

The Shenandoah Update

District News and Activities

July 9, 2020

Sharing Treasures: Anna Belle Stephens

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Matthew 6:19-20 (NKJV)

"Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven—it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well." 1 Tim. 6:18-19 (TLB)

Recently, I read the moving [obituary](#) of Anna Belle Stephens, who died May 29 this year. As I read the story of her life, I felt a sense of loss and my eyes got misty. Why did this brief account of her time on earth stir my emotions so deeply? I did not even know her well. Although a long-time member of the Oak Hill congregation and a staunch supporter of the Shenandoah District Disaster Auction, I had never met her before I showed up at her home to interview her for an article for the Shenandoah Journal on February 27.

Shenandoah District Disaster Auction Coordinating Committee Chair Catherine Lantz had called me that morning and told me about a special donation Anna Belle had planned to make to the 2020 auction. Surprisingly, when I contacted Anna Belle through her daughter, Sally Stephens Ball, they were willing to have me stop by that very day—if I would be willing to wait until Anna Belle returned home from the Senior Center. She was quite active for her age and from the moment I arrived, I connected with her in a way that is hard to describe to others, yet so common when meeting fellow members of the Church of the Brethren for the first time.

As the interview began, I learned that Anna Belle was the highest bidder at the 2017 auction on the replica spring wagon that was crafted in 2002 by Olen Landes, a gifted woodworker and fellow supporter of the annual auction. She said the first time she laid eyes on the wagon, she "...just fell in love with it." From time to time, Landes' handiworks would be donated back to the auction to be resold. Because Anna Belle thought the spring wagon was a unique piece, she pursued it for several years. When hers was finally the highest bid, she said she was "so glad" she got it. Yet, after enjoying the spring wagon for not quite three years, Anna Belle was ready to part with it, but why?



As we sat together in her warm, welcoming farmhouse in the Fort Valley, Anna Belle, full of life and focused energy, told her story. In a calm, matter-of-fact voice, Anna Belle said she was not going to live much longer. She had entered Hospice care and hoped to live long enough to see the wagon she treasured resold at the 2020 auction. She wanted to donate it because she cared deeply about the District's disaster ministry and believed it would "bring a good price." Sadly, her wish went unfulfilled because the auction had to be canceled this year due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Anna Belle departed this world just 13 days after the scheduled sale date. I had silently hoped for her to be in good enough health to attend at least one more auction and to see the spring wagon once again put additional resources in the disaster ministry coffers.

The remainder of our time that winter afternoon was spent reminiscing about raising her five children, working at the local Post Office and being the auction representative for her congregation at Oak Hill "forever." She laughed about pie crust-making failures and volunteering with the Ladies Auxiliary at the Fort Valley Fire Department. She and Sally talked about using a ruler to cut one-inch fabric strips to weave rag rugs and they showed me her extensive collections of family heirlooms and thimbles, a hobby that started with the purchase of a box of thimbles at one of the early auctions.

An 88-year-old woman sitting in her in her family room, surrounded by a lifetime of memories, thought about how her treasures could bless others.

Facing what the future had for her, she exuded a peace that was only possible because of her faith in God and the loving support of her family. That is the truest treasure.

[Brenda Sanford Diehl](#), Director of Communications, Shenandoah District, July 9, 2020.

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