



# The Journeys of a Father's Daughter

By Joy Dougherty

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**M**y childhood was an idyllic one. As the only child of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastor of a large urban congregation in Detroit, Michigan, I was the beloved pastor's daughter and was treated like a princess.

I knew most of the people in my father's congregation and often went with him on visits to the sick. I remember in particular two homebound sisters, Bessie and Alma, who gave us cookies and milk every time we visited, and one man just over 30 who lived in an iron lung because of polio and was cared for by his mother. George could utter only a few words at a time before pausing for the lung to pump and give him the ability to speak again. That was how he lived and breathed. I didn't understand then how he could be so cheerful, but he always was. My father told me later that he had never known anyone who had a stronger faith in Jesus than George.

As a child, I especially enjoyed weddings and other special events in the congregation and was included in all of them; they were a blessing to me. My loving relationship with my father during those early years is beyond description, and I still marvel that my early memories are so vivid.

Although I was baptized by my father, I was not confirmed by him because my happy childhood ended abruptly at age 11 when he suffered a massive heart attack and died prematurely, at age 52, while preaching a Good Friday sermon—doing what he loved most. It was his first sermon in two years following two previous heart attacks. Having received a clean bill of health from his doctor, he was extremely happy that day and eager to preach again. However, the Lord had other plans for him.

Our faith sustained and strengthened my mother and me in our grief, and God guided us, as He had in the past, through those years ahead. One of my favorite Bible verses was and still is,

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28 KJV).

We memorized Scripture from the King James Version then, and I repeated that verse over and over in my mind during that time.

Every summer during my early childhood and into my teen years, we visited Schuyler, Nebraska, where my father was born and where his brothers farmed the homestead and surrounding land. I remember my Aunt Nora, an active LWML member in her country church, talking about the mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. She had a Mite Box on the window ledge in her farm kitchen and spoke admiringly of Helen Gienapp (LWML President 1979–1983). Her enthusiasm was contagious, and I remember it well.

As the years passed, I was fortunate to graduate from Lutheran elementary and secondary schools and receive my undergraduate degree from Valparaiso University. The heavenly Father was with us despite the hardships we faced when our lives were so dramatically changed.

As an adult, my life's journey took me to the LCA, which later became a part of the ELCA, and I became active in Lutheran Church Women. At the turn of the 21st century, however, I returned to my roots and joined Trinity Lutheran, an LCMS congregation in Toledo. The very first question I asked was, "Do you have an LWML society here?"

It gives me great joy to say that a Mite Box now holds a special place in my home office and LWML is a special part of my life. I am thankful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout my life and the promise His Word brings that *all things work together for good*. *Q*

