

L'Abri

INTERNATIONAL



Edith Schaeffer: 1915-2013

A Very Special Heritage

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

Twenty-nine years ago today in Rochester, Minnesota, my dear father, Francis Schaeffer, passed from this life's road of pilgrimage, to the place ahead Jesus said he'd prepared for us.

And between going to sleep in her bed in Gryon, Switzerland the night of Good Friday and the morning of March 30th, my beloved mother, Edith Rachel Merritt Seville Schaeffer, also went the same way in quietness and rest. All of her life she sang, talked and rejoiced in the reality of God's provision ahead. Heaven was so real to her, the home and country spoken of in Hebrews 11. She was one whose citizenship was there, and she shared this with me from early childhood, along with a special joy in Easter and the resurrected Lord. When I heard of her death that Saturday morning, I breathed a huge "thank you" of relief. Of course, later comes that big gap...the separation, the grief. Yes, ERS's citizenship and home was definitely in that place ahead where all tears are wiped from the eyes; where, as she told me with happy eyes when I was four, we'll be thrilled to see Him, our so dearly-loved King, Lord, Saviour, Friend...and "throw our crowns before him." She anticipated the return of Christ promised to us when those of us still here "will meet him in the air," after the "dead in Christ" have risen. She and my Dad enjoyed

the hope that we'll see this polluted and suffering world restored to pristine beauty, with Christ's rule of pure justice and mercy for all. These two pilgrims, so ordinary everyday persons, met up in Philadelphia while still teenagers (Mother was 17), and they married in 1936. The key to their lives is that they had profound assurance that the Bible is Truth. As they matured, lived, had ups and downs, their sense of commitment to their Lord was at their core the whole way.

ERS was born in Wenzhou, China, November 1914. Her mother and father were missionaries in the China Inland Mission. She spent her first five years there, and always kept a profound sense of connection to China and the Chinese people, although she forgot her fluent Mandarin after they moved back to the USA. One of the joys in her later years was going back to the land of her birth twice - including a visit to Wenzhou. There, she even found the house where she was born and worshipped in the still full church where she'd sat as a child! They invited her to speak,

too. In a letter she wrote on June 17, 1996, she said, "...it was amazing to be back in Wenzhou and be welcomed by the faculty at the University of Wenzhou with a special dinner and to present 30 books (Fran's and mine, in English) to the University Library." In the same letter she writes that in May she had time with her third daughter, Debby, in New York where the Schaeffer Foundation was buying a house in the Hudson Valley. ERS, towards the end of the 1980's, had decided that the best repository for my Dad's papers would be an independent trust called the Schaeffer Foundation. It was and is separate from L'Abri - and she became a board member. The idea was that individuals could pursue the works and ideas of Schaeffer at a "study house" in more depth than in the hurley-burley of L'Abri family life in the branches. Udo and Debby Middelmann would commence and continue this work. ERS began marriage as the wife of a semi-nary student, not long after the depression. She supported Dad and herself through

dressmaking, developing the art of truly living on a shoestring. Soon the three years had past, and they together served a small church congregation that met in a beer-hall. Both of them threw themselves into that life and made warm relationships. They began children's work as well as teaching. My mother cooked for undernourished children from needy families at their summer camps.

ERS and FAS always worked as a team. From the start they built life-long relationships, never seeing people as numbers to be totted up. They listened to where people were coming from, both in their lives and thinking. And they had innovative, creative ideas, supporting each other with their gifts. From the beginning, they used their home where my mother's gift as a cook and "welcomer" made it possible for communities to grow.

The first years were in America, in three separate pastorates, the last one in St. Louis. This brought them through the war years, and by

1945 their three daughters had been born...each of us in one of the different locations...Priscilla (Prisca), myself (Susan), and Debby. Mother was a full-time "mom" at home...walking with me trotting by her side to the A&P for groceries, hanging wash in the backyard...staying up into the wee hours to sew lovely matching dresses for her girls and herself (still on a shoestring), etc... but she was also active in church and community Christian work.

She was a gifted teacher. A great storyteller... an almost charismatically enthusiastic song leader. Right up through her last years into her almost 100th year she'd sing with me most verses with heart and soul the hymn, "I will tell the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me." And how well she told that story! In children's classes, conversations with all kinds of people, talks to groups, and in writing.

She supported my father's gifts and insight, teaching with her whole self and service. They loved the Lord. They loved his Gospel. They loved people, and longed to share this living water with all. They were broad-minded and generous, seeming to understand people from most backgrounds, conditions, and cultures. Of course, these life-long qualities matured from the mid-1930's and 1940's in the U.S.A., to the L'Abri Fellowship and its life years later (L'Abri started in 1955). They were both deep thinkers – although people tend to see my father as the intellectual. He was a thinker.... open to questions, searching for answers and realities. Searching not only for answers to others' questions but in his own thinking as well. In fact, when he read, heard or talked with others struggling with deep problems, ideas or questions, he'd truly enter the conversation not "writing off" new ideas out of hand. In this way, he kept growing. Neither of my parents used slogans or formulas.

But Mother was also a deep thinker. She had a firm grasp of Biblical theology and doctrine. They both cared about the reliability of Scripture, believing it is Truth...and thus applicable to all of life, all cultures, all ages. She had a practical, common-sense side as she related principles to real life people and situations. She cared so much for individuals that when I think back to L'Abri in the chalet in the 1950's and '60's, I "see" her preparing the scene, so to speak, for the conversations. She'd set the table carefully, with flowers and often candles making a pleasant, homely atmosphere. She cooked amazing food on a low budget...using vegetables from the gar-

den. But as we served up the plates, she'd so often pause and say, "Let's stop and pray for this conversation, pray for X". She cared that the person carrying huge bitterness from the war, or an awkward G.I. on leave, or an intellectual wanting to discuss existentialism, would be able to express their question or need, and that my Dad would be able to relate to them, and understand what they meant and felt and then bring the Lord's truths to bear on it. (She knew that prayer was needed, God's work to be done through His Holy Spirit.) Afterwards she'd cheerfully do the washing-up so as to not stop a "good discussion" going on in the dining room. The prayers, the ideas, the hospitality bore fruit. This illustrates the "both/and" principle of working. On one hand, doing the best possible oneself – but on the other – knowing that it is God's work not ours, praying and trusting Him.

Going back to St. Louis, it was the summer of 1947 that changed our lives as a family. Dad was asked to travel in Europe for three months, to make contacts with Protestant churches in European countries. When he returned, he'd had his thinking and horizons changed. He'd met friends for life, and had an immense burden to go back and help after the shattering war years. Thus, 1948 found the family sailing to Europe to begin what was supposed to be a four-year mission. They chose Switzerland as a base where they could leave their three little girls when they travelled for their work.

The next years are interesting ones. Mother has written about them in "The Tapestry", "The L'Abri Story" and in detail in two books of letters written to her family and friends covering many years – "With Love From Edith" and "Dear Family". Enough to say that by 1955 the original brief was accomplished, the family was now in a new chapter living in an alpine village. The family had grown. By now there was a fourth child, a son, Frank. They believed that the Lord had led them to this point through circumstances and clear answers to prayer. The mission board wasn't supporting them to stay for a new chapter but they saw "an open door" for ministry to the post-war generation. Was it right to go on there and then?

I remember well the moment both my mother and dad "stepped out in faith." Their life and work had seen them grow deeper themselves, with an agonizing burden for the post-war generation's spiritual need. They had had amazing answers to prayer. With Paul, they believed that "a wide door for effective work

Dear Friends,

In this issue of the International Newsletter we feature a tribute to Edith Schaeffer written by her daughter Susan Schaeffer Macaulay.

We are pleased to bring you this personal portrait of a life given to God and lived in faith. A significant chapter of L'Abri's story has come to a close, but we know it will continue to bear rich fruit for many years and generations to come.

The writings of both Francis and Edith Schaeffer are readily available for purchase online or at Christian bookstores. Recordings of their many lectures, workshops and Bible studies may be listened to at the l'Abri site www.labri-ideas-library.com or purchased at www.soundword.com.

Blessings,
The L'Abri Workers



has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:8). Opportunities and hindrances go hand in hand – that was to be their experience. After having just moved to Huemoz, Easter 1955 they were sure that they were not there by accident. If it was truly the Lord’s place and open door for them, they believed that they should “step out in faith” just as George Muller and Amy Carmichael had done. He would supply and direct the work and the means in this new chapter. It was to be called ‘L’ABRI’, French for ‘The Shelter’.

There was no plan of action, hard as that must be to believe. They prayed. Then Prisca, my sister, brought home a friend from the University of Lausanne for the weekend before we had unpacked our boxes. We lit a wood fire in the tiny iron stove in the hall, cooked a meal somehow, and the first L’Abri meal progressed as so many have done since then (and still do!). Hospitality, a home meal, conversation with it soon turning to some significant area or other. My Dad and all of us conversing...and the conversation beginning to intrigue all of us...progressing to the stunning possibility that just maybe the Bible could be true! or that there might be God...the Creator. Or that human persons cannot be explained mechanistically. I well remember that first lovely young person pushing her chair back in utter surprise and interest...“You don’t mean to say that you believe that the Bible is TRUE? I thought that had gone out in the Middle Ages!” She came back the next weekend with friends; then, more and more friends to our home.

She and others found Life, Light and meaning in the Historical Christ and His work and Word. It was exciting to them – and to us, of course. But as well as giving answers, thinking, enjoying days together right away this new “thing,” this L’Abri, was to be a demonstration that not only was God’s Word reliable in conversation, but one could depend on Him day by day practically. They would do this by not asking for funds, workers or plan a scheme of work themselves. They never ever believed this was the way all Christian work should be done. They felt that for themselves at this time – for this L’Abri – it was God’s leading. We depended on prayer, whether together or individually. There were friends and family living elsewhere committed to share in this “prayer work” with us. We believed that they were sharing in the “fruit”, the life that followed in L’Abri (and continues still now). Mother wrote monthly prayer letters and lists to those faithful co-

workers...“the praying family.” Once, years later, on a platform somewhere, my mother was asked, “Who do you think is the most influential Christian woman today?” She answered, “Whoever she is, nobody knows her. She’ll be a woman whose calling is to be ‘behind the scenes’ praying.”



In other words, Christianity being true, those in personal relationship with the Lord call out to Him in trust. Prayer is not a passive exercise...it is active and makes a historical difference. Although those coming to L’Abri were to live such a variety of types of lives, the fact that they had witnessed answers to prayer while at L’Abri meant that they experienced the reality of God’s work in some small way. Many have been able to take this on into life, and see that God is faithful to them. To us all.

Some have had routines and seemingly “limited lives” that permitted them to be “full-time prayer warriors”. Mother wrote letters to such, and kept in personal touch and friendship right through her last years. It was a community in life and work. She would speak of their reward ahead when our Saviour says, “Well done, though good and faithful servant”. Such lives are possibly the most useful.

It is important to say that my mother, with her beauty, loveliness, gifts, love and seemingly endless energy was not some artificially perfect person like an unreal magazine cover! Both parents had “feet of clay” like we all do. In fact, just as Scripture so carefully tells us, all God’s people have been and are so. All of us would be suspect if we seemed “too good to be true.” I well remember when my father’s cancer was diagnosed. He said to me, “It is a relief. Now ‘I’m one of the gang.’” In other words, this is what happens to us hu-

man beings in the fallen world. Previously, both of them were especially understanding pastorally in relationships and in writing as they were fully aware of their own needs and struggles. Someone close to my mother who worked with her in Rochester, Minnesota after she was widowed in 1984 said, “She is a REAL person.”

In a L’Abri letter my mother wrote June 30, 1993, she says:

“I feel deeply concerned that we continually ask as we pray, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,’ with the reality of honesty to God in this request, and action upon it in the next hour. I also feel very strongly a greater need of intercession for each other within our family circles, and in the wider family of those with whom we work, and those whom the Lord has given us, as special friends or neighbors...in his amazing way of weaving lives together in history. We are having impact on history whether we acknowledge it or not.

When we are confused as to when we are to speak, or when we are to be silent, or where we are to step next, rather than falling into depression and despair, we need to cry out to God, trusting Him to have a solution, asking for and expecting His strength and wisdom to be given. Anything different about this? Hasn’t it all been said a trillion times before? Of course, David prayed and sang with strong tears and earnestness and the Lord not only spoke to Him, but through Him to us. Read Psalm 37 right now.”

L’Abri changed quickly from a few personal guests in the first year to larger numbers drawn to spend time with us. As these two prayed for the shape of the work to be given, they responded to these changes as they occurred. One of the biggest steps was to allow a handful of individuals to spend longer periods of time there to study alongside the comings and goings of the guests. The idea was that for half of the day they would study, and the other half they would join in with the practical work.

For the first time they would pay a basic amount to cover their food. The advantage was to join in the conversations and life. That way, at meals and in evenings, they heard ways of answering all sorts of questions about why and how Christianity could possibly be considered truth? They mixed with a wide variety of people who had all sorts of lives,

beliefs and views. Through the years, my mother and father rejoiced at the growth, and slowly other branches opened up...Holland, then England, later Boston and Rochester, Minn. in the USA. In all of these they'd spend time visiting and speaking. We had annual members' meetings in the branches, too. In the 1960's the first L'Abri conferences were held here in England. Mother (as well as my father, of course) welcomed growth and change. They never saw the way the Lord would lead would reproduce the first tiny L'Abri family pattern. However, the essential was the infrastructure of belief in the truth of God's Word, and its application to all of life. The reality of prayer. And that if L'Abri was to go on, it should be with the unity of the members as they sought God's leading in prayer. Waiting together, as members active in the daily work, and trustees, even if it took time to arrive at an assurance that it was not just our idea, but that given by the Lord at this time. This has continued to be the way L'Abri "works."

This has been my personal experience as I look back to 1955. I was privileged to share in these members' meetings from May 1962 when I became a member (after the three years first as a "L'Abri worker"), to 2001 when ill-health meant that I retired from the work. In fact, Mother was at that time also still active in L'Abri, as a member and trustee. It had been a "long haul" in the same fellowship! She was reluctant to step down, but as she was ageing and her life was changing, I encouraged her to join me. "We'll step down together." It was time to have the trustee's place filled by younger members! But she didn't stop praying, visiting, caring...although she stopped speaking at L'Abri conferences as well.

Mother moved her home from Switzerland to Rochester, Minnesota in my father's last six months so that he'd have a home for whatever time was left battling the final stages of cancer. By this time L'Abri had had a small branch there for several years. It was their "American home town"...the first home they'd had there since 1948!

In fact, in the previous six-and-a-half years since Dad's lymphoma had been diagnosed, they'd been in rented accommodations there during the periods when he'd had chemotherapy. So they'd been involved with the small L'Abri branch and workers and friends there together. They co-ordinated and led

conferences, etc. plus – of course – regular prayer times.

It was a precious time for us as a family. We, their children, would sometimes spend time there with them – usually one at a time. I treasure all the Rochester memories – before and after Dad's death. It felt so right to us to again be in an American house on a sidewalk! Dad and I would walk to "Miracle Mile" for ice creams, we'd have supper together, etc. It was then that my parents decided they'd be buried together there in Rochester.

Mother began life as a single woman again that early morning on May 15th when my father died. She had rich years there in Rochester – continuing writing, travelling, and



speaking. She continued actively in the Rochester L'Abri holding the prayer meetings in her living room, serving teas, and speaking in the conferences. She attended the L'Abri annual members' and trustees' meetings where her contributions were much appreciated. She visited other L'Abri branches too – in Boston, Holland and England.

Had there been more space I would have liked to write more about other sides of who my mother was as a person. A key thing was her wide and deep appreciation of all of life. Her artistic ability gave her much enjoyment of art, beauty and creativity. The book "Hidden Art" (that was the original title) expresses ideas which, as time, energy and resources allowed, she practised in her life. In Rochester she put on small recitals and soirees in her home – a connoisseur of classical music. Early 20th Century jazz would have her dancing. Art and literature fed her too. Woody Allen films would make her laugh. I cannot put her on a page! The summers were spent in Switzerland where she had a little studio

apartment by Lake Geneva where she'd continue writing and relaxing, too. Debby and Udo Middelman included her on their annual summer vacations for many years. When this was no longer feasible, I'd go to the apartment and she and I would have a "vacation by the lake" together.

Christmases at first were with her son, Frank, in Massachusetts – and after 3 years or so, she spent them with our family in Greatham, England. She and my dad had loved "the Pink Room" there in the Manor where the English L'Abri is located, so it was always a "home from home." In the summers, she also had extended visits with us. The crowds of young (and not-so-young) people at L'Abri always appreciated her! She'd give an opening introduction to the Monday morning days of prayer, and join in with all the family and L'Abri life there.

But on February 3, 2000, Mother wrote a "two page letter" from Rochester. I will quote here some of it in her own words. She had arrived at "a next chapter" in her life:

"Here I am in an unusual moment of my life. What is usual? That's a good question. If I go over the past period of time, everything is 'unusual'. For the first time in my life, I spent two months in Cambridge, England at Susan and Ranald's home with an amazing opportunity of going to Ely Cathedral for a fantastic Christmas concert. Listening to that in that great cathedral built 900 years ago and with a precious part of one's family (Susan and Ranald) filled me with exalted, exciting thanksgiving to the Lord which even the driving soaking rain as we came out could not drive away.

Christmas day was spent quietly in Ranald and Susan's living room. It seems impossible that in such a short time (it is now just over two weeks ago that we were in that service) we then had to go in to Stansted Airport by train to change our return tickets to the U.S.A. (Susan and I) for Jan 23. We visited L'Abri at Southborough, MA and had time with Dick and Mardi Keyes and their lovely son Ben along with all the workers at a special dinner for us prepared by Joe and Sue [all still members working at the Southborough L'Abri]. I was able to shake hands with each of the nineteen students and find out a bit about each one.

We flew back to Minnesota to be met by my friends Karen and Bill Carr and their three boys who had kept our heavy luggage when we were in transit from England. Jock and Alison McGregor, the members in Rochester L'Abri, met us. The road from Minneapo-

lis to Rochester takes one through a white fairyland of snow covered trees, rolling hills, and wide pastures. It was good to be back in my own church and to hear a fine sermon by our pastor, Steve Bickley. Susan is here because she will be speaking at the L'Abri conference in Rochester as I will, too. The last count of reservations is over 580. Speakers include, Jerram Barrs, Richard Winter, Dick and Mardi Keyes, John Hodges, Dr. Christopher Hook (Mayo Clinic), Dr. Mike Sugimoto, Dr. Alan Wright (professor of Internal Medicine at Mayo Graduate School) and others on topics related to "Reclaiming a Moral Vision".

God willing, I will be returning to Switzerland after the conference, as Susan will be returning to England; our flights will separate at Amsterdam Airport (Feb. 8th, 2000). I will be having a family dinner for my twenty-six children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

She writes of changes in Switzerland, and then: "I've been changed, too. Yesterday I had an appointment in the eye department at Mayo Clinic, and I am considered legally blind. I have macular degeneration; my central vision is gone. I can see many things, but through a fog whether inside or out. The hardest thing for me is not being able to see faces. The Francis Schaeffer Foundation House in Briarcliffe, N.Y., has been sold for which we thank God. Debby and Udo Middelmann have recently been living in Gryon, Switzerland – the present base for the Foundation work. Across the road from their chalet, 'les Montaux', is a little chalet, 'Mon Abri', built in 1666. 'Mon Abri' means 'My Shelter'. This chalet has five rooms on the first floor which is going to be my apartment. The ceilings are so low that I, in my present height of 5 ft. 1 inch, can touch the ceiling! Udo and Debby have been doing a splendid job of sanding floors and making it into a cozy, pleasant home.

God willing, in the Spring, when this Rochester house sells, I expect to take my living room furniture, books, etc. to my new home. God willing, I will divide my time between my tiny 2 room studio apartment by the lake and Gryon. I expect to carry on the same pattern as last Summer when I visited Prisca and John Sandri each week overnight for one or two days. With my failed eyesight, Prisca reads to me so beautifully – books, letters, articles, etc. We enjoy our meals together, English radio and television, and many visits from Prisca's grandchildren." The move was made as she described and this was the pat-

tern that continued for quite a long time, until the result of the mini-strokes my mother had had in Rochester, plus increasing frailty, meant that she could no longer spend time alone in the apartment by the lake.

However, I was able to visit four times a year for two weeks at a time, so she had continuity, staying in her own place by the lake regularly with me. By this time, Debby had taken on the massive responsibility of organizing care for my mother. She and Udo did a marvellous job finding several American Christian women who'd come for a few months at a time to be "live-in" carers and companions. Thus Mother had warm friendships and had her wish of not being in a nursing home if possible. These were often happy days of being read to out of favorite books, music, talk and laughter. I was able to come to "fill in" with the "vacations" by the lake. And she still had her overnight weekly stays with Prisca and John. Debby had several long patches caring for her between arrangements, meticulous in seeing that the routines and care were constant whoever was caring.

In the last period of time, mother was entirely confined to her own apartment. John visited twice a week, and Lizbee Laughery and Prisca, once a week. Other family came as they were able. And Debby and Udo, over the road, included my mother in Christmas family times as well as frequent trips "down to the valley" for concerts, films, and picnics by the lake as well as doctor and dentist appointments, etc. Udo Middelmann, as a pastor, led Sunday services in the summer months – so, that was her last "church fellowship".

Mother remained alert with her ready smile. She bore with grace, thanks and acceptance the indignities of having total care in the end. I am certain she'd like to express deep thanks for all family and friends in the past – right back to Dot and Harvey Woodson's coming to share in the first days and years of L'Abri – to the ones so kind to her in Gryon. And she definitely would wish all praise to go to God, her much-loved and depended-upon Heavenly Father, his Son, Jesus – and the work of the Holy Spirit.

She would wish all of us, as Donald Drew used to say to "Keep the flag flying" in prayer, trust and obedience.

When words could not come when I telephoned her towards the last years – we'd pray together. That continued! One of her carers has told me that she said, "My 'rememberer' is not what it should be. At night when we pray, please tell me, one at a

time, the names of each member in my family so I can pray for them (her children, their spouses, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren)."

And she could sing. She knew and loved verse after verse of hymns. We'd sing on and on and on. (And when 1930's jazz came on, she'd know words, too – and sing along!)

Right in the last week, she enjoyed readings from her favourite own books, including her own about China and L'Abri. And although she could no longer sing or pray aloud – when I'd pray on the phone – she'd join in with an "mmm". My brother Frank was able to skype her every day that last month when she was awake. He was able to thank her for her prayers. When he asked, "Are you still praying for us?" she nodded.

And over the speaker-phone, I prayed with her, chatted and sang hymns. The last one I sang was one we used to belt out together – "...If you get there before I do, Tell all my friends I'm coming too... I'm a-marching, I'm a-marching, Going to make heaven my home". In her sleep, sometime in the night Easter weekend, she went to that home.

Thanks be to God. May he help us all in his merciful goodness.

In the February 2000 letter ERS ended saying, "Thank you for your prayers through the years, months and weeks. With love in the Lamb who never changes and is able to be everywhere at once – Therefore with you and with me personally, He has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'

Love, Edith Meifuh Mrs FAS" – (and, Noni!)"

Mother, Edith Rachel Merritt Seville Schaeffer, was buried next to her husband, Francis, in Rochester, Minn. as they requested.



Susan Schaeffer Macaulay
Cambridge, England
May, 2013

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