

## **“Montreat” by Amy DeHart**

The name had intrigued me since I first heard it said many years ago. I guess if you parse the words it means “mountain retreat.” But, together, the words make the name, “Montreat” sound much more mysterious and lyrical. And, it is. It is beautiful mountainside, with old and new unique homes and structures hidden by flowering magnolias with creeks and fields, full of possibilities.

In the past, I had thought about signing up to go to Montreat as a chaperone for a youth trip or for a workshop. But I had always hesitated long enough for the opportunity to pass me by. A week without my family, in a new place, for worship and music: the sound of that both interested and repelled me. This spring, I marked on my calendar at work and home, and inquired about it, but never made the leap. And, then, I had a call that there was an opening. My calendar was open, and, I jumped! And, I am so grateful.

I enjoyed everything about the week I spent at Montreat, in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Sharing a house with Bill & Deb and Don & Jeanette was a wonderful opportunity to spend a week with fun and interesting people and to develop a richer relationship with each. We ate delicious suppers and most lunches together and shared the opportunities and thoughts we had.

I guess one reason I had hesitated to go was that if I went, I would be going solo, not as a family, since my husband and daughter are Quakers and my son is grown. But, the folks going welcomed me as part of their church family. The Jeffers invited me to ride up and back with them, and I did.

Worship, music, and art, are all areas that intrigue me, but they are not areas where I spend much time. I stay a safe distance from each of them. But, in the surroundings of Montreat, I did spend time with all of it. I enjoyed art every day: painting, drawing, and throwing a bowl on the potter's wheel with the help of a wonderful teacher. Most days, I enjoyed two worship services. The pastors and teachers were warm, engaging, and creative.

One day on my way to the ceramics studio, as I walked around the lake in the middle of the Montreat village, I stopped to peer into the water where a few others had gathered. Hovering around some debris in the water were the largest tadpoles I had ever seen. They were big enough to make a meal!

This is the way it is at Montreat: welcoming people were everywhere doing all kinds of activities. One could join in or find a quiet place to read and relax.

I sang in a choir for the first time in my life. I love to sing, and I sang everyday when my children were younger. We sang in the car, while we cooked and baked, and at bedtime. I have admired our church choir and the commitment of the members, but I never felt brave enough to make that leap, and commitment. But, I did at Montreat. With registration came the music and the expectation that you would join the choir. So, I did. I showed up for the first of our twice-daily one-hour choir rehearsals. It was a bit chaotic, but by the end of the hour we had mostly found our places and had begun to make music. But, by the end of the second hour that afternoon, I was tempted to quit. 399 members of the 400-member choir seemed to know what they were doing. Jeanette and I sang next to each other and she encouraged me. But, I felt pretty stupid and out of place. Our choir director was very tough and had high expectations. But his humor and ridicule keep me engaged. I am glad that I stuck with it. I got a taste of the amazing potential of a choir singing God's glory, and it was just enough to keep me at it. Now, I want to order the CD so that I can remember and sing the songs we sang together.

I thought I would spend a lot of time reading and writing and playing tennis, and I

could have. But, the opportunities to try new things and engage called to me and I responded. On my last evening at Montreat, walking near the pond, I could hear the songs of bullfrogs. Like the tadpoles, I too had emerged from my Montreat experience renewed to do God's work in this world.

I encourage you to mark your calendar for Montreat next summer. And, with a little nudging, I hope you too will participate in the gift of Montreat.