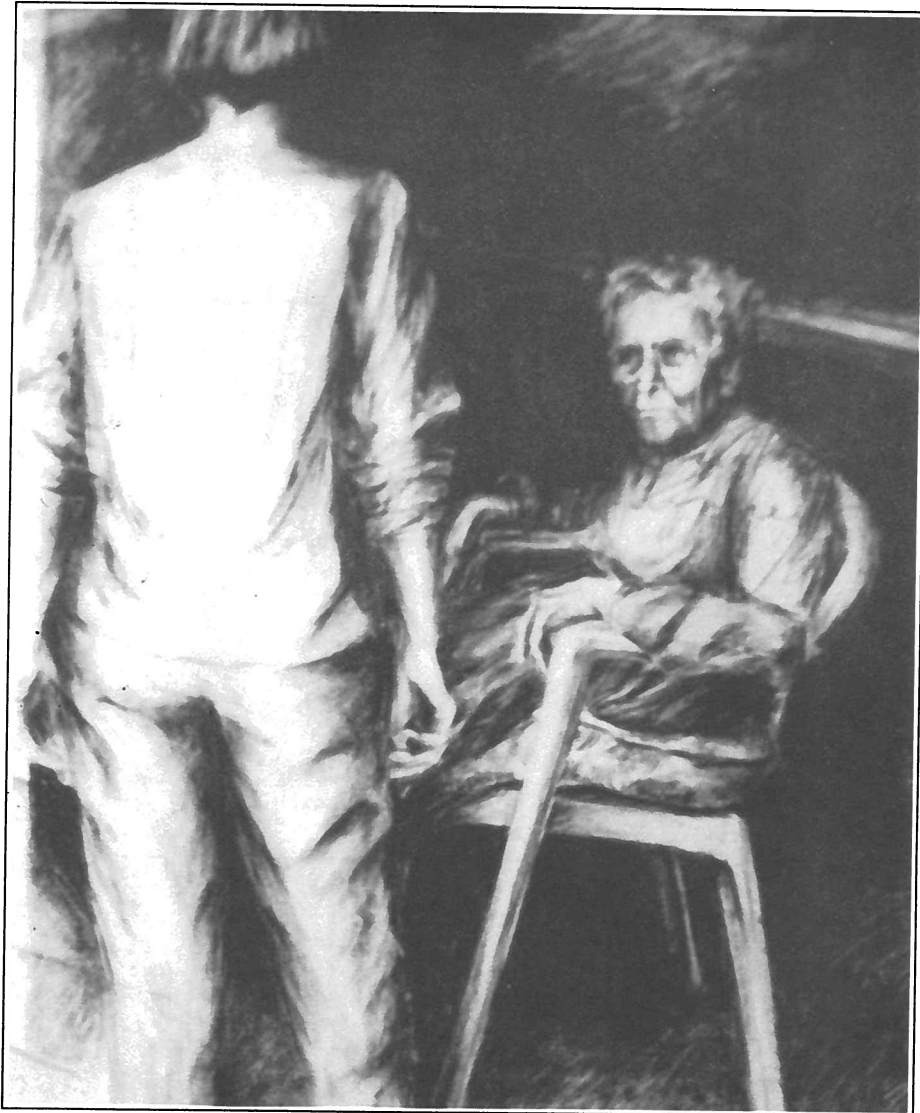


SOPHIA

W I S D O M

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



Artists Among Us



FALL 1994 VOLUME 4 NUMBER 3

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SOPHIA: A Greek feminine noun associated with the biblical wisdom tradition, translated "wisdom" and personified in the book of Proverbs; equivalent in the New Testament to logos, the creative word that was with God in the beginning, creating and giving life to the world.

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Subscription Rates:
\$9.00 for 3 issues.
\$17.00 for 6 issues.

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correspondence and manuscripts to:
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1453 Henderson Highway
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Cover Art: Helene Dyck. *Front door, back yard*, 1991. Charcoal on paper, 135 x 206 cm.

Do We Need Two Hundred Pomegranates?

by Sarah Klassen

A child takes a lump of plasticine and moulds it into the shape of a person or an animal, a tree or a cookie. Or she grabs crayons and draws a big sun, or seven, and colours them yellow or orange, or if she wishes, blue. Then she adds a river and draws a fish in it or a dinosaur beside it, and gives the picture to her mother. A very young student in my class once gave me a picture she had made of God looking down from a second storey window. We are delighted by what the inexperienced hand fashions, and astonished at what the young mind conceptualizes.

All this making and shaping should not surprise us. We were made in the Creator's image, and have tried ever since to understand what that means. Perhaps it means, in part, that we, the creatures, also want to make things, with whatever medium we can find: a solidly constructed house, a sand castle, a fence, a garden, an arrangement of weeds picked at a roadside.

Mennonites have been particularly concerned with constructing things that have practical value: aprons, furniture, fresh *Zwieback*, warm quilts. But although plain quilts would keep us warm, we make them as original and beautiful as time, money and imagination allow. Our mothers' aprons were decorated with rick rack, and sometimes even crocheting. It satisfies something in us if we succeed in using line, colour and texture in fashioning objects that please or



challenge the eye and the mind, something new, something we can call good.

Manitoba artist Lois Klassen says, "I believe that art can be made from anything, any sound, any technique, any colour, any substance, any machine, any space, anything. Whenever I come upon something that strikes me as having the potential to work as something else, I try to remember to put it to use in art" (quoted by Priscilla Reimer in *Mennonite Artist: Insider as Outsider*. Manitoba Historical Society, 1990).

In the temple Solomon made according to God's specifications, the angels made of olive wood and overlaid with gold might have been deleted to cut cost. Or the two hundred pomegranates. But how powerfully this transformed material, representing the best work of the chosen artisans, drew the worshippers to the mystery and grandeur of God.

In the first book of the Bible, we read that God "made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4). In the last book, God declares "I am making everything new" (Rev.

21:5). And that is what artists attempt: a transformation of the familiar, using materials and media to create work that illuminates for us, in new and sometimes startling ways, our world with all its darkness and light, its beauty and its terror.

We like to quote the words "without a vision the people perish." We have always had among us people with vision, and sometimes that vision is artistic. However, in Mennonite communities the artist's vision has received much less attention than the preacher's words. But the artist's work, too, is prophetic, and artists feel called to make art that celebrates or informs or critiques.

In preparing this issue, we couldn't help noticing that not all the artists in our midst, that is, in the MB faith community, stay with us. No doubt this indicates the strong pull that art exerts, and its demands on those committed to it. But the church has not extended to artists the same encouragement it has given to workers in other professions, in the church, in farming and in business. Have we been too suspicious of the subversive nature of art, afraid it will challenge our way of looking at the world?

God gives gifts, in diversity and abundance. If we pay attention to those among us who have been given the desire and ability to make art in various forms, they will give us what they've made.

MISSION STATEMENT: Sophia

Sophia offers a forum for women in the MB 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 expressions 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 dealings with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33)

The Spiritual Gift of Art

by Esther Wiens

How important is art to the Christian church? Is artistic expression a spiritual exercise, or is it merely a reflection of worldliness? Is the person who has a career in sculpting or painting, in dramatic performance or composition or building, neglecting the work of the Kingdom?

There are no artists in the roster of church workers in Romans 12, nor is art found in the list of spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12. But when God spoke to Moses about enlisting his people for the building of the tabernacle, he called for artists and craftspeople. Moreover, it appears that he had done some preparatory work in these people, for he says: “See I have chosen Bezalel son of

Uri,...and I have filled him with the spirit of God with ability and intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft....Also I have given skill to all craftsmen to make

everything I have commanded you” (Exodus 31:1-6). The passage implies that God expected beauty and excellence in the construction of the tabernacle.

Women too were called: “Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair” (Exodus 35:25-26).

The spiritual nature of this work is suggested by the fact that the artist leader was spirit-filled.

Beauty is important in the service of God. This is implied when the Psalmist calls God’s people to praise him with the harp, lyre, tambourine, strings, flute and cymbals and with dancing (Psalm 150:3-5). The poetry of the Psalms is, moreover, an example of the Word given in beauty. The rhythms created by parallel structure and the pictorial images found in the lines appeal to the aesthetic sense; the melding of thought and sound delights the mind and opens it to the praise of God.



*“Is artistic expression
a spiritual
exercise,
or is it merely
a reflection
of worldliness?”*

Some of us may be disappointed that art is not mentioned among the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament. But we must recognize that the list is a relatively short one and is surely not exhaustive. The gifts mentioned in I Corinthians, for example, are basic to a young, persecuted church, one perhaps more in need of finding its feet than its wings. And although the New Testament does not explicitly call for artists to build Christ’s church, it must be admitted that artistry is present in its allegory, story, poetry and epistle.

Non-biblical works, both ancient and modern, can also serve a spiritual end. To read great poetry and prose is to be deeply moved and often transformed; to contemplate a Rembrandt painting is to be filled with awe—as though standing on holy ground. Madeleine L’Engle, who describes the arts as an open window through which we can be given a new glimpse of the love of God, says that the St. Matthew Passion is for her an open door into the realm of the numinous (*Walking on Water*, p.50).

But the engendering of awe and ecstasy is not ensured—it is not necessarily a given. Art, if it is to be used in the service of God, must be exercised within the context of love.

Art Is Informed By Love

After the Apostle Paul speaks of the spiritual gifts of teaching, preaching, interpreting and working of miracles (I Corinthians 12), he says, “And now I will show you a more excellent way.” What follows is the chapter on the greatest gift of all—the one that stands above and informs all others. It teaches us the manner of exercising all of our gifts. Within the womb of love all other gifts are brought to life and nurtured. In the excitement of creating, striving for excellence and urging others toward it, we must above all be loving, i.e. patient, kind, not seeking our own gain. It is, moreover, noteworthy that this compelling chapter on love is given the form of poetry.

Art Is A Search For Truth

The poetic maxim, "beauty is truth," is easier to accept than its converse, "truth is beauty." There is a kind of truth in the formative nature of beauty, in its power to effect psychic wholeness. It appeals more to the feeling and intuitive functions of the mind than to the thinking functions, to those aspects of the psyche that we tend to neglect, particularly in our educational systems. The exercise of these functions fosters their growth, as it were, and offers us the opportunity to become more conscious and sensitive. But "truth" is also "beauty." A work of art may make a hard truth more attractive and compelling than if it were presented in a prosaic way. A dramatic production, for example, through story and enactment, may capture the attention and imagination of the audience and effect a change in them. Sometimes, if the work is a great one, people are transformed. And all of this while being entertained, rather than confronted. Art is more disarming and gentle than lecture or rhetoric.

If beauty is to be true, it must include more than that which is attractive or comely. Deep art moves beneath the surface of things revealing both light and shadow. If it fails to present the dark side of life, it becomes shallow and sentimental. During our teenage years, many of us read novels (I use the term loosely) from our church libraries which presented the Christian life full of romance and material prosperity. But reality teaches that Christians often experience suffering and deprivation. Our art must acknowledge this without going to the extreme of many contemporary artists who seem preoccupied with anxiety and despair. Truth in art, as in life itself, is to see life steadily and to see it whole.

It should also be said that although the words "darkness" and "evil" are often used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. "Darkness" can also refer to the "valley of the shadow" that the Psalmist talks about: suffering, bereave-

ment and the prospect of death. Art that is truthful must not avoid the fact that life is struggle—sometimes a struggle too deep for words. A few years ago I attended a Mennonite church service in Germany with a person who was a new Christian. We sang a number of light-hearted choruses which disturbed her

*Truth in art,
as in life itself,
is to see life
steadily
and to see it
whole.*

because she was then discovering the cost of following Christ in a fallen world. When we left the service, she expressed her intense frustration by saying, "It is a lie....It is a lie!" The songs had floated on the surface of her life but avoided its depths, where a spiritual battle was raging. Truth in song and poetry must be true to life and include both joy and sorrow, peace and struggle. In this the Psalmist shows us the way:

"It is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lights up my darkness" (Psalm 18:28).

Art Is Communication

Art is not necessarily committed to

a clear and unequivocal meaning; it is ambiguous. Those who believe a spade should in all times and places be called a spade are often frustrated by the ambiguity and tempted to discount art altogether. But ambiguity in art, while it may appear exclusive, is really inclusive in that it encourages involvement and contemplation in the audience (i.e. reader, observer, listener) and credits them with imagination and discernment. This should not influence the artist to value the obscure over the more readily accessible work. She must not forget that what has taken her years to appreciate will probably take an audience member just as long. And the audience must be a primary consideration in any public presentation. A brief introduction can often put people on a track that will lead them toward insight and understanding. In general, if it can be said about any work of art that only God and the artist know what it means, it is best kept where it can be appreciated.

Artists working within the context of the church need a high degree of sensitivity. Madeleine L'Engle, a fine artist and a very wise woman says, "Art is communication, and if there is no communication it is as though the work had been still-born" (*Walking on Water*, p.34).

Pope Pius XIII said in an address in 1948: "What joy to the artist who sees shining forth in every creature the resplendent light of the Creator. How noble the mission of the artist who helps the less sensitive, the less gifted, to see and appreciate the natural beauty of the humblest things and through them the beauty of God."

This is indeed a high calling. May we hear and heed that call with joy.

Esther Wiens is on the faculty of Canadian Bible College in Regina. She holds an MA in English from the University of Waterloo, and an MA and PhD in Theatre and Interpretation from Northwestern University, Illinois.

A House Overflowing: PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY OF ARTISTS

by Debra Fieguth

The week her great-aunt died, six-year-old Erika Epp went into the Saskatchewan meadow with her two aunts and a horse and buggy and picked flowers to make into wreaths.

That, and learning how to construct tissue paper flowers in grade two, is firmly fixed in 75-year-old Erika Koop's memory. "I felt so involved," she says of her flowers-in-the-meadow experience.

The wonderment of making beautiful things never left her. Erika Koop has painted murals, made banners, decorated store windows, sewed costumes, made

backdrops for stages, painted pictures, arranged flowers....

The imprint of those childhood experiences goes even further. Erika Koop has raised six daughters, all of them artistic in a unique way: Elvira (Finnigan), the oldest, coordinates art classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and does installation art; Wanda, probably the best known of the sisters, is an established Canadian painter and video maker; Kathryn is a prominent Winnipeg potter; Charlotte (Livingston) finds creative means of teaching children with learning disabilities; Dorothy

(Ryzebol) sings and does colour analysis; Carla (Oliphant) makes flower arrangements, puts together gift baskets and sews costumes.

All six remember a household overflowing with creative energy and projects, from drum majorette costumes for the whole neighborhood to dramas, "radio" programs and circuses. "It was never a bother to have our bedrooms set up in some elaborate configuration," recalls Dorothy of Calgary—the only daughter not living in Winnipeg. "There was always paper," adds Charlotte, "always some kind of activity the whole house was encumbered by." With a personal bent toward needlework and fabrics, Charlotte used to love staying up till three or four in the morning doing cross stitch.

Kathy has fond memories of spending hours with her mother making tissue flowers. "That was a stepping stone to create other things."

Wanda recalls, as a twelve-year-old, painting a twenty- by thirty-foot backdrop for a school production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, done in strips that stretched from the kitchen floor into the living room. She held informal art classes for her friends. Her work has since been shown across Canada as well as internationally—she has exhibitions this fall in Brazil and The Netherlands. Elvira remembers her mother allowing wonderful creative messes that could always be cleaned up later. Carla, the youngest, used to fake being sick so she could stay home and sew. When her sisters were older, she, too, instigated circuses and neighborhood events.

Dorothy, who was musically inclined and insists she "can't draw worth beans," played piano by ear when she was three, playing for her school assembly by the time she got to kindergarten. Music was vital to all the sisters; at one point Kathy was singing in seven choirs at once. All six of them sang in the Mennonite Children's Choir.

From both their mother and their father, John Koop, who died several years ago, the daughters inherited an attitude of doing things imaginatively and doing them well. "My mother and father were amazing in that they permitted this kind of activity,"



PHOTO: BILL EAKIN

L to R: Elvira, Wanda, Kathryn, Erika, Charlotte, Dorothy, Carla

*All six remember a household
overflowing with creative energy and projects*

says Wanda. "There was always encouragement to do it to the best of your ability." John Koop came home with huge rolls of computer cards for drawing on. He, too, would get involved in family projects, making doll houses, picture frames and styluses, and even a sewing machine.

In her own childhood, Erika Koop wasn't given a lot of encouragement. Her mother, who died when Erika was three and still living in Russia, was a painter; a small oil painting of flowers hangs on Erika's sitting room wall as a testament to that talent. But her stepmother had no understanding of the creative spirit, and "The neighbours wondered how I would ever get a husband, so it didn't do to encourage me too much."

"The main thing for a girl was how to cook and how to clean and how to sew. And then you would get through life quite nicely," she says. For Erika Koop that wasn't enough. "I enjoyed cooking and cleaning and sewing, but I felt there was more to life, and that had to be nurtured." Somehow, perhaps because she had boundless energy and optimism, she always found time for art.

In one job she made flowers for window displays in stores all across western Canada; when her daughters began singing in the Mennonite Children's Choir, she sewed costumes and made sets, an assignment she kept for twenty years. Later she was a tour guide at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and taught art and sewing at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute.

Her daughters remember their mother enthusiastically endorsing projects and offering support and advice when it was needed. When Elvira as a twelve-year-old became discouraged in her elaborate construction of the "Easter bunny family tree" for a local art contest, her mother kept her going. The girls "always came out on top," when they entered contests, their mother says. While she and her husband didn't want their daughters to expect to win, neither did they wish to discourage talent. Wanda was only three when she announced that she was going to be an artist when she grew up. "There was no doubt."

"I always think when I've done a body of work, the work becomes much greater than what I am as a human being."



PHOTO: BILL EAKIN

Wanda Koop. *Paintings for Dimly Lit Rooms*, Panel 5. 1993. 9 x 13'

The family had little money and no television, factors which perhaps made them explore the imaginative spirit more than they would have otherwise. The sisters made doll houses, castles, puppet shows, and tents in the back yard that they could sleep in. "My mother would always let us use every single blanket in the house and every sheet," says Elvira. "She would never say no." A few years ago Elvira completed a work called "Doorways," in which she hung sheets like tents in the trees of St. Norbert; each doorway was a different colour and represented a different stage of life.

Some projects leaned to the bizarre. One summer when Elvira was eight or nine, she instigated a series of funerals—replete with proper coffins, flowers and songs—for small animals and birds found dead in the neighborhood.

There was always a measure of altruism. Even though they had little money themselves the family would fix up old dolls with new handmade clothes and give them to poor children for Christmas. Or they would make a beautiful floating island pudding to take to someone who was sick.

As children, Elvira and Wanda—two years apart in age—received scholarships to take classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. "It was a lifeline for me," says Wanda.

"There was a point in time when both of us fell in love with art," Elvira reflects. For her a pivotal point came when the gallery brought in an extensive Van Gogh collection, which, as an eleven-year-old, she could see for twenty cents. "Wanda and I went every single Saturday it was there."

If the community encouraged art, the church did not. "I think that it encouraged craft," says Charlotte, the only daughter still attending Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church where they grew up. "Craft is [seen as] a more practical kind of talent. Art is more a luxury."

The way Elvira sees it, "the church was very much into not making graven images." Some of her friends' families wouldn't even have pictures in their houses, although "it seemed like plaques were okay." Kathy remembers an aunt telling her she was throwing her life away by going to art school.

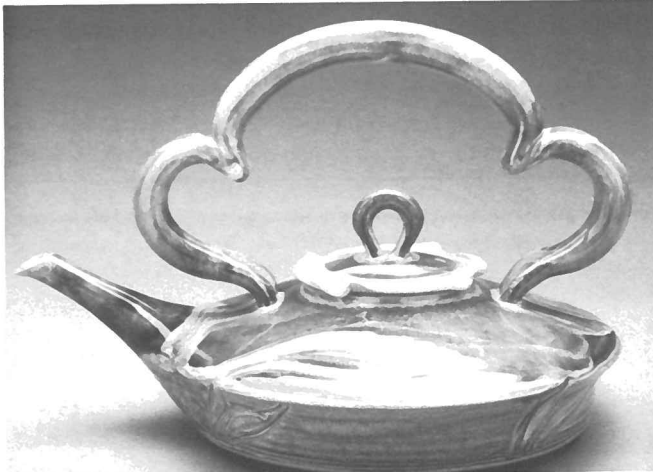


PHOTO: BRUCE SPIELMAN

Kathryne Koop. *Porcelain*, 34 x 24 x 20 cm.

Their mother, who for many years decorated the church sanctuary, was a pioneer. In early days, she would sometimes arrive at church to find her decorations removed, or a vase in the garbage. But “the Bible is full of references about making the house of God beautiful,” she points out. “I was always very convinced that whatever artistic talent I had was a gift from God and that it had to be used in a right way.”

A woman with a strong Christian commitment, she sees art as integral to her faith. “I think to show God to the people in the form of beauty he has created is another way of worship.” Over the years the Mennonite church “has changed totally,” Erika Koop says. She now has more freedom to use her talents.

The influence—for good or bad—of the church has affected her daughters in different ways. Dorothy, who attends a Christian Reformed Church in Calgary, sings solos and in small ensembles, often for church functions. “My music is my expression of my faith,” she says. “My gift in music is one that I have to glorify God with.”

Charlotte says her faith and upbringing “have given me a capacity not to create for my own self-serving purposes.” Working with children who have disabilities has

given her an appreciation of the fragility of life. “I’m profoundly aware of how fortunate I am in everything.”

Carla, who attends a United Church with her husband and three small daughters, says her involvement in art, which includes decorating sets and making costumes for theatrical productions, is instinctive rather than a conscious expression of faith. “We have to do it,” she says about creative work. “It’s not a matter of wanting to or choosing to.”

Wanda, who describes herself as spiritual but not religious, learned compassion and understanding from her upbringing. “As far as the dogma of the religion, that part I chose to forget when I left [the church].”

Mennonites were wrong to view art as frivolous, she says. To her, art is evidence of the human spirit. “I always think when I’ve done a body of work, the work becomes much greater than what I am as a human being.” To deny that spirit is damaging, she says. “To take the dance out of the human spirit is to kill the human spirit.”

Elvira has a similar perspective. “I believe all creativity is a gift. I’m a very spiritual person. [But] the religion we were given was too small.”

Kathy’s approach to her art is more pragmatic. She sees little connection between her pottery and faith in God. “I really do put everything I have into my work, trying to breathe life into my work,” she says. “It’s definitely not religious work. It’s my spirit in there.”

The family, which now includes six spouses and eleven grandchildren, remains close-knit. Erika Koop helps Carla with her flower basket business, and Wanda teaches private art classes to Charlotte’s sons and Carla’s daughters. The oldest grandchild, Elvira’s son Shaun, is following the family footsteps in art school. Though neither Kathy nor Wanda have children, “We’re madly in love with all our nieces and nephews,” says Kathy. The sisters are also



PHOTO: BRUCE SPIELMAN

Kathryne Koop. *Earthenware*, 32 x 32 x 61 cm.

proud of their mother. “As a child, you don’t really take stock of who you’re living with,” says Wanda. Hearing stories now of their earlier poverty, hardship and sheer resourcefulness, her appreciation is strong. “We had her as our mother.”

And while she is busy with her own painting and other artistic endeavors, Erika Koop still manages to facilitate other young budding artists. Carla’s daughters construct ski lodges and other playlands in their grandmother’s attic.

“Now it’s heaven up in her attic, with angels and everything else,” says Carla.

“It takes a great talent to let that happen.”

Debra Fieguth is a writer and the associate editor of *ChristianWeek*.

*“I enjoyed cooking and cleaning and sewing,
but I felt there was more to life, and that had to be nurtured.”*



Mennonites and the Arts: An Unsettled Past

by Eleanor Martens

Art galleries have always been cold, inhospitable places for me. They give me a distinct feeling of being on alien ground. I fly through them in record time, pausing before the "flower" paintings only because I love flowers and because they are less baffling to me than other subjects. I would just as soon watch the folks who watch the pictures, fascinated by those who stand there in solemn contemplation, transfixed by some nuance of stroke and color to which I am obviously blind.

Normally, I would shy away from publicly admitting this ineptitude. I suspect, however, that there are other Mennonites, perfectly at ease in a concert hall or museum, who share my discomfort in an art gallery. Learning to appreciate art was not part of our upbringing, nor that of the generations before us. My own grandparents, destitute 1920s immigrants from Russia, could not have conceived of any pursuit other than the desperate daily grind to get food on the table. But further glimpses into our history reveal that a tense, unsettled relationship has existed between our faith and most art forms other than sacred music.

Our early heritage boasts few painters, sculptors, or poets. In 1667 a German Mennonite portrait painter was placed under the ban for violating the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." He was reinstated when he promised to paint only landscapes and decorations (*Mennonite Encyclopedia*). My father tells me of a Mr. Boldt in Russia, a gifted painter who, upon his conversion, collected all his art supplies and burned them. Just twenty years ago Katie Funk Wiebe felt obliged to respond to the question: "Faith and Art: A Compatible Team?" (*Mennonite Brethren Herald*, June 28, 1974). And in a 1981 *Mennonite Mirror* article, Peter Klassen attempted to explain his youthful understanding that "art was from the devil." My own mother-in-law, who simply bursts with creativity, was told by her mother that no man would want to marry her if all she did was paint.

Why this longstanding mistrust? One reason was the strong influence of German pietism, which emphasized outward simplicity in dress, possessions and leisure. Enjoyment of

culture outside the closed, Mennonite communities was considered "worldly" and a compromise of Christian values. The enjoyment of art was viewed as "pretentious, wasteful, even dangerous" (V. Ratzlaff, "The Christian and the Arts," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, July 9, 1965).

Tied closely to this was the Protestant work ethic, which held that through hard work "the righteous would prosper." Creative activity, which required long hours of reflection and usually did not generate much income or security, was regarded as frivolous and escapist.

Another problem has been the tendency to separate the secular from the sacred. Mennonites have had difficulty accepting art that does not carry explicitly religious symbolism. Because we have been strong on soul-winning and evangelism, all of our endeavours must somehow "preach" the Christian message. In a 1980 *Mennonite Brethren Herald* editorial, the writer states: "Christian artists must aim to treat truths that only *they* can treat" - themes of "purity, goodness, obedience, sacrifice." He suggests that Christians may have to "give up a claim to universality out of love for Jesus Christ" (Nickel, "Bright Vistas for the Christian Artist" 19 (7), p.10). This view tends to marginalize Christian artists who believe that even universal themes such as beauty, suffering or despair can communicate truth.

Art often stands in tension with the status quo, another factor that has proven difficult for Mennonites. Inherent in art is its tendency to stand apart from the rest of society, to look critically at it, and to ask disturbing and sometimes embarrassing questions. We, as Mennonites, like to think we've arrived. We claim to have answers to the deeper questions about life and meaning. We do not like to be challenged or criticized, one reason why a number of years ago, when writer Rudy Wiebe dared to critique, through fiction, some of the duplicity he saw in Mennonite communities, he was ostracized and stripped of his conference job.

During the last several decades, our church has embarked on a remarkable departure from some of these attitudes.

(Cont'd. on next page)

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(Cont'd. from previous page)

Goshen College professor and artist Abner Hershberger believes that a shift has occurred among Mennonites "from the other-worldly to this-worldly, from the cognitive to sensory, toward more creativity and spontaneity" (*Festival Quarterly*, 1981). Urbanization and education have contributed toward this trend. So has, according to Katie Funk Wiebe, a re-awakened emphasis on the gifts of believers.

These gifts are becoming evermore evident among us. An outright explosion of painting, sculpting, drama and even dance is bringing new richness to our communities and churches. In my own church a set of creche figurines lovingly sculpted by several gifted women helps focus our vision on the nativity at Christmas. A scarred, blackened tree stump encircled by fresh green blades of grass points to death and resurrection at Easter. Luxuriant silk and embroidery adorn banners calling us to worship, to repentance and to caring for others. Tambourines and flowing skirts usher us into God's presence on Sunday mornings. Our pastor, dressed in the rough garb of biblical times, strikes home the message of Moses, David or Jonah with his dramatic impersonations.

As for art galleries, I suppose I'll always feel like a stranger in them. But my daughter won't. She spent several weeks there this past summer acquainting herself with the techniques of drawing and design. Who knows? Maybe she'll even be able to teach me a few things!

Eleanor Martens, a regular columnist for *Sophia*, lives and writes in Winnipeg. She and her family attend McIvor Ave. MB Church.

questioning containment

(Helene Dyck's paintings shown here are from a current exhibition, "Driving Inward." Sarah Klassen interviewed the artist in her Winnipeg studio.)

SK: It seems we're always interested in beginnings. How did art-making begin for you?

HD: A grade eight teacher, Art Toews, saw potential in my sketches and he suggested I should take technical art. This would lead to a career with an income. I did take a correspondence art course. It was dismal and put me off art until I was forty. Instead, I made a choice to be a teacher.

In the 80s I was taking art history at the University of Manitoba, and to complete that you're required to take two studio courses. I wasn't anxious to do the studio courses, but I'm goal-oriented enough to want to complete the program.

So I began with the compulsory design course. I was sweating and I thought, "How can I do this?" But finally I took the brush and just painted. The instructor said, "Oh, you've painted before." That made me think that maybe there was something in me of the artist. And I switched my program to focus on studio courses.

SK: Did you get encouragement from the Mennonite church or community?

HD: No encouragement. None whatever. Although my own family was always supportive. I didn't get negative feedback because my work is representational, and because people are easily impressed with technique. And my relatives were interested in my work.

But many people, not just Mennonites, need to learn to look at art. When I go into schools, I do drawing with the kids, but mostly I try to teach them to use their eyes. To see. They have to acquire the tools to view art.

SK: How did your Mennonite background shape your art?

HD: Whenever there's an assumption of established religious dictum, whether Mennonite or Jewish or Catholic, there's a tendency to compromise. My parents were liberal, but we moved to a Mennonite community where things we had always enjoyed in our family were frowned on. I found myself being one person in one place and another person somewhere else. I regret that compromise, which I see as hypocritical compromise.

Institutions confine and limit the range of choices. I question that constraint [in my work]. But I would still question the

AN INTERVIEW WITH HELENE DYCK



Blue Neckpiece, 1991.
Oil, 30 x 40 cm.



Something Blue, 1992. Oil, 55.8 x 122 cm.



Green Scarf, Series Two, I, II, III, 1991.
Oil, 35.5 x 28 cm.

PHOTOS: COURTESY THE ARTIST

restrictions of institutions even if I came from a wholly liberal background.

SK: Your themes are strongly feminist. For instance, there are these women you've placed in cars.

HD: I live out of town and spend a lot of time in vehicles. A car is a microcosm. Dynamics that occur in it are accentuated. Here you have to deal with conflict. Of course the voyage is also the experience of life.

The women in these paintings are seen from someone else's point of view. Even where there's just one woman, another person is implied. The paintings are small, they require the viewer to come close. And yet there's always a distance. The bridesmaids sitting side by side are very separate from each other. And they have their backs to the chauffeur who's taking them somewhere.

SK: I find the Green Scarf sequence quite violent. Could you comment on that?

HD: A lot of violence does go on, and you can't just say, "I don't want to look at that." We can't just have pretty pictures. There is sexual, emotional and physical abuse of women, and then the violence of having to be quiet, the pretense of putting on the right appearance, saying everything's okay.

Scarves are very important to women. They can help give the right appearance, the right touch. I like scarves and like to wear them. But there's a thin line. A scarf can be harmless, a beautiful thing to wear or it can be used to constrict, even to throttle and hurt. Like keeping a person from fulfilling her potential. The bricks in the background also suggest containment.

I am questioning the historical containment of women. Even the square or rectangular shapes of traditional paintings have been used to contain. I've used those same shapes. The mirrors in my paintings are a way of questioning that containment. They are not intended to objectify women. I insist that the woman should look into the mirror for her own purposes.

I'm looking at how patterns of power continuously perpetrate abusive behaviour. And I want my viewers to question how women are perceived, not just to accept.

🍷 Artists Among Us 🍷

Helene Dyck



"Front door, backyard", 1991. Charcoal on paper. 135 x 206 cm.

Nettie Dueck

Nettie Dueck stitches personalized symbolism into her creative needlework. Most of her work is framed and given to friends and relative, often for anniversaries.



Heidi Koop



My interest in fine arts began in the late 70's during theological studies at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary. I took classes in Oriental brush painting with Winifred Waltner.

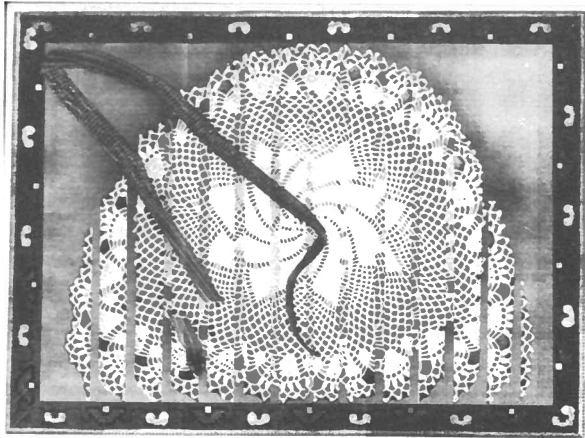
At the Symposium Visual Arts Centre, I am learning about line, design and tone, and expanding on previous artistic expression.

(Heidi Koop's work will be exhibited May to July, 1995, at the Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd.)

Lois Klassen



Lois Klassen. *Untitled mail art (Interior)*. 1993. Mail art assemblage using photocopied imagery, clippings, corrugated cardboard, nuts and bolts, 9 x 11 inches.



Lois Klassen. *Indigenous Patterns*, 1991. Collage using photocopied imagery (floor linoleum, doily, snake skin), 22 x 28 inches. (Photo: Ken Fraser)

Since 1989 I have concentrated on developing the technique of collage. This exploration has shown me how to transform images of ordinary things into something personal and unexpected. I have begun to learn how to *find* suitable imagery and how to alter the objects or pictures in order to bring new meaning.

The results reflect the issues surrounding me. A major theme has been about those who have wandered over this location and those who settled here. I think about their lifestyle and how they coped. I think about what they left: arrowheads, doilies, floor linoleum, and how these artifacts reflect their sense of self and place. I photocopy, cut and paste these artifacts in an effort to understand my own sense of self and place.

The most recent development in my work has been my entry into the wonderful world of *mail art*. Mail art is an international network of artists who dare to share their work through the postal system (or electronic networks). These artists send each other art that is sometimes mass produced, sometimes entirely unique, sometimes done by an individual, sometimes a series of ingenious collaborations. The idea suits my lifestyle quite well; I am able to make a few mailings in the midst of caring for a preschooler and an infant. The supplies for making mailable items are usually available around the house, close at hand. Mail art keeps me in touch or in communication with other visual artists. As one correspondent wrote, "... mail is a way out of isolation as well as an exercise in the art of a gift given and gift giving" (D. Cole).

Agnes Dyck



Refugee. 8 x 11 inches.



Newfie Lighthouse. 12 x 15 inches.

The encouragement of Ivan Eyre, Agnes Dyck's first art teacher, prompted her to continued experimentation in art, and appreciation of all forms of it.

Continued on page 23

Quilting for Joy

Quilts: almost every family has one draped casually over a rack at the foot of a bed or spread invitingly over it. Some tuck theirs safely away in a cedar chest in hopes of preserving it for future generations—a coveted family heirloom. But wait: what's happening? Quilts are turning up in art galleries in much the same way as oil paintings, often fetching just as steep a price. Walk into a posh residence and you may find one cascading down from ceiling to floor, adding a touch of warmth, originality and charm to a particular room or hallway. Quilts are enjoying a renaissance, much as glass bricks or hardwood floors.

Did quilts ever disappear or has their function merely changed? Alvina Pankratz, a renowned quilter, has published a book, *Lifelines: A Quilted Portrayal of Life*, featuring her original quilts. In it she theorizes about the origins and coming-of-age of quilt-making. She is proprietor of a shop, "Creative Alternatives" on Corydon Avenue, a trendy gallery/antique strip in Winnipeg where, among other notable things, she sells hand-sewn quilts at reasonable prices.

For Alvina, it all began at the age of five, when she learned to sew. One year later she had produced her first quilt. Over the years she remained with this hobby/line of work because of its portability and because it can be done in stages, despite interruptions. She insists it's a great time-killer in waiting rooms, and because it's so untidy, what with loose threads strewn about, the receptionist will eagerly place you at the head of the line just to be rid of you.

Quilting can also be incorporated with child care. Her foster charges are

encouraged to participate, even if only as audience. Alvina finds that children with destructive behaviour patterns show enormous respect for her work. They don't always understand why she would spend so much time on something that seemingly doesn't have a "purpose," yet once they try their hand at it, they have a new understanding and a sense of pride in having accomplished something.

Where and when did quilt-making evolve? According to Alvina, the English community had a unique social pattern that developed around quilting. It started out as fun. A group of women gathered to put together the top. Once an engagement was announced (and this would be timed to coincide with completion of the top) a "bee" was organized to complete the quilt in one sitting. As evening approached, the husbands and eligible men joined the toiling women for a hearty repast, while the bachelors examined the finished opus closely. Why the rigorous inspection? They were looking for perfect stitchery. Obviously, the one who could sew the best would be able to outfit them handsomely. Why not marry a good seamstress?



Alvina Pankratz and quilt.

by Linda Penner

Mennonites borrowed heavily from this custom, though their practises were a tad more puritanical. Quilting was sanctioned by the church. The women would gather in one room, meditating on and reciting Bible verses as they quilted, a clever way to preempt gossip, while the men studied the Bible in a neighbouring room.

Even in a large Mennonite community, there are only so many beds, and so many weddings. In time, quilt-making faced extinction, because quilts could be inherited, and duvets and blankets were available in department stores.

Alvina Pankratz looked at her walls and began to see quilts as more than bed coverings. To help realize her ideas, she enrolled in the Banff School of Fine Arts where instructor Jean Ray Laurie showed her how to use fabric to express herself artistically. What amazed Alvina was that 400 women attended these workshops, proof of quilt-making's enduring popularity. A dream took root in Alvina's mind: to stage an exhibition of her own quilts. This took a few years, but the result is recorded in *Lifelines: A Quilted Portrayal of Life*, a publication featuring the outstanding quilts from that show.

Alvina is hoping to expand her business, leasing quilts for covering large bare walls at banquets or in hotel lobbies and ballrooms. Quilts make fabulous backdrops at weddings, anniversaries and other family gatherings. At present, her services include repairing quilts, researching histories of quilts and assessing the value of damaged or destroyed quilts for insurance claims.

Linda Penner, *McIvor Avenue MB Church*, is a homemaker and mother of two.

Quilting Tips

Helen Penner is another Winnipegger stung by the quilting bee. Taught quilting by her mother, she saw quilts as functional. Surprisingly, she did not see many quilts in other people's homes. Helen learned three basic types of quilting: 1. making duvet covers 2. quilting around a printed design on whole cloth and 3. the complex technique of piecing, using appliques.

Helen offers the following directives for getting started:

1. Fabric is important. Use 100% cotton rather than a polyester/cotton blend. Cotton catches light, wears better, will not pill and is less slippery. Ironing 100% cotton produces a flat seam that's impossible to achieve with a blend. Precision is everything in quilting.
2. For batting, "Mountain Mist" is a good brand. It is 100% polyester and easy to separate. For an antique "puckered" look, use cotton batting.
3. Beginners should choose a small, simple project such as a pre-printed panel (e.g. baby quilt or wall hanging).
4. Use only quilting thread. It is stiffer, and the higher twist prevents it from getting soft and fuzzy.
5. It might irk you, but **USE A THIMBLE**. You'll enjoy the finished product more without blood stains. You'll also save wear and tear on your fingers, and eliminate healing time for your next project.

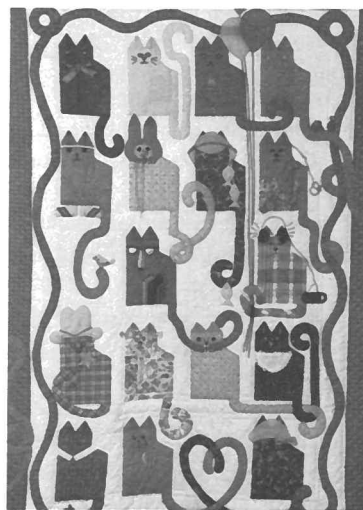


PHOTO: BRIAN PLETT

Helen Penner's Cat Quilt.

BY DESIGN: A Helping Profession

by Donna Stewart

Interior design is a helping profession, according to two Mennonite Brethren women in Winnipeg.

Because they work in different contexts, "helping" requires one kind of skill from Loreen Epp of River East Mennonite Brethren Church and another kind from Olenka Antymniuk of Mclvor Mennonite Brethren Church.

Loreen is Director of Marketing and Communication Services with Palliser Furniture, while Olenka contracts her services to a variety of individual and corporate clients. She works with condominium developers as well as new home builders or their clients, but she's done commercial work too. Her passion is for residential and new home design.

To Olenka "helping" may mean something as simple as assisting in colour choices. Or it may mean guiding people through the multitudinous decisions required when a home is being custom-built. Recently it meant working with contractor Jasper Veenstra to design an award-winning home.

She has to be psychologist, educator, diplomat and counsellor as she smoothes the decision-making process for her clients. "People think that building or remodelling is a nightmare. It's my job to show them that it doesn't have to be that way.

"They think they have to do it all at once. I break it down into bite-size pieces. I help them get organized into a sequence. I tell them to go out and look at roofs, for instance, until they know what they like. 'Take pictures, but not on a snowy or a sunny day, when you'll get a dis-

torted result.' Then they can go and look at exterior coverings or windows another time.

"With my experience, I can save people lots of money and lots of grief. I prepare them for the problems. I can help them decide whether to renovate or sell and move.

"I prepare them for disagreements. I mend marriages all the time. Usually they're so confused. They don't know what they like. I ask questions. I find out about their lifestyle and their values. That's my R & D [research and development]. I say, 'Have you thought about...?' Or 'Do you think you will like that in the winter?'

"I help them know what they want. It's a shared experience. We have to think through the problems together. I have to be very sensitive to clients and their environment.

"Then I have to explain what I mean in common language. I have to say 'That's a calm colour, or that's a fun colour, a happy colour'. I have to help them imagine in three dimensions. I have to be very ingenious."

Sometimes she even brings things for the client to live with for awhile.

"Some people make decisions instantly. Others want lots of options. They may change their minds six times. My job is to leave them with a way to think about the problem, and a feeling of comfort in doing that. Then anxiety becomes joy. There's a feeling of peace and tranquillity.

"When we are through, I want them to be able to come home

and say 'I'm home,' with real excitement. I want them to be really glad to be there."

Loreen's "people" achievements have more to do with the team she leads at Palliser. "There's a synergy when you bring people together to work towards a common goal, when you use power to empower others. When people choose to be part of something, when they all 'own' it, and each contributes something, then a good idea becomes a fantastic idea. That's very rewarding."

Like Olenka, Loreen wants to be very sensitive to people's needs. She wants to use power the way Jesus used it, but she knows

My job is to leave them

with a way to think

about the problem,

and a feeling of comfort

in doing that.

she mustn't be naive about the realities of a business environment.

"There's a balance between accepting responsibility, earning respect, and giving credit to others for their part in the achievement."

The words "balance" and "professional" come up frequently in Loreen's conversation, partly because she knows her credibility in a male-dominated business environment depends on those two things.

"There's a cognitive dissonance between women and men. Men will accept things from other men that they will not accept from a woman; so we have to persevere, to be patient and positive. We have to be strong, but find a way to get the job done in a feminine way. We can't just try to be 'one of the boys.' There has to be a balance.

"And because I love my work, I have to balance that with other areas of life...especially as a Christian..., especially as a single woman."

Even more importantly, Loreen seeks the balance of wisdom borne of humility (James 3). "Women are often more honest about themselves than men are, but that isn't always well-received in the workplace.

"I have to observe, listen, make good decisions, accept responsibility for things not going well. Part of the challenge is to learn how to go from being creative to coaching creativity."

Part of the joy is learning her own strengths: "I have to establish my own standards, be strong in myself. I can't live for praise.

"I have to be consistent...able to handle pressure, interacting with many different people. I have to have a commitment to excellence. I have to be a specialist and a generalist."

For both women, service brings joy. Olenka said, "I can't think of any nicer way to sift through people's lives. It's emotional, even intimate. The reward is the client's joy when it comes out exactly the way they imagined it."

Loreen reflected, "I think the greatest reward is working with people effectively, solving problems, creating an idea, improving a process, making a difference. I have to find a way to keep people committed to doing things well, whether it's the relationship with dealers, or with other employees. And I have to make sure we're having fun while we're being productive. That way it's rewarding for everyone."

Donna Stewart, freelance writer and former Sophia board member, served as outreach staff member for Inner City Voice last year, under MCC. Donna and her husband, Gordon, presently live in Vancouver.



Loreen and an example of her work



Olenka at work

Pioneer Painter: The Watercolours of Mary Klassen

by Lori Matties

The 1930s were difficult years for prairie farmers. At a time when many Mennonites in Canada were preoccupied with forging a life from the soil, it is remarkable that Mary Klassen should have had the opportunity and encouragement to nurture her desire to paint. Born in 1918 in Osterwick, Ukraine, Mary and her family emigrated to Mayfair, Saskatchewan, in 1926.

In spite of the hardship, Mary fell in love with the land. Her creative and imaginative interpretation of the western Canadian landscape became the arena where she explored and expressed her response to life's circumstances and to the presence of God in nature. "From my earliest childhood," she writes, "I have felt 'The Presence' in the world around me.... The beauty of the morning, evening and each hour in between is meant to bring us comfort, to remind us of where we came from, a greeting from our true home" (quoted in *The Balancings of the Clouds: Paintings of Mary Klassen*, by John Unrau, Windflower Communications, 1991, p. 9. This tribute to Unrau's



mother's work is the primary source for this essay.).

As one of Canada's earliest Russian Mennonite women to work seriously at her art, Mary divided her energies between painting and her equally strong desire to be a wife and mother and to be active in the church. Such a division did not seem to her to be oppressive or contradictory. Rather, it was the combining for her of her most deeply felt convictions, and she felt joy in the pursuit of them.

Mary began drawing and painting in her early teens. In 1937, at the age of seventeen, she enrolled in art school at

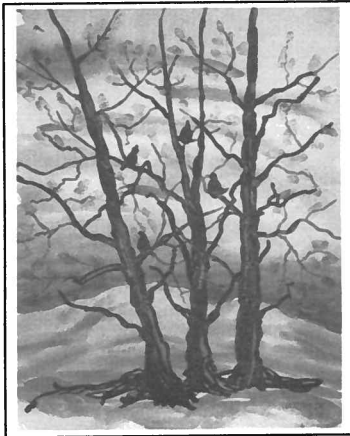
Saskatoon Technical Collegiate. Her parents, who had encouraged her early artistic expressions, offered neither objection nor encouragement to this endeavor, perhaps being concerned about its feasibility, since they were unable to offer financial help. It is significant that in a community where creativity apart from practical use was often viewed with suspicion, none of the leaders in the church spoke any objection.

Art school was a wonderful experience for Mary despite the

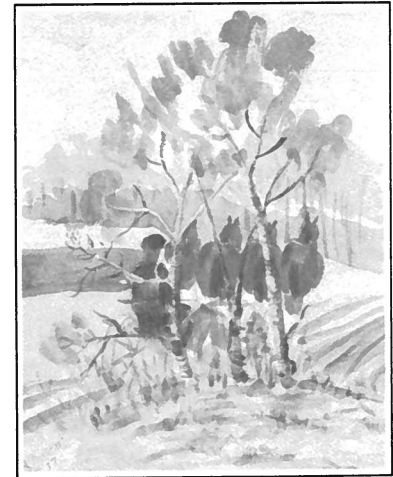
fact that she had to spend free evenings and weekends supporting herself through domestic jobs. She cut some costs by boarding together with her brother, who was attending university.

In her studies under artist and teacher Ernest Lindner she developed traditional techniques of drawing and composition as well as learning and experimenting with newer forms. Lindner was particularly impressed with her use of colour, which often combined bold and warm shades of yellow, brown and orange. By her third year, she was at a peak of happiness and productivity, both spiritually and artistically. "I felt so close to the Truth that everything I saw brought joy. Church gave me the direction and the closer a walk I had with Him the more inspiration came" (Unrau, p. 23). Mary was baptized at the end of that year.

In spite of her desire to continue studying and painting, her marriage in 1940 and the subsequent births of two sons in 1941 and 1942 slowed her ability



Four Quail, 1978. The bright colours in this painting, as well as the stark relief of branches and roots, give it an agitated quality, portraying Mary's excitement at discovering the quail in her garden.



Hope: Spring '27, 1937. Painted at the end of her first year at Art School, this work expresses the hope of forging a new beginning in a new land.

to continue painting. Her early married life was filled with financial instability, frequent moves, and difficult births of two more children, which left her in fragile health for a number of years. In 1949, the family settled in Edmonton, where they were to stay for more than twenty years.

The sudden death of her husband in 1961, though devastating, created an opportunity for Mary to put her creativity to practical use in the form of teaching. She made her basement into a teaching studio and for the next nine years was able to support herself by instructing young people in the techniques of drawing and painting. Her own work also flourished during that time. A second marriage in 1973 brought an end to her teaching and a move to Victoria and then Ottawa, where Mary survives her second husband and continues to paint.

Mary Klassen's paintings reflect the phases and circumstances of her life. Many are calm or joyful expressions of a moment of peace or a memory of a place loved. Some are troubled portrayals of stormy disharmony or bleak resignation. Most draw the eye upward, toward the sky, as if pointing to a mystery beyond sight. The later paintings in particular are reflections on passages of scripture. Her style is one of simplicity, with a few strokes or a particular use of colour expressing her interpretation of the scene.

In a period when "serious" artists were encouraged to move beyond representational paintings to abstract ones, Mary continued to paint the landscapes that gave her joy. The legacy she leaves is one of the courage and determination of a woman who expressed her creative gift when few in her cultural and religious community were willing to allow themselves or others that freedom. For that courage, and for its satisfying results, she deserves tribute.

Lori Matties is a member of River East MB Church. She lives and writes in Winnipeg.

The Mirror of the Martyrs Manitoba Exhibit, April 15-May 8, 1994 Concord College, Winnipeg.

Reviewed by Agnes Dyck

"Human kind cannot bear very much reality."
(T.S. Eliot)

Introduced by a video inviting the viewer to reflect on the witness of the "Damnably stubborn," the exhibit consists of large panels with light blue, black and white prints portraying an historical array of martyrs dating from Polycarp, 156 circa, to contemporary martyrs such as Archbishop Romero. Photos, funeral shirts, poetry, description and lithographs add to an interesting display.

Most compelling, artistically, are the prints made from 23 of the original 104 copper-plate etchings Jan Luyken completed for the 1685 edition of *Martyrs Mirror*. Thirty of the 104 plates still exist and are kept in the Kauffman Museum in Goshen, Indiana. Eight of these original plates, the basis for this exhibit, are displayed in a glass case. Detailed, realistic line drawings with minute cross-hatching are the work of a master craftsman. Jan Luyken (1649-1712) studied painting and composed poems before he became a print-maker. At age 26 he experienced a radical change of life and became known as a man of winsome spirituality.

The centre of the exhibit features a cell-like enclosure with a charred post and a chain, evoking sites and instruments used to execute the victims. Most were martyred for faith reasons; however, contemporary dissidents, as well as victims of ethnic cleansing such as holocaust victims, are also included.

A caption in the exhibit reads: "More than four thousand Anabaptists died as martyrs—more than any other group in the 16th century." One third of the martyrs were women. Their names read like endearments: Maeyken, Maria, Ursula, Anneken, Levina. Levina's story is a particularly poignant one:

Levina Ghyselius was burned with David (Vander Leyen), but her arrest and trial were unrelated to his. Her execution had been delayed because of her pregnancy. Several months earlier her husband, Willem, an Anabaptist shoemaker, was executed. Only after Levina delivered her baby did the authorities kill her, leaving her six orphaned children, including a newborn infant.

The exhibit raises more questions than it answers. Who were the powerful perpetrators, the decision makers? What of those who prepared the torture instruments? What about the executioners? The prevailing political climate and the surrounding culture obviously had some influence on the events. Children were allowed to witness the executions. How did the survivors live with their memories? One viewer commented, "The suffering of the martyrs ended. What about the instigators?"

Some of the martyrs displayed joy as they were dying. A recurring response to the exhibit has been, "I admire such courage but I couldn't do that." Abe Dueck, the organizer of the Manitoba exhibit, remarked: "When it happens, it's a miracle."



*Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, and his praise
in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel be glad in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with
dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.
For the Lord takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with salvation*

(Psalm 149:1-4 NIV).

Sing to the Lord

I became a Christian as a child and easily accepted the things my parents taught me about God. As a young mother, I often used my children's naptime as a quiet time to study the Bible and get to know God better. As the children grew up, the demands on my time changed, and somehow my quiet time with God was gradually forgotten.

In the Bible, Satan is referred to as the "deceiver" and the "accuser." As my relationship with God became more distant, Satan weaseled his way in and began his dirty work in my heart. More and more I felt guilt and condemnation in place of the joy I had once had. I still believed that God was for real, I just couldn't believe that he was real for me.

God has a unique and beautiful answer for each of us. He gave me the opportunity to learn about the tambourine from Teri Myers. I was drawn to the freedom and majesty of the tambourine, and the joy that Teri expressed towards God with every inch of her heart, mind and body.

I faithfully attended the practices because I wanted to learn what Teri had to teach me. One day she suggested that I was ready to play in church. I told her that I really didn't want to play in public. I felt that, regardless of the way I might appear on the outside, God could see right through to the inside of me and there is no pretending before God.

I believe that at this time God was inviting me to take a small step towards him. I was very afraid. I knew that it would be easier to stay where I was, even if I wasn't happy, than to take a risk, and dancing in a Mennonite Brethren church is taking a risk!

After several weeks of encouragement from Teri, I did decide to play in church. When I stood at the front of the church with my arms raised in praise to God, I felt very vulnerable and humble. And God was faithful. I saw him with his arms stretched toward me saying, "I love you Ingrid!" God wasn't impressed with my effort to be a good person or with my long line of Mennonite

ancestors, or even with my ability to speak German and sing in harmony. I realized that it is just me that he loves. Satan had been trying to weigh me down with guilt and condemnation, but God's way is to offer redemption.

That was almost two years ago. Since then God has revealed himself to me in ways I never imagined. I have learned that the power of praising God is more than enough to heal my heart and to bring healing and revival

A New Song

by Ingrid Koss

into a church. I believe that God works in miraculous and extraordinary ways when we are willing to move beyond the ordinary and expected and step out in faith toward him.

For the past two years our tambourine group has been invited by the worship leaders of the early service to play almost every Sunday. This has brought about growth in our physical ability to play the tambourine. More importantly it has challenged us repeatedly to be open to what God has to teach us. I have learned to be confident about who I am in Christ, and I want God to be delighted with the attitude of my heart.

As a Mennonite Brethren church, we have, over the years, established acceptable ways of behaving in church while we worship God. We are humble people, circumspect and unadorned, with an exceptional gift for music. Our traditions have been established over the years by godly people who wanted to ensure that future generations would also live in obedience to the will of God. They wanted to pass on the blessing they had received in the Lord. But tradition without the Spirit of God becomes merely law. Jesus came to set us free from the impossible expectations of the law.

The scriptures are full of references to celebrations, revelry, and joyous praise. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people threw down their coats and waved palm branches in reckless abandonment. They were wel-

coming their long awaited king and Messiah. "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9). They took a huge risk in adoring him publicly.

Hundreds of years earlier, a similar procession had happened in the very same streets of Jerusalem. David was bringing the ark of God into the city with huge celebration. His wife Michal saw him leaping and dancing before the Lord with all his might, and she despised and mocked him for it. David answered her, "I will celebrate before the Lord" (II Samuel 6:21b). Raised as a daughter in the royal court of King Saul, Michal knew about appropriate public behaviour. But God honoured David because David was a man after the heart of God.

Searching after God means taking risks; it means seeking God's will for our lives and following it even if it contradicts traditional behaviour. Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the



Tambouriniers participate in worship service

Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Sometimes we rejoice because we feel like it. Sometimes we rejoice because we choose to. Regardless of my feelings or my circumstances, Christ is worthy of my highest praise. When the day comes that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:10,11), I want my knees and my tongue to be well practised in the art of praising Jesus.

Ingrid Koss and her husband Rick are members of McIvor Avenue MB Church. They have two teenage children, enjoy renovating, gardening and the outdoors. Ingrid plays tambourine in church and with the Saturday Night Praise Band.

Family Dynamics: A Conference Report

by Joanne Klassen

The theme of this year's Canadian MB Conference in Edmonton was "Renewing Family Life," and the Conference proceedings were an illustration of family dynamics, both positive and negative.

I was struck by how little attention was given to the family life of the Conference during business sessions, when numerous unspoken feelings and thoughts begged for attention, and a sensitive, guiding hand could possibly have diffused some difficult and latently contentious moments. Instead, it was business as usual, with little regard for process.

The largest issue of the convention was the withdrawal of Harry Heidebrecht's name as the candidate for Conference Minister. There was very little truth-telling in the way this event was handled. Heavy disappointment, embarrassment, guilt, anger and sadness of those involved in the decision, and those affected by it were hardly acknowledged, let alone explained. The leadership of the Conference clearly desired their decision to have as muted an effect as possible. The delegates were left to speculate, listen to rumours in the foyer and try to find an "inside" track to get their information. In consequence, this became the "family secret" of the convention. Just as family secrets in nuclear families can be destructive to positive family dynamics, so the secrecy surrounding this event was damaging to the Canadian MB family gathered in Edmonton. There was an insidious air of despondency that descended on the delegation.

Highlights of the convention were two sermons, one by Lorraine Dick and the other by Dan Unrau. Not only were the sermons well-delivered, thoughtful and thought-provoking, but they also expanded the scope of the family to include singles and other non-traditional family units. Lorraine's sermon encouraged each adult to contemplate what legacy s/he was passing on to the next generation. Dan's sermon focused on moving toward wholeness in familial relationships by taking risks in sharing ourselves with our families. There was an acknowledgement that threats to family well-being do not come just from the world, but from our own impulses toward destruction of trust and reluctance to openly engage one another.

Lorraine and Dan emphasized Christianity as good news for healing relationships, growing into rich relational experiences and understanding relationship as central to our effectiveness as Christians. Both these sermons were encouraging and moved me toward hope for personal growth in my own family context, and also for families in our churches who are seeking to grow toward wholeness.

As I drove away from Edmonton I was conscious of a deflated feeling about our effectiveness in working as a Conference. On the other hand, I was encouraged as I considered the effectiveness of personal relationships in bringing gradual healing to individuals, families and congregations.

Joanne Klassen (*River East MB*) is a recent graduate of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, with one MA in theology and another in Marriage, Family and Child Counselling. She is currently establishing a therapy practice in Winnipeg.



A long time ago, the early thirteenth century to be exact, Francis of Assisi wondered how to make the Christmas message relevant for the villagers in the surrounding area. Very few people could read, and with the variety of dialects, the usual methods of communication were somewhat limiting. After intense deliberation, he decided to dramatize the story of Jesus' birth. Francis arranged for friends to play the roles of Mary and Joseph and he even brought in live animals as part of the outdoor stable reproduction.

The response was overwhelming. Great crowds came to see the reenactment and Francis quickly realized that he had made the right choice. People understood the concept that God came into this world in human form and in circumstances much like their own. God became flesh. They were able to comprehend because they saw for themselves. The message was received.

Drama does that. It reaches people in ways that the spoken word alone cannot. We are permitted to see from another angle. We are given a more complete picture.

Drama is usually more visual than other aspects of our worship services. Many churches make the assumption that visual interpretations are just for the very young, but we only need to look at each other or at the world around us to see that God has created a very visual cosmos for the benefit of people of all ages. We see dramas of birth, life and death unfolding before us every day of our lives.

During a recent visit with my sister in Ontario, she told me about two mourning doves that had just begun building a nest on her trellis. She excitedly described how they were gathering small twigs and carrying them to the nest. Yet despite her detailed description, I wanted to witness it for myself. Seeing them in action would make it my own personal experience. Then I would know exactly how it was happening and not just how I imagined it from her words.

Drama gives us that front row seat. When we bring drama into the church we give ourselves the opportunity

to see first hand. It is the vehicle of communication that comes closest to real life for people of all ages. We are naturally interested in things that parallel our own existence.

When churches think of drama, they may rule it out for fear of endless rehearsals, long scripts, memorization and complex sets. Fortunately there are many simple and practical ways it can work.

For example, instead of one individual reading a scripture passage, it can be divided up into logical characters and parts. The different roles and the varying voice pitches make a passage come alive and take on a whole new meaning. This takes a limited amount of rehearsal, only a few people, no set and no memorization.

Another possibility is to dramatize a story rather than have one individual read it. Everyone's attention is immediately captured and the interaction between characters is much more obvious than when the story is told by one person. Elaborate sets or costumes are not required. Simple symbolic furnishings or articles of clothing provide the necessary clues to the setting, and the imagination of the audience fills in the rest.

Even a sermon can be adapted and presented in a readers' theatre format. Instead of one voice making a lengthy presentation, several individuals can speak. Their varied vocal tones and personal inflections add colour and richness to the text. The sermon becomes a conversation instead of a lecture.

The beauty of drama is that people of all ages can be involved. If parts are carefully assigned, rehearsed and directed, there is no limit to who can participate and what can be done.

Not only does the congregation benefit from this type of presentation, but also those involved are impacted very directly. When someone plays the role of the Samaritan woman or of Peter denying Jesus, they experience, in a whole new way, what that character is about. They become that person for a short time and sud-

Curtain Call

DRAMA IN THE CHURCH

by Connie Epp

denly understand the effect Jesus must have had on that individual.

While drama has tremendous potential, it must be used cautiously and responsibly. It is important that what is presented is theologically sound. Just because something appears in print doesn't mean it's good. A play that will be presented in the worship service should be carefully reviewed before it is used. Many church dramas today offer over-simplified answers, trivialize God or put God in a box.

There should always be a clear vision of what the drama is supposed to achieve. When used in a worship service several questions need to be asked. What point is this drama trying to make? Does it make that point effectively? Is that the point we want it to make?

Church drama can appear to be a big risk at times, but without taking that chance we also run the risk of missing out on something very significant. Francis of Assisi was willing to take that gamble because he understood the importance of the message and felt this was the best way that it could be communicated.

There are still many important messages that need to be communicated today. Drama is an exciting vehicle through which we can facilitate effective communication. Let's allow ourselves to become vulnerable and take some of those risks. They will pay off if we give them the time and attention they deserve.

Connie Epp has recently set aside her music teaching career and is pursuing further studies in theatre and religion at Concord College and the University of Winnipeg. She is married, the mother of two children, and is a deacon at the River East MB Church.

🍷 Artists Among Us 🍷

Talia Shore



Talia Shore interprets the passion story during the Good Friday Service at River East MB Church.

Lorenda Harder



Lorenda Harder created this ink drawing and poem to convey the stark and disturbing reality of God's demand for absolute justice. If we gaze upon God's greatest and most terrible act of justice, the sacrifice of his son, then Grace begins to be revealed in our lives. We can be thankful for having escaped such terrible judgment and stop attempting to pay for our sins.

***The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields,
Random House, 1993. (361 pages)**

Reviewed by Lorie Battershill.

"My mother's name was Mercy Stone Goodwill. She was only thirty years old when she took sick, a boiling hot day, standing there in her back kitchen, making a Malvern pudding for her husband's supper" (p.1). These words begin *The Stone Diaries*, a novel by Winnipeg author Carol Shields. The book is the almost-true life story of one Daisy Goodwill Flett, born 1905 in Tyndall, Manitoba.

As I was reading, a piece of paper fluttered to the floor. It was a note left behind by a previous library patron. It read:

Dear Peter,
I should be home by 8. Your supper is under
foil in the refrigerator. Heat it in the oven at
300 for 15 minutes. I'll see you later.
Love,
Susan.

This note seemed to be part of the novel. *The Stone Diaries* is a collective record: bits of paper found in almost forgotten places, letters, a journal entry, the menu from a luncheon held long ago. Voices from the past contribute their memories and highlight Daisy's life from other perspectives. And then Daisy tells her point of view and with her we can examine the inner life in the first person.

The Chapter headings are an outline of life: "Birth," "Childhood," "Marriage," "Love," "Motherhood," "Work," "Sorrow," "Ease," "Illness and Decline," and "Death." The story is rich with detail, from vivid recollections of the old peddler who was present at Daisy's unexpected birth to the recipe for Aunt Daisy's Lemon Pudding, found among her papers when she died. I was tempted to test the recipe to see if it was genuine. That's what reading *The Stone Diaries* is like. Whose memories are these? The book even includes old photographs for the reader to study. Where did all these details come from, this imagined biography of an ordinary life? And if it is just an ordinary life then what is it that draws the reader's fascination?

I have always been intrigued by life stories. Seeing life in overview gives it a new dimension. Our own days are spun out one at a time and we seldom have time to step back to look at the whole. But in *The Stone Diaries* we can observe as life's tapestry evolves and here and there we can see patterns from our own lives coming to light.

Near the end of the novel Daisy's daughter Alice comes to visit her dying mother. "On the plane coming over she had invented rich, thrilling dialogues for the two of them. 'Have you been happy in your life?' she planned to ask her mother... 'Have you found fulfilment?'" But when she is actually standing at her mother's bedside she only whispers the question we all might ask. "Just tell me how I'm supposed to live my life" (p.326).

Reading *The Stone Diaries* allows the reader to observe and question along with Alice.

Lorie Battershill (*Grace Lutheran*) is a Winnipeg freelance writer.

***The Gospel According to Mary: A New Testament
for Women* by Miriam Therese Winter.
Crossroad, New York, 1993. (143 pages)**

Reviewed by Deborah Penner.

In the first sentence of her introduction to *The Gospel According to Mary*, Miriam Therese Winter reminds her readers that what follows is an "imaginative work." She adds, "Imaginative, but not ahistoric." I found that if I approached the book with this imaginative mindset and put aside my stereotyped "Sunday school" notions about the gospel, this appealing little book (only 140 pages of easy-to-read print) opened new doors of understanding to the gospels, particularly to the role of Jesus' female disciples.

Winter creates a female gospel writer named Mary, "the granddaughter of Mary the mother of John Mark, who led a house church in Jerusalem." Winter points out that the author, as a child, "often went with her mother to worship at her grandmother's house." Sources for her gospel include her grandmother, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene.

Highlights of Mary's gospel include Mary Magdalene's call as a disciple alongside the story of Peter and Andrew's calling, and Jesus' appearance to the disciples on the Emmaus road. Winter identifies them as Mary and her husband Cleopas. Somehow, imagining Jesus appearing to a couple, both husband and wife, makes the story all the more poignant and inclusive. Women didn't just hear about Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection from male disciples—they were eye witnesses.

Winter's created gospel writer is not above a bit of ironic humour. In her account of the birth of John the Baptist, she makes it clear that the cause of Elizabeth's barrenness was Zechariah's "periodic impotence," and that God told Elizabeth about the impending birth first. Zechariah loses his power of speech because he "dismissed God's word to her'...."

These incidents and those describing Mary the mother of Jesus and other female disciples are particularly strong, giving new insights to an old, old story. However, I was disappointed in Winter's treatment of the gospel parable, "The Delinquent Daughter" (the Prodigal son). The yearning of the mother to gather the lost child just doesn't come across as in the original.

I detected some unevenness in the gospel parables. In most cases male characters were changed to female; however, in the parables that deal with women in the original, the female orientation was retained. Perhaps this was an attempt to rectify centuries of male-oriented Christian thought, but at times I had the feeling that the author, while proposing to give us something new, did little more than change pronouns in some of the gospel stories.

Deborah Penner, Hillsboro, Kansas, teaches writing and is a master's degree candidate in English at Wichita State University. She is the former assistant editor of *The Christian Leader*.

Please send me Sophia magazine.
I am pleased with the efforts made
and very disappointed in the MBs
lack of movement for
women in leadership.

Jean Janzen
Fresno, California

i received sophia as i returned from
church on the feast day of saint
anthony. a big feast day here. lots
of women wearing saint anthony
headscarfs and shirts. very festive.
does the mennonite church have
saints?

i like your comments in the editori-
al. sometimes you have to give "the
luggage" to someone else to carry
(for a while). i think that's o.k. we all
need to be helpful to one another. i
want to say "especially right now,"
but i think it was always that way/
always will be. when we need help, it
seems the right people are sud-
denly there. this is why i believe in
angels!

here is a prayer i wrote:

praying like an artist

thank you god
for the sound of windchimes
for the scent of lilacs
and for the soft sounds
of a guitar.

i pray
for daily food, water and peace.
i pray
that i am brave enough
to speak to my friends
about my saddest thoughts
for this
will be the strength
of our friendship.

i pray for love
from the great creator,
from my co-workers,
from my family,
and from myself.

i pray for the little birds
in winter
that they may find seeds
and i pray for the flowers
in summer
that they may receive water.

i pray
that i radiate love
wherever i am
as long as i am
on this earth.

thank you for the roses
and yes, for the rainbow.

and i also pray that i will be able
to stand my ground
when i need to.
amen.

(June 1994, New York City)

Magie Dominic
New York, NY

Portraits of Dignity *by Ray Dirks*

There are no more joyous sounds on earth than those of Zaire's distinctive popular music. Each song is a celebration defying one not to dance.

There are currently no more tragic scenes on earth than the million or more Rwandese refugees streaming into the human-created squalor of eastern Zaire - in the midst of some of the most beautiful of God's creation. Watching the steady flow of listless humanity endlessly snaking out of Rwanda only to face cholera of plague proportions is difficult, heartbreaking and, eventually, numbing. We must do something. We have to do something. Our compassion is spurred on by pity.

As I sit here writing, and wanting to cry, I hear and feel the music of the legendary Papa Wemba pumping out of my tape deck behind me, forcing my feet to move. Anyone want to dance? This icon of Kinshasa prompts me to remember another steady stream of humanity my wife and I experienced every day during our time spent living in the capital of Zaire.

Each late afternoon women would stride purposefully into Kinshasa from the surrounding countryside. They carried incredible burdens of wood or charcoal on their heads. As darkness descended they were still coming one after another, reaching to the horizon. From a distance they were all fluidity and grace. From close up they were power, rippling muscles and sweat. I often remember their strength and beauty.



At the Kanzombi Clinic (Zaire), 1991.

I am an artist. The subjects I am most driven to paint, to generalize, are the women of Africa. Why? Because of the wood carriers of Kinshasa; because of the pride and spirit of the mothers and farmers of Zaire, and of other countries I have worked in in Africa; because of the beauty radiating from that special, unexplainable spirit common in so much of Africa; because of the hospitality, grace, honor, and dignity I have experienced.

My desire to work with Africans is not a result of pity but of respect. I have to admit, I have always been attracted to cultures other than my own and have always felt more alive, especially as an artist, when in situations I cannot predict based on my own cultural experience. Yet ultimately I choose subjects out of respect and the wish to reveal some of that reason for respect to fellow North Americans.

I think of leaders within our own Mennonite Brethren church in Zaire such as Pakisa Tshimika and Nzash Lumeya. I

cannot recall two people I respect more, anywhere. I think of Muaku Kinana, my best friend in Kinshasa, and how he has never asked me for anything and how he has put his own life in jeopardy on my behalf, without question. Pity? I do not pity these people. I admire them greatly. I am humbled and honoured to call them friends and to have had the opportunity to learn from them.

During these times of undeniable horror occurring not only in Rwanda but in other parts of Africa, and in areas of the rest of the world, we cannot forget the refugees of Rwanda, even with their links to the regime that caused most of the chaos. I believe God calls us to help them. I believe just as strongly that God calls us to remember the strengths of Africa and to help the world to see the silent majority toiling with dignity throughout the continent.

I often reflect on Africa and my time there, especially when Zaire's music is filling the air around me. I close my eyes. I remember the beautiful worship services. I remember eating in friends' homes. I remember holding hands with Muaku at Kinshasa's Ndjili Airport and how we both felt we never wanted to let go. I remember a traditional Masai wedding I attended in Kenya during a time of severe drought, and how when it ended the groom approached me and said, "If you are ever here again, you are welcome. Even if I am not home you may ask for water." I remember the wood carriers of Kinshasa. I believe God has called me to reveal in these portraits the people of dignity I have had the great privilege to know.

Ray Dirks lives in Winnipeg with his wife, Katie, and their two daughters, Alexa and Lauren. They attend Valley Gardens Church.

*My desire to work with Africans is not
a result of pity but of respect.*

GLEANINGS

❖ A reception was held at the River East Church on August 28 for **Sally Schroeder Isaak** whose new book, *Some Seed Fell on Good Ground* was recently released by Windflower Communications. The book describes her calling to ministry and her work with German radio programming at HCJB in Quito, Ecuador.

❖ The MCC women's auxiliary has chosen a new name: "**Women for MCC.**" Current president is **Ruth Krahn** from Steinbach.

❖ **Martha Klassen** (River East MB) spent time this summer gardening with several El Salvadoran families. She solicited donations of seeds, tools and land for the summer. **Alba Menjivar** recruited workers from among the El Salvadorans living in Winnipeg to plant, weed and harvest the plots.

Manitoba weather diminished what started out to be a very promising harvest. However, although there wasn't enough produce to sell as originally planned, the families will have a variety of vegetables to can or freeze for winter.

❖ **Lorna Dueck** (Steinbach MB) has been appointed co-host of the 100 Huntley Street TV program. Dueck, a freelance writer and broadcaster with Focus on the Family, assumed the new position in Burlington, Ontario, on September 1.

❖ **Cindy Klassen**, a grade 10 student at MBCI, was chosen to represent Manitoba in a lacrosse exhibition tournament at the Commonwealth Games in Victoria, BC. Cindy began playing lacrosse only in the summer of 1993 in a school program initiated by the Manitoba Lacrosse Association.



❖ **Fifty women** met at the Canadian MB Conference in Edmonton to share concerns about women in leadership. Sponsored by the Manitoba MB Women's Network, the informal supper meeting provided the opportunity for sisters from across Canada (and a few from the US) to meet face to face to share concerns and hopes. Topics touched on included: 1. local "climate," 2. continuing reluctance in some churches to implement conference policy that allows women to lead worship, sit on church councils and preach and 3. the importance of including women and men beyond Manitoba in the Network.

❖ **Doreen Klassen**, Steinbach MB, travelled to Mexico this past summer to interview Mennonites and record their stories. This project is sponsored by MCC.

❖ The first academic conference on **Anabaptist Women's History** is planned for **June 8-11, 1995**, at Millersville University in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. For information call (717)872-3233, fax (717)871-2003.

❖ "**My Dream To Be Free**," a recording of Christian pop music sung by **Maxine Gacek** was recently released at local bookstores. Maxine and her family attend Mclvor Avenue MB Church.

❖ **Tina Doerksen**, Eastview MB, was the speaker at the unveiling of a cairn to commemorate the former school of Blumstein, Manitoba, a community formed in the 1870s. She taught in the school 1942 - 1944.

❖ **Margaret Fast** and writer **Dora Dueck** collaborated to tell the moving story of Margaret and Bill Fast's son, Willie, and his long struggle with leukemia. Proceeds from sales of *Willie; Forever Young* will go to the Children's Cancer Fund.

❖ **Lois Fast** has faithfully and efficiently kept accounts and processed the circulation of *Sophia*, from the start. We wish her well as she moves on to other employment.

Thanks, Lois!

MCC MANITOBA

WOMEN'S CONCERNS COMMITTEE

Welcomes everyone to an informal gathering with

Cynthia Peacock,
Women's Concerns Director in India

Date: Tuesday, November 29, 1994

Time: 7:30 p.m. (call 261-6381 to confirm time)

Place: MCC Board Room, 134 Plaza Dr.

Ms. Peacock will speak about challenges and dilemmas impacting women in her culture, and women's efforts to address their concerns.

THE MB WOMEN'S NETWORK
is planning an educational conference
on gender issues in the church.

Mennonite theologian

Lydia Harder

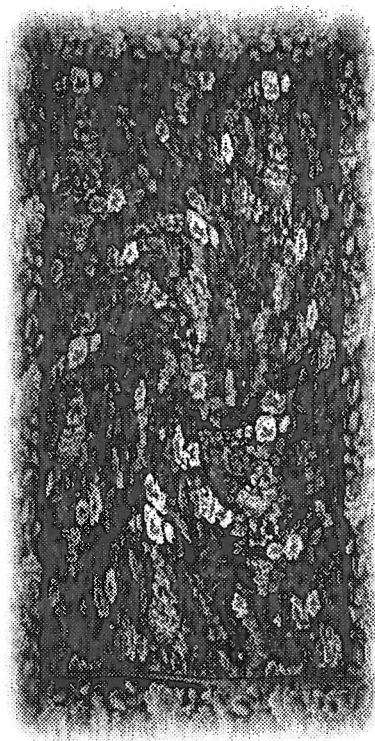
will speak on the theme:

**Invitation to Healing
& Discipleship.**

There will also be a series of workshops.

The conference will take place at Concord College on February 17 - 18, 1995.

Watch for further information in the Mennonite periodicals.



All the skillful women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun in blue and purple and crimson yarns and fine linen; all the women whose hearts moved them to use their skill spun goats hair.

Exodus 35:25,26
(New Revised Standard Version)
