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THEME SONG

The Christian's Welcome Home

*How sweet will be the welcome home,
When this short life is o'er;
When pain and sorrow, grief and care,
Shall trouble us no more.*

*When we the lovely Promised Land,
With spirit eyes shall see;
We'll join the holy angel band,
In praise, dear Lord, to Thee.*

*If we are faithful we shall gain,
The land of promised rest;
Where with the Savior, we shall live,
And be forever blest.*

Chorus:

*Welcome home, sweet welcome home,
My home, sweet home,
Welcome home, sweet welcome home,
The Christian's welcome home.*



THE GATE

Across the road from my childhood home is an old sheep pasture. My uncle purchased this five- or six-acre plot from my father decades ago, but Dad had never done anything with it; so in order for Uncle Lloyd to use this acreage the way he wanted to use it, he began clearing the land. We children had several paths that ran through that tangle of woods; but as Uncle Lloyd began cutting and burning trees, we no longer used the old trails. Those paths eventually disappeared, giving way to soft grasses and wild flowers. Nearly all the trees were removed, and not a single cedar could be found anywhere. Only the large, beautiful, stately trees that offered shade and comfort to the sheep remained. It looked so groomed. It looked so odd.

When the work of clearing and cleaning was finished, Uncle Lloyd dug a decent-sized pond, then began driving fence posts around the entire perimeter of his new field. One afternoon, we children stepped off the school bus to discover that we had been effectively locked out of the sheep pasture. A brand new, sturdy fence with small oblong holes and a double row of barbed wire surrounded that field and its sheep.

My cousin Carolyn and I ran to examine the fence, dismayed and betrayed all at once. How had her father done this to us? What were we to do? How could we get in?

Uncle Lloyd had indeed provided an entry; but it was a large, heavy metal gate not far from the pond. When Carolyn and I went to inspect that gate, Uncle Lloyd came out to meet us.

"Girls," he said sternly, "I don't want you going in and out of this gate and letting the dogs in to get the sheep, and I don't want you climbing over the fence because you'll break it all down."

We looked at him in astonishment, absolutely speechless; but our questions were surely the same: How would we play in the pasture? How would we visit the sheep? How would we swim in the pond? How would we wade in the creek at the bottom of the hill?

"Come up here, girls," he said. We followed him up the hill to my house where he stopped not far from the driveway. "This is for you," he said. "This is the gate where you go in." There, over the fence next to a lone straggly tree that hadn't been removed when all the others were, was a double-sided ladder made of split cedar rails. The ladder straddled the fence next to the small tree, so we could climb three rails to the top of the fence, step over while holding onto the tree, then climb down the other side.

Today, Uncle Lloyd's kindness, forethought, understanding, and generosity in building that ladder fills me with a vast well of love for him. Then, it seemed he owed us at least that, since he'd locked us out in the first place. Today, I understand he made a place for us where we really had no right to be. Then, it seemed there was no place where we shouldn't be automatically wholeheartedly welcomed, no matter how much it cost someone else to accommodate us.

It's been some 45 years since that "gate" was built. Carolyn and I never again entered that sheep pasture by any means other than that ladder in all the years we played there. Uncle Lloyd was right: even to this day, the fence stands as pristine and in as fine a shape now as it was then, still capable of containing a whole flock of sheep.

On Carolyn's birthday this year, I gave her a picture of that old ladder as it stands today along with a few words about this shared childhood memory. One thing, however, I must confess... my uncle kept goats in that field, not sheep. But I just couldn't



write this story with the same impact when the pasture contains goats!

Remember how when we were children
Just over the fence on the hill
Was a radiant meadow of wonder
Where it seemed all of time stood still
We'd climb over that fence on a ladder
Lovingly built by your father for us
And rest in the soft grass and breezes
And in the evening's shadowy dusk

Those days disappeared in a moment
Leaving nothing but sweetness and love
A foundation of goodness and mercy
Rich blessings from our Father above

Remember how we learned as children
That just beyond Calvary's Hill
Was a radiant tomb that was empty
The healing and cure for all ill

We climb over our sins on The Ladder
Lovingly built by our Father for us
And rest in His stunning salvation
Through all of life's shadowy dusk

This world disappears in a moment
Leaving nothing but sweetness and love
And mansions built on His goodness
An eternity – together – above.

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture." John 10:9

Donna Roberts, Rolla, MO



MEETINGS – LIFE TOGETHER

Funny how a smell, a sound, even the feel of the wind can transport one to another time and place. Just the scent of a balmy May breeze can take me back to the image of an iron, gliding back and forth across my dress, one of many dresses made by my grandmother. And suddenly, it's Sunday morning in the country at my grandparents' house. Granddaddy's done with the milking, we've finished our

biscuits and gravy, and the fragrance of honeysuckle drifts in at the open windows, blending with the hot electrical odor from the iron. Soon we'll all be dressed and heading out down the long lane between the pastures to the county dirt road and on to that little white frame church building.

They are long gone now, Grandmother and Granddaddy. These days I'm the grandmother, and I spend time watching Facebook for my little gal's picture and counting the days until we travel to see her. When I do get to see her again—that bright, little light of our lives—sometimes there's a twinge of bittersweet feeling.

For sometimes I think about the people I've loved the most and wish that they could meet, if only briefly, yet knowing that is not the way of life. Generations come, and generations go; and each of us lives in our time on that bridge in between. The life we live now dictates that it must be so.

But then I remember not to dwell too much on that; because, amazing but true, there is a life coming that will break the rules by which we are bound now. Scripture names that coming life: resurrection, a new and simultaneous life for those who belong to Christ.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in His own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who Christ's at His coming. 1 Corinthians 15: 22-23.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, ...Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Rev. 21:1b,3,4

We can't really know what it will be like in that new heaven and new earth; but in my imagination, I picture the joy and wonder of dwelling with God in a city where the "gates swing outward never" – where the city gates that swing inward to open in the day will never swing outward to close at night. There is no night there.

And in the light of that eternal day, I imagine a moment when I will see the outline of two familiar forms coming down the street toward me. As they get closer, I realize I'm seeing the faces of two I thought, in a previous life, that I had said good-bye to forever. As they come close, I take their hands and say, "Grandmother and Granddaddy, I want you to meet someone – my husband, my children, my grandchildren. Everybody, these are the two I told you all those stories about. These are the two who taught my father who taught me. They are part of the chain of us knowing Jesus. And now we are all together."

Sadness will no longer exist. Not even bittersweet feelings. There will only be pure, unalloyed joy in life simultaneous with the Lord and with all, of every age, who lived their moment in time for Him.

Ina McKune, Rolla, MO



FAMILY REUNION

This summer, we had a long-overdue family reunion. It seems so many of us are at the age where our families had major life events (such as children going off to college, major illnesses, and making moves to be closer to the children) that it was difficult to find a time when we could all be together.

We had a Friday evening and all day Saturday to catch up with all the family news, and play some games together. What we enjoyed most was an auction of family heirlooms. There were floor boards from the old home place, tools used by our grandfather, a cotton scale, cups and plates, etc. Each item had a story and a special meaning, and the bidding was fierce.

We topped off the Saturday evening with a time of singing. We passed out the hymnals, asked for favorite songs, and sang until we could sing no more! What a wonderful weekend it was.

Today it is even more special to me, because we just said goodbye to one of the brothers, my uncle. Out of those seven children, only two remain here on earth with us. As we sang at the funeral service today, we were all so glad we had seen him just a couple months before, with his ready smile and “How are you?”

Feeling all of these emotions today made me look to that wonderful homecoming that’s promised us in scripture. “I



go to prepare a place for you.” Can you imagine what a family reunion that is going to be! We’ll have eternity to “catch up” with those we haven’t seen in a long, long time. And when I think about what the singing is going to be

like, my eyes fill with tears. There just can’t be anything more beautiful than that!

We will have fellowship with our Father, God, and our Brother, Jesus. We are going to learn so much that we didn’t even have a clue about. We are going to get to talk with all of those heroes of faith we read about in the Bible. Our hearts will be full of love, and we never have to say goodbye!

Lorna Smith, Lubbock, Texas



WELCOME HOME

It was my first trip to any country outside the continent of North America. Earlier I had been to Mexico and Canada on

a couple of occasions. This time, my husband and I traveled to Guyana, South America, with a medical mission team. We are not medical people; our jobs were to conduct Bible studies and encourage the members of the congregation.

It had never been in my plans to go to Guyana, even though my husband had gone twice before. This time when he was planning another trip, our son asked, “Mom, are you going this time?” “No,” I said flatly. “Why not, Mom?” “Well, because...” Try as I might, I could not come up with a real reason; so I reluctantly said, “Okay, I’ll go.” That is how I found myself traveling to Guyana.

For the first two or three days, I kept asking myself, “*Why* am I here?!” Guyana is a tropical country, so it was brutally hot and humid, even compared to Missouri where summers are also hot and humid. The water was not suitable for our consumption, so bottled water was the only safe water for us to consume. The air held a constant stench of burning garbage, especially in the evenings. Livestock, from chickens and goats to cattle and horses, were free ranging; sometimes they wound up as roadkill. Even though the people of Guyana were friendly and wonderful, it was all a huge culture shock to me.

After the first several days, I began to relax and enjoy the experience. The highlight came near the end of our stay. There was a man named Rom, who came every night to hear the preaching. He navigated on crutches and always stood, leaning against the back wall of the church, during the service.

At the end of the week, Rom wanted to be baptized; but because of a medical condition, he could neither sit nor bend his body at all. How was he to be baptized? The hotel where we were staying had a swimming pool, so Rom was loaded into the back of a van where he could lie in his perpetually prone position.

Several of the American men, two Guyanese preachers, and a few women (myself included) traveled from the church to the hotel to witness his baptism. Four of the men entered the pool, and Rom was lowered to them and was baptized. He was one of the happiest new Christians I have ever seen. He was still trapped in his crippled body, but his soul was set free from sin and death!



Just a few days later, we flew back to Miami, which had not impressed me when we landed there to join the group traveling to Guyana. On this day, however, Miami was America—and it looked absolutely beautiful to me! Once we were in the airport, we went through customs to re-enter our home country. The customs agents all looked so serious and official. What if they wouldn’t let me back in? What if there was something wrong with my passport? I

nervously waited while the agent examined my documents and stamped them. Still with a serious expression on his face, he handed my passport to me and said, "Welcome home." I could have hugged this total stranger! I was so glad to be back home.

Several return trips to Guyana followed that first experience, and each return home was wonderful. But America is not my true home. Now that I have grown up more and have experienced other homecomings, the only one that really matters is the final homecoming when I reach my eternal home. How I look forward to hearing my Savior say, "Welcome home!" Indeed, how sweet will be a Christian's welcome home!

Evelyn Waite, Rolla, MO

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HARVEST TIME

We recently moved to our new home surrounded by cotton fields. Although we have lived in cotton country for the past seven years, we were not where I could see them out the windows of my home. Now I have had the opportunity to watch the entire agricultural process of cotton farming. I already understood how much of it works, but I had yet to see it with my own eyes. One thing I know is that, for as long as people have planted, they have been at the mercy of the seasons. Many farmers don't just work their own fields; they lease fields from others who own the land but cannot, or will not, work it.

In early spring, farmers plow their fields, which serves two purposes. It chops up and buries the stalks left behind after last year's harvest, thus adding nourishment to the soil. It also breaks up the surface, which hardened during the cold winter months. This allows spring rains to seep deep down and wait for the planting.

Then, the soil rests until late May or early June when planting takes place. They plow again before planting. The rows are not straight; they are curved, which helps stop wind erosion. After all this preparation, seeds go in the ground. Now begins the time when farmers watch the skies looking for clouds – not wispy, white, fluffy ones—but gray and heavy clouds. West Texas is a semi-arid region about 3,000 feet above sea level. Farmers know they cannot depend on rain to pour down when the plants need it, so



they have invented a special way to water. It is called a Pivot. One end is attached to a well and then segment after segment is attached until it is the correct size for his particular field. Each segment has hoses with nozzles hanging down on the end. The distance between the hoses

is the exact distance between the rows in the field. Each segment also has wheels and a motor. The motors drive the pivot segments through the fields following the curved rows. Each pivot has to be adjusted to drive at faster and faster rates the further out they are from the well so that all the segments will move in tandem in a line.

The biggest worry comes toward the end of the growing season. If the rains keep coming during harvest, it reduces the quality of the cotton and can even ruin the harvest. It's a delicate dance of just the right amount of rain at just the right time.

The sight I love most of all is when they defoliate the leaves, and the fields stretch out beautifully white and ready for harvest. Of course, this brings to my mind John 4:35: "Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."

It's at this time, with the fields of cotton—white and ready to harvest—that I think of the world and Christianity. When the stalks are plowed back into the ground to nourish it, I think of our telling and retelling the Gospel story to nourish the world with Spiritual food, the Word. It goes deep down within our souls, waiting for the time we need it to help stand against the wiles of the devil. The curved rows, which protect against erosion, are the way the brethren stand in a circle holding hands and praying. The pivot, drawing water from the well and pouring down on each row, is the family of God gathering together in their respective pews to be exhorted. When they defoliate the leaves and prepare the fields for harvest is how we let go of the cares of the world and prepare ourselves for the work of the kingdom.

Where are you in this cycle of planting and reaping? Are you the farmer? Are you the plant? Are you the water? Are you the sunshine? We all have a role to play. May we all work while there is work to be done. (Col 3:23; Eccl 9:10; Heb 13:21)

Peggy Bailey, Crosby County, Texas

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Sunrise
The Newsletter For Women By Christian Women

Sunrise is a monthly newsletter written and/or assembled by members of the Rolla Church of Christ. All previous issues can be accessed by going to <http://www.seekgrowserveandlove.org>. Click on Resources, then on Sunrise Newsletter. You will find the current issue plus all previous issues.

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