

8/2



# SOPHIA

W I S D O M

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

*Tending the Earth* SUMMER 1998 ■ VOLUME 8 ■ NUMBER 2

Bethany College Library



# 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.

SOPHIA is published four times a year by Sophia Wisdom, Inc. No part may be reproduced by any means without written permission.

**Publisher** Estér DeFehr

**Editor** Lori Matties

**Associate Editor** Eleanor Martens

#### Editorial Committee

Dora Dueck, Agnes Dyck  
Debra Fieguth, Lis Vensel  
Lorie Battershill

**Circulation** Darlene Loewen

#### Layout/Design

Darrell Dyck, *Pegasus Design*

#### Printing

Regehr's Printing Ltd.

#### Sophia Board

Willa Reddig – *chair*  
Estér DeFehr – *co-chair*  
Jane Woelk – *secretary*  
Esther Reimer – *treasurer*  
Susan Brandt, Hanny Labun  
Darlene Loewen  
Goldine Pankratz, Lori Wiebe

#### Subscription Rates

\$15 for 4 issues • \$28 for 8 issues  
\$4 single issue

#### Outside Canada

\$18 for 4 issues • \$30 for 8 issues

Please address subscription forms, correspondence and manuscripts to:

#### SOPHIA

P.O. Box 28062  
1453 Henderson Hwy.  
Winnipeg, MB R3G 4E9  
fax: (204) 668-2527  
e-mail: [lmatties@escape.ca](mailto:lmatties@escape.ca)

## Contents

### Editorial

- 3 For the Beauty of the Earth – by Lori Matties

### Features

- 6 Growing up in Dirt – by Doreen Martens  
8 Along the Gorge – by Miriam Pellman Maust  
9 Cultivating Inner (City) Beauty – by Emily Rayl  
10 Sheep Stories – by Ruth Braun  
12 Learning Names – by Dora Dueck  
14 Letting Go of Gardens – by Marianne Ewert Worcester  
16 Home Schooling on the Farm: An Interview with Linda Wilton  
18 Touching the Spirit: A Visit to Pineridge Hollow – by Lorie Battershill  
19 Lesson from the Pumpkin Patch – by Lorie Battershill  
20 Spring Miracles on the Trent River Shore – by Judith Knopp Brown  
21 Searching for God in the Garden – by Carmen Pauls

### Columns

- 4 From the Source  
Kneeling in God's Garden – by Eliesabeth Vensel  
11 Letters  
22 A Brother's Perspective  
Dirt Under My Fingernails – by Harry Heidebrecht  
23 Shelf Life  
*Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*  
– reviewed by Agnes Dyck

### Poetry

- 5 Genesis – by Sarah Klassen  
13 Forest and Garden – by Marianne Ewert Worcester  
15 A Garden – by Lydia Penner

#### Don't miss our next issue!

Please renew your subscription promptly. Make cheques payable to *Sophia* and send to our address, left.

Remaining 1998 themes include: 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 paintings on the front and back cover are by Estér DeFehr, *Sophia's* publisher. Estér lives in Statesville, North Carolina, with her husband, Dave. *Sophia* is grateful for the special gift of this cover.



## EDITORIAL

# For the Beauty of the Earth

by Lori Matties

The first thing I did when my husband and I got possession of our home in May 1985 was to dig up a square of lawn for a vegetable garden. I had been "saving" vegetable scraps in plastic bags for several months in anticipation of this. What happened to that awful, smelly mess is another story. But I was eager to put down roots in that first garden of my own. I was dedicated to gardening organically and to tasting the natural fruits of my labour.

Since that first summer, I have taken great pleasure in gardening. I've learned many things by trial and error, such as how many "Sweet 100" tomato vines to plant, how many heads of lettuce we can eat in a season, how to keep the neighbourhood rabbit from nibbling away my first spring crocus blooms. Over the years I've found my interest shifting from vegetables to flowers – though I still plant vegetables. This year I'm excited to try such exotic specimens as "horticultural beans," different types of winter squash, fennel and parsnips, along with the standard tomatoes, carrots and my favourite eggplants. But the dreams that keep

me going through the winter are about flowers, almost any kind of flowers that will meet the test of hardness here in Winnipeg and add splashes of colour and texture to my small plot of ground.

It's not only the beauty of flowers and the tastiness of produce that draws me to the garden. In the garden I am reminded of my place in the larger ecosystem of living things, of my love for the natural world. Tending plants or hiking in the wilderness heals my soul of the ailments of constricted urban life. I have never felt so small and so holy as when I climbed to the top of a mountain in the Rockies and heard the silence and saw everywhere those magnificent formations of heaved rock. Natural beauty, from tremendous to minuscule, elicits in me the desire to nurture the earth that, I know, nurtures me.

And I am not alone. A number of books have been written recently by women who find identity in their connection to the earth or to their particular place in it. Some of those you will find mentioned in the following pages. They write about ecology

and our responsibility as human beings to correct mistakes and abuses of the past. Some write about how nature connects them to God, the creator and nurturer of life. The offerings in this issue are a celebration of this last theme. Nature, both wild and domestic, teaches us about our identity in relation to the rest of God's creation, about various stages in our lives, about our role as nurturers of health and beauty.

As was jokingly mentioned in one of our planning meetings, this is a vegetarian issue, as opposed to a meaty one. Nevertheless, I think you'll find it a satisfying and nourishing feast.

“It is God whom human beings know in every creature.”

.....  
Hildegard von Bingen (12th century abbess), from *Earthspirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity*, by Michael Dowd, Twenty-third Publications, 1991.

## 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).

# Kneeling in God's Garden

by Eliesabeth Vensel

It's easy for me to imagine a hot July day when I am kneeling in my garden, eye-to-eye with brilliant zinnias, watching the bees tumble in and out of snapdragons. That's when I feel a familiar tug of connection with the earth, though I may be frustrated with digging weeds at the time. But because my feelings last about as long as the flowers, I've learned to look for more deeply-rooted truth to affirm those feelings of connection to the earth.

We learned the basic premise when we were kids: God owns and cares for this world. Jesus reassured his disciples of God's care by reminding them of the lowly sparrows, valued by the Creator. Perhaps he was thinking about Psalm 50, "I know every bird on those mountains; the teeming life of the plains is in my care. ...for the world and all that is in it are mine" (11,12 Revised English Bible). The book of Job, like many of the Psalms, glorifies God's knowledge and nurture of all creation, not only living creatures but also the weather patterns and eco-systems that sustain them. God questions Job's ability to do the same. Hard question. I can barely keep the bird feeder full, although I am full of compassion for the tiny birds when a freezing rain drives them into the evergreens.

Still, nurture of the earth was our first mandate from God. Having been created in God's image, our activities were to mimic those of our Creator. We were placed "in the Garden of Eden to till it and look after it" (Gen 2:15).

The second connection we have to the earth is more subtle. Scriptures imply that the well-being and produc-

tivity of earth, the yielding of fruit, depends on our relationship to God. Leviticus 26 has echoes of Eden, promising that if Israel maintained this covenant, God would "walk to and fro" among them (26:12 NEB). The promise is that "the land will yield its produce and the trees of the countryside their fruit. Threshing will last till vintage, and vintage till sowing" (26:4-5 REB). Breaking the covenant brought a curse: "You will sow your seed to no purpose, for your enemies will eat the crop....Your strength will be spent in vain; your

*Scriptures imply that the well-being and productivity of earth, the yielding of fruit, depends on our relationship to God.*

land will not yield its produce nor the trees in it their fruit" (26:16,20). This virtually repeats the punishment of Cain after his brother's blood cried out from the earth.

The enigmatic quality of growth is highlighted in Mark 4. While one sleeps, the seed that has been scattered sprouts and grows, "how, he does not know. The ground produces a crop by itself" (4:28). We have unravelled some of the mysteries of sustainable yield and crop management. The Green Revolution was supposed to end starvation, but fertilizer only goes so far. Can we hope to control sun, water, weather, insects, and weeds? In fact, have those pesky weeds always infested the ground?

We might find some answers in

the tone of Isaiah 5, for although it is an extended allegory about Israel as God's vineyard, it ends in real destruction, and real thorns and briars. In spite of God's hard work, sin inexplicably enters the vineyard; it yields useless wild grapes. The poem begins as a love song and ends with God's plaintive question: "What more could have been done for my vineyard that I did not do for it?" (5:4). What better expresses God's sorrow over sin?

The first sin had consequences for the whole earth: "on your account the earth will be cursed. ...it will yield thorns and thistles for you. You will eat of the produce of the field" (Gen 3:17,18). Sin started all the biological clocks ticking in the countdown toward death. Illness too seems to be an alien presence in God's field, like the thistles in Christ's parable. Weeds always symbolize the destructive results of sin.

In his book *Project Earth: Preserving the Earth God Created* (1991, Multnomah Press), William Badke warns, "we must be aware that our attack on the earth God gave us is of the same order as natural disasters and other phenomena that are the work of dark witnesses. The world is being unmade, and our ecological viciousness is part of the process." He points to the strong language of Isaiah 24 and Zephaniah 1, which describe a terrible judgment with universal destruction that sweeps "everything from the face of the earth." He concludes, "Ultimately our problem is not ecological, a matter of the neglect of available technology and of greed for maximum profit. Our problem is spiritual."



The most earth-shattering change in our spiritual journey occurred when Christ redeemed the world from sin and death. He sent the Spirit to be a transforming power in our lives. The Spirit's role in reforging the link between the people, the land and God may be seen in Ezekiel 34 and 36. Ezekiel is told to prophesy directly to the mountains and hills, to the streams and valleys, that their humiliation will be reversed: "Everyone will say that this land which was waste has become like a garden of Eden" (36:35). God calls to the land to yield in abundance. This coincides with God transforming the people: "I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (36:26).

Paul makes the strongest argument for the intimate connection between the Christian's hope and that of creation. He writes, "The created universe waits with eager expectation for God's [children] to be revealed. It was made subject to frustration...yet with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God. Up to the present, as we know, the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth" (Rom 8:19-22).

In another place and time I hope to be kneeling in God's new garden, praising my Redeemer along with "every created thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, all that is in them" (Rev 5:13). I don't think I will be pulling out weeds.

.....

Lis Vensel, *Sophia* editorial member and artist, is a member of Church of the Way in Winnipeg, where she often participates in planning and leading worship.

# Genesis

by Sarah Klassen

When does a garden begin? In March my mother covered seeds with earth and watered them. Before we knew it every east window burgeoned with green pepper sprouts. Parsley. Tips of tomato. We watched them with a hungry hope.

In March my gardening friend turns her back to the window where a prairie blizzard howls. She denies the snowman grinning from the neighbour's stormbound yard. She's curled on the couch, lost in glossy *Homes and Gardens*,

the seductive pages of seed catalogues. She drives the winter out with visions of plump tulips, daffodils, the first blue crocus breaking through the snow. Her fingers feel the warmth of the uncovered earth, feel gentle rain. Meanwhile

I'm skiing through the frozen silence of the birdless woods. My head's not filled with gardens, though I'm gliding past aspen and oak, hawthorne and barren birch dreaming their empty branches green.

Some say the world began with a garden. A tangle of lush vines, orchids blooming pink and purple, dense, teeming undergrowth an unsuspecting man or even woman could get lost in. Lots of trees. In their vicinity a serpent coiled. (They say it sheltered

near a pristine tree that bore a shining apple.) Those days the Spirit like a thick moist scent or like the ecstatic carolling of newborn birds pervaded everything. And everywhere light and the first thin shadow shivered across the green.

.....

Sarah Klassen, Winnipeg writer and former editor of *Sophia*, is a member of River East MB Church.



# Growing Up in Dirt

by Doreen Martens

*I* consider myself a child of the earth.

Well, maybe it would be more accurate to say a child of the dirt. As the daughter of fruit farmers, one of the sensual delights of my childhood was to slip off my shoes on that first sunny day in March and run through the peach orchard wildly barefoot, feeling the spring-warmed soil my father had tilled for the first time that morning squish yuckily between my toes. Until my mother caught me at it, of course, and scolded me for risking a cold and hastening the onset of the dreaded bath-every-night season.

I spent my tender years living in that dirt and in the leafy canopy above – as fabulous in my imagination as a Brazilian rain forest. Under the branches of a spreading plum tree, as my parents toiled picking fruit, I'd build spectacular dirt cities, speeding my brother's trucks (why did nobody ever buy me a truck? I wondered) along vast highway systems that wound from tree to tree.

Climbing in the branches, I'd hunt for treasure – big globules of hardened sap, in glowing shades of amber, that had oozed from wounds in the bark. I fancied myself a collector of fine jewels, and in more contemplative moments turned lower-grade globs that didn't pass the gemology inspection into chewing gum. On the ground, I savoured appetizers: sweet clover flowers, bitter dandelion greens and the acrid "milk" of the milkweed.

Once, when my mother made her despised green-bean soup for supper, I declared my willingness to starve rather than even inhale the odour, and took off down the gravel lane for two big old sweet-cherry trees that had long ago outgrown our tallest ladders; skin scraping all the way, I clambered up in one as tall as Everest

and plucked my bloated fill of sweet black fruit, trusting in that dirt to give me a soft landing when I jumped off the limb. (See Ma? No broken bones. Of course, there is that tummy rumble ...)

I never washed a piece of vegetation eaten outdoors; that was "something city kids think they have to do," we kids always said, snickering. Sissies. Why, we were so tough, we'd yank carrots and onions right out of the gar-



den, dust 'em off and eat 'em straight. Downing unwashed produce you have grown yourself is like picking up a piece of fallen food off your own kitchen floor, as opposed to something that landed on a public sidewalk. It's perfectly safe when you own the dirt.

In short, I liked dirt, and everything that grew from it. I even liked the sweaty-dirt smell on my mother's arms after she'd been working in the vegetable garden all day. (I told her that once and she gave me a very strange look.)

What I didn't like was the earthworms occasionally encountered when you dig too deep – a phobia developed when schoolyard boys stuffed them down the back of my dress. (Please don't ask for details; it has taken me years of son-inflicted grub and slug therapy to be able to talk about this.) But mostly, I didn't like the Genesis-curse part

*I savoured appetizers: sweet clover flowers, bitter dandelion greens and the acrid "milk" of the milkweed.*



of tilling the soil, the sweat-of-your-brow stuff. When we moved to town and left the farming life behind, I learned to be a thoroughly enthusiastic urbanite. I've lived in big cities ever since, revelling in work that leaves your fingernails clean day after day, and rolling my eyeballs whenever my husband, raised in the suburbs, gets all misty and romantic about the idea of getting a place "out in the country."

But grow up in dirt, and eventually it calls to you. Pathetically.

Today, I live in a 400-apartment complex in a place named Orange County where the last commercial orange grove was ploughed under for condos a couple of months ago. My private real-estate holdings consist of about five square meters of patio dirt so hopelessly shallow, rock-filled, tree-shaded and kid-toy-strewn that even I have given up on it.

The soil I work with now is the fancy, worm-free stuff that comes in a bag, placed in half a dozen terra cotta pots that sit on my front steps, harbouring the most fussed-over collection of impatiens and begonias that ever graced a stoop.

This, ladies, is my garden. Isn't it lovely?

My neighbor even thinks so. She brought over a wilted potted flower a while back, telling me she was sure it would die in her care and asking me to work my healing powers upon it. I tried, but when a green thing is depressed enough to commit suicide, even Miracle Gro is no substitute for Prozac. I haven't gathered the courage to inform next of kin.

Despite such setbacks, I soldier on, lovingly watering, plucking yellow leaves and spent blooms, sending out the snail patrol (five-year-old Rebecca) to scoop up leaf-munching offenders and toss them where our opossum friends scrounge for treats.

When this gardening mania in miniature struck me a few years back, I thought it was all about my longing for homegrown tomatoes – the caviar of a gardener's banquet. But now, having failed to raise a single healthy tomato to adulthood, I realize there is more to it. The urge to grow things is as fundamental as sun, toes, and squishy soil.

When my impatiens grew too leggy, I turned the prunings into cuttings and plunked them into water to root. Then I looked about for somewhere to plant them and settled on public space – a little scrap of dirt outside my children's bedroom window, where, I hoped, the minimum-wage gardeners who come and hack away at the community shrubs would recognize them as pitiful

offerings to Mother Nature and spare them the weed rake. I dug each spindly shoot a hole in the pebbly soil, creating a little well to retain moisture, patted down the dirt around them and doused them with fertilizer-enriched water, vowing that I would take care of them till death us do part. Neighbours passed by with a little smile and a nod, whether of approval or pity I wasn't sure.

At last I had about twenty planted, and with honest dirt under my fingernails, I stood back admiring my work, imagining the flourishing mass of pink and red that would soon make my little corner the envy of the neighborhood. My husband, who'd come out to see what I was up to, nodded slowly, hands on hips, with his smirking, "yeah, right" look.

The next day, I was horrified to discover four of my baby plants limp on the ground, their defenseless little stems all smashed. The evidence pointed to a wayward basketball tossed by some thoroughly unfeeling neighbourhood kid. Oh, the inhumanity!

"Well, what did you expect?" Jeff said, laughing at my indignation. What did I expect? Life! Abundantly! And a modicum of respect for it!

But I remain unbowed. There are the survivors to care for. We children of the soil have learned to cope with disasters, natural or otherwise. And when dirt calls, the gardener digs in.

.....  
Doreen Martens, a frequent contributor to *Sophia*, cares for her impatiens, and her family, in California.

"Someone in my childhood gave me the impression that fiddleheads and mourning cloaks were rare and precious. Now I realize they are fairly ordinary members of eastern woodland fauna and flora, but I still feel lucky and even virtuous – a gifted observer – when I see them.

For that matter, they probably are rare, in the scope of human experience. A great many people will live out their days without ever seeing such sights, or if they do, never gasping. My parents taught me this – to Gasp, and feel lucky. They gave me the gift of making mountains out of nature's exquisite molehills."

.....  
Barbara Kingsolver (author), from "The Memory Place," in *Heart of the Land: Essays on Last Great Places*, Joseph Barabato and Lisa Weinerman, eds. Pantheon Books.



CABBAGES & KINGS • ELESABETH VENSEL

# Along the Gorge

by Miriam Pellman Maust

*In* Dakota Kathleen Norris writes about her prairie home as a source of self definition, as "spiritual geography." In vast surroundings she sees, as Blake did, "the holiness of the minute particular" and knows that place can become a catalyst for internal change.

Others have seen only boring repetition in such landscapes. The humourist and travel writer Bill Bryson, for example, diminishes a plains scape with the comment, "If you stand on a telephone book you can see all of Iowa" (the lost continent). A sweeping dismissal, even if funny. Like Bryson, many of us have passed through a place, stretching to see something beyond it, not in it.

Norris selected the scintillating comment of José Ortega y Gasset for an inscription to her book: "Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are." Taken literally, I suppose it means one is either a sea-side person or mountain person, an easterner or a westerner, or whatever. Obviously, there's more to it than that. Norris and Gasset have caused me to think about how I interact with my environment and how the landscape defines me.

At one time I thought I could never leave my worn-down Appalachians. Where I grew up I could safely walk to the tops of hills and climb small peaks. I sensed the sanctuary of the enclosed valleys and felt freedom in the view from great heights. I still miss my mountains. Now, I haven't yet figured out how I'm defined at present by a very unusual landmark – a deep earth cut that begins about 300 feet from our house.

Here the Irvine Creek and further downstream the Grand River have deeply eroded the limestone bedrock over more time than I can imagine. Within this deep rock-walled gorge lies an ancient world. I suspect my subconscious has been affected by it even as I've slept. In the high water seasons of the year, though my windows are tightly closed, I hear through the chimney in my bedroom the noise of cascading water.

I had read about the formation of the cliffs that rise vertically 60 feet from the river below, the overhanging reef mass with small designs that look like calcified cabbages. I had seen guides to the dating of the fossils. But only recently did I take the precipitous steps into the gorge and stay in it the greater part of a day.

I'm beginning to feel what the gorge says to me about life below the surface on which most of us pass our days.

*I'm beginning to feel  
what the gorge says to me  
about life below the surface  
on which most of us pass  
our days.*



ELISABETH VENSEL

I've had to get used to the fear of something being thrown at me from above. I've taken courage from the daring flight of birds swerving through the narrow canyon. The changing light patterns mesmerize. Great depth has its own light. Direct sunlight in the gorge begins to diminish soon after midday and a different, decanted light takes over. The birds seem affected – not sure whether gorge light is moving toward dawn or dusk, they sing a muted song. Looking into the caves along the cliffs I feel like one wandering in Plato's cave, seeing shadows and imagining myself the adventurer I pretend to be.

Well, I plan to be a better adventurer. This cut in landscape reminds me that not all passages of my life can be easily traversed. Some life stretches are wild. I want to resist the pressures of time and to take to heart the wise words of a modern monk recorded in the closing pages of Norris's book: "You have only to let the place happen to you . . . the loneliness, the silence, the poverty, the futility, indeed the silliness of your life." For "silliness," I read "holiness."

.....  
Miriam Pellman Maust lives in Salem-Elora, Ontario, where she teaches part-time at the University of Waterloo. She and her husband, Wilbur, attend Waterloo North Mennonite Church. This article originally appeared in "Inscape," a regular column by Miriam in *Christian Living Magazine*. It is reprinted here with permission.



# Cultivating Inner (City) Beauty

by Emily Rayl

If you come to my place, it won't be a living ad for *Urban Gardening in Small Spaces*. But you will find a home and yard in joyful, riotous transition; a space where children drag you off to see their baby corn and watermelon plants while parents clear a place on the patio to pour you a glass of iced coffee. There is a secret hiding place in the shady bean-pole tent, and the birdhouse gourds speak of future family crafts.

If company is coming, the picnic table will be draped with an old sheet. In the center lies a runner of greenery cut from neglected vines that sprawl over garbage bins down the back lane. The napkins are tied with long blades of grass plucked from beneath the hydro tower; each bundle holds a petunia to its heart. Thrift-store brandy snifters with tea-lights twinkle among the green leaves, and paper-bag luminaries on the patio echo an enchanting glow. The backyard fence is merely chain-link, but white Christmas lights strung over it lend an ethereal quality as they float mid-air in the deepening twilight.

Within the banality of home life, we cultivate touches of whimsy: that quality so rare as to be magical. Small details of unexpected beauty hold the power to surprise weary souls into refreshment.

Truth be told, guests are pleasantly surprised when they see our garden, for this is not a suburban enclave, but a cramped lot in the inner city. It's not one of the artsy neighbourhoods with character-to-die-for, either. We live in a working-class area better known for its motorcycle gangs than its ambience.

When we bought the house, it was a neglected two-storey with two scraggly pine trees casting a dank shade over the front yard; the back yard was just a weedy parking lot. We bought it as "The Great Investment;" but then the real estate market dropped, and we couldn't afford to take the loss. We were trapped, and I hated it.

I hated the ugly back lanes.

I hated the people who stole our lawnmower, our bikes, our car.

Most of all, I hated that we had to live there. Our friends and peers had all moved on to live well-manicured lives in green-lawned suburbia. At night, I would cram a pillow over my head to shut out the thunder of a neighbour's party, and curse the cruel dealings of God.

The saying goes: "to plant a garden is to believe in the future." Beyond trimming the crab-grass in front and putting sod and chain-link fencing in the back, I did nothing for the yard, for what future could I possibly want here?

We did escape, once, but three years later we were back. Our renters had moved on, our finances were in a worse state than before, and rumours of not being able to buy house insurance in the inner city had made the property all but unsaleable.

In the midst of packing boxes and dying dreams, I heard a Father's voice.

"Emily," it said, "you want your children to be happy with what they have. How shall they ever learn it if they don't see you doing the same? If you never have less than what you want, how will they know that you're content?"

In a crystallized moment, an action as mysterious as a seed's germination: something changed.

I stopped searching for the way out and made an effort to cultivate the small things at hand. Thus was I led into gardening. It was not a statement of fulfilment but an act of submission. I haven't found myself in my garden, but I have lost myself there; perhaps that is the better of the two.

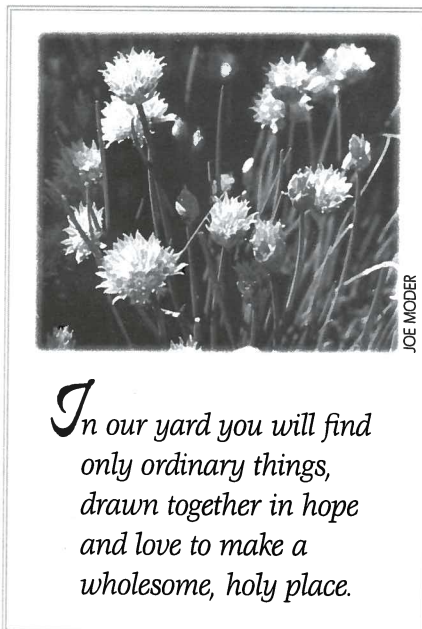
Gardening magazines still often strike me as works of fiction. ("Choose a vista to highlight from your patio," they say. Would that vista be our view

of the neighbour's clothesline, or her garbage bin...?) But mostly I feel like an artist with a fresh medium to explore. With a small fountain and moon flowers, I can paint a peaceful scene evoking evening peace after a day's labour. With herbs tucked into minuscule corners of the yard, I can sculpt meals redolent with scent and flavour.

In our yard you will find only ordinary things, drawn together in hope and love to make a wholesome, holy place. I cannot deliver glossy-paged sophistication, but there is a heady feeling of rejecting the illusion of poverty to celebrate the reality of abundance. Perhaps, in the midst of our carrots and kiwi and Roma tomatoes, you might experience it too.

You'd be surprised.

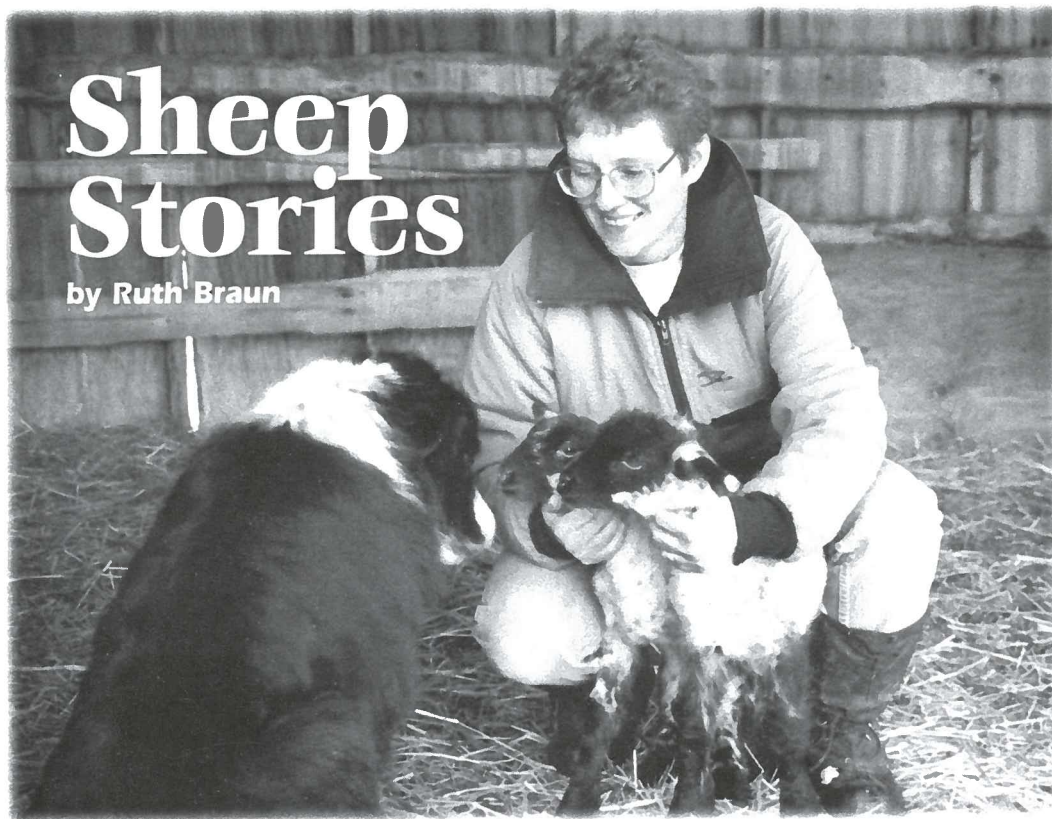
.....  
Emily Rayl is a Winnipeg freelance writer.



*In our yard you will find  
only ordinary things,  
drawn together in hope  
and love to make a  
wholesome, holy place.*

# Sheep Stories

by Ruth Braun



***K**ee*ping, gathering, protecting, caring, even carrying are biblical images associated with shepherds. Psalm 23, memorized by many, instills in the Christian heart that the Lord is MY shepherd, a personal protector and guide. Even the most urban twentieth-century Christian holds to that claim. But the significance of shepherding images is most apparent to believers who, on even a small scale, are shepherds themselves.

The routine chores of a part-time shepherd tick along predictably through most of the year. Each morning and evening, sheep need tending. Their food is a measured amount of hay and grain. Small rectangular bales of hay divide easily into "slices." You tuck a slice under your arm and drop it in the manger. You pick up one of many five-gallon pails lying around, hike to the granary, fill it up, dump it in the trough and you are finished.

Watering sounds equally simple but can be more complicated. Part-time shepherds usually don't invest in automatic waterers. Watering on our farm means plugging in a pump down a well connected to our stock pond, filling and carrying a five-gallon pail to each trough. Simple in warm weather – more difficult in winter. Water in the pump and the hose freezes if they aren't drained perfectly.

For a number of years we hoped to avoid carrying buckets by running a longer black hose from the pump to the trough. No matter what configuration we used – one

becoming equally frozen. Each time I've opted for the porch solution I've only remembered to put the end into the basement floor drain once the ice began to melt and I've stepped in a puddle of ice water.

Eventually we returned to the simplest pump/hose combination. Use a short length of hose and carry buckets into the pens to the troughs.

Lambing time – for us the first week of February – is when shepherding varies from the routine. Often it's the time for stupid-sheep stories. One night this past February,

I was wide awake at 5:00 a.m. We'd had our first lambs, a set of triplets, the night before and one was doing poorly. As I wasn't sleeping anyway, I decided to check the weak triplet and do a quick check on the other ewes as well. I pulled the snowsuit over my pajamas, went out and walked behind the barn to the sheep pen.

To my shock, I found no sheep. Not one in the pen! We had little snow at the time and they had been going out into the hay field to graze on alfalfa stubble. A gate is left open and they just come and go. Jack, the dog, watches for coyotes.

But sheep don't go out at night. Their usual habit is to sleep in a flock in front of the shelter if the weather is mild or inside the shelter if it's not. With a thick wool coat, only severe storms entice them to sleep inside. A group of dozing sheep is as peaceful as you'd imagine the shepherd

*L*ambing time – for us the first week of February – is when shepherding varies from the routine.



scene in the Christmas story. So where were my sheep?

I tried not to panic. Surely they were just out in the hay field, grazing. I sent Jack out looking while I went into the barn to check on the weak lamb.

He came back without them. The line from the Messiah, "All we like sheep have gone astray," ran through my head as Jack and I walked into the eighty-acre field.

It's very dark in rural Alberta at 5:30 a.m. I carried a flashlight, swinging it in an arc as we walked. I'd heard coyotes when I first stepped out of the house. I was nervous, expecting to find a blood bath. What had Jack been doing when those sheep wandered away? Why wasn't he on the alert?

Halfway into the field my flashlight arc caught something white – Jack, chasing a ewelamb. Ewelambs are less than a year old. Her wool was whiter than the older ewes so the flashlight beam reflected on it. Whew, we at least had one live sheep. Eventually I saw the rest and Jack brought them all in.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Isaiah 53:6 (RSV). Most of those wayward sheep were born right in that pen. Now, having had the urge to graze, they simply forgot where "home" was.

Stupid sheep? Yes, but are we any different? We so easily and often stray and forget where "home" is. Our Shepherd may be looking for us.

.....  
Ruth Braun lives in southern Alberta, where she is an avid quilter, serves on the board of the Canadian Mennonite magazine and is active in the Rosemary Mennonite Church. She is married to Erwin; they have three teenagers.

I was most pleased to receive a copy of *Sophia*. I had never heard of this wonderful publication until I was referred to it by Jim Coggins from the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. I then found myself without an address, until our church was sent a copy. Thank you so much for doing this!

Irma Barkman  
Saskatoon

I just came upon *Sophia* and I feel as refreshed as if I'd just had a heart-to-heart with a soul-mate. The honesty with which you approach issues is singularly refreshing in today's Christian publishing market (where it seems we're only to formulate questions that fit our prescribed answers).

Bravo!  
Donna Neufeld  
Winnipeg

## New Writers Contest

*Sophia* is pleased to announce our second New Writers Contest. Contestants must not have written for *Sophia* before. Submissions should be a maximum of 800 words, typed. Please include name, title of article, address and phone number on a separate piece of paper. Do not put name on article. Submissions will not be returned. Deadline for submissions is September 31, 1998.

A \$50 prize will be awarded for each of the four best entries, which will be published in a future issue of *Sophia*. Runners-up may also be invited to have their submissions published. Writing should be in one of the following categories:

1. **Life Writing.** A thoughtful account of a personal experience, a biographical story about a woman you know, or a life's experience recounted through letters or in diary / journal format.
2. **A Reflection from Scripture.** Of particular interest is interpretation of Scriptures about female characters or from a female perspective.
3. **My Experience As a Christian Woman at the End of the Twentieth Century.** A reflection on how you see your life and experience (or a particular facet of your experience) as a woman and a Christian in the present age; how this relates to your past and/or your future; what you see as the most important issues facing you in your daily life or your future.
4. **A Theme of your choice.**
5. **A Short Story.**

Address your submissions to *Sophia*: P.O. Box 28062, 1453 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, MB, R3G 4E9.

# Learning Names

by Dora Dueck

Nature has always been extremely important to me, but I perceive it on the larger scale rather than the smaller. I sprang about the rolling hills of my Alberta childhood and learned the sky's vastness and the earth's beauty as "feelings" which they communicated and to which I answered. The trees and grasses were experienced en masse and emotionally, but not as species with individual names.

I mention this as background to the adventure I had with Nature in the summer of 1989. That summer, ashamed of my ignorance, and motivated as well by envy of people I knew who were jetting around the globe to exotic locations, I decided it was time to get to know the world at my feet. It was time to learn some names.

I went into the field behind our house and began with the little I already knew. It took some nerve, I admit, to sit down. My five-year-old daughter was delighted at the prospect but I was an adult and infested with that problem of minding what others might think. What if a neighbor

looked out a window or someone drove by on the road and saw me? Sitting in a field!

I sat down in clover. In clover, as in "any of various fabaceous herbs of the genus *Trifolium*, having trifoliate leaves and dense flower heads, many species of which are cultivated as forage plants." In clover as "enjoying luxury or comfort," because I set my inhibitions aside and found myself amazed.

## The Stages of a Name

I was startled to see that each plant, named "white sweet clover," contained on this late July day all the generations of a summer's life. There, a flower beginning as a circle of green tufts sheltered by leaves, the purple just visible at the tips like the veins of a fetus. And here, a child clover pushing up and away from the protective leaves, showing signs of its white color. Another, opening outward, the white enlarging and mauve framing the edges. The flower, I realized when I examined one at its fullest and most richly coloured, was composed of many individual flowerets shaped like pods. These peak flowers were the ones the bees visited. Maturing still more, the flower fell open further, but in a downward direction now. At its most ancient, the tiny flowerets were dry and papery – packets of seed.

The cycle of generations showed itself inside the name of every plant I learned to know that summer. It's an obvious thing, perhaps, but it's true for human relationships too. Learning another's name, truly learning it, recognizes more than the body and activities she inhabits now. Her name encloses the younger person she was and the older one she is becoming.

JOE MODER

## Intimacy

I went on from what I knew to what I didn't know. I checked out some books from the library to help me with descriptions and names. The purple plant flowering in abundance on the fields, for example, whose flowers grew on only one side of the stem and who stretched through vines curled like pigtails, was winter vetch. "Learning the names fosters intimacy," I wrote in my journal, where I was noting my discoveries and their idiosyncracies. Vetch. I loved the sound of it.

And names like dogbane. Water-parsnip. Cinquefoil. Even thistle sounds pretty.

My eyes were alert now to things I had never noticed. Watering our trees I glimpsed a single daisy poking out of the gumbo at the edge of our property. Daisies are clichés, I thought, so fresh-looking, so pure and simple – and so easy simply to overlook. Its proper name was "ox-eyed daisy." Where had that come from? Do oxen have yellow eyes?

*I decided it was time to  
get to know the world at  
my feet.*



One morning while biking I spotted a patch of white blossoms at the roadside. I stopped and saw flowers as exquisite as if they'd been unfolded from some gift-wrapped box. They were a wild version of the morning glory. A discovery like this could make my entire day! The things growing around me were truly gifts, each one unique, each with something to marvel over. Names, after all, aren't just labels stuck on to keep life in order, in its place. Naming belongs to knowing, knowing belongs to essence. The creation story suggests this when it says the man gave names to the cattle, birds, and beasts but failed to discover a being corresponding to himself. He recognized this because in naming he learned the quality of the creatures' otherness.

These deeper implications of name remind me that besides my given name, which speaks of me as a whole person from young to old, I have other names as well. Daughter, sister, wife, mother, writer. We receive or choose such names at some point, and then, as someone has said, spend a lifetime trying to fulfill them.

### No to Name-Dropping

That summer I wrote a poem for a poetry group I was part of and stuck in as many of the lovely names I had so recently become acquainted with. I used cattails, roses, yarrow, sage, dogwood, gumweed, silverweed, and goldenrod, and others as well, more or less in a list as I just did to make this point (though I added some adjectives). It was mediocre poetry but my fellow writers seemed impressed with my breadth of botanical reference.

Later I felt this rather shabby of me, however, quite as shabby as name-dropping always is. Name-dropping generally shows off knowledge that's superficial. It's a betrayal of the true naming that friendship or love imply.

The summer passed and the plants I'd come to know died and were buried in snow. The intensity of my search gave way the following year to other adventures. But I still remember some of the names I learned, and when I go walking I see them and know them and they give me, when I stop, the pleasure of who they are.

.....  
Dora Dueck, *Sophia* editorial member, lives in Winnipeg with her husband, Helmut, and their three children. They attend Jubilee Mennonite Church.

## Forest and Garden

by Marianne Ewert Worcester

Having chosen both  
the forest and the garden  
there is nothing for it  
but to begin  
exploration and cultivation  
the same  
and not the same.  
The garden, at its centre,  
holds the wildness.  
Always, as we stay  
within the bounds  
we also roam the outer spaces.  
The place of faith  
is still the great unknown,  
the inner and the outer  
held together  
in the acts of re / creation.  
Lovers, having chosen  
both tree and flower,  
sun and moon,  
know there is only one  
essential  
loving.

.....  
Marianne Ewert Worcester teaches English at Langara Community College in Vancouver. She is a frequent contributor to *Sophia*.



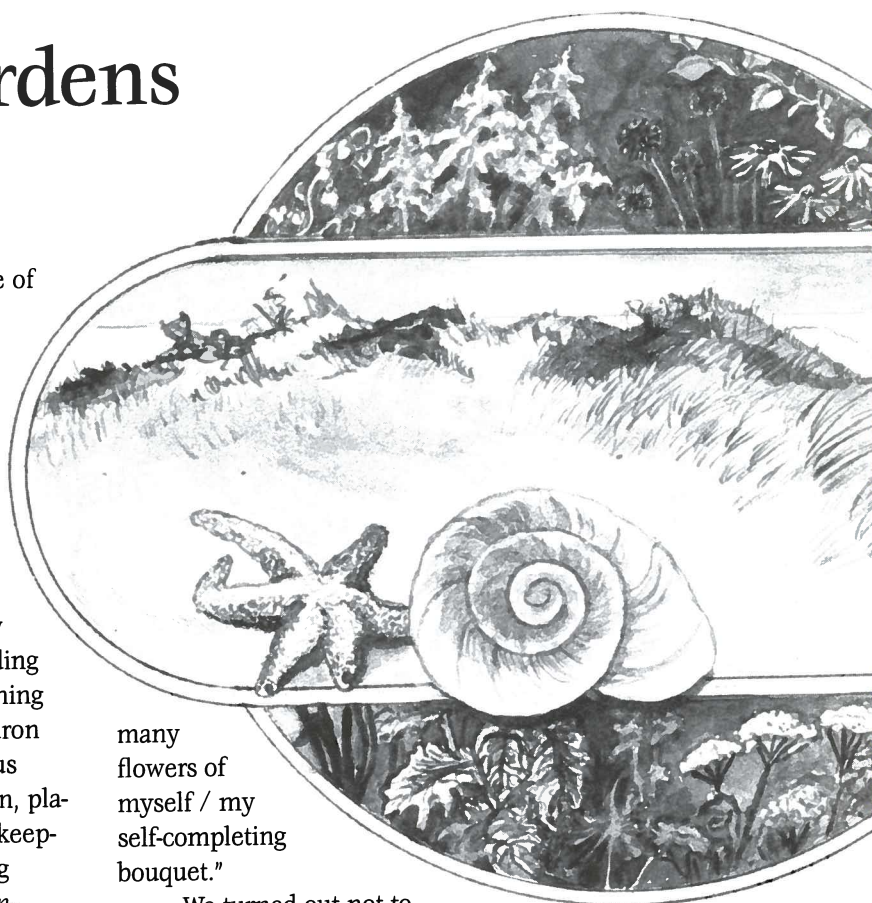
JOE MODER

# Letting Go of Gardens

by Marianne Ewert Worcester

I have begun to notice that I'm tired of taking care of things. The houseplants have been aware of this for some time, dusty and grateful for the occasional drink of water. It's becoming a "live and let live" situation here in the house; things get done when they need to but no one seems to be at the helm. Both of my daughters left home earlier this year. I realized one morning this week that I am no longer brooding over them. I have stopped stocking the pantry with their favourite food. When a rain storm whips up at night I no longer wake up to worry about whether they have umbrellas, or which is standing at a bus stop in a seamy part of town, scared and wishing for home. My youngest, a son, just entering the cauldron of adolescence, does his own laundry and carries a bus pass. He plans his life around my stabs at intervention, placating me with his ebullience. Twenty-three years of keeping track of children and I've had enough. I'm floating away from that centre of my life. As with the *figus ben-jaminis* I'll continue to water and dust as the need arises, but at some subcutaneous level, I'm done with all that.

I am doing a slow turn away from house and garden. Not that I have a garden, in the real sense of the word. At the beginning, we lived in a "handyman's special" on a lot with a garden and grass so tall the red-haired baby would get lost in it. I wanted to be a kind of Madame Targesse, provider of fresh vegetables and flowers, feeding robust children from the fruit of my labours, preserving, preparing herbs, pickling, procuring. I had a vision of myself in country-print summer dresses and clogs, picking blowsy roses in wicker baskets, bending down toward ripe tomatoes and sugar peas in early morning sunlight. But I never really got it right. I planted too late, put in too much zucchini, missed the harvest, and found I much preferred to watch things come full circle and die than preserve and put by. I found I didn't have the gift of practicality, that talent for linking beauty with utility that had given my foremothers honour in their day, blessed for that perpetual motion of the pious. Instead of pickles, I preserved scents, colours, feelings, sealing up in words and sentences the gardens I would need to see me through the winters ahead. I "gathered the trembling flowers of earth / gathered the



many flowers of myself / my self-completing bouquet."

We turned out not to be yard people. While our neighbours mowed lawns and set up barbeques, we would get in the car and drive to the river, or the sea, both twenty minutes away. Here we would be happy, mucking about with boats. So, we moved the baby into a tall thin townhouse in the middle of the city where hired people took care of things and bought a boat instead of a lawnmower. The yard shrank into patio tubs and boxes: wisteria, honeysuckle and climb-


ing roses on the roof deck with its desert climate; clematis, indigenous shrubs and ubiquitous impatiens on the north patio with its low light and damp ardour; jasmine, roses and lavender on the south backdoor patio; sun lovers of all kinds in the boxes there, a serendipitous diorama of colour and scent, including a few pedestrian tomatoes and the essential herbs for cooking and wellness.

Once they got their initial careful send off, things were on their own much of the time. Sometimes the

result of this approach was breathtaking, lavish beauty. Other years, it was a quiet hanging on in understatement until the relief of winter. But I came to be satisfied with this. It wasn't a real garden, but it had advantages: you could throw it all out and start over, or, throw it all out and there would be an end.

*I had a vision of myself in country-print summer dresses and clogs, picking blowsy roses in wicker baskets, bending down toward ripe tomatoes and sugar peas in early morning sunlight.*





And now I'm letting go again. I'm turning fifty this year and "to care and not to care" seems to recite itself as a mantra through my days. The perennials carry on without much fuss, as they're supposed to; I've let some planters go fallow, produce whatever they want; some plants are browning and falling away and I think I'll let them go; caring and not caring. Most days I get in the car and drive to the edge of the sea, as I did when I first came here, a prairie girl coming home.

I walk along, letting my feet take me where I need to go. The sea leaves its daily debris along the tide line and I pick through it, like a bag lady picking through the trash, looking for the good bits to preserve in my boxes and pots. My sea gardens: strands of kelp, shells, rocks, fractured glass, knot holes to peer through, strange shapes of driftwood, perfect round stones, arbutus branches brought in on errant tides from the islands.

I need these sea gardens now. I don't have to do anything here, just be. No cultivating, nursing along, watering, weeding, feeding, digging, protecting, coaxing. Just being there is all that's required of me. In this still, watery place, in this gray-blue bowl of light, something is cultivating me. The middle-aged self I am growing needs this wildness, this expansiveness, this rise and fall of tides, this changeableness that remains unchanging.

I have met an old sister here, and she is Earth, and I have come to "love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am, how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know; we are stunned by this beauty, and I do not forget: what she is to me, what I am to her" (Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature*).

In my pots, the rosemary is shooting out again, and crocuses have sprung up where I don't remember planting any. The children and the perennials are doing fine without my constant attention, and I am free of caring so much. As the tide takes me away from my dream of gardens and who I would be, I know I am being tended in some larger garden.

.....

*Marianne Ewert Worcester combs the shore in Vancouver*

## A Garden

by Lydia Penner

And this is the way you plant  
a garden in spring, it takes  
a fool in winter to believe  
and to see and to place  
the tiny dried up bits  
of life into dark humus  
and trust that the green  
may burst and bloom  
and bring a new way of seeing  
in the winter  
and though all is shadow  
and though all is shadow  
it is in this very inky valley  
that seeds may grow  
and this is the way  
and no other way and  
I know you may protest  
and cry and deny  
but all there is left is  
to trust and trust and trust  
that the dark does not kill  
as the seeds lie still.  
All it takes is a fool  
to believe

.....

*Lydia Penner lives in Winnipeg  
with her husband, Lyle, and their son, Joel.  
She is an elementary school teacher and  
a member of the Watershed Community.*

# Home Schooling on the Farm

## An Interview with Linda Wilton

by Agnes Dyck

**D**oug and Linda Wilton live on a farm near Carmen. They are members of the MB church in Carmen where Doug is Moderator. Linda and Agnes Dyck met to talk about Linda's home schooling and family life on the farm.

**Agnes.** You have four children. What are their names?

**Linda.** Heather is thirteen, Christin is ten, Andrew is six and Michael is four. And the baby is due in June.

**A.** I wonder what that will be? A boy or a girl?

**L.** It doesn't matter. We have two and two. (Laughs)

**A.** So you're home schooling your children. Do you have a curriculum that you follow?

**L.** I use different and various curriculums. I don't stay with one particular company. I do use textbooks and workbooks. I'm relatively structured compared to some people, but I don't have one set curriculum.

**A.** Does the government support any of that? Does it pay for the texts, for example?

**L.** We pay for all of this ourselves and we pay school taxes too. It's not very practical economically. And the government doesn't have much involvement. I make a report but I've never ever had a response back. I guess that means they think it's adequate.

**A.** That's strange that they wouldn't respond.

**L.** They have government cutbacks too, I guess. I only report twice a year. You're pretty much allowed to do mostly what you want to do but statistically the home school kids tend to be getting a better education than the public school children, so maybe that's another reason why they leave us alone.

**A.** I guess the obvious question is: Why are you doing it? People must ask you.

**L.** Well, there are lots of reasons. In the beginning the main reason was, I wanted to do it myself. I started (home schooling) when my oldest was in grade three, and it bugged me that the school bus ruled our lives. We couldn't do anything because the school bus was coming tomorrow, and it was such a long day for Heather. There were other things too. She'd be taught things wrong and then I'd have to reteach them and that was a lot more work than just teaching it in the first place.

**A.** What objections would people have to home schooling?

**L.** The first question you're always asked is, "What about socialization?" Our children have their church activities and 4H activities.

**A.** Can you say something about negative socialization in the public school?

**L.** Kids picking on peers, especially at recess, eh? The girl who had been my daughter's best friend decided she didn't want to be anymore, and a lot of kids are really afraid of recess. Mine were no exception.

**A.** Because of the rough play and so on? When I was teaching we had to supervise at recess. We had to put on our winter clothes and supervise the playground.

**L.** All the kids tend to huddle around that supervising teacher, and that's a sign.

**A.** So you want to protect them from this?

**L.** Well, it's better having them at home. They don't have to experience that. I can teach what I want to teach, what I think is important. That's a bigger reason than the socialization part. I make sure they learn their phonics. There's so much New Age (philosophy) in the schools now; it creeps into all the subjects, religion-wise.

**A.** So have you had criticism from people about your home schooling?

**L.** Not very much. The grandparents have reservations. Whenever you do anything different people interpret that as a criticism of what they're doing and I don't know how you can avoid that. The kids do have friends their own age. A boy who is a bit older than our boys was over yesterday and they were trying to teach the sheep to run on command. I nixed it. I told them sheep aren't supposed to run. (Laughs) They had them on halters. Imagine.

**A.** So you've got sheep and horses and ...

**L.** Cats! Too many cats. We have two horses, an American Bashkir Curly, and Bo. We have chickens; Heather sells eggs. That's been a project of hers for quite a few years now, looking after these chickens. Most springs we hatch a batch of eggs in an incubator. That's fun. In the garden we have black and red raspberries and saskatoons. They're getting experience that city kids would give any thing for. There's a certain discipline too. Yes, you have to do chores whether you want to or not.





*Doug and Linda Wilton with children, Christin, Michael, Andrew and Heather at right, holding Bo.*

**A. How much assistance can you give to your farm business?**

L. If I can still get in and out of a tractor I do hope to do some helping on the land this spring. My due date is June 15. We are going to be short-staffed.

**A. So you want to help.**

L. I'm hoping to help. When seeding starts, home schooling gets pretty bare bones. We'll just continue on next year where we left off. Learning is something we do all the time. I have a degree in Agriculture and I always liked to teach. I went on an Agricultural Exchange trip between third and fourth year university. I was away for thirteen months working on a dairy farm in Germany and a mixed sheep farm in New Zealand.

**A. So farming isn't new to you. You grew up on a farm.**

L. My dad had all daughters so he of necessity became liberated and we all learned to drive tractor and some of us liked it more than others. In fact, my young sister was forced to learn to drive a tractor; we all had to promise not to tell any of her friends, she was so ashamed. Now she's proud of the fact that she can.

**A. I think women would think now that was great, right?**

L. I was always the one who was the most interested, and I was the only one who married a farmer.

**A. Sometimes you have answers to prayer that happen so naturally that you think, "Oh, did that really happen?"**

**Was it just a coincidence, or what?**

L. I sometimes say thank you to God for answering a prayer that I didn't have the nerve to pray.

**A. You were at a home schooling conference at Grant Memorial Baptist Church in Winnipeg?**

L. Yes, it was very encouraging. We had workshops about different aspects of home schooling. My favourite part was a great big curriculum fair; they had books and material that I could use. They also had a youth program that Heather attended.

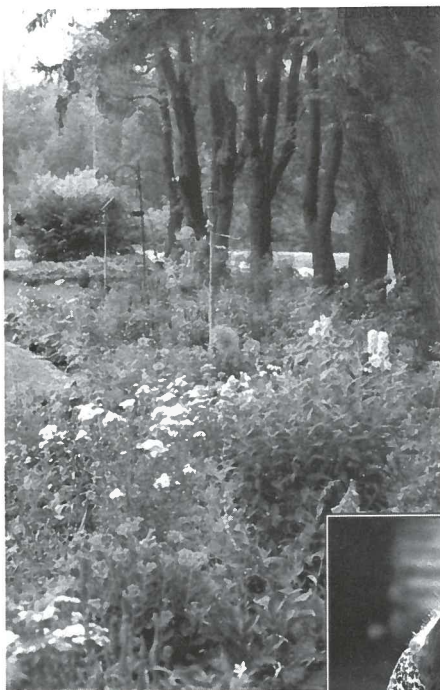
**A. It'll be interesting to see what your children will say about their schooling fifteen years from now.**

L. My kids? I think they're alright. Every April we say, "Are we going to do this again?" The answer has always been yes. This year I already know without asking. I'm not saying that my kids'll never go to a public school. At this point it seems right to keep them out.

.....  
*Agnes Dyck, Sophia editorial member, is a retired teacher who lives in Winnipeg. She is a member of McIvor Ave. MB Church.*

“A sense of wonder is desperately important. Wonder and being able to laugh at ourselves and realizing how terribly arrogant we have become because of a mistaken belief that man has dominion over the birds of the air and the fish of the seas. The word 'dominion' was actually a translation of the Jewish word 'stewardship.'”

.....  
*Jane Goodall (scientist, author), from Embracing our Essence: Spiritual Conversations with Prominent Women, edited by Susan Skog, Health Communications, 1995, p 67.*



ELAINE KROEGER

# Touching the Spirit: A Visit to Pineridge Hollow

by Lorie Battershill



Jan and Katrina Regehr



Down a country road just a few miles north-east of Winnipeg, there is a place called Pineridge Hollow. It's a special place, a place where owner Jan Regehr hopes that people can come to find a moment of peace and relaxation. "People are important," says Jan. "I want to give our visitors a wonderful experience, something to take them away from the stress they experience in their day-to-day lives."

Pineridge Hollow began in 1992 as a gift shop selling the country crafts that Jan loves. At that time, Jan and husband, Ralph, had just started their family; 18-month-old Katrina cut the ribbon at the grand opening. The family has since grown to include three children, Katrina (7) Zach (5) and Bethany (2). Along with the family, the business has expanded too. Now there's an outdoor tea garden and a glorious array of flower gardens, each with its own theme, to tour. Kids can join the summer gardening club and everyone can sign up for classes and workshops on everything from quilting and folk art to gardening. And this year marks the opening of the Carriage House, a tea room that is open year round.

Each new area has given Jan new opportunities to share her faith. "I love flowers and gardens but I love the Creator even more," says Jan. "When I host tours through the gardens, I have many opportunities to share that. For example, there is a garden based on the prayer of St. Fran-

cis of Assisi. Using the language of flowers – lily of the valley for peace, rose for love – I tie in to the words of St. Francis. As I recite the prayer, 'Lord make me an instrument of thy peace,' I pray that the words and the surroundings will touch each person's spirit in some way. Plans for 1998 include adding a biblical herb garden. That will open up other opportunities to be open about my faith. I try to seek out ways in which this venture can honour God."

In many ways Pineridge Hollow has become a reflection of Jan's own faith journey. "In all that's happened in this business," says Jan, "I've tried to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading. It's something that God has put on my heart."

The Pineridge Hollow tea room and gift shop are open from March 1st to December 31st, Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The store is also open Thursday night until 9 p.m. Free garden tours are held every third Friday of the month, May through August, at 10:30 a.m. A detailed list of classes and workshops is available through *The Hollow's Heart*, a newsletter published by Pineridge Hollow. Call or fax for details. Gift Shoppe: 444-3881; Tea Room: 444-3880; Fax: 444-2353; Mailing Address: Pineridge Hollow, Box 247, Oakbank, MB R0E 1J0.



# Lesson From the Pumpkin Patch

by Lorie Battershill

From the kitchen window, my children and I watch as our backyard garden grows. There are rows of carrots with lush, lacy tops. Who will find the longest one when we begin the harvest? The tomato plants cycle through from yellow flower to bright, red fruit. The sunflowers dazzle us with their rapid growth; giant heads hanging low, full of seeds for the winter sparrows. But our favourite corner of the garden is the pumpkin patch.

Children love to grow pumpkins. They seem fascinated by those big, orange globes peeking out from beneath giant, green leaves. Maybe it's the reminder that Hallowe'en is just around the corner, or perhaps kids just rejoice because they know this is the one vegetable that can be served with whipped cream. But what I like best about growing pumpkins is that it allows me to plant seeds for the future. Growing pumpkins offers the best story about where babies come from since the stork gave up his search for babies in the cabbage patch.

The pumpkin plant parallels some of the key elements of the human reproductive cycle. To begin with, it has gender. Pumpkin flowers come in male and female.

The big yellow blooms grow low to the ground and it is easy for even the youngest child to see the difference. Male flowers have a single stamen in the middle and the pollen grains are readily visible. The female flowers have a cluster of pistils at the center and no pollen. At the base of the female flower is a "baby" pumpkin waiting to begin its growth.

The flowers open only once, early in the morning of a summer day. My children and I go out each morning in search of would-be mothers. There are always lots of male flowers, but a female flower is a rare and exciting find. We choose a suitable male flower from a different plant and carefully pull away the yellow petals. The stamen, rich with pollen, is stroked onto the waiting female cluster, and then our work is done. Soon the flower begins to fade, and within just a few short days, we can see if our mission has been successful. If so, the pumpkin will begin to swell

and become visibly larger almost daily. An unsuccessful pollination results in the tiny bulb quickly decaying back into the earth.

Every year our little pumpkin patch produces a crop of jack-o-lanterns and pumpkin pies. But in the last few years it has also produced a more important harvest. As my children approach the outer edge of childhood we have a wonderful set of illustrations to call upon when we talk about human reproduction. When I tell them about the baby seed inside the female body, they will remember that beautiful female pumpkin flower. And they have seen, in our garden lessons, how the male flower is needed to make the new life grow.

As adolescence draws closer and we begin to talk about human sexuality, my hope is that the lesson of the pumpkin patch will leave them with a feeling that reproduction and sexuality are connected to the earth, the sun and the love in their family on a warm, summer morning.

.....  
*Lorie Battershill, Sophia editorial member, grows pumpkins in Winnipeg. She and her family attend McIvor Ave. MB Church.*

## Growing Pumpkins

It is no longer necessary to have a great, big garden in order to grow pumpkins. New hybrid varieties spread out only a little and require just a small plot of earth. I use a type called Funny Face. The pumpkins are just the right size for small bodies to carry with pride. Other hybrid types are also available. Check your local garden centre.

Plant pumpkins in late spring after all danger of frost has passed. Even a light frost will kill the delicate seedlings. Plant six or seven seeds on a small hill of earth. Later, thin to three or four of the strongest plants. At least two plants are required for proper pollination.

Hand pollination is fun and ensures a maximum harvest. You can, however, leave this job to the bees and butterflies.

Sunflowers make a nice companion planting. By the time the pumpkin plants begin to vine, the sunflowers are four feet high and out of the way.

Hybrid pumpkins mature quickly and are often ready in late August. They can be picked and brought indoors as soon as they begin to turn orange. This might be advisable if your garden is subject to raids by little critters (of the human variety). Those big orange balls are very tempting targets.

Harvested pumpkins should be "cured" to prevent decay. Wipe down the outside of the pumpkin with a solution of ten parts water to one part chlorine bleach. Set the pumpkin in a warm, dry place until the skin toughens. This will ensure that your crop will last until Thanksgiving, Hallowe'en and beyond. They sometimes even last until the next spring. Don't use the pumpkin stems for handles. They break off easily and this opens a pathway for decay.

*This is dedicated to my sister, Dorothy Ann. Spring 1996 was her last on earth at her Ohio home. Spring outside my door, by this Ontario river, was so awesome I wanted to share it with her while she was fighting with horrendous cancer. In Autumn of 1996 my sister graduated to her heavenly home.*

**H**ow can one take in all of God's beauty, listen hard enough, or look everywhere?

Rain, lightning and thunder have stopped. Wind gently scoots fluffy white clouds across a sky of blue. Where is God's rainbow?

There is just enough wind to assist bald eagles soaring high over the river. They come down over the land and scold me, then soar again in hunt of prey. Majestic ospreys follow.

Swallows perform their ballet, skimming the river, dancing with the wind. Loons eerily call their song to each other. One dives quickly, reappears, stretches up tall, arches his black neck, bares his white chest, then flaps his wings, finishing his act.

Goldeneyes, common mergansers, red-breasted mergansers with crests trailing in the breeze, all perform in their relaxed floating mode. Ducks frequently disappear in a dive, surface, and turn their heads around to preen. They first skim quietly across the river, then in a quacking rush with wings beating rapidly, flee whatever frightened them. Such a whooshing of wings and splashing of water when they land. Suddenly Canada geese raucously honk their interruption, disturbing the duck's spring afternoon gathering.

Near shore, partially submerged logs and stumps are decorated with varying sizes of turtles stretching in the sun. Ripples trail in the river behind a beaver who, sometimes invisible, sometimes exposing his head, then his back, is always at the ready to whack the river with a warning slap of his tail.

He swims away from the shore where some trees are toppled and others look as if beavers may gnaw them over this evening. A toppled tree hits the river with a resounding splash, and the dog jumps and shivers. Freshly gnawed bark encircles the chosen trees, intricate patterns decorating stumps and fallen masts everywhere their chisel-like teeth have been at work.

Searching for a meal, pileated woodpeckers attack the bark of trees along shore. Their rat-a-tats drum too fast to imitate. They rush off in a flap, screaming, their red crests flashing through the woods. Jittery chipmunks dash over rocks, feeding on birdseed at roots of ancient, gnarled, twisted grey apple trees. They run back to their holes when birds come to feed.

A brilliant red cardinal flaunts his plumage against the brown earth and grey bark, then flies away. Brave chickadees return first, numerous sparrow cousins,

# Spring Miracles

## on the Trent River Shore

by Judith  
Knopp Brown

JOE MODER

nuthatches, slate juncos, blue jays, red-winged blackbirds and grackles join in the feast. None is silent. All contribute to the glorious outdoor symphony.

Scores of huge black crows are everywhere, their cacophony out of tune, never playing the same score as do the other winged musicians.

Thick spongy moss is a new green. Tiny dandelion and wild strawberry leaves are underfoot, too pretty to step on. Where are those tiny pets, the pussy willows?

Remains of a large white bird egg lie on dark moist soil. Did it break as a hatchling entered this world, or did a winged thief steal it from an unguarded nest, then consume it?

Glorious sunrise hues in the sky reflect in the river. Hours later, evening clouds in the east, tinged with colours from an incredible sunset, cast their pink on the river.

How many sounds do frogs make? How many hundreds talk at once? Night creeps in, and even more join in the conversation.

Coyotes raise their nighttime chorus, their pups yelping. If you listen closely, perhaps a fox is heard. Raccoons and skunks aren't in sight. Are they hiding in the pussy willows under the rainbow?

How many are a barzillion? How many bright twinkling stars appear in this awesome firmament? Just off

*Continued on page 23 ►*



# Searching for God in the Garden

by Carmen Pauls

*"What more could he need, this old man whose little leisure was divided between daytime gardening and night-time contemplation? Was not that narrow space with the sky its ceiling room enough for the worship of God in the most delicate of His works and the most sublime? A garden to walk in and immensity to dream in – what more could he ask? A few flowers at his feet and above him the stars." Victor Hugo, Les Miserables.*

**I**n this description of the saintly Bishop of Digne, Hugo articulated something that most gardeners understand, but few ever consider on a conscious level: the link between soil and soul. According to Judeo-Christian tradition, our first connection with God was in a garden. It was our first home, our first place of belonging. And having created us in the Creator's own image, the Master Gardener gave us the task of caring for all living, growing things.

After Adam and Eve had sinned, God cast them out of the garden, but, curiously, left them with the task of caring for the earth. And since that time, we have dreamed of the garden, and of returning to it one day. And with trowel, hoe, seeds and dirt we have tried to create that lost home, hoping to find God in the garden.

"The garden was the place before history began, where happiness was," says Alex MacDonald, a practising Catholic and specialist in utopian literature. "It's the place we want to get back to, which is very much what utopia tries to do. ...And sometimes that utopian experience is described as a reunion with God."

"Just as there are no agnostics in battlefield foxholes, there are few real gardeners who don't believe in some greater purpose in life," writes Peter Calamai in "Food for the Soul," a 1995 editorial published in the *Ottawa Citizen*. This is something that has been understood for generations.

St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscans, is said to have loved flowers so much that he wanted the members of his order to care for them as gardeners. Asked once what he would do if he learned he were to die tomorrow, he replied, "I would keep on cultivating my garden."

And Christians believe that even God sought out a garden as a place of refuge: on the night he was betrayed, Christ went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

A garden can be a place to learn some of the most profound lessons: life and death and our place in the universe, and ultimately the nature of God.

"One of the most exciting times for me is in the early

spring," says Esther Wiens, a Bible college professor and avid gardener. "After everything has seemed so dead, to see new life emerging is just wonderful. I would feel sort of static if I couldn't garden – that I wasn't in touch with growth," Wiens says. "It feeds the spirit. Does it make me a better Christian? I think it does."

"On the other hand, you see so much death in the garden," she reflects. "The transience of life is very obvious in the garden. ...You can't really hold onto a flower, just as you can't hold onto life." Although we are the gardener, the mysterious transference from seed to plant to dust again is not in our hands, Wiens says. "You facilitated it, but you're not in control. You're aware that other things are in control and ultimately that is the Creator."

There are two ways of relating to a garden, MacDonald says. You can force it into the shapes you want, like the 18th century topiary artists who carved shrubs into statues, or you can let the plants grow where they will, as traditional English gardeners do. "My sense of the way God relates to the world is that rather than shaping and

molding like those 18th century gardeners, God is there providing sun and rain, analogies to grace, and allowing things to grow to reach their potential, rather than shaping and controlling them," he says.

"I think one of the biggest things gardening teaches is patience," says Anne Leskiw, who coordinates flower-arranging classes at First Baptist Church in downtown Regina. "It'll germinate when God says to, not when we want it to. Whatever we plant is God-made, not human-made."

.....  
*Carmen Pauls graduated in April with a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Regina. She also holds degrees in Christian Studies from Concord College and English from the University of Winnipeg. She is to be married this summer.*

“Flowers are my metaphor for reminding us that our lives are fragile and precious. We have to be there to smell the rose and observe it before it wilts and withers, because we're going to wilt and wither too....”

.....  
*Alexandra Stoddard (author, lecturer, interior designer), from Embracing our Essence: Spiritual Conversations with Prominent Women, edited by Susan Skog, Health Communications, 1995, p 107.*



**I** grew up with dirt under my fingernails. We lived in a beautiful valley near the hamlet of Linden, Alberta, where the Lone Pine Creek and the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks intersected. Gardening was a means of survival, not a hobby. Father would work the soil with a borrowed horse and plough and mother would sow, beginning with poppies on either side of a foot path that divided the garden. Weeding, hoeing and harvesting was a family activity.

We moved to Coaldale, Alberta, when I was eight. Irrigation became an added feature of our vegetable garden. Water, ditches, dams and trenches transformed the work into play. Garden tasks were passed on from elder to younger of the ten children as each grew older and left home. Third youngest, I needed little coaxing because, for me, the big garden was a world of wonder, work and play. Each fall I felt adequately rewarded, seeing the bins in the old root cellar filled to capacity.

In 1959 I took leave of family and gardening when I enrolled at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. My gardening instincts tem-

## Dirt Under My Fingernails

by Harry Heidebrecht

porarily retreated into dormancy. Studies, love, marriage, family and a teaching career displaced the big family garden in my life. Surprisingly the sap began to flow once more while I was attending seminary in Fresno in 1969. The stimulant was a little plot beside our apartment in the Missions Court. It became a thriving tomato patch. The sign of this rebirth was the dirt that reappeared under my fingernails.

After graduating from seminary, we moved to Greendale, British Columbia. Greendale was a gardener's paradise. My garden became a small-scale experimental farm. Growing the biggest and the best became a passion. My trademark became the giant *Kelsae* Onion. A local greenhouse operator had passed on a few onion seedlings for me to test. Subsequently, he forgot both the source and variety. In the meantime the onions grew, one achieving a circumference of 23 inches. For two years I examined every available seed catalogue for clues to this mysterious onion seed. Eventually, I discovered a source in Scotland. Even though I have since expanded my repertoire of specialty crops to include tomatoes, peppers and long English cucumbers, my reputation as a backyard gardener rises and falls according to the size of my *Kelsae* onions.

Calgary is not a gardener-friendly environment. Seasons don't always unfold as they should. Warm April weather lulls us into thinking spring has arrived, only to bring the return of snow and frost in late May. Our proximity to the Rockies, elevation of 3,300 feet, cool night-time temperatures, the threat of wind and hail and a short growing season of

104-112 days make gardening a high risk hobby. As a safeguard I now grow two gardens, one in the city and the other in the country. Should you attend the Highland Church, don't be surprised to discover me preaching with my hands in my pockets, to hide the dirt under my fingernails.

My love for gardening has no single explanation. It's no longer a matter of survival, although we enjoy produce throughout the year. I find pleasure in gardening. A day at work, outside, under the sun, in the soil, is therapy for body and soul. It has become for me a kind of sabbath. I garden for relaxation and pleasure.

I also garden for fellowship. My wife, Margaret, is more aesthetically inclined and grows flowers. I am pragmatic and grow vegetables. It's a pleasure we share and an opportunity to do something enjoyable together. Perhaps this blend of aesthetics and pragmatics adds a wholesome balance to our relationship and ministry.

I garden for the joy of friendship. Gardening has opened many doors to friendship. My gardening friends have included doctors, teachers, journalists, realtors, retirees, neighbors and others. A retired educator from Comox, B.C., used to visit me each spring to pick up onion seedlings, and each fall sent me the blue ribbon he won at the Comox Valley Exhibition. Helping my friend grow onions larger than my own strengthened our friendship. Gardening friendships create natural opportunities for sharing our lives and our faith.

I garden for the satisfaction of sharing. I remember my father say-

*Continued on page 23 ►*



## Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place

.....  
by Terry Tempest Williams,  
Vintage Books: New York, 1991.

Reviewed by Agnes Dyck.

*Refuge* is an intensely personal story encompassing several themes developed through short chapters, each titled with the name of a bird indigenous to Great Salt Lake, Utah.

The writer portrays the natural world as a source of peace. Her lovely, painterly prose mirrors this

inland lake for the reader.

Underlying her description of the fluctuating natural/unnatural rise and fall of Great Salt Lake we sense a feeling of loss, a lament for human interruption in the organic development of this refuge for birds and other wild life.

We are educated in the fascinating geographical history of the Great Salt Lake area. Paralleling the geographical changes we find that money-makers, endeavouring to exploit the natural loveliness of the lake have lately been forced to recede because of severe flooding.

The last chapter is titled, "The Clan of One-breasted Women." At age

thirty-four the author found herself to be the matriarch of the family.

Williams's long involvement with her mother's illness and death by cancer is another thread running through *Refuge*. There is strong evidence that the frequency of cancer in the area could be linked to atomic tests conducted in the 1950s.

But this is not a depressing read. The author communicates her obvious delight in every aspect of the natural processes at work at Great Salt Lake through her prose poetry. Short vignettes read like journal entries that are carefully crafted by a writer who loves words, the natural world and her family.

## Dirt Under My Fingernails

*Continued from page 22*

ing: "Grow more than you need, so that you have something to share." A gift of seedlings is even more important than a gift of produce, for it opens doors to a whole season of interaction. I garden for health and recreation. I believe "home grown" is better. A tomato picked from the vine is superior in taste and nourishment to a tomato picked from the counter. Besides, I benefit physically by having to work for it.

I garden for spiritual meaning. I call it "contemplative gardening." The Scriptures are rich in gardening metaphors, particularly the words of Jesus. Eugene Peterson, in his book *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, makes the observation: "the congregation is the top soil seething with energy and organisms that have incredible capacities for assimilating death and participating in resurrection. When we see what is before us, really before us, pastors take off your shoes before the

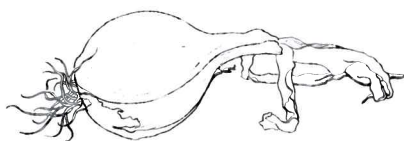
*shekinah* [glory] of the congregation."

Last summer, while driving in the country, I saw the *shekinah* of a field of sunflowers, with each individual flower turned toward the sun. I was awestruck with a sense of beauty and harmony. I decided then and there to grow a few sunflowers in my own garden to remind me of my need to keep my

heart turned toward God. Even more glorious than an individual is a Christian community with every heart turned toward God.

If we should meet at a convention or elsewhere this summer, you have permission to look at my fingernails. If you find dirt there, you now know why.

.....  
*Harry Heidebrecht gardens in Calgary, where he is the pastor of Highland Menonite Brethren Church.*



## Spring Miracles

*Continued from page 20*

from the Big Dipper a comet appears. God keeps it all in balance; God is in charge. God's miracles are awe-inspiring. Spring is indeed a time of renewal, of hope.

I'm thankful for these gifts of sight, hearing, walking, enjoyment of God's creation. I am thankful for my faith, for in faith, I believe all this earthly beauty God created for us is only a tidbit of what we can imagine heaven to be – heaven, where the clear-as-crystal river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, where the Lamb's name will be on his servants' foreheads, where there will be no more night (Rev. 22:1-6). Hallelujah.

.....  
*Judith Knopp Brown lives in Havelock, Ontario. She works part-time for the Loyalist College, Belleville, radio station. She is a grandmother of nine and a member of the Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Bellville.*



*See, I have given you every plant  
yielding seed that is upon  
the face of all the earth, and  
every tree with seed in its fruit ...*

GENESIS 1:29 NRSV