

Pages for All Ages:

The Precious “Not Me”

Some words and phrases to know before you read

- gas-powered machinery
- harvesting
- hired workers
- Blacks, Italians
- custom
- opera
- thee
- precious
- intercultural
- baptized
- hick
- memorized
- entertaining
- career
- prejudice
- conversation
- method
- backgrounds
- appreciate

Rachel Davis was born in 1892 in Clarksboro, New Jersey, the second of six children – Walter, Rachel, Thomas, Amy, Charles, and Alan. Both of Rachel’s parents, Charles and Berthe, came from big Quaker farm families. Lots of uncles, aunts, and cousins lived on farms in Salem County, like Rachel and her parents did, and many attended the same Quaker meeting – Woodstown Friends.

Back in the 1890s, farmers didn’t own gas-powered machinery for doing farm work. Back then, farm work got done by the muscles of the people and animals on the farm, working together, each one doing their part. Sometimes people from different farms would help each other with the really big jobs, like harvesting.

The people who worked on the Davis farm were all eight members of the family plus a few hired workers – mostly Blacks and Italians. The family and the workers all ate meals together and got to know each other. Even though the Davis family followed the old

Quaker custom of not making music, the children were allowed to learn songs from the workers. Rachel learned to work with a team of planters, moving to the rhythm of a song. Each worker did one step in the planting – dig the hole, drop the seed, cover the seed – and each step was timed to a certain word in the song. That way, everybody worked together smoothly. Rachel would drop seed after seed at a steady beat, following the beat of the song. She also learned a little bit of opera from some of the Italians.

By working with different kinds of people, Rachel thought of an important idea when she was a child. This idea would guide her for the rest of her life. She realized that the “not me” in another person was the part that she loved most. How she said it was, “It’s the ‘not-me’ in thee that makes thee precious to me.” When she grew up, this idea helped her create something new called “intercultural education.” She became famous all over the world for that.

But while she was still young, Rachel learned that sometimes, people can be mean. During their grade school years, the Davis children attended a one-room schoolhouse with children of different religions. Sometimes, the Methodist children would make fun of the Quakers for not being baptized, saying that the Quakers would go to Hell because of it. During her first year at college – Bucknell in the city of Lewisburg, Pennsylvania – nobody would talk to Rachel because they thought she was a “hick.” But Rachel figured out how to get around that problem. During her





first summer vacation from college, she memorized and practiced lots of jokes. Then, when she got back to college for her second year, she made herself so entertaining that the other students asked her to join the drama club and the student government.

Rachel graduated from Bucknell in 1914 and took a job teaching history at Glassboro High School in New Jersey. Her students liked her for making them act out stories from history instead of boring them with lectures. After her first year of teaching, Rachel married a businessman named Nathan Stewart DuBois. The couple agreed that they would not have children and that Rachel would have a career.

In 1920, right after the end of World War One, Rachel Davis DuBois and her husband attended the First World Conference of Quakers in London. Then they traveled to Germany to support the Quaker program of feeding hungry children there.



When she got back to the United States, Rachel Davis DuBois decided to take a break from teaching high school and to work instead on world problems. She read an article about the causes of war, which made her feel certain that war is caused by prejudice. She decided to focus the rest of her life on helping people from different groups understand each other better.

For the next fifty years, she did that work in many different ways. Mainly, she got thousands of small groups of people to sit down together and talk with each other. She did this through lots of different organizations – Columbia University, New York University, Earlham College, the U.S. Department

of Education, the US Department of State, Women’s International League, Fellowship of Reconciliation, American Friends Service Committee, YMCA and YWCA, American Baptist Convention, American Jewish Federation, Carnegie Institute for Peace, the Ford Foundation, and many more. Two of the most famous people to hire Dubois to do work for them were Martin Luther King, Jr., and Margaret Mead.



Most people who remember Rachel Davis DuBois talk about her “Group Conversation” method. The most important parts of that method are: Small groups of people from different backgrounds come together. They all sit where they can see each other’s faces easily while they talk. They all share personal memories about some simple idea, like childhood holidays or favorite songs. They try to better understand the differences between their groups. They try to better appreciate the things that are similar about them all.

Rachel Davis DuBois received many public awards for being “the heart of intercultural education.” She died in 1993 when she was 101 years old. ❖

- What is something you’re glad you know, that you learned from someone who is not in your family?
- What are some different groups in your school that don’t know each other very well?
- What are some good ways for different groups of people to get to know each other?

Photos: Immigrant farmworker family, 1909, by Lewis Wickes Hine. Cross-cultural meeting, 1972, by the Menonite Church. Rachel Davis DuBois, circa 1920, from Nicholas Montalto.

