

MY LIFE AS AN
Amish
Wife

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Acknowledgments

My heartfelt thanks...

to God. Thank you for planting me in this community-rich, Amish settlement of Northern Indiana. Even when my family struggles, we are so abundantly blessed and surrounded by your love.

to my ever-patient and encouraging husband, Wayne. Without your support I would never come to first base. One of these days I will mend your pants again. Our 21 years of marriage have been *the best!*

to my children. You are our purpose in life. Thank you for being patient with me and all my whims. I would never survive without you. The Lord will richly bless you!

to the Connection staff. Thank you for letting me be part of your family for 10 years already. Without you, I would never have started writing.



Wayne Yoder, husband

Lena Frey Yoder, wife

Colleen, age 13

Brian, age 11

Karah, age 8

Emily, age 6

Jolisa, age 4

Jesse, age 2

Grandma (Lena's mom)

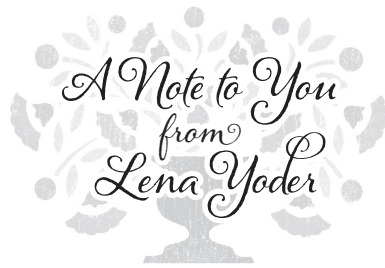
Leanna, Lena's sister, married to Al

Sue, Lena's sister

Ida, Lena's aunt

Ida, Lena's sister

Grandma Raber, Lena's grandmother



I live on the 72-acre dairy farm I grew up on in the middle of a large Amish community. Together with my husband, Wayne, and our six children, we work our land and raise dairy cows.

One reason I want to share some of my daily life with you is simply to show you what the real Amish way of life is all about. With the proliferation of so many “Amish” TV shows, books, interviews, and stories that do not reflect our way of life, this true-to-life diary provides a glimpse of how we really live. Another reason I’ve offered this book is to show how Christ’s love and strength help us through our daily lives. Like all Christians, we experience triumphs and struggles as we grow in our faith in Jesus Christ. “The joy of the LORD is [our] strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

I’ve always loved anything to do with paper and pen. I’ve been scribbling on any available surface ever since I was a small child. All those scribbles led to starting a small business of artistic handwriting and acrylic painting. I do custom order projects for people in my community, as well as others. I’ve published two other books about life on our farm that includes many recipes from our daily menu.

Our main goal, as with any Christian family, is to live for Christ daily and let our light shine for him.

Year 1



*Children are a great comfort in your old age—
and they help you reach it faster too.*

This morning my 11-year-old son Brian wanted to take his hockey stick to school because *everybody* else has theirs there. There are several drawbacks. Number one is that he doesn't actually have one yet. He thinks we have one hidden away somewhere for his Christmas gift. The number two problem is that the pond isn't even frozen hard enough to play hockey yet. Oh, but everyone else has sticks there just in case! It seems so silly to us, but I remember how it used to be in school. It seemed we were always the "duh" ones. The sad part is that ugly peer pressure doesn't quit once you are out of school. However, I do believe as we get older and mature, we are able to pass it off better—if we choose to. I wonder how many of our adult pressures look as silly to God as our children's pressures look to us?

Right now I've got three little ones having a blast in the living room. They have their coats and scarves on and are pretending to be going to the fair. They have no idea what a fair is like, but they are having a blast. The living room pretty well looks like a fair too—imagine a hog pen. But the children aren't crying, and they are able to run, and jump, and play. We'll clean up later. These are the good days—busy and full of challenges, but we're all home, all able to help each other, and all able to enjoy each other.

Life on our farm was pretty well boring until the other morning when Wayne wanted a cow in the *head gate*.* [Definitions and explanations of words with *s after them can be found in the glossary at the end of this book.] Not being a die-hard morning person, I do not relish such endeavors. The cow decided it was not necessary to be forced into a place she did not long to be. I was appointed to stand in a little alleyway that leads to the *motor room*.* The cow was to go in exactly the opposite direction. She got downright evil as she came toward me and decided I was nothing to fear. She politely shoved me along, not worrying about the consequences she faced or where she was actually headed. She shoved me into the diesel room. I couldn't open the door to head on out because the door swings in, and she had me against the door. The room was dark, and she couldn't see. She promptly turned south *on* the motor block. She went clear to the end. Glass, pipes, bolts—you name it—were flying all over the place. I bailed out as soon as I could, sure that my husband wasn't happy with me. It was very icy at the time, so I slipped around outside a while, wondering how I'd gotten myself into this fix—now with another bill to pay with having ruined the motor. What if we can't even get it fixed today yet? I sure wish I could be anywhere but here.

But calmness took over Wayne, who was now getting the cow off of everything and assessing the damage done.

Shakily, I started picking up pieces and apologizing, wanting to say sorry and how worthless I really am a hundred times. I stuck with just a couple times because I knew that didn't impress him either. Luckily, Wayne can fix almost everything by himself, and no, the motor did not need to be replaced. He tried getting the cow in later that day by himself, but he finally gave up. We'll try some other time.



Too bad nobody is dropping in to do my mending. That's a job I push off way too long. Our everyday attire is pretty well rags. I need to sew myself new dresses. Then I'll wear what I have for good now as everyday ones. I always have a hard time throwing away old, worn-out clothing.

I'm known to recycle other people's clothing that doesn't fit anymore. I make little-girl dresses for my young daughters and pants for two-year-old Jesse. I've even made a quilt from dresses. I get a lot more use out of them than I would leaving unused clothes hanging in the closet.



A couple weeks ago I went on an all-day Goodwill shopping trip. It was a treat because I had not gone for probably seven years. Wayne and I aren't anti shopping, but we don't endorse it either. Anyway, I enjoyed the day with neighbor ladies and got good deals on sweatshirts, boots, scarves, pillows, and such. The children had been hoping for some toys but were excited with the clothing and things I got.

Wayne was milking when I got home. The children were all excited to see me and the things I bought. I should've run for the barn to help Wayne. I should've held the little ones. I should've visited with the older ones. That is one big reason I do not go away a lot—because I cannot handle being torn apart like that. Where is my presence needed the most? In what direction should I fly? It is so much more peaceful if I just stay at home.



I have three eager, smiling little faces right around the typewriter wanting to watch me. The children are full of questions and threatening to punch some buttons. Lunch will be ready in about 10 minutes, and then comes nap time, which means peace and quiet for me for quite a while. By the end of this sentence, they're already going their own way and playing nicely. Well, there's Jesse. He's content by himself as he's throwing my extra papers on the floor. I intervene when he picks up a little glass bowl to pitch to the floor from the chair he's standing on. Now he went to visit his grandma, who lives next door. Now he's back again. He is the pure definition of "busy."



Jesse is surprising me by showing a real interest in going to the bathroom. Potty training is not one of my favorite jobs in parenting. Makes it nice when they actually want to. One of the first benefits little ones discover once they are out of diapers is that while sitting in church, if they decide they need a change of scenery, all they have to do is say, "I have to go potty!"

This forenoon, Wayne, the little ones, and I went to our community's private school a while. That is so inspiring to me. I wish I would take the time to go more often. Oh, to be filled with such youthful energy and eagerness! We have nine little first-grade girls (no boys) who brighten up that classroom as only sweet little first-graders can. With now being able to read, their little worlds are being opened up to so many fascinating new things. They were fun to watch. One wanted to show me that she lost one front tooth and the other one was loose!



With the first half of January being so warm and rainy we've, of course, had to deal with major mud here on our heavy-clay-soil farm. With that major mud comes the inability to haul manure, which causes a major messy barnyard. What can we do about it? Be patient and wait for it to freeze over or dry out, whichever one comes first. Remember, being patient means not complaining.



Last December we started a new venture in our farming business. We started milking three times a day. Actually, I should say Wayne does and I help. We milk in the morning at 5:30, Wayne milks in the afternoon at 1:30, and then we milk in the evening at 9:30. The first week and a half were rough going for me. My long, fixed schedule had changed and I, being a person who thrives on routine, had to adjust my patterns of doing things. I do see, though, that it has been very successful, and I am willing to continue on in this manner. There are definitely

some drawbacks we have to swallow, but so far the good changes have outweighed the bad. The cows have responded far better than we had dared hope. I think this is less stressful than if Wayne would have gotten an off-farm job.



On my kitchen windowsill I have a spring flower bulb partially submerged in water. The teachers gave it to us for Christmas. It's taking a long time to bloom but giving us hope nonetheless. I'm looking forward to the day it will give us blooms. This morning I broke the original glass vase it was in, and some of the root system was broken off. Hopefully it didn't do too much damage. I'm also eager to start all my tomato seeds. I'd like to start four varieties of non-acid plants along with the regular canning varieties.

We've butchered one beef for ourselves so far this winter. We want to do one more and also two small pigs. You're asking why so many? We just do younger, smaller beef and pigs, which gives us lean, quality meat.

With the one cow we butchered, I just canned chunks, and the rest was ground and put into the freezer. For the chunks, we put it through the large-blade grinder once, put it into cans (canning jars), added a teaspoon of salt, and pressure cooked it for 40 minutes at 10 pounds pressure. I like to use this canned meat for barbeque beef, beef stew, and beef and noodles. I'd love to use it for vegetable soup too, but I can't convince my family that's something they want to eat.

I will can fried steak and gravy, beef bologna, and more chunks when we butcher the next one. I put the bologna through the grinder at least three times after being mixed with seasonings for a much better tasting bologna with firmer texture. It doesn't taste so salty. The men like to doubt me, but it is a proven fact. I think I have convinced them all by now.

I look forward to having canned sausage links for breakfast too, and

we make our own brats. These are all jobs I do not look forward to, but then it is so satisfying once we have fresh, good meat again. Praise the Lord for these precious blessings. We are blessed indeed.



For a year now I have been working on improving my overall health—changing my eating habits, drinking more water, and getting body and mind refreshing exercise. I still have not conquered all my bad eating habits. That’s probably something I will have to work at the rest of my life.

This forenoon I decided to bake a batch of chocolate chip cookies so the children have something to snack on. Like usual, Jesse had to be at the counter helping me. I turned my back to put trash in the wastebasket. Quickly he got an egg, cracked it open, and, surprisingly, got most of it into the batter bowl! The rest ended up on the front of the cupboard and on the floor. Whew, could have been worse.

Year 1



Due to the weather on Monday, our school was canceled for the day. That caused ripples of excitement throughout the house. I was even glad for the diversion to begin with. It was too nasty for Brian to be outside, so after chores and breakfast I got him started baking cookies. He didn't want ordinary chocolate chip cookies, but rather the soft, oatmeal chocolate chip that are rolled in powdered sugar. I told him regular chocolate chip would be easier. I was envisioning my powdered-sugar-coated kitchen by the time he got done. But then the kitchen is cleanable, so I got him going on the ones he wanted.

Karah and Emily were to wash the breakfast dishes and finish tidying up the house. I don't really know when the tidying up stopped and the messing up began. Between all that, I cut out a dress for Jolisa and got Colleen started on a sewing lesson. I spent most of the forenoon standing beside the sewing machine. Oh my, I do think I would make a better nurse than a teacher. It's easier for me to poke a child and bring him to tears than it is to teach something like basic sewing.

In reality, Colleen did really well. It's just hard for me to remember a time when I had to use my brain to control which way to treadle. It's been as natural as breathing for so many years now, and to see her pedal this way, then that way, and finally shoot forth in a crooked way is hilarious...or maybe frustrating. What is the word I'm looking for? I don't think it'll take long for her to catch on as she really wants to learn.

By the time Brian was done with the cookies and Colleen was almost done with the dress, it was high time for lunch. I made stew because everybody had so many cookies (they were delicious). I knew it would be useless to make a bigger meal.

I helped with the afternoon milking, and then Colleen and I baked two different kinds of cakes, made two pizzas, and got everybody ready to go away for supper. The children were very excited because we'd been home a lot lately, and they were ready for a change of scenery. We took supper to school for the teachers. It was a thoroughly enjoyed evening of eating, visiting, singing, and listening to some awesome harmonica playing. We came home, put the children to bed, and milked again.



Early Tuesday morning Jesse crawled into our bed, and I felt he had a fever again. He'd been battling a cold and cough since last Friday. I finally got him comfortable in his own bed, and he slept until 9:30. That's very unusual for him. I was done with the laundry before he woke up. I cut out seven dresses for the little girls by noontime.



Wednesday forenoon after chores, breakfast, going to the phone shack to check messages and make some calls, and getting mail ready, it was 9:30 by the time I got to the sewing machine. I got three blouses sewn before noon. I had plans to type in the afternoon. I got the typewriter, battery, and inverter all ready, and then the typewriter didn't work. I fiddled around with it for a while and finally called my boss at *The Connection* magazine, an Amish publication. In frustration, I poured out my sob story to her. I gave up that project for the day. Last fall I found a typewriter at a Goodwill store for \$5 and was quite proud of myself...excited actually. Then the thing didn't work properly! So I borrowed my sister's typewriter, and now I've probably ruined it. Must have been in my sleep because I don't know when it happened.

We made an early supper of biscuits and sausage gravy, which is an

all-time favorite meal for my family. The girls washed the dishes, and I went for a long walk. It was a beautiful evening, and I could refresh my mind. I came home and enjoyed the evening with the children. Wayne had gone to a meeting and came home late, so by the time milking was done we fell into bed at 11:30.



Thursday I finished up the machine sewing on three dresses. It's taking way too long, but between settling many childish disputes, looking at farm magazines with Jesse, wiping runny noses dozens of times, fixing tea to drink with cookies—well, it just takes thrice as long to get something accomplished. I thought I had everybody happy with their tea and cookies, but it was mighty short lived. On the first or second dip of the cookie, Emily's fell in, so she had to have fresh tea. It wasn't a bother, as I just reused the same tea bag, but it was another trip away from the sewing machine. I couldn't convince her that those cookie crumbs sweetened her tea and made it even more delicious. Looked too much like cooties floating around in her cup to please her.

While I was sewing, Jesse had about a dozen small toy farm animals on the sewing machine to my right. I'd set them up, and then he'd play and knock them down. I'd set them up again. Next I had a pinched finger to kiss and blow on. Then he got dumped while flying around the house on his beloved, squeaky, red trike. Busy? Majorly. To have his sweet innocence...



I'm longing for the warm, sunny days of summer. I think we all are. Summer spells freedom for me. I enjoy sewing in the winter, but I enjoy the vigorous, physical work of the summer even more. I like the busyness of spring planting, putting up hay, going on bike rides. Okay, I'll stop dreaming now...



Not ready for school yet, Emily is the oldest at home during the day. We spend a lot of time together. She is a very good helper. She loves to color and write—anything that has to do with paper. She's starting to read a little, which is scary because she won't go to school yet this fall. Those are some of her good points.

She is also very picky and tries to act way above her age. She notices everything about anything and everybody, and it can be quite embarrassing for her mom sometimes. Talking about picky, the other day she had a banana to eat. It was a beautiful, delicious-looking banana. She peeled it and then stared at it a while.

"Mom, is this banana okay to eat?" she asked.

"Why, yes," I answered. "It's a good banana."

She took one bite. "Mom, is this tan stuff here all right to eat?"

"Yes, that's fine. That's just how a banana looks."

Another bite. "Mom, is this brown stuff all right to eat?"

"Yes, that's not brown. It's just darker than the outside, but its fine to eat." So on we go until she's finally eaten her banana.

Yesterday for lunch we had leftover baked chicken.

"Mom, is this brown stuff all right to eat?"

"Yes, that's just how chicken looks."

"Is this a bone or is it meat to eat?"

"Yes, Emily, that's meat, and it's okay to eat."

"Well, what's this dark-brown stuff?"

"It's blood vessels, and please just eat!"

The others don't even notice; they just eat.

I love to cook, and it's satisfying to feed a table full of hungry family members. I'm not as creative as I used to be because it seems I'm always pressed for time. I make soup again. We don't have soup as often as when I was growing up, but we had hot lunch in school every day. Here our children eat out of lunch pails for noon.

Recently I decided to be more creative and planned to make "Hearty Twice Baked Potatoes" and chocolate mousse pie. Duh me. I figured I'd use the potatoes we had on hand—not baking potatoes, but

it would work the same. However, the things didn't want to get done. Finally I ended up scooping out the potatoes I could without ruining the shell too much. I cooked the insides a bit and then mashed them. I added cooked sausage, bacon, sour cream, shredded cheese, a bit of Italian dressing, salt, and pepper. I scooped it back into the shells and baked them again. It was plenty of work, but they were good. Next time I'd go about it completely different, plus I would omit the dressing and add more spices instead.

For a while I'd just been using regular baking flour for pie crusts because some other ladies said they do and like it. Well, I was just not satisfied and purchased pastry flour again. Using that and butter-flavored shortening makes the best crusts. Flaky and oh so good! I enjoy baking pies, but then I love to eat them too. They tend to jump immediately to my thirtysomething hips.

Anyway, this chocolate mousse pie was really simple and delicious. It calls for seven ounces of milk chocolate candy bar. I didn't have any, so I went over to Mom and Dad's rooms. They had two small bars, so I just added a handful of milk chocolate chips, until I figured I had seven ounces. It said to melt this chocolate with one-half cup milk and one-and-one-half cups miniature marshmallows (or 16 large). I went to the pantry to get them. Oh no! No marshmallows left. So again I borrowed from Mom. I cooked this mixture until smooth and melted. I stirred and stirred. Why don't all my chocolate chunks melt? I wondered. Emily reminds me that those candy bars from my mom had almonds in them. (Obviously I need more sleep.) I cooled the mixture, folded in two cups whipped whipping cream, poured all into a baked crust, and refrigerated for at least three hours. It was simple and delicious.

I also made a cherry pie for Wayne. I can easily leave that pie alone, but the apple pie I made a couple days earlier is harder to ignore—but I must. Now there's one pie crust left, and then it'll probably go quite a while before I get the urge again.

This forenoon I went to the house of a church lady for brunch to

celebrate her birthday. There was brunch casserole, mixed fruit, cookies, and huge, picture-perfect blueberry muffins. Also finger Jell-O with milk and instant pudding in it. That was good too.



It's high time for garden produce again, but I guess with our family I bake anyway, even with fresh fruits and vegetables available. I think that's part of our heritage.



Last night coming in from *choring*,* I almost landed on the ground a couple times because of the mud. Our barnyard is terribly uneven from the freezing and thawing. The farm equipment leaves deep ruts, and with me almost sleeping, I have a hard time picking my feet up far enough to safely get me back to the house.

By the time I got into the house and showered, it was close to 11:20. I made a round upstairs checking on all the children, making sure they were still in bed and covered. What's sweeter than seeing your children peacefully sleeping?



Today was just one of those days. I woke up with the flu, and when Mom doesn't feel good, well, it just doesn't go very well. I absolutely needed to do laundry, and it was a beautiful day to dry laundry outside. I thought I couldn't miss out on the spring sunshine. Colleen sorted the clothes before she went to school. Finally at nine o'clock I decided I might as well get up and at it. It took me until lunchtime, and I was exhausted by the time I got done.

Jesse threw up three times before breakfast, and I thought, "Here we go! It really is our turn to have this bug." Then he ate oatmeal and was fine after that. I didn't even look at the oatmeal. Maybe I should have. I hit the couch when laundry was all on the line and barked orders to the girls from there.

Emily made lunch for Wayne and the other little ones. It consisted of ham and lettuce sandwiches and some potato chips. She brought me her sandwich to show me how yummy it looked. She had two pieces of whole-wheat bread, Miracle Whip, a little bit of lettuce, and one piece of thin-sliced ham. I guess she choked hers all down because I didn't find any remains. Wayne had to smile at his. He didn't complain and ate it. She had used one pack of thin-sliced ham for all four sandwiches and had leftover meat. I would have used one pack per sandwich, especially for Wayne.

JoAnn, the girl who drives Colleen and Karah to school, wanted to talk with me when she dropped off the girls this afternoon. I opened the living-room window that faces the road to speak with her. All at once the window tilted in and fell down on my head. *Ouch!* The inside windowpane shattered from the impact. My thick head didn't shatter, but the crash did cause some stars to float around in front of me. Wayne wasn't too concerned about my head, but he did wonder how come I didn't go to the door instead of just opening the window. I felt like throwing a shoe at him because who would have thought the window would fall on my head? Oh well, I did get over it and decided not to harbor ill feelings.



Talking about laundry again...I think our towels look so drab on the lines. They are all the same washed-off color from 14 years of laundering. Now the other night my mother-in-law gave me a new pretty pink one, and it really brightens up the wash line! I do enjoy the simple, little things in life.

Emily and Jolisa often have to wash the dishes while I do the laundry. Jesse loves to help, and, oh my, what a mess they sometimes have. Jesse is usually very wet and sometimes the messes they leave behind make me wonder if it was worth it to get them to do dishes. Then the next time it goes better again, and I think they'll get it spotless one of these times.



One day for lunch we decided we were thirsty for chocolate milk. Emily put the container of Nestlé's Quik on the table. I was busy with other lunch preparations. Jesse was quiet, and I was enjoying it—but I should have known better. All at once Jolisa said loudly, "Mom, look what Jesse did!" Nestlé's Quik was all over the table and floor. Having my back turned for a few minutes is all it takes for a busy little two year old. He's so busy, but oh how we enjoy the sunshine he casts on all our days.



I have a brand-new walk-in pantry! Celebrate with me! There was just one door between our kitchen and my mom and dad's living room. Nothing against Mom and Dad, but it allowed us very little privacy. For seven years I dreamed of making a pantry at the end of their living room. The new pantry has two doors, one from our kitchen, and the other from their living room. It is nice and roomy with nice shelves, insulated walls, and room for the folding chairs, the sweeper, and so much more. It still allows us to get to my parents' from the inside, but also gives us so much more privacy.



In December we lost a good workhorse mare to twisted gut. We had been looking forward to having her foal in early spring. Now Saturday night, we discovered her daughter, due to foal this week, was in distress. We had the vet out. He treated her and told Wayne he has to keep walking her and to not let her roll. It was close to 9:00 when the vet came, so at 9:30 I went out to milk. Wayne said I either had to keep walking Bunny or milk alone. I led her for a few minutes while Wayne put more clothes on. The decision was not a hard one for me to make. I would much rather milk 30 cows alone then lead one horse that's not supposed to lie down and roll, when that's exactly what she wants to do. Draft horse hooves are just too huge for my little feet—and in the dark

to boot. Bunny didn't survive the night. It was a bitter pill to swallow. We had a good mother–daughter team that was very dependable. Must we have carried too much pride in them? We didn't think so.



Wayne gets the enjoyment of getting used to new horses we bought at a sale. It's a good thing the horse sale was right after losing Bunny because it's not a good time of the year to be without horses. Wayne talked me into going to the Topeka Horse Sale. I highly doubt I would be able to get him to go with me to a ladies convention with several thousand women present. I knew Emily, Jolisa, and Jesse would enjoy it, so I decided I'd go. It was okay as long as I was sitting, but climbing those bleachers trying to be halfway ladylike, trying not to fall, and trying to help the little children—well that just wasn't my cup of tea! I did get to visit with some people, and that made the forenoon worthwhile.