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Introduction

I don't pretend to be an expert on the Amish. I especially don't pretend to know all the facts or their history. When my husband Clay and I moved to Amish Country from Texas in 2000, we did not know we would be opening a Bed & Breakfast in Sugarcreek. We also did not know how close to the Amish we would become. We did know that we were endeavoring to follow what we believed was a leading from God. I now know that by becoming closely acquainted with an Amish family they have changed my life forever, simply by being Amish.

If someone asked me to describe Amish people I would say: They are honest, hardworking, thrifty, friendly, God-fearing people who are quick to laugh and just as quick to forgive. They are equally as slow to gossip about, slander, or judge others, whether the others are Amish or *English*. At least that is true of the Amish I have been blessed to know.

Amish love God, life, children, hard work, ice cream, going barefoot, noodles, cleanliness, pretzels, horses, applesauce, laughing, cinnamon rolls, and gardening. Not necessarily in that order.

I admire their dedication to God. I do not believe that they have all the answers, but their methods certainly rate our attention and possibly imitating. To dedicate their whole lifestyle to God seems so unique, yet isn't that what any Christian is supposed to do?

I love being around them. Watching how they treat each other. Watching how they play with their children, touching and teaching, showing and sharing, making every child know he is loved and important. Watching how the women respect their husbands. Watching the reverence shown to the elderly. Watching the sibling love instead of sibling rivalry. Watching the young people planning a life together with divorce not being an option.

They have taught me how to be more patient with others, how to get up and get going when the job needs doing, how to give and receive help, and best of all, how to laugh at myself and allow others to laugh at me. Like their children, through their total acceptance of me, I am beginning to feel loved and worthy.

This book is my tribute to the love and acceptance I have been given. In it I hope to show you my *Amish Reflections*; my thoughts, my laughter, my awe at their everyday way of life.

Things that make me smile

Waiting in the van as mothers strap their infants into car seats, movement in my side view mirror catches my attention. Like a small television screen, a whole landscape, painted in vibrant autumn colors, is perfectly framed for my enjoyment. The movement that caught my attention, a horse and buggy, trots elegantly from one side of the mirror to the other. When it's over, I want to push rewind.





Most of the shops and restaurants were closed, but the post office and the banks were open. All of the small country schools were closed, but the bigger schools in the towns and villages were holding classes as usual. There seemed to be extra buggies and extra 15-passenger vans on the roads, but not any extra regular traffic.

Was it a holiday? Only to the Amish. It was Old Christmas. On the 6th of January, the Amish celebrate another Christmas, which they call Old Christmas.

To me it seemed like just another opportunity for Amish families to gather together, visit, and eat, which they love to do anyway. As I drove them on that frosty morning, I began asking questions so that I might learn if there wasn't something else to this tradition of Old Christmas.

"It is a day to keep holy," my passenger answered me. "A day to consider the true meaning of Christmas. A day spent differently than the other Christmas. There are no gifts. We only do necessary chores and we fast until the noon meal is prepared."

No gifts? Fasting? A Christmas of giving and no receiving? What an interesting concept.

The grass sticks through the snow. There has been very little snow so far this year, yet nearly every Amish child I see walking to school this morning pulls a sled behind him. Lunch pails and whatever else they might need for that day are piled on the sled. There is fun ahead, come recess.

No school bus for these Amish children. Mom will not drive them in a heated car. They will walk to the local, one-room schoolhouse, the way children have walked to school for hundreds of years.

One group of children is different. Every child is dressed in the traditional dark clothes, including black bonnets for girls and black hats for boys, but unexpectedly, in this one group I see an array of colors. Scarves of purple, pink, baby blue, white, mint green, and rose are carefully wrapped around each child's neck. Were they Christmas gifts, lovingly made by Mom? In the middle of what is often a dull world, these beautiful, bold colors of children's scarves against their dark and black clothing are making an Amish quilt.

I crest the next hill on my way to pick up Rachel, and the slumber of winter lies before me. In every direction I look, the fields, the trees, the barns and houses, and even the fences seem to be asleep. How do I know? Every fence post is wearing a nightcap of white. Peace stretches before me; mile upon mile of white, quiet, undisturbed, still peace.

I feel sorry for the tourists who come during the rush and bustle of summer and autumn and miss this tranquility. Pulling off to the side of the road, I sit for a moment or two and just relax and enjoy. It was very early in my Amish Hauling career that I learned that no amount of money could buy these moments. When everything in my world is moving too quickly, when problems seem overwhelming, I can simply pull over, sit, breathe, look, enjoy, and whisper, "Thank You,

Father.” You have to whisper. You don’t want to wake up the fence posts.

Later that evening, when I am bringing the ladies home, we notice one lone boy making his way home. His face is rosy with the cold, but he wears a smile. The ladies listen while I tell them how the boy reminds me of coming home as a child, and opening the door to warmth and good cooking smells and safety and love. Is there any feeling better than that, when you are a child? How I envied that boy, for now as the wife and mother I am the one who makes it warm and good smelling.

From the back of the van, Rachel’s great-aunt says, “I remember us kids, walking home from school. When we rounded that last curve in the road, we could smell it. I can still smell it. Mom would be singing. Mom was always singing and cooking. She would take sweet potatoes, ‘slice them thick,’ and fry them in butter. Then she would put them in a roasting pan, sprinkle them with a little brown sugar, and put them in the oven. That was what we smelled as we came around the curve; sweet potatoes baking in her old wood-burning cookstove. The sweet potatoes would bake in the oven until we got the milking done. Then we could eat them. Oh, they were so good.”



What do Amish ladies do in the winter, when you have no garden to tend, no fruit or vegetables to put up, and no lawns and flower beds to take care of?" I asked the Amish lady I was driving.

After a moment's thought, she answered, "We do a lot of sewing. It's also a good time for quilting. Some might want to do some cleaning that there just isn't time for at other times of the year."

Quilting, special cleaning, and even sewing are an opportunity for a get-together. An Amish barn raising is not the only time Amish get together to work and help each other and just have fun. The Amish family I know will use any excuse to gather together, eat, visit, and do whatever work needs doing. They call it a *frolic*.

When women get together for a quilting, sewing, or cleaning, they will start early in the morning. They want to finish in time to be home for older children returning from school, and in time to prepare dinner for their husbands. Many times they will get up early enough to do laundry and bake something to take with them, for before the work begins, they will have a "Morning Coffee."

My first pickup is Rachel. Rachel is small, with dark hair and glasses, but those glasses can't hide the eagerness and excitement, with just a touch of mischief that seems to always shine from her eyes. Rachel has a "Peter Pan" aura. She is light and sprightly, with a "never-grow-up" attitude. Being in her presence is nearly always fun. Yet when I grieved the loss of my Dad, her presence and her mint tea helped heal my heart. She is carrying a bowl I recognize from other Morning Coffees. It will be full of fresh fruit: grapes, bananas, pineapple, and whatever else is available this time of year. Very little, if any dressing, is used, just healthy, delicious fruit.

We drive through Farmerstown to pick up our next passenger. Because it is Tuesday, and Farmerstown is hosting its weekly "Trade Days," we must wait behind a line of buggies which are turning into the auction. The back of the buggy just ahead of us is piled high with cages. Each cage contains a rabbit. To our left are two boys in a small open buggy. They seem hardly older than ten or eleven. There are two pet carriers stacked between them and a third carrier rests on one boy's lap. The carriers contain puppies, to be auctioned off. The boys seem too young to already be entrepreneurs, but Amish children, though sheltered in some ways, are taught responsibility at a young age. Raising rabbits, puppies, chickens, or even goats is a good way for a young Amish boy to make some extra money. How I would like to see how much they get for their puppies, but once the traffic clears, we must continue on.

Deborah gets on next. Deborah is one of Rachel's older sisters. She has lighter colored hair that, much to her dismay, tries to frizz when the weather is *dreab*. (*Dreab* is an "Amish" word that Deborah has tried, in vain, to define for me, many times. She says it is not cloudy, or dreary, or misty, but *dreab*. As when it is just about to rain. Instead of saying four words, you can say *dreab*. But she claims that still does not quite describe *dreab*. Maybe you had to grow up Amish to understand all that.) Deborah loves life as much as Rachel but has

a more serious, questioning attitude about her. She is inquisitive, always ready to ask and go and do. Her love of family is as strong as her love of life, and though she is always ready to go, she is often the first one to suggest we start home. Her suggestion is always met with much teasing and name-calling. She is carrying something that starts my stomach rumbling—her sausage gravy.

At Deborah's stop, we also pick up *Mommie* (the "Amish" word for grandmother), as *Mommie* lives in Deborah's *Daudi house*. (*Daudi* is the "Amish" word for grandfather. A *Daudi house* is a smaller house, usually next to the main house, where grandparents live after all of their children are grown.) How does one describe *Mommie*? She is little, without an ounce of spare flesh, nimble, and active, always doing something, especially for someone else, and always has a sweet word for me. Do I smell banana bread? Nearly everything *Mommie* bakes has bananas in it.

Ruth is picked up after that. Ruth is the oldest of the sisters. She never bosses us, as most older sisters would. We think of her as the quiet, peaceful, patient sister. We also think this group needs a quiet, peaceful, patient sister. After my Dad passed away, it was also beside Ruth, on her porch, that I sat for tranquil spells, drawing from her peaceful nature. Ruth brings with her the unmistakable scent of her cinnamon rolls. Boy, am I glad I am always asked if I want to join their "Coffee."

As each sister is picked up, the chatter grows louder, the laughter is more frequent, and the aroma of fresh-baked goods is almost more than this driver can endure. They talk among themselves, sometimes in English and sometimes in their mother tongue. Most call it Dutch. It is not Dutch; it is a form of German (*Deutsch*). I call it "Amish."

Americanized over hundreds of years, many American words are used such as "Bacon Cheeseburger" and many German words that are pronounced differently than they would be in Germany.

These ladies want to be polite and include me in the conversation by speaking English, but get excited, or need to think about something, or just forget and slip back to their own language. Each time they realize they are excluding me from the conversation, they apologize and return to English for a while. I tell them each time that it does not bother me; I understand it is hard for them to talk English all the time, and not all the people I drive are as considerate as these ladies.

One time, while not in the van, I was sitting behind Deborah, so she didn't realize I was there. In "Amish" she said, "We don't have to talk English. There is no one *Englich* here."

The others pointed to me, for her to see, and told me what she had said. They speak English so well that it always surprises me that it is difficult for them.

They talk about the things women have talked about for hundreds of years: children, family, household chores, gardens, canning, and laundry.

"Look, Abby has her laundry out!"

"I got mine out!"

"Oh, I didn't have time! Mine will have to wait until tomorrow."

I'm sitting there quietly thanking God for my automatic washer and dryer, especially the dryer on a cold day like this. I can't imagine hanging out clothes in the snow!

No "liberated" woman has convinced these ladies that they are not fulfilled in their simple lives. To me they seem far more contented than the *Englich* women I know. (To the Amish, anyone who is not Amish is *Englich*.) The simplest things please and excite them. The hardest work doesn't seem to bother them. But then, any time there is a big job to do, sisters, cousins, aunts, or neighbors will work with them until the job is done, knowing when they need help, these same people will be there for them. To the Amish, family and community are extremely important.

Just down the road, and over the next hill, we come to a quick stop. The road is full of cows. A farmer and his daughter are moving their cows from one field to another. I turn off the van engine. We are going to be here a while. The lead cow takes one look at this big white van in the road, moves to her right, and keeps going, seemingly undisturbed. Other cows don't handle it quite so well. They look worried and try to turn around to avoid this big white object, which was not there only a minute ago. With some persuasion from the farmer and his daughter, the cows are made to continue in the proper direction. We wave to the farmer and his daughter as they and the last cow pass by and we are on our way again.

A little farther down the road our obstacles are human. Buggies are parked all along the side of the road. Amish in Sunday clothes of black and white, carrying "potluck" dishes, walk along the road.

"Church on Tuesday?" I ask.

"They are ordaining a new minister. It will be an all-day service."

Why will it be an all-day service? As well as ordaining a new minister, they will have communion.

Prior to this day of communion, they will have a preparatory church service known as council meeting, in accordance with their interpretation of I Corinthians 11:26-34. Each individual must confess to being in agreement with the standards of the church and profess a desire to partake of communion. This is usually done on a one-on-one basis with one of the ministers.

If someone is guilty of a serious sin of offense, the person must ask forgiveness of the church as a whole. When forgiveness is asked, it is almost always given. "Then he shall be forgiven and it shall be talked about no more."

The Amish lady who was explaining the above quotation to me said it in a singsong fashion, indicating how many times she had heard it. To me its beauty was unforgettable, and I thought worthy

of more awe than her tone denoted. What a truly beautiful attitude to have. “*Then he shall be forgiven and it shall be talked about no more.*”

If a member has a grievance with his neighbor—say his neighbor’s cow keeps getting out and trampling his garden—then this grievance must be resolved. Some grievances might take some discussion or suggestions before a solution can be reached. If everyone is not in agreement, this could take a while. Communion will not be taken until all grievances are settled, and everyone is considered “worthy” to partake of the communion according to the Scriptures listed previously.

Finally we reach our destination, Katie’s house, and all pile out of the van. If you looked up “laughter” in the dictionary, you would see a picture of Katie. Katie laughs almost continuously, and at almost anything. Her face glows with her contentment. How could anyone be unhappy around her?

The last two sisters are already there. Lydia has come by buggy, as she lives only a short distance from Katie. Anna has hired another driver.

Lydia is the third sister, small in stature, like *Mommie*, but taller than Rachel. She always makes a point to greet me, was the first sister to ever hug me (an outward display of affection not often seen among Amish), and was the sister who taught me that it was safe to laugh at myself and be laughed at by those who truly love you. Lydia is the mother of Jordan, whose story you will read later on in this book. I believe it describes the heart of Lydia better than I can do here in a few words.

The baby sister, Anna, works hard to not be thought of as the baby. Though I’ve never heard her use the word *dreab*, she has hair like Deborah’s, and I’ve heard stories of how angry it made her as a child. She seems to have outgrown her anger, or perhaps she has replaced it with fierce determination. Does that come from survival, being the youngest of 12 children? Her determination is positive,

however—always channeled toward making something better. Anna is aggressive, starts something, and often gets the others to follow her lead. A fanatic about healthy food, she is the gardener in our group and would rather be outside digging in the dirt than anyplace else. Fortunately we often benefit from her gardening endeavors, whenever something produces in great abundance.

The house is warm and inviting, and smells of yet more great dishes which Katie, Lydia and Anna have prepared. There is talk of cleaning, for after we have Coffee we are going to clean. Looking around the house, I try to see what we will clean. It all looks clean. Before the day is over I will learn that there are things and places to clean that I didn't even know could or should be cleaned. But first we will have Coffee.

Now, "Coffee" is not just something to drink. This Coffee will be all the enticing foods I have been smelling for about an hour—fruit, juice, coffee, and about two hours of talk. Yes, we will work, and we will eat, and eat, and eat some more, but the best part of a Coffee or a *Frolic* is the opportunity to visit. Without phones or cars, these occasions are fun fellowship times. They never seem to tire of each other's company. The love, though very rarely spoken of, is tremendously obvious in their actions.

While the children run and play, and have to be convinced to stop playing long enough to eat, the women just enjoy, or is that love, each other. I, the only *English* person in the group, am truly blessed to be included.

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that
men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*

Matthew 7:12

Ruth's Easy Cinnamon Rolls

2 cups very warm water
2/3 cup vegetable oil
1/2 tsp. salt
5 Tbsp. instant potato flakes
6-7 cups bread flour
2 Tbsp. yeast
2/3 cup sugar
2 eggs (beaten)
1 Tbsp. vanilla
1 Tbsp. cinnamon
3/4 cup brown sugar
butter
icing (to taste)

Mix all together, except cinnamon, brown sugar, butter, and icing. Let it rise until double. Mix together cinnamon and brown sugar. Roll dough out and spread with melted butter and cinnamon-brown sugar mixture. Roll up. Cut 1/2" thick. Bake at 350° until lightly brown. May be iced when they have cooled.

