

Shoes For The Soul

By Deb Phillippy

I was not planning to attend the women's retreat at the Lantern Lodge in Myerstown. I had other commitments for that weekend but when those plans did not materialize, and after several back and forth episodes with Cindy Smith of "yes I can go" then "no I cannot," I finally committed to "yes I can go."

I travel occasionally for my job and I usually dread the day of departure. I wish I did not have to go and I secretly hope the trip would be cancelled. This time was no different. It was Friday night and I had a lot to do. I wondered what Cindy would say if I cancelled (again) and I wondered what my roommate Kathy Tingstrom would say. Rather than find out, I decided to go; it was a decision I would not regret.

The theme for the weekend was "High Heels in High Places." Friday night Stacy Shrefler opened with a story about how her brand new red Mary Jane's got scuffed and how she had to throw them away after wearing them only one time. She reminded us that God does not throw us away when we are scuffed. He picks us up, cleans us off, and makes us new again. We heard testimonies from Faithe Wagner and Kathy Tingstrom. Faithe shared how God protected her when she travelled across Africa as a young woman. She reminded us that God protects us when we place our faith in him, just as he protected her when she trusted a complete stranger to help her find her way. God also cares about the little things that we care about, like a guitar. Faithe used her guitar to minister in song to others, and when a robber attempted to steal it one night, God equipped her with the boldness to go after it. She ended up being locked in the bathroom with her guitar, but at least it was not stolen!

Kathy shared with us how she came to Christ. Even though she is the only survivor in her extended family, she has numerous brothers and sisters in Christ. Her church family is what is important to her and God continually uses her in their lives and in the lives of others. She has been such a blessing to me.

We ended the evening early enough to enjoy fellowship with one another. Some were entertained as they watched a DVD of Anita Renfro, a comedian from Women of Faith. Some women played table games and others just talked with one another, simply enjoying the much-needed camaraderie of other females. As I heard bits and pieces of conversations, I realized what a treat it was for some of the young mothers to have this opportunity to get away from their responsibilities for just a few hours. Some went to great lengths to prepare for this less than 24-hour treat. I felt bad thinking how I thought I had "so much to do" when all I really had to do was pack a bag and write a to-do list for my husband Dave.

Kathy and I enjoyed chatting until after midnight, as many others did also. We were like young girls at a slumber party and I enjoyed this time with my sister!

The next morning we had a wonderful breakfast in the elegant dining room. We sat at two long tables and enjoyed this rare time of leisure. No spilled milk, no meat to cut, no coaxing to clean plates, and best of all, no dishes to wash!

We opened the morning session with a few praise and worship songs and heard another shoe story about Stacy's steel tipped boots. It was touching to hear how a pair of boots that were likely to never be worn again was given to a man who probably felt like he just discovered gold. One man's trash was truly another man's treasure. Stacy shared another story of how her friend abused her feet, and in essence, her whole body by wearing shoes two sizes too small, just because they looked great with her outfit. It reminded us of all the times we try to fit into something or somewhere where we do not belong. When we try to pretend we are something we are not, God has a way of revealing the truth to us. Stacy has a real knack for finding spiritual lessons in everyday life experiences, and relaying it to others with humor. I have a feeling Stacy could have entertained us all day with stories about shoes!

We heard the testimonies of Evie Hoover and Cindy Smith. Evie, who we all agreed would be nominated for sainthood if the BIC church ever had such an election, shared how God provided for her and her husband in times when the situation seemed impossible. She was reminded how God protects us through the storms in our lives. Cindy's story taught us how God protected her throughout her childhood and into her young adult years. She shared how a little boy (her little boy) by holding a cactus in the palm of his hand brought her back to Jesus. Next, we heard from Dawn Gearhart who took us for a walk in her shoes for several decades. Each style of shoe brought with it the phases of her life and the trials and joys she experienced. God placed people in her life when she needed them the most, and it was touching how she gave tribute to her godly mother.

I shared my testimony last. Although I could have talked for hours on how God has worked and is working in my life, I only had 30 minutes to share how God turned my mistakes into blessings. At a young age, I learned the effects of disobedience but I also learned how God puts us back on track when we take detours.

It does not matter if you were born into a Christian home or born into a non-believing dysfunctional family. We all have one thing in common – at some point, we had to make a decision to accept Jesus and put our trust in him. I was amazed to hear the different testimonies of these women and how God worked in each of their lives. Each of our stories are unique, but the same theme rings true in all of them. God desires our fellowship, obedience, and communion. He paves the way for us and constantly calls us to repentance. He may tug gently at our heartstrings or may use a Mack truck to stop us on the road of destruction. When we accept Jesus and repent, he says I will remember your sins no more. "...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12

I was glad I did not back out at the last minute. Some women thanked me for sharing my testimony, but truly, I was the one who was blessed.