

Highlights

AND THE BRETHREN

by Peggy Reiff Miller

Since its founding in 1946, generations of Brethren children and parents have looked forward to the monthly arrival of *Highlights for Children* magazine. Its tagline of “fun with a purpose” aligned closely with Brethren values, and still does today. That’s not surprising when you consider that the magazine’s cofounder, Dr. Garry C. Myers, was a born-and-bred member of the Church of the Brethren.

Garry Cleveland Myers was born in 1884 on a farm near Sylvan, Pa. His father, John A. Myers, was a founding member and elder of the Stone Bridge Church just across the state line in western Maryland.

At age 21, Garry Myers was called to the ministry by the Licking Creek congregation. His own calling, however, pulled him toward education and led him to a career through which his positive impact on children is still being felt today.



At Ursinus College near Philadelphia, Myers met his equal in a Pennsylvania farm girl from the Poconos. He married Caroline Elizabeth Clark in 1912, after obtaining his Ph.D. in child psychology at Columbia College in New York City. From 1912 to 1914, Myers taught history and social science at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa.

Far ahead of their times in many ways, this gifted duo went on to become experts in child psychology, education, and parenting. Treating children as the world’s most important people and allowing for their creativity was always uppermost in their minds. They used observations of their own children as a mini-lab of sorts, to the point where their four-year-old son Jack would look up from what he was doing and say, “Take a record.”

The dream

After a decade of teaching at what is now Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, the Myerses began contributing to and advising children’s periodicals. In 1935, Garry became editor-in-chief of the newly created *Children’s Activities* magazine. Caroline became associate editor. The publication became known to the educational department of the Church of the Brethren, including peace education representative Dan West.

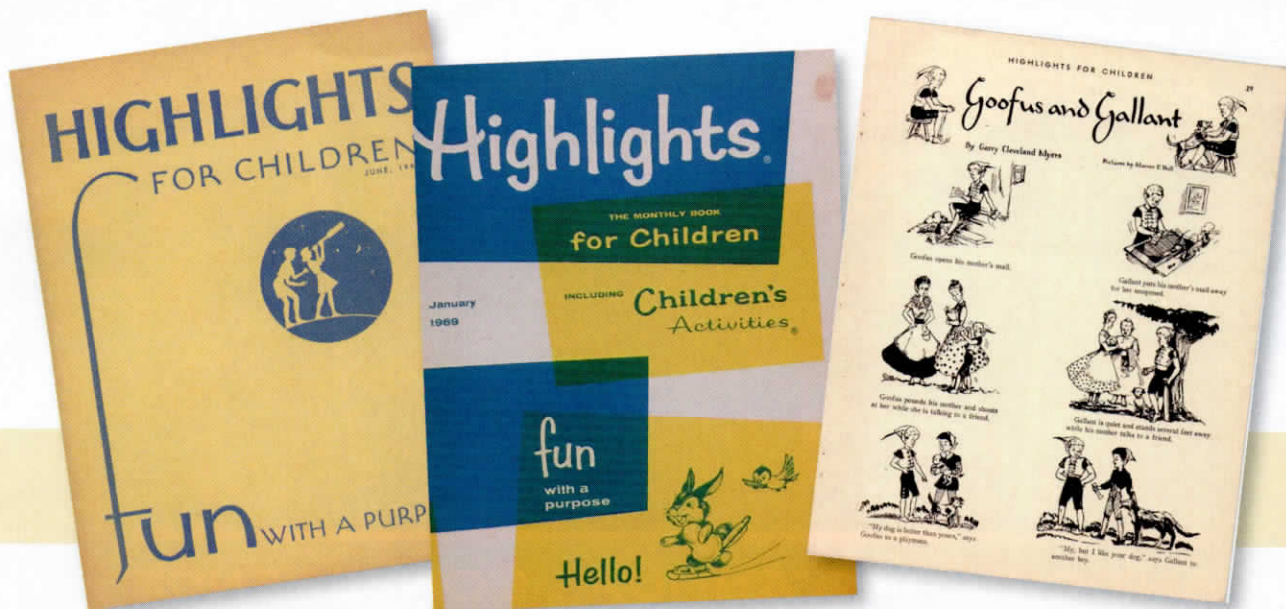
In great demand as speakers, the Myerses left their positions at Case Western in 1940 and began traveling

and lecturing around the country for the magazine’s publisher, the Child Training Association. Being on the road so much gave the couple abundant time to talk. “What we used to talk about,” Caroline told her granddaughter, Pat Myers Mikeson, *Highlights* historian, “is what we would do if that magazine were ours. What we would change. What we wanted to say to children. What we wanted in it and what we didn’t want in it.”

Garry and Caroline Myers became increasingly disillusioned with the publisher’s inclusion of things they didn’t find edifying for children, such as pre-formed shapes to cut out or color, which didn’t encourage creativity, and third-party advertising directed at both children and their parents. They began to talk with others about their dream.

On March 25, 1946, as they were going on stage for a presentation in Bradford, Pa., they received a telegram from their publisher saying, “Information of your proposed publication venture has reached me.” He demanded their resignation March 31 if true, and if not to “present proof at once.” Suddenly, at ages 61 and 58, they were on their own.

It didn’t take them long to regroup. The first issue of *Highlights for Children* was published in June 1946. Paper was scarce following World War II, and they set up business offices in Columbus, Ohio, near a printer they found that had an ample supply. Instead of moving to



Columbus, however, the Myers family moved to Caroline's family homestead in Boyds Mills, Pa., where they had often summered, and set up editorial offices above a car dealership in nearby Honesdale.

Word of this development reached Dan West, who wrote on Feb. 17, 1947:

"Dear Brother Myers:

"I heard some bad news, which may be good news, to the effect that because the official policy of *Children's Activities* is too warm toward war meanings, you split up with them. Miss Ruth Shriver gave me the name of the new publication, *Highlights for Children*, to which we should like to subscribe."

Garry responded: "The reason your name was one of several reasons for our leaving 'Children's Activities' and founding HIGHLIGHTS FOR CHILDREN."

According to *The Highlights Way*, a book published by Highlights in 2014, the very first issue of the magazine "had a drawing showing missiles, grenades, gas masks, and machine guns falling into a great cauldron and being forged into farming and gardening tools—along with a biblical quotation, 'And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.'"

Goofus and Gallant

West also inquired about the Goofus and Gallant feature that Garry Myers had created for *Children's Activities*. Fictional twin Goofus' conduct was

selfish and thoughtless, Gallant's gentle and caring. "Your Goofus and Gallant articles," West wrote, "were very warmly welcomed by our youngsters. I wonder if you were allowed to take them along with you or whether that is the property of *Children's Activities*. I hope that they are still your brain children."

West went on to propose an idea: using the characters "to carry appropriate messages toward effective peace education on film strip and in third dimension [via True-View viewers]."

Garry's response: "The situation concerning 'Goofus and Gallant' is rather curious. We are advised legally that 'Children's Activities' cannot use the names and that we should not for a year or so. I don't see why other characters could not be invented to carry out the fine purpose you have in mind."


The Highlights philosophy

Although Goofus and Gallant never appeared in Brethren educational materials, they did make it into *Highlights for Children* in 1948 and remain a regular feature to this day. In talking about the moral and spiritual values of the magazine, *The Highlights Way* says it is "telling that Goofus and Gallant . . . make up one of the brand's most beloved features."

Pat Myers Mikelson says, "My grandfather was a deeply religious person in a spiritual sense. I believe that his Brethren upbringing influenced very

greatly his philosophy that became the foundation of Highlights. He was a man of great moral character and had a great respect for childhood, for women, for all persons no matter what their differences, and also a deep belief in the brotherhood of man."

The philosophy and values set forth by Garry and Caroline Myers continue to be carried out by the fourth generation of the Myers family, who now lead a much-expanded Highlights company. This philosophy is summarized in a dedication for the magazine written in 1960 by Garry and Caroline and their son Garry, Jr. With one small edit, the dedication appears in the magazine to this day:

This book [magazine] of wholesome fun is dedicated to helping children grow
 in basic skills and knowledge
 in creativeness
 in ability to think and reason
 in sensitivity to others
 in high ideals and worthy ways of living—
 for CHILDREN are the world's most important people. 

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