Raised on a pig farm in Northwest Iowa, the youngest of three daughters, surrounded by cornfields, barns, and a loving family, Adriane (Dorr) Heins may seem to be a paradox.

For starters, she’s comfortable with cowboy boots and high-heeled shoes, pick-up trucks and Jane Austen, Twitter and the Lutheran Book of Prayer. She listens to bluegrass and plays the organ.

Unlike so many, she doesn’t own a TV — didn’t even grow up with TV — yet she expertly juggles social media: tweets, Facebook, blogs, and Pinterest, where in her limited free time she collects pictures of vintage chandeliers, recipes for fried ravioli, and memorable quotes such as “I’m an English major. You do the math.” and “Keep calm and call Dad.”

Fondly, she remembers sitting in her country church, Trinity Lutheran, Marcus, Iowa, and hearing the wind blow through the pine trees, as the cows grazed in the nearby fields.

She’s a country girl with a city heart. Or maybe she’s a city girl with a country heart. Bottom line? She loves using her gifts to serve The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod as the Associate Executive Director for Strategic Communications and the managing editor for The Lutheran Witness.

“I take care of the strategic side of communications, coming up with the messages. Once my team has crafted the message, Deaconess Pam Nielsen and her team take over with the services side. They run with it, creating the ads, taking pictures, putting it online. Our goal is one voice. Whether it’s a press release, an ad, a Reporter story, or social media, we try to do it in unison on behalf of the LCMS,” she says.

Big job for this small-town girl. She’s not alone, though. She has quite a team working with her. She also has followed a well-paved path to prepare her for this position.

“When I look back, I can see that the Lord was really forming and shaping and molding me for this purpose, even though I didn’t see it at the time,” she says.

At seven years old, Adriane was already holding a sharpened pencil, busy editing her very own Toodle-loo Times, a family newsletter filled with interviews and stories. “It’s so embarrassing to look at it,” she says with a laugh. “But I can see even back then there was that itch to write and edit.”
Fast forward a handful of years to Concordia University Wisconsin, where Adriane figured out how to combine her dream to write with her desire to serve the church. Studying English with Dr. Gene Edward Veith, one of her mentors, she learned about the doctrine of vocation. “You could be a deaconess,” he told her. “The church needs deaconesses. But we also need faithful Lutheran lawyers, doctors, and writers.” It was a breakthrough moment for Adriane.

While a student at Concordia, Adriane began pursuing real-life writing and editing experiences, and she contacted [future LWML President] Jan Wendorf to learn about LWML opportunities. “We met for lunch, and then she put me in touch with the folks who do the writing and editing to see how I could help,” she says.

Later, Adriane was invited to serve as Christian Living Editor for the Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly. During her four years on the staff, Adriane witnessed the strengths of the organization and continued to fill her writing and editing toolbox.

In 2005, Adriane finished her undergraduate studies and joined Concordia Publishing House as a summer intern and then as a freelance copy editor, where she learned her way around the copy-editing bibles — the Chicago Manual of Style and the AP Style Guide. The timing worked well as Adriane was able to work from home. “My mom went through some health issues, so I moved back home to help her. We grew very close that year.”

Desiring more theological training, Adriane pursued graduate studies at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, where she received a Master of Arts in Theology in 2010. She also worked in various administrative positions, writing for and editing several publications, including Higher Things and For the Life of the World. “Those were probably four of the best years of my life, being in that community and sitting at the feet of pastors and professors who cared not only for what we learned academically, but also for our spiritual well-being,” she recalls.

Moving away from this comfortable place wasn’t easy for Adriane, but it started with a dare from her father.

“He ripped out the page with the ad for managing editor at The Lutheran Witness, put a little sticky note on it that said ‘I dare you. Love, Dad,’ and mailed it to me.” Adriane couldn’t resist his challenge, so she submitted her application but didn’t really expect anything more than a learning experience.

“I was twenty-four years old. I’d never done anything like this full-time, so I thought there was no way,” she says.

The interview went well, and she was offered the job. “But I panicked a bit,” she says, and then respectfully declined. Two weeks later, she was asked to reconsider and, after talking to her family and pastor, she accepted. “I should probably be brave,” she remembers thinking. So she packed her bags and moved to St. Louis, “a very green young woman, the youngest and (I think) the first woman who has ever been managing editor here.”

The transition to her new job in a new city was smooth, thanks in part to Jim Heine, the outgoing managing editor. “He was a great mentor, very patient and kind,” she says.

Adriane recalls her first day on the job. “One of my co-workers said, ‘We always say that the average age of The Lutheran Witness reader is dead! I thought that was so sad!’ So it became Adriane’s goal, along with her team, to reach new audiences.

“My goal has been to create something that’s visually and content-wise friendly to all ages. We have a column for our youth now. We have a column for families. We’re trying to draw in the church as a whole and not just something for our parents or grandparents,” she explains.

Day to day, Adriane directs the editorial content of the magazine, coordinating with Concordia Publishing House (CPH), contacting authors, giving them direction, and working with graphic designers and doctrinal reviewers.

Last spring she was promoted to her current position. “Part of the joy of working on strategic communications is that we can take a big look at what’s going on in the church and have the magazine mesh with that,” she says.

Adriane loves the fast-paced energy of her work. She’s learned to write and edit in the middle of a busy office, sometimes putting in her ear buds and listening to bluegrass, country, or Frank Sinatra. “Our office space is like a newsroom. Sometimes there’s a lot of noise, people running in and out, or we’re watching something online to see if that affects how we communicate our message.”

The unexpected fills her days. “I wake up every morning and have no idea what’s going to happen that day,” she says. “Every day it’s something different and something that’s going to matter to the church and how we profess our faith,” she explains. “One day, we’re setting up a newsroom at the convention, and we go from seven in the morning until ten at night. Another day, we might be heading to Washington, D.C., to follow our Lutheran folks around as they talk with congressmen or to watch President Harrison testify before Congress.”

Meeting new people and hearing their stories is a favorite part of her job. “People love to tell their stories. My joy is that I get to listen and let them give that story voice."

One particular experience stands out in Adriane’s mind when the magazine recently focused an issue on veterans and military personnel. “I took a team to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio to meet with veterans for this story. There’s an incredibly high rate of suicide among veterans, and we felt it was important to let the church know that we have a huge group of people coming home who need our help. We met so many amazing people, wounded warriors,” she says.

“There was one guy my age who had lost both legs and one arm to a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. He didn’t complain. ‘Ask me my story,’ he said. ‘Don’t pity me. Just treat me like a normal person.’”
It’s one trip she will never forget. “It’s kind of cliché to say that it changes your life, but it really does. I can’t imagine living life with only one limb. Or having to learn to walk again.”

After the issue was in print, a gift arrived on Adriane’s desk. “One of my seminary professors was serving as a chaplain at Guantanamo Bay at that time. He sent me the flag that flew over Guantanamo Bay on Reformation Day, out of thankfulness for what we did in that issue. It’s one of the few times I’ve been moved to tears at work,” she shares.

**Communicating Clear Messages**

Communicating clear messages is what Adriane knows how to do, but she recognizes that it’s not always easy. “We’re all sinners, and we will always have different opinions about how things should be done or said or communicated.”

Adriane values working for the church, where there are daily reminders to forgive. “We can call on our chaplain and say, ‘Come pray with us. Come set us straight.’ It’s great to have a pastor to offer words of comfort and forgiveness and to help us find a way forward.”

Adriane is transparent about her own challenges. “Coming from a line of hot-tempered Germans, I can get frustrated and angry quickly. That will always be a struggle of mine,” she says.

At times she wrestles with the 24/7 demands of her work. “I am never not connected,” she says. “I may get a text message at two in the morning or one on Sunday when I’m going to church. It’s really easy in that moment to say, ‘I just need ten minutes to myself without somebody needing something!’”

In a classic example of dramatic irony, Adriane met her husband, Chris, while she was writing the book. They were married this past November and, since he’s a sixth-generation dairy farmer, she has returned to the open spaces she loves, moving away from the city. Her work with the church continues, and she makes frequent trips to the International Center near St. Louis, but it has taken a slightly different form. She might be missing the daily hustle of the office and the collaborative work with her team, but she’s embracing her new quiet setting. “I think my writing is going to get better,” she says with a laugh. “There’s so much beauty to look at compared to a cubicle wall!”

**The Big Challenge Today: Silence**

On the farm the silence is good, but Adriane sees the silence in our culture as the biggest challenge when it comes to communication. “It’s not necessarily saying or doing something that causes a mixed signal,” she says, “it’s not saying anything. It’s the silence.”

In these moments, though, Adriane reminds herself about the joys and blessings of her work. “I love my job! I get to spend all day working for my church. How humbling is that?”

Over the past year, Adriane has been writing her first book to be published by CPH in the spring. In *Hello, My Name Is Single*, Adriane communicates a clear message to an often-overlooked community within the church: singles. “They look fine. There’s nothing really wrong with them, but they are hurting. They are wondering, ‘Why is this happening for everybody else and not for me?’”

Adriane knows first-hand the challenges of being single. While studying at the seminary, she believed she found her life-long partner, and then he broke off the engagement. “That was a really hard time for me,” she says. “I went through a couple of years struggling to figure out my identity as a single person. I wasn’t sure if the Lord would give me that good husband.”

She admits her fear as she says, “I wondered if that had been my one chance and I wouldn’t find another one.”

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The church needs deaconesses. But we also need faithful Lutheran lawyers, doctors, and writers. DR. GENE EDWARD VEITH
Since becoming involved in her early twenties, Adriane has seen the LWML in action, and she sees LWML as another way to connect the generations.

“I’m encouraged by the women in my generation who are really interested in being about the things of the faith. There is a very strong desire to be rooted and grounded in something. It’s good to have women tell the younger generation about their life’s struggles and how they’ve seen the way the Lord has preserved and cared for them. One of the best things the LWML can do is to help those of us who are young, to teach us what it means to be a faithful Lutheran woman, to teach us what it means to be a wife and a mom. We are desperate to learn those things.

“We’re not growing up in families like our parents did, where there were moms and dads and grandmas who came over. There’s not that order and structure anymore. The majority of my friends have parents who are separated, who grew up without a mom, or who didn’t have someone to sit with them in church. Now that they are getting married and having kids, they are looking for someone to say, ‘Let me help you. Let me come sit with you in church. Let me be that person you didn’t have.’ It’s a mutual relationship, part of being the body of Christ, all generations, teaching each other.

“Beyond being faithful and being Lutheran, there is also a personal side to LWML where women can help upcoming generations learn how to live as a Lutheran woman under Christ’s cross and how to survive this world on behalf of Him. That’s one of the many things the LWML has going for it, and I’m very grateful for it on behalf of the women my age.”