

Reflections About My Brother Ted

by Mary Ann Studebaker Mishler

When I was 15 years old, a Sophomore in high school, my brother Ted was born. It was September 1945. We lived on a 140-acre dairy farm south of West Milton and were accustomed to new babies in the family - we already had 3 girls and 3 boys, so we welcomed him and loved him and all took care of him. I was the oldest child.

Our family was an ordinary family in many respects for that time - nearly 50 years ago, but perhaps not ordinary measured by today's families. First, there were so many of us. Ted was the seventh child, the first to be born in a hospital and when Ted was 8 years old, our brother Doug was born. Also my parents were farmers - my Dad and brothers did the farming, took care of the animals and the crops and my mother stayed at home and cared for the family. We learned how to work hard and long - doing the chores around the farm and in the house. We never had much money but we had all we needed. We had lots of home-made fun. TV was just becoming available so instead of TV we listened to the radio - Fibber McGee, Red Skelton, Bell Telephone Hour, and Cities Service Band of America are a few programs I remember.

Singing around the piano while my Mom played was another source of entertainment - she taught us many songs and hymns and even harmony - Dad always sang bass. Several of my brothers, including, Ted, learned to play the guitar. We had a farm pond that provided many hours of fun - picnics, swimming in the summer and ice skating in winter, playing on a raft my brothers built and swinging from a rope they tied onto a limb of a sycamore tree and then diving head first into the pond. Ted forgot to take off his glasses once and they are still in the mud at the bottom of that pond. My Mom was able to make a game out of work whether it was weeding our mammoth garden, shelling peas, folding diapers, milking cows, or hauling manure.

Growing up on the farm prepared us for many life experiences, I believe. We learned to be flexible. Plans had to be changed because of weather, sick animals, breakdown of machinery. We had a three-bedroom farmhouse with one bath and we learned patience and tolerance and a respect for one another and for each one's special gifts. We learned the value of work and play and the relationship of one to the other. Mom and Dad dedicated each new baby to the Lord and made a commitment to bring each child up in the knowledge of Christ. Our parents took us to church and Sunday School. We took part in youth activities and always were encouraged to go to church camp at Sugar Grove and later WA.

When Ted was in the 5th and 6th grade, he first talked of doing some volunteer work to help other people and he thought about that as part of his life work. When he was in the 8th grade, he had opportunity to work for a plumbing and heating contractor, and saving his money toward college to prepare him in some area of social service. During his high school years the Viet Nam war was being fought and he became even more compelled to make his life a statement for peace and understanding.

On the farm, the girls learned domestic things, sewing, cooking and the boys were often up at 3:00 or 4:00 am to feed and milk cows, so they wouldn't be late for school. Ted participated in FFA and 4H projects, going to the fair. He raised chickens, a steer, hogs and had an exceptional interest in machinery and how to maintain it. Dad told me this week how he taught Ted to drive our little Ford tractor with a harrow on behind, going up and down the field when he was only 9 years old. This caused someone to stop and comment that a tractor was in the field with no one on it. Ted loved his little brother Doug and used to dress him up in his football suit when he was 2 years old.

Ted played many sports but his real love was football, and he wrote a very meaningful essay at Manchester College after he hung up his uniform for the last time, listing the many disciplines he had learned from his years on the football field. Ted was a person who didn't give up easily. He practiced hours and hours on the farm lawn until he learned to walk on his hands. Sunday afternoons he often spent time with his cousins and Doug, doing such outdoor activities, or playing Monopoly and eating popcorn. Mom said that when they got really hungry, they would go to the kitchen and make fried egg sandwiches.

Later when Ted went to Manchester College, he was able to get a job on campus supervising the heating plant at night. He made an area there where he could study when he wasn't tending to his duties. He studied hard and graduated in 3 years including summers and then spent two years in graduate study at Tallahassee, Florida at FSU for his degree in social work. A man from the state government in Alabama learned to know Ted when he went to FSU and offered him a grant if he would spend two years working in Alabama. It was his intention to do that when he came home from Viet Nam.