

# SOPHIA

W I S D O M

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

*Draft*



River East #11  
Kathy Dueck

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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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## MISSION STATEMENT

*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)*

# Why Must We Suffer in Silence?

by Lori Matties



In the summer of 1991, when I was six weeks pregnant with my second child, my good friend experienced the loss of a son in the eighth month of her pregnancy. Our church held a memorial service in which we as a congregation could share grief with my friend, her husband, and their family. But that was not all. As the pastor spoke, he gave voice to the silent grief of several other women in the congregation who had experienced the loss of a child before birth. For the first time in the five years since my first miscarriage, I felt released from a very private pain.

There are other pains we women often suffer in silence. Our first period, pre-menstrual syndrome, infertility (which we share equally with our husbands), so-called "morning sickness" (which can last not only all day but long past the first twelve weeks of pregnancy), post-natal depression, menopause; all these phases in our lives play a part in our ability to perform daily tasks. For some, they are simply passages that we hardly notice; sometimes they enhance our creativity and sense of well-being. For others, they may be annoying, painful, debilitating. Yet, until recently, most of us have felt that these very personal aspects of our lives were to be kept private; we were not supposed to talk about them. At the same time, there was an unspoken attitude that the emotional side-effects somehow made us inferior, unable to cope with many of the stresses of the world outside home and family.

Fortunately, women are becoming more open about these issues, especially in sharing their experiences and knowledge with each other, and society in general is becoming more aware and less prone to stereotyping.

We in the church need to lead our sisters and brothers in the direction of openness and ministry to one another throughout the phases of our bodies and our lives. We need to be on the forefront of providing spiritual comfort and encouragement. We need to share our experiences with each other, so that those who suffer will not have to feel alone and will know when and how to find help. Our bodies should not shame us into silence. They are the precious gift of our creator, made in all their functions for honour and glory.

That is why we chose to devote an issue of *Sophia* to the cycles of our bodies. May the information and experience provided here give us courage to release one another from the pain of suffering in ignorance and in silence.

# Two Women, Twelve Years

by Dora Dueck

*Jesus' healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage.  
Mt 9:18-26, Mk 5:21-43, Lk 8:41-56.*

ILLUSTRATION: DOROTHY STREILEIN



*...both stories  
cry,*

*Why didn't  
he come  
sooner?*

The account of these healings is a story within a story. Jairus makes an urgent appeal to Jesus about his sick daughter, and Jesus agrees to come to the house. While walking there, a woman – long ill with hemorrhage – takes advantage of the large crowd's anonymity to touch Jesus for healing. He realizes what has happened, and stops to speak with her. This delay heightens the drama, for bad news arrives from Jairus's house. Jesus continues on his way, not to see a sick girl, but to see one who has died.

The connection between the two healings begins with what we might call "coincidence": same time, same place. But each story affects the other. Their intertwining allows us to see, in short order and in proximity, two very different women, of different generations and status, at different points of need. The intertwining also allows us to see, in short order and proximity, Jesus engaging himself with these two women. As we watch him move, seamlessly it appears, from one story into the other and back again, we can almost imagine for a moment that the encounter is not two but one: his encounter with Woman, at one or another stage of her life.

It is significant that the twelve years the girl lived out her childhood (Mk 5:42) were the same twelve years the woman suffered (Mk 5:25).

For the girl and her parents those twelve years were a short span. As the mother of a twelve-year-old, I find myself amazed that she is in Junior High. Wasn't she born just yesterday? We express this in clichés like "time flies" but it's true: when life proceeds happily and normally, time is foreshortened.

Jairus's daughter was an only child. The father's entreaties and expressions of endearment tell us she was much loved. She probably enjoyed a comfortable home and the reflected status of her father's position as a synagogue official. In that culture, she would have been poised, at twelve, on the threshold of marriage and the experiences of womanhood. Alicia Craig Faxon suggests she may have suffered a kind of schizophrenia, "a catatonic state" in which she was unwilling to move forward from childhood into maturity. Naming her illness is speculative, of course, but the crisis, whatever it was, would have emphasized both the shortness and the loveliness of the preceding twelve years.

The same twelve years must have seemed an eternity to the woman with the hemorrhage. For twelve years she “had been subject to bleeding... suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors... spent all she had... grew worse” (Mk 5:26). As debilitating as her physical condition (perhaps a fibroid tumor in the womb) was her isolation. With a bleeding disorder, she was ceremonially unclean under Jewish law and literally untouchable. She was cut off from the social and religious life of the community. Twelve years of rising and ebbing hope, twelve years under the pronouncement, “she is unclean” (Lev 15:25). Likely she internalized this label, though obviously she disliked it. She impoverished herself in the quest of a “clean” bill of health.

The same twelve years and two women at different stages, but both stories cry, “Why didn’t he come sooner?” That is not answered. What we have instead is Jesus meeting each in a specific moment in time and decisively healing her.

In the process, Jesus rejected the standards of “uncleanness” represented by the woman and the girl. In the child’s case he touched the corpse, confirming his statement that “the child is not dead” and indicating, in any case, he was not defiled by the contact.

His response to the woman also disregarded the ritual defilement incurred by their contact. He said, by implication, “This woman is not unclean.” Instead of rebuking her breach of religious propriety (as if she didn’t know that even clothing was contaminated by the touch of a “menstrual” woman), Jesus affirmed

her faith. He addressed the element of superstition in it – it was her faith and not his “undefiled” clothing that healed her. He insisted she own up to her risky action. Then, in the midst of people who shunned her, he blessed her as someone to whom he was intimately linked because of the touch that drew power out of him.

The meetings with Jesus, though set in a moment of time, transformed both the past and the future.

“Daughter, your faith has healed you,” Jesus said to the older woman. “Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” That comprehensive Shalom blessing encompassed also her past, with its shame and alienation. While it did not eliminate even one day of the twelve years or explain why she should have struggled so long, it freed her to look back in a new way. She could view the twelve years as years that developed her tenacity and faith and brought her to her encounter with her Lord.

*He said,  
by implication,*

*“This woman  
is not  
unclean.”*

To the twelve-year-old, Jesus said, “Little girl, I say to you, get up.” These words quite literally gave her a future. She was still “little girl” but she had been healed to get up and grow – to move forward into the next stage. As if to remind the astonished parents of this, Jesus instructed them to give her something to eat.

Jesus’ way of responding to both woman and child give us tremendous encouragement for how he meets us in the various stages of our lives. We can also be particularly instructed by the unnamed woman, a model of persistence and faith. She sought health with everything in her power. She had heard about Jesus and believed that he, at last, was the one who could help.

She acted secretly, even slyly, as she had probably learned to act, but her faith drew from Jesus the healing she required. Jesus said, “I know that power has gone out from me” (Lk 8:46). He signified, Lisa Sergico writes, “that it was not he who had used his power to heal her, but she who had taken it from him to heal herself.”

We cannot describe – not per formula, at least – the cause and effect of the intersection of Jesus’ power and the woman’s faith. But the woman’s importunity inspires us to seek fervently after Jesus, to touch him in faith for the healing and power we need.

*Dora Dueck, editorial staff member, is a freelance writer and editor. She, her husband, Helmut, and three children attend Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.*

# A Tale of Two Births

by Angie Jantz



*Angie Jantz, Adam and friends*



We were a third of our way through a three-year MCC term in Atbara, Sudan, when I discovered I was pregnant with our second child. The discovery explained why I was tired all the time and why the pungent odour of beans in the marketplace at breakfast time had become nauseating. It was an exciting discovery, and we soon began deliberating about how and where we wanted the baby to be born.

Atbara is a fairly large, dusty, desert town north of Khartoum. I was not altogether familiar with the medical facilities that would be available for the birth. Khartoum has a Catholic-run maternity clinic that has a good reputation. Another option was to travel to Nairobi where our Country Representatives lived and where modern medical facilities exist.

There were some compelling reasons to stay in Atbara for the birth. Travelling in Sudan is not easy at the best of times and would be even more difficult in the hot season while nine months pregnant. More importantly, Atbara had become our home, albeit temporarily, and we had friends and neighbours with whom it would be nice to share the event. We thought it would be a good opportunity to draw on the support and wisdom of the people around us and to experience childbirth within a different culture, having already experienced it once within our western culture.

As time went on we became more sure that we would stay in Atbara for the birth. The pregnancy was going well. While visiting Nairobi at Christmas I had an ultrasound and learned that as far as anyone could tell I could expect a normal delivery. I had also begun to learn about some of the resources available. Dr. Mohammed Esa was not an obstetrician but a doctor with a good reputation and a special interest in pregnancy and childbirth.

Initially, we thought we would have the baby in Atbara's hospital and return home after a few hours. That idea turned out to be more complicated than we anticipated. We would have to find transportation and bring with us everything we would need for the birth including medications, bed sheets, and an IV kit. We would also have to arrange for our own donors should the need for blood arise. I wanted Walter to be with me during the labour and delivery and while the hospital had agreed to that, husbands in the delivery room were considered a strange thing. Walter thought he would feel conspicuous.

In fact, since it is not a common occurrence for a foreigner to deliver in the hospital, or in Atbara for that matter, we felt we would be very much a curiosity and decided we would be more at ease in the seclusion of our own home.

A home birth was easy to arrange. Most babies in Atbara are born at home. Dr. Esa gave me a list of things we would need. Iqbal, our neighbour agreed to come and help. And so it was that at 2:30 a.m. on April 17, Dr. Esa, the midwife Khadum and Iqbal were assembled in our home.

Iqbal busied herself boiling water and gathering everything we would need. She worked with an air of confidence and efficiency that comes from having delivered her seven children at home. Every now and then she would rub a picture of a Coptic patriarch over my back

and stomach and whisper blessings and prayers for a safe delivery.

The doctor and midwife efficiently transformed the room into a delivery room. Plastic sheets and pillows were arranged on the bed. Sterilised instruments, boiled water and various drugs were set out on tables.

The contractions were well advanced by this stage and I was given an enema, which caused the contractions to become even more intense. Directly following my return from the outhouse, I was given a sedative by injection, which made everything foggy.

The sedative and the quick progression of labour gave me a feeling of having very little control over what was happening. I was aware of people around me urging me to push, but I felt removed from them. At several points, frustrated by their demands, I tried to move away from them.

I was given few of the reassuring touches, encouragement and information about how I was progressing that I had been given during the birth of my first son. With both births I was put on intravenous drip during the labour. To facilitate both deliveries I was given an episiotomy; both were handled skilfully with a local anaesthetic. Forceps were required for the first birth but not for the second. In Canada the afterbirth was discarded somehow unbeknownst to me; in Sudan Walter buried it under our lemon tree.

The time directly following the birth was handled quite differently by the two systems. In Canada, I was given the baby to hold for a while and then he was taken away to be weighed and examined. The nurses washed me and covered me with a warm blanket and then I was moved to the delivery room where I stayed for three hours. My blood pressure and temperature were checked regularly and the nurses were close by if I needed anything.

In Sudan the baby was wrapped in a sheet and left to lie quietly while I was washed and the room was cleaned up. Then the baby was wiped with a clean cloth and oil. I was given a strong cup of coffee, the doors and shutters were closed against the morning sun and everyone left the room, leaving Adam and me to rest in the dark quietness.

It wasn't until some expatriate friends brought us a scale the following day that we found out how heavy he was. Sudanese doctors and parents seem to be satisfied with a healthy baby, whereas for us no report is complete without the pertinent numbers.

After the delivery, Walter and the others relaxed and drank coffee in the other room. In addition to being the doctor and midwife they had also become friends. That is a very significant difference between the second birth and the first. About two hours after the birth, Fatima, our neighbour and good friend, came over with some *helba*, a thick,

sweet soup made with milk and *fenugreek*, which is widely used both to contract the uterus and provide strength to the mother. Then, as the news of Adam's birth spread through the neighbourhood, women began to arrive to see the baby. Women in Sudan feel a strong obligation to visit the mother as soon as they hear of the birth.

A week after the birth of a child there is a christening feast. A sheep is killed and everyone is invited to take part in the celebration. We had our own version of this feast minus the sheep. It was a wonderful celebration of Adam's arrival that included Northern Sudanese, Southern Sudanese and some expatriate friends. It was one of a number of events during our time in Sudan that helped to break the barriers that sometimes exist between these groups.

*Travelling in Sudan is not easy  
at the best of times and would be  
even more difficult in the hot season  
while nine months pregnant.*

As you can imagine, not every woman who has a baby in Sudan feels compelled to go through such a decision-making process, nor is she in such need of reassurance before, during and after the birth. That I did is a reflection of where I come from and what my prior experience had been. In Sudan childbirth is viewed as a natural event that one simply gets through with the least amount of coddling. The outcome is seen more as a reflection of the will of God than as a problem of lack of facilities.

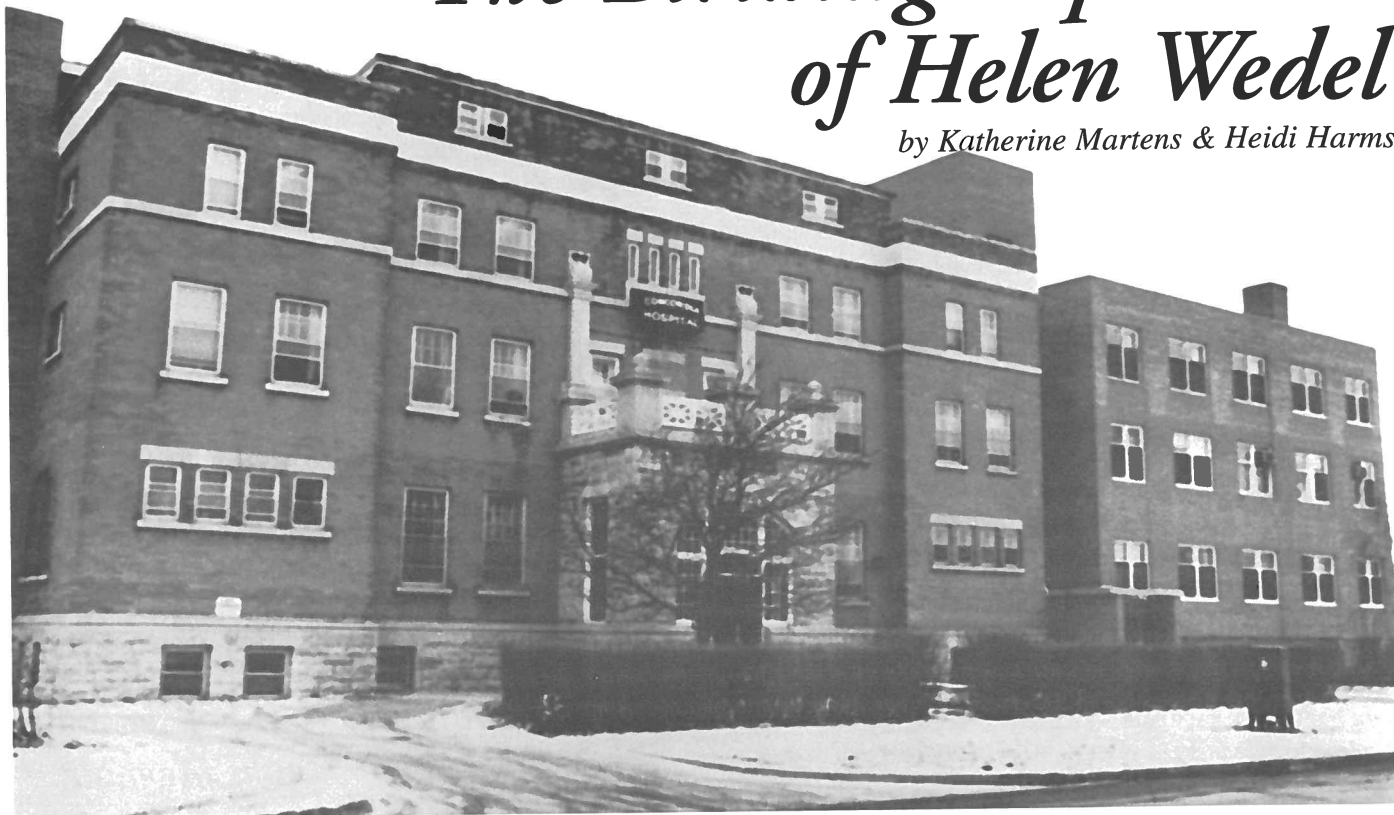
Western notions of what is necessary for the birth and well-being of a child are not universal. In Sudan needs are often determined by what is available and affordable. However, in spite of much poverty, children are welcomed without question. I did and still do vacillate between thinking that we did something quite adventurous by having our baby in Atbara, and on the other hand, realizing that we really didn't do anything very special at all.

*Angie Jantz and her husband, Walter Nikkel, spent three years in Atbara, Sudan, from 1990 to 1993. Angie was working with a Women's Development Project and Walter was teaching English. They now live in Thompson, MB, where Angie is a social worker and Walter is still a teacher. They have two boys, Jake and Adam.*



# *The Birthing Experience of Helen Wedel*

by Katherine Martens & Heidi Harms



*The old Concordia Hospital*

**H**elen Wedel was born in Omsk, Russia, in 1908 and lived in Siberia, and various places in Manitoba after she emigrated from Russia in the twenties. She married Jacob Wedel in 1929 and they had five children. When visited in February 1988 she was in the process of writing her memoirs for her children and grandchildren, so our interview in German seemed almost effortless. She talked without prompting. An excerpt of the interview follows:

The youngest boy was almost ten pounds. He was two weeks early. I had been splitting wood. We had guests, and I wanted to make *Faspa*. Usually my husband kept the box full of firewood, but now there was none. So I went quickly into the cellar and started splitting wood. And it was so hard, I almost couldn't do it, but I managed. We were at the school in Osborne at the time.

Right away on Monday my labour pains started. So my husband says, "We'll take you in." "No," I said; with my other daughter I had waited for two weeks here in Winnipeg, because I had had a fall and had dislocated it, and she was born two weeks later than her due date. So I said, "No, I don't want to sit in Winnipeg for two weeks again. I'm not going."

Well, he was a little anxious, he came in at every recess and asked how I was. I was working as hard as I could, cleaning and baking *Zwieback* and getting everything ready, because we had made arrangements to have a girl come in from La Salle, but she was only supposed to come in two weeks! We waited until after four, and then my husband said, "I'll go over to the neighbours', the Rempels, and ask if just in case we had to leave suddenly, she would be available."

So he took the bicycle over there. And while he was gone, I prayed. I prayed, "Dear God, if this is really the time, please send me a labour pain that will make me know for sure." And sure enough, I had such a strong pain that I had to lie down.

So now I knew. I quickly washed and changed my clothes, and our second daughter was so, she always noticed everything, very vivacious; she came in and said, "Mama, what are you doing?"

I said, "I want to go to the hospital and get the baby." I had been telling them for a while that we would be getting a new baby. "I want to come too!" "No, child,



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you cannot come with me, I'm going to have to stay there for awhile, and you can't come with me. I'll bring home a beautiful boy." I had the feeling it was going to be another boy, I had three girls in a row and wanted to have a boy. Well, she cried a bit, but since the others were staying home too, the oldest one was thirteen by now, and I told her, "Liese Rempel will come over, Papa has gone to ask her."

Well, it was all settled, I finished changing my clothes, gave the children fresh buns and milk. Then my husband came in and saw everything, and said, "Na?" and I said, "Let's go."

It had been raining for several days, and the ruts on the road were deep, and we had eighteen miles to go before the highway. The first few miles were all right, but then the ruts got deeper, and each time there was such a bump; my pains got so strong at one point, I said, "I'm not sure I can hold on." "Please try!" he said.

At first I had planned on lying down in the back of the car, but then I remembered something my sister-in-law had once told me: "If you're that close to delivery, don't lie down in the car. Stay upright, and you can hold onto it a bit longer." And I knew that if I were to lie down, it would have been born in the car. – Well, we hadn't gone very far yet, and it got quite bad, the urge to push started. Usually I had only one or two pushes and then the baby was there. My husband just couldn't see his way through, and drove as hard as he could.

When we finally got to Winnipeg – I had managed to suppress one of the push urges, I pressed down hard on the seat and prayed – we got into the city and there was suddenly a police officer there. The policeman followed us all the way to the Concordia, and my husband stopped and ran in; the policeman just looked inside the car and asked no questions, just left. But I was sure it would happen in the car, a few times it was so strong. And then when we stopped it let up a bit, I had suppressed it so hard. Two nurses came running out to the car to help me, and I said, "Oh just now the pains are gone, I can walk in by myself."

They took me into the hospital, and had a long discussion about which room they would put me in, and I

said, "Just put me in the birthing room, that's where I want to go. With the next push the baby is going to be there." Well, they didn't want to believe me because I wasn't having any pain at the moment. I told them, "I've been suppressing it, if I hadn't it would have already happened." They finally believed me and took me to the birthing room.

The head nurse went to phone the doctor right away, he was out of town and unavailable, so she phoned another one; and nothing was ready! The nurses were a bit flustered, they were just changing shifts; they brought me in, and I quickly undressed, and suddenly I was still wearing my corset and my stockings, and I could feel, here it comes! So I up on the table, and just then a practical nurse comes running in from the hall, "The baby's coming!" And the head nurse tells her, "Push it back!" She grabbed a piece of cotton wool and pushed it back. And the pains stopped instantly. But that should not have happened!

My husband had heard this, had heard me screaming and that the baby was coming, and then everything was quiet. He was alarmed by this, and ran, there was an old nurse named Johanna, who lived across the street in a nurses' home; she had just finished her day shift and gone home. He asked, "Where is Sister Johanna?" and was told she had left, so he ran after her and brought her in, and just as she was entering, the baby started coming for the second time, and again the head nurse told the practical nurse, "Push it back."

She was just getting her cotton wool again when the door opened and Johanna came in. And she grabbed the practical nurse by the arm and yanked her away and said, "No more pushing back here!" And as she was speaking, the baby was there. That's how quickly it happened. And that nurse, as well as the head nurse, was laid off later. That was very dangerous, they said. But anyway, he was a big boy, almost ten pounds. That was an experience I will never forget!

Katherine Martens and Heidi Harms are working on a book tentatively titled "*In Her Own Voice: Mennonite Childbirth Stories*," using interviews collected by Katherine in 1988. Both live in Winnipeg and have published several other works.

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# Letter from Lithuania

by Sarah Klassen

My first morning in Lithuania I look out my window and see an elderly woman sweeping the street four floors below me. She uses a sturdy broom made of branches, the kind you read about in fairy tales. But her life is no fairy tale. Although she is surely pension age, she will not be able to pay for food, rent, heat and electricity with her pension. Street-sweeping is her way of supplementing the inadequate income.

Several students from the teachers' group I taught in the summer of 1992 have now reached pension age, but they continue to teach. One of them offers private English lessons in order to survive; another still teaches English at the University while her husband, also a teacher, continues to work at a trade school. When I visit them, they offer simple meals, featuring potatoes from their gardens and mushrooms gathered in the forest.

On the ferry one afternoon, a Lithuanian woman who speaks no English but knows a little German sits next to me. I am amazed at how she can stretch her small reserve of German words, augmenting them with gestures and facial expressions, to tell me about herself. She is a physiotherapist working in a sports clinic and she's two days away from pension. Will she stop working? Of course not. How would she live? She is on her way to pick mushrooms in the same forest I must walk through to get to the beach. I try to help her find mushrooms, but she rejects every one I pick; they are poisonous. Afterwards we walk along the white sand of the Baltic and watch the ships, ghostly on the horizon.

I meet another former student: a lawyer, a single mother of two teenagers, a recent Christian. She interprets for us in the Baptist church some of us attend. Her life is very busy. She works in the personnel department at the Klaipeda University, specializing in labour laws; she makes a home for her children; and she is involved in the church. Whenever guests or evangelists come to her church, she is given translating or hosting duties. I hope that the pace of work, home and church will not test too severely her new faith.

Manto Gatve, the main street in Klaipeda, is a good place for people watching. At the bus stop I find myself face to face with what might be on the cover of a fashion magazine. The tall young woman waiting for the bus is dressed completely in leather. She carries a large bird cage with a green bird of some kind in it. How can she afford those clothes, I wonder? Where is she taking that exotic bird? Hard to believe that she inhabits the same world, the same city, as my street sweeper.

A student comes to my room to discuss an essay assignment on the novel *Wuthering Heights*. Is it purely romantic work, she wonders, or does it contain realism as well? Like many of my female students, she is drawn to the romantic. And so am I, living as I do in a centuries-old foreign city by the sea, walking the cobbled streets, poking into quaint shops and cafes, exploring parks, watching the candlelight flicker on the graves in a dark cemetery on All Saints Day.

Women have always dreamed dreams and seen visions; they have

also struggled and worked to keep hope alive and the family fed, under difficult circumstances. That's very evident here in Lithuania where they tell this story: "Lithuania is like a roof supported at four corners. Three of those corners are held up by women. The man responsible for the fourth corner has long been missing from his post. The house is still standing." Since my first experience in Lithuania in 1991, I have been convinced of the strength of the women here.

As I observe these women, certain words from the book of Isaiah come to mind:

"Listen to me... al... who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb;... even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." (Is. 46:3-4, excerpted NRSV)

Do they know that they have been, are being, and will be carried, as a child by its mother, through storm and calm, through poverty and plenty, through youth and age, by a God who is trustworthy and faithful? Some of them do.

All sorts of gospels seep into this country, ready to fill the ideological vacuum left by the breakdown of the Soviet system. Only the divine, illuminating Spirit can ensure that young and old, women and men, will be able to distinguish between truth and counterfeit, and will hear the voice that can guide them through this time of change.

Sarah Klassen, Sophia's editor, is spending the year in Klaipeda, teaching English at Lithuania Christian College.



## Banishing a Taboo

by Eleanor Martens

One can almost predict what will happen. Several women exchange a few intimate details. Soon others pick up the “vibes” and feel drawn into the conversation. Within minutes there is a surge of energy as the women begin to share freely of what they know...

Such is the nature of the most animated conversations I’ve been involved in lately. The fact that they are largely about menopause speaks volumes about my life stage and that of my friends. Many of us peer with varying measures of anticipation and dread across that middle-age chasm, wondering what perils of uncertainty and change await us before landing safely on the other side. But there is another factor at work in these exchanges. Unlike our mothers’ generation, we now have the freedom to talk openly about our natural body rhythms. As we draw from personal experience and from the vast repertoire of new literature devoted to these things, we are taking new delight in our “bodily heritage”\* as women.

It is now known, for instance, that the moon does indeed influence women’s menstrual cycles. (Peak conception rates occur around the time of the full moon.) Not only does this monthly pattern govern the ebb and flow of fluids, but also of ideas and creativity. While prior to ovulation women can expect to feel full of energy and enthusiasm about their work and relationships, the post-ovulatory phase is characterized by reflectiveness and withdrawal. Christiane Northrup (*Women’s Bodies, Women’s Wisdom*) urges us to pay attention to these “pre-menstrual blues” because, along with fostering a heightened cre-

ativity, they often divulge important insights about ourselves.

Unravelling these mysteries is empowering for us because it validates one aspect of our uniqueness as women. It helps us regain a sense of wonder and respect for processes that have traditionally been shrouded in secrecy and shame. It breaks the silence on a subject that has in the past shouldered women with many burdens.

I used to think menstruation was called “the curse” because of the discomfort and inconvenience it caused. That was until I discovered the existence of a global legacy of sanctions against women’s sexual processes that somehow linked them with pollution, shame and women’s sinister nature. The Roman historian Pliny wrote in 65 A.D.: “Contact with [women’s monthly flux] turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, seeds in gardens dry up, the fruit of trees fall off... To taste it drives dogs mad and affects their bite with incurable poison.”

Where did it come from, this idea that women’s blood is bad? Not all times and cultures have dishonoured women in this way. Among America’s indigenous peoples, a girl’s “coming of age” was celebrated with a sacred ceremony. While menstruating, she and her sisters would settle into the “moon-hut” to contemplate as the rest of the tribe awaited the wisdom that might emerge (Northrup).

Reverence such as this is not to be found in the annals of Western history. The purification rites required of a Jewish woman after she menstruated or gave birth sent the unmistakable

message that she was “unclean.” Within Christianity, hostile attitudes existed toward both male and female bodies because they were “carnal” or sinful, as opposed to the mind or spirit, which was “pure.” But somehow the female body – was it through the “Eve” connection, or its ties to nature and fertility, or its presumed lack of superior reasoning capacities attributed to males, or its capacity to incite lust in men? – was regarded as more carnal and more antithetical to spirituality than that of the male. One need only glean the writings of the Middle Ages’ church fathers to apprehend the enormity of guilt and blame thrown at women for their perpetual impurity and sedition, conditions for which they have been ostracized, beaten and even burned at the stake.

Lest we believe all such thinking is behind us, we need only remember Victorian admonitions not to bathe, wash our hair or be seen in public on those days, and of course never to speak about it. Our own mothers could barely speak frankly enough to eliminate for us the alarm and ambivalence we felt over the strange maturing of our pubescent selves. Then there is that whole other side of the world where demeaning blood rituals are still practised. Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye notes that everywhere in Africa menstrual blood is considered a primary source of pollution for women, a state that might exclude them from touching others, preparing food or participating in sacred rituals (*The Will to Arise*). It is estimated that many African women spend up to half their lives in various states of defilement!

I wonder what that does to the spirit of a person who is taught she is made in the image of the living God? Without doubt it compounds the problems of women seeking fuller participation in the church! According

*Continued on page 13*

# MENOPAUSE: A Professional Opinion

by Goldine Pankratz RN and Shawna Redekopp Visch MD

**M**enopause must be demystified. "Change of life," as it is commonly referred to, is not just a sign of aging. Because it is characterized by many physical, psychological, and social changes, it marks an important transition in a woman's life. The post-menopausal stage may constitute one-third to one-half of a woman's entire life.

The physical onset of menopause frequently occurs at a time in life when a woman may be dealing with many other challenges and changes. Unlike many Asian and African cultures, where older women are respected and considered wise, our culture has often regarded middle-aged and older women as being past their useful years. No longer being able to bear children may bring with it a sense of loss. The "empty nest" may usher new freedoms into a woman's life, but also alarming new challenges such as caring for aging parents, adjusting to changes in the marital relationship or caring for unexpectedly dependent children or grandchildren. Meanwhile, ongoing responsibilities in the home, family or workplace may not have changed. Some women have to adjust to the unforeseen death of a spouse with all its attendant loneliness and adjustment and the sense of feeling left out of a couples' world.

Menopause brings the reproductive stage of a woman's life to a close and is characterized by the end of the normal menstrual cycle. It can be induced surgically if the womb and ovaries are removed. The slow decline in the hormones estrogen and progesterone that brings about this change affects the entire body. Some women may experience menstrual irregularities over several years while for others the flow might stop quite suddenly. A cessation of menstrual cycles for at least a year indicates they are over. Any bleeding after that time, other than that related to hormone therapy, is considered abnormal and should be investigated by a doctor.

Hot flashes or "power surges" are experienced by many women. For some women,

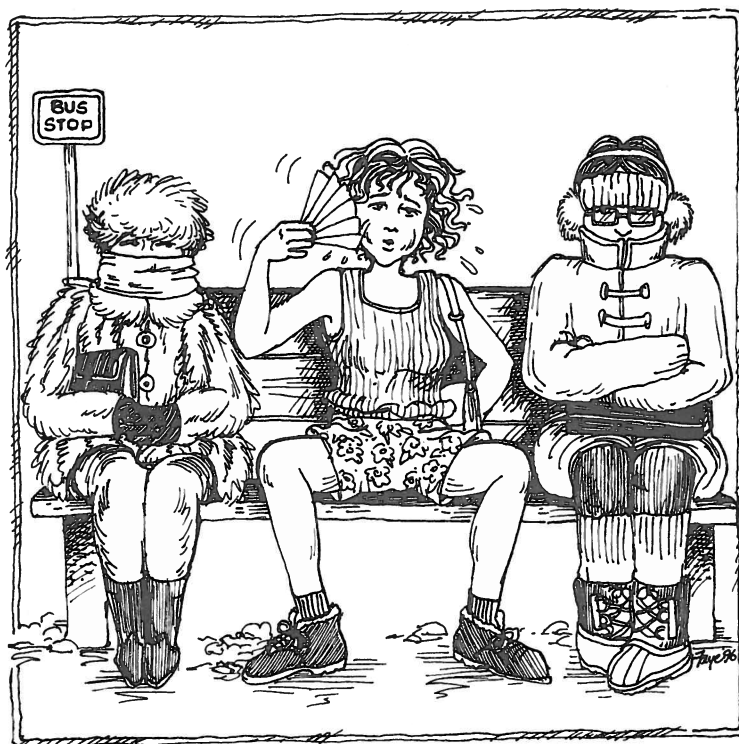


ILLUSTRATION: FAYE KLEWER

these may be little more than occasional minor irritations. Others experience them frequently, with considerable distress. Hot flashes can last from a few minutes to a half-hour, occurring as seldom as once a week or as often as twice an hour, for up to five years. Most often they occur at night and thus may cause sleep disturbances. Helpful hints to manage hot flashes include dressing in layers, wearing cotton rather than synthetic night clothes, and avoiding spicy foods and caffeine. Keeping a jug of water nearby can provide relief.

Menopause itself does not cause memory loss, irritability or depression; however chronic lack of sleep and frustration with recurrent hot flashes might trigger these problems. If a woman is bothered by hot flashes, she should consult her doctor. Most women find significant relief from symptoms within a week of starting hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which can be prescribed in a variety of ways depending on an individual's needs. Another proven benefit of HRT is its significant reduction of both cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis. It is important to note here that adequate calcium helps maintain bone density but will not actually prevent or treat osteoporosis. The risks and benefits of HRT vary for the individual and should be discussed with one's doctor.

When a woman manages her menopause intelligently, it helps her achieve an overall sense of wellbeing and continued

good health in the future. Some suggestions include: find a good doctor with whom you are comfortable discussing your health concerns; eat a well-balanced low-fat, high-fibre diet; exercise regularly; keep informed through support groups, lectures or literature.

Menopause should be viewed as a time of new opportunities and new beginnings. As the baby boomers mature, a large number of women will be experiencing menopause; so remember – you are not alone!

#### Resource Readings:

*A Book about Menopause*, by Meryam Gersen & Rosemary Byrne-Hunter, Montreal Health Press, 1988. (Available for \$4 from: Montreal Health Press, Box 700, Place 700, Place du Park Station, Montreal, Quebec, H2P 2P1; in Winnipeg from Women's Health Clinic).

*A Friend Indeed: For Women in the Prime of Life*, Montreal, Quebec. (A monthly newsletter on menopause and midlife, available for \$30/year from Box 515, Place du Parc Station, Montreal, Quebec, H2P 2P1).

*Change of Life: The Menopause Handbook*, by Susan Flamholtz Trieen, N.Y., Fawcett Columbian, 1986.

*Growing Older, Getting Better*, by Jane Porcino M.D., N.Y., Addison-Wesley, 1988.

*Menopause Naturally* (2nd ed.), by Sakja Greenwood M.D., San Francisco, Volcano Press, 1988.

Goldine Pankratz works as a registered nurse in the geriatric day hospital at Seven Oaks Hospital in Winnipeg. She is a member of the McIvor Ave. MB Church. Shawna Redekopp Visch practises medicine at the Plessis Medical Centre and attends the River East MB Church.

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## LETTERS

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As a writer and a listener, I listen with interest to the conversation of my MB sisters in the pages of *Sophia*. I am also the wife of a grain farmer, and so I was caught between sorrow and anger as I read "Tall Grass Prairie Bread Company" (Fall '95).

I felt sorrow because the rhetoric in this article casts aspersion on many Christians in agriculture who are serious about stewardship but who do not feel that careful application of technology amounts to a "rape [of] the land."

I felt anger because I know how hard and risky the work of food production is, falling to a smaller and smaller number of people, many of whom live sacrificially in order to fulfill their vocation.

I question such terms as "polluting the land with allergy inducing chemicals" as a description of contemporary farming practice, exercised as it is under extremely high standards of testing and control. I also bridle at such vast overgeneralizations as are offered in the third from final paragraph, describing "organic" food as (apparently the only) "food that does not rape the land or kill the environment, thereby ruining lives in the process."

As your MCC services have kept many beyond your own denomination aware, more lives on this small planet are ruined by hunger these days than by the food so generously grown and cheaply provided by Canadian grain farmers.

We are outside Eden, all of us. We do not have the luxury of such easy answers as those suggested by this article, only of hard choices between less than ideal solutions and the devastation of hunger. I hope you would invite some of your farming women and agronomists to enter into dialogue with the kind of rhetoric which I find in this article. Repeated without examination, it takes on the nature of "truth" and ultimately may threaten a food supply we have come to take for granted.

Maxine Hancock  
Marwayne, AB

*More letters on page 21...*

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## AS I SEE IT *Continued from page 11*

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to Oduyoye, it also draws them closer to Jesus. It is not hard for them to "see in the one born of Mary and touching the robes of the 'unclean' their own liberator."

I too feel "unclean" at times. I feel stained by the unholy thoughts, impure aspirations and selfish actions that mar my walk with God. I too seek liberation in Jesus. But I do not feel unclean because I am a woman. I am grateful that my upbringing did not include that stigma. As I see it, every aspect of creation is "good" in God's sight. This includes the special functions and blessings of being female, designed for the well-being and wholeness of all humanity. I'm glad we're beginning to reclaim and honor our uniqueness as women. I'm certain our Creator is pleased too.

\* Pamela Klassen, "What's Bred in the Bone: The Bodily Heritage of Mennonite Women," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, April 1994.

# My Experience of Post-Partum Depression

*by Cheryl Klassen*

I could not have been happier! It was November 29, 1993, and God had blessed us with a son, Steven Paul. It would be a special Christmas. The baby's room was ready, the gifts were bought, and the baking was done. Never had we been so prepared for a baby.

We were already the parents of two children, so we knew what to expect. It would be tough getting up at night, but experience had taught us this phase doesn't last forever.

Did I say, "getting up?" Little did we know we would have trouble even getting down for the night. The two months after the birth were a blur.

The day we brought Steven home, chicken pox met us at the door. Then, at seven days old, he got bronchiolitis and an ear infection. One thing followed another with seemingly no time in between to breathe.

I became filled with anxiety. I couldn't keep things in perspective. I had pain that was difficult to diagnose, and when the possibility of breast cancer was mentioned, my heart sank. Soon, I couldn't eat or sleep.

I fell beyond physical exhaustion into the deep, dark pit of depression. I argued with those close to me that I was not depressed, yet my actions and body said otherwise. I felt my world was closing in on me, that I was going "under." I could not run the household or function as wife and mother.

God met my need for physical, emotional and spiritual healing in a beautiful way. He took the situation, which I viewed as desperate and pathetic, and worked to bring good out of it and glorify himself.

We hired a woman to help with child care, cooking, cleaning and laundry. I felt she was an angel sent by God. While she was in our home, God spoke powerfully to her and called her back to himself. Coincidence? I don't think so.

My mental agony during this time was almost unbearable. Minutes seemed like days and I could not escape my mind's tor-

ment. I felt separated from God, and at times the spiritual warfare was so real and intense I wondered who would win. God's promise to me, his child, is that he will not leave me nor forsake me. Looking back, I know he did not. In the pit of depression, however, lies of the deceiver – that I was worthless, that I had never done a good thing in my life, that there was no hope – seemed quite believable.

For the first few weeks of my unravelling, I just asked questions. Why was this happening? Was it a physical illness or were we under attack? Where did my anxiety fit? Was I being disciplined?

I now wish I had asked for help sooner. I've stopped asking and analyzing. I realize it was a combination of many factors. I've also needed to allow God to release the grip of guilt about the depression. I felt Christians aren't supposed to be depressed but be filled with joy, peace and hope.

I considered myself a strong-willed child of God, confident in my ability to control my life. I was completely humbled. I now know I am nothing without Christ and it is by his grace that I stand. It took much to get me to this point. I needed to cover my mouth, as Job did, and be silent before God.

Society is uncomfortable with weakness or suffering and tells us to "get a grip." I discovered, however, that my greatest gain came when I gave up trying to control my life and released it to God.

I've gained a new intimacy in my life with Christ. My health was restored, and this enabled spiritual and emotional healing to take place as well. Although the experience left me with daily,

longer-term struggles with lack of confidence and self-esteem, this is getting much better. Those months would never have been my plan, but looking back I can see the blessings they have brought me.

*I became filled  
with anxiety.  
I couldn't  
keep things  
in perspective.*

*Cheryl Klassen, member of  
McIvor Ave. MB Church in  
Winnipeg, is a fulltime home-  
maker and mother of three.*

I was thinking about Grandma the day I tried to make peppernuts. Grandma was the expert peppernut-maker, and every year, just before my birthday she would send me a package of them. They were always perfect: round, hard, small, just the right flavouring of anise.

Grandma was expert at making lots of things. When I think of her, I think of kitchens full of cabbage rolls, *vereneke* and her wonderful brown bread. She was always happiest when she was providing for people, bustling around her kitchen and producing plates and bowls and baking pans full of food. (If we ever asked, "How do you make this, Grandma?" she would reply, vaguely, "You take some flour, and then some sugar," etc., etc. "How much is some, Grandma?" "Enough.")

She was like a one-woman factory, turning out quilts, crocheted scarves, embroidered pillowcases, slippers, afghans. Her hands kept making things. I don't know how many things she made with those hands. She was always busy. One time I was surprised to find a scarf she had crocheted for me had become half as long and twice as wide. She had "rescued" it from my closet, unravelled the whole thing and recrocheted it to what she thought was a more appropriate shape.

She was resourceful, using drapery samples and scraps of fabric to fashion quilts, old doilies to edge pink pillowcases. Why buy something when you can make it out of what you already have? And of course, save and take care of what you do have. Grandma once kept a pair of glasses for wear on Sundays only. She recycled when few people were aware of the concept.

I'm lucky enough to have some things that were saved from long ago: a finely-crocheted bonnet she used to wear while gardening; a cloth satchel for carrying embroidery; old Sunday-school papers and postcards with one-cent stamps and messages saying, "Dear Lizzy..."

## PEPPERNUTS

by Debra Fieguth



*The author (left) and her sister Cheryl with their grandparents, Ernst and Elizabeth Fieguth.*

And the prize – her wedding shoes, which were recovered in a cousin's attic in Saskatchewan several years ago and brought out for heritage events. Cream-coloured with a strap across and fine cutwork, slightly scuffed and now sixty-five years old, they sit on my carpeted bedroom floor.

Grandma never had the chance to be educated – "I would have liked to go to college, but there was no money," she told us more than once – but she was smart. Her assessment of the economy: "People want cherries when they should be satisfied with rhubarb."

And so she did what she could: after raising four children, she knew how to clean house, how to look after kids (she got jobs doing both), how to cook, how to make a home. She happily

took boarders into her Vancouver home, cooking night after night and being a mother to many.

She also had a unique kind of sophistication. Born in Canada, she spoke English with no accent and perfect enough German to fool people from the "homeland" she had never visited. She regarded Low German as a vulgar language and didn't like hearing it in her house.

After she was disabled from an accident, Grandma no longer was able to do all that hard work. Gradually she slowed down, and when she moved to the Menno Home in Clearbrook she didn't have to work anymore. Though the staff tried hard to keep the residents busy (banana bingo, unravelling sweaters to retrieve the yarn for someone else's projects), the hands that had made so many things mostly sat still in her lap.

Her hands no longer rolled cabbage leaves around rice and hamburger, or punched down dough for bread, or cut out *vereneke*, or slashed the pastry on top of the pie, or rolled out peppernuts and cut them into zillions of little cookies. She could no longer see well enough to crochet or embroider.

That didn't matter. She had contributed enough to her world. But the fact that she couldn't do things for people anymore, couldn't make things for people anymore, made her feel like she wasn't quite being useful anymore.

The day I tried to make peppernuts they didn't turn out. They were too dry. The texture wasn't right. They weren't like Grandma's.

The next day she died. If I ever learn how to do it right, it will only be by groping my way through countless recipes. Nobody could make peppernuts like Grandma could.

Debra Fieguth, *Sophia* editorial staff, is associate editor for *ChristianWeek*. She lives in Winnipeg and attends Jubilee Mennonite Church. This essay was read at her grandma's funeral.



# Coming of Age: A Youthful Perspective

Katherine L. Unruh

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*What is it like to grow up in the 1990s? On assignment for Sophia, Katherine Unruh recently interviewed four young women on their thoughts about themselves and their emergence into womanhood. Here are her results. (The students' names have been changed to protect their privacy.)*

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She rose to his requirement, dropped  
The playthings of her life  
To take the honorable work  
Of woman and of wife.

If aught she missed in her new day  
Of amplitude, or awe,  
Or first prospective, or the gold  
In using wore away,

It lay unmentioned, as the sea  
Develops pearl and weed,  
But only to himself is known  
The fathom they abide.

Emily Dickinson  
1830-1886

Emily Dickinson, a reclusive poet of the 1800s, seemed to have a grasp of the duality of being woman. Though single all her life, Dickinson sensed women of her time yearned for more than “woman and wife” roles. Today’s young women, often labelled a part of “Generation X” would seem to agree with Ms. Dickinson. However, unlike their bra-burning counterparts from the 1960s and ’70s, today’s young women seem to be ready to take on the role of scholar, business person, spouse – and, perhaps, even mother – quietly, without anger, almost as if it were their entitlement.

Attempting to understand what drives and grounds these young women quickly becomes a journey into one’s own soul. Hearing their stories, like reading a Dickinson poem, breathes life into the almost forgotten agony and ecstasy of what we so politely call “growing up.”

As girls move through childhood into adolescence, the fear of the unknown creeps in. Physical manifestations of their female-ness – getting their first period, developing breasts – and the emotional manifestations of growing up into adulthood, can create an atmosphere rife with self-doubt. And self-doubt in adolescence leads invariably to lowered self-esteem.

However, the driving force behind Melissa, a 21-year-old university student, seems to be her strong sense of self. “I think it comes from deep inside because when I look in the mirror and say ‘I’m beautiful’ or ‘I’m a good writer,’ when I can affirm my own gifts then my self-esteem is a lot better.” She came to that understanding after realizing the place the media has in shaping the attitudes and aspirations of today’s youth. “When you enter adolescence, all the places you spend your time – watching TV, in the malls – they tell you what’s expected of you, how guys should be, how you should be... but you aren’t like that, so you’re always disappointed.”

Julie, another 21-year-old university student, agrees that the media and socialization work hand in hand to lower the self-esteem of adolescent females. “Adolescents learn that to be accepted isn’t always about being who they are – so being who they are isn’t good enough... pressure around appearance – just the changeability of a lot of friendships, social pressures – you don’t always feel like you’ll be accepted for yourself.”

Angie agrees, stating, “...so much is expected of them through the media and the guys at school – you know, how they look.” The 24-year-old believes, however, that “unconditional acceptance” from peers, parents and others in authority may be the only cure for their media-minded generation. “Men and women telling them good things about themselves – not necessarily physical things. Telling them they’re [wholly] beautiful helps. And finding something that you’re good at and being affirmed in that.”

Carmen, a Psychology major in her second year of university, says that her own positive self-esteem is the result of "...an affirming and supportive family. I don't think good friends are what does it. They're just too unstable at that age. I think you need the stability of a good family."

While these four young women appear strong and self-actualized today, all admit to finding their first period somewhat overwhelming. And while their reactions to it range from pride ("I'd been reading too many Judy Blume books") to shame ("I knew about it, but it caught me by surprise"), they all credit their mothers with being warm and sensitive in response to their news. The urge to tell others about their emergence into womanhood seemed to stop there, however. "I sensed it was a private thing that you kept to yourself." "I didn't want the guys to know. I didn't want my dad to know. I didn't want anyone to know." All four believed that girls today experiencing menstruation for the first time would be "...shy and embarrassed. There's still a lot of embarrassment attached to it."

While today's young women are pursuing academic and career dreams, marriage is never far from their thoughts. However, as the first generation to emerge from families where "family" can be defined as any combination of blending, mixing and extending, the thought of marriage is not all that tantalizing. "Some swear off marriage as an institution," states Carmen. "Others are chomping at the bit..." Others in this so-called "Generation X" still view marriage as an option; "it would be hard to explore life without someone with me," says Melissa. All four women stated that while they thought they could succeed as single women, they yearned for the intimacy of a lasting male-female relationship, but as Julie puts it, "...women aren't going to be happy with a man unless they're happy with themselves first."

While marriage may be a prospect, three of the four either pushed the thought of motherhood far into the future or didn't want to think about it all. "For me it's just frightening," states Carmen. "Like this is the first time in my life it's actually physically possible. I just try not to think about it. I'm waiting on making that decision." Only one, Angie, enthusiastically stated, "I look forward to that day. I want to be a mother." But even Angie understood some of her friends who had told her they "...don't want to bring kids into this world – into the corruptness, the danger, the horrific nature of this world and society. They still want to be married, but not necessarily for procreation."

Such serious, articulate comments from such young women. Even though the prognosis for the economy, for the family unit, for the sustainability of the globe, for their future seems uncertain, they all agree that life as adult females is preferable to life as young girls or adolescents. "In high school things were 'shifty' – your best friend can be your best friend one minute and not the next. It can be an emotional roller coaster. As an adult there are more constants," says Julie. Angie feels that adulthood offers her "...a true sense of independence. I'm a very independent person by nature, but this is a time for me [to be able] to act on that nature." Melissa finds the loss of youthful idealism sad, but counters that as a teenager she, "...was dependent on my emotions. I like being less focused on emotions, like what I'm feeling." She is enjoying the "...independence and freedom to go anywhere, do anything," but says that "...independence also scares me because when you're a teenager you're more dependent and that's a bit safer."

If these four women can act as a representative sample of women of their generation, it is interesting to note that while they are able to articulate their thoughts and visions, hopes and fears, they are virtually unable to state examples of any women who stand out in their minds as mentors or role models. "I don't have any role models. I don't know what I'm supposed to look up to – what is a role model?" asks Carmen. Putting a face to the qualities they would like to emulate – attributes like wisdom, creativity, integrity and wholeheartedness – leaves them daunted.

This generation of young women – not at all "X's" but individuals with great aspirations to lead companies and crusades – seems to be going it alone, quietly. The wonder of the sisterhood of women, previously tied up in the ability of women to care – for one another and for their world – may have lost its allure. Maybe along with the annihilation of the nuclear family, the passing of this sisterhood should be mourned. Our inability to extend what we have learned to the next generation may make today's young women more isolated than any women in history. Or perhaps their fate resembles that of the women of Emily Dickinson's era – doomed to a certain success in the world of academics, business, matrimony, child-rearing, with no one to talk to, no sisters with whom to share the fathomless depths of their hearts and minds.

*Katherine Unruh, at 30 a borderline Generation X'er herself, is the Director of Communications at Concord College and spouse to musician Rick Unruh. They attend River East MB Church in Winnipeg.*



*"Isn't it just a beautiful day!"* gushed a fan of the aging Gloria Swanson, to which she replied, "Every day is beautiful – you're just too young to know."

What is beautiful about being 73 years old? For one thing, there is "freedom to be free." Love is more secure. You can make choices, follow pursuits, spend more time with your children and grandchildren... Most important, as Anne Morrow Lindbergh states in her book *Gift from the Sea*, there is a release from things, a levelling off. I like being the age I am now because the road is smoother, less complicated. I don't have to strive to be someone I'm not. Nor do I have to be beautiful as the media direct. I just have to act "serene" and "dignified."

Most of my friends are the ones I've known since crystal sets were in vogue. We met at the MB Mission Sunday School on Maple Street after we immigrated to Canada in the mid-1920s. We are aging together, although our circle is getting smaller. I still work at acquiring new friends, especially those who energize me with their courage and agile minds.

Did you know a person is the sum total of what she thinks? WOW! I did not always know this. When my children had all gone to school, I saw myself as a dull, uninteresting person. I was consumed by my inhibitions and petty jealousies, left over from a

difficult childhood. My idols had toppled and I believed life had dealt me one too many blows. I had set up a record in my mind of remorse and self-pity which I played over and over again. While I believed in God and the Scriptures, I had never made them work for me. Things had to change.

myself than the original wrong. Like Solomon, I had prayed for wisdom but was surprised when I received it!

Because it read like a book, I began in those desperate hours to read *The Living Bible* the children had given me. Soon I was getting up earlier and earlier in the morning for this special time of learning. I researched in my concordance words like "joy," "light," and "silence." I called it my "illumination series." It was the greatest period of Christian growth for me.

During the Depression, four of my teenage years were taken in work. My family was in desperate straits and depended on my earnings. Twenty years later I went back to school, beginning with grade 9. After I began studying at the University of Winnipeg I found a job in the library. Books have always been the vehicle of change for me.

To keep my mind active, I also took a writing course from Myra Haas. This provided me with a means of expressing what was inside of me. In time, I traded in my little car for a computer and sacrificed half my closet space for a work area. Though I truly work in a closet I am not a closet writer. I enjoy seeing my work in print and have had some success with biography and travel, less with fiction.

Travel has also been a bonus, one that has enlarged my life immeasurably. My decision to travel to

## It's Great to be Seventy!

by Anne Martens



*Anne Martens at work*

I had often found the "Patriotic Salvage" on Henry Avenue to be an excellent source for the craft materials I used in my volunteer work at Logan Neighbourhood House. I did not know that the Lord had led me there for a reason. It was a haven for some of the best books from the finest libraries – the rich giving of their excess to the poor. I began to read the classics. Slipped in among these books was often a "gem," some insight that helped stop the record in my mind. I realized, for instance, that by constantly rehashing all the old hurts and not moving forward, I was doing more harm to

Europe on my own in 1967 raised quite a few eyebrows. Married women did not travel alone! Since then I have been back to Europe several times and to Africa once on my own. In my husband's work as a grain consultant, I have been able to accompany him to Iraq, Southeast Asia and Australia.

All my life has been a journey. I have experienced suffering, sometimes self-inflicted but not always. These days I suffer more from the limitations of my aging body. Two of my major bodily functions are in jeopardy, kept in check only with medication and extra attention. But God's wisdom continues to shine in my life, a grace not of age but of God's infinite love toward me. There is a thread that runs through each of our lives, expressed best in God's words as found in Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (New International Version).

*Anne Martens enjoys sharing her love of travel and books with her family.*

*Two years ago she travelled to Prince Edward Island with her 12-year-old granddaughter to visit the haunts of "Anne of Green Gables."*

*Last spring she travelled through England and Scotland with an older granddaughter, tracing the steps of the great writers. She has been a member of Elmwood MB Church, Winnipeg, for most of her life.*

## POETRY

### How Did We Get Along for 65 Years?

*by Cynthia Yoder*

How did we get along for 65 years? That way:  
You live one day at a time, that you do.

At age 84, Betts talks about marriage in the same way  
she'd tell you how she gets her pie crusts so flakey,

no recipe, but by demonstration: She adds this much  
flour heaped into a measuring cup,

and with a silver spoon (the one left by the  
Dutch Band clanging pots to ring in

her wedding day) this much water — you talk it out  
together, she says — and this much shortening.

You don't run away from it either,  
when something goes wrong. And there will be—

there will be times. You work on it  
until it feels right.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### WIND AND FIRE: MOVING THE LIFE AMONG US

*Anabaptist Women Doing Theology*

May 9-11, 1996

Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Sponsored by Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Concord College and MCC Canada, this conference is open to women and men who wish to explore the emerging theological voices of women. Papers, art displays, worship, plenary and small group discussions and workshops. Registration \$80. Contact Wendy Kroeker, MCC Canada, (204) 261-6381.

# INFERTILITY: A Secret Sorrow

by Elizabeth Wall



Six years ago Adam and Eve got married. They knew they wanted children; they didn't know when. They decided to give themselves a chance to put their degrees to work, buy a house and establish a good foundation for a family. They wanted everything to be just right for the challenges of parenting.

Now Adam and Eve have established roots, years of professional experience, a house – and no children.

When I am asked what kind of work I do, I'm not always certain how to answer. In the past, reaction has often been, "Oh! Isn't that interesting!" or, "What did you say?" or, "What is that?" But it is not clear that people really want to know.

This is part of the problem. "Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility" is a specialty practised by few. The knowledge base is very large and changing rapidly. Some who dabble in the area lack the expertise to do it correctly, efficiently, and safely.

So why get into this area? I recall in my student days, we learned very little about reproduction (it wasn't proper for ladies to be too well acquainted with this subject even though we were nurses). There was also very little scientific information about reproduction. I was not very interested in what we did learn and I chose to work in the operating room instead. Years later, I was asked to join a team that was setting up an Infertility and In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) Clinic. A challenge was just what I needed, so I accepted.

The clinic's clientele come from every walk of life. All of them are in need of help, either in the form of information, teaching, testing, treatment, surgery or counselling.

Infertility issues generally involve one or more factors of hormone imbalance, structural abnormalities, genetic disorders, birth defects, adhesions or blockages due to infection, endometriosis, poor or absent sperm production, trauma, chronic disease, repeated pregnancy loss or unexplained infertility. Male and female factors are now viewed as equally responsible for infertility, a dramatic change from just a few years ago when failure to conceive or carry a pregnancy to term was viewed by most as a female issue.

Everything we do at our clinic is intrusive. From the first visit, we ask intimate and personal questions. Though the information we gather is crucial, when, how and how often a couple has intercourse is not part of a general medical history. How do you instruct a man to collect a sperm sample without embarrassing him or his partner? How do you help a couple get past the blame, anger, frustration or sadness infertility has brought to their relationship?

Sometimes the investigation provides a clear picture of why conception has not been possible, and corrective measures are taken. Occasionally the problems and solutions are complicated and more advanced technologies can be applied if desired by the client. Sometimes there is no clear picture or solution.

Some of the most helpful options we can offer are to introduce issues of adoption and child-free living as part of closure. It is important for a couple to review their relationship and their definition of family before embarking on treatment modalities. They need to know that they are loved and significant even without biological offspring. Adoption and child-free living are often not what they want to hear, but treatment does not guarantee success and the couple need to set limits for themselves.

For some couples, the available technologies are not acceptable even though they may offer the desired result. Couples commonly become distressed when their desire for a family comes into conflict with their religious views. There are times when church dogma appears arbitrary or lacking in common sense or compassion. The church puts a great burden on couples to be a "traditional" family, but may deny the approval to proceed with advanced reproductive technologies.

Though family can be supportive, often family members are insensitive. How often have you heard a relative ask a woman, "So, when are you going to get pregnant?" Childlessness may be a choice at this time, but frequently it is not. We expect our children to continue the family legacy. If it doesn't happen, do we give unsolicited advice, offer reminders of their familial responsibility, or tease about performance level? Is it any wonder that infertile couples find it difficult to confide in family?

Infertility is painful. It hurts the soul, relationships and the body. The pain is chronic and is not easily cured with a pill. It robs a person of some of the most important choices in life. Infertility is defined as one year of trying without success. In Canada one in six couples are dealing with infertility.

Because infertility issues are so closely related to feelings of guilt, failure, and loss of self, it is essential that we impart a sense of safety and acceptance at our clinic. Although men tend to be more stoic than women, both need

close emotional and physical monitoring. Sometimes a phone call at the right time or a conversation in the office is enough. If a couple's needs go beyond the limits of our clinic, a referral to a professional counsellor or infertility support group (Infertility Awareness Association of Canada - Winnipeg Chapter) is made.

Despite recent advances in IVF, ICSIS (Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection) and other methods, many couples will still not enjoy the blessings of children. What can we do for them? For starters, give them opportunities to be involved in the lives of our children. When treatment is unsuccessful, it takes a great deal of courage to step out of the traditional parent mode and make a relationship with other people and their children.

Give them a chance to speak about their loss (even if there are tears). Affirm their importance to you and your family. These couples have grieved the loss of a child every month for several years. We cannot know that pain unless we have experienced it personally. Do not say you understand unless you have been there. Do not tell them to "...relax, go on a holiday, it will happen..." Stress is not likely a factor unless it is the result of major trauma or a death in the family. Let them tell you what they need.

We have a long way to go in making the public aware of fertility issues. Reproduction is a complicated and private issue, resulting in poor understanding among many. Ignorance in this area can come to haunt a person whether it be through a lack of self knowledge, questionable behaviour practise, age or a poor choice of physicians. We need to include fertility concerns when we educate young people about sex, sexuality, and the menstrual cycle. IAAC is making efforts to remedy this situation.

This area of work has its rewards. Sometimes couples come back with their children to let us see what we have done together. Sometimes they send a picture and a note. But you won't find our name in the birth announcements as you do with the obstetrician. It is too painful for couples to remember how they got there. Occasionally we get a thank-you note from a couple who were not successful but have been able to come to closure. Most of the time though, couples leave quietly.

I hope that my service to these couples will meet their need during this time of crisis in their lives. As we cherish the children we have brought into this world, remember those who also want this joy, and save a place at your family table.

*Liz Wall is a registered nurse who practises her specialty at Winnipeg's Health Sciences Centre. She and her husband are members of the River East MB Church.*

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## more LETTERS

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As a woman academic, employed at MBBC/Concord College for a quarter century now, I was rather surprised and dumbfounded by the allegations made against the College in a recent letter to *Sophia* (Fall '95). I refer to Evelyn Labun's assertion that the College has discriminated against women academics in the past.

Is there any information offered that convinces us of the conclusion she has drawn? Both men and women academics have experienced the agony of contract termination at this college as at any other. Course changes, financial difficulties or enrolment patterns frequently create situations where difficult decisions have to be made.

Our world at the threshold of the 21st Century has a long way to go in giving women equal opportunity. There are, however, islands of hope for us and our girl children. I feel strongly that Concord and colleges similar to it represent the kind of haven that will take seriously the concerns of women: faculty, staff and students alike. It is a difficult journey, often opposed by people who claim scripture as their guide in limiting God's grace in the lives of women. But simply to ascribe the release of these women academics to discrimination, with no documented proof, is equally unjustified.

In response to the question of how to encourage "talented and creative young women inside (and outside) our churches," we can either tell them to sit down and cry with us or we can equip them with an education, opportunities to test their wings and whatever additional tools they need to realize the dream that God has given them.

Few decisions on planet Earth are squeaky clean. But God works in mysterious ways. Some of the greatest contributions to humanity have been made on the heels of crushing experiences. Let's not kid ourselves; it happens to men and it happens to women.

Irmgard Baerg  
Winnipeg, MB

I just received and read your Fall 1995 issue. What a wonderful transformation from a previous fall issue in which homemaking and cooking were portrayed as mindless, unworthy activities. In this issue you celebrate the act of eating: Good for you!

Susan Rempel  
Chilliwack, BC

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*Correction: In the article, "Tall Grass Prairie Bread Company" (Fall 95), an error was made. The article should have said that the company has grown by 25% in each year of its seven years of operation. We apologise for the mistake.*

*Sophia* invites conversation about all of its articles. Please address letters to *Sophia*, P.O. Box 28062, 1453 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, MB, R3G 4E9.

## A Canadian Adolescence for Amalia *by Gordon Nickel*

At the bottom of yet another dusty box of our belongings a little photograph catches my eye. The smiling, bright female face I see there causes me to hold my breath and seize up inside.

In this hot, humid room in Karachi in May 1995, I've been trying to decide what to throw out, what to take back with me to Rosthern, what to give away and to whom. With each book, cassette and file that I handle I've been asking myself why we had to cut our missionary service short. We'd expected to stay nine years but had left before our sixth year was half over.

The fact that I am still working through the last boxes of our belongings on this short visit more than a year after our family move is part protest, part petulance.

Then, from the bottom of the box, the face of Amalia looks up at me. The snap is from our first term, taken in front of our second Karachi dwelling. Amalia – then about nine – looks happy and *fleissig*. She's holding a cricket bat, getting ready to take a swipe at a tennis ball suspended from the veranda ceiling.

We'd left Winnipeg when Amalia was turning three on a winding journey that took us to Fresno, London, Germany and finally to Pakistan. Like all parents on the move, Gwen and I had hoped that our three children would like their new homes. Had I come to take it for granted that they would – or should?

Unfortunately, Karachi turned out not to be a girl's world, much less a young woman's world. Matthew and Daniel found their place, but ultimately Amalia was not happy living in Karachi and wanted to move back to Canada.

The Revolution came one evening when we were on vacation in the cool hills of northern Pakistan. All three children expressed with a degree of emotion that surprised me their feeling of being trapped in our decision to serve in Pakistan. Their main concern was lack of contact with our extended families.

When I finally got some perspective on that evening, I began to see that the kids had a point. And I understood it because I too had been a missionary kid. Though I don't remember ever questioning my own parents' decision to raise me in India, I could appreciate my children's freedom to question ours. Children have a right to say where they would like to live.

Parents, however, tend to become attached to work they enjoy. After a lengthy apprenticeship in missions, which included biblical studies, Islamic studies, learning two local languages and adjusting to a difficult city, I felt I was finally becoming useful to the people around me. I wanted to continue on...

Amalia looks happy in the little photograph, and I realize how important her happiness is to me. I am indeed grateful that she – now a teenager – is happy in Canada, and I want her to enjoy her adolescence there.

I realize as I keep my eyes on that photograph that Amalia is worth changing location for, worth giving up feelings of fulfillment that come from finding a useful place of service. She's worth a change of career, worth even being second-guessed by people who think that I may not be faithfully following God's call.

On the strength of that girlish smile I set my mind to release the flotsam and jetsam of our family sojourn to Karachi and my own lingering petulance.

Dropping anchor in Rosthern will be good too.

*Gordon Nickel presently works half-time as a teacher at Bethany Bible Institute in Hepburn, Saskatchewan, and half-time for MB Missions/Services as a resource in Muslim ministries and in various capacities on occasional trips to Pakistan.*

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## GLEANINGS

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☛ The Ontario chapter of the MB Women's Network held a gathering last November at the Kitchener MB Church. On the theme, "Women and Men Walking Together in the Faith Community," the 50 women and 20 men shared brunch, listened to four speakers who spoke about their journeys of learning what it means to be fully equipped to serve God and the church, participated in group discussion and worshipped together.

☛ **Janet P. Schmidt** (River East MB Church) recently spent three weeks in the Middle East, speaking to several groups and offering training in conflict resolution.

☛ **"Overground,"** a recording of Christmas music sung by **"Sister Dorothy" Penner** (McIvor Ave. MB Church), a former member of "The Welfare Starlets," was recently released to local bookstores.

☛ **Agatha Doerksen** (Fort Garry MB Church) has been working with The Women's World Finance Association and SEED Winnipeg to form a **"Peer Lending Circle Program,"** which draws low-income business women together to guarantee loans for each other. The program forms circles of four to seven women who participate in training sessions and then work with Credit Unions to secure small startup loans, which the members

guarantee for one another. The program is based on a peer lending concept that began in Bangladesh. So far the pilot project has launched two Credit Circles.

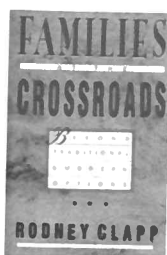
☛ **Heidi Koop** (River East MB Church), whose drawings have appeared in *Sophia* hosted a dinner on January 20, "in praise of God's grace during her ten years of struggle with cancer." Heidi called the event "A Celebration of Life and Friendship."

☛ **Don't miss out on a great event! Attend the Spring Concert at Concord College on April 20th. Tickets are \$8.00. Discounts for Seniors and Students.**



***Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options,***  
by Rodney Clapp.  
Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Reviewed by Donna Stewart



Any book on the family that includes chapters like: "The Unnaturalness of the Family," "The Superiority of Singleness," and "Welcoming Children and Other Strangers," declares at the outset that it is more than "just another book on 'family values.'"

Rodney Clapp does acknowledge threats to the family, but suspects that, "Whatever is tearing us apart is among us. It is not simply – or even primarily – something secular humanists thrust at us from the darkness beyond the rosy glow of our campfire."

In search of the enemy within, the author compares biblical families to modern families and then surveys the historical roots of the modern nuclear family, which he calls the "nineteenth-century bourgeois family," the fruit of industrialism.

Clapp argues that our present culture, with its emphasis on spirituality, leaves Christians more freedom than an earlier context that placed its faith in reason.

Nonetheless, it is beyond the capacity of a nuclear family to resist the influence of its cultural context. "Restoring and redeeming the family does not begin with the nation or with the family itself. It begins with the church."

Those scary but exhilarating words introduce his vision of a church markedly different from the one that "has too long and too zestfully remade our covenants in the image of the markets," tamed the "bordercrossing" God of Israel into a mere household deity, "privatized" Jesus and "market-ed" church programs to its consumers.

Readers who have not yet noticed how culturally accommodating the evangelical church has become may be uneasy with this analysis. Others will question how such a church can take on the task he outlines.

But change begins with discomfort, and this book does more than make us uncomfortable. It rescues us from a diminished understanding of church and recalls us to a more biblically muscular vision of church.

Clapp challenges us to imagine creative new ways of relating to our culture. In an age of hyperindividualism, he says, "People searching for an identity will be attracted to a community that has some sense of where it has come from and where it is going." More than a safe haven, Clapp envisions the church as a "vessel with a rudder and a sense of direction, an ark whose passengers have a sure star by which to navigate."

Women who have been betrayed in the church will be nervous about this image, but Clapp gives encouraging examples of churches that have moved out in faith to be the church in their communities. I wanted more examples and more detailed examination of how they did it, but I think I know: by the prayer and work of a few families who were willing to be more than consumers in the house of the Lord.

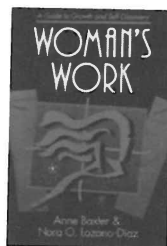
I was initially prejudiced against this book because InterVarsity's *Women at the Crossroads* was so challenging that I thought a "sequel" was bound to disappoint. Clapp overcame my misgivings by acknowledg-

ing the threats to the family, examining biblical patterns, and looking carefully at the relationship between family, church and culture. Then he warmed my soul with his call for creative faith. He lifted us above angry lobbying and shallow thinking to focus on the opportunities available in a postmodern world that has "lost its supposed universals and common goods."

This is one of those rare books where the notes at the back are an essential and interesting part of the whole. There and throughout the book, Clapp includes such delicious quotes from other writers that you may well find yourself adding several more titles to your "To Read" list. You have been warned!

***Women's Work: A Guide to Growth and Self-Discovery,*** by Anne Baxter  
& Nora O. Lozano-Diaz.  
Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994.

Reviewed by Katie Funk Wiebe



This study guide was born out of the realization that women want to learn more about themselves but haven't got the time to study a huge volume on each issue. The authors had been part of a support group for women seminarians studying *Becoming Women* by Penelope Washbourn and *The Dance of Anger* by Harriet Goldhor Lerner when this awareness came to them. The result was this modest-sized guide of 120 pages with 13 chapters. Each chapter

covers a specific issue women might be interested in.

The first four chapters deal with spiritual and biblical issues such as women and their gifts, their relationship to Christ, their image of God, and spirituality. The following chapters deal with learning styles, family concerns, self-esteem, body image, sexuality, anger, friendships and self-care. These latter topics are looked at more from a psychological standpoint.

I recommend the book for small groups of six or eight women who are ready to develop trust with one another and open up to one another. The book would not work well in a lecture situation.

A strength of the book is that each chapter is relatively brief. In some cases, this may also be a weakness. The questions are particularly apt to bring about discussion.

Readers will not find the book stridently feminist, which should encourage women who are hesitant to join any group that discusses women's concerns. It is a gentle invitation to take a look at the issues that every woman encounters at some time in life and then to share one's own story. After working through this book, readers will be more ready to pinpoint the issues they wish to work on in greater detail.

Those women who have already done intensive study of these issues may find the contents elementary. It may also seem that in order to remain brief some generalizations are under-supported.

Anne Baxter, an ordained Presbyterian minister, is associate pastor of the Union Church of Manila. Nora O. Lozano-Diaz has been involved in the issues of women in the theology of the church as a speaker, writer, a pastor and leader of support groups for women.

*...the splendor of  
the heavenly bodies  
is one kind,  
and the splendor of  
the earthly bodies  
is another.*

*(1 Corinthians 15:40 NIV)*