

Farm Wife Writes with Hope and Humor
Ag Connection News
March 12, 2013

The mood was somber as two dozen women and a boy crowded the conference hall basement, prompted there by warning of a tornado looming. Someone quietly asked for an update.

With Internet-enabled Kindle in hand, Linda Bonney Olin said, "I'm not seeing anything new on the tornado, but I can tell you DTN is bullish on corn and soybean prices." A round of laughter broke the tension in the air.

Wherever Linda is, there is laughter and good will. Linda and her husband Bill, whom she met while a psychology major and he an agricultural economics major at Cornell University, operate a 120-cow dairy farm in Nineveh along the Susquehanna River in New York's Southern Tier. A sense of humor has helped the couple maintain a hopeful outlook through fire, floods, health crises, and financial ups and downs during their four decades together.

When she is not managing the farm accounting, Linda is pursuing her passion as an author. She writes music, poetry, skits, prose, and, yes, some comedy. Her humor plays out in puppetry scripts she wrote for her youngest of two children, Jeff, and short essays like "Al Zimmer Comes to Call," a bittersweet look at her father's Alzheimer's disease.

Since the mid-1990s, Linda's work has had an evangelistic focus. Her Bible studies, poetry, and devotions have appeared in *The Secret Place*, *Who Knew: Catskill Literary Journal*, *Walton Writers' Works*, and *Angels Cried* anthologies, *Christianity Today* online, and other publications. As a lay speaker in the United Methodist Church, she has used her songs and dramas to enhance worship services and programs for Lent, Christmas Eve, and other special occasions. In February, 2013, she published *The Sacrifice Support Group: Lenten Drama and Discussion*, based on a humorous play she wrote for an interdenominational cluster of churches.

Retirement from her 32-year career with New York State Department of Labor in 2007 gave Linda time to tackle larger writing challenges. Her current works in progress include a how-to book on personal puppet ministry and a novel about a city girl who contends with murder and mayhem after rushing into marriage with a young dairy farmer. That plot is pure fiction, but Linda's personal experience is a rich source of inspiration and realistic details.

Although she has had no formal musical training, in 2009 Linda followed a divine prompting to create original hymns and Christian songs, such as "You Loved Me First," a heartfelt response to the Lord's unconditional love, and "Only Then," a meditation on finding God amid life's turmoil. She learned to use music notation software that translates her lyrics and melodies to sheet music. She taught herself how to format an e-book in order to publish a 24-song collection titled *Songs for the Lord*. Available on amazon.com, it contains a mix of traditional congregational hymns, reverent prayer songs, real life themes, and even a few humorous numbers for youth and troubadour-style performers. Relevant Bible verses accompany each song. For the next edition, Linda is searching for a mission-oriented musician to add chords and harmonization to the melodies.

In 2010, her poem "My Forever Lord" (adapted from her song of the same name) took second place in the Christian Publishers Poetry Prize's international competition for traditional rhyming poetry. In 2012, her original hymn text "A Lamb in the Wilderness" was selected by United Theological Seminary to be performed as part of its New Songs and Hymns for Renewal celebration.

Linda is also an award-winning photographer, currently using her images in digital projects like note cards and book covers. She recently launched a website, www.LindaBonneyOlin.com, around the theme "Living every day as a song of faith in the Lord's promises." Visitors to the site can enjoy some of her favorite photos and hear the melodies of her *Songs for the Lord*. Besides information about Linda and her work, the site also offers a variety of resources for music, ministry, and writing. Her Faith Songs blog features faith-related posts and conversations with writers and others whose work makes a difference in the world.