



Two strangers from the same home town of Schaff-hausen, Switzerland dared to leave behind their friends, their homes, their rooms nestled in a town along the Rhine River. August, who was orphaned at a young age, made the journey across the Atlantic when he was 21; Anna at the age of 17. It so happened, as it often does with families who have no knowledge of their new country's language or customs, that folks from that part of Switzerland chose to settle near one another.

And so it was that Anna Schudel and August Graf met in Ohio farm country and were married in the year of our LORD 1871.

The combination of farm living and faith living seemed to suit them well. August became an ordained minister in the German Baptist Church and Anna bore nine children with little Minnie dying at the age of two. Tending and keeping the garden, the land, was as essential for survival as prayer was essential for the soul.

It was said of these two immigrants,  
*"They were of the substantial and worthwhile pioneer people who built up and helped to make the community a good place in which to live."*

It seems that in their day, as in ours,  
there were many homeless folks wandering from one place to the next,  
walking across fields  
and along gravel roads  
and sitting for a spell under a shade tree  
or resting against the side of a barn.  
They tramped about  
sometimes with a song in their hearts;  
sometimes with a tear in their eye.  
At any rate,  
settled folks looked upon their tramping life style  
and thus labeled them "tramps".  
Sometimes tramps were feared;  
sometimes regarded with contempt;  
sometimes they were greeted with locked doors and pulled shades.  
Sometimes, however,  
hearts were opened  
and bread was shared  
and a little bit of the garden harvest was placed in their sacks.

Now it so happened that August and Anna had built a rail fence on their property.  
I suppose it could have been decorative,  
but more likely it was practical,  
useful for keeping in hogs or horses,  
or maybe for keeping out deer.

It became something they likely gave no thought to when they dug the holes and split the rails.  
It became a sign.  
A sign of welcome.  
As one tramp passed by another and asked,  
“Any food ahead?”  
“Sure ‘nough!”  
When you get through the woods look for the farm with the old rail fence.”

As the sun was dropping in the sky,  
a tramp came upon the fence  
and knocked on the farmhouse door.  
After receiving a plate of food from Anna,  
perhaps it was his sheer weariness that gave him the courage to ask a special favor.  
“Excuse me for askin’ ma’am, but might you have a place where I could spend the night?”

With eight living children the house was pretty full  
and so Anna said quite honestly that she simply didn’t have room.  
The tramp walked away,  
stopped at the fountain for a little drink  
and looked sadly back toward the house.  
As he departed Anna heard him say,  
“No room. No room.  
Will there be no room in heaven for me?”

Anna had often told the story of Jesus’ birth to her children:  
“[she] wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.”

And so it was  
that Anna took a blanket  
and a pillow  
and a little lamp  
and climbed the stairs to the upper most part of her home.  
There she prepared a place that from that day forward was set aside for those tramping through life with  
nowhere to lay their heads.

I have no doubt  
that when the light in that upper room was lit  
a song was sung by the angels,  
and Minnie was heard clapping  
and a smile came across the face of Jesus who said “whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.”

