

Stay a Little Longer

JILL HARTWELL GEOFFRION

I turned left out of the Hilton parking lot and cranked up the volume on the tape player. Instinctively, I began singing and swaying along with the music. I was surprised at how loudly and enthusiastically my voice joined those blaring out of the sound system.

I had heard "Stay" for the first time during the Re-Imagining weekend that was now drawing to a close. I can't remember if Sweet Honey in the Rock (an ensemble of African American women who, as the Re-Imagining literature stated, "... sing fiercely of being fighters, tenderly of being in love, and knowingly of being women") sang it at their concert on the second night of the conference. Maybe it had become familiar as I'd listened to the "Still on the Journey" cassette as I drove to and from the conference each day.

*The clock on the wall, says it's time to go,
But I know my heart really wants you to stay a while.*

As I headed west on Highway 394, I glanced up to see if there was a sunset in front of me. It was early afternoon, but it seemed to be much later—a brilliant orange afterglow time, full of the beauty of what had been and the apprehension of what seemed like a descending darkness.

When the song was over, I rewound the tape to its beginning and pushed PLAY. As my voice rejoined the women's voices, it had lost none of its passion. I sang my experience using the words of this song.

*Sitting here with you is so sweet, so divine
Like the sound of the wind, whistlin thru the trees . . .*

The Re-Imagining experience was a breath of fresh air in my life. After the first evening of shared worship, nourishment, listening, and talking, I barely slept. How could I? In the Re-Imagining Christian community, I had felt so at home—a rare experience for me during church events. All of me—my senses, intellect, hurts, and hopes—had been engaged by the process. I felt very alive and thus awake. I spent most of the night praying, celebrating with God the wonder of this experience. I got up the next morning feeling refreshed, excited, and ready for more.

But now, four days and nights later, the conference was over. As I sang the same words over, I felt water filling my eyes and spilling beyond them.

Wanting to honor the loss that is always a part of good-byes, I rewound the tape and let my singing of the words move me to more tears.

*When I'm with you baby, not a word, needs to be said
Tender love, I'm asking you to stay . . .*

I hadn't said a lot at the conference. I was surprised that when I did speak, the women around me listened carefully and heard with their ears and their hearts. Receiving understanding in such beautiful ways meant having to speak less. No wonder I was now begging the experience as a whole to stay.

I turned up the volume to its loudest setting and opened the sunroof. I wanted my prayer to be heard, even if it meant the freezing November Minnesota air was pouring in to the car. If singing at the top of my lungs to the God of the universe would make a difference, I was ready and willing.

Why don't you stay a little bit longer?

I pleaded for the conference to stay with me, even though I knew that the last session was over. I couldn't imagine or embody any other response. It seemed both pointless and meaningful. So I kept on singing.

Just to live my life with you would be so sweet, so divine . . .

How would I stay in touch with the Re-Imagining experience? I feared the worst. What if I was never again in such a creative Christian environment? Just the thought of it hurt deep, deep within. Giving voice to my apprehensions somehow moved my singing from being a prayer of lament to one of hope.

Why don't you stay a little bit longer?

In fact it was I who was going to stay. I had moved to the Minneapolis/Saint Paul area less than three months before. One of the realizations of the conference was that this metropolitan Minnesota environment allowed Christian women to express their love for God in beautiful, creative ways that nurtured my deep spiritual passions.

I lifted my left hand to my cheek and gently brushed my tears toward the outside of my face. I pushed REWIND and took a deep breath. I moved the fingers of my right hand across my right cheek and then pushed PLAY—again.

I turned down the volume and sang, "I'm asking you to stay with me a little longer."

Stay a little bit longer . . .

This time as the song came to an end I pushed the STOP and EJECT buttons. I was afraid of overheating the tape. I knew I would need to sing along at other times, even though I didn't know when they would be.

How could I have known that Re-Imagining was not only a conference that I had been a part of? How could I have known that as I sunk my life into the Minnesota soil of my childhood I would become part of the Re-Imagining Community of Minnesota, which did not exist yet?

One light, one breath, one spirit, one heart

One love, lives between us

When you drink, my thirst is satisfied

And when I tire I know you'll be there to give me rest . . .

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Alias **Armstrong** Artichoker **Bednarowski**
 Bender **Berneking** Betenbaugh **Bishop**
 Blagen **Bohler** Bolding **Bomsta**
 Bullard-Zerweck **Campos** Challenger



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and

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