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SOPHIA

W I S D O M

*Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister."
Proverbs 7:4a*



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CONTENTS

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EDITORIAL

- 3 Faith of Our Mothers: A Good Witness - *by Sarah Klassen*

FEATURES

- 4 Sojourner Truth: Preaching God and Freedom - *by Neoma Jantz*
- 6 Pauline Foote: Ordained to Bring Good News - *by Lorina Marsch*
- 7 Bound Feet, Bicycles and Bible Study: Women in China
- *by Sandy Schroeder*
- 9 Living With Loss - An Interview with Esther Horch - *by Donna Stewart*
- 12 Women in a Changing Church - *by Agnes Dyck*
- 16 There's a Wife in my Kitchen - *by Doreen Martens*
- 17 Hunger, Gratitude and Poems - *by Sarah Klassen*
- 19 Women of Influence - *by Esther Schellenberg, Bertha Klassen,
Shirley Bergen, Katherine Morgan, Martha Neufeld, Ester DeFehr,
Hertha Janzen*

COLUMNS

- 8 FROM THE SOURCE
Ruth the Moabite - *by Dale Taylor*
- 11 AS I SEE IT
The Artist As Homemaker: A Portrait - *by Eleanor Martens*
- 16 THE TOKEN MALE
On Basketball and Women in Ministry - *by John Derksen*

SHELF LIFE

- 14 *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Women in Ministry in the Church*
John E. Toews, Valerie Rempel, Katie Funk Wiebe, editors.
Reviewed by Donna Stewart
- 15 *The Return of the Prodigal Son* - *by Henri Nouwen*
Reviewed by Dora Dueck

18 GLEANINGS

5 POETRY

Cover photo is of Helena Dueck (1852-1912)

Faith of Our Mothers: A Good Witness

Faithfulness is a modest quality; it doesn't enjoy a particularly high profile in our present age. The news media aren't jostling each other to offer prime time or front page coverage to stories of faith and faithfulness. Corruption in high places, violence, human rights causes and the Grey Cup Game are much more riveting. Nevertheless, in this issue we want to give our attention to faith, particularly as manifested in the lives of our biological and spiritual foremothers whom we wish to acknowledge and honour.

Our mothers were flesh and blood and carried with them strengths and weaknesses; to idealize them would serve no good purpose. Still, we are enriched when we remember their lives and consider some of the results of their faithfulness.

We could begin with the sixteenth century Anabaptist women whose stories of martyrdom set a high standard for faith against which we hesitate to measure our own.

When Maria van Beckum joined the Anabaptists, her own mother alerted the police. She fled to the home of her brother, Jan, who also refused to support her. Jan's wife, Ursula, however, shared her sister-in-law's faith and agreed to accompany her to the arraignment and hearing. Maria and Ursula van Beckum prayed for and were granted strength, not only to face death at the stake, but also to leave a "good witness." It is reported that in their death they radiated joy. So impressed were the witnesses to that death that they claimed next morning green leaves had sprouted from Maria's charred stake.

Here is faith that is truly "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." This is not untested faith, not a hothouse variety that must be coddled and sheltered. It is deeply rooted, able to withstand the heat and storm of a hostile world.

Our world, too, is sometimes hostile and bewildering. As we look around



us for models, we may make the mistake of concluding that good looks, professional success and sexual power are the only values offered by contemporary women models. This is not so. We also have the courage, skills and dedication of Roberta Bondar, the compassion of Mother Theresa and the unselfish peace activism of Karen Ridd to ponder and emulate.

And we have our own Mennonite role models. Elsie Fischer, who was buried this summer in Oregon, and Katie Penner, who has retired to Saskatoon, spent their lives bringing better health and good news to large numbers of Zairians. Their faith in action has altered the lives of many men and women. They are only two examples of more than a century of dedicated female missionaries sent out by the Mennonite faith community.

The women you will read about in this issue of *Sophia* represent the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us; in the rich soil of their experiences our own faith can send down roots and be nurtured. Because their experiences were seldom as dramatic as those of their Anabaptist forebears, they have not often found a place in the official record. And yet our mothers' quiet influence may have been more significant in shaping our lives and attitudes than the carefully recorded proceedings of (usually male) conference boards and committees.

This issue of *Sophia* also touches on the role of women in church leadership, a matter that we hope will receive attention at the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to be held in Winnipeg in July, 1993. It was with some dismay that we heard of the reluctance to give this question a place on the agenda. The reluctance stems from the potentially divisive nature of the issue.

It seems unlikely that a consensus can be quickly reached on the question of MB women in leadership, even among women. On the one hand, we have those who have lived their lives in submission to their husbands and to male church leaders, and have done so willingly, in the firm belief that this was the biblical, God-ordained way. In their lives they have experienced joy, fulfilment and God's grace. Their integrity and faithfulness are our communal treasure and their voices are essential in this dialogue.

On the other hand, we have those who have suffered under the silencing of women in the church. They have read the Scriptures and heard the call of God to use their leadership gifts, but have not been affirmed in that call. How much longer can we ask them to wait? Can we risk losing these women, who are often the most dedicated to the cause of God's kingdom? Can we allow their considerable gifts to go unused?

It is foolish to think the dilemma will go away if we deny it. To shrink from it in fear is not useful either. Much better to consider the question of women in leadership not a threat, but a challenge which we must take on with a willingness to listen to each other and to study the Scriptures together, once again, prayerfully, as we have done in the past with other challenges. Maybe it's possible for us to embrace within one faith community women and men (and within one conference local churches) who read certain difficult biblical texts and arrive at opposite views. To do so would be to make a strong statement for the possibility of unity in diversity. It would be a good witness. It would be good news.

We invite you, our readers, to reflect on the articles and issues in *Sophia* and respond to them with your insights and opinions.

Sarah Klassen

Women of Influence

*We asked a number of women to respond to the question, "Is there a woman who has particularly influenced you, personally or professionally, at some point in your life?" We were surprised to discover how many women view their mothers as their primary role models. We bring you their responses in this issue of *Sophia*.*

As a child I reflected her faith; as a youth I challenged it. Now as a woman I've learned to respect it. Over the years her Christianity has had an impact on my life. Through her teaching I've gained a knowledge of Scripture and through her example I've discovered the importance of truth and love. The woman is my mother.

I remember my first exposure to the Bible: my parents' bedroom, a quilt to cuddle under, and the rise and fall of my mother's voice reading from the Bible storybook. It's more than a pleasant memory. It was there that I first began to understand and appreciate God's word, which became the foundation of my faith.

While Mother's teaching of biblical truths was deliberate, her quiet example was equally effective. In her daily life I saw evidence of her faith. Honesty was not an option for her. Ly-

SOMEONE TO FOLLOW

By Esther Schellenberg



Esther Schellenberg with her mother, Helena Neufeld

ing, cheating, even "forgetting" to declare goods at the border were not to be tolerated. It was our responsibility to demonstrate truth.

Sacrificial love was another Christ-like quality I observed in my mother. So often, long before I was even aware of it, she set aside her own comforts and pleasures for

us, her family. It is with deep warmth that I remember waking, during illness, to feel her cool hand on my head and hear her reassuring voice. She gave her all. That kind of love made it possible for me to accept the reality of Christ's death on the cross.

When I was young, my mother's faith carried me, much as her body carried mine before birth. When I made my own decision to follow Christ, I developed new ideals. In spite of these, I value the solid base I've received through my mother's teaching. Her faith in God continues to be a source of inspiration to me.

Esther Schellenberg is a mother and a part-time teaching assistant at Greenway School. Together with her husband and son she attends Burrows Bethel Church.

BETH DOUGLAS: JOY IN MUSIC

By Bertha Klassen

Beth Douglas came into my life while I was preparing for my chosen career as a teacher. It was 1956 and she was teaching music at the Normal School in Winnipeg.

I was an impressionable young woman, very critical of all my instructors, as was the fashion among us students. Beth Douglas, however, struck me as unusual.

From the first time she bounced (literally) into class, I was bowled over by her obvious love of singing. She must have been about 43 then, but she never seemed to get older. Her blue-green eyes sparkled, her red hair flamed and her joy in living did not abate.

Beth Douglas never married, never had children, but to me as a mother, wife and teacher, she typified all that was appealing about being a woman. She was charming, immaculate, humorous, and successful in her work. She could make anyone sing and taught us, who loved to sing, how to teach others to love singing also.

After she left the Normal School, Beth Douglas became our music supervisor in the Winnipeg School

District. What a privilege to have such a positive mentor. Even when ill, she would bounce into the classroom with a joyous, "Good morning," that made the children sit up and take notice.

In 1945, when most choir leaders were male, Beth Douglas, age 32, became conductor of the Bethesda Church choir, holding this post until 1978. In addition to ongoing church and school work, she wrote textbooks, adjudicated at festivals, conducted numerous choirs, prepared school music broadcasts and became the first woman to conduct the Bay's Christmas choir. In 1976 she received the City of Winnipeg Community Service Award and in 1981 the Order of the Buffalo Hunt.

I truly admired her. Beth Douglas was caring, wise, sensitive, warm, professional, self-confident, fearless and committed to her work. She was creative, willing to assume new responsibilities and always cheerful. When she died of cancer in 1987, I, as well as many others, mourned the loss of a great woman.

Bertha Klassen has been a music teacher in Winnipeg for many years. In the spring of 1992, she and her husband, John, spent five weeks teaching music to camp counsellors in Russia, under Kingdom Ventures. She is a member of the Elmwood MB Church.

THE SECOND MILE

By Shirley Bergen

My first recollection of cousin Anna is not very pleasant. I was nine years old when my parents asked her to manage our home while mother was in hospital. Although she was an experienced and efficient housekeeper, looking after three children plus aging grandparents must have been overwhelming for her.

Since I was the oldest child, she tried to solicit my help, but I was not very cooperative. As soon as lunch was over I joined my brothers' friends in the sandbox, ignoring her call to come dry the dishes. When I finally trudged into the kitchen, expecting a good bawling out, there were no dishes. And no Anna. I felt so guilty that she never had to call me twice after that.

Several years later, when Anna became my Sunday School teacher, I was surprised at how much she had improved. She laughed and joked with us teenagers and actually tried to answer our questions about dating. Instead of lecturing about Bible characters we already knew, she taught us Christian conduct. Best of all, she took us tobogganing.

Our friendship grew as I became an adult. I admired her neatness and her organizational abilities. Her flexibility in adapting to marriage after 32 years of independence amazed me. At a time when few women worked outside the home, she managed to juggle

raising a family and working as a nurse while her husband studied. At the same time she continued her involvement in the church.

Now, at 72, she still seems young because she has never quit learning. Her perseverance has resulted in, among other projects, the production of a very interesting family history book.

But her most notable characteristics are her friendliness and hospitality. The latter was put to the test one Saturday when my husband and I arrived at her doorstep with two babies because our car had broken down 200 kilometers from home. Instead of inviting us in, Anna stood in the doorway, awkwardly.

"We can't let you in," she said. "Two of our children have the measles."

But she didn't leave us stranded. After a hurried consultation, she and her husband got a baby sitter and drove us the 25 kilometers to my uncle's anniversary. We arrived just in time to catch a ride home, leaving Anna and her husband to arrange for our VW to be towed to a garage. I would call that going the second mile!

Thank you, Anna, for being such a good friend.

Shirley Bergen is a mother and homemaker who has raised five children and now enjoys her three grandchildren. She has experience in bookkeeping, in the family business, and is active in the Richmond Park MB Church in Brandon.

As I reflect on my childhood, I remember being sure my mother must be related to the Queen of England. After all, she had dark curly hair and a strong English background. The resemblance was so obvious! I remember admiring my mother: she dressed nicely, wore perfume, and was so smart. She appreciated my gifts, had a really excellent husband and always smiled. If I could be like that by the time I was twenty-one, I thought, life would be perfect.

Well, at thirty, I'm able to regard my parents with much gratitude and warm memories. I am thankful that God has enabled me to do this, as the past ten years have not been without pain. As the sole Christian in a family of seven, I have mourned the lack of spiritual dimension in our family life. I still have that emptiness, but perhaps I can thank God for putting 1000 miles between me and members of my family so

A MOTHER'S INFLUENCE

by Katherine Morgan

that I can enjoy what blessings we do have, and God can use this space to heal our family wounds.

It's uncanny, how I can hear my mother's voice when I speak to young children. In the past two years I've spent a lot of time with my three-year-old neighbour. Phrases such as, "Young ladies don't...", or, "It's not proper to...", come straight from my mother. As I'm speaking to Amber Lee, I can hear a strong English accent behind the words - and my accent is Canadian! My mother is succeeding in passing on to me a heritage of music, family history, ethnic pride and memories.

I love my job, but the petty behaviour, the chauvinism, the lack of consideration for others in the office can bring me down. Sometimes I describe my day at work to Mum. Usually I phone early Saturday and let her hear what I want to tell my coworkers, but don't. Mother has a good chuckle and says I sound exactly like she did when

she worked in an office. I'm glad my mother taught me a strong work ethic and determination. I know that deadlines must be met in spite of office politics.

My parents have been married 42 years and Mother says she'd never leave my dad for any reason. Even though they are not Christians, their faithful love for each other has been an example and a joy for me.

"Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23). Are these not the virtues Mother has been trying to impress upon me for many years? I am thankful to God for my mother.

Katherine Morgan, a member of the McIvor Avenue MB Church, is a commercial underwriter for an insurance company. Katherine has four older brothers. Her parents, Olwen and Allan Morgan, live near Fergus, ON.

Women of Influence

She was a somewhat shy and retiring child, who did not enjoy the limelight, but she kept her ears and eyes open to learn whatever lessons life offered. Through helping her widowed mother she acquired the skills to run a household and a farm.

She married a widower with six children and asked the Lord to give her a mother's love for those children before she would add any babies of her own. He answered that prayer. Later she added four girls to the family.

She had endless energy, and through difficult times made sure her family was well dressed and well fed. Her hospitality became legend. No visitors left her home without enjoying a cup of coffee, and many departed with gifts of farm produce or whatever she had to share. She always had lots of time for little children.

She taught us that Christ was our Saviour and that we would do well to follow Him. She instilled in us a love of

A FAITHFUL TEACHER

By Martha Neufeld



Anna (Wiens) Dick

poetry and music. Work and play, she believed, were equal privileges, necessary for our well-being. She had a great sense of humour and said it was good to laugh!

We learned from her to be mindful of the poor, to share, to finish what we had started and to do what we did as unto the Lord. People, she believed, were far more important than things. By example she taught us to love and honour our husbands, to honour God, and to serve others.

Above all, she taught us that God was dependable. He was her refuge and strength and, she said, would be ours as well.

Her name? Anna (Wiens) Dick. She was my mother. She has been the single greatest influence in my life and I will always love her.

Martha Neufeld served ten years on the executive committee of the MBCI Board. She is employed in para-medical work and serves on the evangelism committee and church council in the Portage Avenue MB Church where she and her husband, Ernest, are members. They have four children and seven grandchildren.

ANNI AND HER THOUSAND SISTERS

By Ester DeFehr

"We cried to the Lord to help us. We didn't thank for anything. We thought we had nothing to be thankful for. Later on I learned to be thankful even about little things. But then we only cried. We begged for bread and for help."

My friend Anni, now 70 years old, is the granddaughter of a formerly wealthy Mennonite farmer in the Caucasus in pre-revolutionary Russia. At 19 years of age, she was forced to work in a Siberian labour camp cutting down trees with one thousand other women. In those five difficult years of hard labour, Anni saw some of her companions die of starvation, their spirits so broken at times that they felt God had forsaken them. The young women's menstrual periods stopped. When teammates fell ill, the rest had to work harder to fill the quota for cut trees. They had to find ways to keep warm in the Siberian sub-zero winter.

I look at Anni intently as we sit together in her warm study, sipping tea. She is a beautiful woman. Her face is strong. The lines that gently highlight her eyes show age, like the life-lines of the oak tree. Her reticence keeps me from blurting out all the questions that rush to

my mind. Hesitantly, realizing how painful this is for her, I ask, "Anni, how did you make it through those five years?"

She sits back in her chair, looks down at her hands and wrings them slowly. "By recognizing God as our help," she says. "I believed he would hear our cry." Then she quietly tells me how they sang while they cut trees, how she often shared her bowl of soup or her bread with a sick woman, how the women washed the axe cuts on each other's legs and nursed each other back to health.

As she tells me about her companions, I can see in Anni's eyes the "love-pain" she still feels for them, a "love-pain" that comes from sharing hardships, feeling each other's torment and trying desperately to survive. They chose life. They chose to believe. They chose not to give up and not to let each other give up.

Anni's concern for her sisters, her search for ways to help and encourage them, gave meaning to the nightmare. Her desire to live has made me look at my life and the world around me. I realize how important it is to work hard at helping others, not to give up, and to choose to make good of the difficulties in my own life.

I learn from Anni's experience that the way we choose to believe makes all the difference. And that God truly is our help. Because Anni chose life then,

("Anni . . ." continued on page 7)

When I was approached to write about a woman who has influenced me, I knew immediately who it would be - Atlee and Winnifred Beechy.

Yes, Atlee and Winnifred.

Winnie, as she is known, has exemplified for me the role of a partner in that mysterious relationship called marriage.

I recall my first meeting with Atlee and Winnie. It was August, 1972. They had been married twenty-nine years, had three grown daughters with college degrees, who either were married or were about to be married. They had just returned from Calcutta, India, where they had filled an interim position as MCC Country Directors. Other than their India experience, I knew little about this couple.

Atlee was a professor at Goshen College. Winnie - ?

My husband, Neil, and I and our two young children were meeting with Atlee and Winnie as part of our orientation to an MCC assignment in Calcutta. They both contributed. They were clearly capable of working individually, but also worked effectively as partners.

Winnie, in her own right, has accomplished much. I know she has a Master's degree in Peace Studies from seminary, keeps a journal, writes articles, was on the Presidium of the Mennonite World Conference, hosts college students, went to China with the student exchange program, is a grandparent, is a caring neighbour, and has trav-

A PARTNER IN MARRIAGE

By Hertha Janzen



Winnifred Beechy

elled as an ambassador for MCC. Some of the accomplishments are clearly her own - others were as a partner.

When I think of Atlee and Winnie, some lines from Kahlil Gibran's words on marriage come to mind:

"And stand together
yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple
stand apart."

Winnie and Atlee - two pillars.

Herta Janzen is a member of the Elmwood MB Church. She is the Executive Director of Donwood Manor Personal Care Home. She and her husband, Neil, have been married twenty-eight and a half years and are the parents of two grown children.

("Anni . . ." continued from page 6)

she has a strong faith now that enables her to hear God's voice and recognize his hand in her life.

Anni, I am glad you chose to rely on God. It is important for me to tell your story so my children will know how you fought for your life and the lives of others. It is crucial that they understand how God helped you; then they too will learn to love your God and seek his help. You are our hero, you and your one thousand sisters.

Anni DeFehr and her husband, Abram, are members of the North Kildonan MB Church. She holds a degree in economics and for 27 years worked as chief economist and chartered accountant for a building company in Russia. She travelled extensively for this company checking accounts, advising on materials and making sure money was not lost. Anni DeFehr has ten grandchildren. She loves gardening and reading.

Ester DeFehr is a member of the McIvor Avenue MB Church. She and her husband are living temporarily in North Carolina starting up a new plant for Palliser Furniture.

SOJOURNER TRUTH: Preaching God and Freedom

By Neoma Jantz

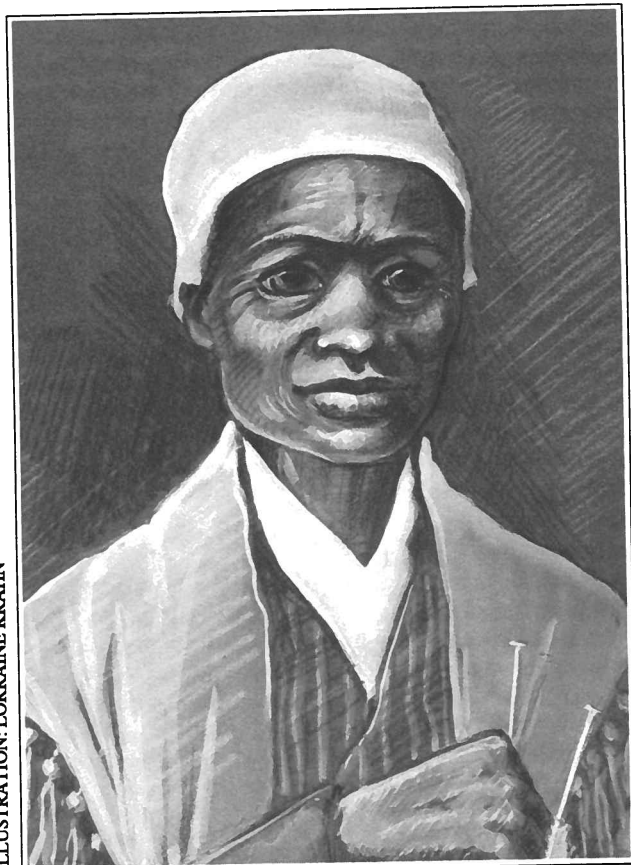


ILLUSTRATION: LORRAINE KRAHN

Sojourner Truth is one of those heroes of history who, in spite of staggering obstacles, helped to change her world through her profound faith, remarkable determination and striking personality.

Born in 1790, she lived through most of the nineteenth century, first as a slave, then as a freed woman. Her crusade for human rights and women's causes could easily upstage twentieth century activists. Her concern for truth is a shining beacon.

Encountering God

Her parents, Baumfree and Bett, slaves of a Dutch family in rural New York, had seen ten of their children sold into slavery. They named this daughter Isabella. Her mother gave her the only comfort she knew of: "there is a God...when you are beaten or cruelly

treated, you must ask his help and he will hear you." Responding to this great mystery of faith and assurance, Isabella began a lifelong conversation with God.

At age nine she was sold to the first of several slave masters who ranged from tolerable to cruel. One of them married her off against her wishes and then reneged on his promise to free her in return for conscientious service. This betrayal prompted her to take her youngest child, and at God's direct bidding, walk away at sunrise down the road to freedom.

Sympathetic Quakers took her in, and at a critical

juncture, when she was almost forced to return to her slave master, she experienced a dramatic and mystical encounter with Jesus. She was left with a sense of worth and of being loved, and her calling to be a travelling evangelist and social activist was confirmed.

Isabella's first priority was to be reunited with her five-year-old son who had been illegally sold to an Alabama planter. The Quakers helped her get legal assistance, which resulted not only in the return of the boy but also in the arrest of a white slave owner, something unheard of at the time. With this success, Isabella determined to take on white society, convinced that the law could be used for the good. She also discovered that she had a strong voice for telling the stories of black abuse.

In 1829 she moved with two of her children to New York City where she was joyfully reunited with some of her siblings.

Isabella's attraction to the mystical and her complete ignorance of theology led her into one of the fanatic religious cults that flourished in the 1830s. The leader was a self-declared prophet who led his group in increasingly bizarre behaviour. Isabella was falsely implicated in a poisoning episode, but her self-initiated legal challenge gained her an acquittal from an all-white jury, making her the first black to win a slander suit against prominent whites.

Repelled by New York City's corruption and vice, she resolved to take her message of Jesus and justice to other parts of the country.

A new name

Like most slaves, Isabella had borne the names of successive owners. Now, wanting to make a break with the past, she asked God for a new name. He gave her the name *Sojourner* because she was to travel "up an' down the land showin' the people their sins and bein' a sign unto them," and *Truth* because, as she put it, "Thou [God] art my last master and thy name is Truth." Penniless and illiterate she began her travels, mostly on foot, receiving hospitality from rich and poor alike. She was soon recognized as the tall, thin, barefoot woman in a grey dress and white bonnet whose voice thundered whether she spoke or sang.

In an era of religious revival Sojourner found plenty of opportunity to speak at the nightly camp meetings common throughout the area. Her text was: "When I found Jesus," and her goal was to do battle for her own people by tearing at the consciences of white folks.

In the decade before the Civil War the country was seething with unrest. Sojourner waded right into the hotly-debated issues of slavery and women's rights. She would enter a meeting where some social issue was being discussed, take a seat near the speaker and, at the opportune moment, rise up and hold forth. Drawing from her own and others' experiences of slavery and oppression, she cried out for repentance, justice and change. She often captivated a hostile audience with her wit and logic, expressed in the simplest of idioms. Sometimes she launched into a hymn that diffused a potentially volatile situation.

Her impassioned speeches drew jeers, tongue-lashings and threats from

her opponents. On one occasion she stripped to her waist to prove that she was really a woman, and not, as her accusers claimed, a man. It was the gallant style in which she could turn an argument upside down that won her the respect and support of her hearers. The famous author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, said of Sojourner, "I do not recollect...anyone who had more of that silent and subtle power which we call personal presence than this woman."

In her wanderings Sojourner met prominent abolitionists and shared platforms with noted politicians. Wealthy and courageous whites who worked with the Underground Railroad became her friends and protectors. In 1850 a white woman who had relatives in the deep south wrote a biography of Sojourner, copies of which the latter carried in her knapsack and sold on her travels. Now and then Sojourner returned home to check up on her family; sometimes she would bring along a young grandson as a companion.

Sojourner became famous from the east coast to the western frontier; she was at ease in log cabins and mansions, in county courtrooms, in Utopian communities, at revivals and women's rights conventions. She was not content to win the vote only for black men, knowing that black women had given just as much of themselves to their country.

When the regressive Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 criminalized escape from slavery and reopened the way for black persecution, some abolitionists, in despair, considered violence. Sojourner, who had always spoken for non-violent change, responded with a call of rebuke: "Is God dead?" God had never failed and he would bring them victory without violence, she was convinced.

Sojourner in Washington

Almost 70, she travelled to Washington to "advise the president." Abraham Lincoln's gracious reception encouraged her greatly. When she stood at his casket soon after, she was devastated.

By this time Washington had become a haven for former slaves, "contrabands," who were crowded together in squalid conditions. Sojourner became their advocate, teacher, nurse and adviser. She was the first black to "test" the desegregation of Washington street cars, rallying her people with the words: "The law is with you; get behind it."

The need for space for her people prompted her to petition for a land grant in the developing west. She took to the road again, crossing the country in her search for support. She delivered her petition to the US Congress, but although she received a standing ovation for her efforts, her dream was never realized.

Sojourner spent her last years in Battle Creek, Michigan, together with her children and grandchildren, sustained by favourite hymns. She died on November 26, 1883 and is buried in the local cemetery. But the ground cannot contain this faithful wanderer; her spirit travels still.

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Sojourners Magazine (December, 1986).

Neoma Jantz enjoys volunteer work in church and community. She is a member of the River East MB Church.

POETRY

To Penelope

(upon a reading of Homer's *"Odyssey"*)

Penelope, you middle-aged queen,
come down from your tower
and get yourself a ship -
a rainbow-hued ship.
Send out the word
to all your sisters,
both those long gone
and those just far away,
and your dead mother -
bring her too.
Companions for the journey,
Strong with singing voices,
hands deft with weaving.
Fill the hold with wine
and bread of your own making.
Then, at first light, and in full view,
cut loose at last.
Untie that gordian knot
which holds you fast.
Hoist the well-woven shroud,
that handwork of your grieving.
Watch it fill with wind,
useful at last, to take you away,
Singing,
with your sisters.
No chart or star map
for your guiding.
Adventures yet unsung,
monsters, divinities unknown.
O day of joy,
O day of leaving,
At last at home
upon the abundant sea.

Marianne Ewert Worcester
(May 1992)

Ruth the Moabite

By Dale Taylor



ILLUSTRATION: JULIUS SCHNORR VON KARELSFELD (1794-1872)

"In the days of the judging of the judges" - so begins the book of Ruth. Dark days, when warriors, barely, ruled Israel. The time of the judges, by the account in the book of Judges, is a time of war, anarchy, pillage, and, in the closing scenes, rape: the rape and murder of the Levite's woman in chapter 19, war to avenge the Levite's honour in chapter 20, war for the sake of rape in the capture of the girls from Jabesh-gilead to buy wives for the Benjaminites in chapter 21. Mieke Bal, in *Death and Dissymmetry*, shows how the heroes of those days destroy themselves and their children in the futile vortex of social and familial violence.

"In the days of the judging of the judges there was a famine in the land." Then as now war causes famine. And in these dark days of destruction and destitution the story of Ruth shines with the brightness of the sun on ripe wheatfields. It is a story of harvest, fruition and children, of faithfulness and blessing.

The book opens with a picture of the context for Ruth's story: war, famine, the flight of refugees. Thus it happens that Elimelech from Judah

comes to, and dies in, Moab, leaving Naomi with her two sons. They marry foreign wives - a clear sign, in most of the Hebrew scriptures from Moses to Nehemiah, of apostasy.* Then they too die, "and the woman is bereft of her two children and her husband" (1:5), left without progeny, without a future.

Note that the book of Ruth actually begins and ends with Naomi: the "argument" of the story, the problem identified and solved, is Naomi's dilemma, which she interprets as the emptiness of her future. Her "bitterness" is precisely this: "I went away full, but Yahweh has brought me back empty" (1:21).

Before we examine Naomi's situation in more detail, we should note the use of a word that reappears in the book of Ruth, steadily flashing blazes that signal a recurring motif. The repetition of this word is sadly but unavoidably obscured in English versions. The word, *yahlad*, takes several forms: as a verb, it means "to conceive" and may be used both of men (*he begat*) and of women (*she bore*); as a noun, it means "child" or "progeny" (sometimes translated "seed"),

that which is conceived, singular or collective. Italics here will signal the repeated word.

When Naomi begins her return to Judah, she uses these rhetorical questions to dissuade her daughters-in-law from accompanying her: "Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight, and if I *should* bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown?" (1:11-13). The story opens with Naomi "bereft of her two *children*" (1:5), lamenting her emptiness.

Not surprisingly, then, the story concludes with Naomi's fulfillment. This is the last scene, after the birth of Ruth's child: "Naomi took the *child* and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son *has been born* to Naomi'" (4:16-17). The story closes with this image of the grandmother, not the mother, with the child on her knee.

Thus the meaning of the story is completed not merely with the birth of the child to Ruth, but specifically with the restoration of children, inheritance, futurity, to Naomi. The initial dilemma was not simply Naomi's bereavement but her childlessness, and precisely this is addressed in the verdict of the community: "a son has been born to Naomi."

But why? It is no marvel or miracle that a young woman like Ruth should bear a child and establish her claim on the future; here, God restores children and blessing to an old woman who has lost her inheritance. Ironically, the inheritance of faith passes not from mother to daughter but from the younger generation to the older. Moreover, this is but one of several reversals in the story: God's blessing is bestowed not from father to son but from daughter-in-law to mother-in-law, *against* the pattern of male inheritance, *against* the flow of generations, *against* the claims of kinship.

And how? Through the most un-

expected of agents, the epitome of Israel's danger, a foreign wife! Thus the inheritance also works, most scandalously, *against* the claims of Israel's election: the blessing is given not by Israel to the gentiles but by the foreign woman to the house of David the king. The agent of God's blessing is not only a woman but a foreigner, a Moabite. Both law (Deut 23:3) and "nature" are confounded in this heritage of faith.

Note also that Ruth's motives remain a mystery, despite interpretations that try to identify her "conversion" to the true faith of Yahweh-worship. We are given no reason to ascribe to Ruth any personal "faith" in Yahweh. But though the source of her actions is hidden, the meaning is clear. Ruth *behaves* like Yahweh, faithfully present, active to protect the alien and widow, though she herself is alien, widowed. Ruth's loved and much-quoted promise to Naomi actually represents Yahweh's presence:

*Where you go, I will go
Where you lodge, I will lodge
Your people shall be my people
Your God, my God.*

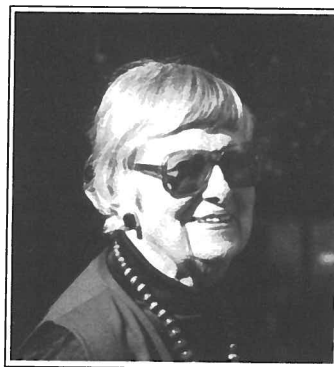
God's approval of Ruth's behaviour is evident in the powerful sign of the Davidic lineage (4:18-22). This, too, is especially significant in context. The days of the judges were times of great wickedness; there was "no king in Israel" (Judges 21:25) and thus no stability, order, hope. Ruth's actions actually initiate a new situation, a specific future. Her enacting of God's desire to abide and protect begins the sequence of events that culminate in the creation of a new social order under a ruler after God's own heart.

*Ex 34:12-16; Num 25:1-18;
1 Kg 11:1-8; Neh 13:23-29.

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LIVING WITH LOSS

An Interview with Esther Horch



Esther Horch

We wanted to interview a woman who had learned something about living life graciously in joy and sorrow. We agreed that Esther Horch would have something to say to us and asked Donna Stewart to interview her for Sophia.

DS: You were described to me as a woman whose life story would be inspiring to younger women because you had overcome many losses. Is that how your life seems to you?

EH: I don't know what you mean. Certainly I've had losses, but in some ways perhaps I've been more fortunate than women who haven't had some of the things I've had.

I've always had faith. My father was a pastor and he kept telling us that *all things work together for good in those who love God*. I think all of us in the family tried to transfer that into our lives.

A book by Ruth Paxton, *Life on a Higher Plane*, was very influential in my life. There was a vivid illustration that impressed on me the fact that the Bible was to be *applied*, not just read. The Bible says God is our refuge and strength. I had to *apply* that many times. Of course it's never easy in the middle of something.

I read a lot, and I like to appropriate what I read for my own life. Leslie Weatherhead's *The Will of God* was important to me too. It taught me we may pray and ask for a miracle, but if God does not perform that miracle, He may perform an even greater miracle than we expected.

When I lost my arm, I had a five-year-old child, and I thought I might as well die, because I wouldn't be any use anymore. I said to Ben, "I know you wouldn't have asked me to marry you if I'd had only one arm." He said, "I'd have married you if you had no arms at all." Perhaps that wasn't strictly true, but it was comforting to hear, anyway. He was very supportive and that was crucial, as it is in anyone's life.

I never believed it was God's will that I lost my arm, but God is not defeated by an evil act and can work a miracle of acceptance in the spiritual realm, *according to his purposes*. So I learned to manage. You have to learn.

(continued on page 12)

I always worked outside the home. It wasn't done at that time, but no one ever objected, and Ben was very supportive. I was the first Mennonite teacher in Winnipeg, but I had to quit when I was married; so I started a German nursery school in my church. I made my own job. After I had Viola, I just took her along too.

Later I taught at MBBC (ESL and hymnology), and I helped with the Mothers' Group at the Neighbourhood Service Centre. After age 50, I took graduate courses in group work. That led to nine years at Marymound, where they needed someone who had both teaching and social work. After I retired, I was on the board for five years. I still keep in touch.

DS: I can hear that you've had a very useful life.

EH: Well, I don't know how useful it's been, but I try to keep going, making the best of what's left of my life. I try to be helpful to others who've experienced loss. One never knows how one succeeds and it doesn't matter, but I contact people I know if they lose a child. Other people who haven't had the experience want to help, but they don't know what you're experiencing. I know it was helpful when people who'd lost a child contacted me after Viola's death.

DS: Did any of the things you learned overcoming the loss of your arm help at all when Viola was killed in a car accident?

EH: No. The loss of my daughter was the hardest thing. She had four children, aged two to ten. I've never believed that accident was the will of God either, but God worked a miracle of acceptance. I stayed with my grandchildren for several months, and brought them home for several more. Then I had them every summer for ten years. I've always been very close to them. I've just come back from a visit with them. It helped a lot that their stepmother accepted us completely.

DS: But now your husband has died too?

EH: Seven months ago. That was really hard, but he was 84. We had lived together in a very compatible way for 60 years. That's a privilege that not many people have. I miss him terribly, especially when I come home from somewhere and I want to tell him all the things that happened. It's very lonely, but when you get married, you know that sometime one of you will be alone. I'm happy that we celebrated our sixtieth wedding anniversary with family a few weeks before he died.

My sister Ruth and her husband Peter Kroeker have been very supportive. I don't know what I would have done without them. I get together with my siblings at least once a year. I have a good church community and a good neighbourhood community. I'm really surrounded by friends. Ben's friends keep in touch; they phone and ask how I'm doing. I've heard widows complain that people lose interest after a few weeks, but I haven't experienced it.

I often think of people who haven't got a community, no visible or invisible means of support. I saw so much of it in social work.

Of course I work at keeping in touch with people. I write lots of letters. I'm pretty housebound because I don't drive. I depend a lot on other people. I try to force myself to go out when I'm asked, even if I don't feel like it, and I'm always glad I went. It's fairly easy to withdraw when you get to be my age.

I belong to a ladies' group and I go to Bible study once a week. We're studying a book on justice. It's important when you get older to keep your mind going. I read a lot.

DS: I understand that you were recently threatened with yet another loss - the loss of your sight?

EH: That was the most scary thing. I lost the sight of one eye through glaucoma, but I had a cornea transplant just before Christmas, and some of the vision in that eye has come back. The doctor doesn't know yet how much will return.

DS: Let's hope all of it. Do you have any final words of wisdom for *Sophia* readers?

EH: Oh, no words of wisdom...except that it's important to keep in close touch with younger people. They keep you aware of how the world is changing. The world does change, and it's important not to fall into thinking that it must stay the way it was.

DS: You seem content with your life.

EH: I have very few regrets, really. It's been a good life in spite of some of the things that happened.

Donna Stewart is an adult educator, author of *Job Stories: I Like the Work. I Like the Money* (Learning Resources, 1990) and a part-time student at Menno Simons College and at the University of Manitoba. She attends Fort Garry MB Church.



The Artist As Homemaker: A PORTRAIT

By Eleanor Martens

My mother was an artist. I could tell by the way she lined up the fruit - apricots, cherries and plums - just in from the Fraser Valley. The jars stood there gleaming on the basement shelves, straight and sparkling in their newly-preserved perfection, pleasing to the eye as well as to the palate. Then there were the tiers of organdies, laces, cottons and fine woolens to which she devoted her time, her exacting eye, her love for precision and originality. Her four daughters, knowing there were few stitching challenges that daunted her and that the impossible posed for her irresistible challenges, took full advantage of these skills. Mother's dinner tables, especially when guests came, flourished with variety, colour and flavour, remarkable not only for their attractiveness, but for the frugality and labour they represented.

That some of these endeavours might have been expressions of creativity never occurred to me as a child. They simply represented the everyday routine of a mother discharging her housework duties, duties from which I aspired to escape once I had established my own adult routines.

In later years, as the demands of household and children waned, Mother began to create items for ornamentation and pleasure, not primarily for usefulness: exquisite flower arrangements fashioned from multi-coloured silk stockings, greeting cards displaying the carefully pressed sweet-peas and daisies she had collected all summer, paper tole, quilting, crocheting, Swiss knitting. The list is endless. We call them "crafts."

Now that she is in her retirement years and less mobile than before, she speaks of taking up water colours.

And I am reminded of a moment of revelation in my youth when I came across an old autograph book from her girlhood and found it embellished with sketches of the delicate wild-flowers that grew around her northern Alberta prairie home. Mother could draw! What might she have accomplished, given the right opportunities?

Many of our mothers expressed their artistry in these ways. Lacking sequestered turrets, and "wives" to cook and clean for them so they could spawn "fine" art, many of our mothers resorted to "domestic" art. In so doing, they infused a world often bordering on drabness and drudgery with order and beauty, a gift to their creator, to themselves and to their families.

In her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker contemplates what it meant for black women slaves to be artists. "They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality -- which is the basis of Art -- that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane." Some of them coped by discarding their spirituality; others found more constructive ways. Walker's own mother, besides working from sunup till sundown in the fields for the landowner, nourished her creativity by keeping a flower garden "so brilliant with colours, so original in design, so magnificent with life and creativity that to this day people drive by our house and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art."¹

Although slavery is not part of our heritage as Mennonite Brethren women, our mothers did experience traditional constraints on time, opportunity

and place. They too learned to use the limited resources at their disposal to fulfill the God-given urge to create.

And yet the art of home and hearth has seldom received the honour it deserves. American writer Ursula Le Guin gives credence to the ancient, complex and necessary art of making "order where people live." Women's efforts at making home a warm and welcoming place, she says, are not even recognized as work, let alone art. Such devaluation gives evidence of society's "barbarity, its aesthetic and ethical bankruptcy."²

These days many of us are able to express our creativity in less traditional ways than our mothers did. Does this lead us to devalue their art forms even more? It is good to remind ourselves occasionally of the important roles beauty and order play in our lives. Then perhaps we will learn to appreciate anew the artistry of our mothers in the place where it may well matter the most: the home. As we contemplate the spiritual legacy handed us by our foremothers, the least we can do is remember this important yet often overlooked expression of their faith that has so enriched us all.

Endnotes

1. Alice Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983. p. 233.

2. Ursula Le Guin. *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989. p. 154

Eleanor Martens is a mother, a nurse and a graduate student at the University of Manitoba. She and her family attend McIvor Avenue MB Church.

PAULINE FOOTE:

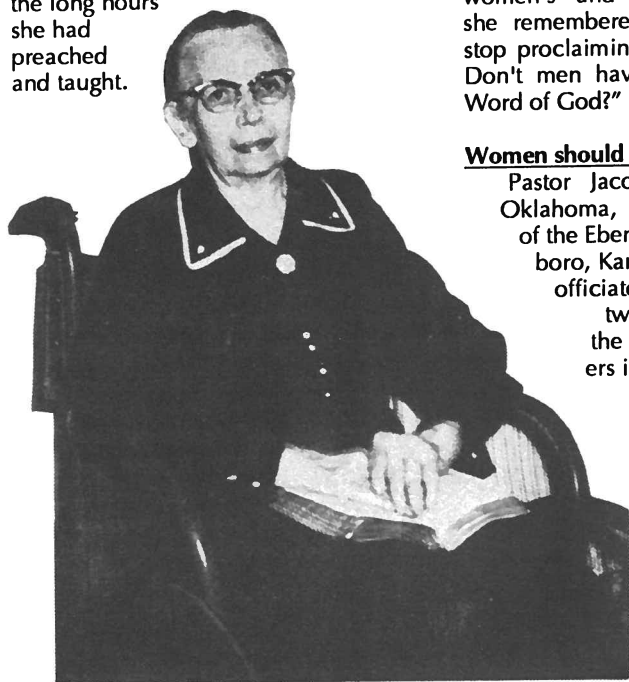
Ordained to Bring Good News

By Lorina Marsch

Pauline Foote, 1891-1968, served nineteen years as a missionary to China. She was the last ordained woman of the North American MB Conference.

On a beautiful evening in October, 1946, just as the sun was setting, a boat pulled into the harbour in San Francisco. Standing at the railing, now and then shielding her eyes to look back across the ocean she had just crossed, stood a spare, upright woman wearing a green overcoat with a grey fur collar, an orange and brown scarf wrapped into a turban on her head. She had not seen her homeland for a dozen years. Strange, how hard it had been, even now, to leave China.

She shivered a little in the evening air. The boat would not dock at the wharf until morning, so there was time for reflection. Already her life in China seemed almost a dream - the tedious miles she had trudged to bring the gospel to people in remote villages, the long hours she had preached and taught.



Pauline Foote (1891-1968) in her retirement

She tried to recall her emotions the day she had last seen the receding American shoreline. Wisps and snatches of her earlier life floated into her memory.

She remembered the summer of 1922 when she had prepared for departure to China. In August the Mennonite Brethren Church at Bessie, Oklahoma, had put up a tent for her ordination and farewell ceremonies. It had not been easy to take leave of her family and her home church, but God had graciously sustained her.

It was her ordination, she recalled, that had caused the greatest inner struggles. She had felt uncertain about being ordained when women in the MB conference did not preach. Why be ordained if she was not also to be permitted to proclaim the gospel to people who had never heard it? But in her tradition women were permitted to share the gospel only with women and children.

"What if men should come to my women's and children's meetings?" she remembered thinking. "Should I stop proclaiming the gospel message? Don't men have a right to hear the Word of God?"

Women should preach

Pastor Jacob Reimer of Bessie, Oklahoma, and Elder Johann Foth of the Ebenfeld Church near Hillsboro, Kansas, had been asked to officiate at the ordination. The two men were considered the most conservative leaders in the entire conference.

Pauline remembered vividly her amazement when Elder

Foth had used scripture passages to prove, in his sermon, that women should preach. He had referred to Mary Magdalene, the first of Christ's disciples at the

grave on resurrection morning and the first to tell the good news that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. "Christ himself commanded her to carry the news," Foth had said.

Pauline's problem about ordination had been resolved. Her experience in China provided further evidence that the Lord had chosen and sent her. In China, many women were slaves of their husbands and mothers-in-law and could hear the gospel only if their husbands heard it first and explained it to them. Men who were convinced through Pauline's teaching that the Jesus doctrine was a good one, had allowed their wives to become followers too.

Writing Chinese

Pauline smiled to think that many missionaries had considered it a waste of time to learn to write Chinese. They had been surprised that she, Pauline, had read through the Chinese Bible between Christmas and spring one year!

It had been her practise to look up

*In China,
many women were slaves
of their husbands
and mothers-in-law
and could hear the gospel
only if their husbands
heard it first
and explained it to them*

unfamiliar words and write their pronunciations in the margin of her Bible. In Genesis 50, which has 32 verses, she had written down 102 pronunciations. The last chapter of Revelation, with 21 verses, had only four.

By rickshaw and wheelbarrow

Other memories crowded in: The first two times she and the Bible woman travelled by wheelbarrow or rickshaw to conduct meetings in the villages, dust storms overtook them. She remembered how she had written out and memorized her messages at first; later she could preach more fluently without memorizing.

The ship seemed to have anchored for the night. Still the memories flood-

ed in and would not let her rest. It had been exciting, in 1927, to arrive in the first MB mission field in south-eastern Fukien Province, where F.J. Wiens had begun the work in 1911. She had been the lone foreigner among Chinese Christians with the task of selecting and hiring teachers. She had felt affirmed when some of her brave actions were undergirded by one of the most spiritual of the national leaders.

Once during a period of great unrest, she had entered the home of a woman enquirer. There had been so many soldiers about that she could not speak to the woman privately, so she had preached to everyone within hearing distance. The soldiers had listened attentively and even encouraged the further proclamation of the gospel.

How well she remembered preaching and teaching choruses to large crowds, and the way they jostled her and each sang a different tune. What tireless listeners and learners they had been. Often her throat had felt sore from speaking and her whole body was exhausted.

Her situation on the mission field had often been precarious, especially during the war with Japan and the rise of Communism.

At a particularly life-threatening time she had fled with the help of Chinese believers. Looking back now she wondered if those eighteen nights had really been flight or just another, particularly dangerous, preaching tour? She had been able to share the gospel fourteen times with people who harboured her.

Sleepily, she brushed aside thoughts of other hair-raising experiences and thought, instead, about the many opportunities these had provided for spreading the gospel. Yes, her nineteen years in China had been good. . . .

Next morning, Pauline felt the tug of the ship docking as massive ropes pulled taut. Her journey was over; she was home. She looked forward to seeing her aging parents. It would be good to regain the strength that had been sapped by her tireless work. For now she would leave her desire to return to her beloved China in God's hands.

Sources:

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Wiebe, Katie Funk. *Have Cart Will Travel* (adapted from *God's Hand*) Winnipeg, Canada: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of MB Churches of North America, 1974.

Lorina Marsch is editor of *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*. She is a member of the Portage Avenue MB Church where her husband, Roland, is pastor.

Bound Feet, Bicycles and Bible Study: Women in China

By Sandy Schroeder

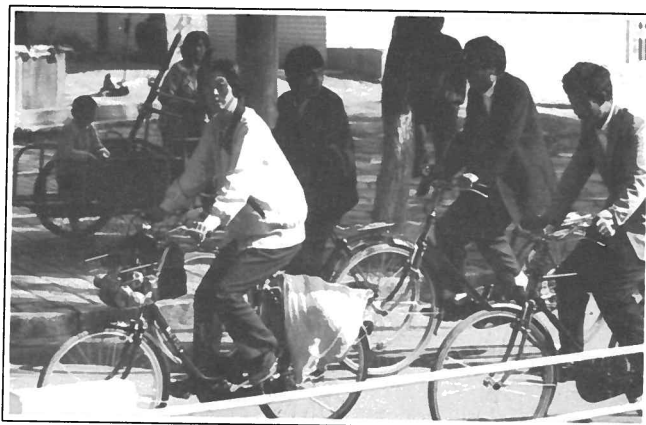


PHOTO: SANDY SCHROEDER

My Chinese students regarded me as an expert in English language. I suppose thirty years of experience in speaking Canadian English might warrant that designation. Two years in China, however, definitely does not entitle me to make an authoritative statement on China, on women of China or even on women in the church in China. All I can do is relate a few experiences and share a few thoughts.

One afternoon I climbed through the hole in the back gate of our campus enroute to the closest vendor selling bottled yogurt. Also enjoying the afternoon sunshine was an elderly woman in the traditional blue "Mao" jacket. I noticed that her feet were bound. We stared at each other in mutual fascination. As she shuffled off I wondered how many other treasures were hidden within the bleak apartments of Chinese cities.

In old China, a woman's small feet were a sign of beauty and wealth, important qualities for arranging a good marriage. A girl's feet were kept tightly bound, bending the arches until they broke. Once begun, the painful and incapacitating process could not be stopped, and certainly never reversed.

In the early years of Mao Zedong's leadership (1940s) women's rights were championed. Foot binding was outlawed; women no longer took their husbands' names when they married; clothing became unisex, with everyone wearing blue Mao suits; and in the fields and factories women made up half the work force.¹

Fifty years later, unisex clothing is out and the Mao suit is rapidly disappearing. Now women have options, and currently frilly prom dresses and high heels are popular, making a strange sight during rush hour, with bicycles the main mode of transportation.

Nearly all women still work full-time until retirement at age fifty-five, while men retire at sixty. Children are cared for by grandparents who live with the family, or in daycare centres.

China's one-child policy may ease the population crisis, but

(continued on page 19)

Women In A Changing Church

By Agnes Dyck

Women's roles in our affluent society have changed a great deal in the last half century. During World War II kerchiefed women donned overalls and "manned" airplane factories; their role was glorified and seen as essential to the war effort. Phenomenal advances in technology and some changes in attitude have made it possible for women to assume roles traditionally reserved for men. This shift toward more independent roles in the larger community has culminated in, and also been influenced by, a proliferation of writings about women's issues.

Women in the Church: General Conference Resolutions

The church, too, is involved in grappling with the specific issue of women in ministry, an issue Tony Campolo includes as one of *20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid to Touch* (Word, 1988). While the issue is not a confessional one, it is nevertheless a significant matter of faith and life within our Mennonite Brethren conference.

In the past, general conference resolutions have on several occasions addressed women's issues in response to requests for clarification of our position. A review of conference yearbooks reveals the extent to which we have changed. Back in 1878 a resolution restricted women from appearing "in church meetings [n]or in family worship without the proper head covering." In the following year delegates resolved, "that sisters may take part in church activities as the Holy Spirit leads. However, they should not preach nor take part in discussion in business meetings of the church" (p. 4). Then, in 1927, it was resolved, "That the cutting of hair by our sisters is in direct contradiction with the word of God as found in 1 Corinthians 11:6" (p. 69).

Since 1973 the issue of women's roles has surfaced repeatedly, with ordination of women to ministry posing the greatest challenge. A 1981 resolution, while ac-

knowledging women's contributions to the local church, concludes, "we do not believe that the Mennonite Brethren church should ordain women to pastoral leadership" (pp. 46-48).

The 1984 yearbook records that the struggle continues:

We wrestle with culture, tradition, but particularly with a variety of interpretations, and authentic ones, of the pertinent biblical passages which speak to the subject of women's ministry in the church.

Since our last convention the Board of Reference and Counsel [now Board of Faith and Life] has continued some discussion on the subject. This is not a settled issue among us, and this question should receive continued study and consideration in the future. Guidance is needed as we recognize that more women will graduate with seminary degrees who will be available for ministries in the churches. We encourage the churches and our conferences to be open to their services (pp. 75-76).

In spite of the prompting of that last sentence, women have not always felt affirmed and empowered to use their gifts in the church. Often they are perceived as being power hungry when they are merely seeking permission to use their gifts. Aggressiveness on the part of women is considered improper, and female leadership, if exercised over men, is deemed offensive.

According to John E. Toews, of the MB Seminary,* it takes a particularly strong woman to go to seminary. Psychological profiles suggest women students have greater stability than their male counterparts and academically they score an average of 30 points higher than men. This evident strength, and women's various but unused gifts, are among the reasons to "encourage the churches and our conferences to be open to their services."

Study Book Commissioned

A 1987 conference resolution recommended "a careful biblical study process by our congregations on the role and ministry of women in the church" (p. 72), and a book including a study guide was commissioned in order to deal with relevant biblical passages. The resulting *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy*, edited by John E. Toews, Valerie Rempel and Katie Funk Wiebe, was mailed to the pastors of the MB churches of North America early in 1992 for study and response. According to Roland Marsch, chairman of the Board of Faith and Life, "Some pastors have responded individually; some have involved others in their study."

When *Daughters* was criticized for favouring the more liberal view, the Board of Faith and Life mailed to MB pastors copies of *Women in Ministry*, a balanced view by four authors edited by Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse. The Board encouraged the study of both books.

Toews, senior editor of *Daughters* admitted recently that the Board of Faith and Life has "been eating a good bit of dust on the book." Readers have criticized its obvious, and deliberate, bias. The Board, assuming that books espousing traditional views were numerous, intended *Daughters* to advocate a less hierarchical view of women in church ministry. The dozen contributors to the book undertook a conscientious reexamination of relevant biblical texts.

Interpreting the Relevant Texts

In the course of their study of *Daughters*, churches will discover (indeed, some have discovered) the truth of the 1984 conference minutes quoted earlier, namely that "we wrestle with culture, tradition, but particularly with a variety of interpretations, and authentic ones, of the pertinent biblical passages...."

According to Toews, the biblical text, which is culturally conditioned, "only answers the questions that are brought to it." A reader's gender, class, socio-economic status, third and first world biases and personal experiences are some of the factors determining the questions she or he will ask of the text. And with shifting world views and increasing diversity in the cultural mix of North American churches, new questions are constantly being asked. We must be aware of what knowledge our brothers and sisters bring to the text in order to better understand each other, as we grapple with the matter of women's ministries.

Younger members are asking different questions of the text regarding women's roles, Toews says. When they arrive at conclusions that differ from the traditional ones, there is anger on both sides of the issue.

Some will argue that women's gifts have in fact been affirmed in the life of the church: our mothers and grandmothers assumed significant functions in *Kinder, Küche*

und Kirche (Children, Kitchen and Church), and single women missionaries courageously opened frontiers of service for our mission boards. But not all women's gifts of leadership have been discerned, resulting in limited participation by women in our churches and conferences. Narrowing the discussion to ordination for pastoral leadership clouds the importance of affirming women and all their gifts for full participation in the life of the church.

Agreeing to Disagree

In the past we have learned to accept and affirm diversity of thinking in order to get on with our task as believers in this generation. Consider, for example, our interpretation of the book of Revelation or our position on the status of non-immersed church members: both have shifted significantly in the past few decades. We have agreed to disagree about other issues as well.

About women's leadership Toews says, "Our mandate is to attempt to hold both sides in tension." Tension has been present in MB churches in the past; so has God's grace. As we seek direction in this matter, our common point of reference will be faith in a sovereign God, and guidance must come from the "still, small voice" of his spirit.

* John E. Toews during a Sunday School discussion, November 15, 1992, at the McIvor Avenue MB Church.

Agnes Dyck is a member of the McIvor Avenue MB Church.

Mennonite Brethren **WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

Date: April 17, 1993

Place: McIvor Avenue MB Church,

Registration: 9:00 a.m.

Cost (includes lunch): \$15.00

Speaker: Sara Pasiciel,
Associate Professor of Communications
at Providence College.

Theme: Prayer

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Theme: "Connecting With Each Other:
Sharing a Vision"

Speaker: Donna Stewart

Place: Concord College

Date: April 30, 1993

Reception - 6:30 p.m.

Dinner - 7:00 p.m.

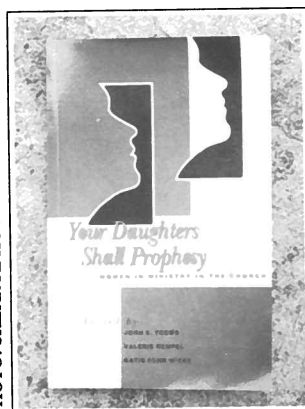
Tickets: \$15.00 (\$10.00 for
students & underemployed).

For information & tickets call
Rhonda Reimer at MCC: (204) 261-6381

***Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Women in Ministry in the Church*, edited by John E. Toews, Valerie Rempel and Katie Funk Wiebe. Winnipeg, Kindred Press, 1992.**

Reviewed by Donna Stewart.

PHOTO: SHERRY KOOP



In *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* you will read about a Man who did not find it necessary to subordinate women. You will also find arguments by some of his followers who not only feel it necessary to subordinate women but who seriously argue that it is God's intention that men should dominate women, even in the church. You will find an historical chapter that describes the changing shape

of the woman-controlling arguments over the centuries.

You will also find chapters that describe the way God has used women, in Old Testament times, in the early church and in the Mennonite church. You will find careful interpretations (sometimes several) of Scripture passages that have traditionally been used to support the limiting of women in ministry.

There are sentences in this book that will cause anyone with a heart of flesh to weep: of Malla Moe, an early TEAM missionary who functioned as a bishop in Swaziland, assigning pastors and overseeing their work, Marilyn G. Peters has to report, "When she returned home, she was not permitted to speak in church" (p. 168).

There are sentences that will cause many to shout for joy: "The church would do well to use Ephesians 5 as Paul intended it, to call men to change," says John E. Toews (p. 135).

There are sentences that are intensely puzzling. Elmer Martens's chapter seems to support women in ministry. Then in the final paragraph he argues, "At the same time it seems necessary that a respect for role differentiation be maintained" (p. 44). After I discovered that others were puzzled too, I re-read the essay more carefully, looking for the point of derailment. I realized that the confusion was caused by Martens's agonized attempts to be fair to scholarly truth while still protecting a traditional position.

All readers should follow the suggestion in "How to Use This Book" and read pp. 191-198 first, because they review the different issues and perspectives.

If you haven't had any training in exegesis, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* will work for you as a layperson's guide to biblical interpretation. The essays demonstrate that on some issues people of faith - even those who study the Bible prayerfully in the original languages - cannot come to agree-

ment. "There is no such thing as 'objective interpretation,'" says the final chapter (p. 195).

This book is valuable for several additional reasons. First, it faces frankly the fact of male dominance in the church. Second, it faces male fears: "It is time for the church to talk openly and honestly about male anxieties in times of massive cultural and personal change," say Toews and Rempel (p. 209). Third, it faces the fears of women who are "threatened by the changing demands of the culture," (p.209) who fear that their traditional role of mother and homemaker is being devalued. Fourth, it makes available to us, in understandable language, the thinking of twelve Mennonite Brethren thinkers. Finally, it models throughout the respectful tone that should mark all our theological dialogues.

If you are lucky, men and women in your church will study the book together, looking up the biblical references and discussing the arguments from different perspectives. Together you will meet the heroines of the faith who have often been overlooked in our Sunday Schools and pulpits. You will find out that the Old Testament advocates neither the subordination of women nor the creation order as the basis for theology or practice.

For women in particular, the Old Testament witness demonstrates that women are neither restricted nor exempt from answering God's call to ministry in all its various forms, regardless of the limitations a society may impose (p. 73).

In your discussion group, you will study the various positions on women in ministry, examining the major points of disagreement: "creation order," "headship" and "problem" texts.

You will not, however, find "the answer" to the question of women in ministry in this book. It was produced as a study guide, "to stimulate study and discussion at the local church level" (p.vi); so it gives space to more than one point of view.

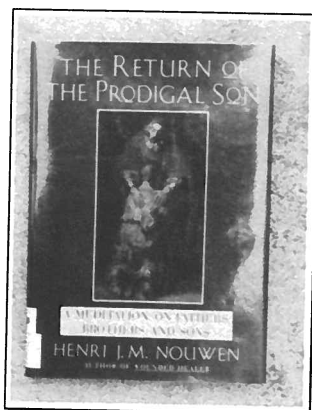
If you want to be able to say firmly on this issue, "Well, the Bible says....," prepare to be disturbed. *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy* presents arguments from the major camps without relieving us of the burden of choosing a position for ourselves.

It does make us recognize that choosing may be more a matter of the heart than we want to admit. It challenges us to bring our lifestyle into conformity with the gospel. As the book concludes (p. 209), "We have a world to win for Christ. The ship is sinking, we are standing on the shore arguing about who should go to the rescue - men or women!" (quoted from Kari Malcolm, *Women at the Crossroads*, p. 132).

***The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen.**
New York: Doubleday, 1992. 142 pages.

Reviewed by Dora Dueck

PHOTO: SHERRYL KOOP



It was a treat to unexpectedly come across Henri Nouwen's newest book at the public library. Subtitled, "A meditation on fathers, brothers, and sons," it seemed at first glance to be a book for men. Not so - it's written for us all.

Nouwen discusses the three characters in the well-known parable, and what they represent for him and for us in our spiritual

growth. What's unique is that Nouwen approaches the story through a painting, "The Return of the Prodigal Son," by Rembrandt. This painting has had a profound effect on Nouwen for several years. It has been a teacher, or better said, a mirror, in which he has seen himself first as the rebellious son, running from home and returning, then as the resentful and bitter "good" son. Lastly he perceives the call to become the compassionate, receiving father.

Nouwen's writing is as insightful as usual, but he seems in these pages particularly gentle, even chastened.

Dora Dueck is a freelance writer whose first novel, Under the Still Standing Sun, was published in 1989 by Kindred Press. She attends Valley Gardens Community Church.

("Bound Feet . . ." continued from page 15)

not without creating a few other social problems. The only child is usually very spoiled. In future generations there will be no siblings or cousins in a society where family connections are very important.

Most parents want a son, especially in the rural areas where a son is needed for farm work. Peasants are permitted to have a second child if the first is a girl. It is customary for a daughter to move to her in-laws' home.

Officially doctors are forbidden to tell parents the gender of their unborn child, tacit acknowledgement, perhaps, that a child of undesired gender would be aborted. A Chinese friend told me of this regulation immediately after telling me that his wife was expecting a baby girl. (This is another fact of Chinese life: for every regulation there is a loophole, if you have the right connections.) My friend was an educated urbanite and didn't need a son to support him in his old age. Half a year later I had the joy of photographing his daughter at her one-month celebration

(They didn't have a camera).

Not all daughters are so lucky. An American teaching in the Sichuan province found an abandoned baby girl. When he insisted on seeing the orphanage where she was taken, he discovered that all the other children were girls, or blind.²

Shenyang, the city where I lived, has several churches which were reopened with government permission in the 1980s. Every service I attended was full to overflowing. I don't speak or understand much Mandarin, the language of northern China, so there is a lot about the Chinese church that I will never know. But I did notice that one of the pastors was a woman. Through another foreign teacher, I had the opportunity to meet this pastor, and fortunately she spoke more English than I Chinese. In her mid-thirties, she was ordained in 1992, after attending seminary in Shenyang. She does some preaching, but spends most of her time leading home Bible studies and baptism classes. The church is growing so rapidly that she can't keep up.

The biggest problem in the Chinese church is the lack of leaders, a result of being closed and persecuted for many years. She said the greatest help we can give the church in China is to pray, especially for leaders to disciple the rapidly growing number of new Christians.

Endnotes:

1. Harrison E. Salisbury. *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992) pp. 28, 77.

2. Conversation with an American teacher, July, 1991.

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Sandy Schroeder taught English in Shenyang, China from 1990-1992, one term at Northeast University of Technology and three terms at Shenyang Teachers' College. She returned to Canada via the Trans-Siberian Railway and Europe. Presently, Sandy is taking an income tax course. She attends the McIvor Avenue MB Church.

On Basketball and Women in Ministry

By John Derksen

From 1972 to 1976 I coached high school girls' basketball teams. For five years, four afternoons a week, a dozen girls and I shared common goals and obstacles. The experience changed me for life.

At the beginning we were allowed to practise on half of the gym twice a week. The boys, meanwhile, got the whole gym three times a week. They, of course, had been winning league championships consistently for years, and expectations for them were high. The girls had always finished near the bottom, and expectations were lower.

It struck me quickly that the boys had virtually twice the practice time and space we had, and that we girls never got the whole gym to ourselves for a really "quality" practice. After

some lobbying, equal practice opportunity was granted, and before long skills began to sparkle.

In our first year, with grade ten players at the freshman level, we finished the regular season with a .500 record. But most of our losses came early in the season, as with each game we improved. By playoff time we were on a roll. The semi-finals were a breeze, and in the finals we shocked the undefeated first-place team to win the entire championship!

We began to believe in ourselves. The next year, as eleventh graders at the varsity level, we finished second to a team full of grade twelve players. And in our third year we won our league and finished fourth in all Manitoba, better than the boys' teams usually did! Equal practice opportunity

made the difference.

My view of life was transformed. In my little sphere of physical education I became a crusader for equal rights; also in intramurals the girls would be given equal access to the gym floor at noon hour. And I began to wonder: in how many other areas were women unable to exercise their gifts and realize their potential because of restricted opportunities? In the marketplace? In the church?

When my coaching years were finished, I headed off to seminary. The most rewarding of my assignments was a paper on women in church ministry. I discovered that Jesus gave women unprecedented dignity, that in Christ barriers between women and men are gone and that the biblical vision affirms the gifts of everyone. All because in Winnipeg gymnasiums I had been privileged to see through girls' eyes.

John Derksen is a member of the Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church. He has just completed a doctoral program in history and is on his way to five years of assignments with the Eastern Mennonite Mission Board and Mennonite Central Committee in Somalia and Lebanon.

THERE'S A WIFE IN MY KITCHEN

By Doreen Martens



ILLUSTRATION: LORIE KOOP

I think it was Freud who asked, "What do women want?"

The answer, had he bothered to ask me, would have been simple: a wife.

Not a bring-home-the-bacon, fry-it-up-in-the-pan, '90s kind of mate. Not even a Proverbs 31 rarer-than-rubies, linen-manufacturing, real estate-pitching, 900 B.C. style spouse.

No, I've always wanted a June Cleaver wife - somebody who'll kiss me on my way in the morning, wipe a runny nose or two, have meatloaf on the table when I come home, rub my feet after a hard day...and who would give the impression this is as sweet and easy as inhaling Nanaimo bars, so I wouldn't have to feel guilty.

I realize that if my name were Bob you'd probably be lighting a match to this page by now. But, really, doesn't everybody, after a hard day, secretly wish for a wife?

Well, I got one.

After seven years of marriage and two kids, my husband has - for the time being - become a full-time homemaker. While that situation isn't unprecedented these days, there still aren't a lot of role-reversal models around to follow. Sometimes we feel like we're reinventing domestic life.

So why does it all look so familiar?

DAY 1: The three-year-old blows me a sideways goodbye kiss, his eyes glued to *Sesame Street*. I cast a departing glance to the doorway, where Jeff stands, stuffing a bottle into the baby's mouth. "Go on, get out of here," he says with a laugh. I feel like bursting into a rendition of "Sunrise, Sunset," or maybe, "Born

Hunger, Gratitude and Poems

By Sarah Klassen

In The Centre for MB Studies, I found a book with the rather clumsy title, *Famine in Russia and Our Journey Around the World*. The book (it's in German) was written in 1924 by David M. Hofer and grew out of his participation in the 1920s American Mennonite relief mission to victims of famine in southern Russia.

One section of the book, "Mosaics or Coloured Stones," contains short writings by Russian Mennonites who benefitted from the relief efforts. These include accounts of personal suffering, expressions of gratitude for assistance from America, and poems.

A significant number of the writings are by women. In fact, this may be the largest (only?) collection of writing by women of that time. The writers represent the younger, better educated women of that Mennonite society. They were daughters of school teachers and missionaries and many of them enjoyed careers as teachers or nurses.

I was moved by the writing in this section. It reflects a faith in God that suffering could not destroy, gratitude and a compassion for others that is remarkable, especially in the context of the writers' own recent experiences of violence, loss and hunger.

The poems in this section reflect that community's appreciation for and tastes in literature. Many of them were selected and/or translated by the contributors, but a good

number are original compositions. About a dozen of these were composed by women who are surely some of our earliest recorded Mennonite women poets, after the sixteenth century Anabaptists. One of these is Widow Helena Toews, whose work follows, in translation.

"...a [person's] life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15)

If God has set with his own hand your table
With rich abundance, heaven's grace,
If you have tasted love, then you are able
to help the stranger find a welcome place.

Do not invite the powerful and wealthy
who have sufficient strength and joy and meat.
Christ hasn't come to overfeed the healthy;
He calls the blind and lame, the old and weak.

Break bread with these, share of your bounty boldly
and let no wanderer depart unblessed.
Welcome the humble, the unnoticed and the lonely
into your home, to be your cherished guests.

Then you will be the instrument that channels
God's miracle. Then you'll not lack for food.
The more you give, the more you will be given
the oil of joy, the soul's eternal good.

Widow Helena Toews, nee Reimer
Gnadenfeld, (Ukraine) June 20, 1923.

(Translated from the German by Sarah Klassen)

Free," but I can't decide which.

DAY 3: "Boy, it just never stops," Jeff moans, as he flops to the couch at 10:30 p.m. "I mean, you finally get them into bed - and then you're so tired you can't do anything but go to bed yourself." He looks at me earnestly. "And you can't expect your spouse to take over when she gets home because she's tired, too." By now, he's wearing that "eureka" look he gets when he thinks he's stumbled onto a profound new insight. I try hard not to smirk.

WEEK 2: Cabin fever is setting in. Snubbed by the "other moms" at the park "like some creepy raincoat guy," Jeff's getting starved for adult conversation. Calls to my office become more frequent.

J: (baby wailing in background) Just calling to ask what's new.

D: Nothing since 43 minutes ago, when you last called.

J: Oh. Well the mail came. (Oprah theme music in background) Big news.

D: Really?

J: Yup. We may already have won \$10 million.

D: Well, that's certainly...uh, I think the boss is giving me that look again.

J: Oh. (sigh) Well, call me if anything happens.

WEEK 5: It's my turn to be disoriented. The Worcestershire and cocoa have disappeared from their familiar places on the second shelf. I'm aghast. My world is spinning.

"Like the way I've reorganized things?" Jeff says enthusiastically. The missing items, he explains, have been stuffed away logically in the deepest corner of the cupboards, "with all that other stuff we hardly ever use." The vanilla's on the top shelf, where it's handy - if you're 6'3". And, strangest of all, at eye level (mine) have appeared three cans of Ultra Siim Fast. Jeff, who's "grown" a little of late, explains, "I figure if I'm going to survive this, I've gotta have some goals."

Uh-oh.

WEEK 8: I arrive home to find the place immaculate, the kids all smiles, and candles burning on the well-set ta-

ble. Delicious smells (meatloaf, I think) emanate from the kitchen. I wander in, trying helpfully to put a couple of things in the dishwasher. Jeff, looking over my shoulder, sighs.

"No, not like that. Oh, here, let me do it. Go relax and get out of my kitchen."

I'm speechless. "It's happened," I think to myself. "He's become the perfect wife."

The warm glow of this realization lasts two glorious minutes. And then - oh, nuts. There it is again. Guilt. I realize, to my chagrin, that I am incapable of revelling in this properly. Jeff may have become June (minus the pearls), but I'm never going to be Ward.

I guess if there's a moral in all this, it's that you can switch roles, but you can't switch psyches. Maybe that's all for the best.

Doreen Martens, a former member of the Elmwood MB Church, lives in California with her husband, Jeff Taylor, and their two preschool-aged boys. She is a freelance journalist.

GLEANINGS

✱ **Sally Schroeder Isaak**, long time Mennonite Brethren missionary, is working on a manuscript that describes her work in the German department at HCJB in Quito, Ecuador.

✱ On November 1, 1992, **Ruth Boehm** was ordained to the ministry at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, where she has been youth pastor since 1989. Boehm comes from St. Jacobs, Ontario. (*The Mennonite Reporter*).

✱ **Mary Friesen**, presently on a leave of absence from her teaching position at MBCI, is completing a Master of Divinity program at the University of Winnipeg. Mary is the assistant moderator of the River East MB Church where she and her husband, Gerhard, are members.

✱ On November 11, 1992, the Church of England voted in favour of permitting the ordination of women as

priests. This historic turning point for the church promises, according to *TIME*, to evoke enough controversy and change to win the label, "The Second Reformation."

✱ *Sophia's* publisher, **Ester DeFehr**, after moving three times in the past year, has come to roost in Troutman, North Carolina. She participates in a local Bible study which includes Presbyterians and Quakers, both black and white. She has also begun floor loom weaving lessons. Ester DeFehr and her husband, Dave, are members of the McIvor Avenue MB Church.

✱ **Bertha Klassen**, Elmwood MB Church, is writing a history of the 70-year-old Mennonite Community Orchestra.

✱ **Irma Epp** has been elected Assistant Pastor of the McIvor Avenue MB Church. In order that she could be elected to a position open only to

members who qualified for ordination, the membership voted to eliminate the restriction.

✱ **Ardith Frey** was commissioned, on September 27, 1992, as "pastoral care-giver" in the Aberdeen EMC church. She became the first woman to hold this position in the EMC church, whose constitution has previously allowed only male members to be ordained or commissioned. In the absence of official pastoral recognition from the largely rural conference, the Aberdeen Church decided to seek temporary license from the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. This would allow Frey to officiate at the marriage of church members. (*The Mennonite Reporter*)

✱ **Tammy Sutherland** won the 1992 John Horsch Essay Contest for her essay, "*The Status of Women in Anabaptism: The Early Movement and Today*." Tammy attends the River East MB Church.

LETTERS

A friend of mine shared her copies of *Sophia* with me. I was excited by this Christian magazine put out by women, and would like to have a subscription.

I especially liked your title, *Sophia* translated "wisdom" and enjoyed George Shillington's "A short story of *Sophia*", giving some good background information.

Elfrieda Schroeder
Kitchener, Ontario

Sophia - what an exciting concept! Please enroll me.

Helen Rose Pauls
Sardis, British Columbia

I want to let you know how much I have enjoyed the articles in *Sophia*. I received and read the magazine yesterday for the first time. I am a mother of three young children with my husband in the final stages of his PhD at the University of Toronto.

I enjoy staying at home with the kids but also look forward to the time when circumstances will enable me (Lord willing) to explore other avenues of life such as further education (I am a nurse) or going back to the work force in some capacity.

Your magazine represented people with various views.

Carla Janzen
Toronto, Ontario

An Open Letter - *From Ester DeFehr*

We have all read about it. *Newsweek* reports it as being "the most sadistic violence since the Nazi campaign's ethnic cleansing." Now, on top of reports of systematic torture and murder in Bosnia, come charges of a new Serb atrocity - the mass rape of 20,000 to 50,000 Muslim and Croat women and girls. Heart-wrenching testimonies from women and girls as young as six tell of having to endure humiliation and repeated rapes in detention camps. These detention camps are turned into "rape camps" and schools and hotels are turned into "bordellos." Serbian leaders deliberately organize this rape to increase their population through the babies born and to eradicate the Muslim peoples.¹

Mass rapes have been a by-product of war throughout history. When German soldiers marched through Belgium in World War I, they practised rape; it was called "The Rape of the Hun." The Japanese occupation of China's wartime capital in 1937 was accompanied by so much sexual violence it became known as "The Rape of Nanking." The raped women of Bangladesh were termed "Heroines of Independence" and gang rapes appear in the records of courts-martial for American soldiers in Viet Nam.

Mass rapes are often given credence only at the emotional moment when the losing side cries out for world attention. After the war is over and history has been written, the women once again are victimized when their stories are glossed over and discounted as exaggerations.²

I believe it is time for us to finally stand in solidarity with

the women who are being victimized and help make them aware that other women and men are concerned. God instructs us in His word not to remain silent amidst crimes against humanity. Injustice must be identified and named. When evil is not exposed and prosecuted, it repeats itself. Only when evil is named can one fight against it. I believe hatred between Muslims and Christians must stop because it produces these war crimes in atrocious dimensions.

We must encourage our governments to oppose and prosecute such crimes. Therefore, I have written a petition with the purpose of calling for the prosecution of the perpetrators of this systematic rape. The petition can be used by women's groups, churches and individuals.* Let us not be silent. Silence is a crime!

Endnotes

1. Tom Brown, "A Pattern of Rape, *Newsweek* (January 4, 1993), 32-36.

2. Susan Brownmiller, "Making Female Bodies the Battlefield," *Newsweek* (January 4, 1993), 37.

I would like to thank the following for their assistance: Jim O'Brien from the US State Department, Michael Scharf from the United Nations, Michelle Dupois from the American Red Cross, John Longhurst from Mennonite Central Committee, Susan Yoder from Davidson College Library and Judith Dueck, HURIDOCS, from Winnipeg.

* The petition is in the centre fold.

MISSION STATEMENT: *SOPHIA*

Sophia offers a forum for women in the Mennonite Brethren Church. Her pages provide room for dialogue, room for women to speak to each other about their place in the family, the church, the work place and the world. She recognizes that the MB sisterhood is rural, urban and suburban; that it represents all age groups; that it includes diverse interests and experiences; that its members speak with various voices.

Sophia offers herself as a rallying place for women in an uncertain, changing world. She is interested in women's stories, in their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. She invites expression of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. She encourages women in the use of their gifts in all spheres of life.

Although *Sophia* was conceived and brought to birth by and for MB women and celebrates sisterhood, it is her desire to be inclusive. She hopes to challenge both men and women; she welcomes their voices and invites them into dialogue.

Sophia acknowledges the authority of God, the giver of wisdom, and of the sacred Scriptures, the story of God's dealing with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).



*Therefore,
since we are surrounded
by such a great cloud of witnesses,
let us throw off everything that hinders
and the sin that so easily entangles,
and let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us.*

Hebrews 12:1
(New International Version)

