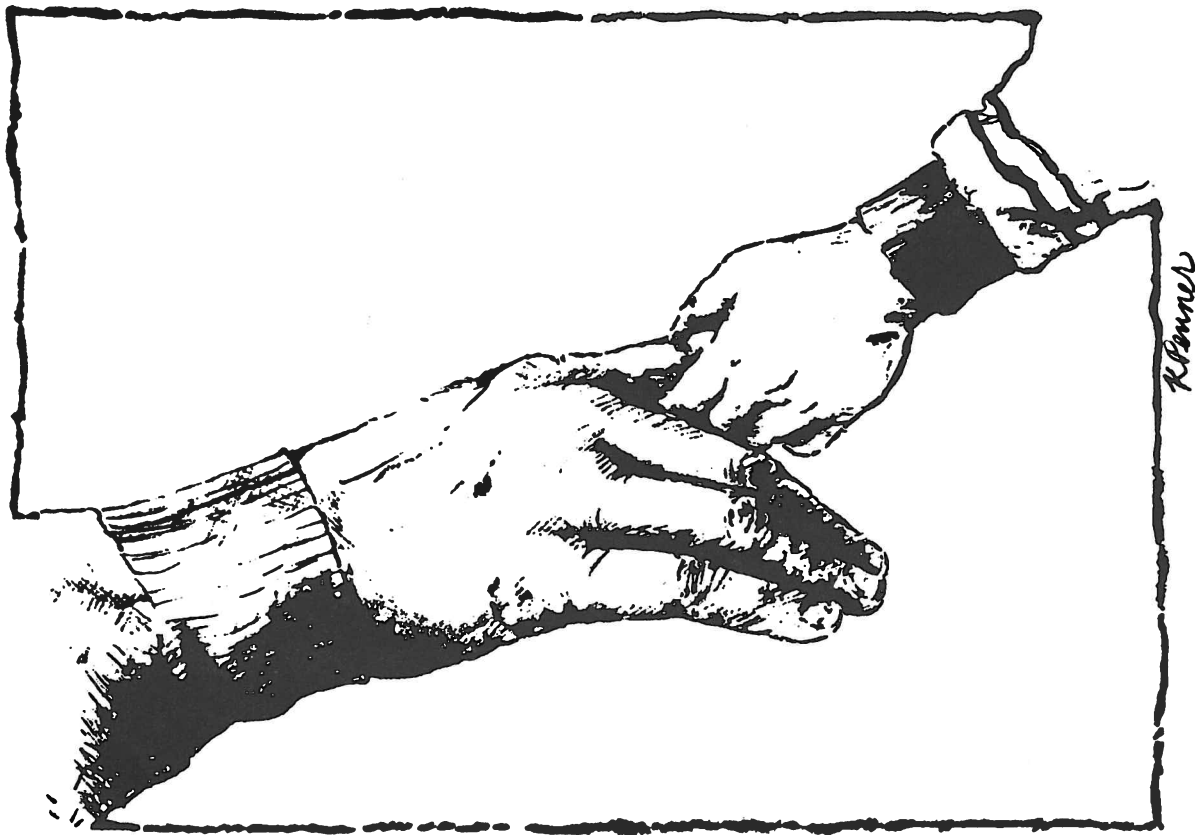


3/2

S O P H I A

W I S D O M

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



Caring for Each Other

Kathy Dueck
REMB #11

SPRING AND SUMMER VOLUME 3 NUMBER 2

Bethany College Library
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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).

Keep *Sophia* Coming

If your subscription to *Sophia* began with the fall/92 issue (Women and Work), then this is your last issue. To keep *Sophia* coming, please renew your subscription promptly and you won't miss the next issue: "Imagining a Better World."

3 issues (1 year) \$9.00
6 issues (2 Years) \$17.00

Please make checks payable to *Sophia* and indicate church affiliation and church mailbox number if applicable.

Sophia
P.O. Box 28062
1453 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg, MB R2G 4E9

SOPHIA is published
three times a year by an
editorial collective of
Mennonite Brethren women.

PUBLISHER
Ester DeFehr

EDITOR
Sarah Klassen

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Eleanor Martens
Lorraine Matties

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Dora Dueck
Agnes Dyck
Linda Penner

DISTRIBUTION
Lois Fast

LAYOUT
Connie Jantz

PROMOTION
Ingrid Martens

ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Wilma Derksen
Judith Dueck
Mary Friesen
Agnes Hubert
Millie Kroeker
Lorina Marsch
Carolee Neufeld
Elaine Pinto
Willa Reddig
Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen

Subscription Rate:
\$9.00 for 3 issues
\$17.00 for 6 issues

Please address subscription forms,
correspondence and manuscripts to:

SOPHIA
P.O. Box 28062
1453 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg, MB
R2G 4E9

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Caring For Each Other

When I was sponsoring the ISCF club in the school where I taught, a colleague spoke to me one day about a student who didn't fit in with his classmates: "What can the ISCF club do for Joe, and for people like him?" My first impulse was to charge my colleague with passing the buck. But I really couldn't dodge the challenge. It makes perfect sense to expect that the Christian fellowship will be a caring place where those who are mistreated or simply ignored can find acceptance and friendship. This includes the hurt and lonely, and those deemed unlovely or so lacking in confidence that they seem to have nothing to contribute to a friendship.

I'm not sure the ISCF club was successful. Christian kids, too, are intent on finding their own secure circle of friends and making a niche for themselves. They may hesitate to be identified with the lonely, awkward and insecure. I'm not saying this to be critical of teenagers; my own record as a youth and adult prevents me from laying blame.

The supportive, communal lifestyle of the New Testament church has always attracted us. Believers held their material possessions in common, shared meals and praised God together. We are told that, "There were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4: 34 NIV). That sounds utopian. Were they all attractive, well-rounded people who exercised good judgement, caring and sensitivity? Like any vision of utopia this one proved difficult to realize on the long haul. The early church, spirit-filled and fervent though it was, soon found itself facing the complaint that the needs of one group—Greek widows—were not being met. The problem required attention and practical action. We are told to "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way...fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2 NIV). The challenge is how to do this so



that our efforts are effective and so we don't wear out. We would also like to do it with glad hearts.

It's not terribly difficult to help out here and there, perhaps in a dramatic, one-time emergency, with money and counsel, with time and our personal presence. If the person we're helping is "normal," interesting and properly grateful, that makes it easy, too. And afterwards we can return to our own lives.

But sometimes we face situations that require long-term assistance. Our personal commitment, if we're willing to make it, will have to be on-going and we must count on its being costly. Our efforts may take us into corners of society that are unfamiliar and even frightening. If the person we're helping is demanding, uncooperative, or someone we find unattractive and uninteresting, it's hard to hang in there.

One way we do our caring is through agencies and institutions. In Russia, concern for each other led our Mennonite people to establish a variety of institutions: an agency to look after orphans, a school for the deaf, an institution for the mentally challenged.

In our contemporary society we often rely on paid professional counsellors and care-givers on eight-hour shifts (or in the

case of MCC, volunteers) to do the work. This kind of organized caring will always be needed and it will continue to relieve pain, ease burdens and provide employment. But it will never do the whole job, nor will it absolve us of personal responsibility in caring for each other. Caring is made easier if we can do it within a faith community made up of individuals who actively share in the task, hold each other accountable, and support each other in it.

Henri Nouwen has this to say: "Therefore, to care means first of all to be present to each other. From experience you know that those who care for you become present to you. When they listen, they listen to you. When they speak, they speak to you. And when they ask questions you know it is for your sake and not for their own. Their presence is a healing presence because they accept you on your own terms and they encourage you to take your own life seriously and to trust your own vocation" (*Out of Solitude*, Ave Maria Press, 1974).

In this issue of *Sophia*, you will find various examples of individuals who, without fanfare, try to "Carry each other's burdens, and...fulfill the law of Christ." We offer these stories for your encouragement and as a challenge to us all not to grow weary in caring for each other.



In July the MB General Conference convenes in Winnipeg. We hope that the section of *Sophia* related to this convention will prompt our readers to become better informed about the issues that will come to the floor. We encourage women and men of our conference to attend and participate.

Sarah Klassen

BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK

Greetings from Paraguay. My mother gave me a copy of your magazine (Vol. 2 #2). I want to affirm you in this new venture. I like what you're doing: creating a place for MB women's voices. Thought you might be interested in a voice from Paraguay. Manitoba is originally my home and since my husband Wilfred and I spent several years in Winnipeg, most of the names in the magazine are familiar to me.

The theme "women and work" has long been close to my heart. I identified a lot with Lori Matties' article, "Do Housewives Work?" Eleanor Martens in her article "How Pro-Family Are We?" addresses some of the contradictions between our words and our actions that have long been a burden to me.

Ever since my first child was born, I have struggled to balance the various areas of work in which I am involved. I've been a so-called "working mom," a "stay-at-home mom" and a "student-mom." The barrier between "work" and "family" in our society often leaves me frustrated with either/or choices. I have worked hard at finding a way in between.

For the past two-and-a-half years (since coming to Paraguay) I have been working part-time in literacy and SSL (Spanish as a Second Language) with indigenous women. My work involves teaching, curriculum development and supervising indigenous teachers. During this time I gave birth to our third child. Due to a much less rigid barrier between private and public realms in indigenous cultures, I have been able to integrate motherhood and career in a way which I can hardly imagine possible in Canadian society.

Let me illustrate. My "maternity leave," like that of Agripina, my indigenous co-worker who had her baby two months before I did, was only several weeks long—just till I felt strong enough to get on my bike again, baby in my front-pack, and cycle the two

kilometers to school. My five-year-old is on his bike ahead of me, on his way to kindergarten, located in the same building as the women's literacy classes. Once we arrive, I put my baby down on the floor mat, along with the other babies and toddlers. Agripina, the indigenous teacher, sits in the circle of women around the table, nursing her four-month-old while teaching the women to write their names. I sit and listen.

Later she walks to my house with her baby and her five-year-old (sometimes she leaves her children at home with her husband). My son and hers play outside in the sand while the two of us sit in my living room, nurse our babies, discuss her teaching and plan next week's literacy classes.

Frieda Lepp-Kaethler
Filadelfia, Paraguay



APPLYING SOPHIA

I am a grade 11 student at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute. A few weeks ago my biblical studies teacher showed *Sophia* magazine to our class and later I picked up some back copies to read.

I especially liked Mrs. Eleanor Martens' column, "As I See It." I felt that her articles apply to my life and were very helpful. Mrs. Bev Hiebert's "A Day in the Life" column made me think about supporting missions in other countries.

I want to let you know that I read your magazine and loved it. I would be interested in subscribing.

Jean F. Dalman
MBCI

WORKABLE SOLUTIONS

I found your fall issue very inspirational and thought-provoking. Eleanor Martens raises some serious questions. I would encourage families who have found workable solutions to the "division of labour" to share these with the rest of us.

One thing that has really worked well for us is that my husband looks after Sunday dinner. He has one menu that we picked up from our mothers—putting a roast with potatoes and vegetables in the oven before we go to church. Dinner is on the table within 15 minutes of getting home and we can always invite company spontaneously. He is in charge of the kitchen even when company is there and I am the helper.

Shirley Bergen
Brandon, Manitoba



TEACHING ABROAD

I read your ad in the *MB Herald* in October. Could you please send me a subscription?

We love it here [in Kenya]. I am teaching at the Rift Valley Academy and David is a physician at the hospital. There is a lot of unrest here, just as in most countries. Where is it safe? Canada?

Sue Lewis
Kijabe, Kenya

Giving Birth to Life in Death

by Nancy Fehderau

On a balmy day last October, I was enjoying lunch with my parents, who were happily looking forward to spending another winter with their good friends in Florida. The car had been serviced. Everything was packed. They

themselves, at 84 and 87, had been declared apparently healthy by the doctor. However, he had ordered a stomach x-ray just to cover a complaint Mom had happened to mention. Lately she couldn't eat as much, always felt full and had lost some weight.

More than a week had passed since the x-ray. I told Mom I would call for the report before they left, just to set her mind at rest. So we talked of good times and shared family news....Then the telephone rang.

In the space of a few moments our world was turned around. An enormous stomach tumour. Three months to live without surgery, up to a year with surgery. We suddenly found ourselves on a fast train, heading in directions over which we had no control.

Mother lived one month longer than the year given her. We cared, we loved, we cried, we shared and talked about life, about death and dying. We encouraged and we prayed as our family walked with Mom along this part of her journey. She spent her last weeks in a spacious, bright room in the palliative care unit of a nearby health facility. Most of my days were spent with her. A cot was provided so that I could spend the nights beside her. We had many precious moments together.

She liked to sit straight upright in bed sometimes, but needed to be held and supported in this position. This was rather awkward from the side of the bed, so I crawled up into bed behind her, so that she was sitting

*I was in the birthing position,
helping my frail, weak mother
give birth to life in death*

between my legs, leaning up against me.

As I sat there quietly holding her from behind, my thoughts drifted as a picture unfolded. A farm house in a blustery March blizzard, many years ago. My mother on a bed in much the same position that I was presently in, giving birth to my life. Now the roles were reversed. I was in the birthing position, helping my frail, weak mother give birth to life in death by holding her through her birth journey into a new world and to a new life in heaven.

I remembered reading recently about a mother who encouraged her daughter by telling her, "When you were born, you cried lustily while all the people around you laughed. Live well, so that when you die, you will laugh while the people around you cry."

My mother breathed her last breath in my arms. She was laughing; I was crying. What an example for me as my soul matures and readies itself for my next birthing journey.

Nancy Fehderau and her husband, Harold, spent seventeen years doing linguistic surveys and Bible translation work in Zaire and Kenya. At present she is active in church and community in Kitchener, Ontario.

Dying Man

by Elaine Pinto

*On this summer night I see a dying man
with bone frame clinging to the mattress
like a retching seaman at ship's side
his appearance a hideous reply
to the boasts of childhood
and a mother's dreams*

*His wife, plump and soft, comes to comfort
but he is anxious
knowing the door is closing
not seeing the next one open yet*

*I read him foolish words
"Let not your heart be troubled"
and hear laughter as my heart recoils
and advances again
"I am the Way."
I continue to play the fool
amid laughter and hear
the sound of my speech gaining force
"It does not yet appear what we shall be"*

*He asks if his days have been enough
as the hours flee our grasping
until only the words remain
cool and firm in the heat
I will believe the foolish pledges
while it is dark at sea
and winds rip our hands from the mast
I will believe though
God sleeps in the boat.*

Elaine Pinto, McIvor MB Church, is in a Master of Divinity program at the University of Winnipeg.

"I'm People Too"

by Mary Flatt

For the title of this article, I am indebted to my daughter Linda. It is a remark she made some years ago when she felt left out of an activity. She, however, will never read this article because Linda is mentally handicapped.

Mental retardation is a handicap which restricts a person's ability to learn. It is not an illness; it is a condition. Although the condition may be modified through training complemented with tender loving care, it is, as a rule, irreversible. Just as there are many different causes of retardation there are varying degrees of retardation. A general classification categorizes the handicapped as mildly, moderately or severely retarded; this corresponds closely to educable, trainable or developmentally handicapped.

Linda, a young woman with Down's Syndrome, fits into the trainable category. Our family's thirty-five-year journey with Linda has not always been smooth and easy and certainly not without frustrations, but it has been challenging as well as rewarding. My opinions are based on my observations of and interaction with Linda and her peers; they may not apply to the educable or severely handicapped.

The presence of a mentally handicapped child has a significant impact on the family. Statistics cite the above-average divorce rate of these parents and the later resentment of other siblings who felt cheated of their childhood because of added responsibilities in caring for the handicapped member. However, it is not the actual experience itself, but the reaction to it that determines whether the lives of family members will be enriched or diminished as a result. Little pleasures and everyday miracles at unexpected times and places may be among the dividends enjoyed by the family with a handicapped member.

The Greatest Little Lady

Upon graduating from school at the age of twenty-one, Linda received the "Greatest Little Lady" Award. And she deserved it; to master the intricacies of socially acceptable behaviour has been a long, arduous struggle. Today, she enjoys new experiences like a trip to the voting booth or to the Stratford Festival, helping the official at a ribbon-cutting ceremony or meeting Brian, the pilot, during a visit to the cockpit on a flight to see her sister in Ontario. The opportunity to represent our family as a pallbearer at her grandmother's funeral was accepted with appropriate solemnity. She handled that situation, as she does most of her "adventures," with amazing aplomb.

Linda has been a tonic in our home, adding warmth by her spontaneous love and open honesty. Often a potentially tense situation has been relieved by her innocent and a propos remarks. I would not exchange the countless times some painful moment has been eased by her built-in sensitivity. Recently someone described Linda's presence as "so comforting and healing." I would be honoured if that could be said of me.

Linda is teaching us patience and tolerance. From her we are learning the art of giving and receiving—two components of any

relationship. She gives and receives everything, from a compliment to a gift, be it a trifle or a treasure, with gracious simplicity and undisguised delight. She has a gift for affirming people and bringing out the best in them. Once, after hearing a soloist at church, I was debating whether to express my enjoyment of the rendition. Linda, without much ado, tapped the singer on the arm and simply said, "Marvellous song!" She had done what she could; I had not.

Degree of Independence

Linda has probably achieved the highest level of independence that she can comfortably handle. While she still lives at home, she also spends time away from us in a privately-arranged respite situation. She has been a "trainee" at W.A.S.O. (Work and Social Opportunities) since its opening in 1981. W.A.S.O. is a sheltered vocational facility located at 585 London Street with an affiliated greenhouse at Munroe and Raleigh. Linda is part of a W.A.S.O. team that is contracted to Palliser, a local furniture manufacturer, to package all hardware on site. She is in a semi-integrated setting working at Palliser but under the W.A.S.O. umbrella with W.A.S.O. staff providing supervision. Her pride and joy in being an employee with an employer and a pay cheque enhance her life immeasurably.

Society has welcomed vital changes in attitudes toward the handicapped even in the three-and-a-half decades that Linda has been part of our family. These changes are reflected in terminology, philosophies and services designed for the handicapped. The move away from labels, especially those with racial or negative overtones, is commendable, but I do not believe that the self-esteem of a person with a disability is determined or instilled by currently-correct terminology.* Linda has on occasion referred to herself as "mentally handicapped." When pressed for a meaning of that term, she volunteered the word "beautiful." Her view of God's creatures would appear to coincide with that of the Creator.

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons

(1971) focuses attention on the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities. Their "right" to education, employment and a community-based life-style is advocated. A philosophy that recognizes and seeks to protect the dignity and worth of each human being certainly rests on a firm foundation.



PHOTO: MARY FLATT

Linda Flatt and her mother

God, in the Old Testament, challenged his people to seek justice for the weak and oppressed.

I applaud the progress in the development of programs and services to expand the horizon of the mentally handicapped. It allows them to become contributing members of the community.

continued on page 8

Nursing and the Feminine Ideal

by Eleanor Martens



From earliest childhood I was drawn to the compassion, generosity and virtue modelled by the white-garbed angel of mercy. Florence Nightingale, Sue Barton and Cherry Ames were my heroes not only because of the exotic adventures their careers appeared to spawn, but because they embodied all that was good and desirable about being female. The

nurse as the sympathetic, sacrificial caregiver was for many young girls the ideal woman.

Those of us who transposed this fascination into reality have experienced untold satisfaction in providing physical, spiritual and social support to those in need. And yet, we are not a happy lot. Our literature muses constantly over the

crisis in our midst, defined by recurring themes of burnout, low job satisfaction and powerlessness. Crisis, of course, is not new to nursing. "For many years we have heard that nursing is at the crossroads. Nursing never seems to get over being at the crossroads" (Ashley).

Winnipeg witnessed this crisis in 1991 when 10,000 nurses braved -30

("I'm People Too"...continued from page 7)

The merit of any service provided, however, must be measured by the value of that service to the person it is designed to help. Of great concern to me is the zealous pursuit of a proclaimed philosophical ideal which often loses sight of the individual with the need. In some instances the ideal becomes an invitation to abandon common sense. As parents of handicapped people we know first hand that an unsuspecting nature places them at the mercy of others. They are, indeed, most vulnerable!

Noble Philosophy Misapplied

Two incidents involving former W.A.S.O. trainees, one male and one female, illustrate this vulnerability. Both "graduates" moved from a sheltered work environment to regular employment in the community. Both had been established in independent living units. Within a year or so their job opportunities disappeared for a number of reasons not necessarily related to their performances on the job. The young woman's quality of life has deteriorated dramatically in the three years she has been unemployed. With her former social contacts disrupted she sits alone in her bachelor apartment, prey to fears of loneliness and unwelcome gestures from the landlord or other tenants.

The young man came to a tragic end. With time on his hands and inadequate supervision, he found friends on the street. They generously included him in their social life, only to introduce him to substances that proved fatal to him. Blaming the incompetence of the agency or the heavy workload of the social worker after the fact resolves nothing. These two people, among others of Linda's peer group, are victims of a noble philosophy misinterpreted and misapplied. This phenomenon is anything but reassuring to parents of the mentally handicapped.

Legally, parents have no authority to make decisions for a

handicapped child over the age of majority. The Public Trustee can overrule arrangements not deemed to be in the best interests of the ward (from the vantage point of the Public Trustee). To guarantee that our voice will be heard, my husband and I, at our initiation, have been appointed Linda's legal guardians by the Court of Queen's Bench. *Today staunch advocates insist that mentally handicapped people, regardless of the degree of impairment, be allowed to exercise their right to participate in the experiences open to so-called normal people whether in education, sex or sports.*

I am uncomfortable with this. When I make such a claim for Linda, am I really speaking with her best interests at heart? Am I showing respect for her as a person when I set goals beyond her abilities? Am I making these goals any more attainable for her? She feels hurt and disappointment, pressure and fear. Am I guilty of violating a very tender spirit by forcing it into a mold?

As parents, we have tried to give Linda the freedom to develop without arbitrarily imposed deadlines; we have tried to set and accept goals that are compatible with her abilities. We have not always been successful. At times our own fearfulness would have hindered her progress so we are grateful to have been challenged along the way. By affirming Linda in the gifts she brings to our family, we are responding to a plea latent in her words, "I'm people too."

* Note: The practices recommended at any given time by experts in mental retardation as the best and most humane, are rejected later. See Edward Zigler: *Understanding Mental Retardation*—(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Mary Flatt, Elmwood MB Church, is a charter member and volunteer at W.A.S.O.

degree temperatures to protest working conditions and lack of influence within a system where women are in the majority. Money was less important to them than gaining respect and recognition for highly skilled and demanding work.

How could self-respecting women called to serve others be so selfish and demanding, so unprofessional, uncouth, utterly ignoble and unladylike, the nurses were asked. Much of the criticism was levelled less at the tactics, some of which did merit concern, than at the principle. Opponents saw the strike as the antithesis of everything the profession and its 97% female membership stood for.

Neither the strike nor the reaction to it were surprising. After years of evasion and denial, nurses were beginning to recognize their crisis as a women's issue. They began to link their frustrations as workers with their status as women. These days it is difficult to find an issue of the *Canadian Nurse* that does not speculate on some aspect of nursing's most pervasive problem.

It has been observed that whenever more than one-third of the workers in an occupation are women it becomes less valued. In fact, the major complaints of nurses—pay inequities, few opportunities for advancement and little decision-making power—are common to most female members of the workforce. Nurses carry the additional burden of the mystification of their work, a legacy of the Victorian era during which nursing was formally established.

Nursing, unfortunately, was unable to avoid subsuming some of the repressive, Victorian attitudes about women. Caring was equated with femininity and considered to illustrate their innate weakness. "The weakness of women's reasoning capacity explains why it is that women show more sympathy for the unfortunate than men do, and so treat them with kindness and interest..." (Schopenhauer, in Ashley).

Florence Nightingale saw nursing as an opportunity for upper class women to escape the idle, prosaic existence of Victorian ladyhood. More than any skills or capabilities they might possess, their character as ladies best qualified them to be nurses. Their modesty, compassion and selflessness made them "born

nurses." Nursing fulfilled the "longing of every woman's heart," to care for others. It was simply an extension of the genetically-driven need to mother.

Nursing captured other 19th century stereotypes. As women, nurses were to be submissive to their superiors, particularly males. It does not require much imagination to discover the parallels between obedience to husbands and obedience to physicians. Loyalty to the physician through silence was the ultimate creed. One physician admonished his nursing class: "Print deep in your memory, I will keep my mouth shut as it were a bridle" (Lovell). No wonder the motto of the first nursing school in Canada was, "I see and I am silent."

Romantic idealism and unrealistic expectations continue to haunt and discredit nursing today. Nurses are still defined by their femininity. Nursing education and research still fail to attract the funding awarded more prestigious, male-dominated professions, mirroring the longstanding perception that nurses need to be nice but they don't have to be smart (even though entrance requirements to university nursing programs are among the most rigorous in the country).

And what about the way nurses are represented in the media? Most nurses are highly skilled professionals, many with advanced university education and a serious desire to assist individuals and groups toward health. They cringe when they see themselves portrayed as brainless, mini-skirted bombshells who float along hallways handing out charts and waiting for the right doctor to come along.

The fact that nurses are expected to absorb a disproportionate burden of cost-containment during these times of health care rationing can only be seen as a gender-specific form of injustice. Because they care, they are expected to sustain cutbacks at personal cost as they try to accommodate ever-expanding workloads. This "compassion trap" capitalizes on the guilt women feel when they say no to meeting someone else's often unreasonable demands.

Both as women and as nurses we have been socialized to believe that meeting our own needs is incompatible with meeting the needs of others. Maybe this is why so many of us feel uncom-

fortable with the notion of pursuing our rights. We fearfully equate the politicization of nursing with loss of sensitivity and caring. Those of us who are Christian face the added responsibility of knowing that as followers of Christ we are frequently called upon to give up our rights for the sake of others. The unmistakable message of scripture, of course, is that selflessness is required of all believers, not only of women.

Nurses derive little pleasure from making strident demands. The point of desperation for many comes when they see their ability to care being compromised by misuse of their skills and devaluation of their work. As I see it, dignity and self-worth are prerequisites to caring for others. Nurses are learning that caring for the bodies and spirits of others requires, first of all, caring for their own. Their protests are pleas for the respect and recognition history has persistently denied them.

Sources:

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M. Lovell, "Silent but Perfect Partners—Medicine's Use and Abuse of Women." *Advances in Nursing Science*, 3, 1981, p.39.

Eleanor Martens, *Mclvor MB Church, is a mother, a nurse and a graduate student at the University of Manitoba.*

Morija

by Dora Dueck



Morija

January 10, 1914

"...In the morning I quickly made a fire in the stove and went milking. After breakfast I finished my sewing and then I began to pack. I felt some anxiety at the thought of leaving Fischau, but the Lord is my shepherd. After dinner my belongings were packed into the sleigh and my dear father drove me to Halbstadt...We arrived at Morija..."

Since I first heard of it in the brief pages of my grandmother's diary, I have been intrigued by a place called "Morija." The name itself looks and sounds lovely to me. What it was is even more interesting.

"Morija" was a Mennonite deaconess home established to train women who would dedicate their lives to nursing and spiritual care in the various charitable institutions, such as hospitals and orphanages, of the Mennonite settlements in Russia.

"Deaconesses, as we think of them and wish them to be," wrote Jakob Kroeker in the *Friedensstimme* soon after Morija's founding, "are single sisters who are prepared, out of love for the Lord, to serve the sick body and soul."

The deaconess home opened on December 3, 1909, in the town of Neu-Halbstadt (Molotschna colony) under the official title in Russian of the Moria Society of Evangelical Sisters of Mercy.

Like most of the Mennonite charitable institutions of the time, Morija was privately founded and maintained. The initiators of the project were Franz and Elizabeth Wall, who were also the founders of the 60-bed Muntau Hospital located within walking distance of Morija; Dr. Erich Tavonius, Muntau's highly-respected German doctor, "a noble man and a philanthropist"; and Peter Schmidt, a wealthy estate owner who provided most of the funds for the building.

The on-going work of Morija was also sustained by private contributions. The deaconesses received their education and all other necessities free of charge as long as they remained with the association. Morija also served as "mother house" for Mennonite nurses in sickness and old age.

Prospective deaconesses, admitted first on probation, enrolled in a three-year program of theoretical and practical instruction. The institution was "ex-

tremely strict" and the women's work was assessed by highly exacting standards. Even details such as table manners, for example, were taken into account. The school wanted women who would "give themselves totally to the task," Jakob Kroeker wrote.

Besides medical subjects such as anatomy, the women studied German and Russian language, arithmetic, Russian and world history, geography, Bible lessons and church history. They also participated in the day-to-day work of the home. Some 26 sisters might be at the table for meals, for example, and there was "a large amount of washing."

For most of Morija's history Vera Michelson was matron of the home. She was likely an ethnic German and it appears from photographs that she was a petite woman with a slender build and a face marked with competence and authority. According to my grandmother's diary, her leadership was firm, pious and kindly.

Photographs from the time also show us the uniforms of the sisters. Some wore blouses and dark jumpers, and others (the graduates?) wore white aprons over long dark dresses, with short white capes fastened behind their ears. Each sister's hair was parted down the middle.

Susie Derksen of Boissevain, who spent her childhood in the Molotschna, recalls the impression the uniformed deaconesses made on her. "They were always spotless," she says. They also had a reputation for being excellent nurses.

My grandmother, Helene Derksen, stayed at Morija less than three months because of debilitating menstrual problems, so her diary offers only tantalizing glimpses into the daily life of a novice at Morija.

After her disappointment at leaving Morija, my grandmother received a proposal from Heinrich Harder, with whom she had been corresponding. They eventually married and her life took a different direction from her earlier wish to be a deaconess.

But, life soon changed dramatically for all Russian Mennonites. During the Russian Revolution and after, the sisters of Morija experienced, with the rest of their people, the terrors of famine and civil war. Their house was completely plundered. C.E. Krehbiel, visiting Halbstadt in 1922, reported, "This Sisters' Home is nationalized... [they]

are to move out tomorrow and it is to be barracks for soldiers.”

The town of Halbstadt was among those with the highest rate of starvation during the early 1920s famine. I have not been able to discover whether the deaconesses too were reduced to scavenging for dried pumpkins, beets, weeds and field animals to keep alive. Nor do I know whether any of them were victims of the violence and the “wide-spread rape,” single and multiple, of the Makhno occupation. *

The following diary notes of C.E. Krehbiel about the Muntau Hospital in 1922 indicate the practical challenges and discouragements the nursing sisters must have faced:

“[They] use gauze again and again. For one year no soap to wash with ...twenty-three patients in the typhus house...twenty children, mostly orphans and foundlings, feet frozen, bed sores, starved...bedding [of] patched rags...They put sawdust into little four-by-six-inch bags and lay [them] on festering wounds...They have had town children gather thirty different kinds of medical herbs for use in the hospital...”

The institution founded unequivocally for Christian purposes was further tested by the anti-Christian goals of the communists. By 1927 the last Mennonite head nurse at Morija was removed and the deaconess home turned into a secular medical institute with an “atheistic spirit” and “demoralizing forces” under a communist leader.

“We do not want to walk past the suffering of others like the priest and Levite, but like the Samaritan, make a sacrifice of our own priorities if necessary,” the housefather of Morija had said many years earlier. It was during the revolution and its aftermath, with the epidemics and other sicknesses that accompanied the upheavals, that this commitment was given its most strenuous opportunity.

What it cost the sisters who had given their “entire soul to the matter” is not known, but this much was reported: it was

particularly in these terrible times that Morija’s deaconesses were able to render “a great service” to others.

*The author would appreciate any information (oral or written) from *Sophia* readers about Morija or any of the deaconesses who were trained there and worked in other Mennonite institutions.

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Conversation with Susie Derksen

Dora Dueck, *Valley Gardens MB church*, is a free lance writer and novelist.



Students and staff of Morija

Unlikely Friendship

by Nettie Labun

With him were the Twelve and a number of women who had been set free from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, known as Mary of Magdala, from whom seven demons had come out, Joanna, the wife of Chuza a steward of Herod's, Susanna, and many others. These women provided for them out of their own resources. (Luke 8:2-3, The Revised English Bible)

My imagination is waylaid by this snippet. Who were these women? Why did they leave home to go wandering about helping a poor teacher whom the respected religious leaders seemed bent on catching out in mistakes? Why should they risk their lives to follow this man who was no longer welcome in the synagogues and had taken to the open road, the hillside and the lakeshore?

Luke, the doctor, recognized a good set of caregivers when he heard of them. He recorded three of their names—people who fit his friend Paul's idea that suffering helps us help others (1 Corinthians 1:4). All these women had been healed by Jesus. Like the Samaritan leper their gratitude brought them back to him.

You may picture Susanna and the "many others" as you will; we have no other information about them. Tradition has added many stories to the scriptural record of Mary Magdalene. Perhaps the seven demons fired the imagination of artists and writers. She has been thought a prostitute, a woman with a mental disorder, and more recently as someone with multiple personalities. The Bible doesn't tell us the details of Mary Magdalene's background. What it does emphasize is her devotion to Jesus. She stood by the cross, assisted as he was laid in the tomb and was specially chosen to talk with him on Easter morning.

"Mary, don't cling to me," were Jesus' words to her then. It was time to stand on her own feet, to be the bearer of news to the other disciples. Jesus considered this woman worthy to be the first preacher of the good news: "Jesus is alive!" Perhaps he knew she needed this important job to give her confidence. Perhaps he knew that she would do it with all the energy, drama and joy it deserved.

Joanna, like some of us, had been on the membership lists as "and wife;" she was known by her husband's occupation. Chuza was in charge of Herod's financial interests, and would have been feared and mistrusted by his fellow Jewish citizens. Was Joanna at court during the shameful incident that resulted in John the Baptist's beheading? Perhaps—such are the mysteries of redemption—it was because of this horror that she met Jesus. Certainly she had financial resources. What did Chuza think of them being siphoned off to finance this cousin of a convict? A difference of opinion on charitable donations has stressed many marriages. She left husband and home to be a disciple. Later, she brought spices to Jesus' tomb. It could not have been easy to sleep in the ditch when she was used to a silken couch.

But all the women who travelled with Jesus had to take the risk

of living among people of different customs and different standards. All of them departed from the cultural tradition that kept "decent" women in the home. In writing his gospel to Theophilus, Luke was recommending Christianity to the Greek world. By including these women, he was demonstrating not only that Jesus' ministry transcended sexual and economic boundaries, but that it brought together people of different social backgrounds; people who had overcome, or perhaps made use of, their origins to new and more glorious ends.

When I consider the women I've sat at table with over the last year, their variety makes me want to write a paean of praise to God's imagination. Some are near the beginning of life and some at its end. Some are daughters of the church, others so marginalized by poverty that they have sometimes been reduced to earning bread in the manner it is speculated Mary Magdalene did. One hands me a scientific journal to read, another a platitudinous tract; one talks about her missionary work, another of her struggle to cope as a single parent. What an array of beautiful shapes, sizes, colours and personality types God made! These friends are my treasure, a precious gift.

In my youth in post-war Britain, I contended with the division of social classes. In Africa in the '60s the division was between races. What divisions exist in the Mennonite churches of the '90s? Often we speak of "needy people" as a group that is separate from us. I learned a practical truth some years ago from a Bible study on the opening chapters of Genesis by Waldemar Janzen, professor of Old Testament at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. He said that one of the Hebrew meanings of the word for "being" in Genesis 2:7 is "throat." Like small birds in the nest with wide open beaks we are needy creatures.

Eileen lent sheets to Rosalie, a Zimbabwean pastor's wife. At the end of the year they were not returned, and so, as Eileen was on her way to India and needed them, she asked me to help retrieve them. Rosalie was amazed. "You mean you will use them again after we have used them?! I have never met a white person who would do that." It is as if we were saying, some can help and some can receive help, but don't mix them.

Life is richer if I look on my sister as a friend rather than a care-demanding case. Then our giving and receiving goes both ways. Jesus received Mary, Joanna, Susanna and the others into his family (Luke 8:19-21), and so they were related to one another. He had healed them all and accepted their company and their help. That healing and acceptance were the keys to the possibility of unlikely friendship. Likewise, his healing and acceptance of us gives us the courage to reach out to one another, no matter how "other." And, wonder of wonders, he accepts our combined "resources" to meet his need, and welcomes our companionship.

Nettie Labun grew up in England, where she studied Mathematics, Education and Theology and Missions. She has taught in England and Zambia, and for the past nine years has been an associate staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. She is a member of Fort Garry MB Church.

By Prayer:

The MB Women's Conference

by Agnes Dyck



PHOTO: AGNES DYCK

Sara Pasiciel

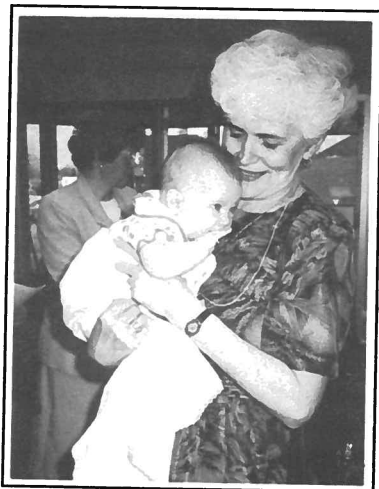


PHOTO: AGNES DYCK

The youngest Conference attendee Julia Martin and her granny, Agnes Olfert.

The voice level of arriving participants suggested the excitement and anticipation of delegates to the 1993 Manitoba Women's Conference, held April 17 at the McIvor Avenue MB Church. This year's theme was "By Prayer."

Sara Pasiciel, Associate Professor of Communications at Providence College, brought the gift of her wide experience in teaching and writing to her task as feature speaker on the theme of prayer. Her reflective manner of sharing from her personal life of prayer and her introductory insistence that there is no such thing as a "typical MB women" put everyone at ease. Barriers to prayer are numerous, she said, as she encouraged women to share their problems with prayer as well as clear answers to prayer. Pasiciel claimed, "What we think of God determines how we pray" and "the fruits of praying are given so imperceptibly that we often don't see them." She encouraged women to read the classics of the Christian faith, to keep a journal of how God has spoken and to seek out a mentor who can help further their spiritual growth.

A regular attendee, Martha Kliewer, remarked that the conference has changed with changes in the larger church: "In the past it was more like a worship service" and "there was not as much discussion."

Some participants travelled long distances to attend. Mary Goosen, who arrived on an overnight bus from Cranberry Portage, gave us a report on the five northern MB churches, urging us to pray for each of the pastor couples who experience unique problems because of the isolation. Susan Hamm, Jacquie Martin (with baby Julia), Jessie Rempel and Marilyn Lennox drove from Thompson, encountering snow and ice (and praying fervently) through one stretch of the road.

Brother Vic Janzen assisted at the registration tables and several brothers helped the McIvor Avenue women in the kitchen, from which emerged a great lunch in the noon hour.

Altogether the day was a time of reflection and learning, of meeting old and new friends and of nurturing each other as women believers.

Agnes Dyck is active in the McIvor Avenue MB church and as a volunteer in the community.

Roses and Thorns

by Elma Friesen

We had made a verbal commitment, aware that we did not fully recognize what that might involve.



PHOTO: ELMA FRIESEN

Granny and Elma Friesen

When we bought our home in 1968, our elderly neighbours welcomed us, and our two girls became very dear to them in no time at all. When I wanted to go shopping they insisted that the girls should stay with them; when it was time for them to clean eavestroughs or wash windows we were there to help. They often told us we were like their own children and so it was natural to call them Grandma and Grandpa to which they responded well. Our relationship blossomed like a rosebush. When our son came along he added to their joys and we all spent a lot of good time together. We never noticed any thorns.

My husband and I had talked about our close relationship with our neighbours and what that could involve. One day Grandpa confided his concern about how Grandma would get along without him. We both assured Grandpa that we would do our best to help her and that we would not leave her in any event. This gave him a lot of peace. Our relationship continued to blossom.

We had made a verbal commitment, aware that we did not fully recognize what that might involve. But we knew that we loved them dearly.

Grandma came to us one morning: something had happened to Grandpa. We

called an ambulance to take him to the hospital since it appeared he had suffered a stroke. Five days later he passed away at the age of 90.

We knew that our twelve-year relationship would undergo some changes. Because Grandma was very lonely we all spent a lot of time with her. She would tell people that I was her daughter, elaborating on my care for her. She confided her financial matters to me and depended on me more and more. Our relationship flourished, like a rosebush with many blossoms. Caring for her was a family affair. All of us tended her yard which Grandpa had kept like a park.

Of course she aged and became more dependent on me. Not working outside the home, I was available whenever she needed me, sometimes frequently in one day. Her family assured us that they were pleased with our care for her.

When it became obvious that she had Alzheimer's disease, our relationship produced its first thorns. She became incapable of making decisions or looking after her financial affairs. With the family's consent, the court granted me the Committeeship. This gave me a lot of responsibility.

Although she believed she was independent, we feared for her safety, since one day, on the way to the bank, she had been robbed of her purse. I struggled with guilt when, during the application for a nursing home, the social system made me feel that I just wanted to get rid of her. They suggested that I get less involved for the sake of my health and to avoid stress.

Where years earlier she had told everyone how good I was to her, now she said, "What have you ever done for me?" I had to remind myself that she was no longer aware of reality. As her confusion increased, my responsibilities increased as well. The thorns began to hurt more and I was discouraged.

In times of discouragement the devil loves to work. I began to think that she was really not my Grandma so why should I be so committed? I should look

after myself first, since I had a family that needed me. I knew very well, however, that these thoughts were not of the Lord.

Somehow I could not see the roses for all the thorns as I had to deal with those struggles. I knew that in order to survive I had to shift my focus from myself to Christ who had suffered for me. For his sake I wanted to go that extra mile and hang in there even though the going was tough.

I started to pray for strength to carry on with this commitment that had no specific ending date. My husband, family and friends listened, encouraged and prayed for me. I had the assurance that God would not leave me, that he did not want to harm me, that his plans for me included "hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV). I realized that God was with me for the long haul of this commitment.

It was an answer to prayer when Grandma was accepted into a nursing home. Emotionally it was difficult for me to take her out of her own home and dispose of her possessions. The load lightened, though, and the rosebush bloomed as we enjoyed regular visits, lunches and drives. She was content and well cared for, and always happy to see us. But the effects of Alzheimer's on a loved one are sad and disturbing; she

I realized that God was with me for the long haul of this commitment.

was not the Grandma we had known.

Grandma lived at the home for a little over a year. In November of 1990 she was hospitalized with a fractured hip. She was happy to see my husband and me and we were with her when she breathed her last. She passed away at the age of 89.

I do not regret hanging in there and give God all the praise. If a rose bush is truly beautiful, we rarely think of the thorns. Even when we get hurt by them we continue to enjoy the roses.

Elma Friesen cares for the elderly through the Home Care program. She, her husband and her son are members of McIvor Avenue MB Church. Her two married daughters live in BC.

A Grand Theory—and Other Bedside Stories

by Doreen Martens

Educational experts are worried about girls these days—worried that, despite twenty-five years of advancement for women, they're still getting the message that math and science aren't valid pursuits for anybody who has never participated in a belching competition.

This has become a serious issue. Last year, a toy maker was forced by public outcry to censor an offensive phrase from the small talk uttered by the first vocal Barbie doll. The horrible sentence no youngster should be exposed to? "Math class is hard."

I never minded math, personally; in fact, I was doing pretty well when I dropped Mr. Dunn's calculus class during my last year in high school. I just figured it was a waste of time, since I already knew I was headed for the words side of life rather than the numbers side. He wagged his nerdy finger at me and warned, "You'll be sorry."

Wrong.

Not only has calculus been of no use to me, neither has most of what I learned in math from Grade 5 on. In fact, my higher math knowledge has pretty much melted away like Camay in the shower soap dish, leaving behind a hard sliver that's useless but persistent—mostly consisting of the Pythagorean theorem ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$) and the vague recollection that x and y can stand for something besides the difference between boys and girls.

But, hey, I buy the argument. We need to get young women into science, if for no other reason than because they're bound to bring some fresh insights into the big problems the boys are getting worked up about.

Say, for example, the Grand Unification Theory. That's the idea, popularized by the brilliant scientist Stephen Hawking, that there may be some perfect mathematical formula that would explain the Big Bang, the inner workings of the atom and just about everything in between. Ideally, the theory

would be both unfathomable and cunningly simple, something like Einstein's $E=mc^2$. And of course it would have no application whatsoever to everyday life.

I was thinking about the Grand Unification Theory the other morning at 5 a.m. while leaning blearily over the rail of my wailing daughter's crib and pondering the mystery of her sleep cycles. (As the severely disabled Mr. Hawking could tell you, an impaired physical state need not be an impediment to lofty thoughts.)

It occurred to me that, far from the chaos I had imagined, there is a stunning mathematical consistency in Rebecca's patterns. Ever since she was born, she has awakened with almost quartz-crystal precision at 5:30 a.m., presuming a normal bedtime of 8:30 p.m. We have tried to change this timing by putting her to bed later. No luck. Still later. Worse.

It turns out, according to my theory, that the hour of her awakening is related in inverse ratio, multiplied by one-half, to the time she is put to bed.

Because not every reader is a scientist, I'll explain in laywoman's terms: Put to bed an hour later than usual (9:30 p.m.),

she awakens a half-hour earlier (5 a.m.). Put to bed two hours later, she awakens an hour earlier (4:30 a.m.). Expressed mathematically, this is:

$$x = 5.5 - (y - 8.5) \times .5$$

where x is the number of hours past midnight when she will awaken, and y is the number of hours after noon when she is put to bed.

To extrapolate,

$$z = 10 \times (8 - [5.5 - (y - 8.5) \times .5])$$

where z is the Exhaustion Quotient of Rebecca's parents and the Preferred Parental Wakeup Time is 8 a.m. As you can see, for each hour earlier she awakens, we seem to get 10 times more exhausted. (Actually, this part of the theory is a little shaky. I suspect the ratio is actually better expressed as a logarithmic equation, but I'd have to dig up an old textbook to figure out what that is.)

As you can see, like most great scientific discoveries, the principle I've deduced flies in the face of conventional thinking. But therein lies its brilliance. I'm even wondering whether, in my fuzzy-headed ponderings in the dark, I may have unwittingly stumbled onto some part of the grand design Hawking and his pals have been looking for.

Think of it. A formula that could make sense of the universe, itty-bitty nuclei and the sleep cycles of a ten-month-old—now that would be some Grand Theory!

I think I read somewhere that Einstein never slept much, either.



ART: TERRILYNN GOERTZ

Doreen Martens, a former member of the Elmwood MB Church, lives in California with her husband, Jeff, and their two children Christopher and Rebecca. Doreen is a freelance writer and full-time newspaper copy editor. (Sorry for our mistake in the last issue about your children's genders, Doreen!)

Putting Winnipeg '93 on our Calendars

by Irma Epp

The 59th convention of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America will take place at the spacious Immanuel Pentecostal Church in Winnipeg, on July 7 - 11. Pastors, lay leaders, delegates and interested participants are being strongly encouraged to put Winnipeg '93 on their calendars.

I have attended a number of conferences over the years. To get maximum benefit for myself and for the congregation I represent, I have had to learn about the workings of the conference and its agencies. Even for the casual attendee, some background information is helpful.

To help us get a clearer understanding of what convention is and what is anticipated for Winnipeg '93, I spoke with Gerry Ediger, Vice-Chair of the Board of Faith and Life and Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Concord College.

Irma Epp, assistant pastor of the McIvor MB Church, sits on the Seminary Board for the General MB conference and on the Committee of Reference and Counsel for the Manitoba MB conference.

Irma: What comes to mind when you hear the word 'convention?'

Gerry: I see a conference of congregations coming together to do some things which are best done at the macro level. I see a church foyer where the people know each other; it is warm and inclusive. If the convention is in fall, I see a grey-headed delegation. If it takes place in summer, I see fewer grey heads. Unfortunately, we have not done too well in attracting young adults or new non-ethnic MB members.

Irma: Do you see changing patterns in the way we are doing conventions?

Gerry: There has been a definite shift. Until 1960, the reason for the gathering of the strictly male delegates was for decision-making. It was leader driven with lots of discussion and dissent. The conference decided; the congregations followed.

Since 1960 there has been a trend towards local autonomy and the professionalization of the boards, which were previously called committees. Discernment shifted from the convention floor to the boards. During the last ten years there has been an increasing shift to gather for the purpose of inspiration, support-building for conference agencies and reporting decisions entrusted to conference leadership and boards.

Various reasons could be cited for this shift. In addition to the trend towards local autonomy is the high level of diversity within and among our congregations. Because we no longer share a lot of common ground, it is becoming increasingly difficult to do authentic discernment on the convention floor.

Irma: What has been the glue that has kept us together as a people?

Gerry: We used to share a common ethnicity, short-term history and socio-economic experience. These three common threads no longer define us as a people. We have also become more eclectic as MBs which has definitely flavoured our Anabaptist convictions. We hope to recover our centre in the new Vision Statement that was accepted at the 1990 convention. It calls for a renewal of spiritual vitality and ethical faithfulness and renewed missionary activity at home and abroad.

Irma: What are some of the recommendations that the Board of Faith and Life will bring to the floor of Winnipeg '93 for ratification?

Gerry: Our Confession of Faith will be on the agenda. We will be asking for affirmation of the Denver Consultation on articles IX and X, baptism and communion. We will also be recommending that our Confession of Faith be expanded and undergirded with additional helps.

With regards to women in leadership, we will be making two recommendations. We will ask the delegates to resolve together that our differing convictions on this issue will not be used to define one another's Christianity, integrity or faithfulness to Christ. Then we will ask that local congregations be allowed to make their own decisions with regard to women in the pastorate.

Irma: So on this issue we will be asked to agree to disagree?

Gerry: Yes. Another big question will be whether or not to publish a new hymnal.

Irma: Why is a new hymnal an important issue?

Gerry: What we sing is what we are. Next to preaching and teaching, it is the most important vehicle of theological memory and teaching. If we don't have a hymnal that is deliberately Anabaptist and evangelical, we are at the mercy of whatever is out there. We will be asking that a hymnal be printed based on the most reliable demand within our congregations.

Irma: So you'd say it's important that we put Winnipeg '93 on our calendars?

Gerry: Yes. It is the most immediate way to be educated, to catch a spirit of who we are and what we are becoming. There is no other place in our church that packs so much potential for change and action into a single context.

Facing the Future

A Reflection on the Meaning of Future Trends for the MB Church

Edmund Janzen, MB General Conference Moderator, has been looking at the changes and trends in our society that affect how the church will be shaped in the near future. Janzen provided Sophia with a list of some of the major shifts that he sees influencing how our denomination looks at significant issues.

1. ***A shift from a "Christian" culture to a pagan culture.***
While people may still be religious, they do not think in Christian or churchly terms. The church is increasingly seen as innocuous or irrelevant. The MB church will need to be aggressively mission-minded at home or it will die.
2. ***The shift from a patriarchal to an egalitarian culture.***
Increasingly in Western culture race, gender, class, ethnicity, no longer define the value of people. Personhood is much more defined in terms of capabilities. Hierarchical models are under attack. The women-in-ministry issue is an example of this (a trend common in all denominations today).
3. ***The shift from corporate to individual authority.***
Private religion emphasizing experiential, feelings-oriented expression has replaced objective authority. How, then, will the church make decisions about moral and ethical issues, worship styles and lifestyle issues?
4. ***The shift from denominationalism to loose church affiliation.***
Younger generations no longer pledge undying commitment to a local church. Some speak of having two or even three church "homes." This will affect giving patterns, voluntary ministries and personal commitment to participate. Already one MB church practices annually renewable membership.
5. ***The shift of economic priorities.***
The present anti-institutional mood means national and international church missions and structures are viewed with suspicion. Local ministries have priority. It is thought that missions are best done through parachurch ministries. People demand careful audits of the way resources are used by church agencies.
6. ***The shift from particularity to sameness.***
The trend is to minimize denominational and theological distinctives in order to blend in with the "dominant" evangelical landscape. The name-change issue is part of this puzzle especially as it relates to the historical designation "Mennonite."
7. ***The shift from a dominant Western culture to an emerging Global culture.***
Western societies are declining while many Third World societies are rising. Sister MB Conferences are no longer "mission" churches. They have much to offer; many represent the "suffering" church. They will call us to repentance for our materialism but will also partner with us in mission and ministry.

The significant contribution of Sister M

A most memorable incident occurred at an MB General Conference convention a few years ago. The *chairman* of the Board of MB Biblical Seminary reported on the educational vision of our pastoral training institution. He spoke of the Board's excitement about future church leaders who were being trained there and assured the delegates the board represented *all of us* in helping to shape the future of our church ministries.

He then decided to introduce the Board, asking them to stand and remain standing. Serving on this ten-member Board was one sister, and when the chairman introduced her, he made sure we all knew how grateful they were for the significant contribution of Sister M, (since he did not say that about the brethren, we thought maybe she was the only one making a significant contribution).

When he had finished with the introductions, he said: "You may sit down, brethren."

The brethren sat and Sister M remained standing just long enough to register the fact that she did not feel included in the term "brethren."

Our Sister M made a great contribution at that moment to the development of a vision for our seminary. She restored hope in many of us that the time had come for the sisters in our churches to be involved in the shaping of theology and leadership in the churches. (*Mary Friesen*)

The other side

A Mennonite Brethren convention can be a confusing event for the uninitiated visitor. Guests and delegates are served at the registration desk by friendly and competent sisters. After this most guests head down the hallway to the display area for the Mennonite *Brethren* agencies, and once again the well-informed sisters (grateful we are for the faithful service of these secretaries!) are eager to answer questions.

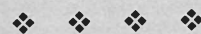
Mealtime approaches and finally a *brother* takes charge: "Everyone line up here and we will serve you." It becomes obvious that "we will serve you" means the sisters in the kitchen have prepared a delicious meal which is served by sisters who also wash the dishes afterwards. Well, in all fairness, there are a few *brothers* helping out with directing traffic and other supervisory responsibilities.

Just when our uninitiated visitor has decided he has come to the wrong convention, he is ushered into the meeting place, where everything begins to make sense. This is obviously where the *brethren* have gathered for their convention.

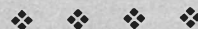
Once again, in all fairness, it must be mentioned that the crowd is not exclusively male. There are a few sisters involved: the pianist, the sister sharing a testimony of her work in Africa, the ladies' group providing special music and a few others. But when the *brethren* of the Conference Executive Committee make their way up to the stage area, everyone knows: The Mennonite *Brethren* Convention has officially started. (*Mary Friesen*)



Of the 408 registered delegates to the Manitoba MB Conference, February 26-27, 35 did not attend. Of the 373 who did attend, 135 were women.



The MB Conference Executive Committee is aware of the diversity in our churches and is challenging the nominating committee to come up with a balanced slate of nominees, specifically with reference to age, ethnicity, rural/urban concentration, etc. This is an important first step, but as long as they then appoint a nominating committee of eleven brothers and one sister, ranging in age from 48 to 70, and no representative from the ethnic churches, this balance cannot become reality (*Mary Friesen*).



"Real discussion happens in the lunch line rather than on the convention floor. Conventions provide an opportunity to build relationships that extend beyond my usual geographic borders. I have the joy of discussing issues with like-minded people as well as the stimulation of discussing issues with people whose perspective is vastly different from mine" (*Karen Heidebrecht-Thiessen*).



"Conventions provide an opportunity for doing together what we as individuals cannot do alone. [In the past] good discussions on a variety of issues kept us thinking together and the resulting decisions made for cohesion and interdependence of churches. My impression of recent conferences is that in the interest of efficiency, boards work at the decisions, presenting delegates with recommendations that require little but rubber stamping" (*Katie Epp*).



"In our day, it is relatively easy to think of these gatherings as occasions where 'professional' conference attenders discuss budgets and hear Board reports. Yet conventions such as this one can be times of inspiration and challenge, of vision making and direction setting for our common ministry" (*Edmund Janzen, General Conference moderator*).

Sharing the Harvest: A Farming Venture

by Donna Stewart

Standing in her sunny kitchen, three-year-old Cora beaming behind her, Wilma Wiens seems the essentially serene country dweller, but her enjoyment of the land is fairly recent.

"I was brought up in the city, and when my father-in-law first said he was giving each son some land out here in St. Adolphe, I said to Dan, 'There's no way I'm living out there.' But after we'd lived in the country in Swaziland [Wilma and Dan Wiens spent several years there with MCC], there was no way I was going to live in the city!

"It's interesting to look back on your life and see how each stage is preparation for the next one. In Swaziland, our house was small. That prepared me for living in the trailer. And in Africa there were people in and out of the house all that time. That prepared me for last summer."

Wilma had their fourth child last summer, and people were in and out of the trailer all the time because the Wienses had begun shared farming. City folk who had shares in their crop came to work or to pick and inevitably needed to use the bathroom. Since it was at the far end of the trailer, Wilma got used to strangers walking the length of her home.

Bridging the Gap

Twin Creek Shared Farm developed after Dan attended the huge Farmers' Demonstration at the Manitoba legislature in the fall of 1991. He recognized the enormous communication gap between city people and farmers.

Seeking a way to bridge the gap, Dan and some friends developed the idea of community shared agriculture. Some expressed acute doubt about the plan: "Where are you ever going to find people

to share the risk of farming with us?"

John Longhurst of MCC prepared a press release, which the Winnipeg Free Press picked up, and 214 city-dwellers agreed to share the risk of the 1992 vegetable crop with the Wiens family. These people bought shares before anything was ever planted, some of them helped to weed and cultivate and, each week for fourteen weeks, they picked up a basket of seasonal vegetables from a local depot, usually a church parking lot.

Along with the broccoli, lettuce and tomatoes came a newsletter with recipes and information about the state of the crops. Twice last summer there was no delivery because the land was too wet for harvesting, but in the fall, there was more sweet corn than the sharers could eat, so neighbours received the surplus.

Sharers love eating fresh vegetables, but they also enjoy meeting each week at the depot, exchanging recipes and news. Most of all they like learning the farmer's reality. As one said, "Now when it rains, I know what that means to the farmer, and I think, 'Poor Dan. How is he going to get those cabbages hoed?'"

Wilma likes the fact that with this system there's no unsold produce and no waste. People who don't have composting facilities return their vegetable peelings and cores in the basket next week.

A Stake in the Farm

"City people like having a stake in a farming operation," Wilma says. "Especially if they were raised on a farm. They like having a connection to the farmer and the land itself. They appreciate having a farm to bring their children to.



ART: TERRILYNN GOERTZ

"This is a very natural way to share our lives with some really fine people that, in the ordinary course of life, we'd never meet.

"Of course it can all get a bit crazy. You have to know how to set limits. Sometimes I just packed up the kids and left for the day. We tell people that Sunday is our quiet day, and they respect that."

Wilma and Dan had hoped to return to Africa, but for now the family is fully immersed in the community farming project. Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration has funded Dan to produce an information package, mount a conference and travel across the prairies to tell people about shared farming.

"He's gone too much," Wilma says, "and when he's home, he's on the phone too much for my taste, but he's a farmer, which is what he's always wanted to be, and we're growing everything organically, with no harmful pesticides or fertilizers. We're caring for the land and helping the local economy. Our work and our faith are one, and the children know that. They're part of it. Josh is really excited that he will be helping this year.

"At first Josh (8) and Malysa (5) were quite shy. They didn't appreciate the children of sharer families using their yard and play house, but now they all know each other better, and there's a friendly relationship.

"That's been good for our children—making friends with the city kids. And when the city people see my aunts and

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Kairos and Caring

by Hedy Martens

KAIROS—a Greek word for TIME—not chronological hurry time, but those moments of TIME when the divine and the human appear to intersect—when opportunity presents itself and transformation happens—if we but see and listen and respond.

I've been asked to reflect on how a Christian family therapist cares through counselling. Walk with me, then, into my world....

Linda (not a real person), like Martha in the New Testament, is full of care. Her friends see her as an angel who never says no. She comes for counselling wondering why she is tired of life and tempted to leave her husband and children.

Gradually she discovers a lost little Linda who buried painful memories under all this caring for everyone but herself. She discovers that paying attention to what others wanted was once her best way to survive. Slowly she becomes aware that she has missed out on developing a will of her own. Now she can't identify her own thoughts, wants or feelings, and fears what

will happen when she does.

Caring for people like Linda resembles watching a chrysalis. It means waiting patiently, or not so patiently, for the kairos of transformation, and finally seeing the splendid inner being emerge, wings wet and wobbly, or seeing it suddenly on a branch—or missing it altogether because it has flown away leaving the empty wrapping behind.

Becoming a self is a precarious enterprise. Sometimes, when Linda uses her newly found will to make harmful choices, I catch a glimpse of God's suffering outside the closed gate of Eden. Then I need to remember that God didn't abandon Adam and Eve there; rather, God sewed clothes to cover their shame. And later God sent Christ to call us all into transcendent, selfless living that does not destroy self but saves it.

Did you know God could sew? God didn't give that ability to me—yet in a way I sew every day, fashioning healing metaphors to fit the shapes of lives. And because I know that even my metaphorical

sewing is imperfect, I recognize God at work when transformation happens in my counselling room, when twentieth century garments of shame are replaced with garments of dignity and celebration.

Often, the rough, ungainly garments of shame have been forced over innocence by someone more powerful. Then caring becomes helping people to see that these garments do not belong to them and to discover the virginal creation preserved underneath.

Susan has begun to tell me about the flashbacks she experiences nightly. Suddenly she freezes. "What's happening?" I ask.

"I can't get away," she says almost inaudibly. Her eyes are dilated, terrified. "It won't stop."

"It's not happening now. It wasn't your fault," I begin repeating. "Feel your feet—where are they? Feel your body—what size is it? See, it's not little anymore, so it can't be happening now."

Caring is seeing inside the adult a child curled in a corner or trying to intervene when one grownup hits another. It is seeing a little one driving her/his scream inward while a big one bears down to crush the security and spontaneity of childhood forever. And when the flashbacks subside, it is facing with a person the ultimate questions: "Where was God? Why didn't God intervene?"

Caring is entering these questions, not without fear, nor with ready-made answers, but with contagious hope drawn from our own transcendent encounters with Christ.

Caring is being there when evil and violence dominate—as God was there for Abel or Tamar. It is standing awed by the courage and survival skills of these wounded ones, by their drive for justice and their ongoing endurance in an uncaring world.

Caring is also listening to Cain or Annon when the voice of the blood they have spilled can no longer be silenced. It means listening together, knowing that I, too, am capable of acting out my woundedness in

Sharing the Harvest ...continued from page 20

other members of our extended families helping out, that's something new for them."

This year there will be other shared farms across the prairies, including one operated by Salvadoran immigrants who will be trying to apply their farming skills in their new prairie setting. The concept may even cross the ocean.

Wilma admits that as more farmers pick up on the idea, some will participate for the wrong reasons.

"Some think of it as just a marketing ploy, but it's far more than that, really." The sharers, most of whom are not Mennonites and not Christians, have become friends, not simply partners in a business risk. Almost all of them want to

continue this summer. Some have offered their homes as depots, so the vegetables can wait in a shaded place over longer pick-up hours.

There will be other changes this year: an extra delivery, a greater variety of produce (26 fruits and vegetables), and more work days (always followed by a wiener roast and bonfire). But no one will have to tramp through the house to the bathroom. This winter, the long-planned-for new house was built. It's not quite finished, but the family have moved in anyway...and there's a bathroom right inside the back door!

Donna Stewart is a Winnipeg freelance writer and author. She attends Fort Garry MB Church.

some terrible way—and finally, of finding repentance.

Caring in counselling means being there for the whole story. Sadly, often no one else will. Family members fear another's story will threaten their own, so the stories remain unspoken, often for generations. It is as though...

Centuries ago, a gang of robbers broke into the home of an unsuspecting family. Each robber grabbed a family member. One was forced to lie face down on the floor, another was led at gunpoint to the jewelry vault, another was gang-raped in a bedroom, another was beaten, another was shut in a closet, another was taken out to the garden to hear the robber's sad life story. Each was forced to swear no robbers had entered and that someone in the family had taken the jewelry. Then they were tied together, back to back, and left. Forever after, everyone looked for someone to blame for the missing jewelry, and no one ever told their real experience. They are tied together to this day.

This story may seem far-fetched, but the stories I hear from survivors of the Russian Revolution, for example, are no less violent. And often no less unspoken. My training as a family therapist has taught me that caring often means delicately unbinding the family so that its members can become separate enough to listen to each others' stories. Then caring becomes believing each story—until not only one individual here and there but the whole family begins to experience transformation.

*Outside, a child stands, looking up.
The sky is awirl
with delicate, vulnerable, butterflies
expressing life
together.*

Until 1985 Hedy Martens carried the labels of writer, teacher, student, wife, mom of three, and finally, Oma. Since then she has completed a three-year Masters of Divinity program concentrating on family therapy. She runs a private practice, Kairos Counselling, which includes an association of counsellors. She attends Westwood Mennonite Brethren Church.

Rita Eckert Wall: Pearl of Great Price

by V.A. Linda Penner

With the grace and style of an accomplished film star, poised and purposeful, Rita would sweep onto the scene. People paused to look: men admiringly, women perhaps enviously. She had a toned and well-proportioned physique, her voice was soft and lyrical, her smile disarming. Her well-timed humour prevented potentially dull moments from becoming so. When Rita



Rita Eckert Wall

stepped into my life, I knew something wonderful was about to happen.

We met in our senior year of high school. Rita, a three-year veteran of Eden Christian College welcomed me into her uncliquish 'sorority,' the Black Widows, a name inspired by our unflattering uniforms.

The year passed blissfully. She participated in sports, I in music and drama. Both of us became avid spectators of the other's interests. We shared Phys. Ed., German (yawn) and Spare, welcoming the fun and relaxation possible in rare moments of minimal supervision.

Six weeks before graduation, the teenage giddiness came to an abrupt halt. My sister, also named Rita, was killed by a drunk driver. The Widows, some of whom were not acquainted with grief, were not afraid to share mine. They treated me lovingly, respectfully and without pity. Rita

PHOTO: LINDA PENNER

seemed to understand that I was unable to communicate the terrifying loneliness and feeling of abandonment. The lessons we learned in dealing with my loss prepared us to cope, years later, with the loss of her husband.

Some years after high school, Rita and her friend Linda Enns came to the Mennonite

Brethren Bible College, where I was already enrolled. Between the three of us we could usually cough up enough money for a cup of University of Winnipeg dishwasher which we fondly called coffee. Regardless of the taste, it always provided relief from the tedium of study.

All three of us met our future spouses in Winnipeg, but Rita was the first to be swept away. Arnie Wall, a native of Argentina and a recent graduate of Columbia Bible Institute, had introduced himself to me as a friend of my deceased sister. I would have been pleased had this handsome young student taken a less academic, more personal interest in me. Linda felt the same way, but when Arnie caught one glimpse of Rita who happened to walk by, we were both out of the picture. Arnie

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Pearl of Great Price...
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fell in love immediately but it would be two years of jumping through hoops before his love would be requited. Their relationship came to reveal the type of people they were—kind, loving respectful, interesting, intelligent and spontaneous.

The summer before Rita and Arnie were married, she and I took the opportunity to see the Great White North. Our ticket was a job at the Alas/Kon Border Lodge in Beaver Creek, Yukon. During those four months, we learned a great deal about living in isolation, hard work and the exquisite beauty of the Klondike. Our biggest enemies were not the legendary mosquito nor isolation. Gossip and its effect on the community of 75 was the biggest threat. We were determined not to succumb to it or resort to drugs and alcohol, used by others. We took up long-distance running, swimming and folk-singing, sometimes providing entertainment in the lounge we tried to avoid. We hosted poetry readings and Bible studies. We had a small group of allies in the battle against the persistent ennui on the compound.

The greatest highlight for Rita that summer was a visit from Arnie in time for her 23rd birthday. For me, the special times were the free weekends Rita and I could spend together, such as the time we checked into an upscale hotel in Fairbanks. We plunged ourselves into heart-wrenching movies and let our tears purge us from incredible tensions under which we lived. Rita presented me with a gift I cherish to this day. It's a picture of an onion pared to the core, with a caption by Carolyn Johnson: *Live simply. Learn the art of shedding—of peeling away the layers, of reaching the pure, still centre.*

These words capture Rita's philosophy and lifestyle exactly. No matter what the surroundings, from harsh tundra to murky sub-tropics, Rita possessed that rare ability to change them for the better, simply by adapting to them rather than judging them.

The greatest tragedy of her life eventually became the source of her greatest strength. Arnie's untimely illness—cancer was diagnosed shortly

after their wedding in May, 1983—came as a devastating blow. As they struggled with terminal illness, they became closer than most married people hope to come in a lifetime. Rita supported Arnie, who felt it unfair that he, who had so much to live for, would have to leave the love of his life, as well as his candidacy for a PhD degree and his future life work. As much as Rita and Arnie had tried to prepare themselves, Rita was devastated, in June 1986, by the loss of her lover, companion and best friend.

No matter what the surroundings, from harsh tundra to murky sub-tropics, Rita possessed that rare ability to change them for the better.

Rita's decision to go to Bolivia one and a half years ago, was neither impulsive nor easy. For years she and Arnie had dreamed of development work in a South American country, and when

PHOTO: LINDA PENNER



Rita: A Namesake

Arnie died, Rita felt determined to keep their dream alive.

When the opportunity came to serve in South America with MCC, however, Rita was not entirely prepared. She would have to give up a teaching position

in Woodstock, Ontario, sell or store her possessions and say good-bye to family and friends she loved. The friends included a very special one, Roland, whom she had met following Arnie's death and who had supported her as she struggled with the grief. Although she didn't want to leave this good relationship behind, Rita obeyed the call to service.

In Bolivia she adjusted to living under Third World conditions, by building relationships and by sharing the people's struggle for justice, self-government and better education. She studied the language and performed her work efficiently and tirelessly, winning the respect of the Bolivians.

In one of her letters she expressed dismay at the American obsession with busyness. Comparing that with her experience of people who were proud to take their time, she concluded that North Americans were the ones losing out; their rushing around eroded the quality of their lives. Fortunately, Roland felt the same way and was making arrangements to join her.

Who could have known that her future was to take a different turn? On January 4, 1993, Rita's life hung in the balance. The driver of a truck she was a passenger in attempted to negotiate a traffic circle at too high a speed. Rita was thrown from the vehicle and pronounced brain dead at the scene. Attempts to revive her restored her heartbeat and she was rushed to the nearest hospital. Informed of her condition, her parents faxed a release form Rita had prepared prior to her trip south, authorizing that in an event such as this life supports should be removed. At 6:30 pm, January 6, Rita entered the land of promise. Rita Monika Eckert Wall lived a life that inspired and enriched me.

Years ago I recorded in my journal that if ever I should have a daughter I would name her after my friend. I hope that readers will also be inspired by this tribute to her.

V.A. Linda Penner, *McIvor Avenue MB Church, is a homemaker and mother of two: Samuel and Rita, a namesake of Rita Eckert Wall. The name "Rita" means Pearl.*

Itsuka by Joy Kogawa. Toronto: Viking, 1992. 288 pages.

Reviewed by Dorothy Huebert.

PHOTO: RANDY BAKER



Itsuka—Someday. Someday the better time will come. This was the watchword for the Japanese Canadians who had their property seized, who were herded into prison camps and then dispersed to communities in northern British Columbia and Alberta's beet fields during the Second World War. When the war ended they were not compensated for their losses nor were the injustices even acknowledged.

In this novel Joy Kogawa continues the story of Naomi Nakane begun in her first novel,

Obasan. Naomi, now middle-aged and living in Toronto, is dragged almost against her will into the struggle for redress of wrongs by her Aunt Emily Kato, a dynamo of energy and commitment. We are taken back to Naomi's youth in the small Alberta community of Granton, to the evangelistic fervour of Pastor Jim and the friendship of earnest evangelicals Tina and Lydia Regehr. It is a world into which she somehow doesn't quite fit. Naomi is caught between the clash of cultures, between her self-sacrificing, peace-at-all-costs aunt and uncle in whose home she grew up and the pressures from the fundamentalist community in Granton.

At age five she was wounded by the loss of her mother who was caught in Nagasaki on a visit during the bombing. Uprooted from her comfortable home in Vancouver and later estranged from her brother, Stephen, Naomi becomes withdrawn and solitary. The acceptance and understanding of kind and gentle Father Cedric, an Anglican priest in Toronto, help her to overcome the terrors of her past, and to find herself and her place in the world. The delicate growth of trust and confidence between Naomi and the priest is beautifully developed.

As the story unfolds, our sympathy for the uprooted Japanese Canadians grows. The older generation, epitomized by Obasan, Naomi's aunt, prefers to live in quiet, polite retirement. Some of the younger ones cope by rejecting everything Japanese. However, gradually the group that rallies around Aunt Emily Kato pours heart and soul into efforts to have its injustices acknowledged by the government of Canada. In spite of conflict within the Japanese Canadian community and many discouraging setbacks in their discussions with government, a settlement is finally reached. The struggle for justice forms the basic theme of the book.

Although the story is fascinating and well developed, for me the most satisfying aspect of this book is the author's wonderful way with words. You feel summer on the prairies with descriptions like:

"...the shrivelling wind packs your pores with grit and turns your skin into tree bark." Or the description of Aunt Emily, who, when Obasan becomes hospitalized, "...flies down noisily that week [to Lethbridge from Toronto] and bulldozes the hospital corridor with questions as she walks briskly to Room 212." We feel the desolation of Naomi's melancholy task of sorting out her dying aunt's possessions, the treasures and accumulations of a lifetime. "I'm an undertaker disembowelling and embalming a still breathing body, removing heart, limbs, lifeblood, all the arteries, memories that keep one connected to the world, transforming this comatose little family into a corpse."

There is much in this book that is worth pondering. The issue of racism as exemplified by the experience of the Japanese Canadians is one of which we need to be aware. To correct injustice takes more than a simple statement of regret, as Cedric points out when he quotes the prophet Jeremiah: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace' where there is no peace." We can share the relief and exhilaration of the Japanese community when an agreement with the government is finally reached.

Dorothy Huebert is active in the Portage Avenue MB Church.

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Extending the Family

by Sarah Klassen

It's ten o'clock on a wintry morning. Agnes Koop has just offered me tea and invited me into the sunny family room. Although it's a school day, eleven-year-old Joel* is at home. He's expelled from school, Agnes tells me, because his misbehaviour disrupts the classroom and the teacher can't allow him to return. At the moment, thanks to the morning medication—Ritalin—Joel is calmly working his way through a stack of math problems.

Joel, who came to live with the Koops when he was five, is one of two foster children presently living with Agnes and Vern Koop. The other is Carl, a part-native boy of 13 who has been with them for three and a half years. Carl is enrolled in a behaviour adjustment program at the Treatment Learning Centre in the school division where the Koops live. He enjoys being on the basketball team at the TLC.

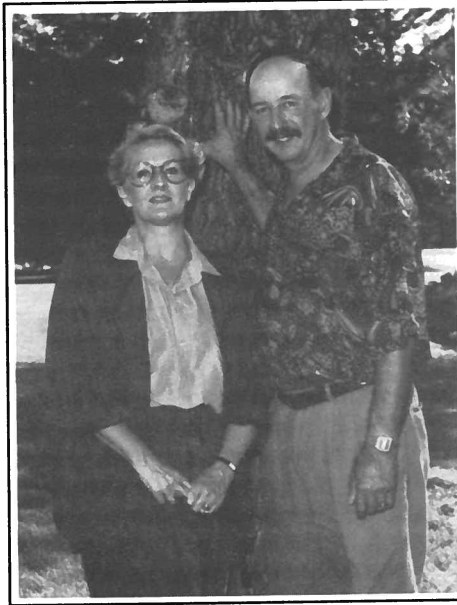
Although Joel has trouble relating to other children, both he and Carl adore the Koops' two youngest sons, both adults, who are still living at home.

Over the past 15 years Agnes and Vern, members of the Eastview Church, have fostered 27 children, sometimes three at one time. They have shared with these children their home and their own family of three sons and an adopted daughter. They have also shared their Christian faith and values, values which balance love with discipline. Agnes insists that the parents, and not the children, must remain in control in the home.

The foster children have come out of situations of abuse and neglect with a variety of problems and challenges. They have suffered from sexual and physical abuse, emotional imbalance, autism, Downs Syndrome and other disabilities.

Why Extend the Family?

What would motivate a couple with a healthy family to extend it in this way? "It started when our boys were small,"



Agnes and Vern Koop

PHOTO: AGNES KOOP

Agnes explains. "Vern and I were very involved with our church, in Sunday School, DVBS, Pioneer Girls and Boys' Brigade. We also served as youth advisors. We love kids." Their love didn't include just kids: they also got involved in prison ministries and at Marymound, a home for delinquent girls.

About 1969, Jack Wall of the Ausable Springs Ranch in Ontario, an organization that serves delinquent teens, asked if the Koops would be interested in becoming houseparents for the organization.

After considerable prayer and reflection, the Koops packed up their family of three boys and headed for Ontario, where for two years they were parents to a constantly changing group of teenagers, thirteen in total.

When they returned to Manitoba, one of their charges from the Ontario ranch came to live with them for some time. They still keep in touch. In the meantime, the Koops decided to adopt a child. Agnes had prayed for a baby girl and she believes the part-Polish, part-native infant girl they eventually adopted was

God's answer to her prayer.

When this chosen daughter became a teenager, it was discovered that she suffered from fetal alcohol effect. After turning 18 she moved out and is living on her own. Not all the choices she's making are in harmony with the values taught by her adopted parents, but Agnes believes, "God is not finished with her yet."

The idea of fostering children in their home became reality when Agnes and Vern helped out several families with mentally challenged children, and through them became involved with the St. Amant Centre. Agnes, who is a trained operating room technician, had decided not to work outside the home, but when she saw an ad requesting a home for a 16-year-old Inuit girl, she sensed an opportunity. She showed the ad to Vern.

This is when they discovered that they would have to be licensed before their home could officially become a foster home. The licensing process involved intensive interviews with the entire family (their children were 17, 15, 13 and eight at the time), considerable red tape and some suspicion from the system, because of their Christian faith. They have learned over the years to maintain good rapport with workers in the system, an absolute necessity for any foster parents, according to Agnes.

A Variety of Children

Since becoming licensed they have received a variety of foster children into their home.

Greg was autistic. His compulsive, repetitive motions and noises were trying. But with patience Agnes and Vern taught him to stop banging his head against the wall and to say "Please" at the table. Agnes discovered that although he could not talk well, he could sing and she encouraged this by playing tapes. Agnes deliberately went about educating herself on autism by attending conferences and reading the literature. When Greg had been with the Koops for three

years, his biological family decided they were ready to have him back. When they were almost at the airport, Agnes was overwhelmed with tears.

Megan was a Downs syndrome child, very lovable. Often the mentally challenged children are more appreciative and cheerful than the abused children, Agnes reflects.

Julia was an emotionally, sexually and physically abused nine-year-old when she came to the Koops. "All that abuse destroyed her for future relationships," Agnes says. For three years she received love and support as Agnes and Vern tried to undo some of the damage. At twelve, she left them for a life of pimps, prostitution, thieving and running from agency workers. She has run as far as Montreal and Toronto and been returned by social workers. And now she is pregnant.

I asked Agnes how she dealt with that—investing three years of caring and heartache in a child who is now back at square one.

"There is a time of real grieving," Agnes admits. "And it's hard when she phones now. But I believe she's searching. Right now she's exploring native spirituality and once she told me she thinks God understands." And it's true, God understands the whole picture as even foster parents can not. Agnes admits she has had to learn to distance herself from Julia.

Media stories of abuse touch Agnes in a special way as she thinks of her foster children who have lived part of their lives in her home. "Our foster kids are victims of that abuse," she muses. "Will they become perpetrators too?"

Giving the Burden to God

Agnes has had to learn to give over her burdens to God, not try to carry them herself. She has to remind herself that Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." She has found help and encouragement in the teachings of Charles Swindoll and James Dobson, and in books like Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost For His Highest*. Although she resists the "doing lunch" routine, she sometimes needs to get out of the home. She takes her Bible or a book to a place where she can find a quiet table to have her own "coffee with the Lord."

Generally, vacations have been

difficult to arrange. Agnes remembers a vacation to DisneyWorld with her own family as a highlight. Camp Arnes has been a haven, a place where the foster children, too, are permitted to attend camp, provided she is within reach. The last vacation she and Vern shared as a couple was a belated 25th wedding anniversary trip to Jamaica two years ago. This April they spent time in Atlanta, on a Habitat for Humanity site, in preparation for Winnipeg's own project.

With Joel at home, Agnes finds it difficult to have time for herself. An anger management team including two professionals come into the Koop home and work intensively with Agnes, Vern and Joel. Once a week a child care worker takes Joel out for three hours so Agnes can have time for her own needs. "So many highly-paid people have invested in this one boy," she says.

Although Agnes admits to being overwhelmed at times with the "many children who are starving, the hurt everywhere," she is not a person to despair or to give up because she can't solve every problem. She has the following poem pinned up close to her kitchen sink:

*I am only one
but I am one.
I can not do everything
but I can do something
and what I can do
that I ought to do
and what I ought to do
by the grace of God
I shall do.*

* Names of the children are not their real names. Joel has since been readmitted to the school system.



Sarah Klassen is a member of the River East MB Church.

I Can Cook, Too

by John Longhurst

According to Gloria Steinem, over the past few decades women have proved they can do the same things as men. But, she says, gender equality will not be achieved until men discover they can do the same things as women.

I agree with Steinem. But I would add one thing to her remark: if men are going to discover they can do the same things as women, women are going to have to treat them as though they can.

From January until March, this year, I was home during a parental leave looking after our baby daughter. Prior to my leave, my wife, Christine, took four months of maternity leave. As we compared experiences, we discovered that one of the major differences was the way women reacted to our staying home. While women often asked me how I was adjusting to life at home and looking after a baby, only a few made similar inquiries of Christine.

Like me, she interrupted a career to

look after our daughter. Like me, she found the adjustment from working full time to staying at home difficult. Unlike me, however, far fewer women commented on the enormous changes she was experiencing. Unlike me, she wasn't asked by a women's magazine to write an article about the experience.

The implicit message in the limited response to Christine is that since she's a woman, nurturing is natural—it's what women are expected to be able to do. The amount of response I received, on the other hand, tells me I am doing something unusual—something that women do not expect a man to be able, or willing, to do.

That we should have these different experiences was not surprising to us. Both of us have jobs that require us to travel. When I'm away, Christine receives little in the way of attention from women. When she's away, however, women frequently ask me how I'm doing. Sometimes I receive dinner invitations—something she rarely gets. The implicit message is that since she's a woman, she can take care of herself. I, on the other hand, am probably helpless in the kitchen and need dinner invitations to survive. But I can cook, too (although I continue to believe that if we had been meant to bake, God wouldn't have invented Safeway's bakeshop).

If men are ever going to discover that they can do the same things as women, two things will be required: first, they will have to believe they can do things that have traditionally been regarded as women's work—look after babies, clean house, cook (If men comment on my paternal leave at all, it's usually only to say, "I could never do that").

Second, and just as important, women will have to stop treating men as if they can't do these things, or that they are really special when they do them. For example, no thanking their husbands for vacuuming the house—by saying "thanks," women send the message that the husband is helping his wife with her task. Cleaning the house is not a matter of men helping women; if the house is dirty, it needs to be cleaned. The same goes for looking after babies.

It will probably be a long time before men discover they can do the same things as women. But women can help by not treating us as special when we begin to make this important discovery.



ART: TERILYNN GOERTZ

John Longhurst directs media and public relations for MCC Canada. He is a member of the River East MB Church.

❖ Concord College student **Marni Enns** won the Tudor Bowl, awarded to the best singer of the Grade B competition level, at this year's Winnipeg Music Festival. Marni, a member of the Elmwood MB Church, plans a career in music.

❖ **Melody Goetz**, Fort Garry Fellowship, was recently awarded a Writers 'B' Grant from the Manitoba Arts Council to complete a manuscript of poetry and short fiction, including poems written during a trip to Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Kenya. She will take a two-month leave from her employment at the Canada Foodgrains Bank to work on her project.

❖ **Mary Friesen**, returning to MBCI after a year's study leave, has been appointed Vice-Principal of the school beginning September, 1993. She is a member of the River East MB Church.

❖ Every weekday morning some 30 cups of coffee are brewed and served up with wonderful, fresh, homemade baking and a warm welcome at the Elmwood MB Church's **Coffee Garden**. Started last September, the "Coffee Garden" is an outreach and fellowship hour for anyone who wishes to drop in. It is staffed in turn by some 25 REWARD (Retired Energy With a Rich Dividend) members of the church.

❖ **Charlotte Siemens** directed an MCC women's study tour to Nicaragua and Honduras in May. The group met with local women and considered issues of poverty and mothering. **Martha Klassen** and **Tammy Sutherland**, River East MB Church, were part of this international study tour.

❖ The choirs of Angus McKay School in Winnipeg brought home the winning honors in six out of the seven classes they entered at the 75th annual Winnipeg Music Competition Festival. Music teacher and conductor of the elementary school choirs is **Irene Warkentin**, member of the Eastview MB Church. Adjudicators praised "the wonderful musical feeling" of the choirs. (EK Herald)

❖ **Sara Schmidt**, Valley Gardens MB Church, won the Keystone Pro-Am Racquetball Tournament, Ladies A-B Division. Sara has been playing racquetball competitively for three years and in May will compete in the Canadian national championships in Burnaby, BC.



PHOTO: MARTHA KLASSEN

MCC Manitoba Women's Auxiliary visits the Thrift Shop in Riverton, Manitoba.

❖ Manitoba now has a provincial **Women's Concerns Committee** to supplement the work of MCC's national Women's Concerns body. Provincial chapters deal with gender issues and local concerns. Chair of the new committee is **Erica Block** of the River East MB Church.

❖ The annual **Manitoba MCC Women's Conference** will be held on October 16, 1993, in the Morden EMMC Church.

❖ **Borderwatch**, a third book of poetry by **Sarah Klassen**, was released in April by Netherlandic Press.

ANNOUNCING...SOPHIA'S FIRST ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST

Readers are invited to submit poems to Sophia's first annual poetry contest. The winning poem will be published in Sophia's Fall 1993 issue, and the winner will be awarded a \$50 prize. Runners up may also be published.

Rules:

1. A cost of \$5 per poem will be charged. (Cheques should be made out to *Sophia*.) Entries of two or more poems will receive a one-year subscription to or extension of *Sophia*. (If you wish your subscription to be given to a friend, please send the name and address along with your submission.)
2. Do not send your only copy, as *Sophia* will not be responsible for lost copies. Poems will not be returned.

3. To preserve anonymity in judging, please do not put your name on the pages of the poems but include your name, address and the title(s) of your poem(s) on a separate page.

Deadline:

All submissions must be received by August 31, 1993. Address your entries to:

**Poetry Contest, Sophia,
P.O. Box 28062, 1453 Henderson Highway,
Winnipeg, MB, R2G 4E9.**



Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

1 Peter 4:8-10

(New Revised Standard Version)