

*Be as One,  
One, One*

*Memories of Growing Up  
in the Swiss Settlement  
at Gruetli-Laager, Tennessee*



*Clara Stampfli Brock Suter*



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*Introduction*

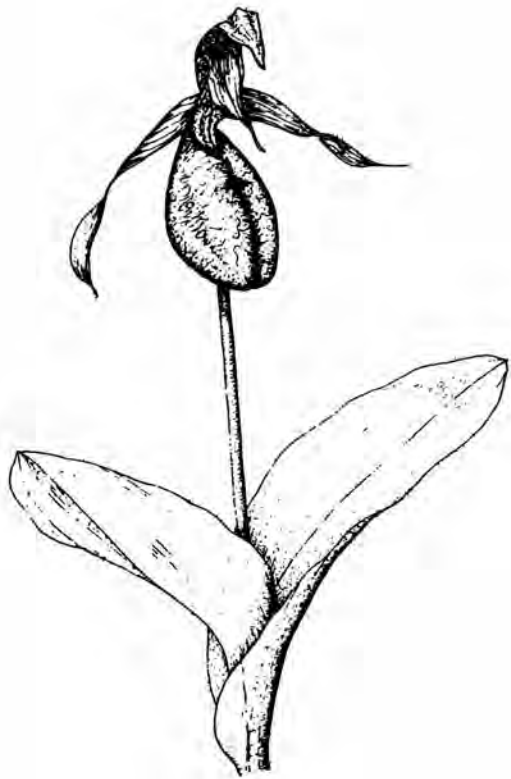
The title of this memoir, *Be as One, One, One*, is a Swiss motto. It comes from the legend of William Tell, a hero who was forced to shoot an arrow through an apple placed on his son's head. For Swiss people he symbolizes the struggle for freedom.

I am pleased to be able to set down for my dear children — Judy, Irvin, Kay, and Susan — these stories of their heritage, which they will come back to someday in their hearts. I appreciate Mary Priestley's help in compiling the tales. There are many more where these came from, and I hope to get them written down in the near future.

I have been blessed beyond words to have grown up in the Swiss colony at Gruetli-Laager, Tennessee. I was lucky growing up to love God and nature.

—CSBS  
2004

*9 Care  
Care Stampfli*



All my life, this poem has been special to me. We had to learn it in school:

*About Ben Adhem*

By James Leigh Hunt

About Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw — within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom —  
An angel, writing in a book of gold.  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the presence in the room he said,  
'What writest thou?' — The vision raised its head,  
And, with a look made of all sweet accord,  
Answered, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'  
'And is mine one?' said Abou. 'Nay, not so,'  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerly still, and said, 'I pray thee, then,  
'Write me as one that loves his fellow men.' —  
The angel wrote, and vanish'd. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And show'd the names whom love of God had blessed,  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest. —

Cover photo — The Stampfli family, around 1925. Left to right: parents Elise and Ernst, with children Jacob, Clara, Fritz, Ernest, and Minnie

Line drawings are by Mary Priestley.

In the spring of 1913 my father Ernst Stampfli and his brother Christian came to America, to Gruetli, Tennessee. He bought three hundred acres (200 initially and, later, 100 more) through a land deal in Switzerland. About three months later my mother Elise Stebler Stampfli and my brother Ernest, a year old, and sister-in-law Rosa came. I've been to visit in Switzerland and saw where my mother and father lived and can't imagine the strength it would take to venture to another country without seeing it, not knowing the language or anything. In the 300 acres of remote woodland were about 15 acres of cleared land and a two-story house, 30 years old, with some windows broken out and much work to be done. The last owner was Anton Stoker. In this house were several Swiss history pictures that were shipped from Switzerland when the colony was first formed in 1869. Also the ledgers with the minutes of the meetings of the Swiss Society. My father and uncle were members.

As far as I know, a young pastor was the last to live in the house before my family. He was shot through the window and killed, while he was working on a sermon. I've been told a jealous person was thought to be the guilty one.

As the years went by, there were many hardships and many pleasures. In 1916 Jacob was born; Fritz in 1918; Clara in 1920; and Minnie in 1922, all at home.



Ernest, Elise (expecting Fritz), and Jacob

The boys had exercise bars, and we all did all types of work. My father built a barn out of logs. Cut them with a crosscut saw, and put them on a stone foundation. He built half of the barn first, and in later years built the other half. All this was brought in with a team of mules. He split shingles for the roof; also for the house and corncrib and other out houses. He made a baby cart, bed, and chest. Farmed in every way possible — cattle, pigs, garden — even grew hops to make the yeast so our mother made bread often, even for neighbors.

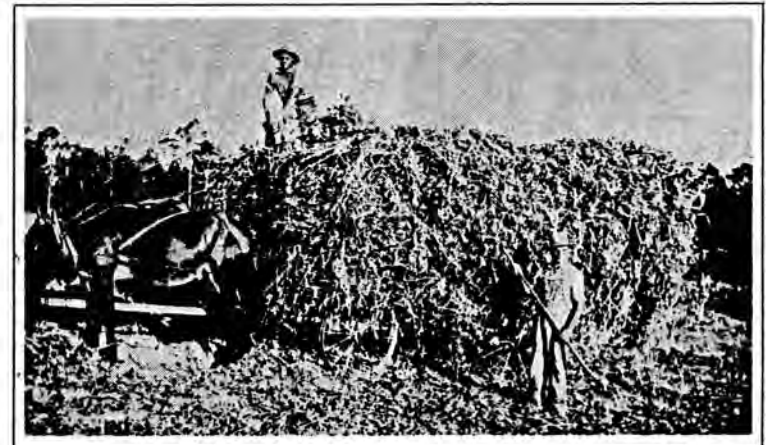
Our mother made cheese all her life. She loved to sing and wanted all of us to do so. My father brought an accordion from Switzerland and bought one here and played it often. In the afternoons, when I got off the schoolbus two miles from home, I could hear him playing it on the front porch. The wind would just carry the sound.

It took years before my mother and father tried to get their naturalization papers. They couldn't read well enough to be able to answer all the questions to pass, so they failed the test.

Then Judge Gore, a relative of Al Gore, came to Winchester for court. He helped them get their papers. Judge Gore was a friend of E. C. Norvell and they came to our house to get cheese and wine, which my mother and father made.

My mother and father got their naturalization papers in Nashville in 1931. There Dad bought a piano for my sister and me and shipped it by train. They spoke broken English, and I didn't know English until I started to school. Because at home they always spoke the Swiss German language.

### *Growing Up on the Farm*



Brothers Jacob and Ernest

I was told that when Fritz was real young he couldn't be found in the house, barn, or land. After a long search, a person looked in the dirty clothes closet under the stairs and there he was asleep.



When I was around two years old I was pulling a branch on the ground, and walking among the beehives. The branch disturbed the hives, and in a second the bees covered me. I was stung all over and nearly died. They put me in a tub of soda water.

When I was about three, Fritz was taking me for a walk as he watched over me. Thank goodness he did. As we walked down the road we saw a coiled object at the edge of the grassy side. It was beautiful — golden and spotted. I asked Fritz if I could pick it up. Suddenly he pulled me back. It was a poisonous copperhead ready to strike.



Julius Stoker, the son of Anton Stoker whose house we bought, brought his wife to visit us. Front row: Minnie, Clara, Fritz; back: Mr. and Mrs. Stoker, Elise, Jacob, and Ernst.

The whole family worked. We hoed corn and potatoes, worked in the hay field, raked leaves to bed cattle in the barn, cleaned the chicken house, washed clothes on a rub board, took care of a garden, and chopped wood. Had to do all the

cooking and housework. When the boys wanted to come down from upstairs without coming down the stairs, they climbed out the window above the front porch and down the tree. My father and the boys caught foxes, coons, and sometimes a mink for their fur, and sold the furs.

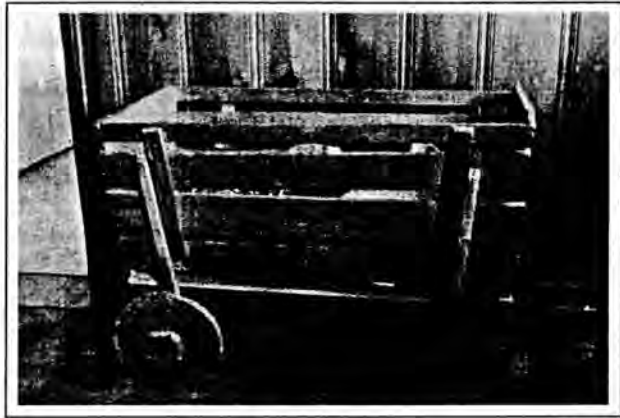
When the bees swarmed, we were taught to ring some cowbells and throw sand into the swarm to keep them from leaving. For years we had raspberries growing along the garden fence. Gooseberries were in the flowerbed in the garden, and we always had chamomile tea growing for medicine. Even the rhubarb got to grow in the long flowerbed.

The garden had a fence to keep chickens out, and the rest of the farm had a rail fence to keep the cattle out. Now things are the other way around. At the end of the day many times Dad would send one of the children to go drive the cattle to come into the barn. We had two lanes for them to come to the barn to feed and to milk some. We had stalls for each cow, and we put them in place with a halter. I never could milk them, though. One time I was squeezed terribly between the bellies of two cows that changed their positions. Boy, I thought I was gone.

You may not choose this way to cross a fence without a gate. My father built a stile, which was steps on one side of a fence leading to steps on the other side. The stile was used to avoid leaving gates open. The pathway across the fence led to a neighbor's house on the south side of our farm. Can you imagine my mother crossing over this fence with a long skirt on? We had to have good balance. They were the closest neighbors we had.

## *The Perfect Baby Bed*

Our father made a cart in which all of us spent a lot of time during the first years of our lives. Fitted with a corn shuck mattress covered by a feather bed, it was a warm and cozy baby bed. Take out the mattress, and we had a playpen. The wheels kept it high off the cold floor.



The perfect bed

## *The Two-wheeled Cart*

Wish the home place still had one. My father had two buggy wheels, so he made a cart. On the middle he made a rectangular lightweight frame out of strips of wood. On the side he added a strip of a small tree with a flat side, and near the front was a stub of a branch for a handle. A person could pull it very easily. We used it outside around the barn.

This was used in many ways on the farm. To bring corn shocks to the corncrib, you could back up to a shock of corn

and lean it on the cart easily. A person could rake leaves in the woods and fill a big tarp of sacks and easily haul it to bed the cattle in the barn.

## *My Long Trip with Dick and John*

One summer day my father asked me to go with him to take garden veggies to the Tennessee Consolidated Coal company store in Palmer. We sold the veggies as we went through the section houses. At the store he bought groceries, and he wanted me to stay on the wagon with the team of mules, Dick and John. At eight or nine years old, I was scared. My father said the mules would be a lot better if someone would stay on the wagon. It proved to be true.

## *Christmas*

We also had some beautiful times. Our childhood Christmases were great. We put a tree in the center of the front room, and on Christmas Eve we lit the candles and watched the candles so they didn't burn the tree, and waited for Santa to come. Our mother and father always had a neighbor (Barbara or Kate Wicher) come as Santa. We had to say a verse for Santa to get a gift, and we sang and my father played the accordion.



Clara, about age two, with big brothers (left to right) Jacob, Ernest, and Fritz

One Christmas when my brothers were young they got four wheels for Christmas. They made a scooter car out of the wheels and four planks. They cleared a small winding route down a slope around the trees. If you couldn't guide it correctly you could wind up against a tree.

### *Easter*

We loved Easter time. We loved to do our own artwork on the eggs. We always had onions that we grew in the garden, and we used them to dye Easter eggs. We boiled clean brown onion hulls in an enamel pan for a few minutes and then let them cool. We used crayons to draw on room-temperature eggs — any design we wanted. Then we boiled the eggs with the hulls. We made light yellow ones by boiling the eggs ahead of time and boiling them again with the hulls for a short time. Some hulls would do better than others.

### *Butchering the Beef*

When Daddy was ready to kill a beef, Abe Schiesier would help with the butchering. He'd be paid in meat or money. I remember once when I was little I heard they were going to butcher a beef. I crawled under the bed so I couldn't hear what was going on in the barn! We had a big sausage mill that we'd pass from house to house when people had beef or pork they wanted to make into sausage.

### *The Old Bone Mill Creek*

I always loved the beauty of the woods and the sound of a creek, with beautiful turkey berry, princess pine, Dutchman's britches, and moss growing around it. A few times in the summer my sister and I went to the creek and splashed. I got a leech on me a few times. When you pulled it off it popped.

About 100 years ago, the first Swiss settlers dammed the creek and had a bone mill to grind bones for fertilizer. There was a big mill stone left. Years later, thieves came in the wagon road from the back of the land and stole it.

### *Sweet Memories*

I remember a special smell, to crawl into a bed where the sheets had been boiled and dried in the sun, and being tired beyond words.

Walking from the gate to the house in the spring, the bees swarming in the apple trees . . .

The good smell of the freshly cut ground. It was pretty, and Daddy would ask me to ride the drag. You have heard the words "It's a drag." Well, seems like I was always chosen to ride the drag because I was heavy. My father drove the team of mules and I had to balance on the drag to smooth the ground to plant in rows. You couldn't tell me from dust at the end of the day.

The sound of a dirt dauber was the darndest creature to listen to.



Sweet memories of Mother's glass wind chimes, lye-scrubbed wood floors, hearing from far away Father's accordion being played on the porch.

Childhood poem:

June bugs come in the month of June,  
Lightning bugs in May,  
Bed bugs come just any old time,  
And say they've come to stay.

As children we had a good scrap, but there were times we would sing to help our sorrow or happiness. That was a way to cry out and relax.

When I started school, I couldn't speak English. So my brother had to tell the teacher when I had to go to the bathroom!

During my grammar school days we often went to church in Belvidere to the Evangelic Reformed Church. Imagine going to church nearly 50 miles in a T model, mother and father and five children.

We were baptized by Rev. Stuckey from the Belvidere church.



Front, left to right: Elise, Clara, Minnie, Ernst, Ernest; in car: Fritz and Jacob. Note the handmade shingles on the house.

## *A Different Sunday Afternoon*

We had company during a thunderstorm, and all of a sudden as we sat on the couch the spring in the couch made us jump. Lightning had struck the walnut tree near the backdoor and it had caught the house on fire inside the wall. The boys ran to the shop and got a pick and made a hole in the roof. We drew water from the well and carried it upstairs to put the fire out. I carried a bucket of water as if it were a feather. We discovered that the house was insulated with straw, wood, and mud. If we had a storm at night my father would always get up and put his clothes on. You've heard of being prepared.

## *A Useful Shelter*

My father added a shelter on the north side of the house. He had a cider mill, tubs, scrubboards, woodstock, garden tools, and even a grindstone in the shed. He also stacked wood there. I turned the grindstone for Daddy to sharpen his tools. That shed was the best thing that ever happened. We could go out there when it was raining. It sheltered the house in winter and cooled it in summer.

Daddy could back his potato wagon in there from the field. We did our washing in there and had our black pot in the back, next to the well. I could go on and on — where we had a cider mill, where we grated cabbage, and where we snapped green beans and vegetables. When I was a young girl we had a pet crow. It started roosting in that shelter. This creature was a real pest after we started petting it.

## *Making Cheese*

Our mother made homemade cheese, and after she died we still made it, and then our step-mother, and later our half-sister Rose Marie. To make a three pound cheese it took around 3/4 lard stand of milk. First you heat the milk to medium warm and stir in a dissolved Rennet tablet. Let it stand and it clabbers. Then cut across both ways. Stir until it starts to separate. Pour into a cloth to let the whey go. (Remember Little Miss Muffet?) Squeeze a little and put the bag into a press for a day. Take out of the cloth and put on a shelf to age. We always had suspended long wooden planks in the cellar. Turn every day and rub with a little salt for three days. When about 3-4 days old, wash in medium warm water every 3-4 days. I always liked my cheese to be around three weeks old. These days you can't make Swiss cheese because of the high protein that the cows are fed. (Rennet tablet: American Supply House, 10 South 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbia, MO, phone 314-449-6264)

## *The Depression*

In the year 1932 in early May my precious mother had surgery at St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville and died the 11<sup>th</sup>. She was 43 years old. I was 12 years old and couldn't believe it for a long time. As far as I know she died from infection and no penicillin. Someone wrote in her obituary that she was as near perfect as one could be.

Everything was in a turmoil, and during Depression time I had two sweet girlfriends that died. And my father lost his

money in stock in a utilities company sold to him by a person named Sizemore.

I learned to sew, cook, wash, and keep house at a young age. We tried to help each other. It was tough trying to go to school and do all the work that needed to be done on a farm. I never had a chance to study. Talk about good work — you didn't need to be rocked to sleep at night!



Daddy was careful—he taught the boys how to handle guns. Left to right: Fritz, Ernst, Ernest, and Jacob

Once during this time, my brother and I were hoeing. We said, "Let's just bury ourselves." "Golly darn," he said, "I couldn't bury you, because then I'd be left living. I couldn't do that."

## *You've Heard of Cat Tales (Tails)*

In 1933 we were hungry for some fried chicken, and the job of killing the chicken fell to me. This was not my first try at

chopping the chicken's head. After scooping up the fattest chicken for the night's dinner I struggled to hold it still on the chopping block, while I swung at its neck. Unfortunately the barn cat was attracted to the commotion at the chopping block, and she was eagerly awaiting the hen's head to roll at her feet.

As I raised my right arm to wield the axe, the cat wrapped its tail around the chopping block and flipped its tail up on top of the block just as I brought the axe down. Instead of hitting the chicken's neck I lopped off part of the cat's tail — not on the menu. The cat screeched and ran. To this day I can't remember if we had fried chicken that night or not.

### *You Wouldn't Want to Meet This One on a Pathway*

One day I went to visit my Uncle Chris who lived a mile away. On my way back I had to pass the deserted old Stoker house that had a wide stairway on the outside of the house leading to the second story. This was a traditional Swiss house. A herd of goat roamed around the house and enjoyed climbing the mountainous steps. As I made my way past this house, I heard a snuffling behind me. Turning around, to my surprise I found a Billy goat aiming for me. My feet literally flew. I think I scraped the treetops as I flew home. That day I outran that angry Billy goat.

## *We All Grew Up*

During the next five years Ernest graduated from high school and then went to work in Columbia for the Experiment



Jacob with Homer Kunz and Boots,  
the hunting dog

Station. Jacob left and went to Florida. Fritz and his friend Marshall Winton left for college and worked their way through. Minnie and I were in high school. I had several people who were good to me during my high school years. For instance, a friend of my mother lived near the high school, Mrs. John Kunz. Many times I had lunch with her and got to spend the night with her. Their house was a second home for my brothers also.

Our  
father  
married  
again —

Cleo Lutsinger — and Rose Marie was born on Feb. 14, 1938. We loved our step-mother, and Rose Marie was and is special to all the family. It was her decision to leave the family farm to the Swiss Historical Society for use as a museum. Each year, on the last Saturday in July, the Society hosts a celebration called Swiss days, which is held at the farm.



Clara



Clara, Cleo, and Minnie



Rose Marie on accordion and Joy Devlin on violin, both in traditional Swiss costumes

## *Postscript*

The families I grew up with cared for each other in many ways. I want to name some of them:

The Schilds: Pete, Chris, John, and George W. Schild who lived in the old stagecoach house.

The Wischers: Tobe, Kate, Barbara, Rosa, and their sister who married Mayor Olgiati of Chattanooga. They helped Mother with all the babies and were angels to us at Christmas.

The Bouldins, Schalagaters, Nusbaums, Schiesiers, Stokers, Scholers, Greeters, Schiesiers and Picketts.

Several families have stayed in Gruetli-Laager, and many including Kisseings, Biesics, Baumgartners, and Anton Stoker, have moved away. Sometimes they came back to visit and learn what has happened to the colony.



## *My Favorite Sayings*

The Swiss motto: Be as one, one, one.

In German: *Seid einig, einig, einig.*

In Swiss: *Anie, anie, anie.*

It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game.

—Grantland Rice

Be prepared. —Scout's motto

You don't cheat, lie, or steal. —taught by my mother and father

You reap what you sow.

The only thing you keep is what you give away.

Life doesn't consist in the abundance you have.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Honesty is the first book to wisdom.

In the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs.

## *Swiss Springerle Cookies*

2 eggs

1 cup sugar

2 cups sifted flour

1 tsp. baking powder

1/4 tsp. salt

1 tsp. anise extract

anise seed

Beat eggs at a high speed in an electric mixer until lemon-colored. Add sugar gradually, mixing slowly. Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt, and add gradually to the egg mixture. Then add anise extract.

Place on a well-floured board or canvas, and using a well-floured springerle rolling pin, press designs on the dough. Then cut into marked squares.

Grease cookie sheets and sprinkle with the anise seed. Then place cookies on cookie sheets. Let stand overnight. Bake at 325 degrees until very lightly browned.

These cookies are better if allowed to mellow in a tin container for awhile before using.



## Farmers Who Achieve

In 1875 some people from Switzerland came into this country and settled in the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee. They had to make a living somehow, so they cleared away the thick forests, tilled the soil, and began to grow crops to provide them and their families with food. This was very hard work but these people were very industrious and did their work with a smile because they liked it. . . .

In 1913 Ernest Stampfli, his wife, and small son came over from Switzerland to the small Swiss Colony. . . . Mr. Stampfli, a man of small stature but very strong and capable of hard work, started clearing off the land which had grown up in small jack pines. He fertilized it heavily and planted leguminous plants to bring the soil back up. He bought several cows and two mules with which to get started. Then very wisely he rotated his crops so as not to weaken the soil. . . .

Mr. Stampfli has eight cows, nine calves, two mules, and forty chickens. From the milk he makes very good Swiss cheese which he has no trouble selling in the neighboring towns, where everybody likes it. He spreads fifty loads of manure, along with two tons of commercial fertilizer, over his land each year. You can see he is putting something into the soil and not taking everything out. . . .

He grows sufficient hay and corn to feed his cattle and mules through the winter. . . . His potatoes, some of the finest grown in this country, form his biggest money crop. Very many farmers in this country buy their seed potatoes from him. . . . In his home garden, about one-fourth acre in size, he grows enough vegetables for his family in the summer. In his orchard of one and one-half acres he grows apples and some other fruits. He keeps the land well cultivated through the summer in order to retain the moisture in the ground.

He is now well fixed. He has a new Ford and is able to educate his children. His oldest son, who is in his last year of high school, has been a great help to his father on the farm.



Herman Kunz  
Grundy County High School *Yellow Jacket*  
April 22, 1932