

Anna and the General

By David Radcliff

*A story about peace from the life of Church of the Brethren leader Anna Mow
For two readers*

Reader One: She was a very...unusual...person, Anna Mow was. At one time or another in her life, she was a Church of the Brethren missionary, seminary teacher, Mother of the Year, author, sought-after youth speaker....and that doesn't say anything about the way she looked.

Reader Two: Later in life—and she lived into her 80's—she was stooped over, wore her hair in a bun, favored wire rim glasses, her upper teeth protruded a bit, and she had a laugh that sounded more like a cackle—well, you can begin to get the picture.

One: But most of all, she loved. She loved people, she loved God, she loved the world we live in. She even loved her “enemies.”

Two: Here's one example of this love: Once upon a time, one of Anna's sons was subject to the military draft. Since the Church of the Brethren didn't believe in fighting and killing, he applied to be a conscientious objector. This meant he wouldn't go into the army to fight, but would serve the country by doing other peaceful work instead.

One: Even though this was a legal thing for young people to do, Anna's son's claim to be a C.O. was turned down by his local draft board—they were going to put him in the military anyway. This was a crisis, since the son knew he would have to follow Jesus rather than fight. So Anna decided to go right to the top.

Two: She wrote a letter to General Hershey, the director of the Selective Service System—the part of the government that selected young people for the military. She told him what had happened, how sincere her son was, what a crisis this decision created for him, and asked if he could do something about it.

One: Some time passed, and then Anna received a letter from the general. He told her that her son's C.O. claim would be honored, and he wouldn't have to serve in the army. You can imagine this was a great relief to Anna and her son. She wrote a letter thanking the general for his intervention on their behalf.

Two: But the story doesn't end there. Some time after that, Anna was in an airport...

One: —she really got around for a little ole' lady—

Two: ...and there was General Hershey. He was a very big man, and in his general's uniform looked even more imposing.

One: Anna was...well...very small by comparison. She recognized him...

Two: —lots of people would in those days, since he was often in the news—and not very popular, we might add—

One: ...and she walked—or “waddled”—over to him.

Two: She pulled on the sleeve of his uniform to get his attention, then introduced herself, and reminded him of their exchange of letters and what he had done for her.

One: He said that he remembered corresponding with her, and that he was glad to help.

Two: Then she thanked him for his help, he told her she was welcome—and turned to go.

One: But before he could leave, Anna said, “And General Hershey, I want you to know that I pray for you every day.”

[slight pause]

Two: The general was a bit in shock—then his eyes began to get misty—his shoulders began to shake—and he started to cry.

One: “Lady,” he said, “I have people curse me, call me every name in the book, send me hate mail—they even burn me in effigy on college campuses. But I’ve never had anyone tell me they prayed for me. Bless you, woman.” He bent down to her, took her smaller hands in his larger ones, held them for a few moments—then they parted.

Two: Love. Sister Anna knew it for what it was—the most powerful force on earth.

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Based on a conversation with Anna Mow
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