Biscuits are comfort food made with love. That’s why Melody Ritchey calls acts of comfort “making biscuits.”

Melody, a successful Realtor in Dadeville, Ala., spent most of her childhood in Selma at the United Methodist Children’s Home, the orphanage that evolved over the years to become Embrace Alabama Kids and Embrace Florida Kids. She also spent a bit of time in foster homes, and her passion for helping children grew out of her experiences as a child in nontraditional home situations.

Although she has many stories to tell about God’s work throughout her life, one experience has shaped her beliefs about how to walk with others in difficult times. “When there’s nothing you can say, you can make biscuits.”

She remembers her wonderful caretaker, Louise Porter, at the Children’s Home, showing love and investing children with a sense of purpose and belonging in practical ways. She tells a story of a young girl whose brother had been returned to their mom while she remained at the Home. Ms. Porter had to try to explain this situation, but there is sometimes no way to explain a heartbreaking truth to a child. Ms. Porter’s approach to helping the little girl in her fear and grief started with a question: “Do you know how to make biscuits?” As Ms. Porter and the girl measured flour and lard, milk and salt, then kneaded it gently amidst talk and tears and silence, she gave the girl purpose, support and tangible comfort, all resulting in a warm, buttery treat. That process was much more than a distraction, she said. That small step of working together to create something real and desirable was an act of faith which would grow.

“I will always be in debt to the Children’s Home and to the wonderful people there who raised me,” Melody said. “They were teaching me by the way they lived. They were making biscuits.”

Melody said when she is overwhelmed or feels helpless, she pulls out the flour and Ms. Porter’s recipe. “Sometimes, I don’t even eat the biscuits,” she said. “It’s the process that reminds me I don’t have to have an answer.”

In the Bible, we see Job’s friends sitting with him in silence for seven days. We see a good Samaritan bandage and feed an injured man who was robbed. We see Mary standing and watching her son Jesus as he suffers and dies. Melody said that whatever the activity, whether it’s working on cars, or doing puzzles, taking walks, or baking a flaky bite of goodness, the beauty for children is in having that caring adult by their side, devoted to them, and sharing the most ordinary of life’s pleasures and the most difficult of life’s challenges.

“We all have our stories of hard times,” she said. “What we remember later, what helps us grow, are the people who were there to support us and teach us.” Ms. Porter and Melody’s house parents, Dot and Hugh Busby, were there for her every day, guiding her mind and thoughts as they not only told her about Jesus but shared His love in their daily activities.

“They taught me grace and mercy,” she said. “They were kind. We shared so much love and laughter.”

As a mother, grandmother, business woman and community member, Melody works to share her appreciation for the selfless adults who made a difference in her life by giving her the “home, healing and hope” that continues to be the core mission for Embrace today. “If it helps someone, I’m in!” she said.

She admires the restorative efforts of foster parents and caretakers as well as the staff of Embrace who invest their lives and hearts in their work to serve vulnerable children and teens.

“Their work is a calling,” Melody said.

“It makes such a difference. And they know firsthand, there will be times in life when all the words won’t fix anything.” she said, “In those circumstances, make a pan of biscuits.”

Ms. Porter’s Biscuits

2 cups self-rising flour

¼ cup lard

¾ cup milk

Pinch of salt

Preheat oven to 475

Make a flour well in bowl.

Add lard. Mix.

Add milk and salt. Mix well.

Place dough on flour surface. Knead gently to large round ball.

Pinch small golf ball size off dough, roll into ball, pat and place on greased baking pan, almost touching.

Bake 8-10 minutes.