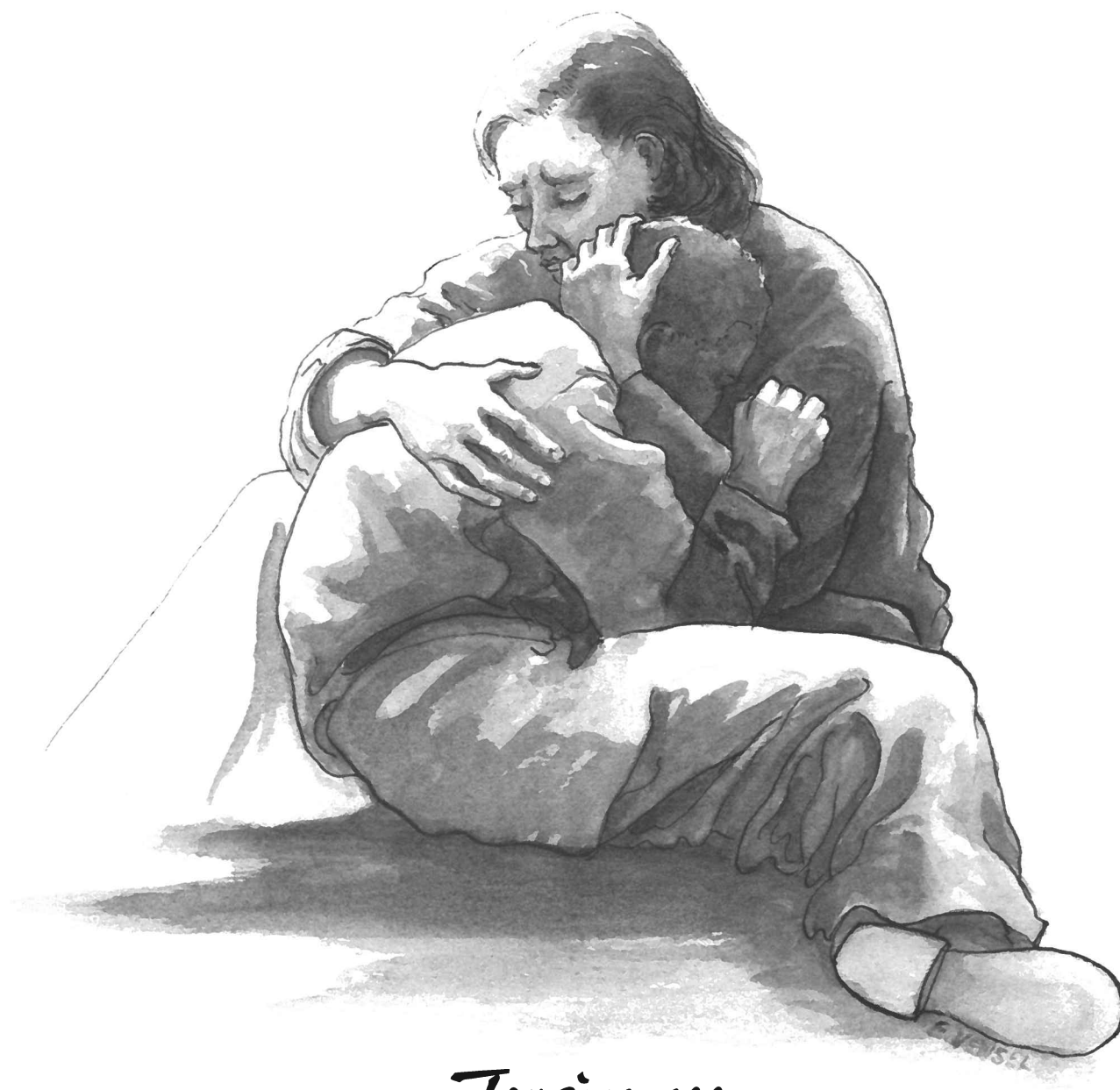


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# S O P H I A

W I S D O M

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



## *Forgiveness*

SPRING 1998 ■ VOLUME 8 ■ NUMBER 1

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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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1998 themes include: June – Earthkeeping / Gardening; October – a special issue from BC on Transitions; December – Women Adventurers.

Donations to the ongoing work of *Sophia* are gratefully received. For a tax receipt, please make cheques to DeFehr Foundation (undesignated, please) and send them to our address with a letter requesting the funds to be used for *Sophia*.

**Cover:** The drawing on the cover is by Eliesabeth Vensel, a Winnipeg artist who has taught in the public school system and who is part of *Sophia's* editorial committee. Lis attends Church of the Way in Winnipeg.



## EDITORIAL

# Forgiveness and Healing

by Lori Matties

I have a friend who is struggling to find healing from her childhood experience of sexual abuse by a member of her church. Over the last decade she has tried to meet with her abuser, the pastor of his church and the leaders of her conference. In all cases she has encountered resistance and refusal. She has been told to "forgive and forget."

The idea for an issue on forgiveness was born with my friend's story. Forgiveness, an idea so central to the life of a Christian, is also one of the most challenging and misunderstood or misused of Christ's teachings. If we are victims, we are much more inclined to seek revenge or, at the least, to reject our offenders than to confront them and offer reconciliation. If we are offenders, we find it easier to justify our behaviour than to admit our wrongdoing and seek forgiveness. The recent execution of Carla Faye Tucker in Texas is an example of how hard it is for human beings to lay down their desire for "justice" in order to forgive. In another case, how astonishing it was to hear a white South African pastor forgive the murderers of his wife during the South

African Truth Commission. One thing is certain: whether we as Christians express our views about capital punishment or whether we are at the forefront in developing strategies for peaceful conflict resolution, the rest of the world is watching. The way we practise forgiveness is perhaps the most public of Christian actions.

The articles in this issue arise out of the desire to grapple with how we inflict damage upon one another (see Dale Taylor's "Who Sinned?") and how we seek to find healing from that damage. Many are personal stories – wisdom that has been gleaned from hard experiences. Some are reflections on Scripture and other books that have offered helpful perspectives. I hope you will find, as I have in reading them, that, though our understanding is always partial, these sisters offer valuable signs to go by on our journey toward wholeness.

One thing we celebrate. Although it was not her intent to initiate discussion, the publication of Marianne Ewert Worcester's story of excommunication in the last issue ("To My Sisters Beyond the Wall," Fall 1997) has resulted in letters and phone

calls, including an offer of formal apology from her former church. Such actions of confrontation and reconciliation are a gift of hope to all of us.

Another bit of good news.

Those of you who wish to contribute to the memorial fund for women and girls in theological studies in India in honour of Karuna Joel and her daughter (see "A Tribute," Fall 1997 issue) may do so and receive a tax receipt from MCC Canada if you send it to their office (134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, R3T 5K9) and indicate that the money is to be used for MCC India, the Karuna-Sneha Ministries fund.

A housekeeping matter. As you know, we have increased our circulation (and our rates) to four issues a year. Your subscriptions will continue through to the last issue you have paid for, whether that was for three, six, four or eight issues! Please watch for the notice stapled to the last issue in your subscription and renew promptly. We will send a letter to remind you if we don't receive a renewal. Many thanks for your readership and your support. Pleasant reading.

### SOPHIA Mission Statement

*Sophia* offers a forum for Christian women to speak to one another about the joys and challenges of living faithfully in an uncertain, changing world. Its pages give voice to women's stories – their experiences in church and society, family and workplace, their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. It invites expressions of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. In doing so it hopes to affirm women in their quest for spiritual, emotional and physical wholeness and for the full expression of their gifts in all spheres of life.

*Sophia* was conceived and brought to birth by Mennonite Brethren women and celebrates Christian sisterhood. Its desire is to welcome differing voices. It hopes to challenge women and men of all ages as they live together in Christian community. The name SOPHIA (wisdom) expresses our desire to search and know the wisdom of God through the Scriptures and our experience as followers of Jesus Christ.

*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).



## Who Sinned?

by Dale Taylor

*The following is excerpted from a sermon Dale gave as the beginning of a series on forgiveness. The text is from John 9, the story of the man born blind. In setting a context for the story, Dale reminds us that the first listeners had a very different understanding of cause and effect and of their relationship to sin from listeners today. To recover a sense of the impact the story might have had, she offers a few hypothetical alterations:*

sovereignty of God, and they knew the goodness of God. Therefore they believed that suffering is not part of God's good plan, but must come from something else, must come from sin. Hence the simple question, "whose sin?"

But Jesus, notably, refuses to answer the simple question. In fact, he tells the disciples that it is the wrong question. Sin, he says is not a *whodunit*, not a mystery to be investigated. He says, instead, "This is a situation in which it is possible for us to do God's work." And then he makes

be able to avoid the effects. So, in this story, the Pharisees see Jesus violating God's law, the law of resting, the law of the Sabbath, and they pronounce him to be a sinner.

What do we have, then, if we put together both of these perspectives? We have the view that "sin" is a name for both cause and effect. When the Bible talks about sin, it refers both to our wrong actions and to the damage that results from these actions. Sin, in this understanding, is not just a bad deed done – or a good deed left undone, though it includes that. Nor is it a pre-existent human condition, or a feature of our genetic inheritance. In very simple and concrete language, sin is damage. I have learned this description of sin from a contemporary theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock. I believe it also to be a thoroughly biblical definition. Sin is damage; both the cause and the effect.

Frequently, in biblical usage, the word "sin" refers to the state of affairs that results from damage, as well as the things that cause damage. It's a word that names an ongoing feature of human life; we fail in our respect and compassion, we make mistakes and sometimes are deliberately cruel, and in all of this we hurt each other.

If I don't think of sin as damage, and for that matter, as inevitable, I don't know how to account for the reckless way Jesus forgives sins. Jesus *assumes* there is sin, and *forgives* sins, without ever inquiring what particular sins – deeds – one may have committed. This is evident in many stories from the Gospels. A typical instance is the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2.

Jesus, like the disciples in

Jesus was thrown out of the church by the Leadership Commission, and as he was walking through the streets he saw – who?

- perhaps, a man who was alcoholic and mentally ill. And his followers asked him, "Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he is a paranoid schizophrenic?"
- or, he saw a prostitute, who had been sexually abused as a small child,
- or, he saw a 12-year-old gang member, who had lived in 20 different foster homes,
- or, he saw a drug addict who had AIDS. And his followers asked him, "Teacher, who sinned, this man or the ones from whom he got the HI Virus?"

Does that feel a bit different? It doesn't feel good to me, as a member of the Leadership Commission, to think that we kicked Jesus out of the church. But if we use the language of *our* society's understanding of sin and righteousness, we can experience the event as it would have felt when John wrote it, in a culture with a different view of causes than we have. The disciples and the Pharisees knew the

*When the Bible talks about sin, it refers both to the causes and to the consequences, both to our wrong actions and to the damage that results from these actions.*

known the works of God, by healing the one who was blind.

The disciples see a man who suffers, and they ask whose fault it is. That is to say that they see the *effect* of sinfulness; they see suffering, and they know that suffering is a consequence of sin. The Pharisees start from the other end of the equation. They know that sin comes from human actions; it doesn't just fall down out of the sky. They want to help us to avoid sin, so they formulate laws and interpretations of God's law. This is to say that the Pharisees are starting with the *causes* of sin: if we can avoid the causes, we should

John 9, assumes that the man's paralysis indicates the presence of sin. Thus he offers forgiveness, which is, in biblical language, the only remedy for sin. He doesn't know what this man has done, but he sees the evidence of sin, a damaged life, and he pronounces forgiveness, the release from sin. And in doing so, he also makes it obvious that forgiveness equals healing. He says: "which is easier to say? you are forgiven? or you are healed? because they both mean the same thing." He knows that we all participate in sin, both in the causes and the consequences. He doesn't know what this man's personal misdeeds might be; he does know that the man is part of the realm of sin, and so he offers release from that, he offers forgiveness, which is healing.

These stories of healing show us that freedom from sin is possible, and that it must include addressing the consequences of sin as well as the causes.

I would suggest another reason to think that the Scriptures share this understanding of sin as damage. You will recall that one frequent biblical image for what we call sinfulness is "hard-heartedness." This word is often used to describe God's people when they turn away from God. However, this word, hard-heartedness, contains another meaning that is illustrative. The word for hardness, here, means calloused; it's not just the way we naturally are, it's something we become, in the course of our lives.

Now, you know that a callous is a very dry and hard spot on your skin; it looks and feels as though the skin has grown a number of extra layers in order to become thicker and tougher. And it works; callouses are tough and don't feel the pain; they insulate the nerves in our skin from the causes of pain on the outside.

On your hands, maybe, when you habitually do rough and rubbing work such as digging ditches, callouses are not a bad thing. But the

Bible talks about calloused hearts. It's a revealing image. Our heart, even more than our skin, is easily damaged. We are, remember, creatures who relate to one another *from the heart*; we are capable of intimacy, we are vulnerable. And by that very fact, we damage one another even by accident, and sometimes deliberately. And our hearts, like our skin, respond to that damage by hardening, by building up layers of protection, becoming thick-skinned, hard hearts.

*We are relational  
creatures; we give and  
receive damage.*

We are relational creatures; we give and receive damage, blisters; we get a little tougher; surely it is not surprising when sometimes our capacity for intimacy and compassion and attention to others is reduced.

Now, it seems to me that the Bible's word for this entire reality is sin. As in the story from John 9: sin is a situation, the remedy for which is healing, which is forgiveness. The Greek word for forgiveness is a very concrete word. It means that something is lifted off or sent away. It's not a word that describes an attitude, but an action: it means to remove, to send away or go away, to forsake, to get totally and absolutely out of town. Forgiveness means that something is gone: the Bible uses the same action word in all these phrases:

- *forgive* us our debts, as we *forgive* our debtors – no more debts
- the fever *left* her – no more fever
- they *left* their nets and followed Jesus – no more fishing
- Son, your sins are *forgiven* – no more sin
- the hireling *leaves* the sheep and flees – no more hireling

Forgiveness means freedom! Sin is a circumstance we are under; and

God's forgiveness is the removal of that. We all participate in the realm of sin, as both the disciples and the Pharisees in this story understand. What they don't understand is the new thing that Jesus offers, which is the possibility of forgiveness, of healing – release from the bondage of sin into the freedom of God.

We all participate in the realm of sin. And we are all offered the chance to be free from sin. Now: what would forgiveness and healing mean to the "sinners" of our society? What would be the equivalent of sight to the blind: for an addict who is HIV positive? for a 15-year-old hooker? for a terrified kid in a gang? Are those situations more difficult to address than healing the blind? more difficult than finding a vaccine for polio? more difficult than developing wonderful little machines to put in our ears when the sounds of the world start to fade? Jesus tells us that healing, forgiveness, freedom from the world of sin, all this is possible.

It's not magic, not a quick fix. But there is a way forward – hope means that there is always a way forward. As we open our hearts to each other, and to others, we will give and receive some damage, develop some blisters as we rub against each other. If we start to become calloused, then we need to give those spots a rest to allow the innate tenderness to grow back. But in all that we need to be reminded by these stories that Jesus is talking about our lives and our possibilities as they are. He sees the complex reality of sin, and he encourages us to hope, to believe that healing is possible because forgiveness has already been given. My prayer for us is that we can live into the possibility of forgiveness and freedom.

.....  
*Dale Taylor is the Associate Executive Director of MCC Canada. She is a member of River East MB Church in Winnipeg and receives her callouses from hiking and gardening.*

# The Long and Painful Path

by Marie Allez\*

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18  
I have searched my soul, I have written pages and still the topic is deeper than my heart can express. How do I communicate what is vital to my existence?

Before tragedy hit my life, I had no idea what forgiveness really was. My life was too sure, too safe. I had nothing to forgive. I had only experienced Sunday school forgiveness. Then someone dropped an atomic bomb on my secure little world, causing an incredible amount of pain. It forced me to realize that to survive, I had to forgive.

I made the choice, God works the forgiveness in my life, and God keeps me on the path. Today, I'm gleaning the lessons of my sorrow. I never want to go back to that complacent, safe place again. I always want to be on the edge—needing God, loving God, and talking heart to heart with God. For nothing is sweeter and nothing is impossible with God.

## *Before...*

*September 1993*

He used to love me  
I was so sure  
I never doubted him  
I will live in that remembrance  
and pretend it's still true  
for I cannot face reality  
and acknowledge his indifference  
how can I love myself  
as my husband should?  
I look in the mirror  
in the middle of the day  
"how ugly you are!"  
I will pretend that all is well  
and perhaps  
happiness will come my way again  
after all...  
he used to love me.

It was the year of the family – 1994. How sad, how ironic, that my husband left me and my children for another woman and their child. We had been a family for nineteen and a half years. It wasn't my choice. I loved him. I would have done anything to keep our marriage and family together. His choice was forced on me. I felt total helplessness. I was in agony, weeping continually. I was furious, with a fury that threatened to destroy me. There was a screaming inside my soul that never stopped.

I felt like a worthless human being and at the same

time I fought fiercely for my right to live and rise above this horrible sorrow. I agonized over my precious children and their intense pain, and at the same time, I couldn't help them. I was completely broken.

God was very near. I was very aware of God's loving presence. I told him to take every thought and every tear as a prayer. My grief had its own language only God could understand. I had no strength to pray or read. God comforted me a thousand times with the loving touch of my family and friends. They carried me. God spoke tenderly to my broken heart in simple ways. He became my heavenly Father.

## *Sorrow*

*July 22, 1996*

Yesterday  
I went out in the thunder and lightning  
stood under a child's roof  
and listened to the rain of God  
I heard His anger  
at all the injustice in His world  
I saw His tears  
over all the sorrow in His world  
I tasted the drops and found them sweet  
I washed my tears off with His tears  
He said,  
'they that wait upon the Lord  
shall renew their strength  
they shall mount up with wings as eagles  
they shall walk and not be weary  
they shall run and not faint.'  
I saw the sunshine come out after the storm  
the creatures started to stir  
they scurried out of their hiding places  
and the tears of God  
glistened and sparkled on the leaves  
they looked like diamonds in the sun  
GOD!

I chose early in my sorrow to forgive. My father said my response to my tragedy would profoundly affect my



children, my grandchildren... The thought overwhelmed me. How humbling. How important I make the right choice. What an amazing legacy I could pass on!

### ***Forgiveness***

*September 21, 1996*

There's a fire burning  
fire is life  
sometimes it warms, comforts and brings happiness  
sometimes it purges  
it burns a forest  
it cleanses  
allowing new green growth  
it burns  
all the old dead branches and leaves  
it burns a house  
there's rebuilding to do  
there's a sorting of priorities  
a realization of what's important  
and hopefully  
what's left is thankfulness.  
thankfulness over who has survived  
not bitterness over what has been destroyed  
at first we start to see  
the value of the fire  
the purging of our lives  
and then  
as the embers slowly die  
as the smoke drifts lazily into the sky  
and dissipates  
we see forgiveness  
then we can go  
and build a fire  
that gives us comfort, warmth and happiness  
forgiveness  
the purging of our souls

Along with forgiveness comes healing. My wound was much deeper than I realized. I spent hours talking with my friends and family. They listened, we cried, they encouraged, they prayed. I searched frantically for a place I belonged. I felt so understood and misunderstood, I felt surrounded and alone all at the same time. I questioned every belief I had grown up with. I argued with God. I wept and wept. I had many tearful, raving words with my own heart. I wrote and wrote. I spent hours walking my dog and riding my horse.

### ***My Horse***

*January 1, 1996*

I was at the barn last night  
all the horses were in bed  
there was some complaining from various stalls  
at my entering noises  
I took my horse into the arena

and we had a walk and a talk  
we passed several piles of shit  
half a dozen times  
Chico smelled them  
each and every time we passed by  
finally, I guess  
he realized he had smelled that shit before (snort)  
what's the point.

What a lesson for me! The screaming inside my heart stopped in the spring of 1996.

### ***Healing***

*April 18, 1996*

You look in the mirror  
and smile  
because you like that face  
there's light in the eyes  
there's life there  
and maybe  
you are beautiful  
why?  
because you're used to that face  
it doesn't shock you anymore  
and maybe you're starting  
to love that face.

### ***To be known by God***

*June 1, 1996*

I've caught a glimpse of understanding  
and I thank my dear God and Father  
that He has taken time to know me  
His touch has dramatically changed me  
He took my sorrow  
as a window of opportunity  
to get to know me  
I've known all along  
that He wanted all of me  
every last bit of this created being  
I thank you Lord  
that you took the time  
and love  
to win me over  
for you have  
and I love you  
above all else

I know now that the depth of my hurting will be the length of my healing. It means I will have to forgive many times, again and again, until the wound is healed over, until only a scar remains on my heart.

*Continued on page 21 ►*



# Seeds of Hope: An Interview with Wilma Derksen

by Agnes Dyck

*Wilma Derksen and Agnes Dyck met over breakfast at d'8Stove Restaurant in Winnipeg. Wilma has developed a Mennonite Central Committee Victims' Support Program with a newsletter called Pathways.*

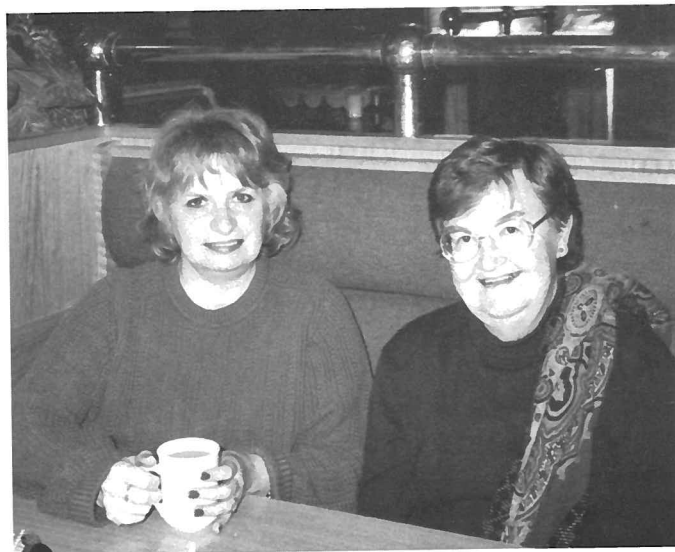
**Agnes:** How did you become involved in an MCC Victims' Support Program?

**Wilma:** A long time ago, I think over the years since Candace's (her daughter's) disappearance, I've worked together with MCC in discussion about their Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP). I've always emphasized that I thought they were offender oriented, and that the victimization issue was very different. So I tried to provide the victim's point of view for them. And about a year ago my interest resulted in a full-time position. I am doing Victims' Awareness on a national basis, supported by the Canadian programs of MCC; the individual provinces are also supporting it financially. It's a local Voluntary Service position that I am contracted to do for two years.

**A.:** What does that mean?

**W.:** I have found that the program has resulted in extensive speaking on Victims' Awareness both for the government and, for example, the Minister of Justice in Nova Scotia. I've been to Ottawa a few times and also on the Parole Board, just providing people with an outline of what victims go through. There my fifteen elements (steps in the healing process) have been really helpful.

Another part of the program has been to create a national network for victims, and to do that we have just started a newsletter called *Pathways*. That's going to be for victims, about their stories, giving them a voice, not so much centering on the justice issues. Justice issues are part of it but they are only one of the fifteen elements that victims experience, so we want to give them a broad perspective. But the newsletter is a network called *Connections* and there we will be connecting victims with victims, and if necessary connecting victims with offenders, meeting victims' needs, but just keeping in touch because in my work with Family Survivors of Homicide, which I was for about seven years, I realized the importance of people of like experience meeting together. You can learn something intangible from that kind of relationship that isn't found in books or in professional counselling, so it provides a certain niche in our own experience.



**A.:** Could you say something about your involvement in Winnipeg?

**W.:** Yes, I think my involvement in Winnipeg is very much still going to Christian women's clubs; I go to Moms' programs. And this is something that most people don't know and is probably interesting, I have been involved with Stony Mountain Prison, speaking to the inmates there and through Open Circle (a Manitoba MCC program that facilitates prison visitation); I'm very connected with Dori Zerbe Cornelson in Open Circle.

**A.:** What about your cross-country activities? The cities that are involved, they span the whole country, Vancouver to Halifax, right?

**W.:** When I think of cross-country, what is wonderful about working with MCC is that there's a director in every province who helps speak, and besides the engagements I get because of prior connections they've also put me on tours, and the variety is fascinating. In Ontario I spoke to theologians at Queens, Toronto School of Theology and McMaster. I talked about some of the issues that theologians have to deal with – forgiveness and theological questions. How does God allow suffering? How does God allow a child to die? And then in Alberta and in B.C. I've done extensive work with the directors, providing victims' awareness for their programs. So that's another level.

**A.:** What feedback have you had? Are people supportive? Are they incredulous? How do they view you?



W.: The response has been overwhelming. My talks elicit a lot of stories – that's why I really want to speak because I elicit stories – and I think the discussions are really important that happen after a talk. I have had personal responses where people just want to get on board, and requests are coming to enlarge the program to deal with things like suicide and sexual abuse. I am starting with homicide and in the last big Victims' Group meeting there were three or four people who had had sexual abuse experiences and homicide experiences, and it was amazing how that was not a conflict (with my program). We all talked about our losses at times. I think that's because my victimization program (including the fifteen elements) is broader than just dealing with families of homicide victims.

**A.: So you've also spoken to inmates in various prisons? What's your main focus when you speak to them?**

W.: I think at first when I started to speak to them I wanted to create Victims' Awareness, to hold them to some degree accountable for what they had done. I think now, especially with my program, I'm focussing more on their victimization because that's really what my talk is about. And what I've discovered is that the prisons are full of our rejected people and there are similarities between victims and offenders. They've developed expertise in victimization, and if I can help them with that then the healing will happen. To allow offenders to remain in their victimization and then to allow them on the streets again is to find that they reoffend. To me, the healing is so important. That's the only way that we can stop the violence. I know that some want me to hold offenders accountable, but the last talk I did, which focussed really on the victimization, I found that the response from the inmates was incredible. The way they came up to me and told their stories; some of them even said that because I hadn't come out to hit them over the head, they were listening to me, and a few of them said they had been moved. And so any kind of movement is really for celebrating, because we don't know their stories.

**A.: We've been conditioned to think in certain ways for years and years.**

W.: Yeah, especially if they're locked away and we're used to it. And the way I opened it up, I said, I'm not that naive that I don't know that all of you are in here for a very good reason (laughs), unless you're wrongly convicted, but you're in here because of something you've done. And I know that there are a lot of people who are holding you accountable for what you've done. We need to be held accountable in my experience with victimization, and this is what I want to give you: I want to give you the freedom to touch your victimization.

**A.: You gear your presentation to the people, right? You**

**change. How would your presentation change if you spoke to people in church? What do you think church people need?**

W.: To the church people I think my message is about forgiveness. I think quick revenge and quick forgiveness are both wrong reactions to victimization. I think that to some degree when we (Wilma and her husband, Cliff) chose forgiveness right from the beginning we still didn't know what it all meant. I think we wanted to escape some of the hard part of processing it, and I don't think you can. I think it's good to choose forgiveness the way we choose God or we choose our husbands, but then we need to know how to walk it.

**A.: That's the difficult part.**

W.: And I think our church has had way too high expectations and we expect things to happen quickly. I had a tremendous healing experience that God designed. The only way to explain it is that God designed it. Twelve years after the event! So if God was willing to wait twelve years for me to reach the moment where I could have a healing experience, why do we expect instant solutions? I think we have to allow the process to unfold.

**A.: Yes, that should be said in churches.**

W.: We ought to see offenders as people we need to work with – just because victims haven't offended in a legal sense doesn't mean that they are better people. We need to evangelize victims with the same care that we extend to offenders. They need seeds of hope just as the offenders do. Victims have tremendous potential for evil, just as offenders do. So anyone who's really hurt needs that careful attention we give in the medical field. We need to do that with victims as well.

### Announcement

The fourth *Women Doing Theology* conference will be held June 25-27, 1998, on the campus of Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. The conference is sponsored by the Women's Concerns Office of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and Kansas Mennonite Women in Ministry. The Theme is "Journey Toward Healing." For more information contact Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, MCC Canada Women's Concerns Coordinator, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9, (204) 261-6381, e-mail [ees@mennonitecc.ca](mailto:ees@mennonitecc.ca) or Gwen Groff, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Coordinator, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500, (700) 859-3889, e-mail [gmg@mccus.org](mailto:gmg@mccus.org)

# Forgiveness is a Journey

by Donna Stewart

Most of us have been taught that forgiveness is an obligation for Christians. If we've had long struggles against bitterness, we ask why forgiveness seems impossible despite prayer and fasting. The Bible verses are imperative but confusing, even contradictory.

Recently several writers have recognized forgiveness as a healing journey that involves victims, offenders and the Christian community in truth-telling, confession, confrontation and struggle. Several Christian authorities insist that part of the process is knowing when not to forgive. Some of those instances follow:

**When the victim is denying that anything hurtful happened.** Denial helps us to avoid pain and humiliation or the responsibility of confronting. Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn, in *Don't Forgive Too Soon* (New York, Paulist Press, 1997), argue that denial has a value, allowing us time to develop courage to face truth. When a person stays too long in denial, though, s/he is blocking God's purposes.

**When the victim is not yet clear about what s/he is forgiving, or who is the real offender.** I once counselled a battered woman who said, "It wasn't too bad. He didn't throw me against the wall this time." She had to be told that choking and stomping her glasses were an offense! People who have been taught to suppress their feelings ("Big girls don't cry") or to lie about them ("Say you're sorry, Dora") or to devalue themselves ("I'm not very smart") may have difficulty identifying an offense. It will take much prayer, the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and long-term encouragement from the Christian community before they will know what they are feeling and why. Only then can they begin to assign responsibility. Forgiveness is not possible, says Flanigan in *Forgiving the Unforgivable* (New York, MacMillan, 1992) until we properly assign blame.

One of the most common errors for women is unwarranted self-blame. Because women have accepted responsibility for relationships in our society, self-blame is easier than blame. If we were "raised guilty," we shy away from the burden of blaming another. I heard the victim of a savage beating say, "It was my fault; I burned the toast." She will continue to be a victim until she can take the step of saying, "What you did was wrong, and I did not deserve it." Then she may be able to see how her willingness to take blame encouraged him in his sin. The Linn volume

encourages victims to see and tell the truth and their fellow-believers to support and encourage them.

**When the victim is not acting out of choice as a person made in the image of God but as a continuing victim.** When Christ says "Bless your enemies," "Pray for those who ill-treat you," he is not calling us to doormat Christianity. If I say words of forgiveness because I have no choice, it is not true forgiveness. I must take some action to reclaim my dignity as a child of God, worthy of respect.

**When the victim has not made her grievance known to the offender.** Then s/he has no opportunity to clear away misunderstandings, nor to apologize. In Matthew 18: 15-19 the goal is reconciliation. The command is to confront as a means to the desired outcome. That's why Augsburg

devotes half of his odd two-sided book *Caring Enough to Forgive to Caring Enough to Not Forgive* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981). He takes seriously Jesus' teaching to rebuke brothers or sisters who sin, and if they repent, to forgive them (Luke 17:4). He urges us to pay attention to Paul's exhortation: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood

and speak truthfully to [your] neighbour" (Eph. 4: 25 NIV).

Obedying these commands of God, the victim refuses the "forgive and forget" "sweep it under the carpet" "pretend it never happened" processes that are doomed to failure.

**When we have neither grieved nor raged.** As Mennonites, we oppose so firmly the violent expression of anger that we often think anger itself is evil. But anger is a gift from God for self-protection, an "Early Warning Signal" that tells us something needs attention. The Bible does not say, "Don't be angry." It tells us to deal with anger promptly. "... do not let anger lead you into sin; do not let sunset find you still nursing it" (Eph. 4: 26,27 NEB). "Anyone who nurses anger against [a brother or sister] must be brought to judgment" (Mt. 5:22 NEB). We may need to "stay with" our anger long enough to know ourselves and our circumstances better. The Linns parallel the five stages of forgiveness to the five stages of death and dying. They say, "Each of the five stages [of forgiveness] is like a chapter in a story, revealing a part of ourselves that we are tempted to push away.... When we listen respectfully to all five chapters in the story of a hurt, we regain our center and a creative [nonviolent] solution can emerge naturally." (p. 10)

*Part of the process  
is knowing when not  
to forgive.*



Individual personality types and their responses in different parts of the journey vary; so the process of forgiveness is not rigidly ordered. Confusion is normal! Yet we are promised that in all things God works for the good of those who love God (Romans 8:28). If we cannot yet forgive, we can honour the stage we are in, and pray for the Holy Spirit to give us the insights necessary for further progress.

**When the victim is depressed.** The Bible teaches us that general self-accusation, as opposed to specific guilt for a particular sin, is a temptation from the Evil One (Revelations 12:10,11). Psychology teaches that depression is often repressed anger. In either case we are not seeing things truthfully and are apt to wallow in self-blame.

**While there has been no confession, repentance or restitution.** Ultimately, a victim will need to bear the burden of the other's sin, forgiving to achieve personal freedom. The offender, however, will be unable to receive that forgiveness until s/he has confessed. For as long as there is hope of repentance, the victim is to bless the offender by confronting and rebuking, with witnesses. When s/he does that, s/he can be an instrument of grace in the life of the offender, calling her to repentance. Whatever the outcome, God has been glorified and the church strengthened.

L. Gregory Jones (*Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) reminds us that confession, repentance and forgiveness are central to authentic community. The church is a community called out of darkness to unlearn sin and to learn forgiveness and love of one's enemies. Through the confession and repentance that are essential to baptism, Christians are conformed to the death of Christ, dying to possession of our own lives and rising to new life in Christ. "Forgiveness," concludes Jones, "is an invitation to imagine and embody a future that is not bound by the past or condemned to repeat it."

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*Donna Stewart is an adult educator, mother, grandmother, and current chair of MCC Women's Concerns, B.C. Studying and teaching about forgiveness is one of their major concerns this year, as a result of a workshop with Heather Block (of Voices for Non Violence, an organization dedicated to educating people about domestic violence) last March. Donna says she's had lots of practice forgiving and needing forgiveness, in reverse order.*

## *Cleaning Woman's Lament*

by Esther Regehr

Cleaning up other people's messes,  
this is what I do in life:

ferreting dirt out of corners,  
carrying out broken chairs  
and lamps,  
sweeping up the abandoned pieces  
of someone else's life;  
scouring with foolhardy hope  
the next dweller will embrace this place,  
nourish the arts of house and home,  
hang its walls with  
circlets of song.

Crawling home, spent,  
I wonder -

Who will clean up my messes:  
broken promises,  
harsh words,  
squandered opportunities?

Who will ferret out my clogging fears,  
polish the heart's grimy windows  
till daylight scours its dingy walls?

Who will salvage the tattered  
remnants of my life,  
piece from them  
with careful stitches  
an heirloom quilt:

deep-rooted faith, strip-pieced  
with dogged hope,  
enclosed in a border  
of steadfast love that covers  
a multitude of flaws?

A thing of beauty, something to warm  
my children's bones  
in the winter of their souls.

.....  
*Esther Regehr is a rental supervisor and mother of two grown sons, living in Waterloo, Ontario. She and her husband attend Waterloo North Mennonite Church.*

# Searching for Healing in Rwanda and Burundi

by Suzanne Yoder

*“My* God, open the skies and take us all!” cried a panicked Rwandan Hutu woman when she saw her praying Tutsi friends being massacred one by one outside her home in Kigali.

This woman and other Hutu and Tutsi Christian leaders are finding ways to heal the deep emotional pain that has seared the entire country since the 1994 genocide when 500,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by Hutus.

How are the women in Burundi and Rwanda managing to forgive? Many are not able to, for the crimes seem truly unforgivable. Hidden anger grows in many of the Tutsis as they grieve lost family members, and also in Hutus fearing reprisals and denunciation of the innocent. For many, resentment has led to bitterness and finally to a debilitating state of sorrow, helplessness and hopelessness. Some carry a profound desire for vengeance, which feeds the cycle of violence, creating a culture of paranoia.

Many are experiencing spiritual darkness. They pray daily for Jesus to return in the Second Coming. “We cannot live like this. This grief, shame and remorse is too hard,” many admit.

Eighty percent of Rwanda’s and Burundi’s people claim Christianity as their religion. There is much Bible reading, in prayer groups as well as by individuals sitting outside their homes or riding in a public van. One woman recounted the many Bible verses that were keeping her sane. She, a Hutu, had been forced to watch her three children killed by her own Hutu people because she was married to a Tutsi. In both countries children belong to their father’s ethnic group.

One important way the women are coping is by joining small neighbourhood prayer groups. One group fasts on Fridays, praying all day for God to help them feed their families, heal their hurt and grief, take away their fear and forgive their guilt. They sing and dance, praising God when even one small detail is answered. Otherwise, they trust that God knows best and that there must be a reason for God’s silence, for God’s allowing this suffering.

Many receive some comfort in identifying with the Israelites and the ten generations of pain they lived

through. It helps to connect with the pain of their African ancestors, with Jesus’ pain on the cross and with each other in their present trauma. “It is good for us to remember others’ pain, just in case we start to think that our wounds are greater than any other’s,” said one woman.

While some women blame Satan and cry very emotional prayers asking God to cast the Devil out of Rwanda and Burundi, others are more open to accepting individual responsibility for choosing between good and evil – both during the genocide and now.

They take seriously the exhortation in Galatians 6:2 to carry one another’s burdens even though doing so involves pain and sacrifice. One group explained that sharing is the natural response and is done with great generosity in a crisis situation. This particular crisis, however, is long term and the

needs of food, clothing, shelter and trauma healing are overwhelming. They do not have enough to share.

The women do not dwell on blaming colonialists and arms dealers for what happened, even though these factors are mentioned along with many other causes for the genocide. However it did help them to realize that their corner of the world is not unique. Human tragedies have happened in other places, such as the Holocaust and the bombs dropped on Japan. There is some comfort when outsiders admit their guilt, their role, in allowing such human tragedy to happen, no matter how small the role was.

Individuals express feelings of being forsaken by God. Some think God must be punishing them for their sins and that the country needs revival for true restoration to happen. Only a few dare to admit that they have renounced their faith in God because of what happened. Most are not inclined to blame God but believe that we humans with our free will have messed up badly and are now living with the consequences.

A few voices are urging women to stand up and say “no” to the men in their families who are prone to turn to violence in trying to resolve the issues in their country. A Burundian Hutu woman, for example, refused to cook some beef her husband brought home. He had stolen and killed a Tutsi cow. She told him his action was wrong. Consequently, the meat was cursed; and she would not feed it to her children.

There are some dramatic stories of women who claim

*Hutu and Tutsi Christian leaders are finding ways to heal the deep emotional pain that has seared the entire country since the 1994 genocide.*

## LETTERS

they have received the grace to forgive. They don't claim they have pardoned the killer – that is for God to do – but they have no desire to avenge themselves and they are able to smile and get on with their lives. In some circles where these testimonies were shared, other women seemed to envy their success and begged to know how to accomplish the same peace of mind.

When wounds to the spirit are deep, it seems they are healed only with the help of others. The community can work together to heal both the offender and the victim. An example of this in Rwanda is told by a Tutsi pastor who ministers to the Hutu killers in prison. One of the killers asked if he could confess his crime to a survivor of the family he had killed. The pastor found a woman survivor who agreed to face her family's killer. The prisoner repented and expressed his remorse. She was able to forgive and proved it by taking him food once a week.

Most women believe that true forgiveness is the only way to put a stop to the killing, and many are committed to finding a way to achieve forgiveness.

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Suzanne Yoder lives in Davidson, North Carolina. She worships at the Davidson Friends Meeting and once a

month at Oakhill Mennonite Church in Winston, Salem. She is a trained counsellor and writes on religious and psychological subjects. She and her husband, Lauren Yoder, have served five years as volunteers with MCC. They have returned recently from Africa where they spent the last two years working on peacemaking and trauma healing.



The "Sisters" issue (Fall 1997) was superb. After lending my issue to my next door neighbour, she decided to subscribe too. Looking forward to 1998.

Hilda J. Born  
Abbotsford, BC

*Ed. Look forward to a review of Hilda's new book, Maria's Century, in a future issue.*

The Spring 1997 Issue, and especially "Dear Ones Far, Far Away..." by Anganetha Wiebe, was very interesting. Our Anabaptist people have suffered, survived and therefore have much to give our new home in portraying stability and a faith in Christ that is alive and works in everyday life. Best wishes and blessings!

Mary K. V. Brodie  
Ottawa, ON

When at last the June (1997) issue arrived with my story in print ("The Cushion") I had to phone the good news to our children. Thank you for using my story. "Dear Ones Far, Far Away..." reminded me of the poignant experiences I had recorded during the one-and-a-half years spent in the Friedland, Germany, immigration camp. The cover painting, "Wedding Day," (by Ray Dirks) is beautiful and makes me wish I could have seen the exhibit. I also liked Harold Jantz's input. I believe we gain much and grow by reading of other people's experiences.

Martha Rempel  
Medicine Hat, AB

I am looking for information about early (c. 1900) Mennonite settlements in Vanderhoof, B.C. Please send to: Shirley Bergen, 1819 34 St., Brandon, MB R7A 5Y1

I enjoy the magazine immensely and find the writings often reflect my

experience. What about an issue dealing with mid-life transitions, or the concept of "detours" in one's life? Another idea is the issue of "necessary losses" – acknowledging my past experiences as part of my life and mourning the unmet dreams or broken relationships, and then figuring out how to live in the present with the reality of my life now. Keep up the good work. I love hearing women's stories!

Marjorie Warkentin  
Abbotsford, BC

*Ed. In fact, you can look forward to the October 1998 issue, now being planned by women from BC on those very topics!*

*Sophia* is a terrific magazine. The first sentence in the mission statement reads: "*Sophia* offers a forum for women in the MB Church." In your editorial, you stated, "...we're seeking ways to make *Sophia* more widely known and read." Is this magazine to remain exclusive – or could it become a forum for all Mennonite women?

Margaret Bergen  
Winnipeg

*Ed. We've been in the process of revising our mission statement and have come up with a new version, which you can read in this issue. Although we loved the wording of the original, we felt we needed to be more specific about who we are now. As a magazine we do want to continue to acknowledge our roots in (and continuing nourishment from) the Mennonite Brethren church. At the same time, the wisdom of God comes to all followers of Jesus Christ, and my hope is that we can share that with all our sisters in the faith. Thanks for bringing the subject up.*

*Sophia* welcomes letters about articles and suggestions for topics. You can write or e-mail us at the address on page 1.

# Oma

by Eleanor Martens

*My* grandparents used to laugh when I said I liked the smell of manure. It's really a tribute to them.

Just a whiff of the stuff and I'm back on their dairy farm at the edge of the Rockies where I spent many of my childhood summers. The scent of fresh hay and sunny pastures also lures me back, as do old barns. Opa's barn was a vast shadowy world of mice, kittens and brown-eyed bovines who would stand patiently munching while being coopted into the multitude of games inspired by our spacious playground. House and garden were Oma's domain. It is colour that stirs up those memories. Purple hydrangeas and crimson raspberries never fail to sweep me back to the ancient porch where I am having a bedtime snack while Oma sits in her rocker humming and darning old socks.

Those were important summers in my life, not only for the fresh air adventures they gave me but because they placed me under the influence of two of the most devout people I've ever known. My grandparents seldom lectured or theologized but when it came to kindness and generosity they taught me more than all the sermons in the world. Opa's request that God "take him home" was granted many years ago. Oma waits to join him in the tiny nursing home cubicle that has been her home for the past 15 years.

At ninety-seven, the years have not been too unkind. She's arthritic and has broken her hip often enough to require a wheelchair, but she can still see and hear and enjoy banana chips and flowers and family visits. Although she has forgotten many of our names, her face lights up when we walk in the door. She still cares about her appearance. Not so long ago she cut her hair for the first time and started wearing jewelry, practices she would have rejected at an earlier age. Her frugal nature remains intact. She still won't wear the "good" dresses in her closet, saving them for that "special occasion" which may be just around the corner. I have no doubt she will continue preserving them into eternity.

*Ancient fears have been  
reawakened*

What has become most painful to watch as Oma grows older are the paranoia and ancient fears that have been re-awakened by her deteriorating brain cells and the many hours where she has little to do except think, pray and remember. She has vivid memories of her early years in Russia – her abduction by marauding bandits, her marriage to my grandfather at the age of 20 after coming to nurse his family, most of whom were dying of typhus. Then the near-death of her own first two children from starvation, the terrifying flight across the border (all the relatives "disqualified" by illness and turned back) and the death-defying ocean voyage; this followed by harsh treatment from immigration officers, settlement on

hostile terrain and the overwhelming strangeness of new land and language.

What really torments her though after 72 years of living in Canada in peace and prosperity, is that her passport will be rescinded. "They" will find some error in it, some alarming miscalculation or oversight and force her to go back. Refuting her fears has proven difficult. It seems there is little one can say to this frail little wheelchair-bound woman that will convince her the immigration police are not about to come and haul her out of her nursing home and send her packing on the first boat back to Russia.

As groundless and pathetic as it is, her fright reminds one that not far beneath the surface for many of her generation lurk those terrible years in Russia. One wonders how it is then that women like her managed to come to terms with their past. What enabled them to build good, seemingly happy and productive lives out of the unspeakable horrors that lay behind?

This seemed like a good question to ask in an issue on "forgiveness" so we engaged in some archival research. To our dismay, although not complete surprise, we found an alarming dearth of material on the subject. Several explanations seem plausible. We know that there were fewer educated women in that era and therefore fewer willing to write or tell their stories publicly. Most accounts of Mennonite tribulation are therefore told from a male perspective, explaining why one reads so little about what it was like to raise families in the absence of fathers or, as historian Marlene Epp notes, the shroud of silence surrounding the



sexual crimes which were inflicted on so many mothers and daughters during that time.

These are obvious reasons for wanting to deal privately with one's memories. But even the less "shameful" stories often have to be pried out of this generation of women. Some, it seems, consider it brazen and immodest to voice personal hurts and longings from long ago. Others may want to avoid the crippling emotions such memories evoke: anger, fear, sorrow, the desire for revenge. They may even repress them into deep psychic chambers from which, in disinhibited old age, they again rise to the surface.

In most cases, the pivotal response seems to have been "acceptance." Tragedy and suffering must be accepted and, with God's help, turned into something good.

These are not unhealthy ways of coping. Today's therapeutic culture constantly urges us to examine and relive our most disturbing memories, even to exhume those of which we are unaware. Surely this is not always wholesome. Excessive wallowing in the past may even do more damage than good. And gold does sometimes emerge from the crucible of suffering.

At least that's the impression I get from Oma who, along with others

in her generation, refused to let the past govern the future. We may wish they had written more about "forgiveness" but we can't ask for any clearer evidence of it from their lives. Instead of living with bitterness and regret, our disinherited elders chose to trust God for what lay ahead. They turned their sorrows into joy and their tragedies into empathy for others. Which is why I suspect Oma and Opa were able to laugh and love and be generous to others, and why life on the farm continues to be one of my favourite memories.





# When We Are Not Forgiven

by Susan Brandt



**F**orgiveness is a concept familiar to everyone, something we all need and expect to receive – first from God and then from others. Forgiveness is a gift that God offers freely to everyone who wishes to receive it.

Forgiveness between people, however, is often not easy or straightforward. And being unforgiven is one of the most painful feelings we can experience. The following examples illustrate this.

Jane and her husband, Don, visited his brother and sister-in-law Peter and Annabelle. According to Jane, during the visit, another brother was maligned and she spoke up to defend him. This was not appreciated and hurt feelings resulted. During a subsequent meeting between Peter and Don this issue was brought up. Upon hearing this, Jane immediately sent a letter of apology. However, the apology was never accepted, and the ill will continued. Subsequent efforts at reconciliation were also snubbed, and the two families have not been able to visit together since.

Then there is a story of a woman who was the youngest in the family. Since she was considerably younger than her siblings, she often felt belittled by them. Many years after her marriage she mentioned to her siblings that it was so good to be considered equal with the

older siblings. This remark was somehow painful to the rest of the family. When this woman was made aware of the hurt she had caused, she sent a letter to each of her siblings asking their forgiveness. No one ever responded to her letter. When this woman mentioned this to one sibling, the significance of the situation was downplayed. Nevertheless, her relationship with her siblings was never broken; she sensed through the actions of her siblings that forgiveness had been given even though it had not been spoken overtly.

Another illustration involves a person who does not like to listen to a certain Christian radio program because the producer has not acted honourably in a specific instance. This person needs to forgive and let go.

According to David Norris in Harold Kushner's book, *How Good Do We Have to Be?* "Forgiveness involves letting go not only of the negative energy connected with an injury but also of the meanings which are learned as a result of that and similar injuries throughout one's life." In the second story, the woman's family let go of any injuries that had been experienced, and good relationships were maintained.

Lewis Smedes, in *The Art of Forgiveness*, says, "We forgive when we discover that we really want to forgive, and we want to forgive when we want to heal ourselves from the hangover of the wounded past. And when we actually do forgive, we are only doing what comes naturally to anyone who has felt the breath of forgiving love on her own heart."

The feeling of being unforgiven is tough to live with. It is difficult to accept the fact that either you have hurt someone so badly that this person cannot forgive you or that another person has not been able to accept grace from God to forgive. "If we cannot love imperfect people, if we cannot forgive them for their exasperating faults, we will condemn ourselves to a life of loneliness, because imperfect people are the only kind we will ever find" (Kushner). This implies that the person who is not forgiving is the person to be pitied. In the first example, forgiveness was not offered but Jane has been able to get on with her life because she made every effort at restitution.

"Many of us are reluctant to forgive. We nurture grievances because that makes us feel morally superior. Withholding forgiveness gives us a sense of power, often power over someone who otherwise leaves us feeling powerless. The only power we have over them is the power to remain angry at them" (Kushner).

Once forgiveness is asked for and honest attempts at restitution are made, the "sinner" has to accept whatever the outcome is. If forgiveness is not forthcoming, the

*Being unforgiven is one of the most painful feelings we can experience.*

"sinner" still has to get on with life as though forgiveness has been extended. Again, according to Kushner, "I'm not okay, you're not okay, but that's okay." Nothing can separate us from God." This is probably one of the most difficult aspects of forgiveness. As in the case of Jane, family gatherings can be difficult times, and yet not to attend would rob her family of good interaction with the extended family.

On the other hand, forgiveness sets people free and asking for forgiveness allows us to be free. In a recent sermon, David Schroeder (professor emeritus at Canadian Mennonite Bible College) stated, "When you forgive you are dealing with sin the only way you can deal with it." This is how God has treated us: While we were sinners, Christ died for us, and through that, we have received forgiveness from God.

Our forgiveness also has to go beyond the "that's okay" stage. How often has that phrase been used as a response when some asks for forgiveness - "Oh, that's okay."? This negates the feeling of the "sinner" and implies that what s/he thought was important really isn't that important. When we have blown it in a situation, we feel bad about it. We confess, and, in order to feel forgiven, we must have our mistake recognized for what it is. Then both parties can continue the relationship unhindered. Otherwise we still feel unforgiven.

It takes courage to ask for forgiveness. It takes love and grace to forgive. If both steps are taken, relationships can be maintained or healed. If either one is missing, relationships can be forever ruined. Both parties must make every effort reach out so that true forgiveness can happen.

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Susan Brandt is managing editor of the Mennonite Brethren Herald and a member of River East MB Church, Winnipeg.

# Forgiveness, Accountability and Prayer

by Jane Woelk

I have been blessed immeasurably by people who have forgiven me when I have approached them, confessed the sin and asked for forgiveness. These people have taken Jesus' words to forgive "seventy times seven times" to heart. Others, myself included, have not always done so. I have found it very easy to forgive when a person has come to me with genuine repentance, however, when the offender has not asked for forgiveness, especially in the case of a serious offense against me or against someone I love, I have been guilty of an unforgiving heart.

The Mennonite Brethren church in which I grew up taught that we must forgive everyone who offends us in any way. I realized recently, while reading the following verses, that the guilt I have experienced for my unforgiving feelings may not be coming from God: In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus said, "... If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive" (NRSV, italics mine). In John 20:23, Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." I have knelt down with tears and sincerity and have told God that I have forgiven an offender, only to experience an unforgiving spirit years later when I met this unrepentant person again. Through these verses I have realized that God has not forgotten my words of forgiveness, though the 'evil one' uses a meeting of the offender to retain memories. I interpret Jesus' words as saying that I can choose to wait to tell the offender that I have forgiven him until he repents and asks me to forgive him. Knowing this, and also that God has heard my words of forgiveness, has brought me peace of mind.

Lewis B. Smedes says in his book *Choices: Making Right Decisions in a Complex World*, "No one ever forgives a person without blaming him first .... If we forgive people at all, we forgive them precisely because we hold them accountable." I had never thought about this aspect of forgiveness before. Forgiving someone is not the same as excusing someone's actions. People need to be held accountable for their wrongful actions.

Many years ago someone told me that it is impossible to hate someone for whom you are praying. In recent years, my prayers for people who have hurt me have included the following: "I ask you, Supreme, Holy God, to heal any bitterness in me, and by the power of your Holy Spirit I ask you to bring to my heart and mind only those memories that serve to refresh and renew my spirit." My heart's desire is for reconciliation with my offenders and a right, whole and just relationship with them, and thus with my Creator.

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Jane Woelk is currently working on a Bachelor's degree in Conflict Resolution Studies at the University of Winnipeg and Concord College. She and her husband have two children, and they attend McIvor Ave. MB Church in Winnipeg.



# Setting Down the **Burdens**

Recently my son said to me, "Mom, you were completely wrong when you said girls like guys who are sensitive and thoughtful. None of the 'nice guys' I know have girl friends. Girls want guys who are exciting and treat them bad." I started to say all the right things, the motherly things, about long-term meaningful relationships. He cut me short with one question: "What were you looking for in a man when you chose Dad?"

Unfair question.

Recently, my daughter and I were discussing which courses she should take at university. She is now the age I was when I married. I am often jealous of her opportunities to travel and study. All her options are wide open, happily ever after waiting to begin. She didn't want to hear one more time about how fortunate she is, and she said to me, "It's not my fault that you decided to marry and just have kids. Don't try to live your life through me!"

Unfair words.

More than twenty years ago, I found the most wonderful man. Handsome, romantic, dangerously exciting ... more dangerous and exciting than anyone I had known. He kept his sensitivity and thoughtfulness well hidden behind a macho facade. Macho was big in the '70s. I was taught the importance of marrying a Christian, but my heart told me otherwise. I chose to marry the man of my dreams even though he was not a born-again Christian.

Recently, I have been crying. Crying for how I wanted things to be when I was young ... for how happily ever after often wasn't there. Crying for the young woman who was so much in love, and yet so lonely and hurt.

For years I decided this was my punishment for disobeying God. Why did I think God would bless me when I had deliberately married against his will? Then I rediscovered God's grace. Divine forgiveness that is given graciously, without resentment, at great cost to the giver.

Only God is able to take what the devil intends for evil and turn it into a thing of beauty. My husband has been a Christian for many years. The man he has become is far more exciting than the man I married. I see the grace of God in action in my husband's life, changing him into a mighty man of God ... a man who loves God, his wife and

his children, who is not afraid to tell anyone who asks. I wonder if grace is evident in my life?

Recently, I have been crying. Crying for the early years. Years when we didn't know how to love each other. Years when selfishness and pride seemed to be in control. Years when, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't make my dreams come true.

God loved both of us in our years of hurt. Why was I so busy looking everywhere but to God to heal my heart and dreams? Was I not taught that he is the good shepherd, my refuge in times of trouble, the lover of my soul?

Recently, I have been angry. Angry at the man God has forgiven, at all the memories, the failures. Could anyone have lived up to my dreams? But he didn't even try.

I am forgiven, and God's love for me is so much greater than all my sin. God's forgiveness frees me of the burden of my sin. When I don't forgive myself, I carry burdens I don't need to. When I don't forgive others, the weight is even greater.

Recently, I have been angry. Angry at myself for carrying and collecting burdens better left behind years ago, at my failure to forgive when it's what God asks me to do.

More recently, I have been learning. Learning that, no matter how hard I try, it's not by my effort that forgiveness comes. Just as God's forgiveness to me is divine, my forgiveness toward myself and others is divine. "For it is by grace that I have been saved, through faith and this not of myself, it is the gift of God – not by my own work, lest I should boast. For I am God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for me to do" (adapted from Ephesians 2:8-10).

More recently, I have been willing. Willing to let go of the control I have over others when I don't forgive. To set down the burdens that have no value. And through my willingness, God's divine love is able to be shown through me. God's forgiveness is beginning to soak into my heart. God's grace is extended to others through me. Maybe, in spite of who I know myself to be, I am going to become that person of beauty God intended me to be all along.

.....  
*The author of this piece wishes to remain anonymous.*



# Three Generations of Marys

by Leigh Pittenger

If you were to ask my mother, "How do you see your life as a woman and a Christian at the end of the twentieth century?" she wouldn't know how to answer. She might be puzzled by the question itself, one which assumes something significant or problematic about embracing both identities. For my mother, the relationship between gender identity and religious belief has never been an issue. For me, however, it has been a question for several years, and I still struggle to figure out what it means to be a woman and a Christian in a rapidly changing time.

We are three generations of Marys: my grandmother (Mary Ella), my mother (Mary Ruth) and me (Mary Leigh). My story goes back to my mother's mother, who was born and raised in Sewanee, Tennessee, in the heart of that region of the United States known as the Bible Belt. My grandmother became a member of the Church of Christ when she married, so my mother and I were raised as Church of Christ women.

My grandmother was physically frail but strong in the faith; I remember her praying with me at bedtime when I was a girl and reminding me through all my years to love the Lord and keep his commandments. She died just over a year ago, leaving behind a notebook filled with notes from sermons and some of her own religious poems. I had never known that she wrote poetry until she was gone.

My mother's faith equalled that of her mother's. She was active in the church within her limits; she taught Sunday school faithfully during all the years I was growing up. Other than Sunday school teaching and nursery care, there were few opportunities for women to contribute visibly to our church. We did not read Scripture aloud, serve communion, lead prayer or singing, or even greet people at the door – much less deliver a message. Both my mother and grandmother seemed to be content with this arrangement; even now, my mother says, "I don't like women in leadership roles." Before this year, I had never prayed or read the Bible aloud in public.

My initial experience in the church left me feeling somewhat isolated from other women. Other than the members of my family, there seemed to be few female role models. There is no doubt that women have managed to form strong female communities even in highly conservative environments, but the few women in our small church made little effort to connect with each other. Somehow my mother and grandmother did not find the absence of

female community diminishing to their faith, but by the time I reached adulthood I did.

In the world outside my church, I saw plenty of women to admire – women who were thinking, speaking and acting in influential ways. At university I was being encouraged by both male and female professors as a scholar. It no longer made sense to go to a church where I was expected to be silent and act as an observer rather than a participant.

When I was a student at a secular university, the women I admired for their intelligence, independence and leadership ability were not Christian.

For a while, I almost became convinced that there was no way to reconcile my attraction to feminism and my Christian belief. I was tempted to abandon my religious faith altogether. Instead, however, I began to search for women who could teach me what it meant to be a woman as well as a Christian. It required that I look outside of my home church, but I

did find them. Some were writers, such as the poet Denise Levertov. Others were women I encountered in other churches or Christian organizations. For me, entering a larger Christian world made up of many denominations has enabled me to find female communities that nurture my own spiritual journey.

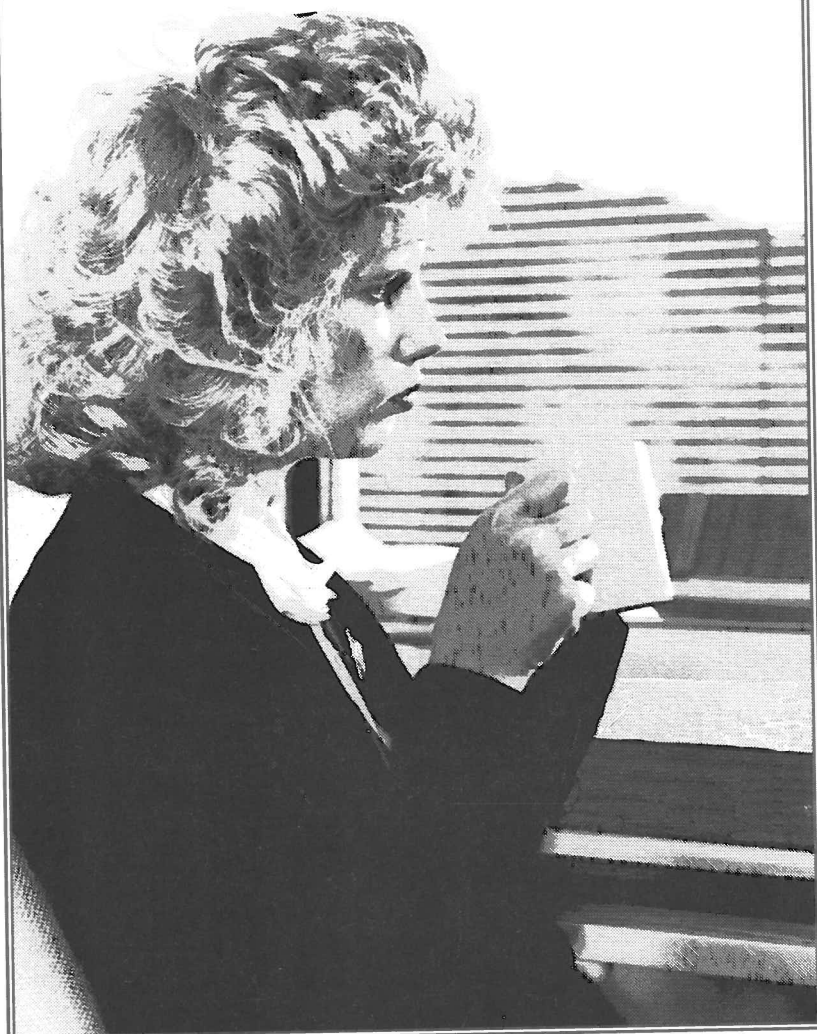
As for the Marys in generations to follow, it remains to be seen how they will view their experience as Christian women, but the signs look promising. For me, unlike my mother and her mother before her, being both a woman and a Christian has led to questioning and reflection. However, I have found the search that began in college to be exciting and rewarding. I am thankful that I'm living in a time when there are Christians committed to helping women discover and interpret their own experience in light of biblical examples. I have seen churches where young women are actively speaking, praying and singing. When Christians recognize that women's gifts extend well beyond their traditional roles, both women and men can join in the privilege of serving God in a variety of ways.

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Leigh Pittenger holds a Master's degree in English from the University of Kentucky and teaches English at the Lithuanian Christian College (LCC) in Klaipeda, Lithuania, where she met Sarah Klassen and became familiar with *Sophia*.

*For me, unlike my mother  
and her mother before her,  
being both a woman  
and a Christian has led to  
questioning and reflection.*

# The Way To Go

by Faith Wiebe



**S**aturday Afternoon, June 12, 1993. I was walking, rather shakily, down the corridors of Pasqua Hospital in Regina. I hadn't talked to him in five years. My legs felt rubbery and I was almost running now. I turned in at a room to my right at the end of the hallway. His bed was at the far side of the room, beside the window. His huge brown eyes met mine as I entered the room. My husband lay dying of cancer.

Len and I were married on June 27, 1976, in the Swift Current Mennonite Brethren Church. I had looked forward to my marriage with great anticipation. So had Len. Our first year of married life was spent as students at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. Len had plans to enter church ministry. But it soon became obvious that Len was struggling with serious depression. I worked towards obtaining my Bachelor of Religious Studies degree and my piano

teacher's diploma. Before our marriage I had believed that love would conquer all. Now love began to be seriously tested. I recall long car rides on bitterly cold January days – Len driving, silent and miserable.

Some dreams did come true for us. I graduated from MBBC and the University of Winnipeg and received my ARCT in piano teaching. Len graduated into being a Winnipeg Transit bus driver.

Our life together seemed to go more smoothly after 1978. We bought our first home and settled into a routine. Len continued to work for Winnipeg Transit and I had a class of about fifteen piano students. Len became a Big Brother, directed a choir at Salem MB Church and together we taught a Sunday school class. I accompanied the choir. On January 17, 1981, our son Arlen was born. I enjoyed motherhood, homemaking and music-making. Len entered into fatherhood with some uncertainty at first, but soon diaper-changing, bathing and playing with Arlen were common scenes in our house.

Things took a turn for the worse during the summer of 1983. Len was experiencing serious depression. He was unable to work or parent for the next several summers. During those months Len's sleeping patterns were often reversed or he would be unable to sleep at all. He became extremely irritable. Ordinary household sounds disturbed him. I was unable to vacuum or even have the refrigerator plugged in during the summer months. My toddler son and I spent most of our waking hours in Vimy Ridge Park. Arlen longed for his father's love and affection. I spent many hours crying. We were trying our best.

My relationship with Len developed serious cracks. Len became an abusive and controlling husband. Life was a yo-yo experience for me while Len tried different psychiatrists and hospital therapies. He was unable to work for two full years. We separated in the fall of 1986. I felt so unloved.

In the spring of 1987 we moved back together again. I was teaching piano at the Yamaha Music School. Len returned to work gradually. However by Christmas he was feeling extremely anxious regarding his job. I could feel the ball rolling faster than I could control it. Our marriage counselling sessions were not working. Len began to spend nights elsewhere. It was too stressful for him to live at home. I really hurt. I did not understand.

Then on March 3, 1988, a new chapter in my life began. Len disappeared for two weeks. On the advice of our marriage counsellor, I changed the locks on all the doors.

When he came home I told him that I was filing for a legal separation. He hugged me for what was to be the last time and I felt I would die. It was the hardest thing that I have ever done. My parents came to stay with me and I made new plans for my life. I began to prepare for going to Seminary by taking Greek at Concord College. I continued to teach piano at home and at Yamaha Music School. God was showing me the way to go on with my life.

Len's life changed dramatically, too. He was hospitalized in Swift Current and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Eventually he went to live in the Salvation Army Hostel on Osler Street in Regina. He became a street person for five years. In the fall of 1992 another serious illness befell him. On June 7, 1993, he was diagnosed with cancer of the kidneys. Len had

two weeks left to live. My brother-in-law phoned me with the news. My head and heart were spinning.

I decided to go and say good-bye to him. My 12-year-old son and I packed our suitcases and my Uncle Jack drove us to Regina.

I had been waiting to talk with Len for a long time. For most of the past twelve years I had lived with uncertainty, afraid of this man. But today was different. Finally I could face him as an equal. Why? Because at last I had learned what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. I had learned that following Jesus means being called to a discipleship of equals.

On that day, June 12, 1993, we had a kind of reconciliation. His eyes met mine as I entered his hospital room. After some uncertain moments together I whispered, "I love you!" I waited. "Do you love me, too?" I asked.

"Yes!" he said. The tears began to flow down Arlen's cheeks. All three of us now folded into each other's arms. A few more moments passed. "We did the best we could," Len said finally. My heart jumped. I had needed to hear those words so badly. Indeed, each of us had gone on in faith, believing that God would show the way. And God had.

I told Len about my plans to go to seminary. He sat up, smiled amidst his pain, and raised his hand in affirmation, as if to say, "Way to go!"

One week later, Len died. My son and I continued on our life's journey. In August we moved to Fresno, California, where I began my studies at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.

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Faith Wiebe earns her living by teaching piano and is looking for a pastoral position. She and her son, Arlen, are members of Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Faith is getting married on March 14 of this year.

## The Long and Painful Path

Continued from page 7

### Dignity

December 6, 1997

I've been abused  
All this time  
I've longed for a bit of dignity from him  
I wanted him to say

'I'm sorry

I treated you badly'

I wanted him to treat me like a person

isn't it sad?

longing for something

so small

and so impossible at the same time.

Today

I realized

that it's my choice again

I can long all my life

for this dignity

which may never come my way or

I can open my eyes

and see how God gives me dignity

He loves me

He's given me a father who loves me

a brother who loves me

and now, a husband who loves me

these special men

and many others in my life

are giving me dignity

are treating me like a person

I chose to thank God

for His healing dignity

and I close the door

on that impossible longing

of regaining dignity

from the one who robbed me of it

Another thing to forgive, another lesson realized, another step along the way to life. And so I will continue, learning lessons that forgiveness teaches. And close behind me are my precious children. They're learning forgiveness too. I treasure every step they take, every bit of laughter, every bit of childhood regained. The miracle of forgiveness!

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own  
understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge Him,  
and He will make your paths  
straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

.....  
\*"Marie" has chosen to conceal her real name to protect her identity and those close to her. She asks, if you recognize her, to forgive him too.



**My** journal in the fall of 1977 before I left for a six-week study tour of India carried many entries about my burdens. Of particular concern to me was my oldest daughter, Joanna, caught in the radical student movement of the times. Our severe clashes over her lifestyle choices widened the gap between us.

I hated the anger and humiliation I felt. I hated my helplessness in trying to convince her there were better ways of living free than footloose and without visible means of support.

I went to India, wanting to forget my many burdens. Yet can one ever truly forget a difficult past in such a way that it is remembered with joy? We get rid of clothing or articles we don't want by discarding them. The used-clothing store and the garbage can are willing receivers. It is not easy, however, to drop from thought or family a member in whom you have invested a major part of your life.

Yet hadn't Joanna dropped us? Her restless wandering continued for several years during her young adult years. Did she want to be part of the family if she seldom came home? When she did, it was with friends I found hard to welcome warmly with their strange clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, and most galling – an apparent freedom to flout tradition. Her ritual hugs came as from a cold marble statue.

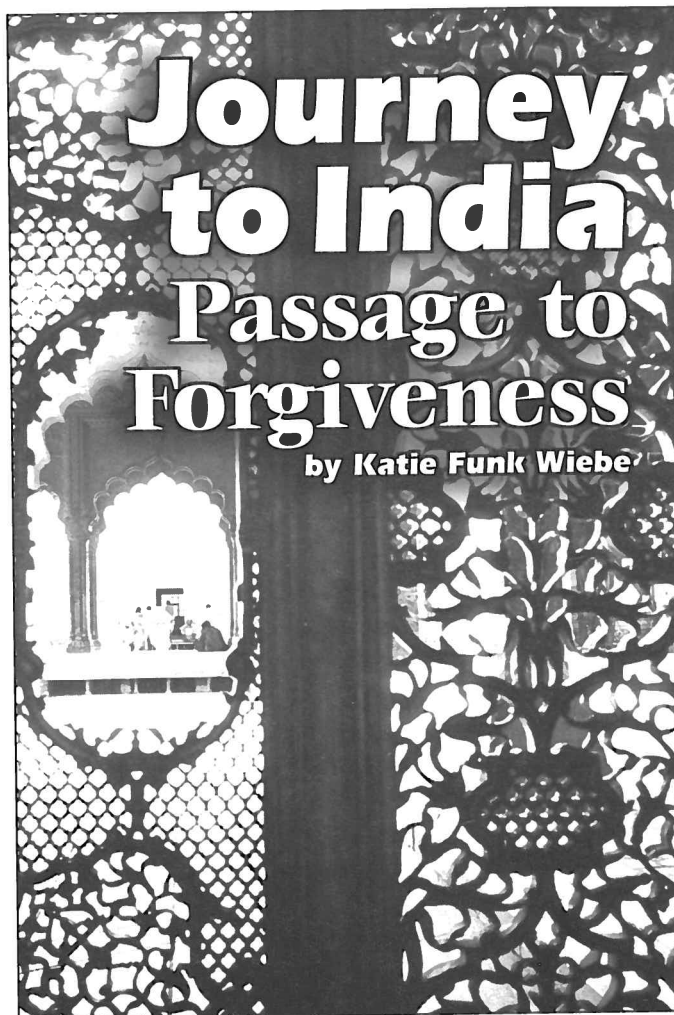
Then when she seemed to have completed one stage in her search for freedom, she moved hell-bent into another as terrifying and embarrassing to me. Always there was the fear of what might come next.

In between I made stabs at love, at forgiveness, at showing the kind of compassion Christ would show, but without the turnaround I wanted to see in her. My open and frantic desperation was a shabby bribe demanding she change her behavior so I would feel better.

Like a running sore, the healing never came. From time to time it opened up, emitting pus, blood, and plasma. Where had I failed? How could I make amends?

There had been some difficulty simply getting to India. American Mennonite church women had been invited to send delegates to the first all-India Mennonite women's conference, yet I could not interest Mennonite Brethren church leaders to give me encouragement for this trip, much less financial help. One told me he was fearful of the theology of another branch of the Mennonite church being inadequate or watering ours down. They could not bless me.

The issue seemed to be whether women should come together by themselves for fellowship and sharing information. (This was twenty years ago). What was the continuation program planned after this conference, I was asked. Was it sufficiently evangelical to receive Mennonite Brethren endorsement? What was the value of bringing



“chickens” together for a conference, quipped someone in my presence.

So, reluctantly, I decided to go without official endorsement. Yet I admit I longed for either an important church official or an unimportant church official to bless me, even from a distance, for something as risky as a journey to India, my first overseas trip.

Memories of other hurts I had received caused by criticism, particularly through getting caught in the power plays of ecclesiastical politics, which sometimes judge persons like pawns in a chess game, came to mind.

The history of institutions is always a history of triumphs, glorious ones, but also of wounds – sometimes cleared from the record by calling them “personality conflicts.” And I nurtured the hurts. I allowed them to move in deeper.

I could not escape the self-inflicted wounds – self-contempt, self-denigration, and self-disappointment because of my failure to trust God in this matter and my readiness to give in to despair, anger, and worry.

I carried the burden of wounds that I thought I had long forgotten, but that the claws of memory ripped open when I tried to find justice. The result was bitterness,



self-pity, and clearly, a loss of effectiveness.

I told friends my goal in traveling to India was to attend the Mennonite women's conference. The issue of a blessing I put aside. Other matters I hoped time would take care of. Deep down I knew I was searching for evidence of the power of the gospel. Did Christ's gospel bring peace and healing to those who trusted in it? If I saw God at work in a foreign culture, I would have greater faith, I assured myself.

The women's conference went well, as four hundred Mennonite women from all parts of India worshiped together for several days. The American and Canadian delegation numbered six. I found meeting Indian Christian women an enrichment I had longed for.

At an all-Indian interdenominational evangelical Christian communications seminar, at which the conferees were primarily nationals, I, as an American observer, sat toward the back. The daily speaker spoke on the theology of communications.

I was unprepared for his words. I had no defenses up, so I was caught by the full impact of the Spirit of Christ as he spoke about the healing of memories through power applied directly by prayer to the wound. Then the wounded person can forgive, see things in a new light, and be healed of past hurts.

I listened carefully. Maybe I would hear something helpful.

He explained how woundedness separates us from other people and from Christ. Because we block the image of Jesus Christ in our lives as long as the wound is open and throbbing, the memory of that hurt separates us from other people and from Christ. The right reason for asking for forgiveness is not just to ease psychic pain.

He was yanking at the scab on my wound.

But the healing of memories is not just a psychological process, he said. It takes more than finding the cause of the hurt and talking it out. Wounds are not cured by tears. "Salt tears preserve the memory," he said. Nor does healing come by rededication to Christ. It occurs only if we can see the past with a new attitude, with the eyes of Christ, and give up our right to get even. Hurt opens us up to other people or closes us to them and to God. There is no in-between stage.

I was taking notes, but they were being written on my heart. My concern in my relationship with Joanna had been myself, and how her behavior affected me and my reputation. How much had I been concerned about her?

"Draw a circle," he said, "and draw a line through it vertically and label the line 'hurt.' In the center place the initials of the person who has hurt you."

Mentally I was following his instructions.

"Ask yourself, 'Lord, what do you think of this person?' Listen for the answer. If God loves this person, will love fight love?"

God loves Joanna. The word was clear.

"Replace the hurt with love, with unconditional forgiveness. Regardless of the act." No 'if,' the speaker said. He was cutting asunder bone and marrow with the delicate knife of a neurosurgeon to get at the cancer.

"Hurt always controls us; we never control it. Hurt keeps us awake at night and hounds us during the day. And behind each hurt is always a person. We hurt because of people—what they did or didn't do."

I was the sinner. I had always focused on Joanna as the guilty one. I wept as I saw myself clearly in my relationship to her, our firstborn, the child conceived out of the passion of the early days of marriage.

She had been a creative, aggressive child, grabbing for every new experience, pushing me far beyond what I could handle easily as a new mother.

The death of her father at age fourteen broke whatever bond we had had during her growing years. She had lost her confidant. She couldn't handle the many platitudes about the death of a young father people offered us. I felt her slipping from me even more by the time boyfriends became important. So I dedicated her to God. She was his child. Let God look after her.

Only dimly did I sense it was my way of handling recalcitrant behavior. I, as an adult, and a recent single parent because of my husband's death, was working my way through many new issues I never expected to face as a homemaker in church and society at the same time she was moving through a difficult teenage rebellion.

Ideas I tested in writing, she experimented with practically until they lay lifeless before her or invited her to move beyond them to greater freedom. I wished she would choose a more conservative lifestyle even though I was looking for a freer one for myself.

One disaster after another occurred in our relationship, with me seeing myself always standing at the edge of the pit reaching for her hand – never crawling into it with her. She was the sinner. I was the saint. She was the problem. I had the answers.

A person with a boil is hesitant to have anyone come close. Yet unless the hidden pus escapes, the boil continues to hurt, the speaker at the India conference said. "If we do not submit, God may bring us someone who tests us even more. Or we can have it our own way and God sets us aside." God wants us to develop joy in the midst of pain,

*I was the sinner. The problem was mine. I couldn't escape the verdict.*

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# Teaching Kids About Forgiveness

by Heidi Goerz

I recently observed two siblings playing – the three-year-old lying on the floor and the one-and-a-half year old jumping on her tummy. Normally this might have been a fairly benign activity but in this case the younger child was wearing boots and caused his sister pain and tears. Mom told the toddler to “say sorry” but he just smiled a cute smile to those around him. Mom tried various threats but to no avail. Eventually the child squirmed away from her grasp without saying, “I’m sorry,” and was soon seen playing with his sister.

Saying, “I’m sorry,” is not the same as asking for forgiveness. “I’m sorry” expresses regret that something has turned out badly: “I’m sorry that while we were playing something made you cry and upset Mommy.” Asking forgiveness is admitting fault and demonstrating repentance. “I was wrong in jumping on you with my boots on and I won’t do it again. Will you forgive me?”

A very young child is not able to ask for forgiveness but is taught to say, “I’m sorry,” as a first step in understanding right and wrong and learning to get along with others. Preschool children are very forgiving, or perhaps it is more correct to say they don’t hold grudges against others. Adults, in turn, model forgiveness to children as they love and nurture them in spite of their tantrums and mishaps.

People who study child development tell us that children under four years don’t understand abstract terms like right and wrong. They eventually discontinue behaviors that bring correction and repeat behaviors that bring approval. Therefore, children this age would not have a true sense of guilt when doing something wrong but rather a fear of the correction that follows.

Five- to eight-year-olds are eager to be good. Their emerging conscience enables them to feel guilt when they do something wrong, and they often tattle tale to test and enforce their learned values. In this situation we expand the child’s understanding of what is right by giving instruction about attitudes and behaviors that honour God. They can now understand that when they transgress Mom and Dad’s rules, they are also disobedient to God’s commands. The Bible is a wonderful tool in illustrating forgiveness with

stories about Joseph and his brothers and Christ on the cross.

Our six-year-old twins are highly competitive. Skirmishes and squabbles are daily occurrences. Telling one to say, “I’m sorry,” usually results in a short grunt, “Sorry!” or a sappy, “I’m soooorry,” neither of which results in the repentance I was hoping for. It takes patience and wisdom to teach children (in a quiet place alone with you) how

their actions make others feel and that saying you’re sorry means you will stop doing what is wrong and you want to make things right. Forgiveness restores relationships.

Children are keen observers. We as parents teach most by what we practise. One chaotic morning as Dad was rushing about getting the kids off to school, harsh words were spoken and later regretted. So that night, at the supper table, Dad began by saying, “Kids, I’m sorry for what happened this morning.” One of the chil-

dren piped up, “What happened this morning, Daddy?” If only we adults could be so quick to forget when we are wronged! We show our children that we too make mistakes and need to ask forgiveness of others and of God.

During the pre-adolescent years, children have a well-defined understanding of right and wrong. They have a greater awareness of the larger world and that this world is not always as good and loving as they once innocently believed. How do you forgive the teacher who embarrasses you in front of the class? How do you forgive your “best friends” when they no longer include you? It is helpful to remind our children that even if the hurt is great, God will comfort us and help us to forgive others. Preteens are capable of delighting in being good and feeling healthy guilt for wrong behavior. They need to know that admitting their wrong behavior is not a sign of weakness but of admirable strength of character and maturity. Ultimately, we want our children to come to realize that no matter how good they may try to be, they still need the saving grace and forgiveness of Christ to bring about his perfect will in their lives.

Heidi Goerz and her husband have three children. They attend McIvor MB Church where she is active in teaching Sunday school and working with the MOM’s program. Heidi works part-time as an occupational therapist in Winnipeg.



*C*hildren are keen observers.

*We as parents teach most by what we practise.*



## The Philos Factor: *Familiarity or Friendship?*

by Adelheid E. (Heidi) Koop

**"M**aybe I have no friends...." Her voice was thoughtful. What a disappointment for someone whose life was filled to overflowing with people contacts! When the flurry of activity ceases, family hardly suffices for someone who is accustomed to more diverse stimulation and opportunity. Is that truly what we want? "Maybe I have no friends ...!"

Albert Schweitzer once said, "We are all so much together, and yet we are all dying of loneliness." We keep ourselves so involved that we don't even recognize the cry for friendship within ourselves. We don't need more people - probably fewer. It is fine to say God will take care of us. The question is: how? When family is taken from us for whatever reason and our little world collapses, when the groundwork hasn't been laid and we have failed to develop the needed bonds, we suddenly find ourselves alone. Many have.

Friends are not family. There are no blood ties. Friends are not marriage partners. There is no ceremony, no signature. Friendship is more vulnerable and more easily neglected. Even so, friends are an integral part of life.

Why then does friendship have such a low profile? One reason is the low profile our society gives to friend-

ship; even in our churches friendship is of too little consequence. It is commonly accepted that children, teenagers and young adults need friends. Is it logical that when we reach a certain birthday we suddenly no longer have a need for friends? In the words of my dear elderly friend Elisabeth, "The art of friendship has been lost." In his book *I Pledge Thee My Troth* (Harper & Row, 1975), James Oltheus writes,

*...[T]he modern world generally ignores friendship. We admit that everyone needs a few friends, but we don't become very excited by their presence or absence. Very few sing the praises of friendship, because very few have experienced its height.... Friendship is accused of being a competitor of marriage and family life, identified with love of neighbour, and often simply ignored.... We tend to have a large number of acquaintances, but to call them "friends" is [to do injustice to] the word.*

If family members, spouses, acquaintances, neighbours, work associates or clients are not friends, then what is friendship and what is its purpose? Friendship is more focused than the general exhortation of the Golden Rule in the Bible: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12 NRSV). This is the way we are to treat all people generally, but all people can hardly be our friends. As someone said, "If you try to be a friend to everyone, you are probably a friend to no one."

*Is it logical that when we reach a certain birthday we suddenly no longer have a need for friends?*

Friendship is love personified. James Oltheus goes on to say that in ancient times friendship was held in high esteem. The Greek word for friend, *philos*, is translated "beloved," "dear," "loving," "kindly disposed," "devoted." It represented the purest expression of Greek love of the good. Love accepts the other and values differences without feeling threatened. It may raise awareness of the other's faults, but it does not blame. Love is freeing, not exclusive or clinging. Love brings with it appropriate expectations, but it refrains from being

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## Journey to India

Continued from page 23

peace and confidence in the midst of confusion, submission in the midst of heavy-handed authority.

I was the sinner. The problem was mine. I couldn't escape the verdict.

The speaker's next step toward healing was even more difficult: Thank God for the memory that has been hurting, yet be aware that God works with us at our speed in learning this lesson of thankfulness. He never pushes us harder than we can cope. Thankfulness opens us to new sensitivities about people who are also hurting. It may be the only way some of us ever learn compassion.

This was his message to this group of Indian leaders searching for the best way to fulfill their ministry in a Christian community where colonialism, imperialism, and their own complex caste system had left behind serious wounds, running with pus, in the jostling for power, position, and influence.

Yet he was saying that growth can come by the healing of memories. Everyone wants the spirit of Pentecost, but no one wants to go over Calvary to get there. Blessing can come out of tragedy. Peace and joy come out of pain. Peace is joy resting. Joy is peace dancing.

I walked over Calvary. I said, "Forgive me, Lord."

Then the moderator, an Indian national leader, asked me to come forward and to pray. I was stunned. Didn't he know women in America in my denomination weren't asked to pray and bless a congregation at the close of big conferences? This was a tribute given to the most respected and experienced leader present—not to the lesser members of the body of Christ.

But I went forward and I prayed—but I don't know what I said. When I returned to my chair, my friend Anne Ediger reached for my hand. Silent tears flooded her eyes. She had sensed the touch of the Spirit. I had blessed her.

The mending of my relationship with my daughter was not a dramatic overnight affair, but a lengthy one. I had to remind myself constantly that I had forgiven her. The past was the past. Slowly the bridge would have to be rebuilt. Forgiveness had to be acted out in each encounter. And I had been given tools to deal with some of the other burdens I had carried to India.

Over the next years Joanna and I made more mistakes. For a long time we alluded only with great pain and discomfort to certain aspects of our life together. Yet our family was being rebuilt. Slowly, step by step. Often with more pain. But we were a family again.

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*This article was abridged from Katie Funk Wiebe's book **Bless Me Too, My Father: Living by Choice, Not by Default**, Herald Press, 1988. It won the 1989 Silver Angel Award from Religion in Media.*

## The Philos Factor

Continued from page 25

demanding. Recognizing the other's strengths, weaknesses, wishes, needs, differences, fears and joys, love is willing to affirm the other, recognize and appreciate her gifts, willing to learn from and be influenced by her. In humble, repentant and forgiving spirit, love is willing to "carefront" (confront with caring), to give and ask for feedback and forgiveness.

Friendship is a covenant, though perhaps unspoken, between two people, a commitment to honour and respect, the expression of which is free and open, yet not without bounds. Though usually not verbalized, the commitment is clear and strong – deeper than words could ever express. Friendship runs deeper than emotion. It touches the very essence of our being. Just try to pull out of a true friendship; it can only be done with excruciating pain.

Friendship is a safe haven for stimulation and growth, an opportunity to explore, to risk and to stretch. It is a challenge to face the world, other relationships and involvements with integrity, hope and wisdom. Sometimes a friend serves as a conscience, a sounding board, an opportunity to try out our wings in new adventures and to test our philosophies, theologies and skills. Although perfection cannot be expected, certain elements are central to friendship: respect, integrity, loyalty and caring love.

In C.S. Lewis's words, "Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves, the crown of life and the school of virtue." Even so, he writes, it appears that because friendship was elevated by paganism, the church seldom celebrated it. Is it not high time that we recognized friendship for what it is, a unique relationship, a gift of God to be treasured and nurtured?

But friendship is a paradox. Though very tough, friendship is, as well, delicate and fragile, easily severed and preserved only with effort. Unless the relationship is nurtured, it will wither and die. Richard Foster, in his book *A Celebration of Discipline* (Harper & Row, 1978) says about practising a disciplined life: "It's not that we can't find time, but rather that we need to convince ourselves that it's important enough to give it time." This also holds true for friendship.

To quote Chaim Potok in *The Chosen* (Ballantine, 1967), "It's not easy to be a friend, son, is it?" In our "doing"-oriented society, in our world of growing anonymity, individualism, self-sufficiency and workaholicism, it is indeed a demanding investment. But can we afford to live without it?

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*Heidi Koop is a Winnipeg writer and artist. She attends River East MB Church.*



## Mennonite Women of Lancaster County: A Story in Photographs from 1855-1935

by Joanne Hess Siegrist,  
Good Books, 1996.

Reviewed by Shirley B. Bergen

Joanne Hess Siegrist became aware of the many photos in people's attic boxes and cedar chests when she was helping her son collect stories for a Grade 5 project on "finding his roots." Most of these pictures had no names or written stories. She had to work quickly to find people who still remembered the faces in the photos. Looking at the pictures, Siegrist noticed that the eyes of the women were not timid, but bold and cheerful, full of vitality, so she presented "a story in pictures" at the "Quiet in the Land?" Conference in 1995, which was very well received. From 1984-1996 she visited old people and documented more than 2000 of the best photographs from over 300 households. The book shows these excellent reproductions of women at work and play.

I found the book fascinating because it gave me a quick, vivid glimpse of the history of the Lancaster Mennonites, showing how they chose to wear the plain dress instead of fancy Victorian clothes as a profession of their faith. There is a portrait of Barbara Buckwalter Hershey whose tragic death in a train-buggy accident in 1896 sparked a revival. As a result, activities of young people changed from parties to hymn sings, Bible studies and mission efforts. Many, like Amanda Muselman, founder of the Philadelphia Home Mission, burned all the pictures of their "worldly life" at the time.

Women had a strong influence

on the community, sometimes through their husbands. Many of the women married men who became ministers. But Barbara Brubaker hosted toy-promotional guests who visited the company where her husband worked. In 1934 their guest was the Lone Ranger who removed his mask for the first time in public when they bowed for prayer.

In 1895 the Mennonite women in Paradise, PA., formed the first Mennonite sewing circle in the United States to sew for poor people in Philadelphia. The clothes were distributed by the Needlework Guild of the Episcopal Church. Their mission efforts transcended denominational boundaries.

Some women entered the professions. Fanny Andrews is the earliest known American Mennonite female professional photographer. She was able to enter the profession because her brother was a photographer. Her pictures, 1902-12, form a significant part of the book.

This book shows me how to tell a story in pictures, and inspires me by the courageous vibrant faces of these women of Lancaster County.

Copies of *Mennonite Women of Lancaster County* may be obtained from Good Books, P.O. Box 419, Intercourse, PA 17534.

### A New Publication Stormy Ties

by Dorothy Friesen, Avalon Books, 1997.

A romance novel that takes place on the North shore of Lake Superior in the resort town of Grand Coeur.

Check your local library or call Avalon Books, (800) 223 5251.

## All are Witnesses

Edited by Delores Friesen,  
Kindred Productions, 1996.

Reviewed by Eliesabeth Vensel

This book is a marvelous collection of essays, thirty-four of which were originally presented as sermons by Mennonite women across North America. Where was I when these women got up to speak? I have, nevertheless, heard them now as I have reflected on their thoughts. Don't be tempted to plow through this book too quickly, though it is fertile soil. The great differences in subject and style of writing demand that you slow down and listen to these witnesses.

Some writers are insightful theologians carefully defining the derivation of a Hebrew word or its cultural context. Some are story tellers bringing to life a biblical personage and dramatizing their story. Others are simply sharing their experience and understanding God's Word and work.

Two minor flaws detract from my enjoyment of the book. One is that the book designers use fragments of the exquisite painting on the cover in black and white as chapter headings. This increasingly common practice does not recognize that composition is essential to the integrity of a painting. Bits of it are hardly art work. Better to depict other work, perhaps by other Mennonite artists. Similarly I cannot understand including truncated versions of meditations in which the ideas are not fleshed out and the voice of the writer cannot be heard. But these are mere quibbles in the face of an inspiring collection of meditations.



*Be* kind and compassionate  
to one another, forgiving each other,  
just as in Christ God forgave you.

EPHESIANS 4:32 NIV