

Ruth Ratliff Smith
and
Effie Waller Smith



Ruth Smith's Two Mothers

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FORWARD

Ruth's story is recounted as a part of Trinity's rich history of its school and teachers. It has a heritage that should not be lost, it begs to be preserved and passed on.

And the stories of Ruth Ratliff Smith and Effie Waller Smith must be told side by side, for their lives entwine in a unique and fascinating way.

Ruth's story is a tale of courage and persistence as she pursued a career in Christian education while being 'partly colored' - and all the while searching for a spiritual home. For 28 years her life was one of an odyssey. Her primary education was very difficult because of the rural school for colored persons she had to attend four to five miles through the woods and over the hills outside of Pikeville, Kentucky. So difficult was the trek to school, that at age 17, she was still in 6th grade. Ruth lived in town in sight of the public school, but she was not allowed to go there. But that all changed when Effie returned to Kentucky from a new life in Waukesha, Wisconsin to carry out the wishes of her deceased friend, Polly Mullins Ratliff. Polly was Ruth's biological mother. Polly had died seven years previously, and it was her wish that after her death (which seemed imminent), Effie would adopt Ruth as her legal daughter and have her properly educated in the North. All that was fulfilled through Waukesha public schools (with no segregation) and Dr. Martin Luther College. Ruth also had the strong desire to perform religious services for her Lord. That was accomplished at Trinity Lutheran School of Neenah, where she was a full time teacher for 34 years.

Ruth also searched relentlessly for a true religious home. It was an arduous journey from exposures to Pentecostalism, Methodism, Plymouth Brethern Gospel Chapel, radio religious programs, and finally to the Lutheran faith.

Ruth has fulfilled all her goals and now waits patiently in gentle retirement to be called to her heavenly home. There, service will be given joyously to her Heavenly Father and her Savior - eternally.

There are no more odysseys and searches for Ruth Ratliff Smith.

Effie's story is one of a unique relationship between the Waller and Ratliff families, perhaps all the way back to the U.S. Civil War era.

The Waller family (Effie's father) came from a slavery background and so did the Ratliff family (Effie's mother). Even though there is no firm verification of a family relationship, there is a suggestion because of race and family name, Ruth's white father, Ransom Ratliff, could have been an extended member of the Ratliff family who first owned and then later freed Effie's mother, Sibbie Ratliff Waller.

Effie's life is somewhat of a parallel with that of Ruth's, although starting 38 years earlier in 1879. (Ruth was born in 1917.) Effie was born in the Pikeville area; attended a rural school for colored persons; went on to a teachers college to receive an education degree (or certificate); and taught in rural schools in her home town area and Eastern Tennessee. But unlike Ruth, she had a keen interest in writing and became an accomplished poetry writer with publications in major literary magazines.

Also, Effie was a devout Christian with membership in the Methodist faith, and her devotion eventually led her to Waukesha, Wisconsin and intimate involvement in Ruth's life.

A detached involvement, but always working its way to an intimate involvement, began some 25 years earlier when Effie taught in the rural school for colored persons outside of Pikeville. Polly Mullins, Ruth's future mother, was a student of Effie. And, further, Effie roomed and boarded at Polly's grandparents' home. Effie and Polly became close friends, a relationship that lasted a lifetime with Polly and then a lifetime with Ruth.

Polly Mullins Ratliff died of a goiter condition while Effie was in Waukesha - and then seven years later, Effie returned to Kentucky to visit its people and the daughter (Ruth) of her dear deceased friend, Polly Mullins Ratliff. While in Kentucky, she made arrangements to take Ruth back to Waukesha with her, for it was the desire of Polly, if she should die of her goiter illness, to adopt Ruth so Ruth could have a proper education in the North.

All of Polly's desires were fulfilled when Ruth became in 1937, Effie's legally adopted daughter.

Effie continued to live in Waukesha while Ruth completed her education and took a permanent teaching position at Trinity-Neenah's Christian Day School. Then, living alone, aging, and failing in health, Effie was compelled to come to live with adopted daughter in Neenah, Wisconsin. She lived the remainder of her life in Neenah - and there, also, came to understand she should change her Methodist faith to that of the Lutheran faith of Ruth. Her final earthly resting place is in Oak Hill Cemetery, Neenah, "far away, far, far away" from her childhood home in East Kentucky.

The picture on the cover features Ruth's two mothers. It is fitting that such a precious old picture should lead to Ruth's and Effie's stories, so rich in family history.

RUTH SMITH

Trinity Teacher, 1945-1979

Memories of Home

Thoughts of the dear old homestead
Haunt my memory today;
Thoughts of my home, my childhood's home
Far away, far, far away.

Far away in East Kentucky,
There beneath her towering hills,
Rich in forestry and beauty,
Watered well with brooks and rills,

On a farm - the old, old homestead -
Which to me is still endeared,
I was born a baby tiny,
And to womanhood was reared.

Often rang through that old farm house
Childish voices gay and sweet;
Oft its walls of log have echoed
Patter of childish feet.

Oh, my eyes are getting tear-filled,
As before my memory come
Those scenes of my early childhood
In my East Kentucky home.

Some of that dear homestead's members,
Many past-gone years have trod
In a far and distant country;
Others sleep beneath the sod.

O'er the graves of those dear dead ones
Marked by moss-grown chiseled stone
All the years in wild luxuriance
Have the grass and flowers grown.

The poetry¹ was written by Effie Waller Smith, the adoptive mother of Ruth Ratliff Smith, and it expresses her own memories of home when she wrote back in the 1903-1908 era of her life (1879-1960). But since places and circumstances in Ruth Smith's life parallel those of Effie Waller Smith's, the poetic memories mirror Ruth's life, especially as a child. Various other poems are quoted throughout this story of Ruth, for they blend naturally with Ruth. Once more the poems yearn to come to life as they walk in harmony with Ruth's own memories, ideals, and spiritual nature.

The story of Ruth Smith is unique and ever so fascinating. Another writer² terms her life an odyssey. I can agree with that since an odyssey is an extended adventurous wandering or an intellectual or spiritual quest. Actually, her life is all of those.

The wanderings took her from the foothills of the Cumberland Mts. in East Kentucky, to various denominational churches, to a WELS church, to Dr. Martin Luther College, to Cleveland, Ohio, and to Trinity-Neenah.

The intellectual (educational) quest went from a log cabin school (for colored people), to Waukesha High School, to Dr. Martin Luther College, with vocational and correspondence schools along the way.

And the spiritual quest extended from Pentecostal exposure as a child, to First Methodist Church in Waukesha, to Plymouth Brethren Gospel Chapel, to Moody Bible Institute of Chicago (very briefly), to Dr. Walter A. Maier of "The Lutheran Hour", to Trinity- Waukesha (WELS), to Concordia College of River Forest, IL (very briefly), to Dr. Martin Luther College, to Missouri Synod congregation in the colored district of Cleveland, Ohio, and to Trinity-Neenah.

The combination of the wanderings and the complexity of the quests, as well as the unrelenting direction that was followed, invites the writer to suggest that the path of Ruth's life was not in her hands. All the things that unfolded in sort of a progression seem a little unusual, but still in what could be considered a norm. But our Heavenly Father uses the norms of life to put His people on His path according to His plan. It is suggested that Ruth faithfully followed God's path, even though at times maybe unwittingly. We know that the Holy Spirit works to guide God's people along His chosen path.

Entwined in the odyssey and the quests is Effie Waller Smith. She has already been introduced through her poetry. But Effie is more than poetry in Ruth's life and odyssey.³

It goes back to the home area of Pikeville, Kentucky; generally, after the U.S. Civil War to the early 1900's. Both had their homes in or near Pikeville and had colored ancestry. In fact, Effie's parents were freed slaves at the time of the U.S. Civil War.

Effie grew up in the area, pursued an education degree at Normal School in Frankfort, Kentucky, and with degree in hand, taught in the school for colored people near Pikeville. Ruth's mother, Polly Mullins, was a student there, so Effie was her teacher. And, as was the custom at that time (around 1902), the teacher roomed and boarded at one of the student's homes. (This took the place of a salary.) Effie did this at the Mullin's home. They became fast friends, maybe to the point of being like family. Even after leaving Pikeville to teach in other segregated schools, Effie continued to correspond with Polly and the two women remained very close friends. All this will play a critical role in Ruth's life 15-25 years later.

Now, Ruth Smith is a retired Trinity teacher (already for 25 years) who had taught there for 34 years (1945-1979). She filled the vacancy left by Florence Witte when Florence left Trinity to get married and move to Minnesota.

Ruth's whole life, with its odyssey, unfolds with the help of her adoptive mother's poetry.

RUTH RATLIFF SMITH



- BORN: 13 OCT 1917 IN PIKEVILLE, KENTUCKY
- PARENTS: RANSOM RATLIFF AND POLLY MULLINS RATLIFF
- ADOPTIVE MOTHER: EFFIE WALLER SMITH IN 1937 IN WAUKESHA, WI.
- EDUCATION:
 - PRIMARY - PIKEVILLE, KENTUCKY
 - HIGH SCHOOL - WAUKESHA H.S., 1941 GRADUATE
 - COLLEGE - DR. MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE, 1944 GRADUATE
- TEACHER:
 - 1ST CALL - ST. PHILIP (MS), CLEVELAND, OHIO, 1944-1945
 - 2ND CALL - TRINITY, NEENAH, WI, 1945-1979
- RETIREMENT: NEENAH, WI, 1979-?



PIKEVILLE, KENTUCKY - 1935

- RUTH RATLIFF AT AGE 18 IN DOOR OF GRANDPARENT'S CABIN ON PETER FORK.
- THE CABIN HAD NO ELECTRICITY, WINDOWS WITHOUT GLASS OR SCREENS, OUTSIDE SHUTTERS TO CLOSE OUT WIND, RAIN, SNOW AND COLD.
- SANITARY FACILITIES ARE OUTSIDE.

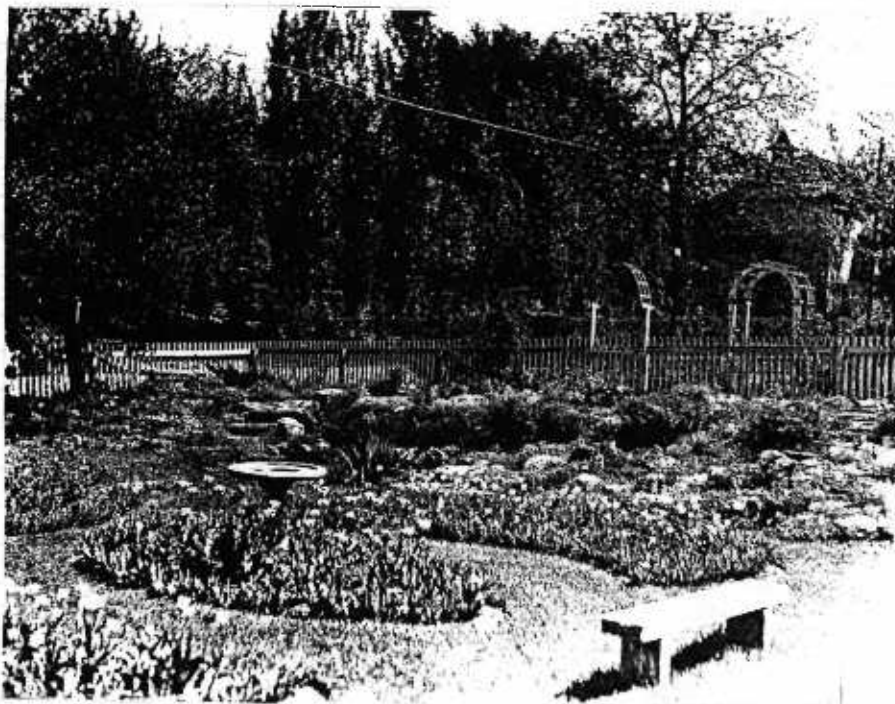


AKEVILLE, KENTUCKY - 1935

- RUTH RATLIFF AT AGE 18 WITH GRANDMOTHER JENNY MULLINS.
- THEY ARE OUTSIDE THE GRANDPARENT'S CABIN. NOTE THE CHIMNEY FOR THE FIREPLACE, WHICH WAS USED FOR HEATING AND COOKING.
- THE CABIN HAD TWO ROOMS.
- RUTH HAD BEEN LIVING WITH HER GRANDPARENTS SINCE 1927 WHEN HER MOTHER DIED AT AGE 36.



RUTH RATLIFF SMITH WITH FATHER, RANSOM RATLIFF (CENTER) AND BROTHER, WILLIAM RATLIFF (LEFT).



WAUKESHA ROCK GARDEN - 1938

- AT EFFIE'S WAUKESHA HOME.
- NEW OWNERS REPLACED IT WITH SWIMMING POOL.
- EFFIE MOVED FROM WAUKESHA TO NEENAH IN 1950.



RUTH SMITH'S NEENAH HOME

- ON CONGRESS STREET JUST NORTH OF CECIL ST.
- PURCHASED IN 1952 WHEN LAND SOUTH OF CECIL ST. WAS ALL FARMLAND.
- 2004: STILL LIVING IN IT AND CARING FOR IT.



TRINITY FACULTY

DATE: FACULTY 1953-54.

SITTING L. TO R.: RUTH SMITH, ANNA KAHRIS, CAROL STROHSCHN

STANDING L. TO R.: SYLVESTER QUAM, WINFRIED STOEKLI,
MRS. TOD BARNES, WILLIAM HELLERMAN

Childhood in Pikeville, Kentucky

Memories of home tell of "far away in East Kentucky/there beneath her towering hills,/...." This is the childhood home of Ruth.

Ruth was born in the small coal mining town of Pikeville, Kentucky on 23 October 1917 to Ransom and Polly Ratliff. Ransom had white ancestry and Polly was mixed. This caused no problem for living and working in town, for there was no segregation for this. But later it became a problem in the matter of schooling.

The matter of religious life was also mixed. Ransom was a nominal Roman Catholic (so had no religious influence), but his wife, Polly, was an ardent Pentecostal. This had an influence on Ruth in various ways.

The steadfastness of Pentecostalism, although not correct, took hold of her young spiritual nature. All her young life she sought after the true nature of God and the correct interpretation and application of Scripture. Pentecostalism was not going to be her real spiritual life, but the twists and turns of following Pentecostalism (and some other religions) eventually led her to the true spiritual nature.

Pentecostalism had one serious drawback for Ruth. Her reason was challenged by the proclamations of the faith healers, particularly, in the matter of handling snakes like rattlers and copperheads. An old newspaper article (date unknown) shown to the writer by Ruth reported this:

Snake Bites Man in Church Ritual

Short brought snakes to the service and Roscoe Mullins was the last person who handled the fat yellow timber rattler that struck brother Pelfry, 65, on the left temple. Pelfry and Mullins were the only persons who actually handled the snakes. Pelfry refused to seek medical help and died shortly before dawn as a score of betheren knelt in prayer around his bed.

The members of the church who handle poisonous snakes do so because they believe the practice is one of tests of faith set by Christ in the 16th chapter of Mark* to distinguish true followers.

*Writer's note.

This refers to Mark 16: 15-18. However, there is serious doubt by Biblical commentators as to whether these verses (all from 9-20) belong in the original Gospel of Mark. They are absent from important early manuscripts and display certain peculiarities of vocabulary, style, and theological content that are unlike the rest of Mark. His Gospel probably ended at 16:8, or its original ending has been lost.

And so, Pentecostalism had various influences on the spiritual nature of Ruth. Later, the religions and spiritual life of Effie, her adoptive mother, will further have various influences on Ruth's spiritual nature. The path that Ruth's Lord prepared for her took strange crooks and turns, but finally led her to the true God with His true ways. That happens later in her life.

The matter of education was difficult for Ruth. Being of mixed ancestry (partly colored), she was not allowed to attend public school, which was in sight of her home. Instead, she along with her older brother had to trudge over the hills and through the woods for four to five miles to the school for the colored.

The long trek on foot, and frequently in bad weather, for a very young Ruth was so difficult that regular attendance was not possible. It took three years for Ruth to complete third grade. Moreover, at age 17 she was still in sixth grade. Things did not look good for Ruth or her education. But Effie Waller Smith would change that by a strange combination of circumstances.

The school for colored over the hills and through the woods had these critical features:

- . A two-room frame building encompassing K-12.
- . Older children instructed in one room.
- . Younger children in the other.
- . Instructional aids were meager.
- , Textbooks were outdated and worn.
- . A library did not exist.
- . A husband and wife team (colored) were the teachers.

The time frame for Ruth and the school was about 1922-1934. Ruth related this little story about her early education:

I am naturally left-handed, but now do most things with my right hand. This is because as a little girl in school whenever I did things left-handed (most notably writing), I got rapped on the knuckles. For some reason back then being left-handed was a bad thing that had to be corrected. I learned to do things "correctly".

Effie Waller Smith Leaves Kentucky for Waukesha, WI

Effie Waller spent 15 years teaching in the rural schools of Kentucky. During these years, she wrote her poetry and a few short stories. She married twice. The first quickly ended in one year due to an unfaithful husband. The second left her a widow when her husband was shot while assisting the sheriff in an arrest of a moonshiner. The second husband was Charles Smith. They had one child who died very young.

Effie had many tragedies. But she was a devout Methodist who drew comfort from her Christian faith and was determined to go on with her life.

Then a sequence of events and circumstances not only brought Effie Waller Smith to Waukesha, WI, but Ruth Ratliff as well. The complete sequence is:

- . About 1902. Effie teaches at the school for colored outside of Pikeville. Polly Mullins is one of her students and Effie rooms and boards at the home of Polly Mullins' grandparents. Polly and Effie become long lasting close friends.
- . 1908. Effie Waller marries Charles Smith. They have one child who dies very young. Effie becomes a widow in 1911 when Charles is shot in the line of duty.
- . Effie, a devout Methodist, draws comfort in the midst of tragedy from her Christian faith.
- . 1911-1917. Effie goes on teaching in Kentucky's rural schools, writes poetry, and is busily engaged in her routine life.
- . 1916. Effie's father dies.

- . 1917. Ruth Ratliff is born to Ransom and Polly Mullins.
- . 1918. Religionists from the north come to Kentucky to canvas, missionize, sell religious articles and literature. Effie is impressed by their zeal - and is especially intrigued by their paradisiacal description of the commune maintained at their religious headquarters in Waukesha, WI.
- . 1918. Effie Smith and her mother, Sibbie Waller, travel to Waukesha to live in the communal resident hall of the Metropolitan Holiness Church Association.
- . 1924. Effie and her mother are disillusioned with the commune and they move out. They purchase a private dwelling in Waukesha.
- . 1922-1934. Ruth struggles to get an education at Pikeville's rural school for colored people. At age 17, she finished 6th grade.
- . 1927. Effie's mother, Sibbie, dies.
- . 1927. Polly Mullins Ratliff dies because of a goiter condition she refused to have medical treatment for. The Pentecostal faith forbade her from seeking medical treatment. She is 36 years old.
- . 1927. Ruth, now at age 10, goes to live with her maternal grandparents in a two-room log cabin.
- . 1928. Ruth's father remarries. Ruth continues to live with her grandmother, because she does not get along with her stepmother and her grandmother badly needs her assistance.
- . 1928-1934. Effie's brother, a retired RR worker, comes to live with Effie. The brother dies in 1934.
- . 1934. Effie is now all alone in Waukesha. She goes back home to Kentucky to visit its people and the daughter, Ruth Ratliff, of her deceased friend, Polly Mullins. Effie informs Ruth about what Polly had said many years before when ill with the goiter, "If I were to die, you should adopt Ruth and have her properly educated in the North."

1935. Ruth and Effie leave Pikeville on the train and two days later are in Waukesha. Ruth's grandparents are very much against her leaving, but her father thought it would be in the best interests of his daughter. Ruth is age 18.

1935-1937. Effie goes through the long process of legally adopting Ruth Ratliff. On 8 May 1937, Ruth Ratliff becomes Ruth Ratliff Smith. Ruth is age 20. Effie is age 58.

Through many twists and turns, Ruth is on the path her Heavenly Father had for her, although she and others do not know it at the time. Perhaps, we can apply a little bit of Scripture to Ruth's path.

Isaiah 30:21: Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it."

Certainly, Ruth turned "to the right or to the left", but in the beginning would have many troubles to follow those "rights" and "lefts."

Isaiah 48:17: This is what the Lord says - your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go."

The Lord sought the best for Ruth in the midst of tragedy and heartache.

Romans 11:33: Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing.

This is part of a doxology by Paul praising God. Ruth can do the same.

Psalm 32:8: I will instruct you and teach you in the way in which you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Psalm 16:11: You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Waukesha to Dr. Martin Luther College

Ruth and Effie arrived in Waukesha from Pikeville in March 1935. The school year had not ended, and when Ruth left Pikeville, she was attending seventh grade (at age 17). The school year in Waukesha was still in progress, so Ruth was immediately enrolled to finish the seventh grade. Also, it was critical that she get adjusted to a new education system.

All went well with her adjustment, for she went on to graduate with the 1941 Senior class of Waukesha High School with a ranking of 143 out of 313. Even vocational school courses and summer school were undertaken. The pursuit of education was well in progress.

As Ruth progressed through her education, several of her instructors recognized that she had the characteristics which would make her a good teacher and strongly urged her to pursue a career in education. But the type of career was not yet fixed; that took some other critical events. Again, the events twisted this way and that, but an unrelenting direction was becoming clear, that of a religious nature.

While striving to meet her educational goals, Ruth sought also to achieve her spiritual goals. That involved the quest for a suitable church. The quest wandered as noted:

- . Effie severed all ties with the Metropolitan Holiness Church Association and joined the First Methodist Church.
- . Ruth attended Methodist services, but was displeased with the liberal theology it followed. She desired a small church which taught the fundamental doctrines that were so prominent in her Pentacostal background.
- . Ruth visited various Waukesha churches. It was at the Plymouth Brethren Gospel Chapel that Ruth liked what she heard and saw, and applied for membership. She was rebaptized in Pewaukee Lake in the name of the Triune God after it was pointed out to her that her Pentacostal baptism might not be valid because it had been performed only "in the name of Jesus."
- . Ruth remained with the Brethren only six months, for the lay preacher who first got her attention left for California and no good replacement could be secured.

- . Ruth again went to attend the Methodist Church because of Effie's insistence. However, the pastor was a rank liberal and that kept Ruth from regular worship.
- . Instead, Ruth spent Sunday mornings tuning the radio for religious broadcasts. A program sponsored by the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago got special attention. In its broadcasts the Institute proclaimed fundamental Christian doctrine and told of its mission of training men and women for service in the Christian ministry. This definitely caught Ruth's interest for a Junior in high school who, on the one hand, was being encouraged by her teachers to seek a career in the field of education, and, on the other hand, was being urged by Effie to get involved in some sort of Christian service.
- . Ruth decided to combine both counsels by seeking admittance to Moody Bible Institute in an education track. Moody Institute confirmed Ruth's pre-enrollment, and emphasized that it was a Christian school and that race had no bearing on its admission policy.
- . (Ruth's path and direction took a big step in clarity.)
- . Ruth attended services at Trinity-Waukesha, was pleased by what she heard, went to instruction class and brought Effie with her, was convinced that the Lutheran Church had what she was looking for - God's Word in its truth and purity - and became a confirmed member on 1 January 1941.
- . Ruth informed the Trinity Pastor that she wished to be active in Christian education and had already been accepted at Moody Bible Institute. Then, the Pastor pointed out that Moody Institute was not a Lutheran school and further, did not maintain all the scriptural doctrines found in the Bible.

Next, he stated that there was a Lutheran teacher training college in the Chicago area and suggested that Ruth apply there.
- . Ruth withdrew from Moody Institute and transferred her enrollment to Concordia College, River Forest, Illinois. Moody Institute honored her transfer request and sent her application over to Concordia. Concordia College accepted her as a student.

- . On 2 September 1941, Ruth entered Concordia of River Forest. She wrote an entrance exam, received her schedule, paid certain fees, was assigned her dorm room, and started to settle in.
- . Ruth's settle-in was brief, a notice called her to go to see the college President. Within a few moments the college President asked, "Are you colored?" She answered, "Partly." Then, the question followed, "Well, who sent you here anyway?" Answer, "My Pastor in Waukesha." The President then declared, "You can't stay here. It just won't work out. In fact, you cannot spend the night here."
- . Highly dejected, Ruth returned to Waukesha. Ruth's short-time Concordia College roommates were aghast, and her Waukesha Pastor was equally shocked about what happened at Concordia College.
- . Ruth was informed that the Wisconsin Synod had its own teacher's college, Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) in New Ulm, Minnesota. No time was lost to contact DMLC, with an explanation about her situation. A vacancy was discovered in one of the women's residences and they did not mind if they had a roommate who was partly colored.
- . On 6 September 1941, Ruth was registered and settled in her new home in New Ulm, Minnesota.

Now, the path for Ruth was straight and well-defined. It would stay that way for the next three years until she graduated from DMLC with her degree in Christian education.

DMLC to Back to Waukesha

The three years at DMLC were wonderful years. Ruth was well received by the faculty and her fellow students. Her classmates remember her as being friendly and easy going. The "partly colored" was no problem whatever. No one ever recalled any racial slurs ever being made about Ruth. In fact, when Ruth's unfortunate experience at Concordia, River Forest, became known, the collective response was one of disbelief.

In the spring of 1944, Ruth's class had dwindled to nine people. They would soon receive their teaching assignments from the Synod Assignment Committee. Ruth was about to experience another strange twist or two in her path to a Christian education teaching career. It happened like this:

- . Everyone was assigned except Ruth. It was explained that things were "touchy" and that matters might not "work out."
- . Ruth was shattered. Once again her ethnic origin stood in the way. The full reason for her not being assigned can no longer be determined.
- . An assessment of Ruth's abilities did not differ greatly from many other candidates at that time. The Faculty of DMLC had no reservations about her teaching ability or having her serve in one of the Christian Day Schools of the Wisconsin Synod.

Her grade school level recommendation was "lower grades".
- . Vacancies existed and were being filled by second year students. Even then some congregations did not get a teacher for the primary grades.
- . Yet, Ruth was not assigned.
- . No specific reasons can be found for her lack of assignment. (The writer suggests that perhaps the people in control at the highest level lacked sufficient courage and trust. They feared that there might be "problems" with her "partly colored" features, for they may not have known how to deal with such supposed "problems" and preferred to stay way clean of "touchy" situations.)
- . The 9 June 1944 DMLC graduation was held and Ruth got her diploma. One milestone was accomplished in her academic career. The most important one was yet to come in an unusual way in another year. The twists of Ruth's path will abruptly turn back toward a long-term straight.
- . For now, Ruth sadly returned to Waukesha and her clerking position at the Sears store.

Waukesha to Teaching at Trinity-Neenah

Ruth worked at the Sears store until early summer (1944). Then, a notice came from the Missionary Board of the Lutheran Synodical Conference that the Board thought it had a place she could serve. St. Philip congregation in Cleveland, Ohio was trying to start a school and needed a teacher to spearhead the project. Ruth accepted this "call" and left for Cleveland at the end of August 1944.

St. Philip was a Missouri Synod congregation (we were in fellowship then) located in the colored district of Cleveland. The Pastor was white and all the members were black or of mixed race, members were from all social strata, including a number of highly educated individuals - doctors, lawyers, etc.. In general, these people were in favor of starting a school, but they did not want it to be a segregated institution.

Ruth's duties included instructing Saturday morning pre-confirmation class, teaching Sunday School, making some sick calls, and visiting all the members of the congregation to encourage support for the founding of a parochial school.

After seven months of service to St. Philip congregation, Ruth asked the Missionary Board to release her from her duties. She was convinced that the members of St. Philip did not want the kind of school which the Missionary Board envisioned. The Board granted her request, and in April 1945 Ruth returned once again to Waukesha. But this time she did not know that it was going to be very short.

Ruth reclaimed her old job at Sears. (The Manager must have been very tolerant of her comings and goings.) The Manager now encouraged Ruth to stay on as a permanent employee and work her way up. However, Ruth still wished to be a teacher in a Christian school. She was persistent in the pursuit of her goal.

Then during the late spring of 1945, Ruth addressed a letter to the Executive Secretary of the Board of Education of the Wisconsin Synod. She asked for her name to be placed on a call list with the notation "partly colored" appearing behind it.

Now Ruth's path of twists and turns takes one last critical twist.

About the time Ruth asked to have her name put on the call list, Miss Florence Witte informed Trinity-Neenah congregation that she was going to resign from her call at the end of the 1945 school year to pursue marriage plans during the coming summer. Marriage would take her away to Minnesota.

Trinity congregation would need a teacher in the fall of 1945. The pastor asked the District President for a call list and Ruth's name was on it. The Pastor, Pastor Schaefer, became interested in Ruth and sought to find out

more about her. He discovered that Lillian Quandt, a daughter of Trinity congregation, had been a classmate of Ruth at DMLC. He also learned that Gertrude Stoekli, a sister to one of Trinity's teachers, knew Ruth. Pastor Schaefer received fine recommendations about Ruth.

Pastor Schaefer then got in contact with the District President and told him that he was planning to recommend to the congregation to call Ruth. The response of the District President was that of strenuously advising Schaefer against doing such a thing. He told him that she would be trouble and that the kids would run out on her. (The inference was that she was different - "colored" - (actually, she looked like she had a white person's nice even sun tan), and that would scare the kids to the point of running out of the classroom the first time they saw her as their teacher.) Pastor Schaefer would have none of that kind of talk and is reported to have responded, "I don't care if she's as black as the ace of spades. We need a teacher!" To that the District President replied, "Well, if you get yourself into hot water, don't come crying to me." (Again, at high levels there are indications that seem like lack of courage or trust in God's servants and the people that are to be served by them. It is not known if there were previous "problems" to cause concern in this Trinity's case.)

Trinity's Board of Education approved that a call be extended to Ruth Smith. On 29 June 1945, Ruth received a special delivery letter from Neenah - her call to Trinity Lutheran School.

Ruth held the call only a short time before notifying Trinity that she would accept the call.

And in August 1945, Ruth arrived in Neenah - and to begin to fully satisfy her goal to serve her Lord as a teacher in a Christian Day School. Her duties for the coming school year included teaching 4th and 5th grades (48 children), conducting Sunday School three Sundays per month, and belonging to the choir. The salary was \$100 per month, according to the basic salary structure for teachers at Trinity.

Ruth went on to be well received by all the members of Trinity. The Staff enjoyed working with her and had great respect for her teaching aptitude and outlook. The children loved and trusted her. The parents expressed admiration for her way with their offspring. Indeed, Ruth maintained an enviable record at Trinity.

Ruth's twisted path was now indeed straight - and true in the direction that Ruth's Heavenly Father had planned and guided her along. Ruth had courage and trust to persistently struggle along the path that too many times seemingly was leading in the wrong direction and had so many hardships and heartaches.

Then, one day six years into her teaching career at Trinity, an amazing thing happened that redeemed some of the prejudice and misguided assumptions about her. There was a knock at her classroom door; it was the former District President who advised against her call to Trinity. He asked if he might visit her classroom. Ruth welcomed him and he sat down in the room and observed for about two hours. Then he asked if he could see her for a moment out in the hall.

In private, he proceeded to tell Ruth that he could see that she was a very capable teacher and that the children loved her. Further, he confessed that he had been wrong about her and that he had been thoroughly mistaken in his advice to Pastor Schaefer at the time she was under consideration for the call to Trinity.

Time, experience, and perhaps good self-examination cured the problems and misgivings the "higher levels" had in the not too distant past.

Now, consider as a side note, a similar happening at Trinity-Neenah. It was late spring in 1989 and Trinity needed a first grade teacher, and it fell to the Synod Assignment Committee to assign a teacher to Trinity's vacant first grade position. From DMLC's graduating class. Miss Beverly Gray was a good candidate for that position and she was colored, in fact, darkly colored. Trinity had no problem with that what-so-ever and she was openly welcomed into the congregation and teaching position. Students and parents loved her. This writer's granddaughter was a student in her first grade class in 1992-93 and she loved Miss Gray. In fact, the African heritage of Miss Gray was instrumental in granddaughter wanting an American Girl doll of African heritage, the doll is beloved to this day.

Miss Gray left Trinity all too soon to get married and move away to Milwaukee. But on special occasions like confirmation, high school graduation, and the like, Miss Gray and her husband are invited back by students and parents. Many smiles and hugs (a few emotional tears) are passed around. "Problems" and "touchy" situations are non-existent - and it is doubtful if there ever were any real ones.

Ruth was well settled in her teaching career, around 1950, when her adoptive mother, Effie Waller Smith, came to live with her. Effie was now about 70 years old, was living alone in Waukesha, and her health was beginning to fade a little. It was now Ruth's turn to care for her mother. They lived in Neenah together for another 10 years before she died just four days short of 81 years.

As time went by in the school years, it became necessary for a teacher to handle only one grade. Ruth became a second grade teacher. Some of the things her students have said about her are:

- . "My mom or dad said that they had you in second grade. You must be 100 years old."
- . Stephen C. Hintz reported, "To this day I have vivid memories from her classroom of Bible stories, phonics class, penmanship practice, and arithmetic flash cards."

Perhaps, Ruth's dedication to her students and her Trinity home is demonstrated in the fact that throughout her years at Trinity Ruth received a number of calls to teach at other schools, but she was led to return them and remain in Neenah.

So, the twisted path that became straight with Ruth's call to Trinity remained straight throughout her teaching career. The path in her Lord's service still goes on, the teaching part ended at the finish of the 1978-79 school year. Thirty-four years of full time teaching were finished.

In reality, the full time career ended a little prematurely when Ruth was only 62 years old, not really at retirement age or desire. It was in the late 70's that Ruth was experiencing medical problems with her legs. Her doctor advised that she should no longer stand for extended periods of time. Very much standing is required for effective teaching. With reluctance, Ruth retired.

Retirement may have caused Ruth to reflect on things of her past life and prospects for the future. Some words from Effie's poetry may give some hint into such reflection....

Forever

We sigh for human love, from which
 A whim or chance shall sever,
 A leave unsought the love of God,
 Though God's love lasts forever.

We seek earth's peace in things that pass
 Like foam upon the river,
 While, steadfast as the stars on high,
 God's peace abides forever.

Man's help, for which we yearn, gives way,
 As trees in storm-winds quiver,
 But mightier than all human need,
 God's help remains forever.

Turn unto Thee our wavering hearts,
 O Thou who failest never;
 Give us Thy love and Thy great peace,
 And be our help forever.

RETIREMENT YEARS, 1979-?

Autumn Winds

O autumn winds, with voices far away,
 I hear you singing on the leafless hills,
 And all my heart with jubilation thrills!
 You bring to me no message of dismay,
 No tender sorrow for the year's decay;
 Rather you sing of giant trees that cast
 Their leaves aside to grapple with the blast,
 Strong and exultant for the stormy fray!

Hearing your music, glad and wild and pure,
 Sounding through night's cool, starlit spaces
 wide,

I grow weary of earth's paltry lure!
 Oh, like the trees, I too would cast aside
 The fading leaves of pleasure and of pride,
 And stand forth free to struggle and endure!

Retirement has a resemblance to Autumn Winds. Even though the winds hint that much of life is over and the end may not be far away, there are definite signs of strength. Ruth has such signs of strength. And she "stands free to struggle and endure!"

17

The poem speaks, "Rather you sing of giant trees that cast/Their leaves aside to grapple with the blast,/Strong and exultant for the stormy fray!" Let the "stormy fray" come! Ruth is the giant tree and the leaves that were cast aside were her full time teaching duties. With those duties gone, like the leaves, there is less resistance and the future can be grappled with on a more equal basis. Life goes on a little easier.

In early retirement, Ruth:

- . Did part time remedial teaching that went on for more than 10 years. No more painful standing was required.
- . In 1985, had a hip replacement at the Kennedy Center. Twenty years later the hip is still doing fine. Ruth reports that every year the Kennedy group gives an annual dinner for those who were served by it. More than 800 people attend every year and Ruth is one of them.

Maybe Ruth's legs and standing problem much earlier had to do with the hip problem.

- . Took care (alone) of her house, lawn and flower garden.
- . Walked to and from church and school (about 1 mile). She never owned or drove a car.

Ruth remained as strong as ever in the sincere faith that her loving Heavenly Father is always there to keep her strong. Some of that is portrayed in....

In Thy Secret Place

(Based on Psalm 91:1: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." KJV)

In Thy secret place, Most High,
Let us ever dwell;
Guarded by Thy watchful eye,
All shall be ever well.

For when dwelling there, we know
That we shall abide
Underneath Thy wing's great shade,
Safely by Thy side.

With Thy wings then cover us
They shall keep us warm,
And the weather chill and drear
Never can us harm.

Yea, when comes the raging storm,
 Keep us still with Thee;
 Round us put Thy mighty arms,
 And we safe shall be.

Ruth has safely come into her late retirement years. The Most High's mighty arms have certainly protected her and showered upon her His blessings. As late as 2004, and with Ruth in her 86th year of God's protection and blessings along her twisted and sure straight path, she....

- . Attends worship services and Bible study every Sunday with the aid of automobile comfort provided by two special lady friends. The knees and legs do not work well anymore.
- . Two or three years ago hurt her knees from a fall on ice. Relies heavily on a cane for walking and standing.
- . Still cares for (alone) her house, lawn and flower garden. The lawn is cut with an electric mower. She works slowly and with a limp. It is those aching knees. She discourages help, for her sentiment is, "If I can do it myself, even though I struggle, I will do it. The knees are not that much of a problem for I have the mower to hang on to." However, the cane is never far away in the grass for her to pick up if she has to move away from the mower.

All the edging along sidewalks and curb is meticulously hand clipped. (Most young people do not do that.) She does not consider the work a problem for she says. "I take my time, I have nothing else to do."

- . She really does have other things to do. There are the letters to write to the many people who correspond with her. These are friends, old students, teaching colleagues, relatives. All her letters are typed on an old mechanical typewriter (I think it needs a new ribbon), for she says an electric typewriter is hard to work with because of arthritis in her fingers.

This year (2004), Christmas letters are being typed in August and September so they are ready to go out in the Christmas season. Last year she got only five Christmas letters sent out because she was not feeling up to it, which means she was not feeling well at all. Those not receiving letters were alarmed. They ever sent letters to her neighbor inquiring if she was ok.

- Has many faithful and concerned friends. Her neighbors do special house maintenance work that she cannot do. Also, they shovel the snow when it is too deep and heavy. Ruth does light snow herself, for the shovel handle supports her like a cane.
- Does not lack for staple food supplies. Caring people send 50 grocery items at Christmas and 40 at another similar special time.
- Takes "meals on wheels". They come Monday through Friday and she reports, "each meal only costs \$3, has seven items and is very good. It is so much I have leftovers for a couple more meals. And on Friday I get a piece of apple pie."

The people who deliver the meals have become dear friends and they have a good monitoring system that tracks how her living goes.

So Ruth manages alone, but she has some surprising benefactors. One story that she related to me typifies who her benefactors can be. She told it this way:

One night not too long ago, Mr. and Mrs. John Bergstrom took me to dinner. Even his limousine was sent to pick me up. Mr. Bergstrom explained that the dinner and all was a little compensation to make up for the nuisance of misdialled calls to my house. My number and the Paper Valley Hotel number in Appleton are similar and people can easily misdial. Mr. and Mrs. Bergstrom are very nice. They own the hotel.

Ruth carries on in her self-sufficiency, along with caring friends' and neighbors' help. But Ruth knows her greatest help comes from her Lord. With her mother's poetry, it is expressed like this:

I Need Thee Every Hour

"I need Thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord,"
With majesty and power
With one accord.

Sang the village choir at church
Truthful words of prayer,
Could we but know how much
We need Thee here.

How much we need Thy guidance
 When roads are drear,
 How much we need Thy guidance
 When sin is near.

Believing on Thy precious Word
 And mercy free,
 May I thus ever pray, "Dear Lord,
 I need, oh, I need Thee."

And Ruth understands the pathway she is treading. She has always followed the path God has laid out for her in His unfailing wisdom. Her understanding is depicted....

Some Day

The pathway thou art walking now
 With weary feet, dear one,
 Hedged in by briars and poison vine,
 Bestrewn with sticks and stone:

Oh, grumble not, 'twill lead thee to
 A smoother and a better way
 Shaded by broad-armed elm trees
 And fringed with flowers -- some day.

Oh, weary toiling one,
 Whose brow is wet with sweat,
 Mind not thy task, though it be,
 Mind not the scorching heat.

Toil on and sing a little bit
 In cheerful tones and gay
 While at thy work, and don't forget
 There's rest for thee -- some day.

And thou, bereaved one,
 Why grieve and sorrow on
 With low-dropped head and weeping eyes
 For loved ones dead and gone.

Believe and trust the Father
 Who has taken them away,
 Knowest best and will give them
 Again to thee -- some day.

Ruth knows the "some day" is coming and she is fully prepared; her whole life has prepared her for the "some day." And as she waits for the "some day", she continues to tread the path as faith and fading physical strength allow her. And 34+ years of teaching the Christian path, as well as exhibiting her Christian life in God's service has prepared and strengthened others.

The preparation of Ruth can further be noted in how she clings to Christian beliefs about Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. It is expressed in her mother's poetry this way....

A Thanksgiving

Dear Lord, we thank Thee for the crops
 Of white and golden grain,
 Which now are safely gathered in
 From winter's sleet and rain!

And for the fruits and for the foods
 In cellars stored away;
 We thank Thee now, dear blessed Lord,
 On this Thanksgiving Day!

Not only for the crops this year
 (So bounteous and free)
 Of grain and fruit so plenteous
 Do we give thanks to Thee;

But for the many gifts which Thou
 Hast on us all bestowed;
 Each day, each hour and all the time,
 We thank Thee, blessed Lord!

The greatest gift Ruth is thankful for is that of a Savior born in far away Bethlehem, and a Savior risen from the tomb on Easter.

Christmas

In a country far, far away,
 Far beyond the rolling sea,
 To the little town of Bethle'em
 Shepherds wond'ring came to see
 Him of whom the heavenly choir
 Sang with gladness, sang with might,
 Of His birth and of His glory
 On that holy sacred night.

Loud those Judean hills re-echoed,
 Loud and joyously they rang,
 What the angel choir so sweetly
 And so gladly, gladly sang.
 Sang they of the Father's mercy
 Who to us the Christ-babe gave
 For our own and full redemption,
 Mercy rich and free to save!

It is not ours to listen now
 To a host of angels sing
 Loud and sweet the welcome tidings
 Which to earth they gladly bring,
 Nor ours with wonderment to gaze
 O'er a manger cradle low,
 As did once those pious shepherds
 In Judea long ago.

For the Redeemer that was born
 In that country far away,
 His coming has not been forgot,
 Still He lives and reigns today.
 Oh, Holy one of Bethlehem,
 Come be born in us to-day,
 "Love divine, all love excelling,"
 In our hearts hold perfect sway.

And on Easter, Ruth rejoices in....

He Is Risen

"He is not here," the angel said
 To Mary, who, with silent tread,
 With weeping eyes and bowed down head,
 Sought her Lord among the dead.

"The tomb is empty, come and see;
 Your Lord's not here, oh, no, not He;
 This is His tomb, and these His clothes,
 But He's not here, for He has rose."

May we like Him - our Savior rise
 From things of low and weak disguise,
 Rise from the trifling things of earth
 To things of high intrinsic worth.

Rise from the world's perplexing strife
 Unto a higher, nobler life;
 A life from sin's pollution free,
 A life of spotless purity!

And there cannot help but be some reflection on the
 many years that have passed....

When a Hundred Years Have Passed

When a hundred years have passed,
 What shall then be left at last
 Of us and the debts we wrought?
 Shall there be remaining aught
 Save green graves in churchyards old,
 Names o'ergrown with moss and mold,
 From the worn stones half effaced,
 And from human hearts erased?

When a hundred years have gone,
 Darkness and oblivion
 Shall our ended lives obscure,
 But their influence shall endure.
 Other eyes shall be upraised
 To the hills on which we gazed,
 And the path o'er which we plod
 Shall be other feet be trod,
 While our names shall be forgot;
 Yet, although they know it not,
 Those who live then, none the less,
 We shall sadden or shall bless.
 They shall bear our boon or curse,
 They shall better be or worse,
 As we who shall then lie still,
 Have lived nobly or lived ill.

When all the years have truly passed, the path that God
 laid out for Ruth Ratliff Smith ends where....

There's a Bright and Beautiful City

(Based on Rev. 21 and 22)

There's a bright and beautiful city,
 A beautiful city on high;
 A beautiful city for you and me,
 Far, far beyond the sky.

The streets of that city with gold are paved,
 The gates are of pearls pure and white,
 And the walls are of rare and precious stones
 Most beautiful and bright.

In that city are never-fading flowers,
There the Tree of Life ever grows;
And the River of Life so clear and pure
Through that beautiful city flows.

No moon nor stars ever shine there
For there never is any night,
Nor no sun is there to shine by day
For the Savior is the light.

The inhabitants never do get sick
In that fair city on high,
And they never need any grave yards there
For they never, never die.

Ruth Ratliff Smith lives now in the hearts of those who
know her - and later she shall live in the bosom of her
Father in that "bright and beautiful city, a beautiful city
on high."

NOTES

- 1 Poetry. All Effie Waller Smith poetry is quoted, whole or in part, from The Collected Works of Effie Waller Smith by the Schomberg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers.
- 2 Another writer. This writer is Pastor Stephen C. Hintz. He was a second grade student of Ruth Smith. His article, The Odyssey of Ruth Smith, was written during his senior year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The date of the original research work and writing by Pastor Hintz appears to be 1981. Pastor Hintz's article fills in and rounds out information received directly by this present writer, James Kuehl of Trinity-Neenah congregation, from Ruth Smith in the summer of 2004.
- 3 But Effie is more than poetry in Ruth's life and odyssey. Information about Ellie Waller Smith was obtained by the writer, James Kuehl, directly from Ruth Smith in conversation during the summer of 2004. Other information to round out and fill in the story came from The Collected Works of Effie Waller Smith by the Schomberg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. Particularly useful was the Introduction by David Deskins.

EFFIE WALLER SMITH

The story of Ruth Ratliff Smith just preceding this story of Effie, Ruth's adoptive mother, relates that Ruth's father, Ransom Ratliff, is white. Has he some relationship to the General Ratliff who bought Effie and her mother many years previously? The whole relationship of the Wallers and the Ratliffs can be examined more closely.

Both families came with slavery backgrounds at the time of and shortly following the U.S. Civil War. Note:

- Effie's father, Frank Waller.
- Was a servant with the Waller family in Virginia.
- Effie's mother, Sibbie Ratliff Waller.
- Was a maid with the Ratliff family.

It is possible that Frank took on the Waller family name and Sibbie did the same thing with the Ratliff family name after they were free. It was a fairly common custom then for former slaves to take on the family name of their former owners, for they had no formal family names of their own, at least names that were reasonable to be used as official names in the new free life and society. So, due to the names of Effie's parents' former owners, Effie is related to both the Wallers and the Ratliffs.

Now, the story of Effie, her father and her mother can be examined in more detail.

Frank Waller. He was born in 1845 on a plantation on the North Anna River in East Virginia. The plantation, called Cedar Point, was a large and successful operation owned by the important Waller family. Eventually, Frank became a free man. (How and when is unknown.) As a free man he was very successful in his capacities as a farmer, blacksmith, and businessman who speculated in property and who had accumulated a sizeable estate by the time of his death. And though not formally educated, he was known to be an effective manager who valued education. (The education values carried on with his daughter Effie, and Effie's adopted daughter, Ruth Ratliff Smith.) Frank Waller went on to marry Sibbie Ratliff in 1873 and established a farm on Chloe Creek about four miles from Pikeville, Kentucky.

Sibbie Ratliff. The background of Sibbie comes from an article in the April 2, 1926 issue of Pike County News. The article writes about a General Ratliff, who must have been a white man who had some money. The article relates:

While General Ratliff sympathized with the Southern cause, he also sympathized with the colored people. On one occasion in 1860, a man named Slone who lived on the Levisa Fork above Pikeville had his slaves sold at auction. General Ratliff owned no slaves but because he hated to see the family of slaves separated he went out and tried to buy them. He was outbidden, but did succeed in buying the mother and daughter, and kept them together until the mother's death. The daughter (Sibbie) remained with the Ratliff family in Pikeville until she married Uncle Frank Waller, a former slave from Spottsylvania county, Virginia.

Effie Waller. She was the third child of Frank and Sibbie Waller, born on January 6, 1879. Her formal education began in Pikeville at Colored School District A, one of the first schools made available to black students in the commonwealth, and it is to Pikeville's credit that the school existed. After eight years there, she attended Kentucky Normal School for Colored Persons (now Kentucky State University) in 1899 to 1901. The Normal School was a teachers college located in Frankfort, Kentucky.

Effie's older brother and sister had earlier attended the same Normal School. They served as her early mentors who gave her books and poetry of a traditional nature. When Effie herself completed the teacher training program, she spent the next sixteen years writing and teaching (off and on) in schools in her hometown of Pikeville and Eastern Tennessee.

While teaching in Pikeville, Effie taught Polly Mullins, Ruth Ratliff's biological mother. And as was the custom at that time (around 1902), the teacher roomed or boarded at one of the student's homes. (This took the place of a salary.) She did this at the Mullins' home, Pollie's grandparents' home. Polly and Effie became fast friends, maybe to the point of being like family. Even after leaving Pikeville to teach in other segregated schools, Effie continued to correspond with Polly and the two women remained very close friends. All this will play a critical role in Ruth's life 15-25 years later.

But to back up a little to Effie's home life as a little girl. Ruth reported in an interview with another writer in September 1987 that:

Effie Waller had a very congenial home life. Her parents read to her, what little they could being (former) slaves and not having much of a chance. Her parents provided a deeply religious background... She (Effie) said they did a lot of things together, berry picking... They would gather about the fire and pop corn and her father would tell stories about his slave days. Evidently, he (Frank Waller) had a very good master.



EFFIE WALLER'S FAMILY

- BACK ROW: PARENTS, FRANK WALLER AND SIBBIE RATLIFF WALLER
- FRONT ROW: SISTER ROSA, BROTHER ALFRED AND EFFIE (DIRECTLY BELOW HER MOTHER)



RUTH RATLIFF SMITH'S TWO MOTHERS

- DATE AND OCCASION OF PICTURE ARE UNKNOWN. (1908?)
- BIOLOGICAL MOTHER:
POLLY MULLINS RATLIFF (STANDING)
BORN: 1891
DIED: 1927 AT AGE 36
- ADOPTIVE MOTHER:
EFFIE WALLER SMITH (SITTING) (ON HER WEDDING?)
BORN: 1879
ADOPTED RUTH RATLIFF: 1937
EFFIE WAS AGE 58.
RUTH WAS AGE 20.
DIED: 1960 AT AGE 80 IN NEENAH, WI
- EFFIE WAS ONLY 12 YEARS OLDER THAN POLLY, AND 38 YEARS OLDER THAN RUTH.



LOG CABIN SCHOOL - PIKEVILLE, KENTUCKY
(FOR COLORED PEOPLE)

- DATE: A LITTLE BEFORE 1910
- LOCATION: SEVERAL MILES OUT OF TOWN
- THE PICTURE IS WITH TEACHER, PARENTS AND STUDENTS
 - EFFIE WALLER, THE TEACHER, IS STANDING AT FAR LEFT.
 - PARENTS AND OLDER STUDENTS STANDING IN BACK ROW.
 - YOUNG STUDENTS IN FRONT ROW.
- FEATURES OF THE SCHOOL
 - ONE-ROOM LOG CABIN
 - ELECTRICITY: NONE
 - HEAT: WOOD BURNING FIREPLACE
 - SANITARY FACILITIES: OUTSIDE
 - VENTILATION: OPEN WINDOWS WITHOUT GLASS OR SCREENS BUT WITH OUTSIDE SHUTTERS TO CLOSE AGAINST WIND, RAIN, SNOW AND COLD.

NOTE

- CONTRAST THE ABOVE SCHOOL WITH THE TRINITY-NEENAH SCHOOL BUILT IN 1893.

Effie Waller had a foremost desire to write. As early as 1902 (Effie was now 23 years old) several of Pikeville's residents recognized both her potential as a poet and the racist barriers she would confront in realizing her talent more fully. Already, she had published some poems in local newspapers. And with financial support of her supportive Pikeville residents, her work began to be published. Between 1909 and 1917 she published books of poems and three short stories in major American literary magazines. Her last success was in 1917 with the poem "Autumn Winds" (See the Ruth Smith story.), published in Harper's Monthly, the most significant magazine of the time. Prior to this no black women in America had published in Harper's or any other significant magazines. Thereafter, her work disappeared from the public record altogether.

Effie married twice, the first to a railroad man that soon led to divorce, the second to Charles Smith, a black Deputy Sheriff who died in the line of duty in 1911. They had one child who died very young.

Effie had many personal tragedies. But she was a devout Methodist who drew comfort from her Christian faith and was determined to go on in her life.

In 1916 her father, Frank Waller, died. Soon after in 1918, Effie and her mother, Sibbie, left Pikeville to join a religious sect called the Metropolitan Church Association in Waukesha, Wisconsin. It was a Fundamentalist Methodist sect and operated a commune in Waukesha. All of this came about because the religious group from the North came to Kentucky to canvas, sell religious articles and literature. Effie was impressed by their zeal - and was especially intrigued by their paradisaical description of the commune maintained at their religious headquarters in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Effie lived with her mother in the communal resident hall of the Metropolitan Holiness Church Association. But by 1924, they were enough disillusioned with the commune that they moved out and bought a private dwelling in Waukesha. Effie also went on to join the local Methodist Episcopal Church where she was an active member for many years.

Then, a whole series of events took place to drastically change Effie's life, as well as Ruth Ratliff's life.

- . 1922-1934. Ruth struggles to get an education at Pikeville's rural school for colored people. At age 17, she finished 6th grade.
- . 1927. Effie's mother, Sibbie, dies.

- . 1927. Polly Mullins Ratliff dies because of a goiter condition she refused to get medical treatment for. Her Pentacostal faith forbade her from seeking medical treatment. Polly was 36 years old.
 - . 1927. Ruth, now at age 10, goes to live with her maternal grandparents in a two-room log cabin.
 - . 1928. Ruth's father remarries. Ruth continues to live with her grandmother, because she does not get along with her stepmother and her grandmother badly needs her assistance.
 - . 1928-1934. Effie's brother, a retired RR worker, comes to live with Effie. The brother dies in 1934.
 - . 1934. Effie is now all alone in Waukesha (at age 55). She goes back home to visit its people and the daughter (now age 17), Ruth Ratliff, of her deceased friend, Polly Mullins Ratliff.
- Effie informs Ruth about what Polly had said many years before when ill with the goiter, "If I were to die, you should adopt Ruth and have her properly educated in the North."
- . 1935. Ruth and Effie leave Pikeville on the train and two days later are in Waukesha. Ruth's grandparents were very much against her leaving, but her father thought it would be in the best interests of his daughter. Ruth is age 18.
 - . 1935-1937. Effie goes through the long process to legally adopt Ruth Ratliff. On 8 May, 1937, Ruth Ratliff becomes Ruth Ratliff Smith. Ruth is age 20. Effie is age 58.

And so, that series of events outlines the story of Effie Waller adopting the daughter of her close friend Polly.

Effie's personal life goes on.

After Effie's mother, Sibbie, died in 1927, her brother Alfred, a retired railroad mail clerk, moved in to share her Waukesha home. That home had a special feature. An enormous rock garden with hundreds of different varieties of blooming plants, flowers, and shrubs was constructed in the early 1930's. The garden was now her form of public expression; her poetry became a very private interest. The garden was open to the public and thousands of people walked through it each year. A ledger was kept to keep track of the visitors. Her daughter still has the ledger.

But in 1950, Effie's health began to fail and she no longer had the strength to keep up the garden. By that time, her brother had been dead for 17 years, and daughter Ruth had been teaching and living in Neenah for five years. She sold her home in Waukesha and moved to Neenah to live with Ruth.

And the wonderful rock garden in Waukesha is no more. Somewhere along the way, new owners removed the rock garden, and in its place constructed a swimming pool.

Effie lived in Neenah for 10 years with daughter Ruth in two different homes. The first one on Monroe Street very near to Washington Park. The noise and commotion of children at play in the park was too much for the health condition of Effie; they had to find a new home. That new home was found in 1952 on Congress Street, just a little north of Cecil Street. Ruth still (2004) lives in that home.

Not too long after Effie came to live with Ruth in Neenah, she found reason to give up her Methodist faith while attending worship services at Ruth's Trinity Lutheran Church. She received Christian instruction to become convinced that the Lutheran Church (WELS) did teach God's Word correctly and was confirmed in 1954.

Effie died in the Lutheran faith in 1960, just four days short of her 81st birthday. The burial place is in Oak Hill Cemetery, Neenah.

Effie Waller Smith, adoptive mother of Ruth Ratliff Smith, now lies "far away, far, far away" from her childhood home in East Kentucky.

It is fitting to close Effie Waller Smith's life story with some of her own poetry. One poem expresses her early life in Eastern Kentucky and the other her eternal life in the paradise she was seeking long ago.

TO THE CUMBERLAND MOUNTAINS

O, Cumberland! Oh, Cumberland!
My own dear native hills;
For you, oh, rugged Cumberland,
With love my bosom thrills.

Your rugged and towering cliffs,
Are beauty and a wonder;
They have withstood for centuries
The crash of maddened thunder.

In childhood's days upon your slopes
How often have I wandered;
How oft o'er your sublimity
My childish mind has pondered.

With joy I've plucked the flowers that bloomed
Within your dells and dales;
With eagerness I've watched the streams
Plash through your wooded vales.

Not soley for your beauty,
Nor because my home is here;
Nor for these dear old mountains,
In my heart I love you dear.

But within your soil lies buried,
'Neath a wealth of snow-white flowers,
The only love of my lost youth,
Of my childhood's bygone hours.

THERE'S A BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL CITY

(Based on Rev. 21 and 22)

There's a bright and beautiful city,
A beautiful city on high;
A beautiful city for you and me,
Far, far beyond the sky.

The streets of that city with gold are paved,
The gates are of pearls pure and white,
And the walls are of rare and precious stones
Most beautiful and bright.

In that city are never-fading flowers,
There the Tree of Life ever grows;
And the River of Life so clear and pure
Through that beautiful city flows.

No moon nor stars ever shine there
For there never is any night,
Nor no sun is there to shine by day
For the Savior is the light.

The inhabitants never do get sick
In that fair city on high,
And they never need any grave yards there
For they never, never die.

NOTES

1. Frank Waller. From The Collected Works of Effie Waller Smith by the Schomberg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. Particularly useful was the Introduction by David Deskins. Other information about Effie Waller Smith was obtained by the writer, James Kuehl, directly from Ruth Smith (adopted daughter of Effie Waller Smith) in conversation during the summer of 2004. The information from the Introduction of the Collected Works rounds out and fills in the information obtained directly from Ruth Smith.
2. Sibbie Ratliff. Ibid.
3. Effie Waller. Ibid.
4. Effie Waller. In part from The Odyssey of Ruth Smith by Stephen C. Hintz. Various parts of the Effie Waller story are woven together from The Odyssey of Ruth Smith and the Introduction by David Deskins) of The Collected Works of Effie Waller Smith. The information from the two works rounds out and fills in information gathered directly from Ruth Smith by the writer, James Kuehl, during the summer of 2004.
5. Another writer. David Deskins, and as recorded in the Introduction of The Collected Works of Effie Waller Smith.
6. To the Cumberland Mountains. From The Collected Works of Effie Waller Smith by The Schomberg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers.
7. There's A Bright and Beautiful City. Ibid.