



Adele and the Strawberry Festival

By Charlotte Johnstone

When Forbearance's Community Outreach committee asked Adele Washington to oversee the church's very first Strawberry Festival, she agreed after hearing it described as not only a celebration for Forbearance's members, but also as a way to attract the larger community to the church with an outdoor event of exciting possibilities. Adele was a good organizer and her enthusiasm grew with each new suggestion for a splendid summer day of family fun. She lined up volunteers, researched types of activities, contacted vendors, made booth assignments and oversaw a flurry of preparations on the church grounds for the big day. The cooperation among Forbearance's members was excellent and everything was proceeding according to schedule. She remade her lists and checked them twice and, when she set out for the church on festival day, she anticipated the dawning of a Forbearance tradition that would endure for many years.

And just as she planned, Forbearance's grounds presented a marvelous scene—bright balloons and banners, children racing around, adults in conversation amid bursts of laughter, booths and festival attractions operating at full capacity—a panorama of good cheer and high spirits. Not only were most of Forbearance's members there, but also, she was delighted to note, quite a number of new people from the neighborhood.

Adele was everywhere, clipboard in hand, happily surveying her domain, when the first hint of trouble arose with a small commotion at the white elephant table when Chloe Makepeace discovered the wedding present she had given just last

year to Lois Borman's daughter—a somewhat overwrought watercolor of Adam and Eve in mid-banishment—now forlornly residing among old pots, chipped plates and used toasters, and about to be sold to a neighborhood woman for 50 cents. As Chloe snatched the painting from the astonished woman's hands, she loudly declaimed that "If your daughter did not appreciate my gift, Lois, she could have returned it to me rather than discarding it with junk like that!" Lois, who had been unaware of the painting's origin when she found it stashed in her attic, was mortified and frantically engaged in the sort of verbal backpedaling employed by those unable, at the moment, to cough up a believable excuse. Chloe was not buying any of it and, with the buyer demanding her 50 cents and Adele rushing over to mediate, Chloe proclaimed herself thoroughly insulted and huffed away in high dudgeon.

Then, as Adele was attempting to soothe Lois, shrieks arose from the ice cream booth as a swarm of bees discovered the mother lode of their bee dreams—sugar, lots of sugar, and a big tub of sticky strawberries. They were everywhere and the two women behind the counter were ducking and swatting and loudly mewling in alarm, when Jack Brannigan, who had been assigned the job of grounds manager, sprang into action with his mosquito-fogging machine, which Adele distinctly remembered warning him to use only before people arrived. Assuming a rather heroic stance as he switched his machine to full power, he proceeded to accomplish the near gassing of his wife, Marge, Betty Chandler and two visiting Episcopalians,

who momentarily disappeared in a cloud of noxious fumes. While the Episcopalians staggered away, it fell to Adele to direct the replacement of the ice cream and strawberries, as well as Marge and Betty, who fled the scene with wet towels clutched to their faces while hurling quite unladylike imprecations at Jack.

After that, all seemed to go well—with the possible exception of Minnie Maleska's complaint that her chocolate mousse pie had been assigned a lower price than those donated by others, and the ominous repercussions beginning to be felt by several neighborhood people who had eaten a batch of potato salad too long in the sun—until midafternoon when total pandemonium broke out next door.

Adjacent to the church, in the backyard of Rev. Hustisford's manse, Adele had installed a petting zoo, consisting of Chester Burrough's two llamas, Daisy and Emma, his goat, Pete, the Hustisford children's seven rabbits, and three neighborhood dogs that Adele didn't recall inviting. The Hustisfords had graciously consented to the use of their yard, as they had to the pony rides assigned to their driveway, and both attractions had proved most popular. What Adele had not anticipated, however, was that Jack Brannigan, intent on litter patrol aboard his motorized garden cart, would back over the temporary fence surrounding the zoo to loose a chaos that everyone later agreed was the signature event of the day.

When the fence collapsed, Pete, whose goat senses had been too long tormented by the aromas wafting from the church lawns, instantly took off for the food booths. Hell-bent for the hot dog stand and only briefly distracted when he upended Chloe Makepeace and her watercolor into the plastic pool of the children's fishing game, Pete resisted all attempts at capture while cutting a swath of havoc and alarm in pursuit of the sustenance he felt he deserved. Meanwhile, the rabbits scattered in all directions with the Hustisford children in frantic pursuit,

as Daisy and Emma, who had already spent hours regarding the ponies with suspicion, confronted them up close and personal by spitting in their faces and gnawing on their ears. While one pony was barely restrained by its handler, who shouted for help as he tried to fend off the llamas with his manure shovel, the other two ponies bolted for what they took to be open pasture with the eight-year-old McGarrity twins jouncing up and down on their backs and screaming for their mother.

The ensuing pony chase involved not only the McGarrity parents and a number of other adults, but also Jack at full speed on his garden cart brandishing his spewing fogging machine, the three dogs keeping pace and yelping that they knew a good thing when they saw it, and most of the festival's children who, if truth be told, were utterly delighted by the entire spectacle. Adele stood open-mouthed in dismay and was not even slightly comforted when Jack later told her that the community outreach aspect of Forbearance's Strawberry Festival had been at least partly achieved when the great pony chase careened past the Methodist Church and several of its parishioners exclaimed, "Look! The Presbyterians are having a stampede!"

Even though Adele vowed to never again get involved in such a thing, the church eventually came to regard the festival as a milestone event of high drama worth repeating, although perhaps without llamas and goats, and with Jack Brannigan confined to a lesser role. And Rev. Hustisford's rather sardonic suggestion that they might be wise to look for their next festival chairperson among members who had been out of town on that memorable day was considered by all to be sound advice.

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