

# **Christian House: Everyone is Welcome**

*By Deborah (Berghoff) Lara*

*“So glad you're doing this. Thought about it from time to time, but I'm not a writer...Looking forward to seeing the end result.” — Anon*

*“I have truly thought about writing a book for sure. But my experiences were a mixture of bad and good. But I did meet you and Jody and so many more I hold dear to my heart!!” --Becky (Eich) Shay*

*“A lot of what I experienced there was the foundation for my relationship with Jesus. I have been through many, many experiences after leaving the House that almost derailed that relationship. The goodness of God leads us to repentance, and by the GRACE of God my identity is secure in Jesus and I am truly living in His love like never before. I trust in growing from Glory to glory...and I can say with assurance that I am forgiven and forgive, because of HIS LOVE. Christian House and those who lived there have a supernatural bond. The WORD of God is real, living and TRUTH. I LOVE YOU ALL.” --Chris Archer*

*(All endorsements taken from the Christian House Facebook page).*

Christian House:  
Everyone is Welcome

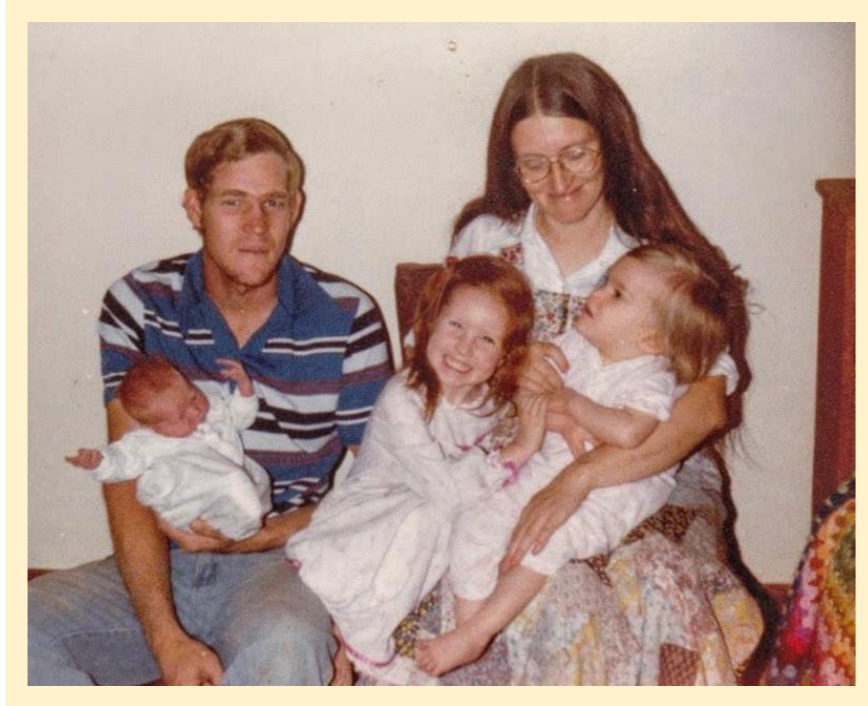
*Published #Partyof8 Press*

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*Updated September, 2022*

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***To my dear Dad, Ron Berghoff (1952-2018), on whose shoulders I stand...***

***To my dear Mom, Rebecca Berghoff, who has been my biggest cheerleader...***

***To my sisters Angela (1980-1982) and Rhonda, who have been through it all with  
me...***

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# INTRODUCTION

*What do a Gospel Train, a Camel Train, and a royal train have in common? If you know, then this book is for you. If you have absolutely no idea, then this book is for you. In this book, you will be transported to February 25, 1978. **The Holy Spirit of God will be your tour guide** on a fascinating exploration of the Wilbur Christian House.*

*If you were living at The House on this date, undoubtedly you can still recollect the variety of voices and sea of smiling faces. For you, I hope that this story will bring back pleasant memories. Years of research and interviews with people who were there have been woven together to create a picture of my patchwork family.*

*If this bygone era is nothing more than a story that no one will tell you, I want to give you more than a simple snapshot into communal living in the '70s. I want to paint a clear picture that communicates that you are welcome into this family of soldiers, sheep, and saints. You will meet kids, teens, and twenty-somethings that have since aged by four decades. You will use your imagination to see, hear, and smell things that have long since disappeared.*

***I'm going to fade away now and let the Holy Spirit do His job...***

—Deborah Lara (2018)

# Gospel Train

*Gospel Train is coming soon, don't be left behind. There's a lot of trains ramblin' 'round this world but there's only one on this line; It's the line of truth, the righteous way and God's love is the answer.*

*Jesus the captain of my soul has the throttle in his hand, sir...*

*The gospel train runs smooth and clear, she rides a narrow line. By mercy she's a faith machine and on faith she runs just fine. Jesus drives the gospel train; He's a mighty fine engineer; gospel troops all ride first class spreading gospel cheer...*

*I've got my sword, I've got my shield, I've got my gospel shoes, I've got my helmet on my head, I am preaching the good news. There's people lined up 'round the world waiting for this train, but some folks haven't got the Word, that's why you hear me sing...*

*Gospel Train is coming fast; I hope I'll see you there, but you can't get on with your worldly trash and money won't pay the fare. You've got to give up all you got to ride the gospel train; don't be left behind when she's up and gone and only hell remains...*

## CHORUS

*Gospel train a comin...get on board! Mighty engines humming, thank the Lord! Gospel train a comin get on board! Run the race we're running, for the Lord.*

# Chapter 1

## From the Outside

*Hello friend! Welcome to the town of Wilbur. Did you like that song? It probably doesn't mean as much without musical accompaniment, but I'd like to introduce you to some people that are riding the Gospel Train. See that giant gingerbread house down the street? Let's go inside... I've got connections. I want to show you around. Well, no. Obviously it's not a real gingerbread house; there isn't icing along the eaves and no gumdrops for windows, but it's brown and shaped like a big square...house. I don't know how else to describe it. It used to be a hotel a long time ago, in the early part of the twentieth century. But now it's just a place that a bunch of people call home. And today is a very exciting day...I'll be **bringing an important announcement.***



*If you walk down this sidewalk, you'll see Key Bank on your left and the Wilbur Register newspaper office on your right. And Ma's Cafe and the cleaners, and the grain elevators in the distance...oh, isn't this such a quaint little town? There isn't even a stop light. Sorry to go on and on; **you want to see what's in that Big. Brown. Building.***



*So...what do you think of when I say commune? Any ideas? Maybe the words hippie, free-love, and cult come to mind. I admit, back in the 1970s, lots of things in the world were topsy turvy. **Hey, look at this paper on the ground...it will give you some more information.***

"Communes in the 60s and 70s are classified into two main types. One is described as an "Anarchistic," or "retreat commune" in which there is an agreement to reject establishment and organizational worlds. It is purposely disorganized because any form of organization is foreseen as archaic (Fitzgerald 8 & Kanter 176). Usually anyone is welcome, members are transient, and there are no rules or regulations. This type of commune, for obvious reasons of disorganization, usually doesn't last long..

The second type is called a "service" or "intentional" commune in which people pool resources and agree to live a certain way with a motivating philosophy. Membership is more closed, residents must commit to the commune's purpose. This type is socially organized with leaders and rules (Fitzgerald 9 & Kanter 196). Usually this type of commune has a sense of mission and zeal that binds the people within the commune together toward a common goal (Kanter 191).\*

It was the combination of industrialization, technological advancement, prosperity and materialism, political disillusionment, and moral decay that brought the young people from the Haight-Ashbury movement of visionary psychedelia and politically defiant college students together to flee to rural utopian communes in attempt to escape the Establishment and take control of their own physical, cultural and spiritual environment."

(Communal Living in the Late 60s and Early 70s By Rachel Meunier Human Issues Project: 12-17-94)

*Did you want to keep going? It's fine if you've seen enough. If you keep walking straight and then around the bend in the road, Highway 2 will take you east, all the way to Spokane. Or, if you'd like, we can go over and take a look inside.*



***Take my hand while we cross the street.** Traffic in Wilbur, Washington can be pretty, well okay, there's no traffic in Wilbur. In 1978 the population isn't much more than 1000. The curbs are kind of steep, so watch your step. Folks around here call this deep brown building the **Wilbur Christian House**. Many people live here, but we are always welcome. There are two entrances at the front of this sunshine-yellow trimmed building; we'll enter the door on the left that leads into the **Dining Room**.*

*Go on, step inside, look around. I know it's a lot to take in, to process. The sights, the smells...the hubbub! Can you sense the excitement? It's Saturday afternoon, the Brothers are all home from the orchards, and everyone is getting ready for Fellowship tonight.*

*And there's so much color, from the multi-colored linoleum samples on the floor, to the patchwork curtains adorning the windows, it is delightful, yet dizzying. There's teenage **Tom Stoothoff** and little **Geno Wilkie** hauling the tables and chairs into place. This room will have nearly one hundred people here tonight to share the supper.*

*Straight ahead, on the far end of this room, you can see several ladies, including **Dawn Hilderbrant, Chris Dingman, and Jean\*** hard at work in the kitchen, preparing the evening meal. I think I smell fresh bread baking.*

## Chapter 2

### The Living Room

*Do you hear that? Follow me. The doorway to the right leads into the spacious **Living Room**; **Sam Weaver** is strumming his guitar and **Richard Eich** is plucking his banjo. Let's sit and listen for a minute.*

***"If we'll just praise the Lord, and let His two-edged sword, cut our flesh all away, we'll see the light of His day... for in worship and praise, the Holy Ghost will amaze...if we'll just enter in, He'll show us all about HIm..."***

*Isn't that a great song? You look confused...well, I guess not many people go around singing about circumcision. The people here sing a lot. They write many of their own songs, with lyrics taken from the Bible.*

***"If we are walking in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship, one with another, my sisters and my brothers...if we are walking in the light as He is in the light truly our fellowship is with the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ..."***  
***(1 John 1:7)***

*“Sam, Richard, would you mind if we asked you a couple of questions. Have you always lived at Christian House in Wilbur, Washington?”*

**Sam:** Let me explain something; Christian House is more than just a building. It's even more than a certain group of people. It's more of a frame of mind. The Christian House has only been in Wilbur since 1976, when a group of believers in Jesus moved into this vacated hotel. Before that, we lived in **Wauconda, Washington**, and before that in a vacated store, on **Wide Hollow Road, in Yakima, Washington**.

**Richard:** I remember, in **Yakima**, when people started to move in with us. My parents, **Jack and Phyllis Eich** had spent six months working and living with poor families in Mexico, where they came to appreciate the friendship and generosity of the people. Upon returning to the States, they decided to open their home to people needing the Christian atmosphere of family living, particularly young people. I was thirteen at this time, in 1972.

*“Geno, Tom, I see you peeking in; would you like to join our conversation? Do you remember moving in with the Eich family?”*

**Geno:** I don't remember very much, because I was only three at the time. But my mom, **Donna Wilkie** and sister **Dawn Marie**, and I were the second ones to come. A single mom, **Pam**, had moved in with her son **Ezra**, not too long before.

**Sam:** I was just 18 when I joined them on March 1, 1974. I was a new believer in Jesus. I didn't think I'd be staying long; I just thought I'd help out for a while. I was drawn to the exciting opportunity to serve something bigger than myself. As best as I recall, **James Rutz**, we called him Blue, came next, and then a married couple, **Terry and Pattie Johnson**. If you're not paying close attention, you can get lost . Terry and Pattie had been living with **Johnny and Tee Eich**; that was Richard's brother and his wife. **Francis McSharry** and **Ron Berghoff** were also living there. Eventually those two single guys would join us too.

*"But why was everyone moving in together? Couldn't you just hang out on the weekends?"*

**Sam:** Communal living was a big thing for young people in the 1970s. Some were searching for a utopian life with no rules, but as for me, I **relished a lifestyle wholeheartedly devoted to God, surrounded by those who felt the same.**

*"Richard, you didn't choose communal life, did you?"*

**Richard:** Nope, communal life chose me. I've simply been carried along in the current of counter-cultural Christianity, up to this point. I've never had any role in leadership at the Wilbur Christian House; my main role has been working in the orchards with the other brothers. When I turn 18, I'll be ready to spread my wings and start my own life.

*"I notice you said that you work with the "brothers"; are you all related?"*

**Richard:** I call the Christians in our fellowship Brother and Sister because we

have the same Father, God. **We are all a part of the family of God.** Let me share a song with you about that.



***You will notice we say "brother and sister" 'round here; It's because we're a family and these folks are so near; When one has a heartache, we all shed a tear, and rejoice in each victory in this family so dear.***

***I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God. I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood! Joint-heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, For I'm part of the family, the Family of God.***

***From the door of an orphanage to the house of the King, no longer an outcast, a new song I sing; from rags unto riches, from the weak to the strong, I'm not worthy to be here, but praise God I belong!***

*"Tom, when did you become a part of this intentional community?"*

**Tom:** My family joined this fellowship of Christians when they were living at an old school building in Wauconda. So many people were flooding in at this point that we started looking for a bigger place. It was in the early part of 1976 that we were able to move to Wilbur.

*"Tom, tell me more about your family and where you came from."*

**Tom:** Well, I'm fourteen. My parents and my six siblings all live here. If you want to know about the path that ultimately led us to Christian House you should talk to my



mom, **Marilyn**. I think she's taking care of my baby brother **Michael** right now, but she'd love to tell you. Ever since we moved in with so many people in a communal setting, I've had to stay in a dorm with the other single guys. Our family unit has been largely separated.

*"It sounds like all of you have had to make some pretty serious adjustments to make this extended blended family work. You came from a wide variety of backgrounds, worldviews, religious traditions...and essentially were thrown together in the Christian blender. What are some other ways that you are different from those on the outside?"*

**Sam:** Holidays are pretty much ignored.

**Tom:** Yeah, we don't really celebrate holidays, other than often a large meal with other friends and family of Christian House.

*"There seems to be quite a bit of activity in the kitchen right now. Do you guys know what's for dinner?"*

**Richard:** Who knows...it's a lot of work to feed this many people.

**Sam:** I really appreciate the work that **Steve Hegdal** does to get affordable meat on the table...he is in charge of the meat ministry and is on a \$5 budget, but he butchers whatever he can get his hands on. We've eaten everything, from mutton...

**Richard:** ...to outdated steak...

**Geno:** and homemade sausages; I love those.

**Tom:** Maybe we'll have tacos. That goes a long way. I hope we also have cowboy cake; that's delicious.

*"Well, we're going to head over to the kitchen to see what's on the menu. We'll talk to you later!"*

## Chapter 3

### The Nursery

*I see you eyeing the staircase opposite the front windows; if we have time I'll take you up there, but now let's go down this hallway that runs parallel to the dining room. Down here, and to the right is the nursery.*

*In keeping with the rest of the decor, there are splashes of color everywhere: colorful pictures of animals are taped on the walls that are light*



*yellow on the bottom and light blue from the middle of the wall to the ceiling, the floor is covered with a patchwork rug and the children are happily running around, wearing a variety of colorful patterns on their t-shirts and floor length dresses.*

*“Sweet child, yes you, sitting with your little friends. What is your name?”*

**Sweet Child:** My name is **Teresa**, and this is my sissy, **Lisa**!

*“Your chairs are lined up like a train; where are you going?”*

**Teresa:** We're going to Bo-skan!

*"Alright, have fun in Spokane! We're headed to the kitchen."*

*In case you were curious, this nursery is primarily used for children who are two and under. The small ones are cared for here, as needed, while their mothers are doing chores, sewing, and preparing the meals. There is an elaborate wooden playground out back where the older children play. Also noteworthy is that a school room is set up where the school age children could receive an education, but we'll talk about that more later.*

*Okay, onward! But seriously, there are so many precious children here; I just love all the children. I wish I could sit and squeeze them all day!*

*"On second thought, children would you kindly sing this song with me:"*

***We're growing up and as we do there's times we almost  
fall...but if we turn our hearts to Him, He's sure to hear our call.***

***It's simple serving Jesus...it's simply loving God...it's simple  
faith and trust in Him...it's walking paths He's trod.***

***And when we grow up loving Him, He takes us deeper  
still...until our life is lost in Him and in His precious will.***

*Ok, let's go. The sewing room is on our right. That's **Arlene**, nose down at the sewing machine; she always makes incredible creations for her boys, **Alfonso** and **Junior**. Everyone at Christian House has had a unique journey that brought them here, but each one is loved just for who they are.*

*"Excuse us ladies..."*

*The girls that just squeezed past us in this narrow corridor were **Mardie Macy**, **Lynette Hillman**, **Lillian Eich**, and **Dawn Marie Wilkie**. They may not feel like it, but I value each of these young ladies like a princess.*



## Chapter 4

### The Kitchen

*And now, here's the kitchen. The limited counter space is covered with pots, dishes, and miscellaneous gadgets. Every nook and cranny of this bright yellow cooking area is occupied with buckets, boxes, and containers of essential ingredients. Each of the women take turns being on a cooking crew that will feed the House each night. Tonight, as I mentioned earlier, Dawn, Chris, and Jean\*. are preparing the meal.*



*“Friends, do you have a minute to talk with my companion and me? And what is that...smell?”*

**Chris:** You must be smelling our ground mutton that we are using in our tacos tonight. We are always excited to meet new people...what brings you here?

*“Actually, I was invited. Do you know why you're here?”*

**Chris:** I read a very good book about Christians living in extended families and the practical aspect was very appealing; communal living is very practical and frugal. But more than that, I love daily worship, living testimonies, the Gospel in reality, the sharing, the constant refining, the fellowship of Believers, and the love.

**Dawn:** I agree. The wholehearted commitment to Jesus by those already living together was very attractive. I wanted my whole life to be dedicated to service for Him.

**Jean:** I had received a dream and a vision from the Lord that compelled me to join this community of Believers.

*“At what point did you ladies join Christian House?”*

**Chris:** Prior to going into Christian House, my husband **Steve** & I had been a part of a group with the **Stoothoffs, Dawn & Rhonda Hilderbrandt**, and about 25 others. We met together at either our house or Ron Stoothoff's and did our best to fellowship as often as we could. We were all fairly new Christians, of 2 years or so. We all were coming out of the hippie movement and really on fire for the Lord, but we had no real place to fellowship or worship. In May of 1975, someone heard about the Wauconda group and we got together there for fellowship and fell in love. Jack Eich would come over and minister to us and preach and preach and preach. We loved him and could not get enough of the Word of God. We also could not get enough of these Saints.

**Dawn:** That's right. My sister **Rhonda, Betty Rowell, and Sal and Joni Salcido**, whom I lived with prior to Christian House, also came with us when we merged groups. They continue to be my close friends.

**Jean:** Like Dawn, I was also single when I moved in. I became aware of the Christian House folks when I was living with **Dan and Nancy Hillman**, and their children **Nadine, Lynette, and John John**, in Yakima a few years back. However, I found my soulmate, **Steve F.**, here and, in January of 1977, we were married.

*"Tell me more, please, about what changes you've made to join this community."*

**Chris:** When we joined, we gave all vehicles...a new truck and car...to the House. We also donated all furniture and appliances, and our money. My husband, Steve, quit his job; we have no privacy, no quiet time, no bank account, no savings, no insurance... nothing for self.

**Dawn:** I gave up my job with animals. I felt I had to let loose of my previous life connections. Although my sister Rhonda lives here, I have maintained limited contact with my previous relationships.



**Jean:** I quit my job and, because of the prompting of the Holy Spirit, moved in with folks I didn't really know.

*"That sounds pretty intense to an outsider; what is your perception of the leadership here?"*

**Chris:** I love our elders, including Jack. I believe in their judgment and most of the time support their decisions on issues. They use the Word and the Holy Spirit as their guide and try to follow its leading.

**Dawn:** There are things I agree with and some things I don't. There have been some very hard times, but God keeps pressing me on to the high calling of submission to Jesus Christ and my Brothers and Sisters. I love everyone and feel that, for now, this is where I should be.

*"Are there any specific jobs or roles assigned to you?"*

**Jean:** I participate in food preparation, cleaning, and caring for children, but my favorite role is by husband's side doing music.

**Dawn:** Although I'm in charge of our canning and preserving in the summertime, I'd say that we all pretty much do everything. Would you agree, Chris?

**Chris:** Absolutely! Sewing, cooking, cleaning, watching kids...we do it all. My favorite job, however, is being on the midwife team!"

*"So, many of the women have their babies right here? Fascinating! How is that going?"*

**Chris:** We have had a high success rate of live births. But there was that one time, our friend...

*"My dear, I already know this story. I love your friend and am acquainted with all of her pain. Remember this song? It always brings encouragement when life doesn't go the way we expect..."*

***Though I walk through the valley where the sun does not  
shine, I walk in the light of a good friend of mine. Though my  
cupboard be bare and my table be small, He fills me with joy  
that I may share with all. Though life fail me...***

***He shall be my sufficiency.***

***Though the wind blow a storm and the waters run deep, He  
lifts me up and my soul doth He keep. He fills me with peace***

*that I can't comprehend from his living waters that flow  
without end. Though life fail me...He shall be my sufficiency.*

**Chris:** Thank you for that reminder. Sometimes I wonder when I'll have a baby of my own.

*"Chris, I want you to know that I've heard all of your prayers; in less than two years, you will have a baby of your very own to care for. When that time comes, call her Amy Hope. She will be a gift to you and you will be a gift to her."*

**Jean:** Would you like to go meet our newest arrival? The **Berghoff family** just welcomed their first child three days ago. Ron and Becca got married just six weeks after Steve and I did, last year. The four of us took a trip out East together in the summer to visit Becca's family in Indiana and my husband's family in Massachusetts. There's just something about road trips that unites people like nothing else.

*"That would be delightful. I just love watching how you all care for each other. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, are definitely evident in all that you do."*

# Chapter 5

## The Family Wing

**Jean:** If you'll follow me out of the kitchen, past the toast bar, and to the right...wow it sure is crowded here this evening... there's a door that will lead us up a few stairs. This next level has bedrooms that have a sink or their own bathroom. This privilege is reserved for married couples and those with children. I see Becca is down here, sitting in Pattie and Terry Johnson's room. The door is open so you can go right in...I need to get back to the kitchen, but I'm sure I'll see you later at Fellowship, when we get together to sing and share what God is speaking to us.

*"Thank you, Jean. I always love to hear you sing, especially that song from Philippians 4:8, which reminds of the things we should think about. Blessings to you...Rebecca, that's your given name, isn't it? Do you mind if we come in? We'd like to meet you and your baby."*

**Rebecca:** You are very welcome. My husband, Ron, has stepped out, but when he gets back we will be heading down to dinner.

*"So what's your story Rebecca?"*

**Rebecca:** Two years ago, in 1976, while on assignment in Washington State with Brethren Volunteer Service, a ministry of the Church of the Brethren, I encountered some folks from the Christian House. I was waiting for the bus at the laundromat in Wilbur. Some people walked in; they were obviously a group. A couple of guys were carrying Bibles. I got my Bible out of my overnight bag and began reading. Pam McSharry and Joni Salcido came up and asked if I was a Christian. I indicated that I was; they said they were too and they were moving in to the Hotel and I could come for fellowship on Saturday night. It sounded like a place to get my tank filled. So I came for Saturday night fellowship instead of going to Saturday night movies with the boys at the Bar 41 ranch where I worked. The rest is history.

*“Would you mind telling us how you met your husband?”*

**Rebecca:** I actually lived at the Christian House for a year before we officially met. If you hadn't noticed, there is a huge emphasis on avoiding things that would gratify the sinful nature...we all want to live a life that honors God in all things. After being here just a short time I sensed they were really serious about "serving the Lord"--ALL about serving the Lord. Everything was based on "what does the Word say?" and being totally sold out and focused on serving the Lord within the confines and expectations of Christian House. Suddenly the things and people I thought were Christian just did not measure up to this "all out" standard." We sing a song that kind of explains it...

***Jesus be first in all things. To my heart, your glory bring. That  
you'd be my first of all, by your grace I'll stand or fall.***

***If I depart from the faith lead me back to see your face. If this  
dark world gets me down, help me race on for your crown.***

**Rebecca:** When Ron and I were given the green light to pursue a romantic relationship, we felt pretty quickly that we could make a marriage work, especially within the walls of Christian House. We were married within two weeks of our first outing together, that Phyllis Eich chaperoned, on March 5, 1977.

*“Thinking about your wedding reminds me of a song...”*

***T'was a day in early spring time, by an ancient wayside well.  
Eleazar paused to rest his camel train. He had found a bride  
for Isaac, as the evening shadows fell, for his weary journey  
had not been in vain.***

***Now he took the fair Rebecca, draped in jewels rich and fair,  
back to Abraham and Isaac far away, where Rebecca loved her  
Isaac and he loved Rebecca fair; oh that must have been a  
happy wedding day.***

*Now the blessed Holy Spirit left the Father God above, to come  
down to Earth to find a worthy bride. For our Isaac over yonder  
has prepared His tents of love and He wants his fair Rebecca  
by His side.*

*We have left our kinfolk gladly, we have bid the World  
goodbye, we are going to that home beyond the sky, where  
we'll behold our Isaac in that bless'd eternity, what a happy,  
happy wedding that will be!*

CHORUS

*Oh get ready, the evening shadows fall. Don't you hear the  
Eleazar call? There's going to be a wedding, our joy will soon  
begin, in the evening when the camel train comes in!*

*"Congratulations on your baby... she's beautiful. What did you name her?"*

**Rebecca:** We've settled on Deborah Ruth...it just seems fitting. We delivered her here at the House; Phyllis and Donna were my attendants. Ron was present and his long-time friend, Joe McSharry, was playing his guitar in the corner of the room.

*She looks like she's full of potential, that one. Make sure you point her in my direction and someday she'll make you very proud. Also, in three and a half years, you'll be welcoming another redhead, and your third daughter, in this very room. You all have quite an adventure in front of you, but I promise, you will always have a mighty Savior in your corner.*

*Your husband has returned; do you mind if we follow you back to the Dining Room?"*





# Chapter 6

## The Dining Room

*“I enjoyed hearing your story. Would you take us to meet that couple that is walking through the front doors?”*

**Rebecca:** Of course! Those are our dear friends **Jim and Laurie Thomson**. They are currently pastors of a nearby Foursquare church.

*“Greetings friends. It’s good to have you with us tonight. How did you hear about Christian House?”*

**Jim:** A while back we heard rumors that this group was coming or had come to Wilbur. Originally we thought they might be a cult. But, if I may share a quick story... one December day, I was out putting Visqueen plastic sheeting on the outside of the church’s windows. Francis McSharry came by and helped me. I was impressed by his act of love. Laurie and I then started attending Friday night worship at Christian House. Things grew from there. We are just drawn by their love for Jesus and their worship.

*“Do you have any intention of partnering with this group in a more permanent capacity?”*

**Jim:** Not at the moment. On occasion, I've voluntarily gone and worked with the Brothers in the orchards and Baby's Breath fields. Before I became a Christian, I was an English Literature major; if the need arose, and I was no longer pastoring, I suppose I'd be amenable to teaching the school age children at the House.

*"At this time, what are your favorite elements of Christian House?"*

**Jim:** Like I've said, I really enjoy worshiping the Lord here. The guitars, violin, and flute...all special as we sing countless songs and praise God together. And the people that I admire, there's just too many to name. This group, that appears to be crazy in love with Jesus, has reignited our lives with Him.

*"Jim, thank you for sharing this. I see that many people are filing down here into the Dining Room for supper. I'll let you grab a seat now, but be sure I have some more things I'd like to talk to you about later."*



*We will just watch  
now as these saints  
gather for their  
evening meal. We  
won't be able to meet*

*each one, but every individual is important, like stones that are fit together to form a strong wall. However, I will point out a few to you.*

*There's the Eich clan: Jack, Phyllis, Lizzie (with her own little family), Richard (who you already met), and Nathaniel and Lillian. (Their other brother John comes to visit, when he can, with his wife, Tee and kids, Becca and Ben). This family is important to point out because without them, no one else would be here.*

*Next, we see Pam and Francis McSharry with their young crew: Ezra, Caleb, and Mary Martha. This couple is highly respected for carrying most of the administrative load at Christian House. They are overworked, but they do an impressive job. Although they hold a leadership position, many folks here consider the McSharry family to be among their closest friends.*

*There are other McSharrys here as well; Helen, with her preteen daughter Jody, and teenage Joe, the youngest of the McSharry clan.*

*As we scan the room, there's Gary and Sue Pope; you met their daughters Lisa and Teresa earlier in the nursery. Gary is known for his unforgettable smile, infectious laugh and booming voice, which can always be counted on to hush a room when he calls, "May I have your attention please?!" Gary is also a musician who keeps the beat with his bass guitar. His sweet wife Sue joins him in singing and is also appreciated for the homemade bread she makes.*

*Terry and Pattie are seated with their two children, helping to cut up their food...lean in and you'll hear their indignant son Isaac, wise for his years, declaring, "But*

*dad, I'm fo' years o'd!" This family is admired for their sense of humor and genuine care for others.*

*There's many single Sisters sitting together: Vera Novey (and her son, Tim), Anne Sermon, Marilee Leal (with energetic Heather and Andrea), Rhonda and Dawn Hilderbrant, Sharon Stoothoff, Betty Macy (with her beloved Mardie), Donna Wilkie (with her treasured Dawn Marie and Geno), and Gail Rector (with her dear Jonah and Trillium). Christian House has been quite an experience for many of these ladies since they brought their young children with them when they moved in.*

*The single Brothers are scattered throughout: Mark Yaple (it's been said that if necessity is the mother of invention, then Mark is the father), Dan Pittsley (who always has time to take the younger boys hiking or fishing), and James "Blue" Rutz.*

*Little family units fill in the gaps: Brad and Dusty Finch (with precious Abigail and Abraham, and room in their hearts for Silas, Hope, and Grace ), Sal and Joni Salcido (with precocious Malachi, who is in much need of Mercy), Bob and Karen (holding tightly to their sweet children Heather and Jennifer, and soon Justina and Gabriel), Sam and Katie Weaver (with Anna Naomi and Naomi Ruth, who are such angelic girls, but they all hope their next baby will be a boy), and a whole slew of Stoothoffs: Ron, Marilyn, David, Eric, Tom, Amanda, Tim and Michael (soon this quiver will grow to include a Peter, Catherine, and Jennifer).*

*Countless others have come and gone over the years. Can you sense the electricity of love as these Believers live out their faith in God together? Just the mere*

*mention of a name of one gathered here brings to mind thoughts of past adventures. It is not an experience that will ever be forgotten. It reminds me of a song...*

***“Behold how good and how pleasant it is, for Brethren to dwell together in unity within, sharing with one another the good things of the Lord its our reasonable service for the Lord...it’s that living water, that makes me happy when my Brother smiles, it’s that breath from Heaven that makes me want to share my life. Through our many trials, we must understand that division and contention are the adversary’s plan but through the blood of Jesus on hind’s feet we can stand on the high places with the Son of man... it’s that living water, that makes me happy when my Brother smiles, it’s that breath from Heaven that makes me want to share my life. From the treasury of the Word so seldom heard today how to live like Jesus and our old man put away, but I feel I must tell you, it’s not too much to afford, for the kingdom of Heaven is your reward.” (Psalm 133:1)***

## Chapter 7

### Fellowship

*Yes, it is crowded here. Yes, it can be loud and feel like a sheep pen at times, but there is actually a lot of order and discipline that is required for this many people to live together in peace.*



*The time has now come to dismantle the tables, circle up the assortment of chairs, and bring out the instruments: guitars by Steve Finch, Francis McSharry, Anne Sermon, Sam Weaver, and Bob Burns, Richard's banjo, Brad Finch's flute, Pam McSharry's accordion, Jean's violin, Stan Hunt's trombone, and Gary Pope's bass guitar.*

*Let's listen as they sing a few songs...*

### **Streets of Glory**

***There's a city, where the streets are paved with gold; a land  
where the milk and honey flows. And a mansion waits for me  
cuz my Bible tells the story... I just hope my feet are clean  
enough to walk upon the golden streets of glory.***

***Green meadows, where the little children play, no sorrow there  
just one long happy day; and no one can enter in except for  
the pure and the holy... I just hope my feet are clean enough to  
walk upon the golden streets of glory.***

***And when I reach my journey's, and if I'm worthy to go in,  
those golden streets of glory I'll walk on, and the golden  
streets of my new home will lead me up to the Master's throne  
where with the angels we'll sing glory to His name. We'll sing,  
"Glory! Glory! I just hope my feet are clean enough to walk  
upon the golden streets of glory.***

***Hallelujah! I just hope my feet are clean enough to walk upon  
the golden streets of glory.***

## I Have Hope

*Walking in the Gospel light that shines, careful as I go, one  
step at a time. Clinging to a prayer and holding two hands that  
I can't see...*

*Listening for the Master's voice to say, "Come a little higher to  
the land of day!" Standing on His promises gives me  
confidence, and I have hope...*

*Well, I've heard about heaven and i want to go, there's nothing  
to keep me here below. My sights are set on mansions bright  
in glory land...*

*If you want to make it to the Pearly Gates, turn to the right,  
keep going straight. When the journey ends we'll meet again,  
'cause I have hope.*

### CHORUS

*I have hope, there's a land that's better...*

*I have hope where the soul is all...*

*I have hope that the sun shines brighter in that land...*



***Walking by faith, I'll reach my goal. Over the hill I see the lights  
of home, I've found this one and the race is running'...and I  
have hope.***

### **Meeting in the Air**

***You have heard of little Moses in the bullrush. You have heard  
of fearless David and his sling. You have heard the story told  
of dreaming Joseph and of Jonah and the whale you often  
sing. There are many many others in the Bible. I would like to  
meet them all, I do declare. By and by the Lord will surely let  
us meet them in the meeting in the air.***

### **CHORUS**

***There's going to be a meeting in the air in the sweet, sweet by  
and by. I am going to meet you, meet you over there in that  
home beyond the sky. Such singing you will hear, never heard  
by mortal ear, t'will be glorious, I do declare! And God's own  
Son will be the leading one in the meeting in the air!***

*Perhaps there's an extra songbook you could have to peruse at your leisure.*

***Although it seems like paradise here, there's another force that silently  
prowls around these halls. While I have come that they might have a full and***

*satisfying life, he is seeking someone to devour. As long as these saints keep their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith, no weapon formed against them will prosper. **I have come tonight to encourage them and strengthen them for the coming storm:***

***“Lean in and listen,  
for life at the Christian House  
will soon be dissolved.***

***It won’t be this year,  
but when you least expect it,  
a great storm will come.***

***Beyond all belief,  
order will turn to chaos,  
peace to confusion.***

***You will be spread far,  
like ash from a volcano;  
watch Mt. St. Helens.***

***The strain of duty  
will relax it’s grip on you,  
a fork in the road.***

***And then, at that time,  
what will you do with Jesus,  
take Him or leave Him?”***

*Like the Last Supper, this circle of faces clouds with the threat of betrayal. My heart breaks with their impending pain. **They need to know that I will not be caught off guard by their future failings.** They need to resolve today where their true allegiance lies. And so I speak again..*

***"I want you to know,  
I'll bring beauty from ashes,  
I'll never leave you.***

***Someday, long ways off,  
when gray peppers your thin hair,  
you'll think on this time.***

***The child at your feet  
will not beg for attention,  
but lead their own life.***

***You will be thankful,  
despite the difficulties,  
for this time of growth.***

***And, when you look back,  
and today feels like a dream,  
think on what is true:***

*I'm worthy of praise,  
from the rising of the sun  
until day is done.*

*I will be your Rock,  
I'm the lover of your soul,  
Your strength, and shield*

*You may wander, but...  
God's kindness will bring you back  
to His green pastures.*

*For now, we will fade into the background...hovering, but invisible...*

***And now to you, friend,  
you have been given a gift,  
a sacred lesson:***

*Just like Isaiah,  
when your King Uzziah dies,  
will you see the Lord?*

*He sits on His throne,  
His royal train amazes...  
Holy is His name!*

*I love my people,  
nothing can separate them  
from my affection.*

*The same goes for you.  
I'll be with you through it all,  
fighting against sin.*

*Take what you have learned:  
you can walk life's road alone  
Or let me lead you...*

***But as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord!***

## Epilogue

The Christian House dissolved in 1981 after indiscretion was uncovered at the highest level of leadership. Since then, the members have moved on, from Yakima, throughout the state of Washington, and to the uttermost parts of the Earth.

Countless children and grandchildren have been born to these members since then.

This is what my contributors have been up to:

"I've been a wife and a mother. As much as I loved my Christian House experience, my greatest contentment and fulfillment has been my family." --Dawn Woolley

"I've done many, many things not worth talking about. But today (2004), I am serving God in Yakima again with some of these Saints and so happy to see God so faithfully still working and refining their lives and mine." --Chris Archer

"We transitioned into the local Foursquare church even before moving out of the hotel. Wilbur became our home for the next 11 years. At that time we felt we had to leave which launched us into a several year desert time. God kept us through the bewilderment. And we eventually came back to our roots in Yakima & joined ourselves to Valley Fellowship. Katie and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary this month (2004). And God's faithfulness never ceases to amaze me!" -- Sam Weaver

"After a couple of years of migrant work, I moved to Yakima. I joined the Yakima Foursquare Church, then moved to Valley Fellowship. I worked as a landscaper for 12 years and transitioned to carpentry for 8 years. I have been a volunteer firefighter for 17 years (as of 2004)." --Tom Stoothoff

"We both got jobs and are now both retired, but still must keep working :), so it goes.

We have continued with our music, raised our son, bought a house.

We're playing music, bluegrass style, and meeting friends & fellow musicians, and also spending time with Steve's twin brother & his family. —Jean

“Logged... and played lots of music teaching private lessons.” —Richard Eich

“I have traveled the world installing and developing renewable energy. I currently own a solar company Now Solar in Washington state and a indoor vegetable and fruit company called Indoor Farms Of America. A vertical aeroponic growing technology. We develop and own indoor farms with our patented technology.” —Eugene Wilkie

“Laurie and I went on to pastor a church in Otis Orchards, staff pastor at Life Center, and then missionaries to China, Papua New Guinea, Israel, India, and Mexico. Currently retired.” —Jim Thomson

“I have kept singing all the songs. I have learned to serve the Lord and seek the Lord and Love the Lord more everyday. I have learned to connect with Body-Parts every where I go. The Lord has blessed me with more friends and family and blessings than I could have ever dreamed--everywhere I have lived and worked and travelled.... I remained married. Angela died in 1982. Deborah and Rhonda grew up into amazing and beautiful women of God, serving the Lord in their respective locations and careers. I worked 3 years in a nursing home and 25 years as a visiting nurse and then 5 years as a professional foot-care provider, all in Yakima, preparing me thoroughly for my current responsibility of 24/7private duty nursing....Ron's MS was diagnosed in 1984 and has progressed gradually since then. He now says only a few, barely audible, words. But he says Thank you, and I love you, and "Rebecca" more than he ever did previous to being totally bedridden. We moved from Spokane to Yakima in 1983, then from Yakima to Little Rock Arkansas in 2016, by the grace of God. We have sent my girls on mission trips all over the world. I've also been gifted with trips to Israel, Mexico, Alaska, Uganda, and Hawaii and points in between. The Lord is amazing in my Life!!! . God is so good.” —Rebecca Berghoff

# Acknowledgements

Thank you so much for answering my questions and helping me write this book. I truly  
consider you all family.

## **Contributors:**

Dawn Woolley

Chris Archer

Sam Weaver

Tom Stoothoff

\*Jean (name changed by request)

Richard Eich

Eugene (Geno) Wilkie

Jim Thomson

Rebecca (Becca) Berghoff

Marilyn Jean McAllister Stoothoff



# Appendix A

## (Mama Marilyn's Story)

Marilyn Jean McAllister Stoothoff was born on Aug. 23, 1936 in Battle Creek, Mich.

Ronald David Stoothoff was born on April 14, 1935 in Drayton Plains, Mich.

Ron and I were Born Again Christians when we were teenagers.

After we were married in 1955 we got involved in other things and joined the Unitarian Church in Ann Arbor, Mich, where Ron was a student in the Philosophy School.

Our first four children were born in Ann Arbor.

After Ron received his Master's Degree in Philosophy he got a job at Northern Illinois College in DeKalb, IL, and he taught there for four years and then he got a job at Western Washington College in Bellingham, Wash in 1967.

He taught for a year and in the second year we got involved in the Anti-Vietnam War activities. In the winter of that year we started smoking grass and taking psychedelics.

We found a wonderful log house that was built in the late 1800's, in Maple Falls, WA and we moved there in the spring and Ron quit teaching at Western.

We lived in Maple Falls for four years and during that time Ron spent a lot of time reading lots of books on different religions. I don't enjoy reading but he would try to get me to read them, too.

In the spring of 1973, Ron was working in the berry fields near our home and he decided to put his trust in the Lord and to serve Him for the rest of his life.

The Lord changed Ron's, our children's and my life forever. One change Ron made was that he never asked me to read the Bible as he had the other books. He just read and did what the Lord showed him and prayed for me.

When we were hippies, we were friends with Steve & Chris Dingman and his brother and his wife. When they gave their hearts to the Lord, we thought they were lost. But, they were praying for us and I am thankful for that.

In the summer of '73 we moved to Curlew, Wash. and Ron got a job at the lumber mill in Republic. Steve and Chris moved to the area and Steve went to work at the mill.

There were some other young couples that had recently given their lives to the Lord and the men worked in the mill, also.

We started going to the Assembly of God Church in Republic and after a period of time we started getting together in our homes. We were gathering on Wed. Fri. and Sat nights and Sundays for a potluck meal and fellowship. The Lord was drawing us closer and we found that we wanted to serve the Lord together and started praying about it and looking for a place to move to.

When we were hippies, I never wanted to live in a commune but we had several people live with us. One was a student and her horse. Later a young man from Calif. that was about 18 and a classical guitarist. Ron reconnected with James Kline on the internet and he lives in France in the mountains and does concerts around the world. I enjoy having him on fb and I have 3 of his cds. He is a blessing.

Another young man, Lionel Picker, was an artist in oil and made his own oils and he is in France and is a famous artist.

The brothers spent the Saturdays of '75 getting firewood in for each of our homes and it was the first time we had wood for the winter.

In May, '75 we heard about a group of Christians that were living in an old school building in Wauconda and some of our group went and visited them. I didn't want to but when we did, I was blessed. They were called Christian House.

We gathered with them often over the next few months and one of the families that had taken in two single sisters and one child, decided to join the group. I did not want to.

Some more of our group decided to join them, too.

Early one morning in Nov. or Dec., before Ron went to work, he asked me to call Jack

Eich, the elder of Christian House, to come to our house after work. Ron didn't tell me why he wanted them to come but I guessed he might want to move in with the group. He was going to tell me when he got home from work but Jack and Phyllis got there before he did.

So, I found out that Ron wanted to move in with the group and the Lord had prepared me and I was glad to move in, too.

Jack and Phyllis had thought that Ron was upset that the others wanted to move in and they were very surprised with what Ron asked.

One day before we moved, Dawn came to visit me and see how I felt about moving and I told I wanted to move in and I felt like it was urgent to move before the storm.

I was 37 when Amanda was born and 39 when we moved into Christian House and Tim was a month old.

Our group and the Christian House group met on a Sat. night at the Community Center in Curlew. During worship something strange was going on and I looked up and saw one of the sisters dancing. I had not seen that before and I was very surprised. Later I was afraid that Ron would not want to move in but he did.

After we moved to Wilbur, several people would praise the Lord in the dance and I sought the Lord so I could, too. He blessed me. I can't Praise the Lord in the dance anymore, but He gave me a way to worship Him with my hands.

Amanda was born in Feb. 1974 and Tim was born in Nov. 1975. We moved into Christian House in Dec. and my Mother had planned to visit over Christmas and so she came to Christian House and she had a bed in the Sister's Dorm.

There had been about 35 adults and children and with our group moving in with about 35 more, it made the school building very full. The single brothers slept in a small building on the property.

In Jan. or Feb of 76, Jack found an old hotel that was for sale in Wilbur, WA. We were able to purchase the hotel and we moved to Wilbur in Feb. The brothers continued to work in the orchards in Brewster and Bridgeport, driving an hour or so each way.

Married couples had their own bedrooms and the young children were in a nursery with

other children. Ours was right next door and we had our babies in our bedrooms.

Our oldest daughter was in the Sister's Dorm and our oldest 3 sons were in the Brother's Dorm.

The sisters in the Sister's Dorm took care of maintenance in their rooms and a couple of married sisters cleaned and took care of the Brother's dorm.

We had house chores to do and we did them in the morning and also gathered for Sister's meeting. Most were a time of worship and fellowship and once in a while they would be a business meeting.

The sisters to do the dinners were planned by an elder sister and the rest of the chores we chosen in the business meetings.

We had more free time to sew or whatever than when we were in our own homes.

We were probably closer to our group that we had known longer. Our family was not in the area but some families had friends and family that came and visited. My Mother and sister came from MI. A few times and later my Mother and her husband came.

The first Dec. after I gave my heart to the Lord, Ron was reading his Bible before he went to work and instead of reading where he had been, he found a scripture in Jeremiah 10:3---,"For the customs of the people are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax, they decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple," and we had always done this and we worshiped the Christmas tree and the Lord showed us that we can give gifts any time it is on our hearts and not just at Christmas or birthdays.

That Christmas we did not do the tree and gifts. and it was very hard for our 4 older children but they did get a gift for Amanda who was 10 months old and very special to them. She was 10 ½ years younger than Tom.

Ron and I never did have a tree after that and I do not want to. It was a huge blessing for me not to have one. Some of our family has a tree and we get together for a dinner and gifts.

We did not celebrate holidays at Christian House and I do not know why. I don't

remember it being talked about, but some holidays were a time when some of our Christian family came up to Wilbur from Yakima for the weekend to fellowship and that was a blessing.

I remember making stuffed cabbage with Dusty, and it was a lot of work and I had never made it before, but I really liked eating it.

We were older but not elders at Christian House and after everyone left, the Lord kept us there and that meant that we were the ones to minister to the people that came. I was blessed but it was different for me. We were able to help all but one man with some mental problems that came and Ron worked at the IGA and did not feel to have him there with our children and me so he called on a local man and he was able to take him to his home. All of the local churches sent people to us over the years when everyone was there and continued when Ron and I were there.

I learned a lot from the elders.

I have loved music my whole life but I do not play an instrument. We had record players and I had them playing most of the time. All of the music was special to me and once in a while, Dawn would whistle and that was very special. Also, when she played the piano she would make the thunder roar.

One of my favorite songs is "It Happened".

In 1981 when people were leaving, Ron and I thought we would be, too. So we went up the Republic and Colville and we didn't find that was where to go. Then we came down to Yakima and stayed with Francis and Pam while we looked around. Several of the families were from Yakima and had returned. After looking around for a couple of days, Ron asked me what I thought and all I could say was "No." And that changed the spirit and we knew we were to return and stay in Wilbur.

When we arrived back there and told Sharon and Katie, they were very, very surprised. They were cleaning walls in the kitchen at the time.

We stayed with our youngest children and the older ones went on to do other things. The Berghoffs stayed for a while and a few others.

The Lord kept us there until the winter of 1985 and we moved to a small Christian group in Fruitland, WA. There were many things that needed to be fixed and we didn't have

the finances to take care of them.

I had thought that the Lord would bring us all back together but that didn't happen.

The group at Fruitland was a part of a group in Tenn. of Sabbath keepers. Not Adventist or Baptist, but a small group.

Doug Earp was ministering to street people in Yakima and we decided to come down and join in his ministry in May of 88. In Aug. we move Mabton to the ranch and were there for 2 years.

From there we moved to Bellingham area and thought we would find work and a place to live near the McSharrys and the Johnsons, but that didn't work out. We were staying with the Johnsons, 11 kids, for about 8 weeks.

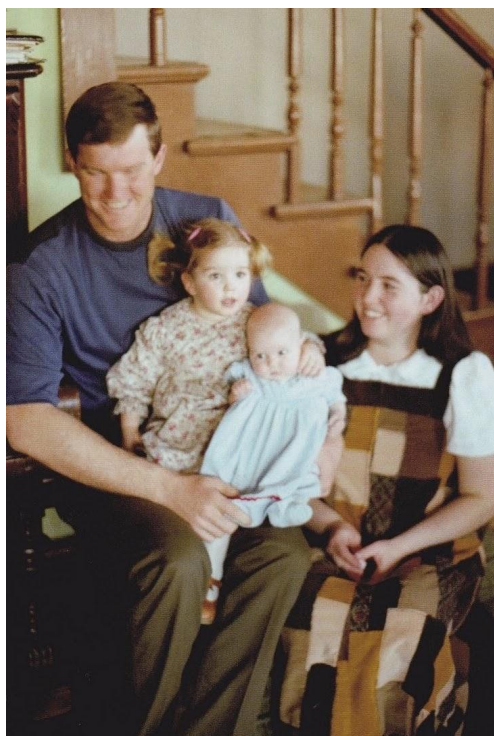
Ron felt to call his boss at the IGA in Wilbur to see if there was a job opening there and there was and we moved back to a house in Wilbur. We later arranged to buy the house and we lived there and the kids went to the public school until Jennifer graduated in June of 2000.

In Aug. we moved to Yakima, Ron went to work at Cub Crafters. I am still in Yakima, along with 7 of our children.

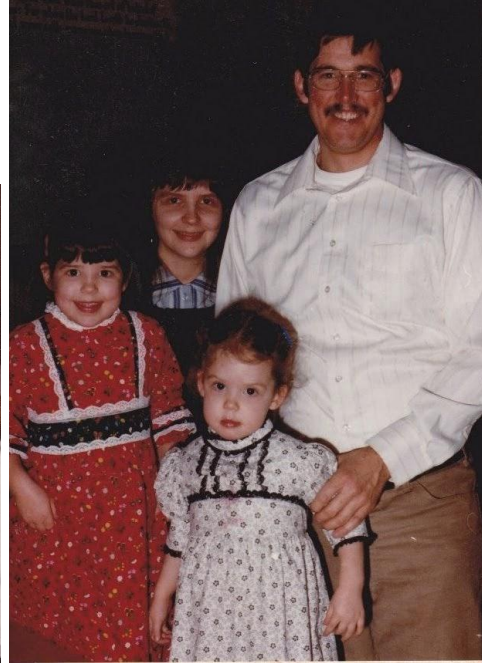
I am very, very thankful for our time at Christian House and they are still my closest family. I don't often see the ones living in Yakima but if I want to I can. Some of them are spread from the west coast to the east coast and I am blessed by all of them. (Some are even in the South.)

## Appendix B

*(Picture Album)*

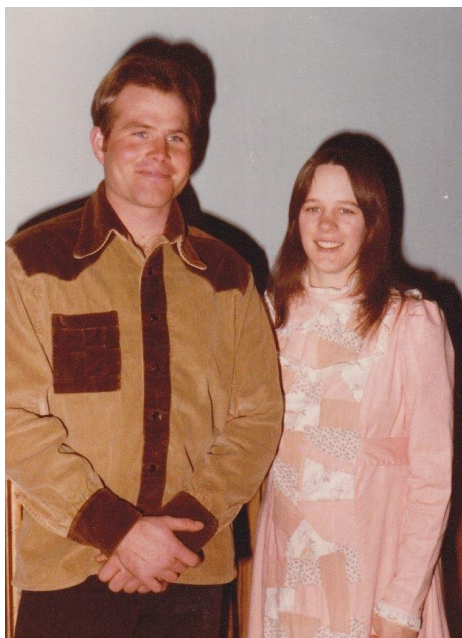
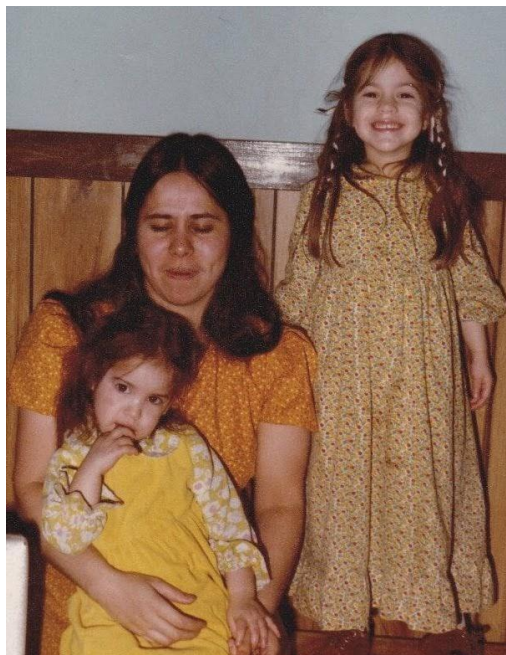
















# Appendix C

## (Memorable Quotes)

"Saved for a precious Brother" (written on food in the fridge)

"We are an unprofitable organization." (Dan Pittsley)

"Let's head for the hills, Brothers!" (Ron Berghoff)

"Loving 'all things common' or 'all things crummy'"

"Burning flesh"

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness..."

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart..." Proverbs 3

"ala yinddar"

"We are family."

"The Pride of Man is NOT so good!"

"Let's go home before the rain quits."

"Ya miss some, ya lose some!"

"That's the brakes!"

# Biography



1980



2018

I became a part of the family at Christian House on February 22, 1978. I was the firstborn of Ron & Rebecca Berghoff...and they called me Deborah Ruth. I lived at Christian House from my birth in February of 1978 until I was 3 1/2 years old.

My husband (Abraham Lara) and I have been married since 1999. We live in Yakima, Washington, with three of our six daughters.

I am currently serving as a lead co-pastor, with my husband, at our church. I also work as the Primary Music Teacher at our local Christian school, inspiring kids, from kindergarten to sixth grade, to love music and the Word of God. Any given day you will find me playing the piano, driving the kids around town, or stealing some quiet time with the Lord.