pork carcasses were cut up. Some of the beef steaks were cubed, put in jars, and steamed. Spare ribs and chops from the hogs



The author behind her invisible fence

were put in a tub outdoors and frozen for the winter's use. Hams were sugar-cured and hung in the smokehouse. There were tubs of ground pork for pork sausage. A mixture of ground pork, beef, and seasonings was stuffed into cotton sacks for summer sausage.

Rows and rows of sausages were hung in the smokehouse for smoking and curing. Lard was rendered. Crocks and pans were filled with head cheese, sometimes called liver sausage. Some pork sausage was canned and some was smoked.

Beef bones were boiled and the meat was picked off, ground, and blended with ground apples, raisins, and spices for "mince." The mixture was canned in dozens and dozens of jars for mince pies. Last of all the year's supply of laundry soap was made by boiling a mixture of grease and lye.

ONE DAY while I was picking

meat off the beef bones, I felt something was happening. I felt chilly, had a headache, a severe pain in my back, and my temperature began to climb. I finally had to give up and snuggle under some blankets on the couch. It seemed I was getting a bad cold.

When home remedies failed, the doctor was called. He said I had the flu and should be in bed with such a high fever. I was to be kept away from the rest of the family, so a bed was set up in the parlor. I was a very sick girl for several days.

Then, I noticed some strange blisters appearing on my hands and face. This was something more than flu. I was suspicious. I don't know whether it was premonition or curiosity, but a few weeks earlier I had read an article somewhere about smallpox. I got out the medical book, the "family doctor" (which most folks had in their homes at that time), and read all I could find

Purpose David E. Hostetler, Editor, Vol. 12, No. 5, Part 2, a Christian monthly, published in weekly parts for young and old, by Mennonite Publishing House with business and editorial offices at 616 Walnut Ave., Scottdale, PA 15683. Single subscriptions in U.S. dollars: \$5.50 a year. \$15.00 three years. Bulk rate for Sunday schools available on request. Lithographed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1979 by Mennonite Publishing House.

about this disease. When the blisters appeared I had some idea what they might be. I immediately told Myra about my fears and the family doctor was called.

I guess the doctor didn't want to scare me, so he said, "Oh, I think it's chicken pox, but I'll call your mother." My mother told him I had had chicken pox.

"You don't think it's smallpox?" she asked anxiously. He said it looked suspicious. Well! In a short time, the health inspector arrived and confirmed our fears.

How was this unexpected and difficult situation to be handled? Here I was in the house of a family with six children and the Shantz's had a herd of cows and were selling milk to the dairy. Some arrangements had to be made about that. First of all everybody had to be vaccinated and the family was quarantined. A card with the horrible words smallpox was tacked on the door.

One of my sisters remembers Ben coming to school in the middle of the afternoon to pick up his children. This unusual happening sent my brothers and sisters racing home after school, their minds full of questions.

As they rounded the last curve they met a horse and cutter carrying our parents. They knew immediately something was terribly wrong. Mother was crying. She told the bewildered children only that she and Dad were on the way to the Shantz farm because I was very sick. To have mentioned the word smallpox would have been like pronouncing a death sentence.

At the Shantz farm, beds were moved to the barn for the men. They could not go into the house if they were to handle and sell milk, so they

lived and slept in the stable with the bawling cows and squealing pigs. Their meals were brought to the dairy house somewhere between the house and the barn. Since it was March, it must have been very cold and uncomfortable to eat in an unheated building.

I was very comfortable in the best room of the house which had just been redecorated with fresh wallpaper and a new rug. Sheets were hung on the outside of the door to my room and every few hours some kind of disinfectant was brushed on them to keep the germs from sneaking to the other side.

My sister Enetta came to the Shantz home to help with the house work in my place. She brought my meals to me. Fortunately there was a double door from the veranda to the parlor and a tray was placed between these doors. Food was brought and my dishes were filled on the tray. After meals a kettle of boiling water was poured over my dishes and they were left there, ready for the next meal.

This would have been a good time to do some spring sewing with the children home from school, but the sewing materials and patterns were in a drawer in my room. Everything in that room was contaminated and had to be left there.

I'm not sure what all happened during those first two weeks, but they were probably the longest two weeks of my life. I lived in anxiety and concern, afraid someone else would be stricken with this dreaded disease and that the quarantine would be prolonged. Thanks be to God, He took care of that and no one else in the family got smallpox. I can't recall any fear or even

(continued on page 7)

(continued from page 3)
thoughts of death.

The doctor said we would be quarantined for at least six weeks. This seemed a very long time for all the inconvenience. The health inspector suggested setting up a portable garage on the lawn into which I could move. Then the house could be fumigated and the family could get back to more normal living. I was happy to do anything to make life more tolerable for everybody.

A prefabricated garage was purchased, set up, and furnished with a bed, stove, table, chairs, and a few other pieces of furniture necessary for cottage housekeeping. A few scatter rugs made the floor warmer and more homey. It was really quite an attractive and cozy cottage. I even had a private telephone line—a bell on a thin rope strung between the cottage and the house! When I pulled the rope, the bell rang at the house and someone came to see what I needed.

I also had some beautiful hyacinths. Myra had planted bulbs in pots in the fall so we would have some nice flowers indoors during the winter. These were in full bloom in the parlor when I became ill. When I moved to the cottage, Myra said, "You may as well take the flowers along. They'll die when they fumigate the house." These lovely flowers were a delightful addition to my home.

I started a new life in the cottage. For six weeks there was an invisible fence around my little piece of land and everyone seemed to know where the line was. There was no need to be afraid of unexpected company, for few ventured across. The only visitor was the doctor, and he would say, "You are like a leper, unclean."

Lepers in Bible times had to live by themselves outside the camp as I lived in isolation. During that lonely time a line from a song became very precious to me. Over and over through my mind flashed the words, "He slumbers not nor sleeps."

After I moved to the cottage, the house was fumigated, cleaned, and life for the Shantz family returned to normal. The smallpox card was moved to the cottage door. I should have kept it for a souvenir!

A little table stood outside several yards from my door. There I would set some bowls at mealtime and someone would bring my food and empty it into my dishes. No one touched anything I handled.

Weekends always brought special treats—home-baking from friends and neighbors. I lived like a queen. Sometimes friends sent goodies for both my sister and I. If they came to me first, I couldn't even share.

To pass the time, I did a lot of reading, tatting, and crocheting. When the pretty lace doilies and edgings were completed I stitched them on sheets of blue tissue paper and tacked them on the wall. These delicate wallhangings added a touch of beauty to my humble home.

My mailbox usually had lots of letters and cards. I would have had plenty of time to answer them, but no mail could be sent from my box.

One evening while looking out the window, I saw a beautiful sight in the sky. I have never seen anything like it before or since. There appeared to be an opening in the sky, farther away than the eye could see. The most beautiful curtains seemed to frame that opening, spreading out and extending to the horizon. I watched for some time and thought that maybe Jesus was coming.

Editorial

Mother's Day in the Abstract

We humans still need to have our finest qualities—unselfish love, gentleness, understanding, and the like—symbolized in some way. Catholics find this symbolism fulfilled in Mary, the mother of Jesus. Most persons find that their mothers embody these characteristics. Hence the appeal of Mother's Day.

But mothers are human, too. It is for this reason I have decided to run two stories about real people, mothers of friends whose lives I know.

The first takes us back to the days when smallpox was scourge, and the outcome of the disease was either

death or the cause of ugly and indelible markings. Ida Gingrich Cressman is the mother of Ferne Burkhardt and Arnold Cressman (whose writings have appeared in our church periodicals) and other family members, whom I don't know so well.

The second story is also about a woman, her husband, and children who have given much to the church.

So, rather than sentimentalize about "mother" in the abstract, I have chosen these stories of very human mothers for your edification. —David E. Hostetler.

One Saturday the doctor stopped by and announced, "On Monday we'll set you free."

This was good news, but one thing bothered me. So much good food had been brought in that weekend. I would have to throw it away. There was no way that I could eat all the fresh baked buns and coffee cake before Monday. There was one thing, however, that I was not going to throw out. A friend had brought some freshly made maple syrup, a real springtime treat. I decided to boil it down to make taffy.

Later, on that beautiful sunny day, I stood outside my door with a dish of taffy in my hand. Irvin Shantz, who always stopped to chat a bit when he walked by, asked curiously, "What are you doing?" I told him I was enjoying some maple taffy.

"Oh, if only I had smallpox too!" he said.

Monday came and I moved out of

the little room which had been my home for six weeks. The cottage was fumigated, dismantled, and hauled away. Only a bare spot in the yard remained to remind us of the ordeal. I was back in the house with the family. It was pleasant but strange to once again live among people.

I had a feeling they were a bit afraid of me. Although I was declared cured, and there was no more danger of spreading the dreadful disease, small purple-colored spots still showed on my skin. They eventually faded and not one scar marked my body!

Although I did not go to the river and wash seven times like Naaman did to be healed of his leprosy, the Lord did give me a new, clean skin. There were no permanent scars.

CREDITS—Photos: page 1, David Hiebert; page 2, supplied by author; page 4, supplied by author.

Purpose