

TIDINGS

SPECIAL EDITION

Harrisonburg Mennonite Church
September 3, 2017

I had worked with Lila Mae Janzen to recognize in *Tidings*, their coming to Harrisonburg 50 years ago this year. Since *Tidings* is not now being published, Pastor Craig agreed for this to be released as a one item “special”. Ruthanne Heatwole, who is now a member of HMC, worked with Lois Preheim to write a reflective piece.

Sam preached his first sermon at Chicago Avenue on Sunday, September 3, 1967, 50 years ago today. The congregation moved to its present location, changed its name, and grew significantly during his 17 years as pastor. Pastor Sam introduced the concept of the adult Sunday School classes to function as congregational units with broad responsibilities. They are now known as Discipleship Communities.

Ken Weaver, HMC Historian

Lila Mae's reflections:

How Samuel and Lila Mae Janzen came to Harrisonburg

I interviewed my mother, Lila Mae King Janzen, in mid-July when I was in Harrisonburg to see her. Here is what she remembers about their life-changing decision to move from Glenwood Springs, Colorado to Harrisonburg, Virginia so that Sam could follow his calling to be a full-time pastor. I am putting her memories in italics and using regular print for my links.

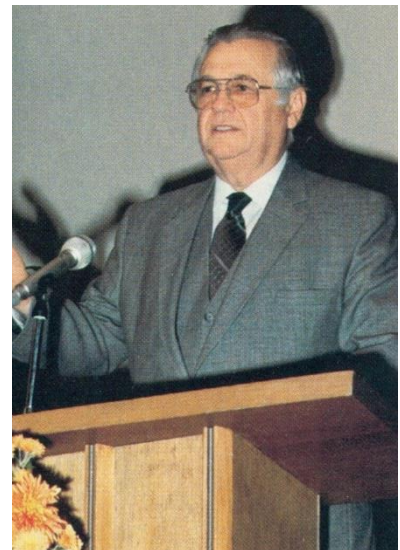


*In August, 1966, we got a telephone call from Winston Weaver. “Would you consider full-time ministry at Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church here in Harrisonburg?” As Sam knew little about the congregation, he told Winston that he wanted to learn more, and his understanding at the end of the phone call was that Winston would either be sending more information or calling again with more to tell him. We started looking through church papers for references to Chicago Avenue. And we waited for more information. But we didn’t hear anything. Early in 1967, we read in *Gospel Herald* that Chicago Avenue had hired an interim pastor, so we thought, “Well, that’s that.”*

Meanwhile, Myron Augsburger and B. Charles Hostetter had a conversation. The result of that conversation was that B. Charles called Sam to invite us to come to Harrisonburg to check out the congregation. So, early 1967, we flew to National Airport in D.C. and then transferred to Weyers Cave. These were my first airplane rides. Harley Rhodes met us. I remember that Highway 81 was finished north of Harrisonburg, but they were still working on 81 south of Harrisonburg, so there was lots of traffic on Highway 11.

We went to Harley and Alta's for breakfast, and we took the picture that was used in the directory that was made for us when we came. The people at breakfast were the search committee: Winston Weaver, Elwood Weaver, Warren Burkholder, and Ken Weaver. (She doesn't remember if the wives were there, too). After breakfast, Ken drove us around Harrisonburg, and we spent much of Saturday meeting people. I'm not sure now who all they were, but I do know we went to Warren and Virginia Burkholder's house for supper and that we stayed with Winston and Phyllis for the night.

On Sunday morning Sam preached, and I remember being shown the study at the back of the church and standing at the back of the sanctuary greeting people. (She stops the account of the day to remember that Dad's study at Chicago Avenue was an important place for the younger girls after they moved, and that this was one place Margaret wanted to revisit much later as an adult. And even I remember this study, because I remember that Carla made an appointment with the secretary to talk to Dad here because "he was never home!")



They went to Ken and June Marie Weaver's house for Sunday dinner. Mom looked forward to seeing June Marie in her home because she had remembered meeting June Marie at a Colorado meeting with her children in a bathroom. Mom had also had her four younger girls in tow who all had three day measles, so Mom had worried that June Marie's kids had gotten the measles from her girls. So, the first thing she asked June Marie, "Did your kids get the measles from us?" June Marie laughed, "Yes!"

Mom doesn't remember if anything else happened that Sunday, but she knows that Harley took them to the airplane Monday morning. There was a delay in the flight, so they were late getting back home to Glenwood Springs. When we drove in the driveway, Deanna was standing at the living room window and as soon as she saw us, she came running out. "Oh, Mom, I was so afraid something bad had happened! I'm so relieved you're home!"

About two weeks later, we received an official letter of invitation. We accepted, and we spent the summer getting ready to leave. Ruthanne had already applied to and had been accepted at Goshen College. When she realized our plans, she reconsidered hers. Finances were a big issue, so she decided to come to EMC and stay at home with us. I might add that I had just gotten a teaching job on the Navajo Reservation at Dilcon, Arizona. I had deliberately chosen a

job that would allow me to forge my own way but be close enough to go home frequently, so I was dismayed to learn that the folks were moving to Virginia!

Mom admits that they made a mistake in not processing the decision with their children. In their minds, the four older ones were “not at home” and the four younger girls were “the little girls.” As Carla jokes, “The Lord called Dad to Virginia, and the rest of us followed!”

August that summer was a series of leavings. I was the first to leave. We packed up my stuff in my green VW, and the folks and the four girls followed me to Dilcon, so they could see where I would be living. Dad could not believe he was leaving me in a desert! He kept saying, “You’re going to live here?” A week later, the twins left for Hesston College. And then, it was the rest of the family’s turn. They recall gathering in the empty living room for prayer, thanking God for the twelve years in Colorado and asking God for “traveling mercies.” (I still use this phrase when I travel.)

The trip to Virginia was 1,924 miles. Dad was driving a truck with all their furniture and other worldly goods, and Mom and Ruthanne took turns driving their car. It was tense driving for Mom, because she wanted to stay close to Dad. And this is, of course, way before cell phones. It took them four days.

There are lots of family stories about the adjustments of that first winter in Harrisonburg, but that is not this story. Mom and Dad never regretted their choice to come to Harrisonburg. This became their home for the second half of life. Mom, at 94, is so grateful for the richness of their lives here and the friends she has. For my part, I will take this opportunity to thank those of you who visit her, send her cards, or call to chat.

---Lois Janzen Preheim
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