

Born into Belonging

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I was born without the doctor present as he was still at home shaving. Dr. Parsons was the only doctor in the small town of Trimont, Minnesota, the address of my birth hospital. A person could get an appointment with Dr. Parsons at his office in the hospital or at office he kept in the old bank on Main Street. In the middle of the night you visited him in his kitchen which served more as a medical triage center than a family kitchen.

The youngest of six Swedish Lutheran farm children, I thought we had a “cool” family; we were just like the Brady Bunch: boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, girl. Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale and DFL were household names. My father, Floyd, served on the Butterfield-Odin school board and my mother, Eunice, found her way onto local, regional and state boards for public education and of the church.

Each of my siblings began piano instruction in third grade with no opting out until after the sixth grade. My brothers took the ‘opt out’ alternative and my sisters dutifully studied through high school. My formal music instruction began a year early in second grade (an advantage of being the baby), and I wasn’t so much dutiful about continuing to study piano and organ as I was drawn to the music. I was the rare child who had to be told by my mother to stop playing in the words, “that is enough now.”

Gustavus Adolphus College was in my immediate and extended family’s Swedish blood. But I was going to be the one to break that blood line and attend anywhere but there and be anything but the music education major my two sisters had become. After visiting other campuses I took the inevitable Gustavus tour which I could have given myself having been on the campus dozens of time throughout my childhood. I realized that Gustavus felt like home and decided all the fuss had been for naught. And I, too, became a music major but without the license to teach.

My future was to take me to the Twin Cities or other large metro area. I was going to save the world from something, I’m not sure what. I had dreams of becoming somebody, somewhere. Then, on a weekend visit to our small rural county I ran into a local young farmer who I had known from a distance through my memberships in 4-H and FFA. There he was. There I was. And soon after, there we were.

Raising children, teaching private music lessons, working part-time positions in fundraising and public relations for St. James health facilities and studying for a Master of Arts in Teaching in music education pretty much occupied the late ‘80s to a decade later when that first and most precious teaching job started. When a person marries a farmer you also marry a farm. You can’t move; you must wait for all off-farm, non-agricultural jobs to come to you. It’s what you

commit to when you say “I do.” I have been blessed to have had satisfying jobs in education as those jobs “came to me” in our rural area.

It was during my first year of the twelve I spent in the classroom that my principal said, “When you are tired of hauling around choir risers and instruments, you need to become a principal. It is who you are.” Obviously, that stuck.

My husband and I have raised three independent farm boys who have traveled to Purdue University, Gustavus and the Carlson School of Management. Our Boilermaker is wandering through the gravitational pull of the world of politics; the Gustie is an accountant at a local ag cooperative near our farm, married to a math teacher and is farming with my husband; and our Gopher has entered the world of fraternity living, balancing his social life with academic rigor.

My purpose in writing this was to reveal in black and white the themes of my life; in other words, to help me answer what I was Born into Belonging. The two themes seem easy to see now that they are on paper:

- small town, rural, agriculture, farm family, blood lines, heritage;
- public education, instruction, college, universities, boards, learning, study, teaching.

This story didn’t take me to my initial destination of a large city; it led me back to our rural, small town community. I truly believe that the rest of my dream came true: becoming somebody, somewhere.