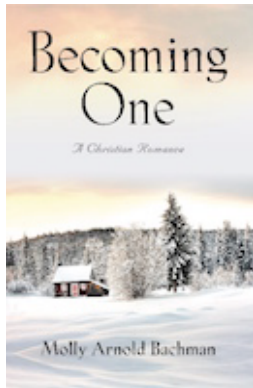


# Becoming One

*A Christian Romance*



Molly Arnold Bachman



*Amy Eisner goes to teach in a Christian community in the wilds of British Columbia, beyond the reach of electricity or telephone, or benefit of modern plumbing. These challenges are soon dwarfed by her experiences of hostility, legalism and spiritual abuse. Amy fumbles her way to constructive solutions with the aid of Jeff and his family. Together they find deeper understanding and experience of Amy's goal of becoming one with God and her fellow believers.*

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## CHAPTER SIX

...that they may be one just as We are one... John 17:22

Saturday night dinner was over; plates were scraped and stacked. Dishpans had been distributed to the ten tables in the dining room. Two men carrying big buckets of steaming water were filling them. It was Amy's turn to wash. She was used to the routine after more than a week at Hope: separate the wash and the rinse pans, apply detergent to the former, and wait for the "infilling". Now if she could just wash fast enough to satisfy her young dryer who believed in speed more than perfection...

"Here, Mary, I'll give you a night off." It was Jeff Tunncliffe, visiting from McConnellsburg, offering to replace his young sister as dryer. Flashing a smile at her 24-year-old brother, Mary poked the dishtowel into his hand and fled before anyone could substitute another assignment, leaving Amy to cope with his presence alone. She had been introduced at the beginning of the meal, but, guarded on each side by her zealous chaperones, she hadn't dared utter more than a polite hello. It was a struggle to keep her eyes demurely cast downwards. Once, she had looked up only to discover gentle brown eyes focused on her, filled with amusement. It was a quick glance; she longed for another. Now she was alone with him, abandoned by the rest of her tablemates. *Don't think for a minute you aren't being watched*, she reminded herself, surveying the nine other cleanup teams at their respective tables, searching for anywhere to put her eyes besides looking into his.

"Amy Eisner, eh? That's an unusual last name". His casual attitude put her immediately at ease. The water-men poured and Amy filled the dishpan with mugs and silverware before answering.

"It's pretty common in Nova Scotia where I come from. German, you know. Used to be Eisenhower, but no one liked the sound of *that* during the First World War. Half the county suddenly became English!"

"Too bad! You lost the opportunity to appear related to an American president!"

"Alas! I'll just have to make my own reputation in this world." She sighed in mock despair, feeling more comfortable by the moment.

"Bet you'll do okay." Jeff's response had a comforting, positive ring. "You've come all this way to the wilds of northern BC! How did *that* happen?"

"Yes, three days and three nights in the belly of the Greyhound. I really saw the country!" Amy was piling mugs into the rinse. The wash water was too hot and she felt clumsy trying to pull items out without burning her hands.

"But what made you decide you wanted to be part of the community here?" he probed.

*What indeed?* Amy wondered. She hadn't thought of it for a week, too busy surviving each day. Now, she had to reach to remember her original motivation.

"It's a long story," she temporized, unsure if she wanted to get into it, uncertain whether he was just being polite.

"So? We still have lots of dirty dishes. Why not give it a try?"

She piled plates into the wash water and began scrubbing. *Okay, why not?* she decided, and plunged in. "I guess it all began when my girl-friend invited me to a meeting. It was unbelievable! No, I don't mean that; it was very believable. Everything I'd ever heard and read became really real for the first time. It was like Jesus came out of the Bible and was right there. It's hard to explain," she said, covering a new attack of shyness with vigorous action in the dishpan.

"Maybe so, but I know what you're talking about. Actually, there's a group in McConnellsburg that's like that for me."

Her eyes flew up and met his, deep touching deep...then quickly turned away.

"Go on," he said, his voice normal. (Had she only imagined that look?) "You ended up out here. How come?"

"John 17." This time she spoke without hesitation. "That's where Jesus prayed to the Father 'that they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me and I in You: that they may also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.' How's the world going to know him if we Christians stagnate in an all-dressed-up-Sunday-only world? We've got to build close relationships and put away the things that divide us."

"And joining a community seemed a step in that direction." It was a statement, not a question.

"I felt it was my assignment. And I was excited to do it."

"And now?"

"Oh, I still do think so! I still am excited, only it turns out the teacher has an awful lot to learn."

"Community 101, eh?"

"Yes, and so far I'm in peril of flunking out." Memories of the week's mistakes brought color to her cheeks.

Jeff chuckled. "Nonsense! Nobody flunks out of God's school. He doesn't allow it."

While they talked, Amy had been sizing him up out of the corner of her eye. He was taller than she was by at least four inches. *That doesn't happen often*, she thought. Quick glances had revealed a handsome face framed by dark, slightly curly hair – like his mother's – and his father's merry countenance.

She started stacking the clean dishes in the middle of the table. He was watching her, she knew. *So what!*, she

thought, annoyed at the color that flooded her cheeks. *It doesn't mean a thing. He's got to look somewhere.*

She turned to face him, striving for a business-like tone. "Thanks for the encouragement, and thanks for the help with the dishes."

His smile got past her defenses and wrung an answering one from her lips. But she was careful not to touch him as she took his dishtowel and prepared to wipe the table.

"See you next time I'm out," he said as he left, heading towards the Tunncliffe cabin to spend the evening with his family.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Behold, a sower went out to sow. And (some seed) fell on good ground and yielded a crop. Mat 13:3,8

Early Thanksgiving morning Amy dreamed: a gentle breeze was caressing her face, carrying a sweet fragrance to her nostrils. Where had such a lovely aroma come from? *There it is!* A field of flowers stretched as far as she could see, moving in waves as the air passed through them. *Oh! How lovely! I want one for my own.* She reached out, only to discover the field was on a plane above her. Her arm was too short! She stood on tip toe and stretched. They were almost within her grasp. *I must have one!* Her need became urgent as she inhaled great breaths of sweetness. *Maybe if I stand on something I'll be tall enough.* She pried her gaze away from the flowers and searched for an appropriate object. There was nothing. Desperation flowed from her soul in big tears, coursing down her cheeks. *I have to have one; what am I going to do? I need it so badly!*

Then she noticed a man standing beside the field. *Oh!* she thought, *he's probably the gardener.* He was looking at her - kindly, interested, and a little as though he could see right to her core. *He knows what I want! He's going to pick one for me!* She was certain of it and danced her happiness with the breeze that billowed around her. But no! Instead, he tilted his head back and laughed the most joyful laugh Amy had ever heard, extended his reach towards her, and poured seeds into her outstretched hands.

Amy slipped into wakefulness reluctantly, loathe to surrender the comforts of sleep. She groped to recover her dream, but it had faded beyond recovery. A glance out the window revealed a dark, cloudy, white landscape. *Looks more like Christmas than Thanksgiving,* she thought. Indeed,

the snow lay thick on the spruce boughs, unmelting at minus twenty degrees Celsius. In Nova Scotia, people would still be out driving through the last fall coloring. She felt a prick of longing – for the temperate weather, the vibrant colors, yes, and the warm hearts of her loved ones. Then, resolutely, she turned to the business of the day.

She hurried to her closet, thankful she had washed the night before while the house was still warm. Pulling out her only winter dress-up dress, she treated it to a scowl. *Same old dress every Sunday*, she thought. *Wish I had something else for special*. But there was no help for it. How many fancy clothes could you include when packing for a year in three bags?

*Thank you, Lord, for this day and all it brings*, she prayed as she hastened to dress before her bed-warmth left her. *Help me to live it in a way that brings honor to you*. It was her regular morning prayer, but this time an avalanche of discouragement followed. How could she be thankful when each day brought a new revelation of how far she fell short of that goal? *Am I letting the winter blahs get to me?* she wondered. *Not a good idea when there's a long one ahead!*

She summoned her most effective weapon, praise. *Okay, Lord, I praise you for the beauty around me, right here with the snow and the woods and the pretty log cabins. It's not like home, but it has its own loveliness*. She applied lipstick and a touch of blush, selected her favorite blue earrings, and turned from the mirror, satisfied. *Keep going*, she told herself. If she didn't add praise to the most difficult parts of her life, the depression would strengthen.

*Okay Lord, I thank you in the midst of unkind people like Kathryn, and lonely circumstances*. Pain stirred in her. *Oh! I guess I am lonely and didn't even realize it! There's nobody I can really talk to. But I'm grateful for the positive people*

*you've given me, she added, especially the Tunnicliffes. And for the meeting today; I know it will be a special one.*

Amy sang with an open heart at the Thanksgiving service and sat attentively to listen as Brother Richard began his message to the young people.

"Today seems appropriate to think about harvesting and how it speaks to us of spiritual principles," he said. "Does anyone know what we have to do to get a good harvest of grain?" He addressed the question to some of the younger members.

Michael jumped to his feet, waving his hand. "Brother Steve has to take the big Massey tractor with the cutter bar and mow it all down."

"Yes, that's true, Michael, but what happens before that?"

A knowing groan went up from the children. "Weeding!"

"In the vegetable garden, yes, but not in the grain. We have to let that grow, weeds and all. How about before that?" Michael was on his feet again, waving wildly. "You've already had your turn, Michael; let's see if Billy can tell us."

Billy gulped, shuffled, and mumbled, "Plant the seeds?"

Amy's heart swelled. These were her kids and they were darlings.

"Right, Billy! Good for you! We have to sow. Now, what would happen if I went out in the oat field and sowed...ah...tomatoes?"

"They wouldn't grow very well 'cuz Brother Steve says it's too cold." Michael was again first off the mark. Laughs all around, much to his delight.

"Well okay kids, supposing I planted canola. Would I get oats?"

"No!" they yelled together. "You'd get canola!"

"Right! Now, God put seeds and ground and plants out there to show us something about how we can live. The ground is like the world around you. You can sow any kind of seeds into it you want. What kind of seeds would you like to plant? Remember, whatever seed you sow will be the kind of harvest you get. Let's let the older children answer this time."

*He's a born teacher!* Amy marveled. *I need to watch how he does it.*

"Being happy and smiling at other people?" The first response was hesitant.

"Good, Darren. Happiness seeds. Anybody else?"

"When somebody's unhappy, telling them a joke to cheer them up."

"Right! Fun seeds. Keep going."

The answers began to roll out from all over the dining room.

"Always be fair and don't cheat."

"Share things with other kids."

*Fairness. Fun. Children have such a fresh way of looking at things,* Amy thought. *I'd probably have answered by rote "Love, joy, peace", but not these kids.*

"So if I plant happiness," Richard continued, "what will I get back at harvest time? Happiness!" He paused for a moment for effect. "But what happens if I throw unhappiness seeds all around? What will I get then?"

Groans. Michael fell off his bench in high drama.

"We'd get a big harvest of unhappiness, wouldn't we? We all need to be very careful how we act and what we say because we're all the time planting good crops or bad crops."

Brother Richard was wrapping it up now. "Here's one last question. I want you to go home and think about it. When we want to plant oats, we have to go to the grain

store and buy oat seeds, but where do we go to get the kindness and happiness seeds?"

*OH! Amy nearly spoke it out loud as she remembered her dream. Lord! How could I have forgotten it? You were the gardener and you were giving me SEEDS.*

The rest of the preaching dimmed as Amy explored her dream. *Of course you don't give us everything on a golden platter, God. You want us to work along with you. Our job is to do the planting...and the weeding, too, I guess. And your job is to make everything grow.*

As the sermon concluded, she considered her next steps. *Some ground is pretty hard to get seeds into. I may have some tough work ahead of me.*

She pictured again the seeds that had poured into her waiting hands. Oh Lord, *I should have known you wouldn't send me here and not equip me for the work.* She felt the tide of new hope wash away her despair. *A vast supply,* she thought. *I can't wait to get planting!*

The light in her eyes and the glow on her cheeks had passed beyond what earrings and blush could produce. At their Thanksgiving table, Elsie took note. In a corner of her mind a new reason emerged to regret that her oldest son was not with them.

*I can't say I'm not a bit disappointed,* Amy admitted as she surveyed Jeff's empty place at the table. *Just a little bit. He was fun to talk to, that's all. A nice friend.* He'd written again in answer to her "thank you" for the gloves. He was over his head with work and study, but looked forward to visiting at the farm when he'd completed his course. Then he'd be able to hear how she was progressing in the school of hard knocks. *That sounds like friendship to me...but then again it might be only kindness.* She covered the thought with humor: *Maybe he's just planting a few kindness seeds...*

Sister Angela interrupted her thoughts with a question. "You *have* taught the children about the first Thanksgiving, haven't you?"

Sister Lacey confirmed her sentiments: "It was wonderful how the Pilgrims and Indians celebrated together that first year when the harvest came in."

"It's a good lesson for us all today," Sister Angela continued; "peace on earth, good will towards men."

*And I'm getting my lesson for the day,* Amy thought. Indeed, she had neglected to do a unit on the Pilgrims. They were American so why should she? Sister Angela and Sister Lacey were from the States, too, but she was Canadian – and so were her students.

"There's something wonderful I just thought of," Sister Lacey announced. "Those Pilgrims were Christians and so are we. It's almost like we were there and they are here."

"One in Christ," Amy said, intrigued. *Whoops, and so are Americans and Canadians - in Christ.*

While Sister Angela argued with her friend that she was letting her imagination go too far, Amy was examining a memory. Not two months ago, right at this table, she had told Jeff about John chapter 17: Jesus' prayer (and her vision) that they might be one. How could she have forgotten so soon?

Later, in her room, she reviewed the day's events. Seeds... God had given her the tools to take up her challenge. Planting those seeds would bring a good harvest, one that would take away the hurts and alienations she now experienced. *Well, maybe not take them away. Didn't Brother Richard say the weeds kept growing with the wheat? But they won't amount to much next to an abundant harvest.*

Excitement welled up, leaving its deposit of new energy. She was eager to start, a runner ready for the race, confident of victory.

Where to begin? *It needs to be something manageable*, she thought, remembering her rule with her own students. 'Kathryn' came forcefully to mind and was immediately rejected. *Too ambitious. She's a tough one. Maybe I could start with Tim; that wouldn't be too hard.*

'Kathryn', the thought persisted. *Yes, yes, I'll do her later, after I get in the swing of things.* But her conscience was telling her things she didn't want to hear - *Okay, so I'd rather leave her to stew in her own juices.*

*Love your enemies.*

*No, I've had enough quills from that porcupine to last me a lifetime.*

*Do good to them that hate you*

*Must I?*

There was no answer to her question and Amy knew why not. She was free to choose. She also knew which choice would bring her the most happiness.

*Okay, Kathryn it is! But Lord, she prayed, if you're not in this, I'm toast. Burnt toast buttered with porcupine quills.*

Amy took the plunge Monday after school.

"Kathryn, I've been thinking I'd like to help around the house a bit, especially now that Amos is home and there's more work and less time for you to do it." This explained why she was offering now and not before. "Would you rather have me do some cleaning or take the kids for an hour or so?"

An astonished silence greeted her; the first time she had known Kathryn to be wordless. "Well, you might try mopping up in the bathroom and sweeping the hall. The kids are messy, but Amos has them beat by miles."

Reflecting on the situation as she did her chores, Amy was amused to note that Amos caught his share of Kathryn's wrath. *So! I'm not the only delinquent punished by her blasts!*

*The seeds of love sprout slowly,* Amy thought after a week's effort brought only a grunt of thanks from Kathryn. *Like carrots. Mum used to give me the radish seeds to plant because they'd sprout in a few days.* Mum had taken the carrots, content to wait three weeks before seeing their tiny wisps of leaves poke through the soil. Mum knew her child's expectation couldn't sustain hope that long. *Now it's different,* she told herself. *I'm an adult. And besides, I'm on assignment.*

By the second week Amy became aware of another issue. Kathryn was pregnant. Even loose, long-hanging shirts could no longer hide the fact. *All the more reason to give her a helping hand,* she decided. Indeed, it was time to ratchet up the giving another notch.

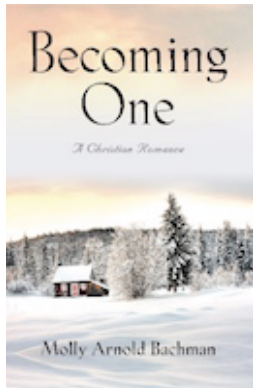
"How about I fix you a cup of tea?" she asked at the end of week two.

"Sure. Get one for yourself, too, if you like."

*Wow! That's progress,* Amy thought as she put the kettle on the propane hot plate. Mindful that very young seedlings can be easily hurt, she kept the visit - her first in four months - short and sweet. *Well, short, anyway,* she told herself later. It had been stiff, but not unpleasant. *No harsh words, thank God!*

By the end of the day she'd decided to make tea time a daily event. *I'll give it a try, anyway. Who knows what might come of it?*





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