



E-Newsletter | December 2015

Poetry and Songs

At this time of the year, as we gather and celebrate with family and friends, we sometimes sing the words or hum the song: "Over the River and Through the Wood" or some variation thereof. Most of us don't realize that the song is based on lyrics written by a woman! In this e-newsletter, we profile two women whose poetry/songs are familiar to us, although their names are not.

An ardent advocate for abolition and human rights, Lydia Maria Child's writing supported her family in the 1800s, when that financial arrangement was quite unusual. Her 1833 book, in which she provided a history of slavery and reasons why slavery should be abolished, led her to being considered the first person to publish anti-slavery literature. Prior to the publication of this book, she had written fiction, edited a children's magazine and published a popular book titled *The Frugal Housewife*.



Lydia Maria Child

Child continued to write anti-slavery works. A collection of her anti-slavery letters was published in 1859 as a pamphlet; over 300,000 copies were distributed. Ironically, she is not remembered for her ardent abolition writings or her work to defend the rights of Native Americans. Instead, we know best Child's poem "A Boy's Thanksgiving Day" which are the words for the song we sing this time of year: "Over the River and Through the Wood to grandfather's house we go. . ." Child has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Known for her more than 8,000 hymns (yes, 8,000-NOT a misprint!), Fanny

Crosby became blind shortly after birth because of an accident by a medical quack. Blessed Assurance is probably her best known hymn. Because the hymnals are filled with so many of her works, she wrote many of the hymns under pseudonyms.



Fanny Crosby

Crosby wrote her first poem at age eight; it minimized her blindness and demonstrated her refusal to feel sorry for herself. By age fifteen, she was enrolled at the New York Institute for the Blind; after finishing her education there, she stayed on to teach. She was dissuaded from writing poetry for a time, but later she was free to indulge her passion. Her husband was an organist who wrote the music for many of her hymns. Musicians would come to their home looking for lyrics. One famous story has her putting the lyrics together for "Safe in the Arms of Jesus" in less than 35 minutes. Under contract to her publisher to produce three hymns a week, Crosby was so prolific, she often produced six or seven each day. Crosby continued to write poetry until shortly before her death at age 95. Her last verse was "You will reach the river brink,

some sweet day, bye and bye."

Child and Crosby are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. We salute their accomplishments and are proud to continue telling their stories.

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Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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