



Dr. Jean S. Garton with husband, Rev. H.W. Garton

A Celebration of Life

By Dr. Jean S. Garton

Talk about perfect timing! Each year my spring cleaning and our congregation's garage sale coincide, and that gives me an opportunity to simplify my life. This year, however, there was a moment of sadness when I added a favorite sweatshirt to the pile of giveaways. It had kept me warm through many a chilly day and, in addition, had served as a commercial of sorts. Living as we do in an area where Lutherans are few and far between, I was proud to sport a shirt that said: "Genuine Antique Lutheran — Been There, Done That, Still Prayin'." I wasn't too thrilled with the "antique" part but, all in all, it was a true statement.

It is also a true statement that there are advantages to being an antique.

Despite creaky knees and a leaking memory, I now know how to pray better. I also know what the sainted Ozzie Hoffman meant when he said, "Don't sweat the small stuff, and it's all small stuff." As the years have passed, I find myself cherishing more the simple truths of the Christian faith found in the old children's hymn than in the theological fine points about which we argue. "I am Jesus' little lamb, ever glad at heart I am; For my Shepherd gently guides me, knows my need and well provides me, Loves me ev'ry day the same, even calls me by my name." As I put that old sweatshirt in the garage sale, I thought about how the Shepherd had indeed gently guided me, and looking back, I realize there were signposts along the way

that provided life-shaping times of decision, growth, and insight.

There was the time, for instance, when my parents sent me off to a college that my Brooklyn Dad said was named Con-cor-dee-yuh. It was in the affluent community of Bronxville, New York, a lovely village of huge houses and manicured lawns. It was a planet away from our two-family row house on the trolley tracks. It was at Concordia where, for the first time, I was challenged to examine what I believed. When I arrived as a freshman all that mattered was becoming a cheerleader. By the time I graduated, however, I knew what I believed, and it was that I wanted to live my life — here and in eternity — at the feet of Jesus.

Another time of decision came after years of marriage. We were living with our three children in Dallas where my husband was a successful businessman. It was November 22, 1963, a life-altering day for the country and for our family. That morning I was eager to leave our LWML Christian Growth meeting to join the crowds that lined the streets of Dallas to catch a glimpse of President John F. Kennedy. Instead, he entered eternity by way of an assassin's bullet. It led my husband to wonder if using his life to make money would really mean anything in the



Garton children —Dru, Donn, and Dale

long run. He was certain there was a better way to solve problems than through violence. After a year of praying, the Shepherd led us to Springfield, Illinois, where my husband, at age 40, became a Concordia Seminary student. We arrived at the school with a healthy bank account — enough to see us through four years of training — and with three healthy children. However, that was not how we were to leave the school.

Our oldest child, Dale, was diagnosed with severe rheumatoid arthritis and with a rare blood disease that was expected to end her life in her teen years. We traveled from hospital to hospital trying, unsuccessfully, to find a cure. Our resources were soon gone, and some days there was only oatmeal to eat. One Saturday morning there wasn't even oatmeal. As the five of us sat around the breakfast table praying, the doorbell rang. It was a woman from a neighboring church. Her LWML had had a pantry shower the day before, and she wondered if we could use

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The Garton's grandchildren — Jeremy, Joshua, Jonathan, Carissa, Claire, and Caitlin



Close-up of grandchildren Claire and Carissa

some food. Manna from heaven! Brown paper bags never looked so good. That day we had a *celebration of life*, rejoicing in how the Lord binds us together as a body, as brothers and sisters who care and share. How rapidly our lives changed and how necessary that had been for us to learn how totally impoverished we are apart from the true wealth that is in Christ Jesus.

By the time the four years of seminary preparation were over, we had learned to live a day at a time, and we marveled at our daughter Dale's indomitable spirit as she struggled with pain and crippling. We moved to Millvale, Pennsylvania, my husband's first congregation, where another one of those signposts was to occur. We forget sometimes that while we are, indeed, sons and daughters of the King, we are also His sheep. That is no

compliment because sheep are dumb and very prone to stray, and chief of strayers I was to become.

We were excited to begin our service as full-time church workers, only to find this church worker hanging full time over a bucket — pregnant at 40! The doctor tried to soften his diagnosis by saying, "Think of it as having the Egyptian Flu. It lasts for nine months and then you become a 'mummy'." It wasn't funny and it wasn't fair! Our three children were finally *in* school, and my husband was finally *out* of school. It was my time now, wasn't it? The slogans about *A Woman's Right to Choose* and *A Woman's Right to Control Her Own Body* were prominent in the public debate about abortion. They became seductive when combined with another slogan — *Every Child a Wanted Child*. This

fourth child wasn't wanted, so the obvious solution was to abort the pregnancy. Of course, the human mind is never more clever or resourceful than when it is engaged in self-justification.

It was a time *before* the sweeping 1973 Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion throughout the country, and I couldn't find a doctor who would agree to terminate the pregnancy. What a benign-sounding phrase for what I wanted to do. With abortion not an option, I set my jaw and counted the days till the pregnancy would "terminate" itself. I joined an activist group seeking to promote abortion-on-demand. I spent six months studying the abortion issue from numerous perspectives in an attempt to find confirmation that abortion, as its advocates claimed, helps women, doesn't take a human life, and is a choice God allows us to make. I came out the other end of that exhaustive research with a changed heart and mind and with a commitment to be a voice in defense of the unseen, unheard, unborn child.

It wasn't until after the birth of that

fourth child, a boy we named Donn, that I understood that God, indeed, does want every child to be a wanted child, but He puts the burden on us to be better wanters. It was only then, at age forty and after four children, that I learned what so many other women have learned: that an unwanted pregnancy, allowed to play out according to God's plan, often becomes a wanted child. That "caboose" was and is a great joy and, in addition, I was blessed with the forgiveness that this straying sheep so desperately needed.

It was that almost-aborted little boy, Donn, who at age 10 rode with us from New Jersey to St. Louis for the 1979 LCMS Convention. The State Police tracked us down along the way. In our Christian language the message was — *Dean is alive; in God's presence but face to face*. In the world's language the message was — *Dean is dead; murdered in Dallas*. He had just completed four years in the Air Force during the Vietnam War and was beginning a management training program. Dean, our first



The Garton's great granddaughters — Skyler (Jeremy's daughter) and Johanna (Jonathan's daughter)



son, our planned son, our wanted son, dead, while seated between us bringing great comfort was Donn, our second son, our unplanned son, our unwanted son, whom I had wanted dead.

The human solution to a problem is often death, and if I could say anything to those men and women who plan to destroy their unborn child because it is the wrong sex, wrong shape, or wrong time, it would be to caution them about the unknown days ahead that can turn our seemingly planned lives upside down.

God's solution to the world's problems is always life — the giving of Himself. Thus it was that while we were struggling with Dean's senseless, violent death, the Lord was preparing a most wonderful surprise. Dale, the daughter who was not expected to live beyond her teens had reached her twenties, was married and pregnant — *with triplets!* From the moment those little babies entered our lives — while still in the womb — the healing of our family began, and the pain of Dean's death was gradually replaced with the *celebration of new life.*

It is often said that life is full of twists and turns, but I have found that it sometimes goes in circles. Originally an abortion advocate, I came full circle to becoming a pro-life advocate. Vietnam, which took our son, Dean, away from home for four years, is now the home of our son, Donn, who lives and works in

Saigon. We left Dallas upon the death of the President, only to return for the death of our son. Then, and most amazingly, that unwanted pregnancy became a very wanted child.

So, here I am today — *A Genuine Antique Lutheran* — with four children: Dale, in Arkansas; Dean, in Heaven; Dru, in Florida; and Donn, in Saigon. There are now six grandchildren. Dale is the mother of triplets Joshua, Jonathan and Jeremy, all out of college and in Christian service of some sort. She is also the mother of three daughters: Caitlin, in nursing school; Carissa, from Taiwan; and Claire, from Korea. Two of the triplets are married and each has a new baby, which makes me a great-grandmother. My cup truly runneth over!

I don't know what is ahead in this journey, but I know that Jesus is ahead. I don't know what chapter will follow this one, because it is the Lord's story to write, not mine. All I have is today. He hasn't given me tomorrow yet, and maybe He won't, but I have His promise that even if He doesn't, I will still be alive and in His presence but then face to face. That means the best is yet to come! As the children's hymn says:

"Who so happy as I am, even now the Shepherd's lamb?"

And when my short life is ended, by His angel host attended,

He shall fold me to his breast, there within his arms to rest."

Dr. Jean S. Garton served on the LCMS Board of Directors, the Council of Members for Concordia University System, and was Chair of the President's Commission on Women. She is active as a conference speaker and serves her community at Safe Haven – Shelter for Battered and Abused Women. The author of "Who Broke the Baby?" Dr. Garton is the founder and president emerita of national Lutherans For Life.



Cantaloupe + Carrots = Compassion... LWML-Style!

By Adriane Dorr

Ground beef isn't all that exciting to most people. Neither are carrots, chicken, or tomatoes. But to students at Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, these foods are a welcome gift.

The seminary helps to provide for its own by maintaining the Food and Clothing Co-op, where students and families get groceries, clothes, and household items for free. In past years, the food co-op was mainly stocked with nonperishable items, such as soup, flour, and cereal. But when the women of the LWML joined together to make a recent sizable financial gift, things began to change.

Last year, fourteen LWML districts voted to fund mission grants to the Food and Clothing Co-op at the seminary. The districts of Florida/Georgia, Indiana, Iowa East, Kansas, Louisiana–Mississippi, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska North, Nebraska South, North Dakota, Northern Illinois, North Wisconsin, Ohio, Oregon, and South Dakota together donated \$149,000. In addition, two districts, Texas and Minnesota South, gave the co-op door offerings totaling over \$5,600, and the Minnesota North district collected 17,000 phone cards for students' use.