

CHLORA GETS REAL: Excerpt from APRIL
For "Chlora's Picnic Basket"

---the setting is the public park, where Chlora's church is having its annual Sunday School Picnic on Easter



Detail, Raggedy Andy, from Chlora's Picnic Basket

Chlora strategically parked her Raggedy Andy
at the picnic table to save her place;
she'd have to get back to him after the parade.
Her little brother was squalling.
He had gotten himself stuck in the baby swing
and she laughed while pulling him out.
She told him to run around and get it out of his system.
She had had enough of swinging lately,
but had to admit that it was fun to swing beside a friend,
going as high as possible in tandem and then apart,
swooshing by with no fear of colliding, then again in synch.
Other kids were gallivanting around, playing swing-and-jump-out
or flapping like a flag on the monkey bars. One prissy girl
was showing off her fancy panties on the jungle gym, hanging
on the barbeque bar like a rotisserie chicken.

They all paused when they heard the jingle of the ice cream truck.
The Sunday school parents grumbled that what,
no blue laws, even on Easter?
Well, it isn't Easter to everybody.
A cacophony of unusual words arose around the ice cream truck
as it was swarmed by kids in odd clothes.
Those kids already had a tan and it was just April.
Some mother remarked that it was a good thing those kids
didn't have to worry about sunburns, since they were

*

wearing such skimpy clothes.

The church crowd held back their own children
who jealously observed the others getting their treats.

You had to be wary in public parks
because that is where the public goes.
Once here Chlora saw something truly vile.
A man on a bicycle circled the playground,
exposing his baby carrot like it was some great emergence.
It was an emergency all right; all the mothers got livid,
chased him down and beat him up with their purses.

The guest preacher had told them
not to merely tolerate other people
or merely include them, but to love them.
And Jesus even extended that to your enemies.
Chlora silently challenged the guest preacher to
love that unlovable, nasty, do-nothing bicycle bum,
and while he was at it, he could love those kids
who were depleting the ice cream truck.

PICNIC BASKET UNPACKED

Her mom lugged over their picnic hamper
which was so full it groaned.
It promised to be a miracle feeding.
Chlora eyed it as their lunch provisions were unearthed.
That picnic basket seemed bottomless.
Next Easter she should use it for the
egg hunt and toss her fancy Easter basket.
There was a bundt cake, or was it a butt cake?
Whatever, it travels well.
They would be eating high on the hog,
as there was a ham covered with pineapple rings and cherries.
Chlora, however, preferred the fried chicken.
The basket held eggs, of course, Mom's specialty—
a dozen devilled eggs. They circled a plate
around a mound of olives.
There would be egg salad for days to come.

There were enough toothpicks on the plate to reassemble the true cross.
Chlora stuck a black olive in one of the eggs and called it Judas,
since he was the most devilled of the dozen. Then she ate it.
She avoided the two eggs that had a purplish tint from being over-dyed.



.....then there's the "just us" parade...and Chlora plays on the merry-go-round

PICNIC TABLE MESS

Chlora was called over to set out the family's picnic.
She got out the paper plates she had decorated herself.
She opened up all the bottles of pop.
Then she shook up the can of
Reddiwip and squirted whipped cream into the bowl of strawberries,
sputtering a ridged circle around each one.
It was fun to draw with Reddiwip, but Jesus had a whip ready
when he had his temple tantrum and that wasn't funny.



Readymade Reddiwip
Glazed porcelain with white gold, 1997, Adaptation of El Greco's [Purification of the Temp](#)

And it wasn't funny when the ornery boys came running by
with their beach towels, flicking them like whips, popping
her on the leg, teasing her about befriending the enemy.
The moral majority whip was at it again;
This was the same boy who got her in trouble here before.
They were on the teeter-totter, see-sawing like mood swings.
Then Chlora jumped off of it too fast,
and he hurt his crotch.
He had hollered to high heaven
and said she had ruined him for life.

Now he was giving her dirty looks,
so she hung a pickle in her mouth,
snarled, poked a green olive on each finger tip,
and wiggled them like the wicked witch of the west.
He threw a ball at her and she dodged,
but the ball landed splat in the middle of the picnic table,
knocked over the fried chicken bucket
and set off the domino effect.

Drumsticks rolled in the dirt. Whipped cream shot up in the air.
The ball smashed her favorite meringue cookies
and bowled over six bottles of NuGrape Soda.
It fizzed and spread like grace over every available surface.
The Wonder Bread grew into purple mush.
It was grosser than cannibalism.
Plus it ruined all opportunities for the sandwich contest
she had wanted to host. Her favorite invention,
a mustard and mayonnaise sandwich--was bound for glory.
She had planned to dub it the "must-may" sandwich, and the eater
would have to proclaim whether it was her duty or her privilege to eat it.
It was the best thing since sliced bread
and like all sandwiches, it had a story behind it.



Adaptation of Grandma Moses' "Family Picnic" on tablecloth

A shiny black grackle descended upon the fried chicken and flew off with a drumstick in his long beak. If that hadn't been so amazing, Chlora would have had a hissy fit. Fortunately her favorite cherry pie was undamaged except for the big slice already cut out of it.



Otherwise, the prospects for lunch were getting grim.
So Chlora wailed and that quickly attracted a colony of aunts
to their table. They made over it like Columbus discovering America.
Like Jesus turning the tables, the aunts stripped that
table clean, tossing the dripping tablecloth
into the empty picnic basket.

Out came the bounty of their own picnic baskets,
an amazing array of potato salad, ham, asparagus,
baked beans, cupcakes, and sweet tea.
Chlora knew from experience that such
bounteous goodness had its down side.
Sure enough, a volunteered Jell-O salad appeared,
wobbly and pale green in a big orange Tupperware bowl.
Little bits of carrots and raisins
were suspended in time amid the cottage cheese.
Chow mein noodles were poking out of it.
It had lime disease. Chlora made the sign of the cross
with two fingers to fend it off.
Peace may improve the texture of Jell-O
but this was not a time to lower your standards.

ESCAPE with ANDY

In the midst of the picnic panic
Chlora said she would go follow the bouncing ball
and go look for Moses and Joshua. Someone asked her why
she was into these Old Testament guys on Easter.
She shrugged and said, well, it's all connected to
what happened back then.

It was the perfect time to escape and execute the experiment
she had been planning since that lesson on Baby Moses.
Nobody would see her and ask what on God's green earth
was she doing. Chlora grabbed the jelly, peanut butter, a knife,
and two undefiled pieces of Wonder Bread, and a chocolate rabbit.
These she stuffed into the picnic basket along with Raggedy Andy
and the empty bubble bottle, and her toy accordion.
She announced that she had her own pot luck, thank you,
and sauntered off to the far end of the park, away from the hubbub.



When she looked back, all was quiet.
The trio of aunts were holding hands, having a gab fest with God,
looking like the Three Graces praying it in.
Thankfully they weren't nude,
but had on their flowery moo-moos.
Her aunts were loud and funny. One's got a mouth on her,
another has eagle eyes, and the third had ESP real bad.
The rest of the church group
had circled up like a big wagon train and was
saying the Lord's Prayer for a blessing. Chlora wondered
who all was included by OUR Father,
and who was left out of the circle of prayer.

Chlora took a wide berth around the park's
big fount of every blessing , which she called Ebenezer Geezer .
It was splashing merrily.
However, any day now it could turn into
a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
like in that old hymn, and splatter all over her.
She muttered that she would prefer the fountain be
filled with Nu Grape soda, thank you very much.
Then if she fell in, she could drink her way out of there.

She once saw a lady fall into Monet's lily pond
on the other side of the park.
The lady was all dressed up and had fluffy hair.
She was backing off from a threesome of mating peacocks.
All the while she was talking so much that she couldn't see
and with a loud whoop she splashed right through the lily pads
and came up sputtering green water.
All the frogs shot out of there
and the poor wet lady had to be helped out.
Throughout she kept her demeanor
and acted like nothing had happened.

Even with the threat of falling in,
Chlora circled back by the park fountain to check for pennies.
The fountain was the center of the park, like the
Pool of Bethesda where people went to get healed in the Bible.
And just like that healing pool, somebody always got there before her;
all the coins were gone.
She was pushed aside by a girl running after her dog.
The dog did a belly buster into the water,
not nearly as graceful as the back dive executed by the soggy lady.
The dog's claws scratched through the algae covered concrete
like wild fluorescent green calligraphy marks.
Chlora got splashed but at least it wasn't with blood.

She had heard that revolutions begin at the margins
so she walked toward the edge of the park.
That led to two rabbit trails that converged within the woods;
naturally, she would take the one less traveled.
It was a short trail along the creek, lined with Japanese iris.



The Iris Deep Within Me, 1991

How much glory could one day bear?
After some consideration
she found a good spot for her experiment. She squatted down
and carefully swaddled Raggedy Andy

in the tablecloth. He was the only boy doll she had except for that idiot Ken. Andy would make a fine baby Moses since his hair already looked like a burning bush.



It was hard to believe that Moses was the same baby who grew up and threw the law at people. He probably knocked out somebody with those stone tablets.

Andy was a serious doll, so this was not a Hello Dolly moment. Next to Teddy, he was her favorite, and more importantly, he was a compliant suffering servant. Once he played the Fugitive from the TV show, which meant he had to have his arm cut off. Chlora said Farewell to Arms and apologized before she took the scissors to him. But Moses had been a fugitive too. The Bible didn't say if he was a one-armed man, but then it doesn't tell you everything. She wondered if Moses had had a weenie roast on that burning bush.

Chlora had a broken arm once, so she knew just how Andy felt. At first it hurt like the dickens, then it just itched. The only way to scratch it was with a skinny knitting needle that could go down the cast. Poor Andy didn't complain about being disarmed but she knew firsthand how annoying it was, so she apologized to him again about his phantom limb. They say phantom limb pain is like a lost love that never ever goes away but persists in taking up space,

[WATERPROOFS BASKET](#)

Chlora would get Andy floating down the Nile in no time,

like hell in a hand basket.
The Bible said the basket had been covered with pitch.
Why didn't his sister Miriam just put that kid in something waterproof?
Didn't they have plastic back then?

To remain authentic to the story,
Chlora had been saving up a big wad of tar
from the public swimming pool, diving deep to retrieve it
from the cracks in the cement. And she had saved up
some sticky goobers of tar from her bicycle tires,
picked up on the hot streets last summer.
Too bad she hadn't been to a Texas beach
to get some real tar balls.
She scrubbed the tar on the basket but it was too hard
and would not cooperate. The peanut butter could be Plan B.
Peanut butter should be a good waterproofer since it sticks
to the roof of your mouth. She sacrificed a whole jar to the cause,
smearing it all over the bottom of the basket.



Nearby there was a No Trespassing sign tacked onto a tree.
Chlora knew she was supposed to forgive her trespassers,
but she wasn't sure who they were.
She also was confused if Private Property
meant the same thing as private parts.

She stepped carefully to protect her new shoes.
Skinny Jesus bugs skimmed the surface of
the water. Chlora reached for one and a red crawdad
put up his dukes, punching the water at her.
The crawdad carried on like that for a moment
and Chlora laughed at his puny bravado. She'd show him
a thing or two about bravery and deftly plucked him up from behind.
But when he wiggled around and almost pinched her,
she tossed him back into the water.

This was her lucky day, for right there on a rock was a tiny green
turtle. The pet store quit selling them because they gave kids salmon.
Chlora picked him up with only two fingers
and put him in the empty peanut butter jar. Yertle the Turtle was on
the Welch's grape jelly jar, so at least he'd have company.

High stalked, fuzzy cattails lined the riverbanks.
It was good that creeks had banks or
they'd spread themselves too thin.
Chlora parted the reeds with her basket,
like Moses parting the Red Sea,
pretending to be Miriam in the bulrushes.
Or she could be the beautiful Egyptian princess
who rescued Baby Moses. No, she'd rather be Miriam,
because she knew how to hide and watch.
Being a princess would require a tiara
which of course she had earned many times over,
but she had left it at home.
She imagined Miriam like one of those
big-eyed Disney princesses,
who always won in the end.

Chlora squatted down by the stream and eased
the peanut-buttered basket with Andy into the water.
It bobbed around in the current and twirled. It floated!
It began moving downstream, staying the course
and getting way ahead of her as she trotted on the bank.
She quickly thought of a musical accompaniment
and began playing "Row, Row, Row your boat
gently down the stream on her accordion.

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
life is but a dream, but that dream dissipated
as the Moses basket began listing to the far right.



The Gospel Accordion, top view

Alas and alak! Andy was not much of a sailor;
the basket whacked into a low branch and his cap went overboard.
It was getting dangerously out of reach.
Chlora followed the basket, taking note that the peanut butter
held up pretty well. Her experiment had been a modest success.
Next time she would try rubber cement.
Suddenly the basket lurched and careened into a whirlpool.
Chlora reached out as far as she could
and performed the Princess rescue routine
just in the nick of time, liberating Andy just before
he got swift-boated over a small waterfall.

WATERFALL

Andy was quite grateful to have averted another loss of life or limb.
He deserved a rest and so did Chlora.
They sat by the waterfall and she retrieved her
earless chocolate rabbit from her pocket.
She offered Andy a bite but he politely
said No thank you. The rabbit couldn't hear a thing now,
and she slowly nibbled on his tail.
It was like getting bit in the butt
by an unused talent that gnaws at you
until you give it its due.

There was one inconvenient truth—
there was litter in this perfect little creek.
Yet, the waterfall was a pleasant, private spot in a cathedral of leaves.
Just beyond it the stream was as wide as mercy.
Chlora sat on a rock, hiding like Miriam

from the Sunday School crowd.
She quieted herself and practiced layered listening,
Most obvious were the birds
and she counted five different calls, in stereo.
The water was like underlying percussion, providing
a steady roar, but there were also intermittent drips.
She cupped her hands behind her ears so she could hear more accurately.
Back in the park, children shouted watch this, look at me!
But mostly they argued as they played,
their laughter interjected by few high-pitched screams.
Above was the whishy sound of wind in the trees
differing according to the type of leaves.

Suddenly there was a major disturbance in the
willow tree. Squirrel fight! One charged forward,
closely tracked by another, both taking leaps of faith
onto small twigs. They just as suddenly stopped
and stared Chlora in the face as if to say
we see you, and so does God.
A frog plopped. A bug loudly buzzed near her ear.
Far away there were muffled engine sounds, car or plane,
and the distinct pattering of a lawn mower.
A door slammed, a barbecue pit creaked open.
All of this was punctuated by the metallic chimes
of the park swings. Chlora shut her eyes to hear better.
One bird repeated a seven note trill backwards.
She shifted and heard the crunch of gravel beneath her feet,
and recognized the sound of her own sigh.
This sorting through sections of sound would later serve her well
if she ever got to go to the symphony.

She observed that the Viagra Falls was frothing over,
looking much like the petticoats she had discarded earlier.
She'd brought her empty bubble bottle to wash out here,
to see if the waterfall would churn it up like in the bathtub.
But the waterfall was making plenty of bubbles on its own.
Chlora had always lived in a bubble and sort of resented that;
maybe if she could just forgive her bubble for not being everything
she hoped for, she could go beyond it.

Small bubbles floated within the confines
of a larger one, and all of them traveled in bobbling lines,
moving gradually in a long "U" shape that circled back
to the source. It seemed like things were bubbling up here
that already belonged to her. Most of them sailed along
whole and unbothered, then one would pop

for no reason at all, obliterated in the blink of an eye,
like its very soul had spritzed out.
A little green leaf played tag with the bubbles
and got caught under the iridescent dome of a big one.
The leaf ducked under and floated free,
only to be swept up into the flow again.
Clusters of bubbles bumped into one another,
forming thicker clumps that moved slowly.
These were headed toward some rocks, while the ragged,
smaller clusters skirted the danger and broke off.
The green leaf persisted in its water ballet and
Chlora cheered it on. It finally made it back around
to the starting point, did a back flip and took off again.

FOOTWASHING

Deep called to deep at the sound of the falls,
calling up the deep reserves.
The stream was endlessly flowing, like ideas
Chlora clicked off all other noises one by one,
as if using that set of lenses the eye doctor tests
your vision with. Gradually the other sounds faded away
until water was all that she could hear.
The weight of the waterfall on her shoulders
She wondered what the waterfall weighed.

The water had the familiar smell of chlorine,
betraying its source as the public swimming pool nearby.
Thankfully it would soon be swimming season again.
Something told Chlora to take off her shoes
and stick her feet in the water, so she obeyed,
except she left on her bobby socks
to protect her from any pee that might be in there.
Yaw Wee! It was cold! But it felt good as she wiggled her toes.

She must be on holy ground, even though
this was cold. When Moses went barefoot on holy ground
it had to be hot because of the burning bush.

Chlora recalled that picture of Jesus in his bath towel.
She doubted that he flicked his friends with it.
He was washing Peter's feet, and Peter didn't get it.
It probably felt really good but Peter wasn't about to
let himself get pampered. Peter tried to throw in the towel
and he protested, like the aunts always did
when somebody offered them dessert.

Of course the aunts always took it anyway,
and then served more to others. Those desserts seemed to
multiply at night. Chlora didn't quite understand
this chain reaction of generosity. But she did remember that
Jesus told his disciples that they would understand
their pedicures later. That gave her hope,
since they were such flip-floppers,
flipping over words like thongs.
Jesus was always confusing things,
being host and servant at the same time.

The pool below the waterfall was overfull
and seeping into the grass.
The preacher had said that confession removes blockage.
So Chlora confessed that she was sorry that she could not
understand all this. She pulled away some trash and
clumps of grass, and the water trickled through.
No telling how that'd affect the flow downstream.

For no good reason, the sun came shining down
on Chlora like a spotlight. The whole area seemed lit up.
The soft carpet moss glowed an impossible shade of emerald.
Reflections from the bubbles made tiny dancing stars on the stone
creek bed below them.
Her heart felt strangely warmed. So did her feet.

She reverently peeled off her soggy socks
and kept them as a promise of better things to come.
Who said only boys could be Promise Keepers?

Then a voiceless, flat voice told Chlora
that she was an artist. Say what? She laughed.
All she ever did was paint-by-number kits.
The sensation hovered. Chlora looked all around, saw nobody.
She checked her sanity and pinched her arm,
which hurt. The sensation took its own time until Chlora
rather begrudgingly responded with
OK, what do you want me to do?
And he, or she, or it, replied, clear as a bell:
Pay attention to the verb.

The sun receded, just like it did in the movies
to indicate that the drama was over.
It seemed time to go back to the picnic.
Chlora resolved to return to this waterfall spot again,
where the water above was connected with the water below.

Chlora rubbed the picnic basket
in the grass to remove the remaining peanut butter.
She put all her things back inside it.
When she stood up, she heard that weird voice again,
In whom I am well pleased...
Then she tugged on her tennis shoes over her wet socks.
They squished as she walked back toward the park,
swinging her Moses basket.

TRASH & BEES

The nasty trash cans at the edge of the park were now spilling over.
There was one perfectly clean Chinet paper plate on top.
Chlora looked it over and put it in her basket.
She usually cleaned her own plate so that the hungry kids
in Africa could eat.
Then she did her second (or was it her third?)
good deed for the day. She gathered up twelve baskets full
of fried fish sticks and rolls and jammed them into the trashcan.
It smelled bad, like some miracle she had heard of.
The stench was compounded by beer bottles.
Whoever had swizzled beer on Easter was really asking for it.
The ice cream man had done well today.
She collected all the used popsicle sticks and sorted them by tints;
These would make a nice set of pick-up sticks.
On a table nearby sat a grape popsicle,
its wrapper pulled down around its ankles,
just melting in the sun. What a waste!
She tossed it too.
But along with it came some bees.
Glory bee to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Ghost,
she did not desire to learn about the birds and the bees!
She'd rather be flitting around like a bee, pollinating
Everyone in sight.
She swung her basket at the bees and ran.
She wouldn't hurt a fly but a bee was an entirely different matter,
even if they were experts in intelligent design
as evidenced by their honeycombs.

BEE STING & BOY

Chlora ran until she stopped. The wet socks
were making her tennis shoes squeak.

She untied the shoes and peeled off the socks.
The green clover felt good between her toes.
Instantly a sharp pain sent her reeling,
hopping around on one foot, and yelling all the bad words
she had saved up for a moment like this.
She was crazed, like in the Flight of the Bumble Bee.
She dropped the picnic basket, spilling its contents in the grass.
She flung herself down and examined the tiny stinger still stuck
in the tough part of her heel. Luckily it had missed that soft,
tender part of the arch.

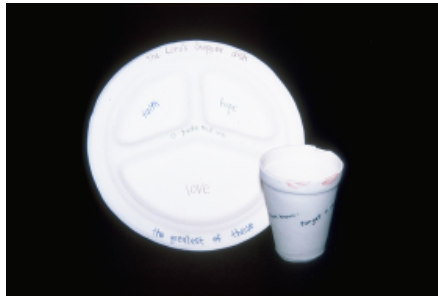
Suddenly a kid from the Other Side of the park
hoisted Chlora up and swooped her aside.
He gently sat her down across the path, away from the bee zone.
He had Bugs bunny teeth but also had the kind eyes of Jesus,
darker than her own, but at the exact height.
The kid said something in a different language
and pointed at Chlora's foot.
The bee sting was swelling up pink and proud. Chlora winced.
The boy gently flicked off the stinger, and scraped her wound
so the venom oozed out. He put his finger in her bubble bottle
and smeared some soap on her foot.
He spit in the dirt, made a bit of mud and gently dabbed it on
the spot. Then he cupped a paper napkin around her foot
and twisted it on top. He slipped off his own flip flops
and extended them to her.
They were worn down rubber, stained, the plain yellow kind
they make you wear in the showers at camp
to keep your feet from getting athletic.
Chlora put on the groaty flip flops, since sometimes
it was better to receive than to give.
She said gracias and the Other Kid smiled brightly.
He said Hoppy Easter, solemnly bowed to her,
turned, and ran off.

She stood there and stood there.
She wiggled her toes and they all responded.
She felt her face glow.
She was sure if anyone saw her they would be blinded
and have to cover her with a veil,
like Moses coming down from the mountain top
after a sunrise service.

BASKET SET UP

She hobbled over to the clover patch and gathered up her stuff.

She took the poor little green turtle out of the jar,
wiped peanut butter off of him, and let him go back to nature.
Since she hadn't named him yet, that made it easier.
She set the basket upright and draped the tablecloth in it,
and in front of it positioned her beloved tennis shoes.
She tied the laces into perfect bows, making them as attractive as possible.
She curled up the damp socks. In her pocket she found a long lost crayon
and carefully printed on the paper plate she had saved from the trash.
In the smaller portions of the divided plate
she wrote FAITH and HOPE.
In the big portion she printed LOVE.



Lord's Supper Dish

Then she made a nice thick
jelly sandwich, cut it into a cross, and put it on the plate.
Finally she beautified the arrangement with dandelions.



Chlora picked up Raggedy Andy and walked around the basket.
Andy's red hair was sticking out every which way,
but it looked better than hers.
She hummed the Andy hymn,
gave the doll a hug and sat him
in the midst of it all where he could oversee some miracles.

*Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me,
Andy tells me I am his own,
and the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known..."*

It was corny, but it was true.
Andy Warhol should try it sometime.

Chlora took out the last of her bubble soap
and began to skip and blow bubbles at the same time.
A multitude of bubbles set off on the breeze
in every direction. She stopped, took a deep breath
and slowly, steadily blew one long wobbly bubble.
Into it she blew the best that she had
and the bubble grew until she ran out of breath.
It was a big beauty, requiring the entire contents of her lungs.
It was precariously dangling from the plastic wand
like an undulating mirror, like one of those reflective
globes in her grandmother's garden where you see
yourself and your surroundings in a never-ending world
and realize you're never in the garden alone.

The bubble certainly wouldn't last happily ever after
but its joy was sure to take on another form,
like the resurrected Jesus did.
It detached from the wand and was carried by the breeze
across the park. The boy who had helped her turned around
and gave a toothy grin at her basket offering on the ground.
The gigantic bubble suddenly popped
and sprinkled his face.
Chlora realized that he was the spitting image of God
himself and maybe with all that saliva
he should play the trumpet.

Her foot still hurt.
But Lady Julian of Norwich, who was quoted in
The Easter Sunday bulletin had said,
*All shall be well, and all shall be well,
and all manner of things shall be well.*

This *was* good news, and it should be spread.
She revved up the gospel accordion again.
It squalked and squeaked but even with Chlora
garbling the verses, it got the point across.

*Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,
Opening to the sun above.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Flowery meadow, flashing sea,
Teach us how to love each other,
Call us to rejoice in Thee.*



She positioned the accordion beside Andy and the basket,
to give the gift some more potential.
Chlora grinned from the inside out
and continued skipping around her Easter contribution,
a wider circle each round,
making a hippity hoppity flippy noise....
a bit off-rhythm due to her limp.

