

A Long
BRIDGE
HOME

 ZONDERVAN®
Amish of Big Sky Country

KELLY IRVIN

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A Long Bridge Home

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*To Northwest Hills United Methodist Church,
my church family.*

*Thank you for standing in the gap for me,
for reminding me that God is good all the time,
and for making me think about what I believe and why.*



Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

JOHN 14:6

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

I TIMOTHY 2:1-4



Deutsch Vocabulary*

ach: *oh*

aenti: *aunt*

bopli(n): *baby*

bruder: *brother*

daed: *father*

danki: *thank you*

dawdy haus: *grandparents' house*

demut: *humility*

der fux: *the fox*

Deutsch: *German*

dochder: *daughter*

eck: *corner reserved for the wedding party*

eepies: *cookies*

Englischer: *English or non-Amish*

fraa: *wife*

freind: *friend*

gegisch: *silly*

Gelassenheit: *a giving up of self for the greater good of the community*

Gmay: *church district*

Gott: *God*

groosdaadi: *grandpa*

groosmammi: *grandma*

guder daag: *good day*

guder mariye: *good morning*

Vocabulary

gut: *good*

gut natcht: *good night*

hochmut: *pride*

hund: *dog*

Ich bin gut: *I'm good.*

jah: *yes*

kaffi: *coffee*

kapp: *prayer cap*

kind: *child*

kinner: *children*

mach's gut: *goodbye*

mammi: *grandma*

mann: *husband*

millich: *milk*

mudder: *mother*

narrisch: *crazy*

nee: *no*

onkel: *uncle*

Ordnung: *written and unwritten rules in an Amish district*

rumspringa: *period of running around*

schweschder: *sister*

sechndich schpeeder: *see you later*

suh: *son*

Wie bischt du: *How are you?*

wunderbarr: *wonderful*

* The German dialect spoken by the Amish is not a written language and varies depending on the location and origin of the settlement. These spellings are approximations. Most Amish children learn English after they start school. They also learn High German, which is used in their Sunday services.



I

West Kootenai, Montana

Even the fresh scent of bleach couldn't overcome the acrid stench of smoke from the Caribou wildfire that raged in Kootenai National Forest.

Usually Christine Mast approached her work with steely determination to smite every dust particle, ferret out every stain, and banish every germ. It seemed silly to clean a house that might burn to a crisp in the next few days. On the other hand, on Wednesdays she cleaned the Drake house. Period. DeeDee Drake didn't sacrifice cleanliness for anyone or anything. Labor Day weekend might be a time for holiday celebrations, but for Christine, it meant laboring. The Drakes' ranch-style home better be spick-and-span or DeeDee would have plenty to say about it. That's why she and Christine got along so well. Cleanliness was, after all, next to godliness.

The evacuation order could come any second, and yet Christine stood in the Drake living room with her trusty dusting rag in one hand and a Willow Tree figurine of a woman and man holding a newborn baby in the other. These delicate carvings were so sweet. DeeDee had more than a dozen on her mammoth fireplace's wooden mantel.

Christine held the figurine family close to her chest and closed

her eyes. What would it feel like to rock her own baby to sleep on a cold winter night? Her beau, Andy Lambright, talked about marriage, but he never came out and asked her. Sometimes he looked as if he might pop the question any second, and yet, nothing. Wouldn't it be the pinnacle of happiness—cleaning her own house for a husband who appreciated all that hard work?

Neither the man nor the woman holding the baby answered. Their faces remained blandly blissful.

“Christine. You need to go—now!”

DeeDee's voice boomed behind Christine. She jumped. The fragile sculpture slipped from her fingers and hit the pine plank floor. It shattered in a half dozen pieces.

“*Ach!*” Christine sank to the floor. She gathered the pieces of the happy family, their faces a puzzle that couldn't be put together again. “I'm so sorry. Your beautiful figurine—”

“It's okay, sweetheart. It's not the end of the world.” DeeDee knelt next to her. “Stop, you'll cut yourself.”

Indeed, the end of the world did roar down the mountains, and this tiny bit of beauty seemed too precious to lose. Christine would glue the family back together. No, it would never be the same. Like her serene, orderly life.

A pointed shard pierced Christine's thumb. Blood dripped on her apron. She clutched her hand to her chest, trying to stymie the flow from a small cut. “I'm such a clumsy girl.”

“You're not clumsy. It's my fault. I scared you.” DeeDee heaved herself to her feet and offered her plump hand. “Let's get you a bandage and get you going. We just got the Code Red Reverse 911 call. It's time to evacuate. The fire's coming.”

With one last look at the broken family, Christine scampered after the other woman. A quick fix in the kitchen and she rushed out the door. DeeDee followed. They hugged as if they might never see each other again. Being hugged by DeeDee was like being enveloped

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in a soft, down-filled comforter that smelled of Dove soap and lavender shampoo. A safe, clean fragrance.

“I didn’t finish the bathrooms.” A sob caught in Christine’s throat. Letting go and leaving this kind woman who had been a neighbor for Christine’s entire life seemed impossible. “Alex left a terrible mess in the kids’ bathroom.”

The oldest Drake son was a teenager sure he needed to shave those three spindly blond hairs on his chin and wear large quantities of a stinky aftershave that made Christine sneeze.

“Honey, God willing, they’ll still be here when we come back and you can scrub them extra hard.” DeeDee gently tugged free. “We’ll see you and yours in Eureka. Don’t you worry.”

A conversation played in Christine’s head. One she wasn’t supposed to hear. Mother and Father whispered over glasses of iced tea in the kitchen after the little ones went to bed. Father wanted to go home—to his home. Kansas. Mother argued against it, but if things went as usual, Father would have the final word.

Christine had been two when Father pulled up stakes and moved the family to Montana, drawn by the gorgeous vistas, hunting, fishing, and mountaintops he said brought them closer to the God who created them. Kootenai was their home. Christine had graduated from school here in the eighth grade, cleaned houses for four English families since she was fifteen, and been baptized at eighteen. She went on camping trips with her family to Lake Koocanusa even though tramping around outdoors with the mosquitoes and snakes numbered far down her list of favorite activities. She’d hike in the mountains a hundred times a year to stay here.

All she remembered from trips to visit family was a shimmering asphalt ribbon that cut a straight line through endless flat fields of golden wheat and corn as far as she could see—and dirty convenience store restrooms. Even as a child, she’d rather hold it than relieve herself in such stinky, miserable quarters.

Kelly Irvin

The future heaved in front of her, a winding mountain road that suddenly buckled under the weight of a rock slide. "I'll pay you back for the figurine." Tears choked Christine as she grabbed the bike she'd left leaning against the back porch. "I'm so sorry I broke it. It was so beautiful."

"Knickknacks can be replaced." DeeDee swiped at her dimpled cheeks and then shooed her with both hands. "Go, girl, hurry. Your daddy and mama will be looking for you."

Christine slid onto her mountain bike and pedaled down the gravel road. The thick smoke stung her eyes and hurt her throat. The entire world smelled like a wood-burning stove. The bandaged cut on her palm throbbed.

She glanced back. DeeDee stood on the porch waving as if she had all the time in the world. Behind her, black smoke loomed over the house, a sinister, growing monster lurching closer and closer. The towering pines and spruce that normally guarded the grounds with such stately dignity quivered and shrank as if they could see the seething flames roaring down the mountain, bringing with them the demise of every living creature and plant in their path.

Don't look.

Gritting her teeth, she faced the road and pumped harder. Her muscles complained. Her parched throat ached with each intake of harsh air.

A horn blared. A shiny blue pickup truck loaded down with furniture, boxes, and suitcases swerved around her. She skidded to a stop at the intersection with Wilderness Road. The truck barreled past her. Gene Dickson's wife yelled an apology from the passenger's seat. Her words whirled away on a gust of wind, dust, and smoke.

Christine's legs quaked. She gasped for air and then regretted it. Smoke burned all the way to her belly.

Go, go, go. Gott, help me.

A buggy came into view with a familiar chocolate-colored

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gelding pulling it. The steady *clip-clop* of horse's hooves thudding on packed dirt steadied her.

Andy.

He always showed up when Christine needed him. He showed his love in every way possible—except one.

Now she might never get a chance to hear those words.

