

## *Harvey and Fannie (Hershberger) Byler Family*

by Katie (Byler) Yoder

LIKE NUMEROUS OTHER AMISH-Mennonite families who moved to the Kempsville area, our family already had relatives living there: Mother Fannie's sister, Sarah, the John B. Yoders and their brother, Joe I. Hershberger Sr. Uncle Joe's family had moved to Virginia in 1922. Fifteen years later, in 1937, we too—Mom, Dad, my brother Clarence ("Curly"), my younger sister Verna, and I—left our native Geauga County, Ohio, for a new home in Virginia. Dad, had not been well, and Uncle Joe offered to help us get established.

Initially, we moved into a house at Powell's Corner, where Bonney and Holland Roads intersected. The house, later turned into a store, was operated by Cornell Freeman, before being razed during the early 1950s. We lived only a year or so at Powell's Corner, before moving to the Beech Grove property at the north end of Yoder Lane, where sister Verna's family, the Henry Yoders, lived last before moving to Abbeville, South Carolina, in 1969.

Though I was nineteen years old, I had not dreaded the move to Virginia, having spent part of the previous year,

Harvey Byler family, circa 1980. Left to right: Mrs. Verna (Byler) Yoder, Mrs. Katie (Byler) Yoder, mother Fannie Byler, and C. H. "Curly" Byler. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie (Byler) Yoder



1936, working there for Aunt Sarah and her family. During that time, I learned to know the church young people, and in particular, one young man, Melvin L. Yoder, with whom I had several dates. Melvin didn't allow me to get lonely upon our permanent arrival at Kempsville in 1937. The first weekend, December 12, 1937, he took me home after Levi Beiler and Lydia Miller's Sunday evening wedding supper.

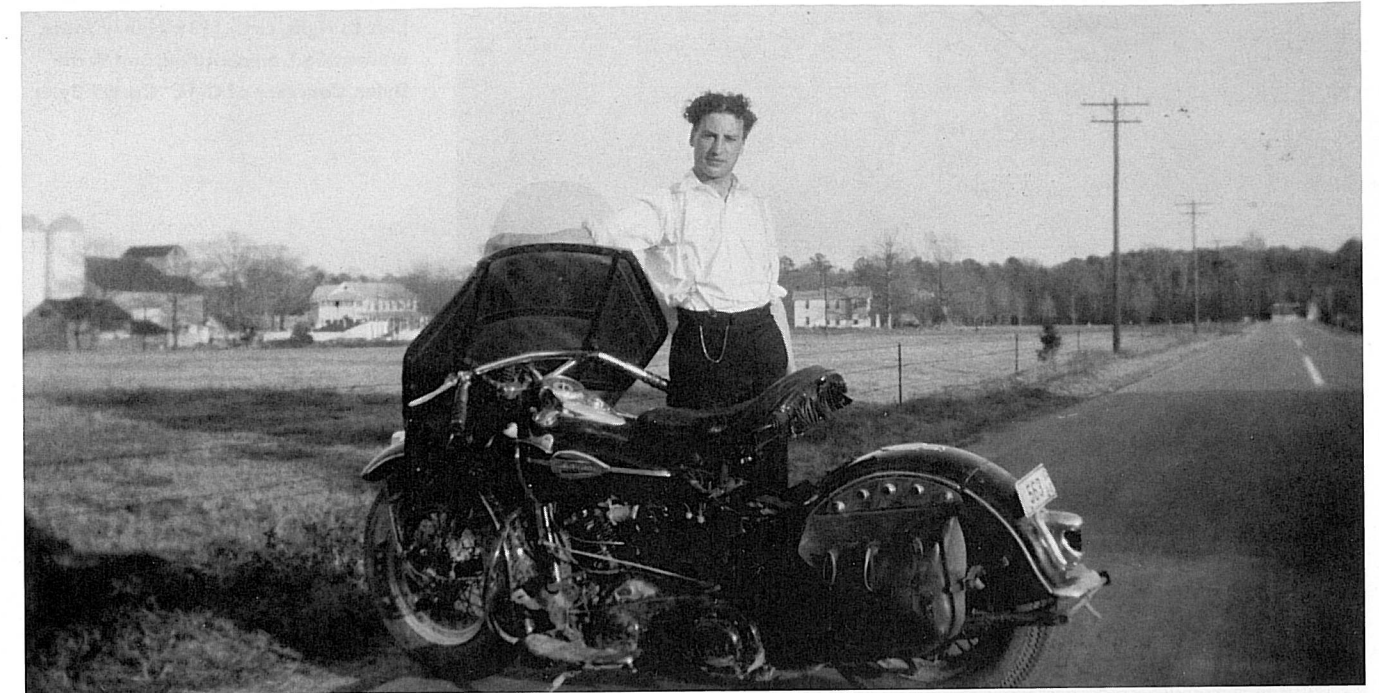
After moving to Beech Grove, Melvin's family, the Lloyd W. Yoders, became our near neighbors. Melvin and I continued to date until our marriage, December 17, 1940. We celebrated our fifty-fourth wedding anniversary this past year.

Early on, our family began attending Norfolk's downtown Brewer Street market. With Uncle Joe's help, we obtained a horse-drawn market wagon, onto which we loaded our poultry and dairy products, cooked hominy, and Mother's homemade chicken and potato salads. Mother introduced a new—for Norfolk—poultry marketing concept. Until then, fryers had always been sold whole. Mom began cutting them into parts: legs, breasts, wings, necks and backs, placing them on trays displayed in a glass-front showcase. The choice parts, of course, brought higher prices than the less desirable ones, but at the same time allowed customers with less means to buy chicken. The idea caught on quickly, and soon most merchants were offering chicken cut up, ready for the pan.

In 1942 Melvin and I bought the Pete Kinsinger farm when Pete and his wife, Sara, decided to quit farming. The Kinsingers moved across the road onto what had once been the Ben K. Smoker place. Pete and Sara lived there only a year or two before moving to Stuarts Draft, Virginia. Most recently, the Menno L. Yoder and Isaac Plank families had lived there. The



Clarence ("Curly") Byler. "Guess why they call me Curly?" Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler



"Curly" Byler, circa 1940. The Lloyd W. Yoder farm is in the background. The Point O' View Elementary School is now on the site. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

Kempsville Church of Christ presently occupies the site.

Our farm buildings were directly across Parliament Drive from the entrance to Yoder Lane. That put us close to both sets of parents: mine, a scant quarter-mile in Yoder Lane, and Melvin's across the road and a couple hundred yards to the northeast.

We had been there less than two years, when in April 1944, a lightning bolt struck the house. The strike occurred during an evening storm and at the time there was no indication of fire. However, around midnight, a gentleman driving by saw the flames and roused us from sleep. There was no fire department to call, and the house was quickly engulfed. We and the hired girl, Frieda Yoder, and our children, Raymond, two, and Verna, one, escaped with our night clothes.

The only item saved was a double-

tub washing machine and a few jars of canned goods. Melvin's sister, Elva, and Frieda Yoder carried the washer up several steps from the basement and out onto the lawn. The day following, the girls were unable to budge the heavy machine.

People immediately responded to our loss. Ladies from church came the next day to sew new clothes for us; the men came to clean up the mess left by the fire. Uncle Joe I. Hershberger and Melvin's dad, Lloyd W. Yoder, put in the foundation for a new house. We lived in the garage while the house was being built. It took eight months, but soon after Christmas, 1944, we had a nice, new three-story house. By then, our family had grown to five, son Allen having been born in November.

We lived there twelve more years before selling the farm for part of the Huntington subdivision and moving to





Left to right, circa 1939: Henry Yoder, unidentified, unidentified, and Verna Byler. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

Montezuma, Georgia, in the spring of 1956. While the farm buildings were being constructed, we lived with our six children in a mobile home. In June, I returned to Virginia for several weeks for the birth of Harley, our youngest son. The last of our eight children, Fannie Carol, was born here in Georgia in 1957.

Looking back, we have fond memories of our years at Kempsville. I particularly recall from the very beginning the special bond I felt with the church's fifty or so young people—something I had not experienced back in Geauga County, Ohio. The ties with our extended family and the church community became even stronger as time passed. The decision to leave Virginia was not without some difficulty, although the move to Georgia was made easier because numerous

Kempsville families, including our relatives, were already living at Montezuma.

Life brings difficult experiences to every family, and we have had our share. Raymond, 23, our oldest, died in a plane crash January 13, 1965, while stationed as a noncombatant with the United States Air Force at Mannheim, Germany.

During the eleven painful days between Raymond's death and burial here at Montezuma, I felt God's wonderful presence surrounding me in a way I had never before experienced. Not only was I comforted then, but I believe God was also preparing me for future sorrows that would come to our family.

Later that same year, 1965, my dad, Harvey, had a fatal heart attack at the bank here in Montezuma. On

September 9, 1967, in the evening after Billy and Barbara Stoll's wedding, Melvin Jr., twenty-one, died in an auto accident on a rain-slick highway in Stark County, Ohio.

More recently, October 6, 1991, our second oldest son, Allen, forty-seven, died four hours after being attacked by the farm bull. He and his wife, Emma, were just two months short of celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

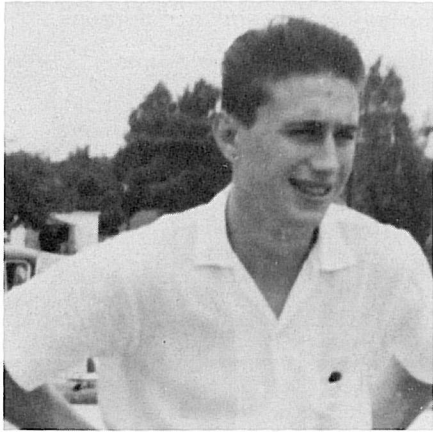
The Lord willing, Melvin and I will celebrate our fifty-fifth wedding anniversary later this year, 1995. For the past two years, we have struggled with Melvin's health problems, which

included a light stroke, Parkinson's disease, and progressive supranuclear palsy. Since November 1993, he must be fed six times daily with the aid of a feeding tube. We are happy, nevertheless. He improved enough that we were able to travel to Sarasota, Florida, in February and, during the spring, he mowed the lawn with the riding mower.

Though life's dark days sometimes threaten to overshadow the bright, our family finds comfort in the Psalmist's words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

Melvin Yoder farm, circa 1958, currently on South Parliament Drive and Herndon Road. Courtesy of Mrs. Melvin L. Yoder

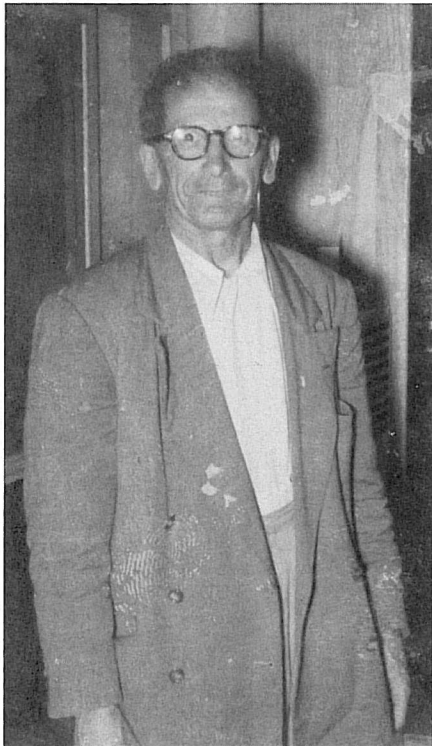




**Raymond Yoder, circa 1964. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Yoder**



**Melvin Yoder Jr., circa 1960. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Yoder**



**Harvey Byler, circa 1952. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber**

**Allen Yoder, as usual, visiting with several of his countless friends, circa 1989. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Yoder**

