

Christiane Richards

I was born in Nothomb, Belgium, a small village (pop. 200) in the Ardennes region just a few miles from Bastogne where the "Battle of the Bulge" was fought at the end of World War II. My childhood was reminiscent of "Little House on the Prairie." The village had only dirt roads and no running water or sewer. Until I was six years old, we had an outhouse, hiked up the hill to pump water from a well and did laundry in the stream. My playground was hundreds of acres of woods and fields. I attended elementary school in a one-room schoolhouse where all the grades were lined up in rows (my grade had only 4 students!). Our one and only teacher (Maitre d'ecole) ruled with an iron fist and used corporal punishment without hesitation to keep us under control, including a "good" whipping with his square ruler. I even attempted to stuff newspapers in my pants to soften the blows. The school had a small library (one cabinet) but it was enough to instill in me a lifelong love of reading. The village was ruled by five men: the mayor, the priest, the schoolmaster, the "secretaire communal" and a lone policeman (garde-champetre). I was the last generation to grow up with the native dialect, Luxemburgish (official language of the country of Luxembourg) spoken at home and I only started to learn French at school where the whole curriculum was taught in French.

When I was 12, I went to High School in the town nearby. It was a traumatic change for me to go from a tiny schoolhouse to a big high school with more than 1,000 students (all girls). We had to pick a "major" and I chose math (the main thing I learned at the village school) and modern languages (Dutch, English and German) for which I had a natural aptitude because of my German dialect. Afterwards I attended a business college with an emphasis on accounting and my three foreign languages.

I worked as a loan officer for the Belgian government and quit to come to the United States as an "au pair" for a year to improve my English. I met my husband Stanton and we continued to date for four years while he finished college. During that time, I worked for Dow Corning International in Brussels in their finance department. We were married in 1977 (civil wedding) and again in 1978 (church), in a double wedding with my sister and her husband. We joke that we had to have two wedding anniversaries to make up for having only one birthday since we were born the same day. After our marriage, I started to work (and still do) at Richards Investment Company, my father-in-law's real estate investment firm. I also raised capital for the firm after getting my real estate and securities licenses. My husband's large family (nine children) welcomed me in every way and made me feel at home right away.

We were blessed with two wonderful children: our son Dane is 26 and our daughter Tess is 20. I did a lot of volunteer work at the schools our children attended and had to be involved in their schoolwork since they had learning disabilities. All of us have enjoyed the great classes offered by SBCC. The Adult Ed program changed my life in many ways. After all the years in finance, I was thrilled to be able to study art and use my "right" brain again (I had a wonderful art teacher in high school who kindled in me a love for painting). About six years ago, my husband and I committed to meditating twice a day. We both experienced a strong spiritual awakening and I felt attracted to the

psychology classes (with David Richo, Timothy Conway and of course to our very unique Tuesday class with Spencer) because of their connection to spirituality. I discovered the Tuesday class through an article in the Santa Barbara News-Press which featured Martha Clyde as the founder of this class. So thank you Martha and Spencer! It has been a great and unique learning experience.