

Writing a Woman's Life: Lucille Brechbill Lady, 1910-68¹

LUCILLE MARR
McGill University

On 8 April 1968, Lucille Brechbill Lady wrote from her home in Upland, California to her sister Mabel Brechbill Blosser, who had settled in Goshen, Indiana. In her usual bright manner, Lucille began the newsy epistle that like so many others over the years had connected her with her siblings and their children in the eastern states and Ontario, with the salutation: "A joyous Easter!" Nowhere did she hint at the sadness that would overtake her just four weeks later, for its final time.² The jolt of her suicide that reverberated through her family, and the entire Brethren in Christ church, the denomination to which she and her husband Jesse Lady had devoted their lives, is suggested by his biographer: "For fifteen years [Lucille] had been suffering periods of severe depression, the details of which he did not share with even his family and closest associates. Rather, he carried the burden alone. Thus when she took her life" on 2 May 1968, "all who heard were shocked."³

It was through the eyes of a great-niece carrying Lucille's name, that I read Jesse's biography several years ago.⁴ The latter was portrayed as a charismatic church leader, serving at various times during his thirty-year ministry as evangelist, bishop, professor, college president, and missionary. Lucille, on the other hand, remained, by and large, a mystery. As historian Gerda Lerner has explained in *Why History Matters*,

... women have been denied the power to define, to share in creating the mental constructs that explain and order the world. Under

patriarchy the record of the past has been written and interpreted by men and has primarily focused on the activities and intentions of males. Women have always, as have men, been agents and actors in history, but they have been excluded from recorded history.⁵

What this suggests is that although Lucille's life remains largely undocumented in the public arena, it was much more than the debilitating depression that caused her to take her own life.⁶ Over the decade that I have been attempting to uncover information that would bring her story to light, what has become clear is that Lucille Brechbill Lady's memory is worthy of reconstruction, not as a failed life, but as one, in the midst of pain and struggle, that held meaning in its own right.⁷

Lucille was a loyal member of the Brethren in Christ. Her first forty years coincided with the period described by historian Carleton Wittlinger as the denomination's "period of adjustment." Confirmation of the doctrine of second-work holiness, an increased emphasis on the role of higher education and the expansion of mission outreach all strongly influenced Lucille. All of these movements had been introduced in the denomination between 1880 and 1910, the years in which her parents John and Henrietta Davidson Brechbill raised their family, in what Wittlinger has identified as "the first period of transition." Lucille's latter years were after 1950, when the Brethren in Christ were seeking a new identity.⁸ Not only was she influenced by all of these developments in the denomination, her biography provides a case study through which we can begin to understand how they manifested themselves in the life of an individual woman.

By using the tools and employing the questions asked by historians concerned with the private domain, a sketch of Lucille Brechbill Lady's life as devoted daughter, sister, aunt, nurse, teacher and churchman's wife has emerged. Hopefully this biography will also provide a window through which we can further our understandings of the experience of women in an era of rapid change and major transition in the history of a denomination.

Ancestry: From the Mid-eighteenth Century to 1910 – Pennsylvania and Indiana

Lucille was the last in a family of nine children. John Brechbill's paternal ancestors had been among the Anabaptists who had emigrated

from Berne, Switzerland, to become part of William Penn's "Holy Experiment." In 1738, Christian Brechbill had settled in the emerging colony of Pennsylvania, amidst a variety of Germanic peoples including Mennonites, Lutherans, Reformed and Dunkers, along with English Quakers, Anglicans, and Scots-Irish Presbyterians. Henrietta Davidson Brechbill descended from a minister of the latter persuasion. Robert Davidson had joined the developing colony not long before the American Revolution. The pietistic religious awakening that coloured Pennsylvania's religious climate in the latter eighteenth century saw him, among others of his ethno-religious community, affiliating with the emerging societies of German-speaking peoples.⁹

The son of a pioneer farmer who had joined the mid-nineteenth-century movement westward, John married Henrietta, also from a family intent on breaking new ground.¹⁰ While the Brechbills had helped establish a new Brethren in Christ community in Indiana, the Davidsons would have enormous influence with the initiation of a denominational periodical and in pioneering mission work. Among the handful who "developed their intellectual capacities to impressive levels" in an era when most in the denomination were still suspicious of higher education, Henrietta's father Henry worked long and hard from his home in White Pigeon, Michigan, to convince the Brethren in Christ of the need for print communication.¹¹ In August 1887, just under a year after Henrietta and John were married, the first issue of the *Evangelical Visitor* was published.

Although all four of her grandparents had passed on before Lucille's birth, their legacy was visible and would be felt both in the local community and broader church for generations to come. Jacob (1832-1902) and Sarah (Ober) Brechbill (1839-1908), who lay in the cemetery surrounding the Christian Union Church on the land they had donated early in their marriage, must have died contented, for their son John and three of their daughters had settled with their families on farms in the community. Henry (1823-1903) and Fanny (Rice) Davidson (1835-1894), who had been buried respectively in Wooster, Ohio and Abilene, Kansas, also must have felt positive about the close bonds established in the families of their youngest, Henry's namesake twins, Henry and Henrietta.¹²

Formative Years: 1910-1928 – Garrett, Indiana

One can only speculate on the mood in the home of John and Henrietta Davidson Brechbill when on 12 May 1910 a new baby girl

joined their already large family of three sons and five daughters. In their mid-forties, John and Henrietta were well established on their Indiana farm northwest of Garrett and several miles west of Auburn, DeKalb County's political centre. They had developed their homestead on land obtained upon their marriage nearly twenty-five years earlier from his parents, who had been part of the mid-nineteenth-century movement westward.¹³ When John and Henrietta's two eldest children were toddlers, the couple had moved from the log cabin where they started out, to the large brick home that they had built.¹⁴

When Lucille joined the family, Frank and Albert were young men in their early twenties, able to fully assist their father in the farming operation. Mabel, Ruth and Elmo, well into their teenaged years, were accustomed to helping their mother with the younger children – Pearl, John and Pauline, all of whom were under ten years of age. The girls were also responsible to milk the cows, feed the chickens, keep the gardens and the multitude of other domestic chores necessary to maintain a home and feed a large family.¹⁵ With the birth of a new baby, these tasks would only increase, for now “nine . . . sat around father's and mother's table,” as sixteen-year old Ruth put it in her diary.¹⁶

An attractive and wise woman, Henrietta had come to the marriage with a solid education; it was she who taught John, in the words of their grandson Earl, “the rudiments of arithmetic and reading and writing to the extent that he was able to conduct his affairs in a suitable and profitable manner.”¹⁷ Late in her life, Lucille would recall her mother's prayers and how “discipline and love were closely interwoven in our family circle.”¹⁸ In contrast to Henrietta's reserve, in the words of their daughter Pearl, “the more people around, including his children, the more John's eyes twinkled. His sturdy health, his boundless energy and his appreciation for nature over which God ruled, made him a force to all who knew him.”¹⁹

Although the Brechbills raised their family in an area isolated geographically from the Brethren in Christ centres of Pennsylvania and Kansas, hospitality to visiting evangelists brought their children into contact with the doctrines promoted by the denomination. As Lucille's brief “Impressions” suggest, she and her siblings were influenced also by their mother's sister Frances who had gone to Africa as a pioneer missionary in 1898. During the summer of 1913 when Lucille was still a toddler, Frances spent many days in an upstairs bedroom of her and Henrietta's brother Henry's large home writing *South and South Central Africa*. From their church pews, congregants would only have had to look

beyond the cornfields and tombstones to see the window on the other side of the road which looked in on the room where she wrote of exotic adventures a world away. One can only imagine the impression that this made on the youth who would have been quite aware of the window behind which fascinating tales of the “dark continent” were being told.²⁰

Just as Frances was among the most highly educated in the denomination, having been the first to hold a Master’s degree at a time when few individuals had gone on to college, Henrietta valued schooling for her children.²¹ By 1913, Albert had obtained his Bachelor of Arts at Goshen College, the Mennonite school close by.²² The previous summer Ruth had taken teacher training there.²³ Both Albert and Ruth would begin teaching careers in local schools, and later serve respectively at Messiah Bible College and Niagara Christian College, where they “sustained,” in Morris Sider’s words, “the Brechbill-Davidson reputation for excellent teaching.”²⁴ In fall 1914 Frank, who had married Jennie Hoover the previous year, was ordained by the Brethren in Christ as pastor of Christian Union Church.²⁵

Ruth’s decision in 1918 to go east to Grantham, Pennsylvania, to take a term at what was still called the Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home that had been opened the year of Lucille’s birth eight years earlier, would prove to be a significant moment in the life of the family. The school’s principal purpose was to educate for mission or evangelistic work, and there, as Ruth later would recall, “the Lord spoke to me concerning the lost heathen.”²⁶ That term she met Clarence Heise, who was also missionary-minded. On 25 June 1919, Frank officiated at their marriage and the couple left directly from the Brechbill home, where the celebration took place, to travel west to San Francisco, and from there by ship to India, where they would serve at the Brethren in Christ mission at Saharsa for a seven-year term.²⁷

As Lucille reached her teen years, John and Henrietta would again be called upon to let another one go in support of the missionary enterprise. With college-educated young men still rare in Brethren in Christ circles, Albert was invited to consider going east to Pennsylvania to teach at the denominational missionary and training school, which had recently been renamed Messiah Bible College.²⁸

By Lucille’s late teens, the family faced difficulties that meant major decisions were on the horizon. Albert’s move east and Frank’s contraction of a tragic illness, known in the family as “sleeping sickness” two years later, meant that life on the family farm would dramatically change.²⁹

Meanwhile, Ruth's fragile health had forced Clarence to bring her and their two little ones home from India that spring, after only one term of service. They would settle in Gormley, Ontario.³⁰ These disappointments were augmented by concern for Elmo as she suffered from a debilitating form of arthritis, and for the younger children as influences from the local high school took them away from the church.³¹

A revival at the local church brought the possibility for positive change. In his role as minister, Frank was a proponent of perfectionism and the notion of the importance of a second blessing that was becoming increasingly accepted by the denomination.³² In 1927, an up-and-coming young evangelist named Jesse Lady came to the community to hold meetings. Now seventeen years old, Lucille was "converted, put on the plain garb" and "joined the church."³³ Jesse had recently graduated from Messiah Bible College and in her new-found faith commitment, Lucille was drawn east to complete her high school education there.³⁴ Although this decision would further fragment the family, as John and Henrietta anticipated, Lucille's spiritual commitment would be strengthened.

Young Adult Years: 1928-1934 – Grantham, Pennsylvania and Chicago, Illinois

While attending Messiah Bible College, Lucille would become acquainted with her aunt Frances Davidson, who may well have provided a role model for her young niece and other women students.³⁵ Demonstrating her aunt's strong intellectual capacities, Lucille excelled academically.³⁶ Taking a different professional path than her aunt Frances and her older siblings, however, Lucille chose to study nursing and would return west, with the next several years devoted to training at Chicago's Englewood Hospital. Her parents were getting on in years, and it must have been a comfort to them to have Lucille studying closer home. Her decision also may have been related to the school's proximity to the Brethren in Christ mission on Halsted Street, for her sister Elmo, who had been serving there for some years, was suffering from serious health challenges.³⁷

Lucille's spirituality had opportunities to flower during this period. During her first term in Pennsylvania, the College underwent a notable revival that transformed her brother Albert in a way that was demonstrated in his relationship with his students.³⁸ Sarah Bert, the director of the Chicago Mission, also exercised a leadership that promoted "a strong

spiritual fervour.”³⁹ She and Lucille’s sister Elmo shared a deep spirituality that was purported to include an element of mysticism.⁴⁰

It must have been devastating for Lucille when, soon after she arrived in Chicago, cancer claimed the life of her thirty-three year old sister Elmo.⁴¹ It would appear that it was a comfort and welcome diversion to have Jesse Lady, the young holiness preacher under whose ministry Lucille had experienced her religious conversion, appear in Chicago that summer to study. In a denomination where, in Myron Lady’s words, “advanced education was still frowned upon” by many, with her family background Lucille would have been the ideal mate for a man who would become a pioneer in obtaining seminary education and a doctoral degree.⁴²

Early Married Life: 1934-1943 – Mountainside, New Jersey and Grantham, Pennsylvania

The couple married on 13 June 1934 and began their life together in Mountainside, New Jersey, where Lucille had her first experience of what it meant to be a clergy wife. This was a time when the minister’s wife was assigned, in historian Paul Boyer’s words, “a special mission: not only to accept with grace that role as it had been taking shape – economic and political subordination, moral and spiritual superiority – but to embody it publicly.”⁴³ Lucille would begin her married life on the threshold of a new era, quite different from that of her mother and aunt, who lived their mature years when women still pioneered, some as partners with their husbands, others overseas as missionaries.

A year after their marriage, Messiah College invited Jesse to return to their Alma Mater to teach religion.⁴⁴ The decision to return to Pennsylvania coincided with Henrietta’s decision to dispense of the family farm. In the face of John’s decided lack of enthusiasm for the project, Henrietta solicited the help of her grown children, and moved herself and John close to their youngest daughter’s new home.⁴⁵ Henrietta’s leadership in the family reflected the strength for which her sister Frances was known, as Albert stated so well in his eulogy at the latter’s memorial service that December:

The story of her upright character, of her exceptional education for that time, and the remarkable devotion of her superior talents to the arduous work of pioneer missionary endeavour was refreshing to all

who had been privileged to know her and touching to the youth to whom her name is that of a hero.⁴⁶

As Lucille continued to work at fitting into the new mould deemed best fit for a churchman's wife, her aunt's missionary memoir, published twenty years earlier, took a prominent place on the college curriculum. One would wonder what conflict Lucille experienced as she took on the role of the 1950s clergy wife, so different than that of the pioneer model of her mother and aunt.⁴⁷

At the same time, Lucille would follow in the family tradition of teaching, using her own expertise in nursing to instruct students in health and first aid. Nor was her speaking confined to the classroom. During the 1930s, the denomination progressed towards a statement on sanctification that clearly named a second instantaneous spiritual experience following conversion; while remembering her role as the support behind her husband, she practiced the admonition published in the *Evangelical Visitor* a few years later for the pastor's wife to be "[r]eady to testify, pray, assist in any possible way."⁴⁸

Lucille and Jesse's participation in a revival conducted in Harrisburg by holiness preacher Henry Landis during those years was still remembered vividly sixty years later by her nephew Earl:

[He] had things running in high gear with excitement . . . And Aunt Lucille got up and gave a very impassioned, very inspired testimony. It brought some Amens and a few hallelujahs from the congregation. And when she stopped, Uncle Jesse jumped up . . . he shook his fist at her and said, "I tell you, I hate the devil. I hate him with all my might. If he should be here, I'd like to see him flee." And Henry Landis jumped off the platform and said "I would too." Those guys both ran towards each other down the aisle waving their hands, shouting threats against the devil. Then Henry went back to the platform and they had a good service.⁴⁹

If, as Elaine Lawless has suggested, women's testimonies may be seen as "acts of preaching," the reactions of her husband Jesse and evangelist Henry Landis may have served to remind Lucille and the congregation that her role was to remain in the shadow of her holiness preacher husband.⁵⁰

More fitting was the role of helper, as articles in the *Evangelical Visitor* outlining the duties of the ideal churchman's wife emphasized: "It is necessary for the minister's wife to control the domestic affairs so that

the husband may give himself, as much as possible, to prayer, study, and visiting.”⁵¹ A snapshot taken in the Lady home in 1939 illustrates Jesse’s role as he sits with an open Bible; meanwhile, Lucille sits reflectively on the opposite side of the table with niece Naomi Heise (Marr).⁵² Excerpts from Naomi’s diary kept during her year at Messiah hint at Jesse’s active public life and illustrate Lucille’s hospitality, especially when it came to the nephews and nieces who attended the college: “The Male quartette is going to Virginia with Uncle Jesse. I am going to stay with Aunt Lucille . . . Had dinner at Uncle Jesse’s tonight. Grandpas were there. We had chicken dinner.”⁵³

As these occasions suggest, although there is evidence of public participation, “for women’s history, as for so many aspects of social history, the real drama is in the humdrum.”⁵⁴ Indeed, although it was absolutely essential, women’s work was rarely done for economic exchange. In Fox’s words, it was often presented as a “labour of love.”⁵⁵ Through family letters, we learn of Lucille’s significant “labour of love” especially in her role as nurse and care giver. She cared for her father during his last days and she played a significant role as nurse during Albert’s wife Cora’s last days.⁵⁶ Albert and the youngest four children stayed with Lucille and Jesse for several months as they adjusted to the loss.⁵⁷ With these strong family connections, one must ask what it cost Lucille to leave her aged mother and much-loved nieces and nephews, when the year after Cora’s passing Jesse was called to serve on the other side of the continent. Whatever the case, she supported Jesse in his ministry as president at Beulah College in Upland, California, with the grace fit for the faithful minister’s wife.⁵⁸

Middle Years: 1943-1954 – Upland, California

During Jesse’s years at Beulah (after 1949 Upland) College and as Bishop of the California-Oregon Conference, Lucille continued to play a public role at the college as nurse, in health education and on the Religious Life Committee.⁵⁹ In keeping with the “virtuous woman” described in Proverbs, she was well known for her “gracious personality,” “gentle hand,” and “merry heart that doeth good like a medicine.”

Following in the tradition of her family and husband’s dedication to excellent pedagogy, these were also teaching moments. In a piece published that spring in the *Evangelical Visitor*, Lucille’s query reflected the thought of German educator Friedrich Froebel.⁶⁰ “What is Teaching?”

the title of her article asked:

Teaching is accomplished not only in instructions that are given but by the life that is lived. As a child, my walk, talk, and mannerisms changed in proportion to the variety of teachers I had, so my mother says. Certainly it is vastly important particularly in Christian education that the teacher is what she teaches, providing guidance that leads into right relationship with God.⁶¹

For Lucille, this modelling would continue to prioritize being a supportive wife as a letter posted 20 July 1949 to her sister Mabel illustrates: "I'm in Jesse's room at the Hospital. He had Surgery last Thursday and is getting along beautifully." This "summer vacation," that Jesse had told her would be the only one they would have that year, is reminiscent of their honeymoon spent in a hospital room in Chicago fifteen years earlier. This time, Jesse's hernia repair was scheduled six weeks after her mother's death, a loss that she had anticipated at the time of John's funeral nine years earlier would be "our hard time just coming."⁶² Although Lucille had been unable to return to Pennsylvania for the funeral, she expressed no sadness in this letter.⁶³

The letter hints at another grief – the absence of children in their marriage. Lucille's description of her and Jesse's time together in the hospital with a "No Visitors" sign on the door protecting them from the cares and responsibilities their role as Bishop and wife brought, ends with the observation: "I guess we give each other the affection we'd give to our children plus what we'd have with children. So much for that!" This sorrow was alleviated by deep caring and strong bonds with young people, especially their many nieces and nephews.⁶⁴ Lucille and Jesse's childlessness also meant that she was able to be more fully the "help-mate of her minister-husband" by supporting him in his leadership roles during the denomination's years of change post-1950.⁶⁵ An article published in the November 1951 issue of the *Evangelical Visitor* just months after Albert's death, for instance, illustrates that Lucille's vision identified closely with Jesse's hope that the church would exercise more zeal in the cause of missions.⁶⁶

In the spirit of the denomination's new emphasis on the minister's wife having her own identification in the interest of "the high calling of God's servant – the minister," Lucille stood up before the Upland congregation on 5 August 1951.⁶⁷ Basing her remarks on Joel 2:1 and 12:32, she spoke in a prophetic voice.⁶⁸ Commending the congregation for

its “missionary zeal” and the “sacrifice” that had “made it possible for our young people to have a Christian Education,” she expounded on a vision of the shackles that bound them, prohibiting them from fully responding to God’s call for missionary work. Her salutation, “Friends, I do not know how long some will be allowed to stay here and work with a people who have had so many opportunities” when “[i]n other lands, some have never heard,” would serve as a prelude to the next chapter in Lucille and Jesse’s ministry.⁶⁹

Mature Years: 1954-1960 – Jerusalem, Israel and Wanezi, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)

Finally, as Lucille put it in her “Personal Testimony” published in the *Visitor* to herald their arrival in Jerusalem, she was no longer “among the observers of missionaries going out.” She and Jesse were “participants” in a new venture for the Brethren in Christ.⁷⁰ With the Israeli government’s failure to renew their visas at the end of their first year, they continued on in their missionary journey to a land deeply connected with Lucille’s heritage.⁷¹ With some fanfare, the couple arrived in Zimbabwe on 20 August 1955. Jet lag and culture shock notwithstanding, the following day he accepted the invitation to take the main service – a love feast for 452 people; she spoke to the Sunday school on “Jerusalem and peace.”⁷² Reports to the *Visitor* on the transition from Israel to Zimbabwe were optimistic. A beautiful country, “with its colourful trees and mild springs,” they found the food to be “excellent.”⁷³ Many Africans still held fond memories of Frances Davidson and with her family connections.⁷⁴

Lucille’s letters included newsy descriptions of their extending hospitality, her own role as support of other missionary wives, and helping Jesse in preparing a unit for his class on Israel. In the midst of the news, however, a passing comment in a letter to her niece Rosemary hinted at some darker moments: “Tell your Mother everything seems all right since my D and C so we’re expecting no more trouble in that area!”⁷⁵ It is well known that dilation and curettage are done for two reasons: to stop heavy bleeding after a miscarriage, or post-menopause.⁷⁶ Although Lucille said no more on the matter, it is worthy of note that in the summer of 1956, she was one year older than her mother had been when she was born. This evidence of her menopause underscored that she had reached the end of her childbearing years, what the Chicago psychoanalyst Theresa Benedek has described as “the death” of “life as a woman.” In feminist activist and

writer Betty Friedan's words, "some adjusted to the loss, sublimated in gardening, good works, their grandchildren, others did not."⁷⁷

A debilitating depression made it clear that one term in Africa was all Jesse and Lucille would be able to manage. Yet, in the midst of the deep night with which she would live for the remainder of her life, she kept up a positive and cheerful manner as is evidenced in the letter of encouragement that she wrote to Ruth's children Clarence Heise and Naomi Heise Marr in response to the news of another break in her family – their mother's sudden death.⁷⁸ For a family who had in one generation experienced the fragmentation of dispersal not only across a continent, but across oceans as far away as Africa and India, letters would continue to play an important role in creating a virtual network. This correspondence, which would grow more intense, helps chart the last stage of Lucille's life.⁷⁹

Last Years: 1960-1968 – Upland, California

After considering Pennsylvania, which would have allowed Lucille to be closer to her family, they settled in Upland, California, where Jesse would teach Bible and Religion until the college closed in 1965.⁸⁰ Lucille continued to provide hospitality in their home, mostly for Jesse's niece and nephews who lived close by.⁸¹ Her love for their great-nieces and great-nephews is expressed in a picture of Lucille and Jesse with Pearl's son Hubert Jr. and his wife Margaret's children: "We fell in love with their three cherubs . . . Gretchen and Hubie cried when they said good bye to us."⁸² Lucille would spend many hours babysitting for Jesse's great-nieces and great-nephews closer home. Right up until her passing, she cared for Debby Tidgwell on a regular basis.⁸³ In the words of Debby's mother Lois, "Aunt Lucille was one of the warmest and most loving people I ever knew."⁸⁴

During these years Lucille also continued to express her heart for missions, no longer in an active way, but by editing a monthly newsletter put out by the Upland Congregation for the Pacific Conference.⁸⁵ In a day when long distance telephone calls were still too expensive, and electronic mail had yet to be invented, letter writing was a way to alleviate a sense of isolation and loneliness.⁸⁶

In retrospect, knowing that rather than going into their difficulties, letter writers most often prefer to do their self-reflection by telling the news, Lucille's stories of problems encountered by others, including a neigh-

bour's suicide, might have given some clues to a disease that had become, at times, all consuming.⁸⁷ Lucille would become the victim of a family illness, one which Emile Durkheim has suggested is the result of the anomie characteristic of contemporary society. Certainly, the multiple losses that the Brechbill family had suffered held the potential for the sense of meaninglessness and emptiness inherent in modern culture.⁸⁸ As the youngest, and childless, Lucille faced a potentially frightening future.

Psychiatrists and psychotherapists such as Alice Miller hold the belief "that mental illness and suicidal despair . . . occur because [the individual] can't verbalize . . . what . . . [is] suffered . . . Feeling suicidal, then, means that there's a story that hasn't yet been told, that there are feelings linked to that story that haven't yet been expressed."⁸⁹ Lucille's wonder, articulated in a letter to niece Naomi Heise Marr, at how her dear friend Arlene Climenhaga verbalized experience with Hodgkin's disease, stands in stark contrast to her own inability to talk about her inner struggles.⁹⁰ Instead, Lucille maintained a brave front, presenting her habitual sunny face to family near and far.

Jesse's niece Eunice Engle recalled seeing Lucille at a prayer meeting the evening before she ended her life: "I looked over at her and thought, 'Aunt Lucille looks like an angel!' Little did we know that the next morning she would be gone . . ."⁹¹ The eulogy intended to "summarize the essence" of Lucille's life, read by a brother-in-law at her funeral a few days later, reinforced this image of perfect womanhood that Lucille carefully presented despite her debilitating depression:

Serving God in the healing touches of a registered nurse; giving choice years on the mission fields of Israel and Africa: being the behind-the-scenes support and inspiration for her bishop and college president husband; becoming involved in her own right in the concerns of church and school; extending to friend and stranger alike the hospitalities of their home; and performing these services with an unusual grace and glow! – This was Lucille Lady!⁹²

Whatever one makes of Lucille's determined end to the psychological pain that, at times, immobilized her, hers had been a calling that was known to be difficult.⁹³ In 1960, the *Evangelical Visitor* ran an article on "The Minister's Wife" which acknowledged, "[h]ers is not an easy place to fill." Indeed, more was "required of her than [wa]s required of her preacher husband."⁹⁴ Lucille, as so many other talented women of her time, found it necessary to subsume her gifts beneath those of her husband.

The era of strong female leaders such as her aunt Frances Davidson, Chicago Mission's Sarah Bert, and her own mother Henrietta Davidson Brechbill, had passed.⁹⁵ Evidence of Lucille's intelligence and ability are shown in her academic records, her thoughtful pieces published in the denomination's periodical, and her opportunities for public speaking. Her warmth, loving presence and sense of humour remain as warm memories for the numerous nieces and nephews who were recipients of her hospitality.⁹⁶ Gifted with personality and talent, Lucille chose to direct her attention to filling the challenging role of churchman's wife in a time of change, and by all accounts, she did it well.

Endnotes

1. Carolyn Heilbrun has used the term "writing a woman's life" in her discussion of women's biography (*Writing a Woman's Life* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1988]).
2. Rosemary Blosser Fry has given the author samples of correspondence between the several Brechbill sisters. Unless otherwise noted, originals or copies of the letters referenced are in the possession of the author.
3. Myron Lady, "Jesse F. Lady: A Loyal Churchman in a Time of Transition," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 18, no. 1 (April 1995): 36.
4. In his study of family and parish life, Rabbi Edwin Friedman has raised this intriguing question: which of your ancestors really ordained you? (see *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* [New York: The Guilford Press, 1985], 22).
5. Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 207.
6. As is common practice, Lucille Brechbill Lady's obituary read at her funeral outlines the highlights of her life. Note that although Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has written about an earlier era, her observation that what is remembered about women's lives has largely been through their obituaries (often written by ministers) is suggestive for women of the twentieth century (see "Virtuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735," in *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James [University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980], 68).
7. Louise Desalvo has described how "people who write about their loved ones' deaths are paradoxically engaged in a search for the meaning of their loved ones lives" and how especially "if the death was a violent one," they "want to

discover . . . an overarching meaning for this death so that it will not have been for naught” (see *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* [Beacon Press, 2000], 191).

8. For the development of these eras, see Carleton Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1978).
9. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 1-2.
10. Anita Brechbill, *A Teacher . . . and More: Biography of Albert H. Brechbill* (n.p., 1987), 6; and Earl Brechbill, “Ancestry of John and Henrietta Davidson Brechbill: A Historical Narrative,” unpublished manuscript, n.d., 31.
11. Brechbill, “Ancestry,” 31; and Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 120.
12. Brechbill, “Ancestry,” 58; and Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 47.
13. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 131-32.
14. Brechbill, “Ancestry,” 29.
15. Brechbill, “Ancestry,” 34.
16. Diary of Ruth Brechbill Heise, in possession of the author.
17. Earl Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999.
18. Brechbill Lady, “The Christian Teacher’s Relationship to His Students,” *Evangelical Visitor* (29 July 1957): 6.
19. Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999.
20. Brechbill Lady, “Impressions Shape the Child’s Destiny,” *Evangelical Visitor* (22 June 1964). Henry and Elizabeth Davidson’s daughters Edith and Esther, who in October 1999 still lived in their family home, showed me the bedroom from which Frances wrote her missionary travelogue.
21. Carol Heilbrun has confirmed the mother “as the secret bestower of possibility” (see *Women’s Lives: the View From the Threshold* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999], 52). As a young person growing up, I often heard my mother Naomi Heise Marr, who was Ruth’s daughter, speak of this desire of her grandmother’s. See also E. Morris Sider, *Nine Portraits: Brethren in Christ Biographical Sketches* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1978), 161.
22. Brechbill, *A Teacher*, 11.
23. Diary of Ruth Brechbill Heise.

24. Brechbill, "Ancestry," 38; E. Morris Sider, *Here Faith and Learning Meet: The Story of Niagara Christian College* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1982), 57.
25. Brechbill, "A Teacher," 11, 46.
26. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 298; and Diary of Ruth Brechbill Heise.
27. Diary of Ruth Brechbill Heise. For a brief discussion of the establishment and early years of Brethren in Christ mission in India, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 179, 185-92.
28. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 298. See also E. Morris Sider, *Messiah College: A History* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1984), 63.
29. Brechbill, "Ancestry," 37; and Brechbill, to the author, 30 July 2000.
30. Clarence E. Heise, *My Story, My Song: Life Stories by Brethren in Christ Missionaries*, ed. E. Morris Sider (n.p.: Brethren in Christ World Missions, 1989), 195. In her diary, Ruth wrote of the "relief to know that we were sailing toward America" and her tears of joy as she met the various family members from whom they had been separated for so long.
31. Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999.
32. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 327-28.
33. Earl and Ellen Brechbill, interview by the author and Phyllis Marr Harrison, Mechanicsburg, PA, 18 July 2000. See also Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 349ff, for a discussion on the significance of plain dress to the Brethren in Christ during this time.
34. Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999; and Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 15.
35. In *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun has discussed the paucity of female role models for young women.
36. "Certificate of High School Study," Jesse Lady papers; and *The Clarion* (1928), Brethren in Christ Archives.
37. Earl and Ellen Brechbill, interview by the author and Phyllis Marr Harrison; Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999; and Engle Heise, telephone interview by the author.
38. *Evangelical Visitor* (6 February 1928), cited in Brechbill, "Teacher," 20. See also Sider, *Messiah College*, 86-87.
39. Sider, "Sarah Hoover Bert," in *Nine Portraits*, 38.

40. Sider, "Sarah Hoover Bert," in *Nine Portraits*, 40; and Earl and Ellen Brechbill, interview by the author and Phyllis Marr Harrison.
41. Brechbill, "Ancestry," 35.
42. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 17.
43. Paul Boyer, "Minister's Wife, Widow, Reluctant Feminist: Catherine Marshall in the 1950s," in *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 257.
44. See, for instance, Berniece Woodward, "The Pastor's Wife," *Evangelical Visitor* (9 January 1950): 14-15.
45. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 15; and Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999.
46. *Evangelical Visitor* (20 February 1936): 29; see also Brechbill, "Ancestry," 57, 59.
47. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 434.
48. Woodward, "The Pastor's Wife," 14; and Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 330.
49. Earl and Ellen Brechbill, interview by the author and Phyllis Marr Harrison.
50. Elaine Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 3; Lucille's ability to present a strong testimony was substantiated by Grace Stoner (Interview by the author, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 18 July 2000).
51. Woodward, "The Pastor's Wife," 14. See also Lela R. Marzolf, "The Minister's Wife," *Evangelical Visitor* (20 March 1951): 107-08.
52. Photos from Naomi Heise's (Marr) album are in possession of the author.
53. Earl and Ellen Brechbill, interview by the author and Phyllis Marr Harrison; and Diary of Naomi Heise (Marr), 26 January 1939, 8 February 1939, 30 March 1939, in possession of Connie Harper.
54. Ulrich, "Virtuous Women Found," 69.
55. Betty Jane Wylie, *Reading Between the Lines* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1995), 113-15; and Bonnie Fox, *Hidden in the Household: Women's Domestic Labour under Capitalism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1980), 12.
56. Brechbill Heise to Brechbill Blosser, 21 November 1940; and Brechbill, *A Teacher*, 75.

57. Brechbill, *A Teacher*, 83-84.
58. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 24.
59. For a discussion of Jesse's contributions as college president and bishop during these years, see Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 24-32; and Beulah College Yearbook *Echo* (1949). In 1949 Beulah College, established in 1920, became Upland College after the church that hosted it. In 1965 it merged with Messiah College (see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 306).
60. For a discussion of Froebel's thought and its influence on twentieth-century pedagogy, see Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 18ff. I have developed these ideas as they pertain to Christian Education elsewhere: for example, see "Sunday School. Teaching: A Women's Enterprise. A Case Study from the Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian and United Church Tradition, 1919-1939," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* (November 1993): 329-44.
61. "What is Teaching?" *Evangelical Visitor* (5 April 1948).
62. Brechbill Heise to Brechbill Blosser, 21 November 1940.
63. Brechbill Lady to Brechbill Blosser, 20 July 1949.
64. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 17. In her letters, Lucille made countless references to nieces and nephews and their children.
65. "The Minister's Wife," *Evangelical Visitor* (20 March 1951): 7; and Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 32. See Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 475ff for an excellent discussion of these developments.
66. "My Spirit Shall Not Always Strive With Man," *Evangelical Visitor* (12 November 1951): 14-15.
67. Marzloff, "The Minister's Wife," 7.
68. Marzloff, "The Minister's Wife," 7. According to Brechbill, *A Teacher*, 89, Albert died of a heart attack in January, 1951. Nearly fifty years later in 1998, during a time of conflict and crisis the Upland congregation again took counsel from Lucille's "vision" (Lois Tidgwell to the author, 26 May 2000).
69. "My Spirit Shall Not Always Strive With Man," 14-15.
70. Lucille B. Lady, "A Personal Testimony," *Evangelical Visitor* (27 September 1954): 7.
71. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 33.

72. "The Ladys arrive – and begin to work!" *Evangelical Visitor* (26 September 1955): 10.
73. Brechbill Lady to Brechbill Blosser, 11 November 1956.
74. Jesse and Lucille Lady, "Israel to the Rhodesias," *Evangelical Visitor* (27 February 1956): 10; Brechbill Lady to Blosser (Fry), 15 July 1956; and Brechbill Lady to Brechbill Blosser, August 1956. For a brief history of Brethren in Christ missions in Zimbabwe, see Alemu Checole et al., *Africa: Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, vol. 1 of *A Global Mennonite History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 136ff.
75. Brechbill Lady to Blosser (Fry), 15 July 1956. For a brief history of the establishment of Wanezi Bible School, see Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 459ff.
76. "Dilation and Curretage D & C" (see http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/health_advice/facts/curretage.htm).
77. Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1981), 15.
78. Brechbill Lady to Heise Marr and Clarence Heise Jr., 9 January 1959.
79. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, "Letters as Literature: The Prestons of Baltimore," in *Women's Personal Narratives*, ed. Leonore Hoffman and Margaret Cully (New York: Modern Language Arts of America, 1985), 47.
80. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 35.
81. Conversation with Sherilin Heise on 13 May 2008.
82. Brechbill Lady to Blossers, 2 September 1965.
83. Brechbill Lady to Brechbill Blosser, 23 January 1968; Lois Tidgewell, to the author, 26 May 2000.
84. Lois Tidgewell, to the author, 26 May 2000.
85. Brechbill Lady to Brechbill Blosser, 18 October 1965; 15 May 1966; 10 October 1966; Jesse and Lucille Brechbill Lady to Friends, Christmas 1966. Wittlinger has noted that in the mid-1940s women across the church formed "prayer circles to pray for and promote missions" (*Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 467).
86. Susan Kissel, "Writer Anxiety versus the Need for Community in the Botts Family Letters," in *Women's Personal Narratives*, 51.

87. See Charlotte Gray, *Canada: A Portrait in Letters* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2003), 13; and Patricia Spacks, *Gossip* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5, for these observations on the function of letter writing. Brechbill Heise to Brechbill Blosser, 17 February 1963.
88. Brechbill, to the author, 12 July 1999. Blosser Fry, conversation with the author. Carolyn J. Tice and Kathleen Perkins, *Mental Health Issues and Aging: Building on the Strengths of Older Persons* (Toronto: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1996), 86-88.
89. Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), quoted in DeSalvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing*, 167-68. This is also Carolyn Heilbrun's view (see *Women's Lives*, 15).
90. Brechbill Lady to Heise Marr, 1 March 1968.
91. Eunice Engel, to the author, 20 May 2002.
92. Lady, "Jesse F. Lady," 36; copy of obituary in possession of the author.
93. Sue Monk Kidd, *Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 47.
94. "The Minister's Wife," *Evangelical Visitor* (17 October 1960): 2.
95. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, 523.
96. See, for instance, Lois Tidgwell, to the author, 26 May 2000.