

# Memories Of Christmas Past

**GAY BROWNLEE**  
*Virginia Correspondent*

**HARRISONBURG, Va.**

One of the most inspiring and significant Christmas events for Julia Kauffman and her husband, Tom, occurred late in the 1950s when they were engaged in missionary work amid Kentucky's delightful and rugged mountains.

It was a performance of 'Messiah' composed by George Frederick Handel and rendered for the public by a group from the Cumberland College.

Then Julia was a young mother. She had never seen the oratorio done, although once in Canada her husband did, so they awaited the day with eager anticipation.

The couple loved good music. It was in their hearts and souls. To be granted the glorious opportunity of witnessing a live performance was considered a gift from God.

"Anytime there was good music around we took advantage of it," the couple said.

Off the family went, in the

rusty Plymouth that had seen better days and that bounced them, merrily, over an obstacle course of gravel roads and potholes. Eventually, they had covered the 11-12 miles to reach the Oneida Baptist Church, which was hosting the performance.

"The thing we went for," Julia said, "was to hear the music and the singers. That's what really thrilled us."

"There was a lot of action. A lot of response from the audience," her husband said. "We felt like we were in heaven."

They were accustomed to the a cappella style of singing that stemmed from having Mennonite roots and growing up in separate communities of Mifflin County, Pennsylvania.

At home, however, the advent of Christmas always generated excitement for the young couple. The four-room houses they lived in while in Kentucky seldom had enough space in those years for the addition of a Christmas tree, nevertheless there were gifts to unwrap.

dren. She not only did household chores to assist the mother, Esther Good, but Julia also accompanied her to the local public schools where the students received instruction from The Christian Education Plan For the Public Schools.

The hour-long lesson included a Bible story with flannelgraph illustrations and scripture verses. Recitation of these was important and the children could merit awards if they memorized verses.

"We visited by jeep the country schools," Julia said. "Sometimes we had to ford the streams in the jeep."

The rotation of their weekly visits was five schools one week and five the next week.

Meanwhile, subsequent to Julia's and Tom's introduction at a Bible School each had attended in Mifflin County before she left, a full-fledged romance had developed for which marriage was the only acceptable antidote.

Julia neither recalls the rosy blush in her cheeks that her sweetheart does when their eyes first met, nor the smile that passed between them, that still exists in his mind's eye with romantic clarity.

Tom had also moved to the Bluegrass State and was living with another family until their 1955 wedding in the Mattawana (Pa.) Mennonite Church.

The newlyweds settled into a house by the Bullskin Creek in Brutus, Ky. They were considered fully supported missionaries who received a stipend of \$150 a month from the church body that was behind the work.

Prior to the birth of Judy, their eldest child, Julia received maternity care from the Frontier Nursing Service which was chartered in 1925. She expected to deliver her baby at home like other women in the hills did.

According to a bulletin from its 30th anniversary in 1955, the FNS by then was using a jeep, but nurses and nurse-midwives often had ridden into the mountains on horseback, the medical supplies stowed in saddlebags and fording rivers and creeks as necessary.

The FNS was committed to reach rural families with health care, inoculate the children against diseases, and teach information about keeping sewage away from the source of the family's water.

One nurse recalled in the same issue of the bulletin having spent a "summer in the saddle..."

Reportedly, the FNS was the first organization in America to use nurses qualified as midwives.

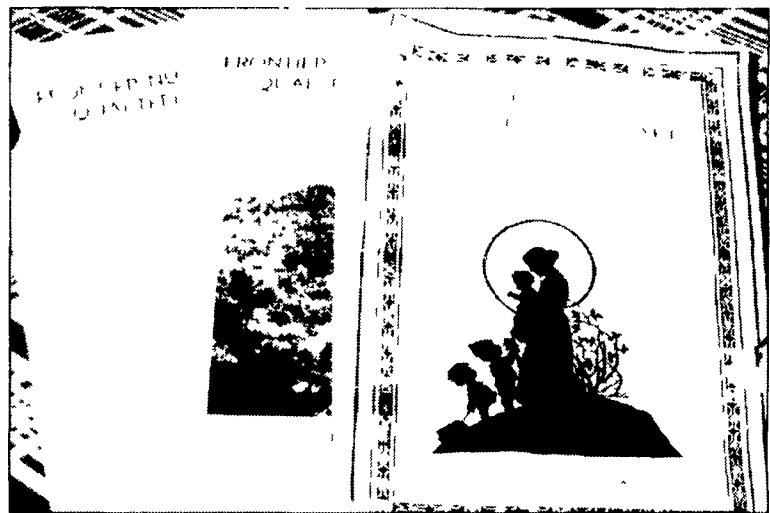
According to Julia, who praised the Service for its efficient, caring medical staff, families depended on and enjoyed the company of nurses, nurse-midwives and doctors who traveled up and down the remote area and on waterways to administer medical care.

"When the patient would go into labor," said Julia, "the husband would go looking for the nurse."

"The nurses were very skilled and efficient," said Julia. "We didn't even think of having health insurance," she said, add-



**A Christmas wreath that got a new bow for the yuletide season gets a final inspection from Julia Kauffman before she hangs it on the door of her home.**



**The Frontier Nursing Service started in 1925, published quarterly bulletins that were widely read. The bulletins were a valuable connection to families in the mountains of Kentucky. The nurse-midwives of the Frontier Nursing Service were a blessing to missionary Julia Kauffman, when four of her five children were delivered at home.**



**Pictured at her sewing machine Julia Kauffman is constructing a Christmas gift that is bound to provide snugly warmth for the recipient. She also sews professionally for a local bridal shop when gowns and dresses need to be altered for clients.**

Best of all the Yoder and Kauffman relatives sent surprise packages from Pennsylvania and the children discovered new clothes for their doll babies, yummy homemade edibles and candy, under the wrapping paper.

"My oldest sister, Kathryn (Yoder), was very important to our children," Julia said, adding that their aunt knitted sweaters and other warm garments for them.

Julia says they lived a lifestyle in keeping with that of the local people. The dwellings had electricity in them but telephones came later. Instead of indoor plumbing, more often than not, folks just used outhouses.

"We lived as simple as the local people did. We had a refrigerator and deep freezer, and planted a big garden," said Julia.

Thus the homemaker used canning and freezing to preserve food and sewed clothes for the family. Her cozy home was comprised of the kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms.

Julia was unmarried when she first went to Kentucky, the employee of a family with five chil-

ing that the total charge for prenatal and post-natal care was \$25 until the fee was increased to \$35.

In Oct. 1957, Sherrill, the Kauffmans' second baby arrived during the Asian Flu epidemic. The nurse they were expecting to attend the delivery had herself contracted the disease and thus, a substitute came to daily bathe and care for the infant.

"The nurses weren't available when I went into labor with Joel," Julia recalled of her third home birth. "Tom was running all up and down the creek looking for a nurse-midwife."

Finally, at the FNS headquarters a note on the door provided a telephone number for him to call. At the time a female doctor visiting from Boston was a guest of the FNS and because the FNS was having great success in its work, she was eager to observe one of its newborn deliveries performed in the relative isolation of the mountains.

At long last, when she and the others finally arrived, newborn Joel was already an hour old and a neighboring lay person was caring for mother and child.

The little fellow had surpassed his due date by 23 days. Thus his parents were anxious for any catalyst that might initiate labor pains. They admitted to taking a rough jaunt in the jeep over unpaved roads with potholes in them. Julia scrubbed the kitchen floor to an inch of its life and on the notable March morning when Joel finally made his move, she had successfully planted the spring garden, as well.

Their house was on the "wrong" side of the creek when Christmas baby, Regina, arrived on Dec. 19. To wit, their drinking water had to be boiled and the creek had to be forded before they could go anywhere. Then her father-in-law helped Tom install a rock base in the water that was strong enough to accommodate crossing over in the jeep.

In Feb. 1965 they were domiciled again in Pennsylvania and for the fifth child's birth it was a novel experience for Julia to deliver Ruby in a hospital. It all seemed so different and disconnected from what she knew, and indeed, far more expensive.

Julia says she wouldn't trade the home delivery experiences for anything. They were blessed occasions that knit the family close as well as the community.

But Ruby was a born vocalist and lover of music who, according to the parents, would listen to Handel's "Messiah" for hours on end as a teenager.

Their children later expressed a desire to attend the Eastern Mennonite High School in Harrisonburg. The parents agreed and relocated the family Virginia, where, for the first time in her marriage, Julia took employment outside the home cooking for a nursing home until her feet signaled she should opt for something else. That's when she turned to professional sewing.

Seven of their grandchildren live in Virginia, two in California and two in Kansas.



**Ever since her teen days in Mifflin County, Julia Kauffman has enjoyed sewing, but she shows an item here that she neither started, nor ever got around to completing. It is a postage stamp, baby quilt top composed of wee squares cut from material scraps. In Kentucky, 50 years ago someone gave it as a gift.**

