

ZIONSVILLE TIMES SENTINEL

Wednesday

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The gift that keeps on giving

For several summers during my early teens, my family vacationed at a little resort in rural Moodus, Conn. Owned by Art and Olga Donnellan, it was called Riveredge. Back then, Moodus was the "Catskills of Connecticut." Each summer, the vacationers at dozens of Moodus-area resorts — primarily from New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and other parts of Connecticut — quadrupled the region's population to more than 20,000.

Riveredge boasted small cabins and a large main house where we gathered for breakfast and lunch. Each morning, we enjoyed Olga's tasty pancakes and scrambled-eggs. At night, we savored hot dogs and corn roasted by the Salmon River.

We swam, paddle-boated, joined in sack races and pie-eating contests, played volleyball outside and Ping-Pong in the clubhouse. We made s'mores by firelight and watched old movies on an outdoor screen.

It was a lovely little piece of heaven, made all the more so in the summer of my 13th year when I met a 17-year-old boy vacationing there with his family from Long Island, New York. His name was John and I promptly fell in love. He was a

sweet, handsome Irish Catholic who planned to go to college in upstate New York and dreamed of one-day joining an inspirational singing group of the time, called "Up with People."

We held hands during walks in the nearby woods and often stopped in a little area thick with wildflowers some of the vacationers called "Lands of Love." There, John told me of his deep love of God and that he had considered going to seminary.

As you can imagine, the week shot by like a motor boat. When we parted, John gave me a tender kiss; we exchanged addresses and promised to write each other. We did so for almost a year, exchanging pictures and news about school and families. One day, I received a letter from John expressing enthusiasm about a young lady he had begun dating at college. Devastated, I responded that I was happy for him. Then I stopped writing.

He must have known I was hurt, as only a young girl with a serious crush and a rich imagination can be. In his last letter to me, he enclosed a beautiful poem written by his father. I've kept it all these years, read it and re-read it in times of sadness, lone-

liness, despair. It always helps me to put my problems in perspective and to know that God will help me through whatever I must face. I have shared it with friends going through hard times and with an entire fourth-grade catechism class I taught back in Connecticut.

I thought I'd give it to you this Christmas, for even though I don't know most of my readers, I know we share worries this holiday — about the economy, our jobs, our homes, our retirement. I know we're concerned about the war, the new president, the future. Although Christmas is a time of hope and joyful anticipation in our coming Lord, there's also darkness and fear this Christmas. And so, I present you with the Light. And with my thanks to a long-ago boy who shared it with me.

*When your burden seems kind of heavy
and you pause on the brink of despair,
just let your thoughts turn to Calvary's Hill
and what He suffered there.*

*When your heart is saddened and weary
from bearing life's burdens each day,
just turn to our crucified Savior
and like a child say
a prayer that your faith will not weaken
from the weight of the cross that you bear.*

*And you'll find if you just persevere
He'll lighten each worry and care.*



CYNTHIA STARKS
new view