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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*



Encounters
WITH GOD

VOLUME 10 • NUMBER 3

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SOPHIA

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

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December 2000: Fear/Fear Not.

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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).

On the Cover: This photo and several others throughout the issue is taken by Susan Dueck. Susan shares her home in Edmonton with her husband, David, her son, Andrew, and their pets. Susan loves to use her camera as a tool to get to know people, to tell the story and to celebrate life. She attends Lendrum MB Church.

Our Mission
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- Promote the dignity and value of each other.
- Respect the environment.
- Support our community.
- Strive for excellence in all we do.

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Making Connections

by Lori Matties

Last January Carolyn Wagner wrote me a letter in response to our Winter 1999 issue on Volunteering (you can read it in the Spring 2000 issue). As she shared of her interest in writing I tucked her name away in my mind. We were planning for the year 2000, and I thought maybe she would be interested in working on some pieces for an "Alberta/Saskatchewan" issue.

Carolyn's response, when I asked, was enthusiastic. As we wrote back and forth, it became clear that she could find enough writers to fill an issue on her own. Saskatchewan would have to wait.

Putting together an issue is somewhat like building a house. There are seemingly endless decisions to make as articles come in that are longer or shorter than you expect or turn out to have taken a different thematic tack. There are first-time writers who have important stories to tell and seasoned writers who don't expect any changes to their writing. And then there is the artwork, which is very important to the look and feel of the magazine but which is difficult to place, or even choose, before the articles are ready to lay out. In the end, I am always surprised and grateful for the work of God's Spirit, that sparkles through the pages of each issue.

This is our third "regional issue," and, as always, it is a pleasure to make new connections with sisters across Canada. Carolyn's enthusiasm in gathering a writer's group and calling for writing and artwork, and her patience as our e-mails flew back and forth, make this issue a reason to celebrate. Once again, God has revealed wisdom through the stories and creative gifts of these sisters from Alberta. I am grateful to Carolyn, whom I now feel is a friend and whom I hope to meet in per-

son some day, and to all those who have contributed their writing.

But Carolyn has a few words of her own to share about how this issue came together:

I swallowed hard as I hit "send," e-mailing Lori my acceptance of the challenge of gathering writing for this "Alberta" issue. It has been an astonishing journey of boldly asking, gently prodding, listening and encouraging.

From many conversations, the theme of "encounter" emerged. Life-changing encounters with strangers, friends, the Creator and ourselves became the subject of our stories.

Courageously, each of us has opened a window into her life. Some reveal a few moments, others a period of years. Many of the stories are about hope in the midst of suffering.

I thought I knew some of these women quite well. Then I read their stories. I heard myself telling Hilda Dueck that I'd be happy to discuss her piece with her, if only I could do it without bursting into tears.

My eyes bugged out as Faith Nostbakken tossed off a poem about Jacob during a reading session, a poem she hadn't considered submitting. We grabbed it.

After Laurel Borisenko had regaled us with tales of boisterous encounters on the beaches of Belize, to read of her skirt-shattered vase was all the more poignant.

I am particularly grateful that my mother, Kae Neufeld, and my husband, Dave Wagner, offered to share their gifts of writing in this issue. A gifted speaker, my mom shows the same blink-back-the-tears talent in her writing. Dave has been able to put into words some of our African experiences that I cannot yet express.

It has been a wonderful journey. And it's not over yet. Those of us from the Lendrum Church have been asked to put together a worship service based on our

writing for Sophia. God has prepared for us a new avenue to express our gifts in community.

Enjoy the stories.

Carolyn

In this issue we introduce a new column, "Voices from the Past," in which Dora Dueck translates portions of women's writing in the *Zionsbote*, a paper that was distributed to German-speaking Mennonite Brethren people in their early years as American settlers. In addition to her translations, Dora shares her own reflections about the lives and perspectives she finds there.

We are also pleased to include an article for "From the Source" by Karin Enns of Dinuba, California, who shares her experience with fruit-tree grafting to illuminate Paul's metaphor in Romans 11.

Sophia's collective has gone through a number of changes recently. We are sad to say farewell to Jane Woelk, who has worked with energy and dedication as Executive Secretary on the Board for the last three years, and to Debra Fieguth, who has added much experience, creative talent and humour to the Editorial Committee. We shall miss you both and we wish you the best in your future endeavours.

We welcome Jean Reimer to our Editorial Committee. Jean has worked extensively with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Togo, Africa, and continues to work for that organization. We also celebrate with our designer, Darrell Dyck and his wife, Lisa, who recently gave birth to their fourth child, Javan, a brother for his three sisters. Congratulations!

Finally, please note our new mailing address.

A Picture of God's Family: Romans 11:1-24

by Karin Enns

A picture is worth a thousand words. And picture language is what Paul uses in Romans 11, where he tries to explain how God is growing his family from both Jews and Gentiles. To help his audience visualize this big plan of God's, Paul uses a grafted tree.

Trees are a big part of my life since I am a plum, nectarine and apricot grower. My family relies on these fruit trees for our livelihood and grafting is one procedure that we use. As a matter of fact, our family has 5 acres of grafted trees just outside our backyard fence. Needless to say, Paul's metaphor leaped off the page for me.

Paul is attempting to convince his audience that God's family includes both Jews and Gentiles. The difficulty lies in the fact that many Jews believed they were the only ones in God's family and that all of them were included. Paul defies these notions by explaining that only a remnant of the nation of Israel is included; that the remainder is excluded; and that some Gentiles belong, too. But who are the remnant? They are: 1) those like Abraham who believed God's promises (ch. 4 and 9:6-13) and 2) the Jewish Christians of Paul's time (ch. 9:27 and 11:1,5,7).

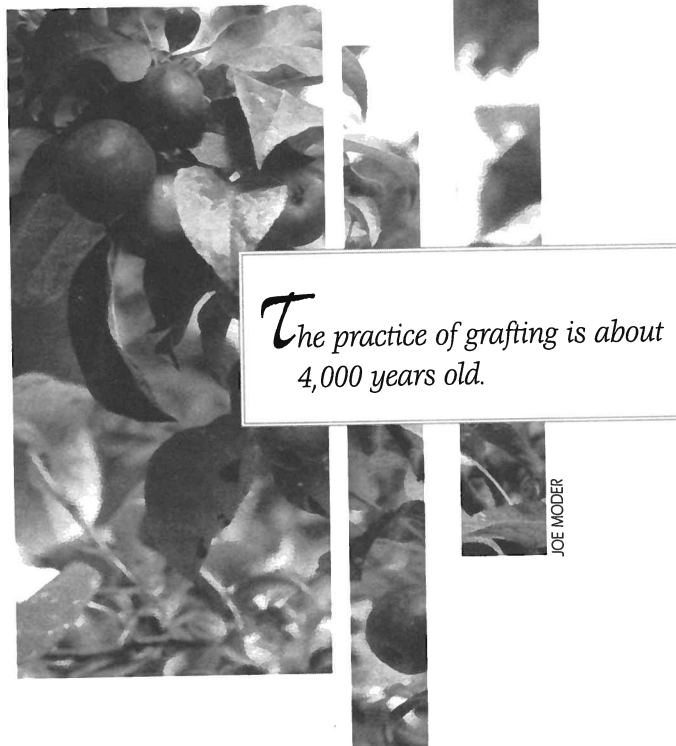
What of the remainder of Israel? Paul states that the rest of the Jews, i.e. Israel minus the remnant, have stumbled and have been hardened due to their lack of faith. In other words, they are excluded. This exclusion makes room in God's family for believing Gentiles.

Paul has bombarded his audience with a complicated idea. To ensure their understanding, Paul turns to picture language to illustrate this difficult concept.

He begins with a batch of dough. If a portion of dough is holy, then the rest of the batch is holy. This Old Testament analogy is only briefly mentioned before Paul switches to the root and branches. If the root (a portion) is holy, then the branches (the rest of the tree) are holy. Why this quick transition from dough to a tree? Commentators offer little insight but I am willing to venture a guess. I visualize Paul pacing in front of a window as he dictated his letter and spotting an olive grove with grafted trees.

Paul introduces grafting to illustrate what he has been saying. He speaks of broken-off branches; they have been cut off because of unbelief. This makes room for the new branches to be grafted in. It is important to notice that only *some* branches have been removed; some remain.

It is now possible to draw some parallels between these branches and Paul's teaching about God's family. The



broken off branches represent the unbelieving Jews/Israel. Those who believe are the branches that remain connected to the root. The engrafted branches are Christian Gentiles. However, this picture remains incomplete or unclear for anyone unfamiliar with grafting. Although I am not a grafter by trade, I have acquired an understanding of the process from years of observation and conversations with professional grafters.

The practice of grafting is about 4000 years old. I assume that little has changed in the actual process from Paul's time to ours. I also assume that deciduous fruit grafting is sufficiently similar to olive grafting to serve as a viable substitute.

What is the purpose of grafting? Grafting is not about improving the health of the tree, since a healthy root system is essential for grafting. Sickly or diseased trees are not rejuvenated; they are usually taken out and new ones put in their place. The purpose of grafting is to change the fruit that is produced. The fruit the tree is producing, if any, is not what the owner wants. The original fruit may exhibit too many cosmetic flaws, such as shape and color, it may ripen at an inconvenient time, or

lack flavour. It is also possible that the fruit has become obsolete, i.e. an improved replacement exists.

This brings us to how the grafting is actually done. Most of our fruit trees have four to six major limbs. All, except one, are sawed off to make room for the grafts. Cuts are made, and two or three scions are grafted into the stump of each removed limb and then sealed with tar. The scions are sticks of new wood, about as thick as a pencil. The old limbs (like the unbelieving Jews) are removed in order to provide a viable site for the graft wood. The new wood (like the Gentiles) is inserted into the existing root system, at the place where the old limbs were.

As I mentioned above, one limb is not sawed off. This is to ensure the continuation of the tree. Without this "nurse" limb, the tree could die. What a great connection this has to the remnant of Israel. The believing Jews are necessary for the Gentiles to be grafted into God's family!

Finally, we consider the root. For grafters, the root is more than the underground root system. It also includes the trunk of the tree. So, the branches are grafted above the ground into the "root system" at the base of each limb.

The trees that Ken and I have grafted currently produce two types of fruit; apricots and nectarines. The new apricot branches are growing along with the nurse limb of nectarines after being grafted into a root system. In Romans, the Gentiles that are being grafted into the tree are a different "variety" from that of the Jews. Therefore, Jews and Gentiles are different types of fruit on the same tree, yet they both draw their life from the root.

Paul's grafting illustration is like a snapshot. A moment has been captured. And Paul's moment is our moment. While we are chronologically in Paul's future, we are in the same age with him. It is the age of the "already and not yet" kingdom of God – that place where the ends of the ages meet. It is in this age that God is grafting his family tree. The work is not yet finished. God is still in the business of inclusion. That is to be our business, too.

We are to be inclusive. God has mercifully added us to his family tree. We are there because of God's goodness. We have life because we are connected to Jesus. There are people all around us who are not connected to Jesus and therefore are disconnected from God. Who do we know who needs to be grafted into God's family?

We are to be inclusive. We produce the fruit that God has designed us to produce. We are to be unified, not uniform. We are not to be arrogant towards those whose fruit is different from our own. Which members of our faith community (or entire faith group) have we avoided or snubbed because they are too different?

God is inclusive. All the nations belong to God's family. Remember that the next time you see a grafted tree.

Karin Enns is the internal auditor and assistant to the C.F.O. in her family's tree fruit packing business. This article was originally an assignment for a class at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, where Karin is working on her Masters in New Testament. She and her husband, Ken, attend Fig Garden Bible Church in Fresno, California. Their daughter, Katherine, is a junior in college.

The Incarnation

by Faith Nostbakken

Whenever I see goodness in someone else,
I see God.
I have seen God in many eyes,
The soul-windows of many faces;
I have heard God through many voices,
The word-windows of many hearts;
I have felt God through many kind acts,
The open doors of open-armed generosity;
I have touched God in many an embrace,
The closed-armed communion of hearts and souls
In joy, in grief, in love;
I have tasted God in many meals,
The bread and wine of someone's hospitality.
I have experienced the Incarnation in so many ways.
I have found God through so many people who
worship Him.
I have known God through so many people who
do not know Him.
Whenever I encounter goodness in someone else,
I stand on holy ground, for I see God.
I celebrate this miracle, this mystery, of humanity
Created in the Creator's image,
For behold, what I see is very good.

Faith Nostbakken is a freelance writer from Edmonton. A great lover of words and literature, she has written poetry, short meditations, multitudinous letters and e-mails and two published books on Shakespeare.



In her letter Margareta wrote, "But you got out." What did she mean?

I knew my father, Jacob Isaak, had come to Canada in 1925 with two older brothers and a widowed half-sister, while two older married sisters, Tina and Liese, remained in Russia. For fifteen years my father corresponded with his sisters until they died in 1972.

After 1979 the *Aussiedler* (emigrants) began emigrating from Russia to Germany, and my husband, Rudy, discovered that several hundred were his relatives. They came from the Orenburg area, which was near Neu Samara, my father's birthplace. I photocopied the addresses on the envelopes my father had received and, while on a visit to Germany in 1994, showed them to some recent immigrants. A relative recognized the name Tina Martens from Donskoj, Pleschanovo (formerly Neu Samara).

I wrote a letter and a month later received a surprised but happy response from my cousin Tina. A stroke had paralyzed her right side, so, writing with her left hand and in German, a language she hadn't used for many years, made the letter almost illegible. She said a brother and sister were also in Donskoj, and her sister Greta lived 350 kilometers west in the city of Samara.

It was in the summer of 1996 that Greta wrote me her first letter. "In the photo you all look so young and happy that I can't look at the pictures without crying. I thank God that not all people need to be as poor as we are; but I don't want to complain, we still have bread to eat."

In 1997 Rudy and I travelled to Russia for the first time, to see where our parents had lived. We visited Greta and the other Pleschanovo relatives. She told me then why they had remained in Russia. In 1925, when Greta was one year old, her family sold their possessions and had the necessary documents to emigrate to Canada; however, her mother was pregnant and so they waited for the baby to be born. The baby turned out to be twins, but they had papers for only one child, and the authorities cruelly refused to issue any more documents. They said, leave one child here and you can go. Of course, that was impossible. The twins survived to grow up, and though the family "never got out," the failed emigration may have saved their lives; when collectivization began they owned so little that they were not classified as Kulaks and were allowed to remain in Donskoj.

Aunt Liese and her family were not as fortunate. Greta remembers the day in 1929 when Aunt Liese visited her mother, how they talked and cried. Greta was only five but sensed something dreadful was happening. Liese and Peter Dueck, who owned two houses, four horses and a carriage, were classified as Kulaks. They were stripped of all possessions and shipped north to work in the forests. Only the mother and the three older children survived.

Seventy-five years later Greta is finally in Canada,



Photo taken in Donskoj, Russia, May 1997

but only for a visit. This frail, slightly bent, small woman wearing a head scarf arrives at the airport walking beside the attendant, who is pushing the wheelchair carrying her luggage. "Ney, ney!" She certainly doesn't need a wheelchair.

She sits in my kitchen telling stories, marvelling at the incidents and details she now remembers. She laughs when relating an amusing episode; says she hasn't laughed so much in a long time, there is not much to laugh about in her country. She tries to recall all the families that lived in her village. A book, published in Canada, stated there were forty-five *Wirtschaften* (farms) in Donskoj, and by the next morning she has remembered them all and made a chart for me, every family in order.

After collectivization, Greta's parents and older siblings worked in the *kolkhoz* (collective) while she, only seven, had to care for three younger sisters, when she so longed to play. At age ten she cooked the main noon meal for a family of nine. Her mother wrote out the menu, the ingredients and amounts; sometimes she could do nothing but cry when she had problems such as making *kjielkje* (noodle) dough.

In 1941 she was seventeen, and she and eight other young women were ready to be baptized, but then Germany invaded Russia and everything changed again. They were forced into the *Trudarmee*, work army; which was a means of both controlling minorities and providing labour for the war effort. Germans were considered enemies, of course, and all Mennonite men and women 16 to 55 years old (60 for men) were forced into this work army. Only the young, old and disabled remained working at home.

With others from the Neu Samara and Orenburg villages, Greta was sent to Orsk to dig foundations for oil refinery tanks. Frequently huge fires killed many people. The workers were forced to clean up everything, including

bones. Greta said the stench was dreadful, especially burned hair.

In the *Trudarmee* they were given very little to drink and allowed few bathroom breaks. Women were given injections without being given a reason and found their monthly periods stopped; they didn't start again until four months after they were released. I asked Greta why they would do these things. She replied, "You always ask why. But we couldn't ask questions, we just did what we were told."

Once she and five other women tried to escape but were caught and sentenced as deserters to six years or until the end of the war. They were placed in prison barracks, which were better than the earth huts of the *Trudarmee* workers. They lived on starvation rations so that when she was released four years later she weighed only 38 Kgs.

In 1929, 1937-38 and 1941, many men, both young and old, were imprisoned or sent to work in the forests and mines for reasons such as owning property, promoting religious beliefs or belonging to a suspected minority group. They were always classified as Germans, so Greta still insists she is not a Russian. The churches had been closed many years earlier so she had not heard of Mennonites either. She told me that forty-one German men were taken from their district one night in 1941. Few of these men returned, and those that did were forbidden to speak of their experiences.

When the young women were released from the *Trudarmee*, many of them, including Greta, married Russian men because so few German men had survived. Greta continued to work at the refinery in Orsk, but after a huge fire in the Samara refinery, she was moved there to help with cleanup. She remained in Samara and trained as a security guard at a *zavod*, a fenced factory complex. For two years she had to patrol with a gun and pistol (yes, she could hit a target, but never shot at anyone) but then she refused to continue. She got another security job checking people and orders at the entrance to the *zavod*.

There was always a lot of theft and dishonesty at her work place but she refused to take part in that. "When I knew it wasn't right, I didn't do it. In all the years I worked at the *zavod* I didn't even take a nail." That's why she doesn't own much now, but she said she couldn't live with herself if she had acquired things dishonestly. All she owns is a bachelor apartment, which was given to her after sixteen years of good work. She now receives a small pension after working till the age of seventy-two.

She told me that in the fifty-three years she has lived in Samara, a city of two million, she has not been to a

concert or museum. Her husband wasn't interested, and she could not leave the children with a drunken father. Alcoholism was (and still is) a major problem, especially for Russian men, and so family life with them was difficult. Often the men would trade the last of the family's meat and vegetables for homebrew. Many women left their husbands, and most of the men did not survive middle age. Greta also separated from her husband after twenty-five years. A year later he developed cancer on his face and, after drinking heavily with his friends, had a heart attack and died.

"I never imagined I would live this long; to still be alive after all I have suffered!" She was always hungry as a child and didn't think this would happen again in her old age, as it has in non-Communist Russia. She has had malaria, nearly lost a leg because of a severe infection

caused by a careless doctor and at age forty-nine had a radical mastectomy with radiation and chemotherapy. "We older people have lived through difficult times and know how to survive." She thinks the following generations have not learned this; her family still looks to her for advice and support.

Throughout her difficult life she kept her faith in God and knew God was always with her in every situation. For almost twenty years she has attended a growing Baptist church, which provides her with the spiritual encouragement she needs. Her daughter finds it hard to believe in a God who would permit the things that have happened in their lives, but Greta continues to pray that her two daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren will also become believers.

Again and again Greta told us how much she enjoyed her break from the bleak and difficult life in present day Russia. Very curious and observant, she asked many questions about land ownership, farming, politics and rights in Canada. She really enjoyed visiting with relatives and also our friends, surprised that so many could still speak German and *Plattdeutsch* (Low German). What she never ceased to marvel at was the clean orderliness of the city and, especially, the beautiful yards with grass, trees and flowers. Daily she checked the progress of the apple tree and each flowering plant in our Edmonton yard. Our whole family is grateful that we got to know such a remarkable woman.

.....
Tena Wiebe operates a retreat centre, Strawberry Creek Lodge, near Warburg, Alberta, which she owns with her husband, Rudy. She is a member of Lendrum M B Church in Edmonton, and is actively involved in peace and justice issues.

She sits in my kitchen telling stories, marvelling at the incidents and details she now remembers.

"Encuentro de Dos Mundos" is the title of a postcard you can buy on the streets of Guatemala. It means, "Encounter/clash of two worlds"; the postcard shows a line of soldiers in full combat gear – including plexiglass shields – facing a line of Indian women and children. It is a picture of what has been the struggle of poor people and common citizens throughout much of Central America.

I began this millennium by travelling for three months in Central America where I encountered many worlds. My most poignant encounter was in the world of former refugees and civil conflict in El Salvador. This is the tiny country between Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, whose tourist motto, after decades of brutal civil war, is "We're Still Here!"

It was in El Salvador that I experienced the juxtaposition of being a tourist with encountering the political past of Central America. One day I was on Balsamar Beach, mesmerized by the glittering black volcanic sand and trying to figure out how to body surf. The next day I was at the Oscar Romero Museum at the University of Central America, taking petals from the rose bushes planted to commemorate the 1989 murder of the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter. I saw pictures of shattered skulls and brains blown out.

I listened to person after person tell me, as part of our casual conversation, about family having to flee, being kidnapped, hiding in the mountains with the guerrillas, having land stolen. It was a time when it was too dangerous to identify the corpse of a loved one. People couldn't grieve. And so, on February 28, 2000 – twenty years after the murder of Oscar Romero and thousands of loved but anonymous others – it was time to remember. On that night I attended a special mass organized by my Salvadoran friend with some of her friends to remember

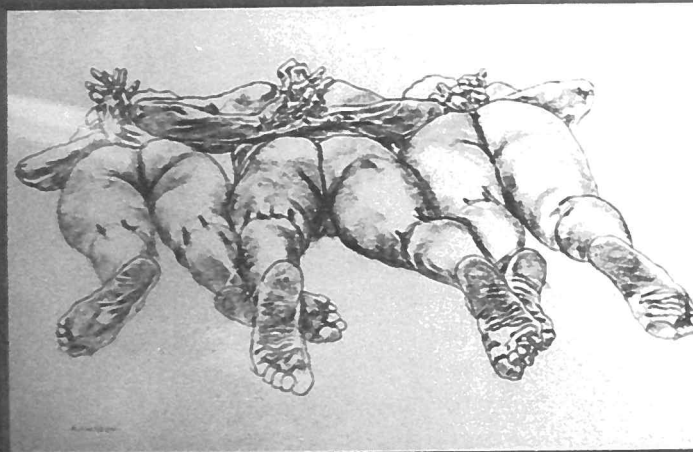
those who had been murdered during the civil war. This is what I saw and heard at that service:

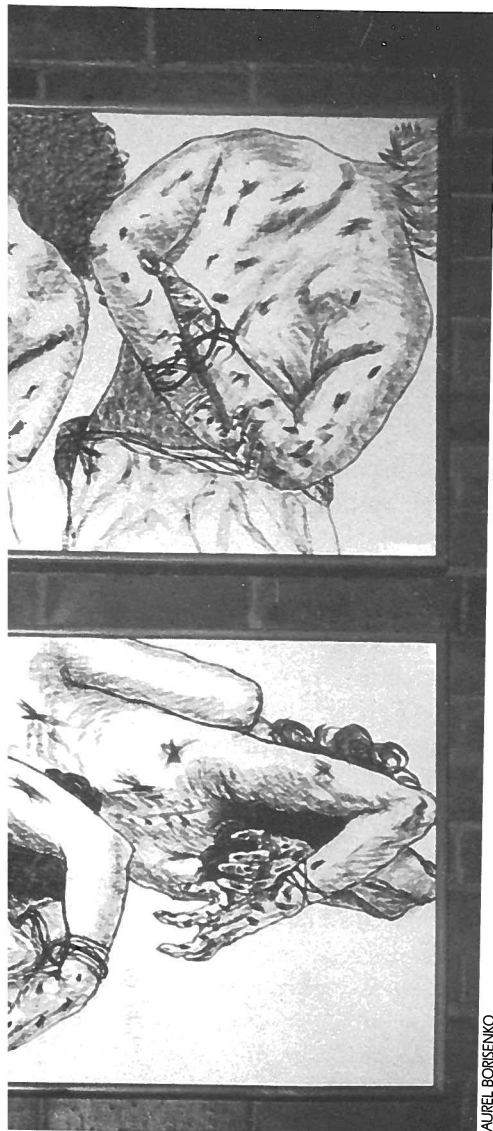
"For everything there is a season...a time to be born and a time to die;...a time to mourn and a time to dance..."
(Readings are from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NIV)
Now I am at the mass organized by Patricia in the Oscar Romero Chapel. The chapel itself is full of symbolism. The Eucharist table and pulpit are covered with cloth tapestries of the simple, brightly coloured Salvadoran folk art embroidered on a white background. At the back of the church, so that you only see them when you leave, not as you worship, are several large conté drawings of tortured bodies, something that you would never see in a North American church, but that seems completely appropriate here, and appropriate to this service. We must never forget how people suffered.

"a time to kill and a time to heal..."
Windows cover one full wall, with bars down the full length of it. Are we in a kind of prison? No, there is beauty inside and

Encuentro de Dos Mundos

by Laurel Borisenko





LAUREL BORISENKO

out. And "El Padre" – Monsignor Oscar Romero – looks over the whole chapel from a large portrait on the side wall. A small *muchacho* (boy) gives out baseball card-sized pictures of El Padre. The *estampa* (card) reminds me of the highly-coveted pictures of the Dalai Lama that tourists smuggle into Tibet.

I sit off to the side; this is not my story. I ache from the sidelines, as so many of us did during the '80s and early '90s. As I wait for the service to begin I notice out the large church windows the most exquisite pink and purple sunset. I want to tell Patricia

so that she can enjoy the poetry of this moment. As I make my way over to her my skirt brushes against a glass vase sitting on one of the pews. It falls to the floor and shatters. I stare helplessly at the broken pieces; Jose Maria starts to pick them up. Before I can reach Patricia the sky is back to normal. This accident also seems symbolic of what we are here to remember – that people and things were shattered.

"A time to tear and a time to mend..."

There is the screech of some metal being sawed outside as the priest speaks. Father Cortina came to El Salvador with the six Jesuit priests who were murdered in 1989. His fate was to be out of town that night, and so he could continue his work of solidarity with those in this service, and those being remembered. A song plays on the tape. His calm, even voice continues through construction and music. He reads from Ecclesiastes 3. People of all ages listen thoughtfully, prayerfully, to healing words – words that speak truthfully about the past and the present. We take communion together. I forget that the Pope

would not approve of a non-Catholic taking Eucharist. But even if I had remembered, I still would have joined them. Not to do so would be unthinkable.

"A time to be silent and a time to speak..."

Next, people come forward to light candles to remember those who died. They are the children, the parents, the friends, of the disappeared. Lit candles are placed in a row across the front of the altar. A song is playing as people come forward: "Who said that everything is lost? I am coming to offer my life." Are those the words of Jesus, or of El Padre? Both. Jose Maria gets up to sing his own song. His father was a lay priest in a district near San Salvador. One night he was taken out, tortured and murdered. The family had been expecting something terrible to happen for months. The next day the rest of them fled to Mexico, then to Edmonton.

"A time to embrace and a time to refrain..."

A woman folds the vestments as another woman is still reading. At the end of the mass people embrace – the "revolutionaries," who never thought they would live to be adults, their children, whom they thought would never grow up and the grand-mothers, who suffered such heartache. People slowly drift out. We pack everything on the steps outside the door, and as we are about to leave we look into the chapel. There we see one last exquisite sight: the row of candles, still lit across the altar of the darkened chapel. Patricia's friend Marta starts crying at the sight. "There is my husband, my father, my brothers..." Patricia holds her, then we go gently into the night.

"A time for war and a time for peace."

Life shatters in. Sunsets bloom and disappear before we can see them. Marta sees her murdered husband, father, brothers, in candles that burn brightly in the darkness. I see *conté* sketches of tortured bodies at the back of the chapel. Maybe this is the poetry of the moment – that some things are shattered as we try to see beauty and that we are here together to pick up the pieces.

.....
Laurel Borisenko has travelled extensively, most recently in Central America. She has lived and worked in Mainland China and Thailand. A former MCC volunteer, she now directs the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers in Edmonton, where she 'encounters' refugees and immigrants and hears their stories every day. She is a member of Lendrum MB Church, and she loves to write.

Destined for Something Higher

by Dora Dueck

This past year, I've been researching in the Mennonite Brethren Church's first periodical, the *Zionsbote*, begun in 1884 by immigrants to the United States. It was a small and somewhat crude-looking paper in its early years, dependent on its readers for reports and articles, or, failing those, on material copied from other papers. Nevertheless, it was an important link between the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren scattered in the frontier settlements of the American midwest.

It's been a surprise to discover how much women's writing appears in the *Zionsbote*. In 1890, for example, the first year for which copies still exist, there are 12 women's voices within 37 issues. (The paper was a 4-page weekly then). By the end of 1896, which is as far as I've kept track so far, there are 97 pieces of writing by women.

Since *Sophia* provides "a forum for Christian women to speak to one another," I would like to submit some voices (in translation) from the past to our current conversation.

Let's begin, for no other reason than that it's the first extant to us, with a short piece by Margaretha Enns under "Correspondence" from Buhler, Kansas, 5 February 1890.

Since I enjoy reading the Zionsbote because it brings so much news out of Zion, I thought I too would contribute something. I have experienced what wise Solomon found when he turned his gaze away from God and looked only at himself and the world, and saw that everything under the sun is absolute vanity. That's how I felt too when I was alone with the young children and thought about life, how much trouble, worry and effort it takes to get through it and to live properly before God. But God be thanked, we will not stay here. We are destined for something higher: the Lord Jesus has won heaven for us and that lets us forget everything else. How happy the one who is drawn only by Him. Oh, it's worth the effort to open oneself up to the Lord and follow Him, so whoever has not yet attained salvation, seize it today. You will not be sorry.

I often feel so disadvantaged because I can't hear well. This is especially hard for me in the prayer and Bible study meetings. Sometimes things seem so dark to me then and I wonder if I will remain true to my faith in our loving Saviour. But thanks be to the Lord for his grace to the weak: he doesn't let the darkness continue long but banishes it by his Spirit and fills my heart with joy. He who started his work in me will

also hold me fast; yes, I will trust in him. I will throw myself at his feet and tell him all my distresses. Dear brothers and sisters. I commend myself to you for your prayers. Your sister, Margaretha Enns.

I was struck by the melancholic tone of this letter. In spite of confident faith statements, there is a sense of both vulnerability and grief. Who was this Margaretha Enns?

Using the clue about her hearing difficulties, I was able to discover, from her obituary and other sources, a little more about her. Margaretha was 41 when she wrote this letter. She had migrated to America from the Crimea in Russia with her husband, Dietrich, some six years earlier. She had been orphaned at age seven. Her difficult experiences – of her parents' deaths, hearing loss, pioneering – made her reach out for God. Through much Bible reading Margaretha reached the assurance that she was God's child. Her husband also experienced conversion; they were baptized into the Mennonite Brethren Church in Kansas in 1885, in their 30s, and "pilgrimed together" the rest of their 60-year marriage. Margaretha was totally deaf the last 15 years of her life.

Margaretha's voice is heard in the *Zionsbote* on at least two other occasions after 1890. After 20 years in Kansas,

she and Dietrich moved to California in 1904, where she spent the remaining 26 years of her life. In 1911 they took a 2-month trip east, to visit children (she gave birth to 11) and friends.

Margaretha described the highlights of this trip in a long article in the 16 August 1911 *Zionsbote*, titled simply "About our Trip." It's the kind of article we would never find in our denominational papers today, full of personal details and names, but one which was probably fascinating in a context where people had huge kinship and friendship networks within the church, and where travel (apart from migrating) was still something of a novelty.

Dietrich and Margaretha travelled by train. In St. Paul, Minnesota, she was re-united with a brother she had not seen for 30 years. "It's almost as if one has already died to one's siblings," she wrote. "But this visit started our relationship all over again and we experienced much love and warmth there."

If seeing friends and family again was wonderful,

*"I will shelter you in my lap.
My care is more than motherly."*



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seeing one's children was even better. "We had not laid eyes on each other for three years and the emotions were nearly unbearable," she said. "I couldn't sleep that first night."

Besides chronicling visits, Margaretha apologized in print to her husband's nephew and family, recently emigrated from Russia, for not joining her husband on a side trip to see them. "Because I hear so poorly, I often feel so unnecessary," she explained, "and prefer to withdraw myself somewhat."

Seeing a blind man, "brother Bartel," led to the chance to speak during a church service reminded her that she was still very fortunate, however: "I can read and sign, but for him everything is dark."

The denominational college (Tabor) and the publishing house in Hillsboro, Kansas, were important attractions for Mennonite Brethren travellers of the time. Margaretha described their visits to these "sights" and teased the *Zionsbote* editor a little: "We went into a restaurant and ate lunch, but we couldn't finish in five minutes the way Brother Schellenberg can."

The train trip back home through Rio Grande country filled her with awe. They journeyed through mountains and the salt flats; they toured the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City and points of interest in San Francisco. "I can't

describe it all," she said but wished she could stay in the mountains for a while to thoroughly "admire" everything.

The trip report is a lively, cheerful piece of writing. In it Margaretha followed the conventions of other *Zionsbote* travel reports, telling the story chronologically, expending the most detail on getting from one destination to another or on that which was new or strange, but letting a kind of happy generality fall over the time actually spent visiting loved ones. Reports of reunions and separations also usually included reminders of a better reunion coming, as Margaretha wrote, "with the Father of Light, where we will be free from haggling and earthly sorrow, to see the one who shed his blood for us."

Margaretha's final contribution to the *Zionsbote* was a 48-line poem that followed a report of a family gathering at which Dietrich and Margaretha were honored for their 80th birthdays. (The family numbered 131 by then; 87 attended.)

Looking back over 80 years Margaretha focussed on two parts of her life – her experience of being orphaned, and her anticipation of death and heaven beyond it. Here are stanzas three through six of this poem, freely translated (her stanzas rhyme). Note the tenderness she evokes in her images of God.

*Left so early without Father and Mother,
We five siblings drew a hard lot.
Our pathways were often rough.
Our yearning for them often great.*

*Since loving Parents could not comfort me.
Jesus drew lovingly close.
And said so kindly, Come to the Highest One.
To the Saviour and motherly Comforter.*

*"Indeed. I will be more than a mother.
I will forgive your guilt.
Will give you repose against my heart.
Will patiently nurture and carry you.*

*All of your sorrows, small or large.
You can lay down at my feet
I will shelter you in my lap.
My care is more than motherly."*

Margaretha Enns died in 1930, at age 82, in Shafter, California. While she had suffered long with physical weakness, her obituary commented, her spirit had been "vigorous."

.....
Dora Dueck, former Sophia editorial committee member is now working toward a Masters degree in history at the University of Winnipeg. She and her family attend Jubilee Mennonite Church.

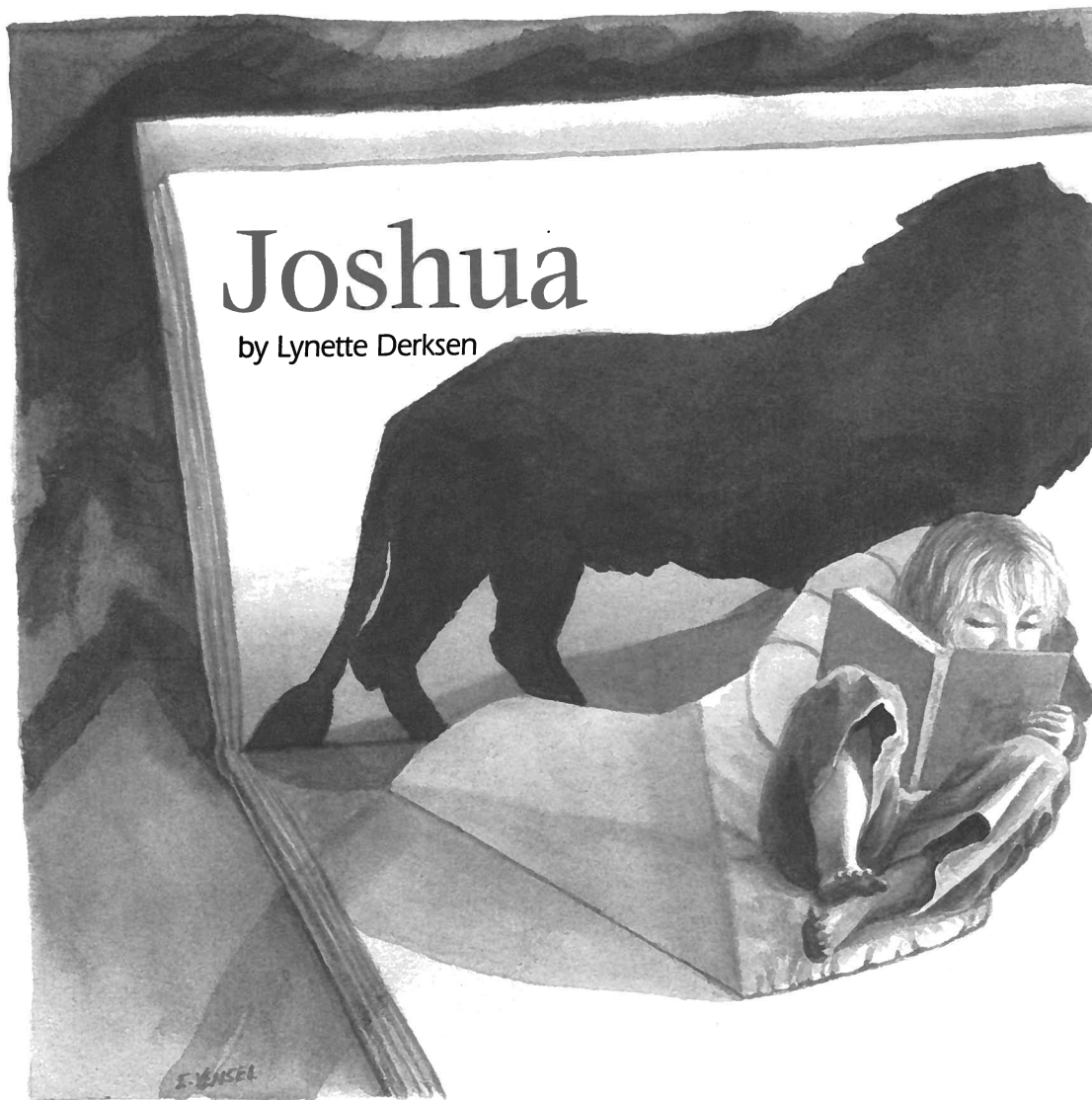
Joshua came to see me for his first speech therapy session the Friday morning before Halloween. I stood chatting with colleagues near the entrance of the clinic's waiting room while I waited for his arrival. At five minutes after ten, the clinic door swung open and in popped a miniature version of the Brave Lion from the Wizard of Oz. With the costume askew atop his head, painted-on whiskers and nose, and eyes wide with anticipation, Joshua stopped dead in the doorway and stared at the cluster of therapists towering above him. I quickly crouched down for face-to-face contact, introduced myself and told him how happy I was to see him. He readily took my hand and trotted off to my office, his mother and me in tow.

From that first sight Joshua captured my attention. As we became further acquainted, he endeared himself to me with his three-year-old wit, curiosity and brave face. His was the practised face of a lion who had already spent much time standing up to and imitating an older brother. Evidence of a repaired cleft lip and palate, scrutinized subconsciously by my trained eye, served only to add character and charm to this brave little lion's stature. However, Joshua was extremely difficult to understand and would require weekly speech therapy to make communication easier for him.

Joshua never seemed void of curiosity. His impish comments and questions frequently brought out the laughter and playfulness in us all. I eagerly anticipated my sessions with him. Wide-eyed and expectant each Friday morning, Joshua was eager too, though for entirely different reasons. He liked my toys and games as well as the opportunity for individual attention. We read books, played pretend or built towers, and I emphasized his speech

Joshua

by Lynette Derksen



sounds repeatedly. Occasional retorts but more frequent attempts to speak clearly reflected Joshua's determination. When he experienced success and received praise, he became again the brave, proud little lion I met that first morning.

Joshua didn't always have fun. In fact, when tasks became too difficult for him, he deliberately turned away from the activity and me. He experienced difficulty when he received unclear instructions, missed consecutive

sessions or had no immediate reward (his snack). On more than one occasion he became so frustrated that he escaped and ran away down the hall. At those times his resemblance to the Brave Lion in the Wizard of Oz, who realized his strength only in the face of difficulties, was doubtful indeed! We stepped back and established clear

*When he
experienced
success and
received praise,
he became
again the brave,
proud little lion.*

Grade One

by Carolyn Wagner

communication once again.

Sometimes Joshua achieved success when he concentrated on the fun of the game and forgot how hard it was to change his speech. After he experienced some success with new speech, we would re-read a favourite book, which highlighted a previously learned set of sounds. His response to this book had originally been one of fear. Now, in his engrossed involvement with and enthusiasm for the book and its pop-up pictures, Joshua forgot that he did not struggle to use his sounds correctly.

How like Joshua, this brave little lion, I am! I experience God's enjoyment and love for me when I come to meet God through the Word. I obey and follow God's leading when I feel the support of others. I run away when I don't understand God's direction, can't see the outcome, or miss out on my time with God. I wonder why God is silent. I look for change in the circumstances of my life rather than pursuing God's change in me.

When I choose to obey rather than run away, clear communication is established once again. When we speak together, God repeatedly speaks of love for me. And I struggle less with the change.

.....
Lynette Derksen feels fortunate to have the opportunity to express her creativity and love for children in her work as a Speech-Language Pathologist with preschoolers and their families. Lynette plays violin, enjoys scrapbooking, and attends Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmonton.

Socks taut against those skinny calves, hair neatly combed, blouse as yet uncrumpled, she bounces out the door to stand in front of her favourite tree for the obligatory photo, a memorial to this day of promise and beginning.

She is fully equipped with a rainbow of magic markers, brand new scissors and eight lethally sharp pencils; an arsenal of learning material. A paint shirt and box of tissues are ready to absorb the messy bits of this new undertaking.

It is the first day of grade one.

In the car, we pull out of the garage, truly on our way. Now she has a question. I'm as attentive as a knife-thrower's assistant. These last few minutes of my daughter's pre-school life still belong to me, and I am determined not to mess them up.

"Mommy, when you die, can I have your bike?"

I'm afraid to ask if there are any more questions.

Hoping that the gift of prophecy is not one of my daughter's extraordinary qualities, I explain that my bike ought to be ready for the junkyard long before the question of her inheritance comes up. Not only that, but she will need to learn to ride her own two-wheeler before my bike can be of any use to her.

"Don't you have any questions about school?"

Nope. School is just one more adventure to add to a growing list. To this young life, new frontiers are commonplace. Her mind Hoovers up facts as if they were spilled sugar.

When we get to school one of us will cry, and it won't be her. Why does she embrace something that part of me dreads? It is like cutting off my own arm and making a gift of it to a circle of artists, hoping they will be able to train it to create something beautiful. No matter what delicate new moves the fingers learn, they will still be my fingers, even when I no longer recognize them.

We find her name on the list, and are swept up in the coathook-labelling, nametag-attaching, desk-choosing frenzy of the first day of school. I look up at the chalkboard one last time, and we have reached the end of the tasks for which parent help is required. It's time to go.

She doesn't even turn to watch me leave. My orbit is being pushed further from the centre of her universe, and this is as it should be. One day I will die. While I hope she will miss me, I hope even more that she will shine bright and strong, a beacon for the lives she touches. For now, this small break away from me is effortless, like riding a bike.

.....
Carolyn Wagner lives in Edmonton, but she met her husband in Switzerland and gave birth to the younger of her two daughters in Swaziland, Africa. Having dabbled in economics, music and writing, she is still deciding what she wants to be when she grows up.

When we get to school one of us will cry, and it won't be her.

On Matters of Faith

by Bonnie Payne

It is quiet and I am alone. You are my grandfather, you were my grandfather; my mother, Joyce's, dad, the husband of my grandmother, Irene: the son of my small, sweet, great-grandmother, Bessie.

97 years you have trod this journey, born before the turn of the century, and here I sit quietly with you, as you are laid out in death – in peace. The memorial service is tomorrow: family, friends, silent tears, stories, remembrances, chuckles – but for now I sit quietly.

Eyes closed, hair receding, I feel the stubble of your beard against my cheek and think of you sitting at the kitchen table in your white undershirt, pants and suspenders, shaving with your electric razor, slowly moving it over the contours of your face, missing some spots, but always careful. Some days the stubble grew. Some days you stayed in bed.

I see and hold your hands, mottled with age spots, long fingers with carefully trimmed but thick nails, some cracks and some grit beneath the tips, and calluses from more than 70 years of handling cars, trucks and other vehicles.

I think of your patience, gentle smile, so warm and pleased when we came to visit, never complaining, always welcoming. Coffee from the blue and white Corningware pot on the stove, a plate of cookies or "help yourself to whatever you might find in the fridge." A chat about a recent news item or the weather, "in '27 the snowdrifts completely covered the fences," an inquiry about how we were doing or a humorous story about how you trapped the skunk in the back garbage can and the debate between the city and the S.P.C.A. as to which department was responsible for its removal.

Your pride in still having your driver's license and glee in thinking that we did not notice, although you agreed not to drive your car, it often was in a slightly different position every few days in the back yard.

Your determination not to let your arthritic knees slow you down, the willingness to try the most recent medication, and your declaration that to keep them moving you had ridden around the block on my mother's 1930 bicycle hauled out from the depth of the garage.

Behind the soft, blue eyes – knowledge, practical skills, listening to our hurts, joys, and losses. These were often more unspoken than spoken, but carried.

Your faith was private and quiet, often with the "I've been asking the Good Lord."

In the arrogance of my youth, that is, comparatively to yours, in my forties, one Christmas I wanted to get you a new, more-easily-read translation of the Bible, to which you replied you were certain you had at least three Bibles already!

Then...we started to share stories of how your grandfather conducted Sunday School on the farm in Illinois, how at age 12 you attended a rally and listened with a friend to a travelling preacher, how in the 1920s travelling between Michigan and Edmonton, your mother prayed when the Model T ran out of gas, and found the quarters in the dirt, just enough to complete the trip, and how she, late in life, needed to reconfirm her Anglican faith.

You tell me of your nightly prayers for my teen son and his struggles, my mother and her illness, your children, grandchildren and their families.

I am humbled at my arrogance by your quiet faith.

Thank-you, Grandpa Bill.

Written in memory of William Passmore, 1898-1995.

.....
Bonnie Payne, MSW, RSW, is a family counsellor who enjoys working from her home as it allows for her other pursuits of gardening, journalling and sports. Recently "empty-nesters," she and her husband, Tom, live in Edmonton with their two large dogs.



Recognition

by Gwyneth Bell

With downcast eyes and vision blurred by tears
I fail to see you Lord.
Like Mary, I mistake you for the servant.
Blinded by my needs, preoccupied
I pass you by.

You call my name, I turn, retrace my steps
look up into your face.
Concern and love are written there.
We walk and as we share our words I know
you Lord.

.....
Gwyneth Bell is a member of St. Paul's Anglican Church in Edmonton, and a Pastoral Care Visitor. She visits an extended health care facility weekly as well as parish members.

Strength in Weakness

by Gwyneth Bell

You greet me with a smile and softly
ask me please to raise your head
and move your lifeless hand.

You cannot lift the cup to drink,
but you've drunk deep of pain and loss
and still you show God's grace.

You cannot hold the bread you eat
and yet your spirit, fed by God,
shines with radiant courage.

You show me strength in weakness,
patience in adversity,
trust in helplessness.

For years confined to bed or chair,
deprived of much and yet so rich,
you teach me how to live and die,
and I am blessed.

Written in memory of a young woman with M.S.



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The Seeds of a Journey

by Karen Kuntz

Have you ever led someone closer to God without even realizing it? Most of us probably do it more often than we would guess.

Sometimes we Christians are so concerned with sharing our testimonies and witnessing boldly that we lose sight of the fact that God uses us even when we don't know it. In the small things we do, in the quick and natural choices we make, in the unnoticed words coming out of our mouths, God is speaking volumes to the non-Christians around us. And I really don't think God cares that we're oblivious to it most of the time.

You see, I am a strong believer in the "little things mean a lot" philosophy. My teenage years were a testimony of many small things working together to lead me to Christ. I call these precious moments on my faith journey my "seeds." God saw to it that they were planted – sometimes scattered thoughtfully in front of me but more often dropped accidentally and unknowingly onto my path. What

matters is that they were planted at all.

As a teenage non-believer surrounded by non-believing friends, it is amazing to me how God found ways to provide me with repeated encounters with Christians. At seventeen, I found myself hearing testimonies and eventually even listening to sermons. But more than all the bold witnessing and convicting messages I heard, beyond all the people getting sweaty with shovels and rakes and hoes, it was the people whose seeds accidentally blew my way who changed my life. Doesn't that sound funny? In the end, the seed that had the deepest root was the tiniest one of all, and it was from a couple who didn't even know they'd planted it in me.

I was spending a lazy Saturday morning at the home of a friend. His Christian parents, Tom and Jesse, were unpacking a chest of drawers that had been delivered from a department store. Sitting at the kitchen table with not much else to do, I was watching them while periodically glancing at a magazine. At one point, Tom opened the top drawer and found in it a brand new telephone, still in its box. "What's this doing in here?" he asked. "They must have mistakenly left it in there," his wife replied. Both of them were completely preoccupied as I almost exclaimed, rather happy for them, "Hey! A free phone!" But before I could get out the words, I saw Tom toss it aside disinterestedly, saying simply, "I'll take it back this afternoon." He didn't even look up, and Jesse didn't even answer him. They both resumed their business of unpacking as though returning this phone to the department store was the most obvious and natural thing a person could do.

To me it was neither obvious nor natural. I sat at the kitchen table completely dumbfounded. I saw myself as honest, but surely, I told myself, even an honest person would just keep the phone. I knew Tom and Jesse were Christians, but to me the term "Christian" had always been a superficial distinction



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– it meant you went to church and read the Bible. It was a term based on certain things you did, but it wasn't a way of living, and it definitely wasn't a way of thinking. What I saw disturbed my view of Christianity, and it disturbed me in general.

That feeling of being disturbed was a necessary and vital step in my movement toward Christ. Yes, there were many other seeds sprinkled along my way. And the circumstances of most of those memories were just as incidental and unremarkable as those of this one. What is amazing to me is that Tom and Jesse, just like the others, are to this day unaware of the role they played in my journey, of the precious tiny seed they quite accidentally planted in me. Who would think that in the tedium of unpacking a piece of furniture, in the unnoticed business of going about life, God would find a breeze to scatter seeds?

.....
Karen Kuntz is a full-time homemaker who enjoys writing poetry and sharing stories with her children, Nathanael, 7, and Hannah, 4.

Photographer: Susan Dueck. See page 2.



SUSAN DUECK



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I wasn't expecting anything unforeseen when I went into labour on a Thursday evening in April of 1974. I had made my occasional visits to the doctor, had taken my vitamins once I knew I was pregnant and had tried taking less medication for my migraines. My pregnancy had gone without a hitch.

By Sunday morning, I still hadn't progressed to more intense labour, even though I was having contractions every two to five minutes. I wasn't unduly concerned but was tiring, so I decided it was time to go to the hospital.

Our local doctor, the same one who had delivered my mother's babies, was perplexed about the delay and ordered an x-ray.

I was walking the halls to speed up the delivery when I passed the x-ray room and heard the doctor's voice. "I don't know if we should tell her," he was saying. I looked in and saw my husband's face ashen grey.

"What don't you know if you should tell me?" I asked. They both turned to look at me, their eyes speaking volumes.

Time came to a crashing halt. Shock, fear and disbelief constricted my chest. "What is it?" I repeated. "I need to know!"

His voice was quiet, almost apologetic as he explained that the top of our baby's skull did not show up on the x-ray. It might mean there was cartilage that wasn't showing up, or it might mean that there was no bone there. In any case, there was a serious abnormality.

My mind reeled as my husband and I walked back to my room. How could this be happening? How would it change our lives? I couldn't imagine raising a handicapped child. And how would this affect the little two-and-a-half-

year-old daughter who was so eagerly waiting for "baby"? We had planned for a healthy baby, and now we were faced with uncertainty and disappointment.

I have no sense of time after that, but I can still see myself draped over my hospital bed with my feet on the

floor engaged in one of the most desperate battles of my life. "Oh God!" I cried. "This isn't fair! I don't want any of this to be happening. I can't handle what you're asking me to do! You have to let this baby die!"

At some point, my husband read Psalm 27:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ...One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.... And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy.... I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord. (King James Version)

I wish I could say that I saw the selfishness of my

prayers: that I submitted graciously to the circumstances over which I had no control. But I did nothing of the kind.

Instead I ranted against God, argued about the unfairness of it all and tried to tell God how to make an impossibly horrible situation at least somewhat bearable.

How long I was there, lying over my hospital bed

In the Time of Trouble

by H.M.R. Dueck



LORI MATTES

The group that had come to sing for the patients in that room didn't even know I was there, but they sang for me.

Offering

by Kay Gillen

This poem is inspired by a painting called Ioyan Mani "Tomorrow's Child," by Maxine Noel. The painting is of a woman on her knees, lifting her infant child skyward. It can be viewed in color on the following website:

www.hillsnativeart.com/08-artists/noel/html/080.jpg

She is a suppliant.

Supple. Bendable.

By the grace of God she bends

her "can't" into "I can,"

her "won't" into "I will."

She kneels.

The garment that drapes her

flows with grace and beauty;

the garment of salvation,

the robe of righteousness

presents her spotless

before her beloved.

Her head is not bowed in despair or defeat.

Instead, her face is lifted upward

that she might gaze steadily

into the eyes of the Almighty.

Her eyes, fluid with pain yet filled with peace,

have been blessed into seeing.

Her ears, curved inward into receptive channels,

have been blessed into hearing.

Sorrow creases her face in many places

even as the oil of joy caresses away the creases.

Her lips part slightly in a silent cry of relinquishment.

Her arms reach upward, hands open.

On her palms lies her most precious possession:

Her baby.

She knows that when her God

takes this offering from her He will require

another offering and then another and another.

So she forever remains in motionless fluidity:

perpetually kneeling and watching,

perpetually offering and worshipping;

dying, yet behold she lives,

sorrowing, yet always rejoicing,

becoming poor, yet making many rich.

beating my fists against Almighty God, I can't say, but while I was still struggling, an unusual calm began to settle over me, enveloping me. And in that calm that I can only describe as a loving presence, I was finally able to open my fists and hold up my open hands to God.

My baby boy was born that day with a deformity I would later learn was called anencephaly. He didn't cry and the look on my husband's face told me that we weren't prepared for what we would see. The nurse bundled him into a blanket, and was about to whisk him away.

"I want to see my baby," I said.

What I saw shocked and revolted me: a face, discoloured on one side from the prolonged labour, eyes swollen shut, a narrow band of black hair and then nothing. I felt myself recoil.

That evening as I lay in my room alone and shattered, the gentle strains of a hymn reached out to me from across the hall. The group that had come to sing for the patients in that room didn't even know I was there, but they sang for me. It was the balm of Gilead for my wounded soul.

It was two days before I finally mustered up the courage to face the little life I had birthed. With determined steps I made my way to the nursery and asked to be alone with my baby. There I unwrapped him. Apart from his malformed head, he was a baby like any other. I marvelled at the perfection of him. I touched his little hands and was startled to feel his little fingers curl around mine. My heart overflowed with sadness and love. I would have given anything to be able to take him home with me just as he was, but I knew I had to say goodbye.

We named him Malcolm Lowel (our beloved). He lived for five days. The morning he died I was discharged, just as another woman was in the final stages of labour. Mercifully, I was spared witnessing her joy. We buried our little son that day in a casket lovingly made by my husband and me.

At the end of the short service, a mother's outstretched hand placed a single white rose on the little coffin. It was the hand that God had mysteriously helped to open in submission, acceptance and trust. And in her time of trouble he had reached out to her with courage to face the inevitable, comfort for her sorrow and strength to go on.

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Hilda Dueck lives in Tofield, Alberta, is active in the Lendrum MB church in Edmonton, currently as moderator, and is a teacher and a writer. She has published articles and short stories for the Mennonite Brethren Herald and the Mennonite Mirror. Her novel, An Orphan's Song, was published in 1993.

.....
Kay Gillen worked for many years as a physiotherapist in Edmonton. For the last few years a severe illness has made it necessary for her to rest most of the day. This gives her lots of time for prayer and reflection, and sometimes this spills over to words on the page.

Stumbling Blocks or Stepping Stones

by Helga Loewen

The dream seed fell into my young heart as I stood at my grandmother's grave side. "God, let me become a person like her." Simple. Born of impressions, of pain and desire.

"When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for" (Mark 11:24 TEV). I don't actually remember my desire being a prayer, much less expecting it to come to pass. But then, what is prayer but the sincere desire of a searching heart? Grandmother left a legacy. God used it as a seed.

In time, the memory of her dropped into the background. I forgot my prayer. Normal (well, more or less) growing up years followed. I became a teacher, ambition dictating that I should become the very best teacher there ever was. The dream of academic excellence was alive and strong. One May night, coming back to the teacherage after a date, I heard that two of my grade nine boys had been killed that evening. Academic excellence for the rest of the year was mockery!

Surely the next year would be better. It was an opportunity for a restart in a new community with a brand new husband. Setting up our own home, the future looked bright. We soon anticipated the birth of a baby, but I had a miscarriage at four-and-a-half months, and with that lost a month in the classroom. Academic excellence? Not by my standards!

The third year of teaching began and was terminated early because of pregnancy. Creeping doubts about knowing the will of God raised their heads. Had I never understood it? Was I in the wrong place? Had I the wrong goals? Doubts plagued me for weeks and months.

But when a healthy baby boy arrived in October, life again was rosy and full of promise. Nevertheless, one day I knelt beside our bed and prayed that God would become more real to me. I needed something!

I expected new insight, new hope, a clearer vision. Instead, a few months later, my husband Jake died in a hunting accident. I had wanted with my whole heart to

come to love God, and God came to me in a most awful, terrible manner, leaving me totally helpless and without any ability to make sense of what had happened. I felt betrayal, anguish and anger. Surely I had already experienced enough roadblocks! I appreciated the friends who came to comfort, to shoulder the burdens, occasionally to take baby out for a walk or to give me an evening break – but my deepest pains went unanswered.

God allows us unlimited restarts. As long as we get up each time we fall, we will win. I was privileged and blessed to remarry, have a daughter and begin a new life. And it has been a good life. Many times, though, I have felt like Jacob, wrestling with God all night and coming

*Many times I have felt like
Jacob, wrestling with God all
night and coming out limping.*

out limping. For many years illness plagued me. Life seemed too uncertain, too unfair, to commit myself to anything again totally and with passion. Oh I tried! But the success and excellence that had been my conscious dream was elusive. Raising two children, welcoming in-laws, and, in time, grandchildren, serving in church or as Bible study leader and coordinator, working on committees – all these were significant but they never answered the underlying question.

Was my dream only a childhood fantasy? One day, listening to a tape, the answer came. God does not give us a dream because we are already there, but precisely because we *aren't* there. When God gave Joseph the dream that someday his brothers and parents would bow down to him, it was not because Joseph was already a powerful leader. It was because God wanted to bring him from where he was, a pampered, favoured and spoiled son, to a place of authority and power.

Joseph had to face his brothers' betrayals and false accusations and have his hopes dashed repeatedly. God used what seemed like major stumbling blocks as stepping stones in Joseph's life to bring him to where he could handle the responsibilities of leadership. Were they easy? Never. Did Joseph understand what was happening? I

doubt it. Did he fail sometimes? Undoubtedly. Did he become a leader? Yes.

Suddenly I understood. God has been answering my child-prayer all my life. While I didn't know it then, with that prayer I began to "put on the new self. This is the new being which God, its Creator, is constantly renewing in his own image" (Col 3:10 TEV). All the things I saw as stumbling blocks, God meant for stepping stones. And often, in spite of me, God has made them that. "We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 TEV).

Grandmother left a legacy. God used it as a seed and is working continually to accomplish his purpose.

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Helga Loewen is a former teacher, a mother of two, grandmother of five and wife of George, a general practitioner. She has served on the board of MCC Alberta and on the Alberta Church Extension Commission, was moderator of Lendrum MB Church and served seven terms as chair of the Worship Commission. Most recently she worked as business manager at a medical clinic.

He's Deaf, You Know

by Kae Neufeld

She sat across the office from me, her hands gentling folded around the cup of coffee I had just brought for her. She was cold, and I thought the coffee would warm her, but rather than drinking it she seemed to treasure it as if it were a special gift she was afraid might vanish. I sat silently, waiting, not wanting to break into what seemed to be a sacred moment.

"Thank you," she finally said in a low clear voice. "It's good of you to help."

I nodded as I struggled with thoughts of whether I really could help. I had found her sitting on the bench in the front hallway of the school. She was dressed in a thin ill-fitting coat, and her two children had bare feet in tattered running shoes in spite of the minus 30 degree temperature outside. They had slipped into the school unnoticed and had found the place to sit. I invited her into my office where I now waited to hear her story.

"I got away today. I came here because you said I could," she said in that same low clear voice.

I knew that she lived in an extremely abusive situation and her husband never let her out of his sight. Today he had gone out without locking her in, and she had collected her two young boys and come to the school, trudging through the snow in clothing appropriate for a cool summer day rather than for the dead of winter.

"Thank you," she repeated. "Thank you."

I acknowledged her thanks with a slight smile.

"He beat me all the time, you know. He never left me. I just couldn't get away." Her voice was soft but composed. There seemed to be a depth in her life that was beyond my understanding. Her five-year-old son sat in the chair beside her, swinging his feet in a carefree way as only a child can do. She looked at him and smiled.

"He's deaf, you know. I am so glad he's deaf."

The look on my face must have registered my confusion at that kind of a statement. How could any mother be thankful that her son couldn't hear the sound of her voice?

"He couldn't hear me scream when my husband beat me," she explained. "He is happy because he doesn't know what has happened to me. He couldn't hear."

Years have passed but that voice still haunts me. She had suffered unjustly and yet her voice betrayed no anger. The dignity with which she spoke could well have said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing."

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Kae Neufeld is a former school principal with Edmonton Public Schools and is presently the associate pastor at the Lendrum MB Church in Edmonton. She and her husband, Don, have three grown children.



LAURA PANKRATZ

My Third Mother

by David Wagner

Until my family and I served with the Mennonite Central Committee in Africa I had two mothers – a birth mother and a mother-in-law. In Swaziland I gained a third mother. Together with my third father, she adopted me as a son while my wife and children became their daughter-in-law and grandchildren. My new parents gave us their surname and a sense of belonging in that country. My daughter used to boast, "I have six grandparents!"

We lived with our new kin for two months on their homestead and afterward visited frequently on weekends. We grew to love them as their love grew for us.

When my birth parents came to visit, we were delighted to take them to meet our Swazi family. My parents expected to see poverty in the rural areas, but what they found instead surprised them. Where they expected poor, unfortunate people they found hope, love, joy and peace – qualities that are too often missing in our home country.

My birth mother was intrigued by the penniless girl who lived with my Swazi family to help with chores in exchange for support for her education. My mother mused that this girl was better off than most of her peers in Canada, notwithstanding the too-short list of her possessions: a towel, a bag, a blanket, two dresses and a three-month-old child. Because of the beautiful people she lived with, I wondered the same thing.

My Swazi parents were not shy about their love for each other. Their smiles and laughter became wonderfully familiar to us as we interacted with them. The joy they found in each other seemed to be a necessary ingre-

dient in their ability to apply incredible effort and time to serving the needs of the people around them.

The two of them took part in so many good things in their community. It seemed that they applied themselves tirelessly to every group with a vision to serve. The national teachers' association, the scouting movement, and their church denomination all benefitted from the strong hope of these two people.

Although their involvement in these institutions was extensive, I think their most important service was to individuals. They found dignified work for the very poor and the injured, and they prayed and provided material help for people with emergent needs. The love they gave to us typified the generosity with which they gave their time and resources.

A year after my birth parents visited we took my parents-in-law to the homestead. They too were visiting from Canada, the world's top-ranked country for living conditions. They too saw peace, hope and love, but this time joy was missing. My Swazi mother was close to death. Even then, a little bit of joy was found when she exerted herself to cuddle and visit with our infant daughter, a new grandchild.

After this visit my mother-in-law asked us, "What is poverty?"

We tend to believe that the world's most fortunate people are the ones with material wealth and with access to good education and health-care. But I am beginning to believe that the truly fortunate are those who live in an environment of hope and

love and who are at peace with their neighbours and with their living conditions. In this sense the real impoverished are the people living without love or in fear of their neighbours or of the future.

Yet I cannot deny the value of material wealth. As we were preparing to leave that beautiful country, my Swazi mother was prematurely taken away. This lovely woman who was responsible for so

She had a will more powerful than a legal document.

much of the family's and the community's true fortune of love, joy, peace and hope died of a disease that might have been easily cured in a Canadian hospital. I couldn't help wondering what good a life-giving, life-embracing mother is when she is dead.

Truly, material advantage plays an important part in good fortune and great inheritance, but there is also an inheritance in other kinds of wealth. The many people this woman has touched continue to inspire hope, love, peace and joy in the places she has walked and beyond. The legacy of her real fortune continues. She didn't need to write a will to pass on this fortune, for she had a will more powerful than a legal document. She was a woman with a consuming will to serve and to celebrate.

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For the last year Dave Wagner along with his wife, Carolyn, and their two young children have been getting reacquainted with living in Canada after serving with MCC in Swaziland. Dave is a high school math teacher.

From the Inside Out: The Rural World of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929

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Edited and with an introduction by Royden Loewen

(University of Manitoba Press, 1999). 350 pages.

Reviewed by Dora Dueck.

Editor Royden Loewen admits right off the top that the diary selections in this book belong to the "poor stuff" of diary-keeping. He warns that what's ahead is quite different from the published diaries of "extraordinary" Mennonites like Gordon C. Eby or Jacob D. Epp (or even, we could add, Anna Baerg), which are rich in emotion and analysis. The 21 excerpts here are the records of ordinary people, limited by their authors' generally ordinary circumstances, personalities, and/or powers of articulation.

The reader, slogging through Moses Bowman's repetitions, Abraham F. Reimer's 4-times-a-day record

of the temperature, or all those names in the diaries of, say, Maria Reimer Unger or Judith Klassen Neufeld, will not be inclined to disagree with Loewen. Very little of this is page-turning material.

Still, there is a great deal that is interesting here and the book is an important addition to the study of Mennonite "life writing." Loewen's introduction to the volume convincingly sets out what such ordinary diaries contribute to our understanding of the worlds they represent. They reveal the nature of work and social relationships in a rural society: work attuned to the demands of the season and vagaries of the weather, and relationships revolving around kin and the church. "To know what they chose to record is...to know something of their culture," Loewen writes, "[the] meaning constructed by ordinary people in their everyday lives to make sense of life."

The selections are taken from the diaries of Mennonites in Ontario and Manitoba and from women and men of different ages. Their grouping

in eight categories, such as "old men and young boys" and "immigrant women," allows analysis of that which is similar as well as the variables of region, class, gender and age. Religious sensibility also ranges quite widely here.

This is the kind of book one can read eclectically, dipping into diaries in this section or that, reading carefully or even scanning the entries to notice a kind of poetry that emerges in one-line-a-day records or paragraphs of who did laundry or came visiting. It is helpful to re-read the introduction along the way, as a guide to discovering what's there.

Loewen raises the question of what the diarist was trying to achieve in the act of writing. This is a fascinating question, both for these diaries and for contemporary efforts to record our lives. Clearly, both form and motive may vary.

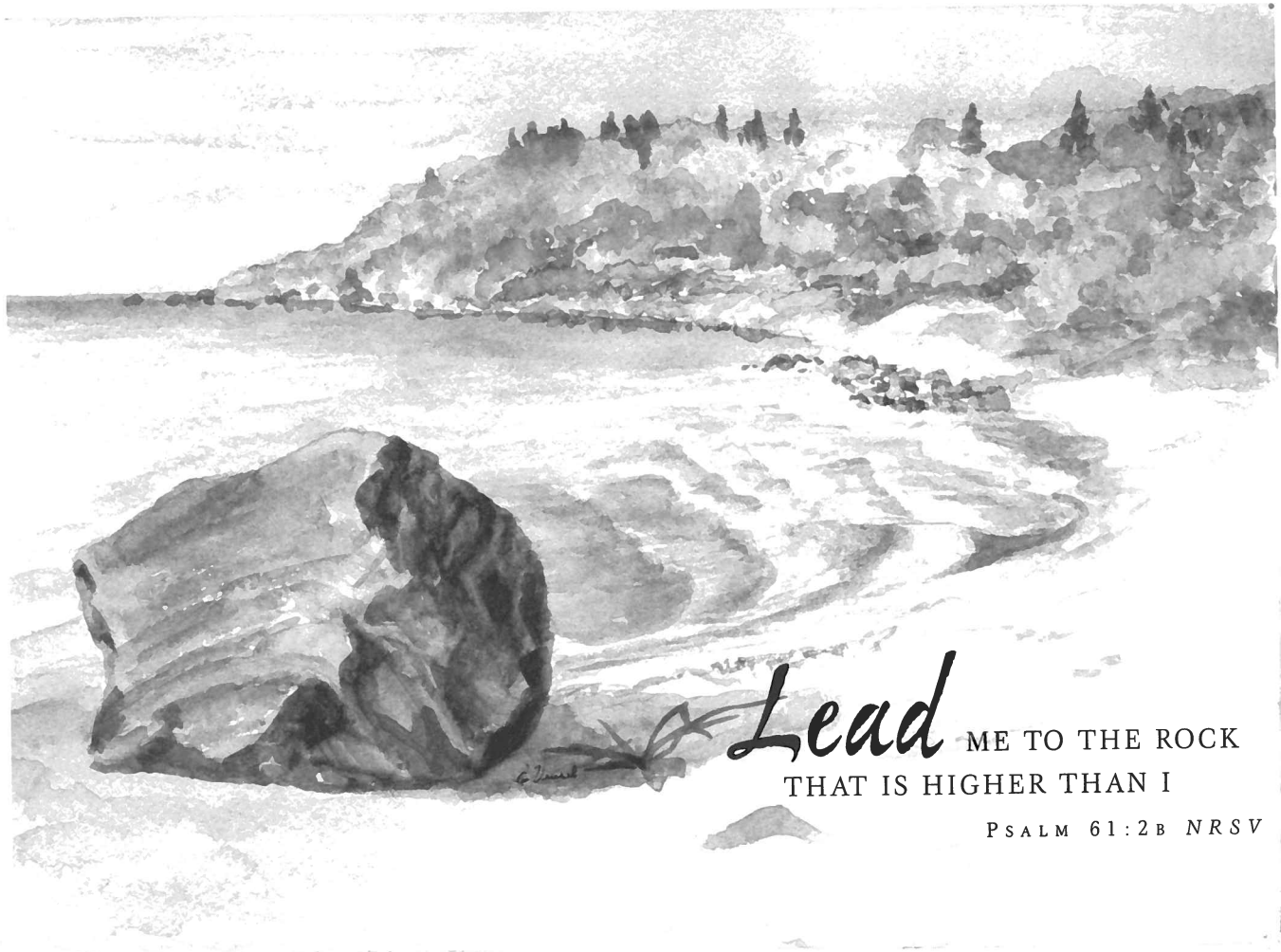
I recommend this book for its insights into earlier Mennonite lives as well as the multi-faceted reflection it evokes on the medium of diary writing.

About the Photographer

Laura Prankratz enjoys texture in photos and likes to capture the moment, rather than painstaking planning and set-up. The time she has, even to capture the moment, has experienced a significant reduction since she changed jobs from high-school physics teacher to full-time mom. She and her family attend Lendrum MB church in Edmonton.



LAURA PRANKRATZ



Lead ME TO THE ROCK
THAT IS HIGHER THAN I

PSALM 61:2B NRSV

US VENSEL

The Morning After

by Faith Nostbakken

Son of laughter,
stone for a pillow, stiff-necked
under the brittle light of the stars,
you wake up knowing as clear as the dawn
there's more matter than art
in the drift of this dream.
To prove it so,
you tilt your pillow upright,
shoulder and sweat against the granite
and drench it in oil,
marking for weaker eyes
the first step of the stairs.

Visionary architect
of the daybreak,
you name that rock-hard sky-ward
house of prayer with the fervour
of a prophet or a priest...
then edge back from the spell
of that seraph-laden sleep,
closing worship with words
sharpened against your own teeth,
offering a wary bargain
as the safeguard for your journey.

Heel-grabber still,
you practice the meagre art
(common enough) of taking
only what seems possible
from a star-crammed flight,
turning "always" into "if,"
rubbing ancient promises
against the grain of doubt,
and leave that holy ground
on unsteady feet, gingerly
fingering the pocket pebbles
of your stiff-necked faith.

(Ref. Gen. 28:10-22)