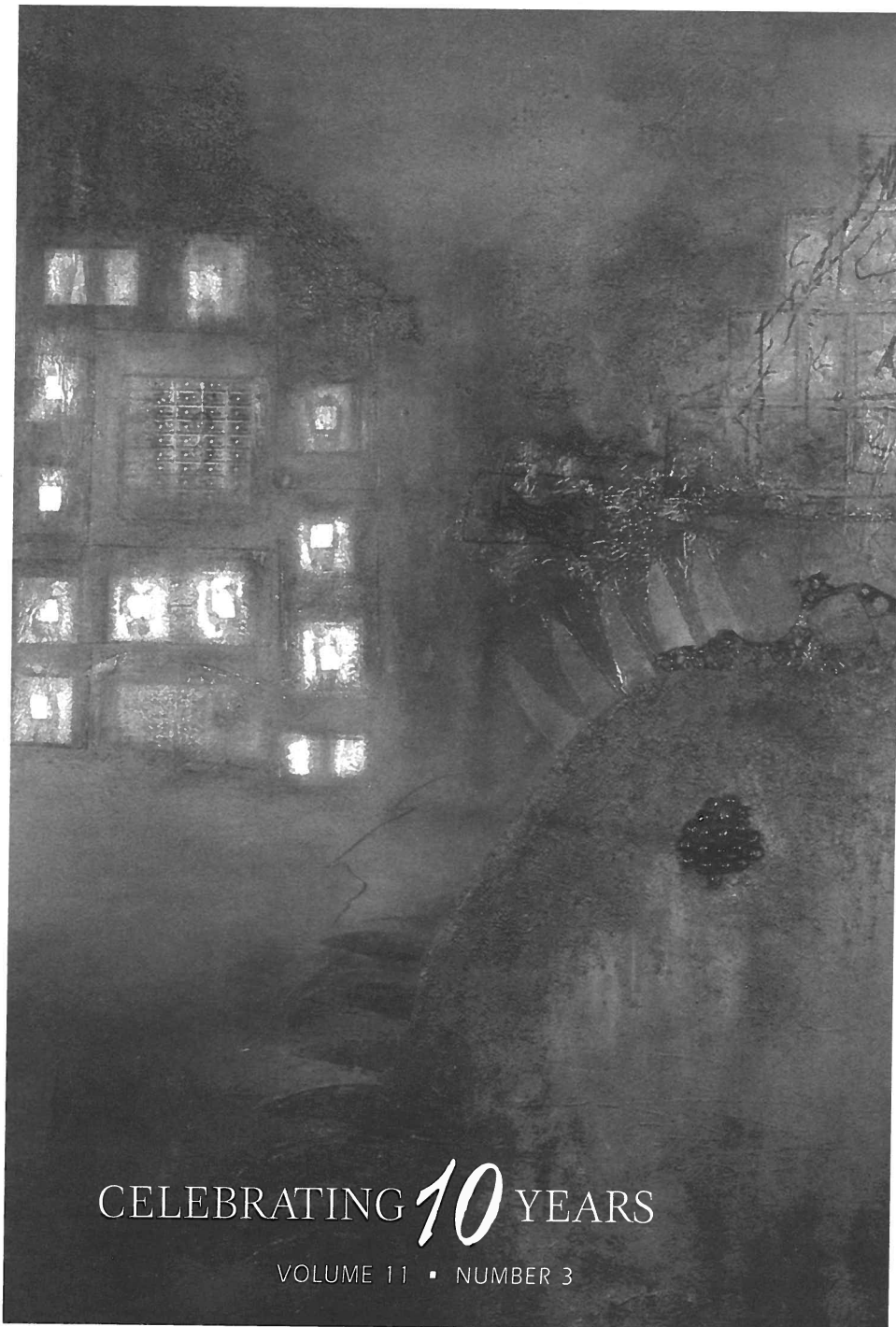


11/3

SOPHIA

W I S D O M

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



CELEBRATING **10** YEARS

VOLUME 11 • 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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CONTENTS

Editorial

- 3 Carrying Half of Heaven
- Sarah Klassen

Features

- 4 Birthing *Sophia* - Estér DeFehr
8 A Voice for Women - Linda A. Heubert Hecht
10 A Precious Perilous Adventure - Eleanor Martens
11 Telling Our Stories - Agnes Dyck
12 348 Pieces - Dora Dueck
16 A Meeting of Soul Sisters - Donna Stewart
17 My Journey With *Sophia*, 1999 - 2001 - Elfrieda Neufeld Shroeder
20 Women's Voices - Mary Friesen
21 A Decade of Transformation - Heidi Koop

Columns

- 5 From the Source
What Mean These Stones? - Jean Reimer
7 Letters
14 Images of God
The Mystery of the Tetragrammaton - Helga Doermer
18 Voices from the Past
The Gift of Eight More Years - Dora Dueck
22 Unspeakable Issues
Sophia's Voice - Lori Matties

Poetry

- 6 The Art of Prayer - Sally Ito

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:

The painting on the cover, entitled "Mindscapes," is by Agatha Doerksen. See page 13 for more of her work and a biographical note.



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To be a community of people dedicated to leadership in design, service and customer value in the furniture industry.

Our Values
Building on a heritage of faith, we aspire to:

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

PALLISER®

Carrying Half of Heaven

by Sarah Klassen

Given the frequent demise of small publications, the fact that after a decade *Sophia* is still with us, name and all, is cause for gratitude and celebration. On *Sophia*'s tenth birthday, those of us involved with the magazine – readers, writers, editors – can tell stories of how the magazine began and grew, marvel at the variety of issues examined over the years and make wishes for the future.

Right from the start *Sophia* has invited women into discussion and called them to faithfulness in seeking God in good times and bad. Strident, cutting-edge feminism was never *Sophia*'s style. Editorial policy has been, first, to emphasize women's stories, celebrating their historic and contemporary experience in the church, in careers and on their spiritual journeys, and then to stimulate thinking on personal, church and societal issues.

Nothing in the patriarchal family and church structures I grew up in encouraged me to think that someone of my gender might attempt to speak God's word and offer spiritual leadership.

Sophia's first decade has paralleled both the secular happenings in feminism and the church's struggle with the "women's issue." Of the broader women's movement, some would say that it has matured, evened out, even lost its fire or become hope-

lessly fragmented. Others believe it has run its course, having accomplished what was necessary. Still others would say with Ulysses, "Though much is taken, much abides."

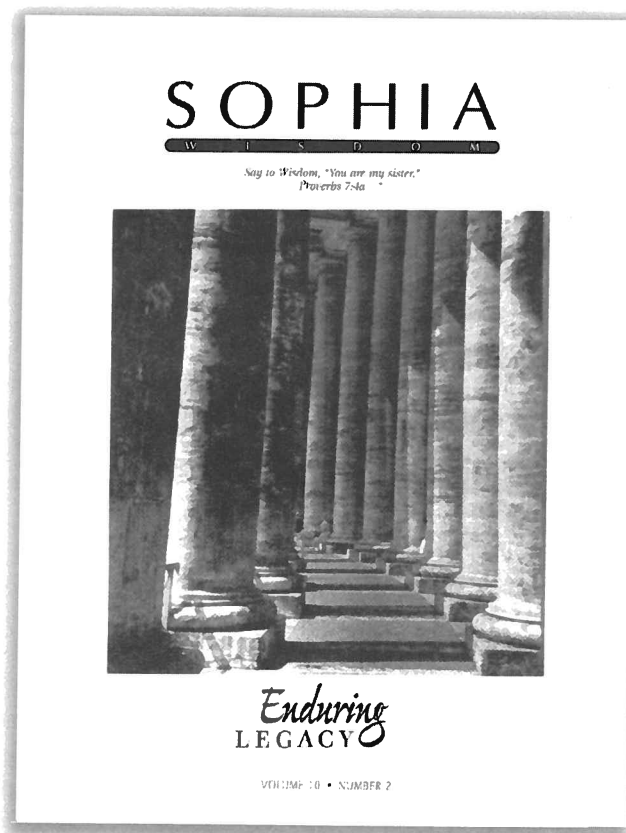
The second half of the last statement is also true of the church-related movement, especially as we think of the MB church.

Here and there women are taking their places in church leadership, at conferences and on committees, bringing their wisdom to decision-making and freshness to preaching and finding new ways of bringing together worship and the arts. But progress is modest and full equality still to be achieved.

It is possible that in this matter practice will precede policy, and the status and affirmation that church women seek will come, though not soon, by default rather than as a result of conference resolutions. In the meantime we can all name women for whom the changes have been too little and too late. For them, answering God's call has meant moving on to other denominations.

Long before *Sophia* saw the light of day, I was a teenager attending a suburban Mennonite Brethren church with all-male leadership, listening to preaching by men. I prayed a prayer of gratitude that God

had not made me a man. Men were in danger of being called to preach. They would have to know God's will and God's message and proclaim it with



authority and confidence, not once, but again and again. They were responsible for the spiritual welfare of all of us. Who would want such fearful responsibility? Not me; I was neither courageous nor confident. Besides, nothing in the patriarchal family and church structures I grew up in encouraged me to think that someone of my gender might attempt to speak God's word and offer spiritual

Continued on page 9 ►

Birthing *Sophia*

by Estér DeFehr

The idea of creating a space where we could all meet and speak was very exciting and terrifying at the same time. It was an idea I got after observing and listening to women during a women's conference. We all had so much to say to one another, and as I listened to women telling their stories, I realized that something important was happening. Each story was a significant event of

70ish-year-old one who said, "It's about time we had an art show." I never knew we had so many fabulous artists. Their art spoke about the sunset over the prairies and about a dresser with open drawers containing the personal objects of a mother who had died. There was also a display of beautiful flowers painted on china. It was amazing to me that there were so many talented women and I hadn't known about them. I began to form the idea of a newsletter/magazine where we could learn about one another. So my work began...to provide a place where we could all come together and tell our stories. A place where we could increase our knowledge and develop our talents and in that way help us with our self-esteem and to find our inner voice. A place where our healing function and our intuition would be valued. A place where we could join in celebration of our joys and our sorrows, our sacrifices and our life's work.

I birthed *Sophia* in 1991. I named her and began the shaping of her within the church. When Lori asked me to write this article, she asked me to write about, "How I watched my baby grow." I felt comfortable with that analogy of *Sophia* being "my baby." It's true. *Sophia* has been like my child. A year after birthing her within McIvor Church, I asked 17 women to join me in developing a board. They all did. I was so happy as they knew more than I did. Some of them were writers and some were published, and Oh Boy! They had smarts! So, as my baby grew, I began to step back. It was time for "mother" to pass on the torch. Isn't that amazing how these transitions in life happen? With the pain of detachment came the joy of watching first Sarah Klassen, then Lori and the *Sophia* staff, take ownership of the magazine. I am so full of praise for them – not that they need praise because they are a group of secure women who get much satisfaction from their creation. What I do have for them is gratitude, and I am mindful of how their work has given women a place where they can find their voice. It is such a blessing for me to have faith as they go forward. Now I can become a grandmother in more ways than one.

I want to congratulate you *Sophia* on this your tenth anniversary. You're awesome.

.....
Estér DeFehr, publisher of Sophia, is an artist, a mother and a grandmother, living with her husband in North Carolina. The lilies on the cover of 8:2 were painted by Estér.



Tending the Earth SUMMER 1998 • VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 2

self-definition. I heard women speak of convictions, experiences, methods and lessons learned in life. I listened to a single woman from my church and realized I knew nothing about her life – what her dreams were and what her life's work was. To learn how another sister developed her talents as a freelance writer and poet gave me an insight into the discipline and hard work required in writing. I also learned how she handled rejections.

At this particular conference, I had organized an art show which brought about interesting reactions, from a 48-year-old sister who made it clear to me that art was not something Mennonite women were interested in, to a

What Mean these Stones?

by Jean Reimer

Thousands turned at the top of the slope and looked back – back at the dusty swath between the two shores, at the priests standing in the middle of the riverbed with the ark of the covenant, at the twelve men each picking up a boulder from near the priests' feet and staggering up the rise. They watched the priests and the ark come up out of the riverbed, then made a wild scramble for higher ground, as the flood waters of the Jordan came roaring back in, swamping the breach, and surging up the banks.

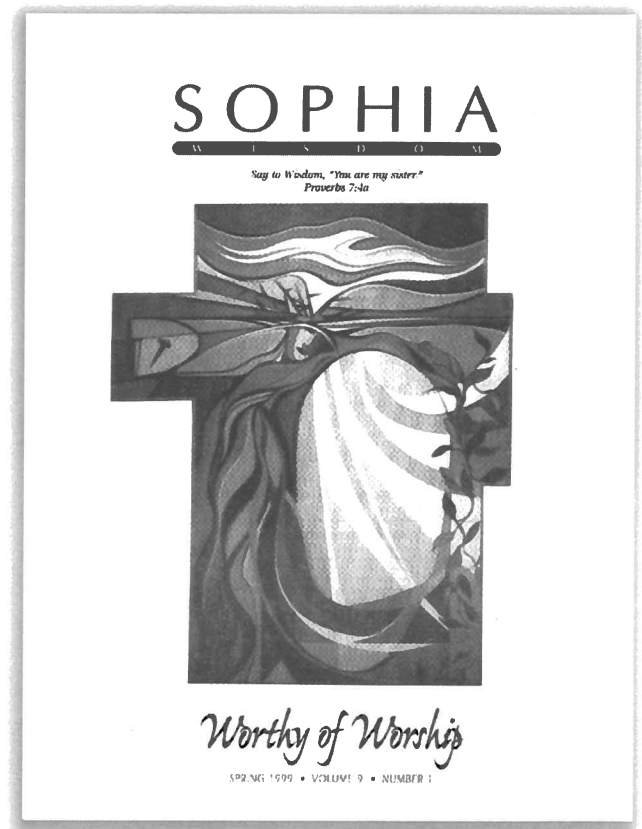
Joshua set up the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan, and said to the Israelites, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that when the ark of the covenant crossed the Jordan, the waters were cut off, and Israel crossed the river on dry ground. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever...God did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful, and so that you might always fear the Lord your God." (Paraphrased from Joshua 4:6-7, 19-24 NIV)

This cairn of stones became not only an altar of thanksgiving for that day of awe, but also a chronicle for the future, so they wouldn't forget.

Each generation of Hebrews became intimate with God's covenant through the yearly cycles of celebrations. By re-enacting the great things God had done, they renewed their trust in the God who interacts with humankind. By remembering the past, they built surer paths for their future: at Passover they remembered the Exodus, the Passover lamb, the crossing of the Red Sea (see Lev.23:4-22; Deut.16:1-12). On Pentecost they rejoiced for the place God would choose as a dwelling for the Holy Name. On the Days of Awe – the 10 Holy Days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement – the High Priest entered the Holy Place to seek atonement for the sins of the nation, and at the Feast of Booths, the people reflected on Israel's journey through the wilderness (see Lev.23:23-36; Lev.16:1-34). Hanukkah commemorated the rededication of the temple in 164 BC. Purim celebrated the victory of Esther over Haman's plot against the Jews. These celebrations still mark the Jewish year.

Jews remember not only joyful, victorious times; they remember horrors. Four different "Fasts of Lament" mourn Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple (see Zech 8:19; II Kings 25). Today, the Holocaust is added to their memorials of horror.

We remember in order not to forget. To look back, to remember – this is one of the divine gifts to and obligations of humankind. Remembering instructs us to cherish, affirm and multiply goodness, and to deplore and restrain



evil; it teaches us gratitude and hope. As families, as a nation, we have our own Days of Awe and Lament – a child born, a Manger, a marriage, a loved one buried, Remembrance Day, a Crucifixion, a Resurrection. Like rings on a tree, each year of re-enactment can add a new layer of richness, depth, and understanding. Birthdays not only celebrate a person's birth, but recognize and affirm who they have become, and are becoming.

The Hebrews perceived the number ten to be the number of completion, of perfection, of foundation. We see it incorporated into some of the most significant of God's

Continued on page 9 ►

The Art of Prayer

to Paul

When you pray
take two stones
and breathe on them.

One stone for yourself.
One stone for another.

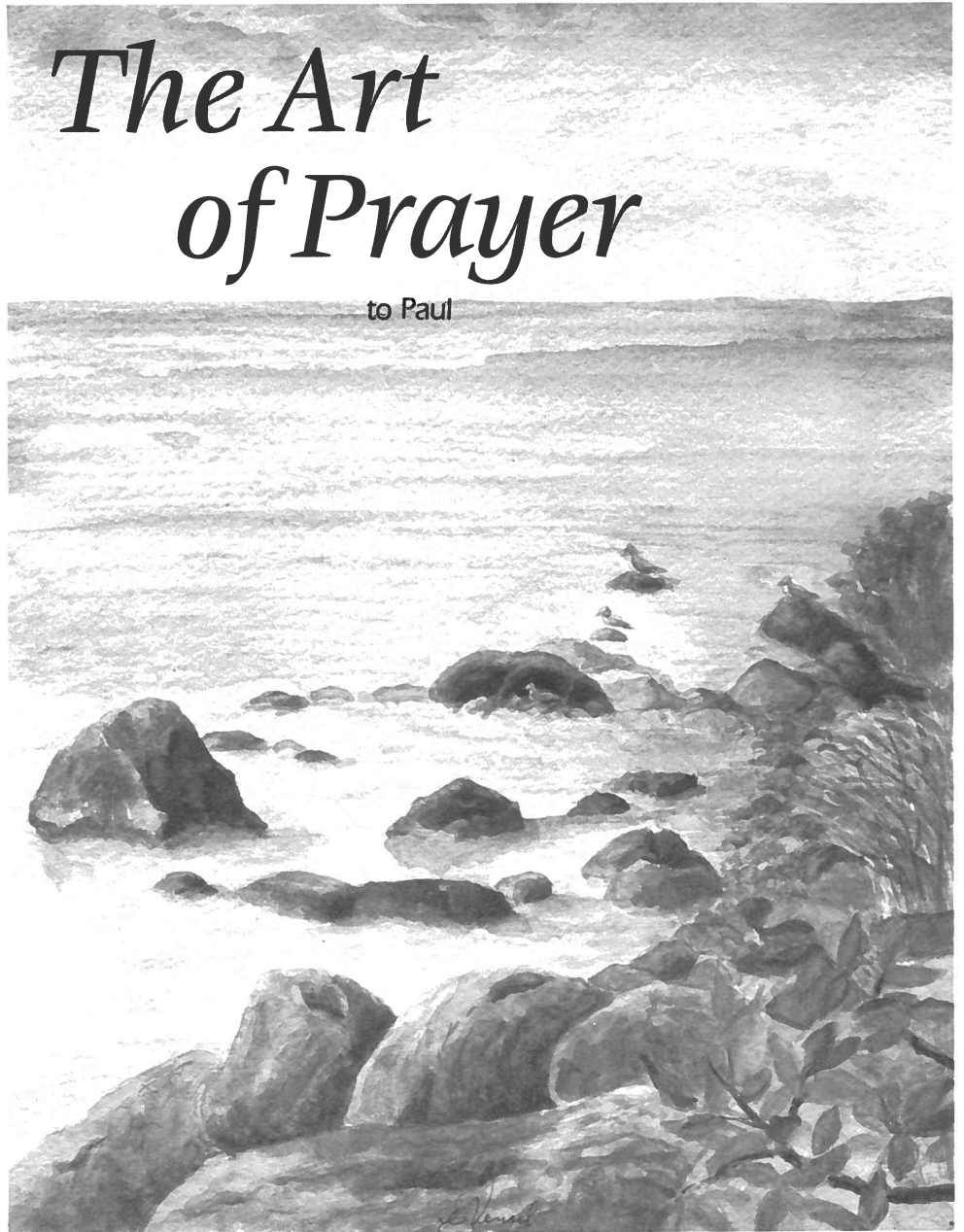
To the first stone
make complaint
Rest it on a bed of thorns
Tell it your shortcomings
Turn it left and right
making sure all is
thoroughly pierced,
purged.

To the second stone,
kiss the surface
so that it will be warmed.
Pay close attention to
the grooves and holes
and speckled surfaces
for there is no
other stone like it
in the world.
Hold it in your pocket
remember always to bring it out
into the light.

When you have learned to hold
these two stones together,
you will have learned the art of prayer.

Now find two such stones,
now go
to riverbeds, mountainsides,
gardens and deserts.

Now go, go alone.



.....
Sally Ito is the author of three books of poetry and a novel. She recently gave birth to her second child, a daughter. She lives with her husband and two children in Winnipeg.

This poem was published in Season of Mercy (Nightwood Editions, Roberts Creek, B.C., 1999). Reprinted by permission.

On our Tenth Anniversary

Ten years of *Sophia* have shown again that trans-gender mutual respect and learning is an ongoing life issue, and that the "conversation" of a few won't hastily change the world. So it is best to think of it not as a crusade, but as a truth to which we are invited. And though we thrill with joy and freedom at new insight, we understand the living of this truth, too, only partially, "in a glass darkly." So, "glow, little glow-worm, glow."

John Regehr,
Winnipeg

In response to the question how the magazine has touched me over the years, I tend to look to see whether authors I particularly like are included in an issue – such as Doreen Martens, Eleanor Martens, Dora Dueck. I enjoy Lori's editorials. I prefer personal stories that teach rather than extended expositions. I prefer challenges to my thinking, rather than controversy. And since I like to know what women are doing and thinking, I enjoy the tidbits about people, and the letters.

Mary Regehr,
Winnipeg

Each time I receive my copy of *Sophia*, I feel pride. I am proud that my sisters have a place to express themselves: to tell their stories. Previously, many of my sisters had felt frustration in not having such a venue. I delight with them that now this is possible. Here is an avenue where sisters of varying ages, occupations and professions can tell their stories. Other sisters read these stories and are encouraged and inspired in their own personal lives.

I am proud that though the

early days of the magazine were indeed uncertain and that often it seemed the challenges that confronted it were too difficult to overcome, *Sophia* has continued to survive and has flourished.

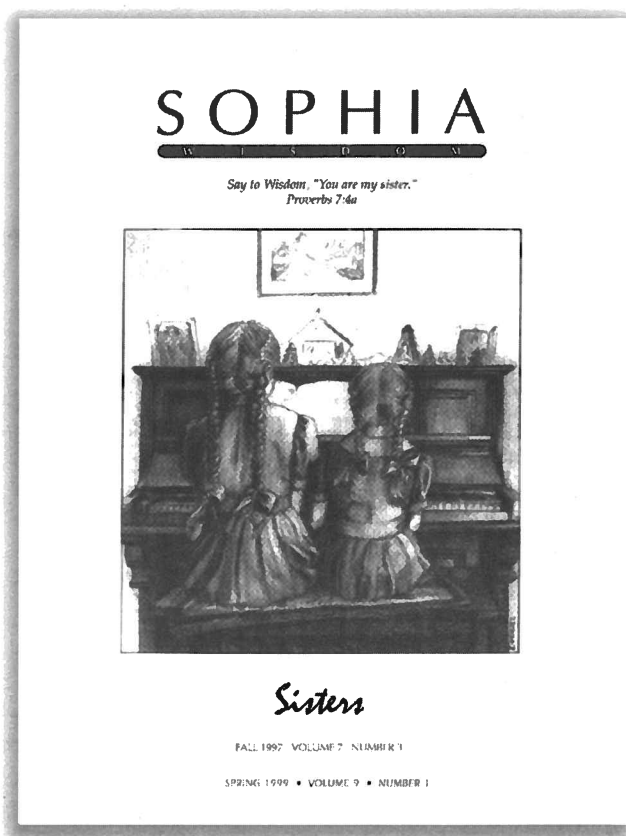
I am proud of the *Sophia* editorial staff for producing a very professional magazine that has integrity. These are the people who volunteer their time and energy to provide an outlet for other people's talents and abilities. I am proud of the *Sophia* board – a skeleton of a crew that works long and hard behind the scenes to insure that the magazine can continue and to be a support group and sounding board for the editorial staff.

The pride I describe is not vanity, which is defined as excessive pride in oneself or one's accomplishments. Rather, it is a sense of proper dignity or value and self-respect. It is a pleasure or satisfaction that one has taken in one's work and/or achievements.

Sisters of *Sophia* can look back with pride on their accomplishments and achievements. It is so exciting that *Sophia* has been there for all of us for ten years already. I hope she will be around for a long time to come.

Willa Reddig,
Winnipeg

Ed. Willa Reddig served on the Sophia board from 1992 to 1999, several of those years as its chair. She knows whereof she speaks! In December 2000 Sophia merged its board with its editorial committee so that the collective now functions as one body.



On Servanthood and Women

I too believe with Antoinette van Kuik (11:2, "Christian Higher Education: Learning to Serve") that a good alternative to the "dominant attitudes of individualism and self-gain that pervade our society today" is "an identity that is caring and willing to serve others."

Van Kuik lists a number of motivations for service. However, she

Continued on page 15 ►

A Voice for Women

by Linda A. Huebert Hecht

Congratulations *Sophia* on ten years of successful publishing! I still remember how thrilling it was to hear that a new magazine written by and for Mennonite Brethren (MB) women had been published in Winnipeg. Elfrieda Schroeder of Kitchener MB Church showed me the first issue. Eagerly I read it and was not disappointed. This new magazine was all the more exciting to me since at that time I had just spent several years studying the lives of medieval and reformation women. I had also learned to read the Bible in a new way and had discovered that, as Eleanor Martens wrote in that first issue: "Jesus was, and is, the friend of women." To know that now the experiences of women in my own church were going to be discussed in terms of the new ideas and approaches that I had been learning was very affirming. My purpose in writing about sixteenth century Anabaptist women for my Master's degree had been to bring the experiences of our foremothers from the sidelines to centre stage. To see this happening now for women in my own church was very exciting indeed. A new vehicle had been provided by which Canadian MB women could express themselves.

When I think back to those early years of *Sophia*, one picture stands out in my mind – the cover of the Winter 1994 (4:1) issue. The crocheted doily shown there seemed so appropriate, representing as it did the creativity of women's hands, the beauty they brought into their world, as well as the many handmade items they made to sell at local church auctions to raise money for the Mennonite Central Committee. More recently, I found the article in the last issue (11:2) about Marcia Friesen's education in engineering very moving, particularly since my father wanted me to become an engineer. At that time, I told him I didn't know what I would do in that faculty with all those men. It was an answer that "fit" in a time when the hand-work pictured on the '94 issue was one of the primary creative outlets for women. In the last ten years, the editors of *Sophia* have shown us many areas in which women of faith have used their gifts.

I think the founding of the magazine was timely. *Sophia* afforded MB women a new and different voice, at times a feminist voice, but in general a voice of support for the lives and work of all MB women, past and present, especially in their role in the church. When suddenly MB women were made to feel like second class citizens by the defeat of the Canadian conference recommendation of 1993, which resulted in the continuing restriction of women from becoming senior pastors, the role of the new

magazine was all the more important. The women in Ontario who joined together to form a MB Women's Network, as had MB women in Manitoba, always promoted the magazine whenever they met together or sponsored meetings.

In 1995 the first history conference focussing on the experiences of Anabaptist/Mennonite women took place at Millersville, Pennsylvania. For me, as for many others who participated in the presentations, it was a major event. There had already been several "Women and Theology" conferences since 1992 but none such as the one at Millersville where the historical development of Mennonite women's

I had also learned to read the Bible in a new way and had discovered that, as Eleanor Martens wrote in that first issue: "Jesus was, and is, the friend of women."

lives was examined closely. Among the Canadians at this conference was Sarah Klassen, editor of *Sophia* at the time. She asked me to report on Millersville for the magazine, and so I was able to share my enthusiasm for this important event in the lives of Mennonite women with the readers of *Sophia* (5:3).

I experienced an even bigger highlight when the book in which Arnold Snyder and I had edited and written articles about the lives of sixteenth century Anabaptist women was published in the Fall of 1996.* Again, our work was affirmed in *Sophia* with a positive review written by Agnes Dyck, in an issue edited by Dora Dueck on life writing (7:2). They asked me to write about these Anabaptist women in a more personal way, combining it with some of my own experiences. More recently I had the privilege of co-editing (together with Nancy Fehderau) an issue of *Sophia* by and about MB women in Ontario (9:3). It was a challenging and inspiring but very valuable experience to be involved in putting together a whole issue.

The editors of *Sophia* have been very creative these past ten years in focussing on the many themes and issues affecting the lives of Christian women past and present. *Sophia* has added much to my own journey as a woman in the MB church through its concrete expressions of the experiences and gifts of all Christian women, and of MB women in particular. I have appreciated the chance to contribute articles to the magazine. Thank you *Sophia* for your support of my work and for the support you have given to all MB women!

Unfortunately, since 1991 we have lost a number of

talented women in the MB church who are now exercising their gifts in other churches. It seems there is more work to be done so that women will be able to use their gifts in our own church. I wish the editors continued success as they document the events in women's lives and tackle the issues facing women of faith today.

.....
Linda A. Huebert Hecht, MA, History, works part-time in the Conrad Grebel College Archives, cataloguing historic photographs in a computer data base and processing the papers of historian Frank H. Epp. She and her husband, Alfred, live in Waterloo, are members of Glencairn Mennonite Brethren Church in Kitchener, and have two married children.

***Profiles of Anabaptist Women
 Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers**
 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).

From The Source

Continued from page 5

events: the lamb for the Passover selected on the tenth day of the New Year; the Israelites crossing the Jordan on that same day; the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month, and every fifty years the Jubilee beginning on this day; the Ten Commandments forming the foundation of God's relationship with Israel.

Sophia was born ten years ago. This year, we celebrate not only her nativity but also the way she has grown and developed over these past ten years: foundations have been built, redemptive grace has occurred, God has moved and touched us. *Sophia* is a cairn, a journal, recording and proclaiming the active, lively and ongoing work of God in our lives.

.....
Jean Reimer, a member of Sophia's editorial committee, is a translator with Wycliffe Bible Translators and spent many years in Africa. She lives in Steinbach.

Carrying Half of Heaven

Continued from page 3

leadership to God's people.

Today's young women lack neither ability nor courage. But the lack of models and the church's encouragement may create doubt about God's call or divert their energies and abilities elsewhere.

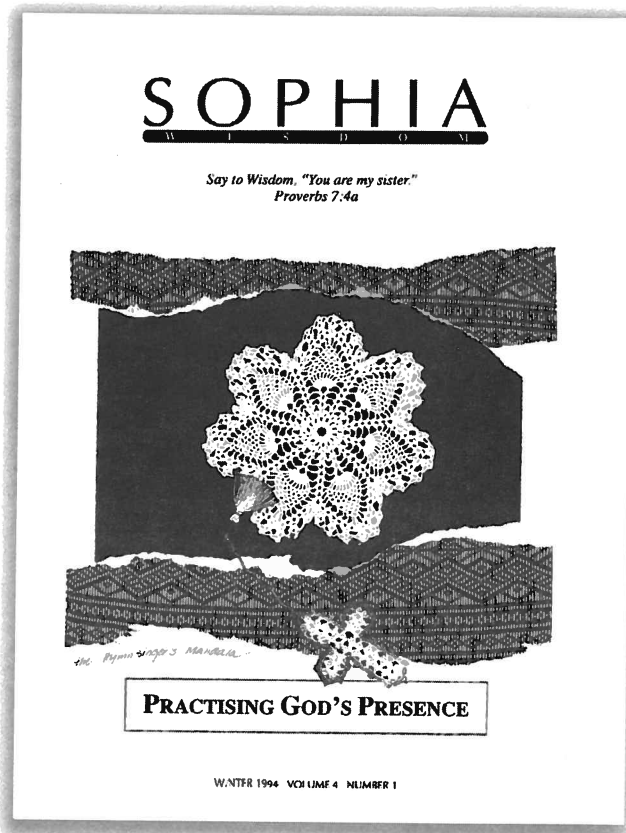
Mao Tse-Tung once said, "Women carry half of heaven on their shoulders and they must conquer it." These strong words spoken out of a secular context suggest an enormous responsibility shared equally by men and women. *Sophia* readers will prefer God's charge to humankind immediately after creating them male and female to "have dominion over the earth," and Christ's challenge to go "make disciples." These commands also suggest shared responsibility in a shared world.

Today the small number of women who preach and take spiritual leadership in our churches do so fully conscious of the seriousness of being called to speak prophetically and assume a shepherd's role. They know that carrying "half of heaven" is both wonderful and fraught.

I believe we have evidence that where women are welcomed into ministry, neither God nor men are abandoning the church, as we were sometimes warned would happen should women's leadership be allowed. In fact, although some men are undoubtedly threatened by this shift, I think many are as grateful as women for the infusion of new energy, outpouring of faithfulness, and evidence of spiritual strength in areas of ministry formerly reserved

for men. Both women and men know that the work of the Kingdom is not to be undertaken lightly. Unless it is willingly shared it becomes too burdensome and too one-sided. And without the grace of God and the prayers of the faith community it simply can't be done.

The work of producing *Sophia*, a small but significant part of Kingdom work, also depends on God's enabling and on the support of the committed. On this anniversary I congratulate Lori and her faithful crew, volunteers



all, and wish *Sophia* good health and a clear voice of encouragement for women of all ages, including those for whom the future is slow in coming.

.....
Sarah Klassen was editor of Sophia from 1992 to 1995. She left that position to teach at Lithuania Christian College (1995-1997). Now back in Winnipeg she writes poetry and short fiction. Her latest publications are The Peony Season (fiction, 2000) and Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger and Love (poetry, 1999). She is a member of the River East MB Church.

Writing can get you into all sorts of trouble. I was warned of this back in 1991 when I first started writing for *Sophia* and thought I had a thing or two to say. I should, as much as possible, avoid saying those things that might jar people too much or “disrupt the peace.” I knew of some writers in the Mennonite community who had been shunned for speaking their minds. Like other Mennonite girls, I had grown up with the maxim, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say it at all.”

But I wasn’t feeling very “nice” back in those days. My life had recently undergone a major shakeup through the adventure of returning to school. In my late 30s I was being exposed to ideas that became alive to me for the first time. It was especially “Women’s Studies” that snapped me to attention.

Almost by accident I had fallen into a perspective that seemed to concur with the lifelong stirrings of my heart. I had been a Christian since childhood but had always harboured a vague uneasiness about the “biblical” prescriptions for women’s lives, which limited them in ways that did not conform with my understanding of the equality Jesus emulated and taught.

Now, after so many years of inexpressible disquiet, I found myself in the company of women protesting systemic inequities and centuries of silencing, as well as articulating an alternative vision for society. Adopting this new lens for viewing the world was one of the most profound experiences of my life. I felt sad, betrayed and angry that women had this legacy to contend with, but also proud, excited and hopeful that things could change. I changed from being a shy, passive onlooker to someone who wanted to speak out and make a difference. I longed for some means of exchanging views with women of like conviction.

That *Sophia* should come into being at just such a time seemed nothing short of a miracle. As I thought about how a magazine for Christian women could be an instrument for change as well as bring together my love for the church and my passion about women’s issues, my spirit soared. When I heard that other kindred spirits were prepared to take this leap, I was ready too!

I never looked back. My seven years with *Sophia* proved to be among the richest of my life. First, I was given the opportunity to write, something I had yearned to do for years but lacked a focus. At university I discovered I enjoyed writing those essays everyone else detested. Although the idea of voicing my opinions publicly filled me with terror, I saw in *Sophia* an opportunity to explore my new interest.

This new endeavour was full of surprises. I learned a

A Precious, Perilous Adventure

by Eleanor Martens

lot about words – the way they can hurt or heal, provoke or play. I saw how the process of putting them together actually helped formulate ideas. It was often not till I saw my own words in print that I knew where I stood on some-

thing. Getting there could be ecstasy or agony, depending on mood or inspiration. I developed a new respect for the “real” writers who did this for a living.

It was all rather humbling – submitting to the editor, recognizing others could say it better, learning that loving wordplay does not mean you always have something to say. The

real route to humility of course lies in reading something you wrote ten years ago. (“Who was that person? Why did she have to say it like that?”)

Sophia also taught me about the diversity of belief, as well as mechanics of change, in our Mennonite Brethren community. The hostility and suspicion that *Sophia* aroused, at least initially, caught me off guard. I was not prepared for the furor over our name or the very notion of a women’s magazine being regarded by some as an act of rebellion. We did want to challenge the faith community into rethinking our gendered social arrangements but did not anticipate how frightening this could be for some.

It became a source of angst in my writing. Although I was convinced certain ideas needed to be aired, I cowered from the perceived loss of my “nice girl” image and the censure of a community that suggested women like me were a threat. Had I known sooner how some people would react, I might have been more sensitive in my choice of words, less eager to jolt people into a response. In the end I’m not sure it would have mattered. Raising “difficult” issues in the church always entails some measure of risk with the interesting paradox that the very ideas some

*I learned a lot about words
– the way they can hurt
or heal, provoke or play.*

find so offensive others eagerly embrace.

The most important and enduring gift *Sophia* gave me is the connections forged with other women of faith. The flourishing of women's minds and spirits portrayed by their art, poetry, stories of joy and lament were a great gift to me, helping heal my own wounds, deepening my soul journey. Our editorial collective became for me a haven of quiet acceptance and support, a safe place to air and balance my views during a rather stormy period of my life.

Thank you, *Sophia* women, for granting me this opportunity for self-discovery and growth. I will always cherish you as mentors, soul-mates and friends, and I know that I will continue to savour this precious, perilous adventure we have shared for the rest of my days.

.....
Eleanor Martens loves cooking, reading and emailing her kids. In her job as clinic coordinator of Hope Centre Health Care in Winnipeg's north end, she has the privilege of working with strong, beautiful women who lead very difficult lives. She and her husband Ray attend River East MB Church. Eleanor served on Sophia's editorial committee from 1991 to 1998 and was the principal contributor to the column "As I See It."

Telling Our Stories

by Agnes Dyck

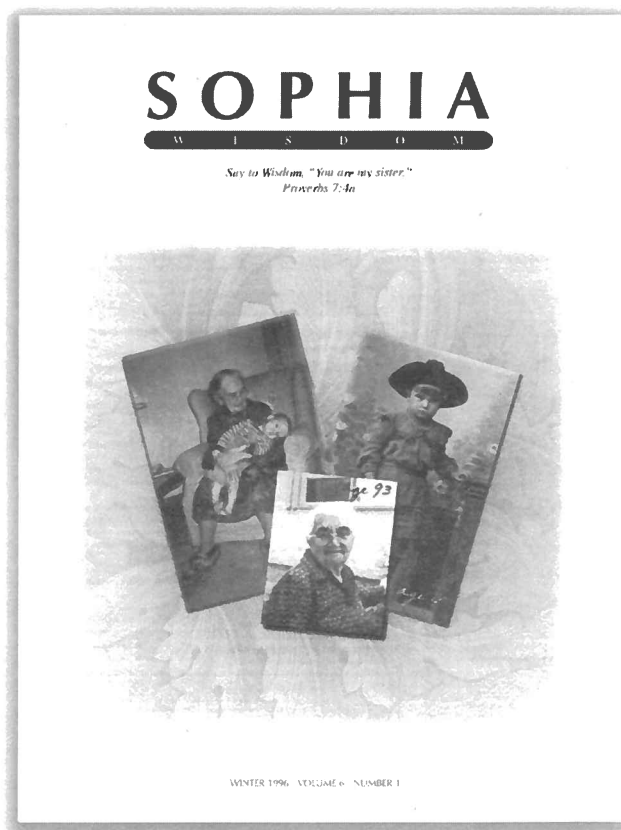
The dream, ten years ago, was that MB women would be encouraged to tell their stories. We've been telling our stories ever since and that is exciting. Initially we speculated about whether *Sophia* would survive, and some of the editors agreed that if we survived for one year we'd be doing well!

We invested time, energy and money in *Sophia*, but for me personally the benefits outweighed the input. I enjoyed the camaraderie in our editorial meetings. All the writers loved words and were avid readers, so the conversation was always stimulating. I admired the varied gifts offered by individuals and their dedication to our volunteer project.

The writing assignments led me into a variety of experiences: interviewing a farm wife near Carman who was home-schooling her children; writing about a Wycliffe volunteer who had spent thirteen years in a remote Indonesian village; resurrecting Christmas stories for survivors of war-torn Europe; re-visiting memories for my Ethiopian friends and their arranged marriage; writing about the benefits and rewards of volunteering; researching the role of women writers in the MB Herald; getting to know the musician, Sister Dorothy; reviewing books I loved to read. The list surprises me.

Older women become invisible, so I was especially pleased when my elderly mother, Helena Dyck, was featured on the cover of *Sophia* with her latest great-grandchild on her lap(6:1). In our family, as in so many others, we grew up with a

form of vicarious sadness because of the losses incurred by the Russian revolution and World War II. So I was very grateful when excerpts of letters from Anganetha Wiebe, my mother's mother, were included in a four-page article in *Sophia* (7:2). Her letters to our family here in Canada documented the upheaval in the Ukraine during the thirties. Many Mennonite men died. The surviving women struggled desperately for long years to save their families, in the face of unimaginable grief and deprivation, chaos and



confusion. Why do I go on about this? Telling this story seems necessary somehow; our grandmother found her source of comfort and hope in Jesus Christ despite her baffled response to events and her many troubles.

.....
Agnes Dyck is an avid reader, a sometime writer and an enthusiastic volunteer in various justice-related areas. She served on Sophia's editorial committee from 1992 to 1999.

348 Pieces

by Dora Dueck

Here we meet again, conversing over our cup of print as it were, and I am thoroughly startled, I confess, to discover it is a decade already that we have been talking and listening to each other. How fond I am of you, little magazine, *Sophia*! Whatever else may be said about you – of your vulnerabilities, determination, timidities, power – you have always carried yourself, to my mind at least, with a kind of elegance. “Mennonite elegance” – the words want to pull apart, as if surely an oxymoron, but I insist: you are elegant. Elegant as in graceful, dignified, holding-your-head-high, resolved-to-be-wise, excellent. And, looking better than ever as you mature.

And to the sisters who gather here, fellow readers and writers, thank you! Neither reading nor writing gets easier, I am finding, but I am grateful for those who stay involved in this particular kind of communication. Because I was on the editorial committee some seven years, the memories of past *Sophia* texts and visuals intertwine with memories of our many meetings, our wide-ranging discussions, our good friendships. Now I get the paper in my (church) mailbox as do so many others and have the privilege of opening it as a gift on a Sunday afternoon. I enjoy that too.

In 1998, I returned to university to study history. One course led to another and before I knew it, I was working on a Master's Degree. I wrote my thesis on communication in the *Zionsbote*, the first Mennonite Brethren periodical, launched in Kansas in 1884. That may sound boring, but communication is a fundamental and profoundly human activity. To focus on any sample of it, no matter how homely it may be, is to encounter processes that are ultimately fascinating and complex. Communication involves the body and/or a technology of some sort, it involves givers and receivers, it has relationships and content and context. Every communication uses a particular language, and it also uses language in a particular way.

Trying to discover the meaning of this first venture by Mennonite Brethren into print during the years 1884 to 1906, I discovered something else. There was women's writing in the periodical in those years, more of it than I would have believed possible. I knew women were generally absent in our official Mennonite and church histories; I was aware of the efforts by scholars and writers in the last decade to undo that neglect. But I had also gained the impression that our foremothers had not given us much to work with.

Here, to my surprise, I found one woman after another speaking in the public of the church paper. And, they spoke as Maria or Helena or Elisabeth So-and-So, sometimes with a maiden name attached as well. They were not hidden from view behind the moniker Mrs. Johann or Mrs. Heinrich So-and-So. (That particular usage entered our periodicals later.)

Although women's writing was not my research focus, I kept paper on hand to note every instance of women's writing. Slowly I have continued to expand this file of information and at this point have listed the women's writing in the extant issues from 1890 through 1904. According to my notes, there were 348 pieces of women's writing in those 15 years. (The paper was a weekly of 4 to 8 pages during that time.)

Of these, 136 were conversion stories. Other major categories were the reports of female missionaries (62),

“testimonies” such as answers to prayer (40), death stories (16) and what I call “inspirational” writing (30). By hearing some of these voices in the column “Voices from the Past,” we have been celebrating this treasury of writing.

I think it will also be important, eventually, to look at this body of writing more carefully, with a

view to analyzing it, perhaps from a number of perspectives like the historical, literary, religious and others. I come to such analysis, of course, as an “insider.” The insider writing Mennonite women's history, states Mary Cisar, is often “burdened with an emotional baggage that makes objectivity and criticism difficult or impossible” (“Mennonite Women's Autobiography: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Approach,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 1996, 143.).

Hard words, those, but undoubtedly true and something that needs to be acknowledged. Perhaps in the future I will write about my reactions to reading and researching the Mennonite Brethren women of the turn-of-the-century period, reactions ranging from admiration and curiosity to discomfort. For today, however, I just want to say I am grateful that the *Sophia* collective has indulged my enthusiasm about these documents and given me a column to share them. The deadlines of a column help me keep working at this project.

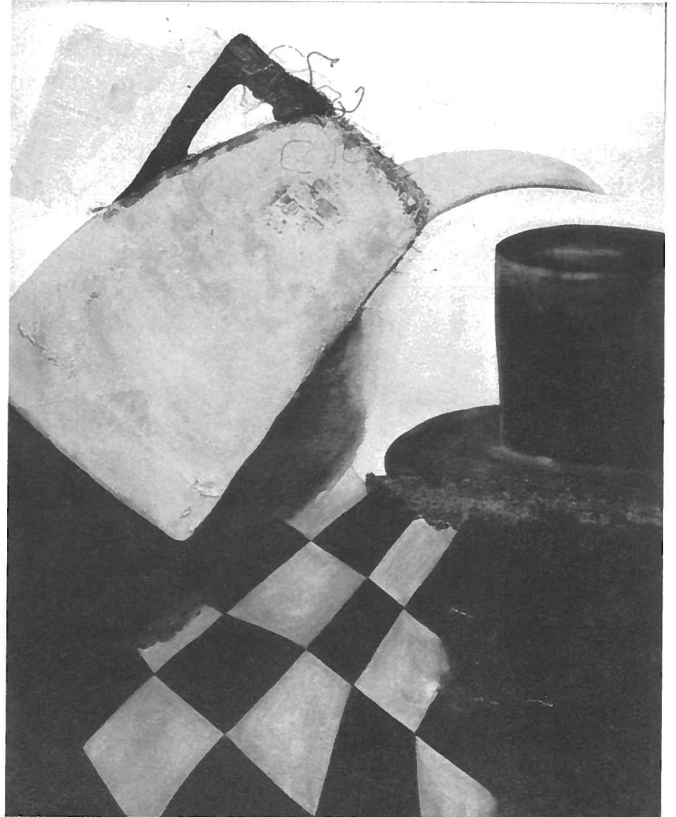
The reflections above have not nearly covered the past ten years of my life, but they do describe how a signif-

Continued on page 15 ►

Now I get the paper in my
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a gift on Sunday afternoon.

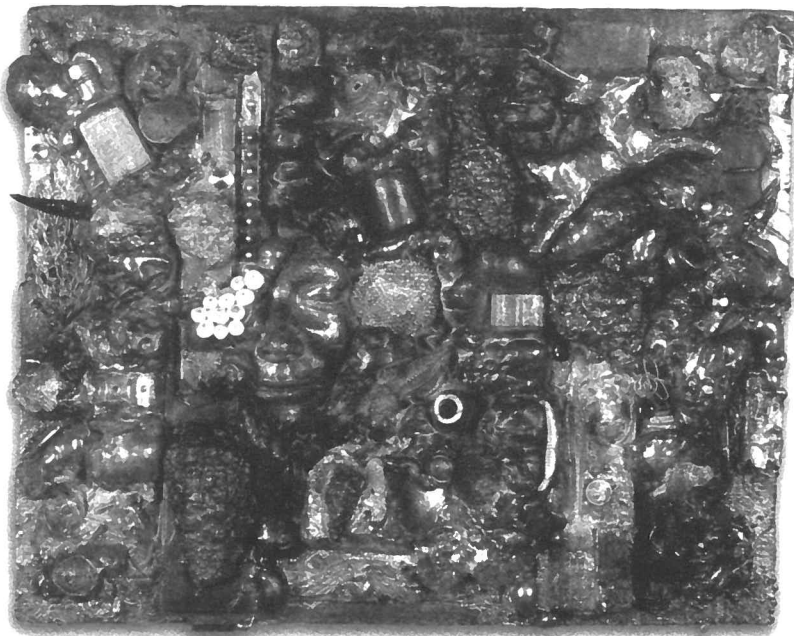


Garden of Nests, 2001



Green Pitcher, 2001

.....
 The works shown here and on the cover are by Winnipeg artist, Agatha Doerksen. They were recently shown as part of "Alchemy," a 5-woman show that ran April 19 to May 27, 2001, at the Franco Manitoban Cultural Centre. Agatha graduated with a 4-year diploma in Fine Arts from the University of Manitoba last Spring. She is now working toward a one-woman show at Winnipeg's Mennonite Heritage Gallery, this November. "My work is a detailed mapping of places I have been and remember and places I still want to explore. These journeys ... are documented in the colours, textures and diversity of materials."



"What's the Magic Word? 2001

Mystery of the Tetragrammaton

by Helga Doerner

While exploring the historical meaning of giving names I discovered that long ago (and still in some cultures today) it was believed that to name someone or something was to have power over the named. Even to know the name of another was synonymous with having power over the one whose name was known. This discovery brought to mind an old fairytale.

As a child, my fascination with the fairytale focused on the life-changing circumstances of a young woman. The story begins with a miller who meets a king. Dreaming of bettering his fortune, the miller tells the king he has a beautiful daughter who is so clever she can spin straw into gold. I wondered how the girl's father could bear to risk his daughter's life by lying to the king. I feared she would die when the king chose to test the truth of the deception.

The miller's daughter was delivered from the death sentence of her father's deception through the intervention of an unnamed little man. He was able to work the magic, thereby transforming the miller's daughter into the richest female in the kingdom. The king married the rich young woman, and instead of dying the girl attained the status of a queen. It seemed that all was well after all. But the story didn't end there.

In due course, the queen gave birth to a son. I became uneasy, for the nameless man had struck a bar-

gain with the girl before spinning straw into gold one last time. He had offered to spin the straw into gold in return for her firstborn son. Caught between losing her own life and giving up a life she had not yet conceived, she had agreed.

On cue, the nameless man appeared and laid claim to the infant. Though the queen offered him every conceivable material gift instead, he did not relent. The suspense intensified as the man reciprocated with a rather strange offer. He granted the queen one possibility of redeeming her son. She had to guess his name within three days.

It is this last detail that intrigues me at the moment. As a child, I could not fathom the potential consequence of this character's offer. Yet in the context of its history, the power play becomes quite visible. The offer was made with confidence

that his identity would remain unknown and his power would remain intact. But through circumstances fortuitous for the queen, the secret of his name was revealed.

The stranger arrived

for the third and last time. As he reached for the queen's child, she cried out: "Rumpelstiltskin is your name!" The effect was phenomenal. He screamed his rage, and self-destructed. His power over her was undone.

The story of "Rumpelstiltskin"

draws me to a deeper reflection regarding the power of naming and our attempts to name "God." Within the biblical stories and throughout the Christian culture, God's titles are many and varied. Yet it seems that somewhere in the process we have forgotten that each name for the Divine can never be more than a symbol or a metaphor for the One who cannot be fully known.

Despite the many names that have attached themselves to God as concrete revelations, there is one that continues to defy definition. It retains the essence of undiminished Divine

power, of Mystery that can never be fully known. In the ancient Hebrew writings, it was represented by four consonants: Y - H - W - H, known as the Tetragrammaton. It was a lettering without pronunciation, as there were no vowels to give definition.

Scholars have attempted to pinpoint the origin of the Tetragrammaton and to fill in the missing vowels. Research stretching back through time and enhanced by the imagination has been very active. Yet the clues have led in many different directions rather than toward one. To date, no consensus has been reached regarding either the origin or meaning of the name.

I wonder if there is divine purpose in the enigma of the name. Is it purposefully elusive? Is it intended as a perpetual mystery? Perhaps the

The ambiguous name is in keeping with the timelessness of the Eternal One.

I wonder if there is divine purpose in the enigma of the name. Is it purposefully elusive?

clue lies somewhere between the Bible and "Rumpelstiltskin."

Since I could not find or follow up all clues, I settled for one – the English reconstruction of YHWH. Through the addition of two vowels, the reading is turned into the name "Yahweh." And Yahweh is translated as "I AM": "God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14 NRSV). And later, "God spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am Yahweh' (Ex. 6:3 NJB).

Further exploration reveals that "I AM" is variously interpreted as: to be; to become; to be in existence; or to have continuity. Again the essence of Mystery is retained. At the same time, "I AM" reflects an active and dynamic Presence that cannot be contained or given definitive definition. The ambiguous name is in keeping with the timelessness of the Eternal One characterized in the biblical description: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psalm 90:2 RSV). Or, from the Christian scriptures, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelations 1:8 RSV). It is in keeping with the empowering and transforming Presence believers experience in their lives: "In [Yahweh] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Could it be that the tale of Rumpelstiltskin contains a truth that was understood at one time? Though we cannot diminish the power or presence of God, is our understanding of the power and presence of God diminished in confining definitions? Is God restricted when "known" only

through the Son or scriptures or names such as 'Father God'?

I am intrigued with the enigma of the unpronounceable YHWH. It offers an inviting symbol for the One Who Is Beyond All Names. Through it, I can imagine coming face to face with the reality of an ultimately unfathomable Mystery – the invisible Life force unfolding in our lives. I imagine the Unseen and Beyond-Naming animating and connecting all living things. I imagine the Source of wholeness/holiness coursing from time past to all eternity. I imagine . . .

.....
Helga Doermer, a member of Sophia's editorial collective, is a regular contributor to this column. She may be reached by email at hldoermer@excite.com.

Letters

Continued from page 7

does not discuss the fact that for centuries women have been expected to take on a service role in society. When an identity is forced on an individual or a group and not embraced by choice, it can become a burden. Many women have felt trapped in the "servant" role society or their community places on them and have lost their sense of identity as a result. When they do manage to free themselves they are often left with a feeling of guilt. Sometimes, in their journey toward wholeness, they see no other solution but to leave the community of which they have been a part. This is not healthy.

True servanthood, just like true Christianity, should be by choice, not by mandate. Individuals need a healthy sense of identity in order to choose and embrace servanthood. Only then can there be a healthy community.

348 Pieces

Continued from page 12

icant stage (the going-back-to-school stage) and this paper have intersected, and how they continue to do so. Our stories in *Sophia* and those of Mennonite women a hundred years ago in the *Zionsbote* are different in many ways, but their desire is the same: to communicate – to connect – within a place of faith, safety, and intimacy.

.....
Dora Dueck and her husband, Helmut, are members of Jubilee Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. They are parents of three adult children and are eagerly looking forward to becoming grandparents right about now!

Rather than simply believing what they have always heard from society, which is that servanthood is their role and their duty, women need to feel that they alone are not singled out to be servants. Only then can they serve joyfully.

*Elfrieda Schroeder
Kitchener*

Sophia welcomes your comments. You may send letters by email, fax or snail mail, to the addresses listed on the inside cover.

A Meeting of Soul Sisters

by Donna Stewart

In 1991, somewhat to my surprise, I had become a Mennonite, a pastor's wife in a church where they were debating whether women could be deacons. The real issue was not whether they could do the *work*, but whether they could have their names on a ballot and hold the *title*. Everyone acknowledged that if a man's wife didn't have time to do the deacon *work*, he would refuse the nomination. Gifted widows and single women were completely excluded by this policy.

I was invited to do some teaching on women in the church "because you don't have to live here the rest of your life." We did as thorough an examination of the role of women in the Bible as was possible in three weeks, but that didn't help. "It's hard for us," explained one honest man, "All our lives we've been told that the Bible says one thing, and you come along and show us it says something else."

The concept of Sophia Wisdom was unknown; so you can imagine my joy upon receiving that first issue of the magazine. To be invited later to join the board, and later still, after a move, to help put a British Columbia issue together – those were unimagined honours that put me in touch with a group of soul sisters: admirable women whose faith has survived the pummellings of patriarchy in the church.

I'm sure I've read every word of every issue of *Sophia* and have copies of all except those I lent to people who didn't return them. But the one that impressed me most deeply was the one on "Forgiveness" [8:1]. How incredibly honest those writers were about their experiences! How enormously patient many of them had been! I needed those lessons because in 1993 I had attended the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, had become aware of a campaign to exclude women from senior pastorates and had watched in horror as the campaign succeeded. Some male pastors did "high fives" while their female colleagues raced weeping for the washrooms. I went home and said to my husband, "Never, never again will I go to an MB church."

But God has a sense of humour. The next church that asked him to serve as interim pastor was Killarney Park MB Church in Vancouver. At the "show and tell" lunch, I answered the question about women in ministry biblically, passionately and at length, concluding with "I cannot understand Christians who think they cannot learn from a woman made in the image of God." And people *clapped!*

My husband has since retired (for the fourth time) but we remain at Killarney Park, where the Spirit of Christ is recognized in women as well as in men. I continue to cherish my *Sophia* connections. And I continue to be amazed at the patience of Mennonite women, particularly Mennonite Brethren women, who are erased in the very name of the conference.

When I reflect on women's patience, however, I ask the old feminist question, "Who pays?" I'm afraid it is our daughters and granddaughters, gifted and called, who are excluded from service as senior pastors. I'm afraid it is the women in the pews who so rarely hear their life challenges

wrestled with biblically from the pulpit.

I remember hearing my husband's Annunciation sermon one year. I thought it was excellent, but by a fluke I also heard my daughter's sermon on the same topic. Cathy was at the time pregnant with an unplanned third child (though the congregation didn't yet know that). I went home and said to my husband, "No man could ever preach this sermon, could he?" Gordon, after reading it, said, "You're right. No man could ever preach it, because we have not had the personal experience of a child in our bodies." It turned out that the sermon was particularly meaningful to a woman who had given birth to a Downs' syndrome child a few weeks before. We need women in our pulpits, and until we have more, *Sophia* helps make up for the lack.

Mennonite historians have begun to honour our foremothers, but perhaps because the church is still male-dominated, the brave women of the Bible don't get much profile from our pulpits. So I particularly welcome the courageous new feature, "Unspeakable Issues." In fact, "The courage of women" would be a good topic for a whole issue of *Sophia*, don't you think?

I guess what I'm trying to say, in a roundabout way, is that *Sophia* provides me with fellowship through the thoughts and experiences of sisters in the faith. It gives me hope. Blessings on you all.

.....
Donna Stewart, matriarch of a clan of 25, has been a Mennonite for ten years now. She is an adult educator who has volunteered with MCC in various capacities. This fall she begins a term as Moderator of Killarney Park MB Church.

When I reflect on women's patience I ask the old feminist question, "Who pays?"

My Journey With *Sophia*, 1991-2001

by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder

*I*t is always a worthwhile exercise to look back on the past and to celebrate the milestones. How well I remember the Mennonite Brethren Conference in Winnipeg in the early 1990s, at which time MB women were firmly told they did not have the same rights as men in the church. I was one of many women who went to that conference, joyfully anticipating some necessary changes, and left with tears of disappointment.

As a result of the decision made at that conference, I became part of a group of women who resolved to network for change. This group was formed in Manitoba and branched out to other provinces. In Ontario, a group of us worked hard at this, even though we met with roadblocks along the way, sometimes by male leaders who seemed sympathetic but proved to be non-supportive when their reputation was at stake.

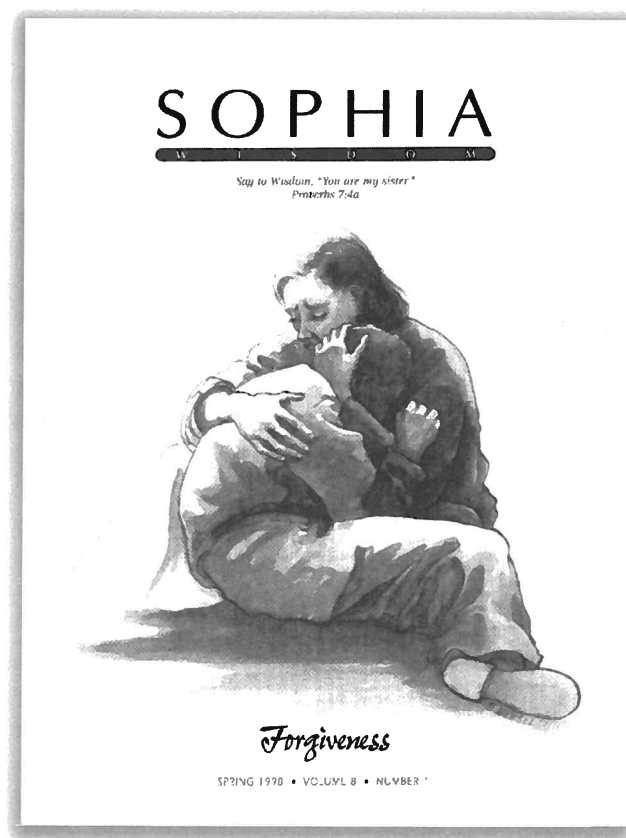
In Manitoba, *Sophia* was a fledgling magazine that gained momentum as it grappled with the pain many women felt and as it walked alongside the Women's Network. This journal has helped many of us to try to come to terms with our feelings as women who have been deemed not worthy to participate fully in the work of the church.

In the years that followed, *Sophia* has lived up to its name, "wisdom," as personified in the Book of Proverbs, and equivalent to the New Testament *logos*, the creative word. She deserves to be celebrated!

For me, personally, these were significant years in which all three of our daughters left the family home, and what had been my primary occupation for decades gradually ceased to exist. I had already begun undergraduate university studies earlier on a part-time basis, and graduated with my BA in German and English Literature in 1993. I continued studying full time and received an MA in German Literature in 1995. I recently graduated with my PhD in the same discipline.

In 1992, just before receiving my BA, I spent a summer in Germany, studying upper-level German grammar and researching for my MA thesis. Since our marriage, that was the longest time I had ever been away from my family. These were fruitful months as far as studies and research were concerned, but productive also in terms of self-realization. I missed my family very much and was overjoyed to return to them, but I had also begun the sometimes scary process of confronting myself and my own giftedness, rather than living through the gifts of my family members. *Sophia* helped me walk through this maze, and though time pressures forced me to be selective in my reading, this journal was always read from cover to cover.

In these years I realized that my daughters, so intimately a part of me, suddenly became independent beings and took on lives of their own, apart from their primary nurturer and caregiver. I am now discovering that this also happens to the words I write on paper. Once they have left the quiet, secret place of my thought life, I cannot determine how they will be interpreted by others, who might



read into them things I never consciously intended to say. This is the fearful risk every writer takes.

Sophia (wisdom and word), you have helped shape me into the person I have become today. Willing to take the chance of being misinterpreted, I strive to be a self-confident woman of wisdom and word in my role as educator, speaker, and writer.

.....
Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder is the mother of three daughters and grandmother of one. She and her husband, Hardy, live in Kitchener, Ontario.

The Gift of Eight More Years

by Dora Dueck

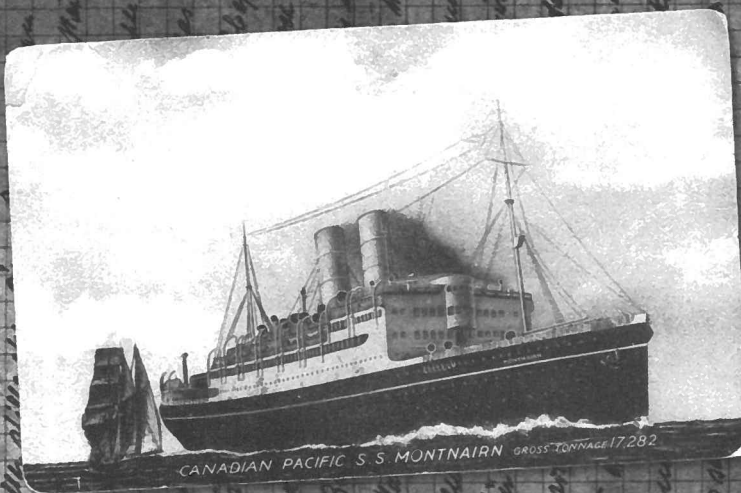
This testimony by a widow, a Mrs. Wiens, appeared in the 3 August 1892 Zionsbote under the title "Several Experiences of my Faith Journey." Since her first name was not given, I have not been able to find out more about her than this account of her baptism and a subsequent answer to prayer reveals.

On the Sunday before the Ascension of our Saviour in the year 1872, my husband and I and ten other precious souls were buried in the death of Christ by baptism in Klippenfeld.¹ I was full of joy as we emerged from the water, blessed [selig] by the fact that I had finally prevailed in following the Lord. A sister said to me, "The day after tomorrow, Satan will come; just be prepared." That had been her experience. He had caused her to regret what she had done, but the Lord had helped her and strengthened her faith. The day came, but I experienced it differently; thanks be to the Lord for the love with which he gladdened us that particular day. From the morning on I was very happy; as I cooked dinner I sang the song:

The Lord breaks forth at midnight,
Though as yet He is not here,
How blessed is the one who waits,
to meet him as he nears.

While singing I almost felt as if I should go outside to see whether the Lord was already coming; I was completely ready to go joyfully towards him, and my husband was glad as well, which doubled my joy. But, alongside joy a Christ-

ian also has much sorrow, and that's how it was for me too. Poverty made our lives difficult but we were often comforted by the song, "What would I have if I had not chosen Jesus for eternity?" The following year, my husband turned ill right in the middle of the threshing; this was a difficult time. We had six children, the oldest daughter barely 14. Various dear brothers and sisters came to comfort us, but no one had time to help us with threshing, for everyone was busy with their own. The brothers often prayed that my husband would have a blessed death,² and he also wished to



"Loving Father, you know how things are here: the children need a father; do have pity on us and wait until the children are older."

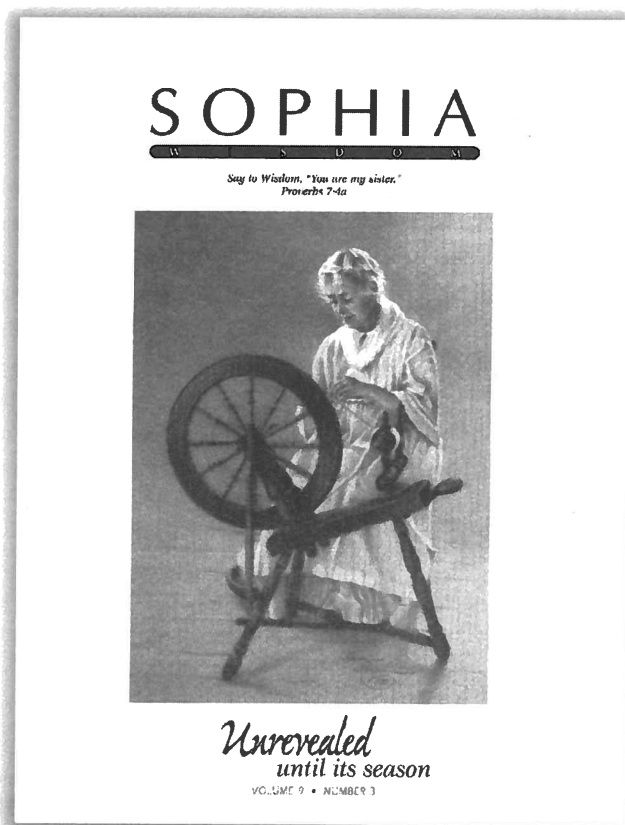
die, but I desperately wanted him to get better. One evening brother and sister J. Boese, with

whom we were spiritually close, came to visit. Again they prayed that my husband would attain heaven. It made me cry. They bid him farewell; at the door I said, "Dear brother and sister, you always pray that my husband have a blessed end; why not rather pray for his recovery, for if he dies, what will my children and I do?" The sister sympathized with me and said, "From now on I will pray that he recovers." That night my husband was much calmer and I had time to talk with my heavenly father. I said something like this: "Loving Father, you know how things are here: the children need a father; and if it is your will that he die before me, do have pity on us and wait until the children are older and our debts fewer." In four weeks my husband was well enough to leave his bed. Soon after his recovery the Lord gave us a son, and I was so glad the little one still had a father. The following spring, we moved to Fuerstenland,³ where the Lord blessed us materially as well as spiritually. That first summer our oldest daughter was converted and also baptized. In 1881, my husband got sick again; the oldest children were grown; now it looked as if he would soon die, but again I prayed for his life. With the doctor's help he seemed to be getting better. He was able to be up although he always spoke of dying. He got sick at the time of the rye harvest. He continued to regain his health. At the beginning of October we had a little Thanksgiving festival [in our church], also a baptism, led by brother Loepp of Andreasfeld. It was a very meaningful time. Brother Schellenberg from the Molotschna was also there with his wife, to preach God's Word to us and thus enrich the day. On Monday the guests wanted to return, by boat and then train, each to their home. My husband decided to go along to the Molotschna, taking our oldest daughter with him. I was very happy that week, anticipating the day he would be at home again so we could talk about the festival and rejoice together. It rained on Sunday, so I stayed at home; I felt very uneasy. I kept wondering how my loved ones were doing in the Molotschna. It rained that entire day. In the afternoon I drew a verse⁴ for comfort and got: "What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter" (John 13:7). This made my desire to know about my dear ones even more urgent, but I did not guess what would happen. On Monday I got the news that my husband was very ill, perhaps even dead. He had already died that night, but the person who brought me the news did not know that he had died. I found that out later. The time that the Lord had given

me the father of my children had run out; they were older, the debts less. In answer to my plea, the Lord had extended his life by eight years. Your sister in the Lord,

..... Wiens

.....
Dora Dueck, regular contributor to this column, received a Master of History degree last spring from the University of Winnipeg. She welcomes your comments or questions and may be reached by email at hddueck@home.com.



- 1 Klippenfeld was a village in the northeast corner of the Molotschna Colony of South Russia, founded in 1863.
- 2 The author uses the expression *seliges Ende*, literally "a blessed end," three times; the wish is for a good, peaceful death, but in the context of the Mennonite colonies also includes the outcome beyond death, that one truly achieve salvation, that is, gain heaven.
- 3 Fuerstenland was a colony northwest of the Molotschna, on land rented from the Grand Duke Michael Nikolaevitch.
- 4 *Einen Spruch ziehen* – this expression is often used by *Zionsbote* writers; it probably indicates pulling a verse out of a Scripture box.

Women's Voices

by Mary Friesen

Ten years ago I enrolled in a graduate course in church history as part of my Master of Divinity program at the Faculty of Theology, University of Winnipeg. Since I was teaching church history at the high-school level, it seemed appropriate to enroll in this intensive three-day course. I must admit, it also promised to be an easier credit for me

The surprise for me was the personal recognition that I carried emotional and/or spiritual scars of abuse that were directly related to the system of patriarchy.

since I had taken numerous church history courses in my undergraduate program and felt quite confident that much of the lecture content and the required reading would be familiar. My only concern was that it might be boring.

The weekend was full of surprises and far from boring. After the first hour I knew that this was going to be a very different church history lesson and that the professor was

teaching from a perspective I had not encountered before. I quickly discovered how much I did not know about church history, as it dawned on me that my education had focussed on the history as written and experienced by men. Why had it not occurred to me earlier that the stories of women, their contribution to home, community and church, were not included in the written record of the history of the church? I thought back to the experience of my own parents and their contribution to the life of that particular Mennonite community and intuitively understood that the written record would focus on what my father and his colleagues had accomplished. My mother's sacrifices, as she carried on the work of the small farm with her five children while her husband was off to meetings and conferences, would not be perceived as a significant contribution to the development and story of the community. I was surprised by how my interpretation of church history was so quickly changed by my participation in that course.

Even more surprising was the emotional impact the course had on me. On the last afternoon of the weekend we gathered in a circle and listened to a song by the Wyrld Sisters. Although I don't remember the title of the song anymore, I can still feel the emotional response that overwhelmed me as my eyes began to fill with tears. The seminar leader had announced that we would share some of our thoughts and feelings after the song was finished. During the last part of the song I kept my eyes on my

hands in my lap and hoped that others would be in better shape to share or respond. The song finished and a total silence of several minutes followed. Glancing at some of the others, I realized that they too were struggling. It was a relief to hear the facilitator's voice saying, "Let's just take a break and reconvene in about fifteen minutes."

The surprise for me was the personal recognition that I carried emotional and/or spiritual scars of abuse that were directly related to the system of patriarchy. I came away from the course with a changed perspective and with a conviction that women's voices must be heard in the church and become part of the official history of our communities. It also forced me to re-examine my concept of what it means to be created in the image of God as both male and female. This incarnation of God is found in the faith life of the community or church through the contributions and experiences of all – men, women and children of all races, classes and nationalities.

My involvement with *Sophia* has allowed me to explore further the implications of my experience in that church history course ten years ago. It has also contributed to my growth and new insights. Certainly, *Sophia* has been a place where women's voices could be heard and their experiences added to the story of the community of faith.

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Mary Friesen, a member of the Sophia collective, is currently working on a Doctor of Divinity at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton. She and her husband are members at River East MB Church in Winnipeg.



A Decade of Transformation

by Heidi Koop

1991-2001 was a decade of transformation based on the 1980s, a decade of ceaseless crises. By 1991 I had lost my whole family: my only sister died quite suddenly in 1980 of an aneurysm. My mother, for all intents and purposes, left me in the

earn a Master of Divinity degree. I graduated from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in 1978. I was looking forward to increasing credibility in church ministry, a difficult feat, indeed, for women in ministry in those days. I felt that with

the cancer diagnosis in 1986 my professional respect as teacher, guidance counsellor and most recently as minister took a tremendous blow. My choice of naturopathic medicine as a primary cancer treatment seemed to undermine whatever was left of my personal respect. Now not only my identity as daughter was destroyed, my identity as a contributing member of church and society was also devastated. And my health was gone – all I could look forward to was living as a terminal handi-

capped person or dying soon. Most likely the latter. My days, I was told by the medical gurus, were numbered.

The 1980s was indeed a decade of crises after crises. This kind of trend is not easily reversed. For me, in the 1990s, it necessitated a gradual series of learnings and psycho-spiritual transformations. I learned how to forgive. I learned how to pray. I learned how to be reborn. Oh yes, I had learned about these before. And that was okay. But I needed to relearn them in a new way.

I learned that I was not a victim. Difficulties became gifts, spiritual crises offering me the option to be transformed. Those I blamed for my hurts became bearers of opportunity. To release them did not mean they were necessarily faultless, but that is between them and God. Transforming these potentially devastating experiences into spiritual crises that challenged me with an opportunity to grow, became my task. I learned that prayer is not primarily making words with my lips or even only in my mind. Prayer is not asking God for favours or, more fittingly said, for privileges. At its very essence prayer signified liberation from something I felt obliged to do. It became a time of simply, though not easily, being in silent communion with my maker. No agenda was needed, only a waiting trust, deeper than words and even thoughts could ever go. Prayer became an opportunity of releasing my will into the will of God.

I learned that rebirth is not a one-time occurrence, though there has to be a first. Rather, the possibility of rebirth is available to me whenever I discover a barrier to my spiritual growth within myself – and that can happen only through enlightened inner self-observation. Rebirth is the opportunity for transformation of thought, of accompanying feelings, and of resulting actions. Unless all three: mind, heart and gut are in harmony, transformation cannot happen.

The years 1991 to 2001 were truly a time of transformation, a time of birthing new ideas and of expressing these in a variety of media: yarn, graphite, watercolours, the written word. It was a time of sharpening old concepts and of bringing forth new understandings. It was a decade of transforming cerebral beliefs into a

Continued on page 23 ►



late 1980s as she succumbed to Alzheimer disease. She was not really gone, and yet she was no longer there with and for me. It was a new relationship, a reversal of roles. Then standing at my father's bedside one August day in 1990, I took leave of my dear Dad who, inwardly at peace, struggled physically with multiple cancer to his last breath.

As well for me the 1980s was a decade of health breakdown. As far as I have been able to ascertain I was the first Mennonite Brethren woman to

Sophia's Voice

by Lori Matties

Early in September the *Sophia* collective, now eleven women, gathered on a Saturday morning to plan themes for the four 2002 issues of the magazine. As we had done in the past, we hoped to evaluate issues from the past year and dream about where we wanted to go in the future, ending the meeting with a potluck lunch. What actually happened was that we spent most of the meeting hearing about each other's lives and the issues each of us is dealing with. We talked about attending a "Women Doing Theology" conference, suffering through a denomination's passing a vote that limits women from serving as leaders in the church, coping with the illness of a spouse, sociology, exploring many parameters of spiritual growth and many other things. We ended with a pocketful of ideas for future issues and a better understanding of the need to support one another. Not to mention a very fine lunch!

From the articles I received for this tenth anniversary issue, I think that meeting was representative of what *Sophia* has tried and in some part succeeded in doing over the last decade. It's gratifying to learn how *Sophia* has encouraged women. For many it has provided a network of support in times that have sometimes been difficult and discouraging. It has also provided a safe outlet for creativity and exploration of ideas. And, in a small way, it has connected women across Canada and beyond, who have shared their joys and sorrows, concerns and outrage, and also their God-given wisdom. In these ways *Sophia* has met her mandate well.

We've also been aware of the difficulty we've had in giving voice to

some of the issues we've wished to explore. Often we've found it difficult to find women who felt qualified to write about a particular issue. Sometimes it has seemed too painful or confusing to know what to say or how to go about addressing a subject. And though we knew we wanted to be a "voice for women" (particularly, in the beginning, for Mennonite Brethren women; later we sought to be more inclusive), we were not always agreed, even among ourselves, what sort of voice we wanted to be. In the MB context, the very fact we existed was seen by some as a threat. Women did not

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need a separate voice, they said. They did not want to be identified with a "feminist" magazine. Among those who were not threatened by that "f" word, some said they wanted the fight for gender equality to be fought together with men. Both groups saw no need for a "separate" voice for women. Others wanted a much more radical approach. For them, *Sophia* was much too tame and accommodating of the status quo.

As a collective, we agonized over our identity. All of us were in some way sympathetic to the struggle of women to gain the right to exercise their full gifts in the church. Our mission statement clearly expresses that. But as we thought of the audience we

sought to reach, we wondered how to gain the trust of those who, we felt, needed so much to be given the space to tell their stories and explore their gifts. We chose what we called a "gentle" approach. We rarely used that "f" word. We affirmed the experiences and skills of women, we sought out those we thought could share their stories in a way that would encourage us all. We hoped that by working within the lines of loyalty to the church, we would persuade people that women exercising their gifts are not a threat but are necessary participants in God's community. We debated often about whether we were being *too* gentle, whether we were pushing enough edges. And sometimes, even for ourselves, we clearly were not. We found ourselves aching over political policies that excluded our sisters and drove some away. We felt powerless, and also speechless.

In the aftermath of a conference in Minneapolis in 1995 called "Reimagining," the name "*Sophia*" created a crisis in our identity. At that conference it became clear that some women were identifying *Sophia* as a goddess, one they said was repressed by the patriarchal system that became Judaism and Christianity. For those for whom *Sophia* was already a threat, the goddess idea was fuel for their fire. Others, who were genuinely supportive of the magazine, found the name a stumbling block. We were advised to change it so as not to be mistakenly identified with the goddess worshippers.

How we struggled over this issue! We didn't want to be identified as goddess worshippers, but neither did we want to give up a name that symbolized for us so well what the

magazine stood for. No other name seemed as rich with affirmation of feminine gifts and our desire to both receive and share God's wisdom, especially when coupled with Proverbs 7:4: "Say to wisdom, you are my sister." It was a good, biblical metaphor that fed and nourished us. In the end, we kept the name. We breathed a collective sigh of relief, and *Sophia* gained a new confidence in her voice.

We continue to grapple with what sort of voice *Sophia* needs if she is to speak for women of faith. We continue to tell our stories, and we are convinced they strengthen us for the challenges we face every day. Some of our stories, though, often the most urgent ones, are still not being told. We are asking ourselves how to tell the stories of, for example, homosexuality, physical and sexual abuse, poverty, racism – all stories that seem unspeakable and yet we feel need to be told. *Sophia's* three newest columns, "Voices from the Past," "Images of God" and this one, "Unspeakable Issues," all represent ways in which we are attempting to break the silence – about the history of women, about the many ways we can begin to understand aspects of God's character from the symbols and experiences of our own lives, and about all the untold stories we carry and from which we need to be healed.

Sophia thrives in conversation with her readers. We invite you to continue being *Sophia's* voice. Tell us your stories. Remind us of the unspoken stories that need yet to be heard. Celebrate your joys and let us help carry your sorrows. We leave a record for our daughters; may it be a record of courage, dignity and wisdom.

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Lori Matties, a member of the Sophia collective, lives in Winnipeg with her husband and two children. She enjoys working with words, creating things with her hands and exploring the world God has created.

Back Issues

Back issues of Sophia are available for sale for \$2 each.

Volume 1 - Premiere Issue

Volume 2 - Untitled

2:1 - Untitled

2:2 - Women and Work

3:1 - Faith of our Mothers

3:2 - Caring for Each Other

3:3 - Imagining a Better World

4:1 - Practising God's Presence

4:2 - Travelling Light

4:3 - Artists Among Us

5:1 - Growing Up in the Church

5:2 - The Business of Women

5:3 - Come and Eat

6:1 - Our Bodily Heritage

6:2 - Rest and Recreation

6:3 - A Pot Pourri of Fine Ideas

7:1 - A Musical Mosaic

7:2 - Life Writing

7:3 - Sisters - *sold out*

8:1 - Forgiveness - *sold out*

8:2 - Tending the Earth

8:3 - Transitions

8:4 - Adventuring Women

9:1 - Worthy of Worship

9:2 - Marriage and Other Worthy Endeavors

9:3 - Unrevealed Until its Season

9:4 - Volunteering: The Heart of Ministry

10:1 - Celebrating the Gift of Writing

10:2 - Enduring Legacy

10:3 - Encounters With God

10:4 - Fear Not

11:1 - Community

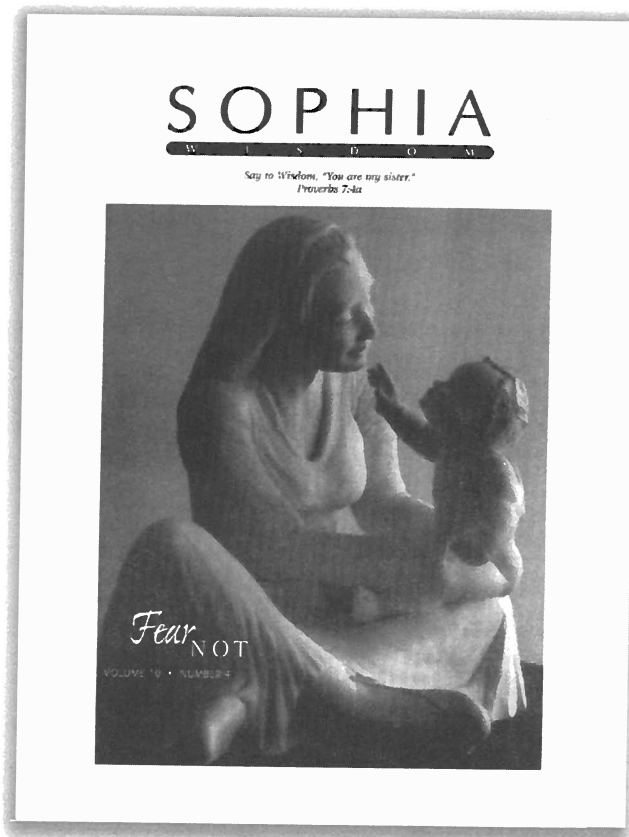
11:2 - What Have We Learned?

A Decade of Transformation

Continued from page 21

more dynamic faith.

With these new understandings, which are the result of a combination of new knowledge and singular experiences, came a new sense of freedom, a renewed love for Life, of which life on this planet is but a fragment. Looking forward to death gradually became an adventure to look forward to with hope. And I realized that as I awaited



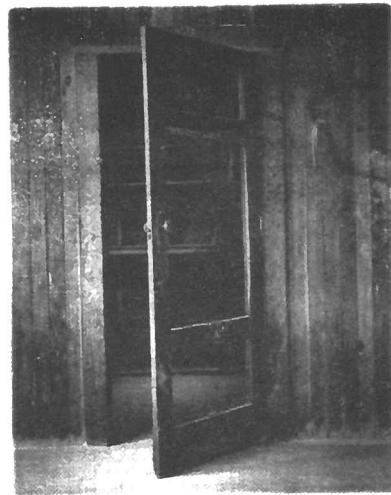
death with its release from all the physical encumbrances, I had only the present moment, no more and no less. Each present moment is a precious moment to be savoured and put to use for the greater good.

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Heidi Koop, formerly a teacher and guidance counsellor in the public school system, has also worked as a Bible school instructor and dean of students, a pastor and a spiritual director in a variety of settings. She lives in Winnipeg.



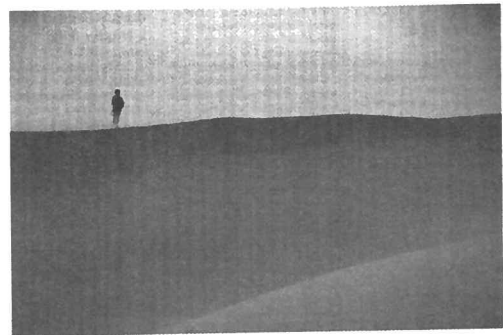
Be kind and compassionate
to one another, forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you.

EPHESIANS 4:32 NIV



"There I will give her
back her vineyards,
and will make the
Valley of Trouble a *door of hope.*"

HOSEA 2:15 NIV



*"S*tand at the crossroads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls."

JEREMIAH 6:16 NRSV