

Reminiscence of Alberta MacMillan Kirkpatrick

Alberta was the last girl taken into the Canterbury Shaker Community.

When I was six my mother died and left four little ones. I was the oldest. My father just wasn't able to cope with us. So he farmed us out separately to anybody who was willing to take us.

I wasn't treated the way I thought I should be treated, even as a little girl ---- to the point where, when I was eleven, I considered suicide. My father tried to find some place to put me where I would be loved and be safe; he was at his wits end. Some friend told him about the Shakers. The nearest we could find was Canterbury, New Hampshire.

He called and talked to Sister Josephine and she said they had stopped taking little girls. Well, he was so desperate that he kept begging her to change her mind.

Sister Josephine told him:

At Christmas time the Shakers write on a piece of paper three gifts they might like for Christmas. That year all that Sister Marguerite Frost had written was

1. Another little girl
2. Another little girl
3. Another little girl.

So at Christmas they had nothing for Marguerite. They had no little girl.

Sister Josephine said she would talk to Marguerite. She called back and said my father could bring me. Sister Marguerite would love to have me.

I thought that like every place else, they were taking me because they needed somebody. Every place you went, you were needed for something; for a babysitter or a cleaner. It wasn't because somebody wanted you, and they were going to love you, that was for sure.

When they brought me to Canterbury it was just another place to move to.

I remember sitting in the parlor at the Trustees Office. Marguerite came running from the Dwelling house. It was winter time, December 29th. I could see her cape flying, that's how fast she was running. I thought to myself how disappointed she's going to be – she's not going to like me. She came through the door, got right down on her knees and put her arms out to me and said,

"Darling, I thought you would never arrive." It was very emotional for both of us. She was the first person who hugged me since my mother died five years ago. She told me what a lovely little girl I was. She that day brainwashed me into somebody entirely different from the little girl who had arrived. There wasn't anything I wouldn't have done for that woman. I adored her.