

A STORY

(From CONTEXT, February 15, 1982)

John Killinger tells the following story: “A woman from the Shenandoah Valley told me this story. She is an artist. One day she was in the woods, painting at her easel. Two shots rang out from a nearby bluff. She realized she had been hit and was lying on the ground. She could see two young men on the bluff with a rifle. They were still shooting at her. She was struck on the hand, on a thigh, in the torso. She passes out. When she came to, she was in a hospital room. Her body was suspended above the bed in a sling. She had lost so much blood, and was in such a state of shock when she was discovered that the doctors were afraid to operate immediately to remove the bullets; they waited nearly a week to see whether her condition would stabilize enough to bear an operation. Most of that time she lay hovering between life and death, in a state of semi-consciousness.” (Now the story begins) “But she remembers one important thing. People from the church she belonged to –though she did not attend regularly –cared for her. She could not speak and they did not know she was aware of their presence. But they were there. ‘I lay there in my sling,’ she says, ‘blissfully aware of their coming and going. I felt as if I were gathered up in a cocoon of love. It did not matter if I lived or died. I was part of the beloved community.’”