

A 'Gathering of Sisters' You Won't Want to Miss

*Note: This is Part 1 of a two-part interview with author Darla Weaver about her new book, *A Gathering of Sisters* (Herald Press). To read Part 2, [click here](#).*

***Gathering of Sisters* tells about getting together weekly with your mother and sisters. Tell us a little bit about your family.**

There were five of us sisters, growing up together with our four little brothers in the white farmhouse our parents built. The nine of us kept this five-bedroom house brimming with life, and crowded with both happiness and some inevitable sadness. We did a lot of living and a lot of learning in that house.

And then we all grew up.

I was the first to leave. On a warm and sunshiny day in September 2000, after the leaves on the lofty silver maples had faded from summer-green and before they wore brightly flaming autumn shades, I was married to Laverne Weaver. It was the first wedding in that mellowing white house we all called home. Four more were to follow in the next several years. Except for my youngest brother, we've all left home. Most of us live close, but one brother lives in Alaska.

Q: Why did you decide to make an effort to get together once a week?

Our Tuesday happened more by accident than by conscious planning. We never sat down and planned for Tuesdays. But after I moved six miles away to my own home, I gradually acquired the habit of going back to the old home place and spending a day each week with my family. On Monday I always had laundry to do, and scores of other jobs to tackle after

the weekend. And before we had children, I worked part time in a bakery at the end of the week.

That left Tuesdays. Tuesday really was the perfect in-between sort of day to spend with Mom and my sisters. On Tuesday, the five of us sisters still come home. We pack up the children—all 18 of them during summer vacation—and head to the farm.

We go early. I drive my spirited little mare, Charlotte, and she trots briskly along the six miles of winding country roads. Regina and Ida Mae live much closer. They married brothers, and their homes are directly across the fields from Dad and Mom's farm. They usually bike, with children's noses pressed against the bright mesh of the carts they tow behind their bicycles. Or they walk, pushing strollers over the back fields and up the lane. And Emily and Amanda, who also married brothers and live in neighboring houses about five miles away, come together with everyone crammed into one carriage.

Q: Do all the kids enjoy Tuesdays as well?

The children love Tuesdays. On warm days, they play on the slide and the swings in the cool shade of the silver maples, jump on the trampoline, run through their grandpa's three greenhouses, ride along on the wagon going to the fields where produce by the bushels and bins is hauled to the packing shed. They build hay houses in the barn and explore the creek. The boys take poles and hooks and bait and spend hours fishing and playing in the small creek that flows beneath the lane and through the thickets beside the pasture fence. They catch dozens of tiny blue gills and northern creek chubs, most of which they release back into the water hole, a deep pool that yawns at the mouth of a large culvert, to be caught again next week. They work too, at mowing lawn, raking, lugging flower pots around or anything else Grandma needs them to do, but most often Tuesdays on Grandpa's farm are play days.

Q: What do you do when you are all gathered together?

We don't exactly play, yet Tuesdays for us are also about relaxing. Of course, there is always work to do—just making dinner for such a group is a big job—but the day is more about relaxing, reconnecting, visiting and sharing. We talk a lot; we laugh a lot; sometimes we cry. Tuesday is about being sisters, daughters, moms. It's about learning what is happening in each other's lives.

Every day is different, yet every Tuesday follows a predictable pattern that varies with the seasons. Winter finds us inside, close to the warmth humming from the woodstove, absorbed in wintertime pursuits which include card-making, crocheting, sewing, puzzles—jigsaw, crossword, sudoku—and reading books and magazines. But as soon as spring colors the buds of the maples with a reddish tinge, we spend more time outside. The greenhouses are loaded with plants, the flowerbeds full of unfurling perennials, and the grass is greening in the yard again.

In summer, while the garden and fields burst with produce, the breezy shade of the front porch calls. It wraps around two sides of the house and is full of Mom's potted plants and porch furniture. We sit there to shell peas, husk corn or just sip a cold drink and cool off after a warm stroll through the flowers.

Then autumn echoes through the country, the leaves flame and fall, and we rake them up—millions of leaves. Where we rake one Tuesday is covered again by the next, until at last the towering maples stand disrobed of leaves, their amazing 70-foot branches a wavering fretwork against a sky that is sullen with winter once more.

Q: How did your sisters react to the news about you writing this book?

The initial reactions varied.

"I suppose you would change all our names," Mom said after a

while.

That was a new thought for me, and one I didn't want to consider. "Oh, no, that would be much too hard. We would just use everyone's real name." Merely the thought of renaming 18 children exhausted me.

"Maybe you'll have to Sunday us up a bit," Emily suggested with a laugh. "Make sure we all use our best manners when you write about us."

"Oh, yes, I won't write anything you wouldn't like," I promised.

"She will still have to claim us as sisters," Regina points out, as usual finding a positive angle to the topic. "She won't make us sound too odd or ornery or anything."

I promised not to.

Regina's oldest daughter, Jerelyn, who at 14 has graduated from eighth grade and is again spending Tuesdays with us, considered staying home for the entire next year to keep her name out of the book. But on a whole, no one really objected. Like Laverne and our children, Mom and my sisters are almost used to my compulsive scribbling. Almost. {eoa}

Darla Weaver is a homemaker, gardener, writer and Old Order Mennonite living in the hills of southern Ohio. She is the author of *Water My Soul*, *Many Lighted Windows* and *Gathering of Sisters*. Weaver has written for *Family Life*, *Ladies Journal*, *Young Companion* and other magazines for Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups. Before her three children were born, she also taught school. Her hobbies are gardening and writing.