

## The Teacher Who Paused

by Cammie Corlas Quinn

My favorite English teacher taught me much more than grammar and composition. As the editor of Lincoln Land Community College's annual periodical, *The Harvester*, Mrs. Sollenberger orchestrated my first publication—a descriptive account of the blustery Illinois winter of 1977. In the hallways, she paused to converse with me about our shared love for writing, as if we were colleagues. When a writing job opened at the college, she called my home and offered to send a letter of recommendation. To a 20-year-old aspiring writer, this meant the world.

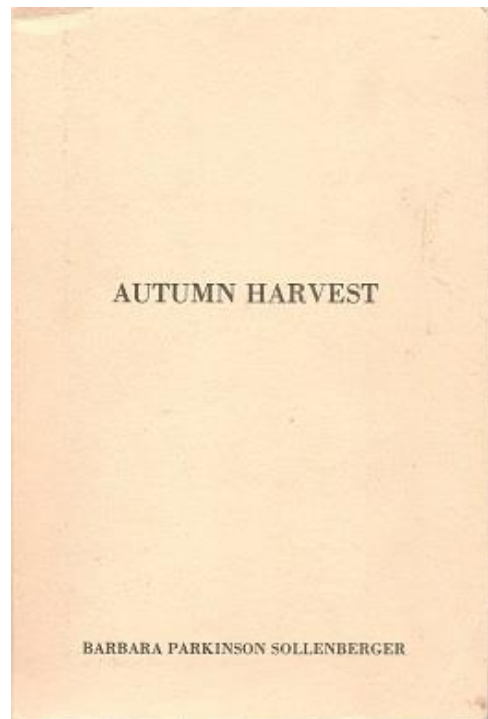
Mrs. Sollenberger never became a famous author as I planned to become one day, but she self-published two books of poetry and stories about growing up on a farm in Central Illinois. My favorite, *Autumn Harvest*, is a modest book with a plain cover and several black-and-white photos of her home and family. The stories brim with detailed accounts of hulling walnuts, fishing, canning strawberries, and attending 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnics—things that don't seem to matter on the surface, but when taken altogether, demonstrate tremendous gratitude for the people she loved and for the life she'd been given. It made its debut in the college bookstore during the final year she taught me. Today, it is one of my greatest treasures.

During the two years Mrs. Sollenberger taught me, she missed an unusual number of classes due to illness. She never explained the nature of her illness. Every time she returned, she was as encouraging and enthusiastic as ever.

Not until I graduated and someone mailed me a newspaper clipping did I understand the selflessness of her service. Mrs. Sollenberger had been battling cancer. She died at age 56. Just when I should have been encouraging her, she was encouraging me.

More than thirty-five years have passed since I saw my teacher, but her example of selfless giving is still pulsing in my life. Though we were not peers, nevertheless there was a subtle, profound connection between us. We shared the same admiration for the soil, for its overseers, and for the Creator. Today, I, too, am writing stories about growing up in Central Illinois. I, too, have battled cancer. My teacher set a benchmark for me before I ever knew what I would face.

Mrs. Sollenberger taught me that it is not commercial notoriety that matters most. Rather, it is the passion behind the task that makes the enduring difference. It is the quality—not the glitter—that matters. Unlike those who are driven to “climb the ladder,” she had learned to pause



from ambition long enough to genuflect at what she'd already been given. This understanding freed her to write tributes to her family, encourage a young writer, and pause for the common man even when the grand issues of life and death loomed on her doorstep.

In recent years, I have laid down my ambition and rekindled a devotion to the things I sensed back then—but did not think were enough—until now. The stage is my back yard—not Hollywood. The characters are in my hometown. The epitome of life is roundabout me, deeply embedded in the simple gifts of God and His creation.

*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Cor. 13:2 ESV)*