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This publication is designed merely to tell the story of events in the lives of members of the Shank family. Pieced together through interviews and conversations, it has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration and is not intended to treat any condition. The ideas and opinions stated herein are solely those to whom they are attributed. Some names have been changed to protect their identity.

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## Acknowledgments

When it first became apparent to me that everything is connected to everything else, I wept. Suddenly, my world made sense. The love I have for the earth, from the very stones and soil, to the plants, trees, animals and humankind, had validity. All were and are, a part of the me that I am, and related to everything that is. In the Native American way, I say now, “Mitakuye oyasin”, all are related.

This work is dedicated to the Great Mystery, the Creator of all.

And to each person who ever believed in my ability to tell a story. These include my spiritual mentors Glen and Tweet Downing, my dear friend Connie Yarab, and my helpers. Among them are Sharon Saunders, Tim Spencer, Kim Bauer, Brenda Wood, the Titan Team, Nick DiMario, Mark and Diane Shank and the staff of Sunnybrook Farm Herbs. Above all, there is my partner and companion, who is the constant love, encouragement, and dreamer beside me, Joe DiMario. I love you Joe, for celebrating life with me, and taking me fishing when I most need to go.



## Introduction

It was a crisp, cold day, December 31, 2005. I was performing an annual ritual. At the end of each year I do something I've never done before. That day I was on my way to an appointment with Bill Shank, an herbalist and iridologist I'd heard some startling things about.

My eyes widened in surprise as I crested the long, winding hill to Sunnybrook Farm Herbs. Before me was a neatly sided farmhouse with a gorgeous angel statue in front. Behind sat a gray, tastefully appointed array of low-slung buildings and a curved gravel driveway along the side.

As I entered the building marked "Office", the door opened into a waiting room, so beautiful and welcoming, I immediately relaxed and felt at home.

A robust, gray-haired man of late-middle years came from an inner room, to greet me with a powerful handshake.

Soon I was letting Bill know that I was not aware of any health issues, simply wanting confirmation that this was the case. After a serious car crash two years prior, I wanted to nip any potential problem before it surfaced.

Happily, I was given a clean bill of health after Bill examined my eyes behind a bright, oval light. He was so impressed with my good health, that he asked what I was doing to be so fit. Yoga, the use of herbs and teas, and a lifelong passion for the study and use of wild foods and medicinal herbs were the answer, I told him.

At that, Bill invited me to see the entire facility. He was proud of its up-to-the-minute, spotlessly clean kitchen. Other rooms are a potpourri of delightful smells, and shelves sport rows of jars, tinctures, oils and salves. Bottles filled with various liquids were all so beautiful and clean, that I felt overwhelmed by their living presence.

As we talked of herbs, Bill often remarked that I should meet his son Mark, the "real" expert on herbs and related topics.

By the time I left two hours later... time spent getting the tour, meeting Bill's quietly attractive wife. Peggy. then hearing the story of how Bill came to do what he was doing. I left in a daze. It was to become a life-changing experience.

Looking like a man who's just come in out of the woods, Mark is tall and lean, with long shaggy hair and a short beard. He bears an appearance of overwork, which he admitted to me. Calm, clear blue eyes look out at the world with ageless curiosity, discernment and compassion.

There was no need to get acquainted with Mark. We quickly found out we were kindred spirits of the woodsy kind.

And the friendship was on.

Mark is quietly direct as he studies one's eyes. While asking questions, he charts his findings. After informing the client of what he knows can help them, he tells them of the products available to treat what ails them. He lets them know they are not obligated in any way to purchase them, nor is there a fee for the iridology exam.

Since our initial meeting, I've taken many people to Sunnybrook Farm Herbs. Some cannot afford to pay for the herbal formulas, and each is told that the money isn't important, that their getting better is. Each can set up a self-monitored payment plan or give a donation if they wish. In any case, they are given absolute assurance that their health and well being are the top priority to the Shank family.

Often I leave, shaking my head in wonder at the bags of herbal formulas my friends carry out of the Sunnybrook office. When I've inquired about this, I have been told that this practice was often carried out by Dr. John Christopher, whose work and philosophy the Shank family emulates. Bill and Mark are convinced that they are simply doing God's work and will, in this way.

History being what it is, the Shank family drama has been revealed to me, simply by my ability to show up over there at just the right time to hear of it. My amazement has become total awe, as I see the hand of God at work in the lives of ordinary people. Who love Him, and believe that all does indeed work for good for those who believe in the Creator, and are

called according to His purpose and plan.

The Shanks are people who pray, who strive to honor God by obeying His commandments in their lives. Faith is how they operate. They give of self and substance. In short they are very human, subject to error, but to God they give the credit for all. It is my great honor to be entrusted to tell their story.



Just walk on in.

## The Early Years

## Chapter One

It begins as a simple story of a girl named Peggy and her man Bill, a young pastor in the Wesleyan Church. They'd met at a church camp in Pennsylvania, fell in love and married in 1951.

The couple were assigned a pastorate in Virginia, where Bill walked the deep valley coal leases, seeing as many people as possible, building a congregation.

As church assignments go, so did Bill and Peggy, from Apple Valley, Virginia to Templeton, Pennsylvania, and finally, back to Akron, Ohio where both had family.

After years of evangelistic work in Ohio and surrounding states, Bill and Peggy began to dream of a more settled life. Over time, the demands of Bill's ministerial duties, along with the constant moving of his family, began to make some serious inroads into his health. There were digestive problems, continuous headaches, and nerves constantly on edge.

By that time Bill and Peggy's two older children, Kathy and Linda, were grown women and married. The remaining two, sons Gary and Mark, were of concern mainly because of the negative conditions surrounding them in city living, mainly drugs and immorality.

Mark's memories of his boyhood in the suburbs were of backyard gardens, saying "We were always out back, diggin' in the dirt. I spent as much time outside as I could, ridin' my bike

to the park, where they had trees and everything... then when I was twelve, we moved to the farm, then everything was fine!"

Peggy approved of Bill's idea of a farm, knowing that whatever he wanted to do would be good for the family. Then there was Gary, obviously so taken with the idea, that he began searching the newspapers.

Peggy said, "He was just a kid in high school at the time, and saw an ad in the paper for this farm. He talked us into comin' down to look at it.

We went home and told him there was no way we'd want that place!! It was really bad!! The house was totally burnt out, just a shell. You could stand in the basement and see the stars, up through the roof." Bill's opinion of the property advertised as a handyman's dream, he said wryly, "Oh no...it was a nightmare!!"

"But Gary kept talkin' to us about it," Peggy remembered. "There's woods on that property, and you can..."

"Well, Gary's a good salesman, so we came down and looked at it again. But the second time, we looked at it with a more open mind. What could be done, if you had the perseverance to do it?

At that time, we were really very poor, had almost no money. So Bill was looking at the trees, the woods, saying 'Well...if we could sell off the timber to buy the place...'

We came in and went through the house. To do that, we had to put a ladder up and crawl in through a window, to see up through. The staircase was gone... burned out."



Bill was more graphic in describing the mess. "The people lived in a trailer here, and the woman threw all her tin cans, garbage and glass jars, into what was the kitchen (in the house.) Downstairs was an old coal furnace. It was all warped. That's what caused the fire. It was piled high with junk, down in the basement."

