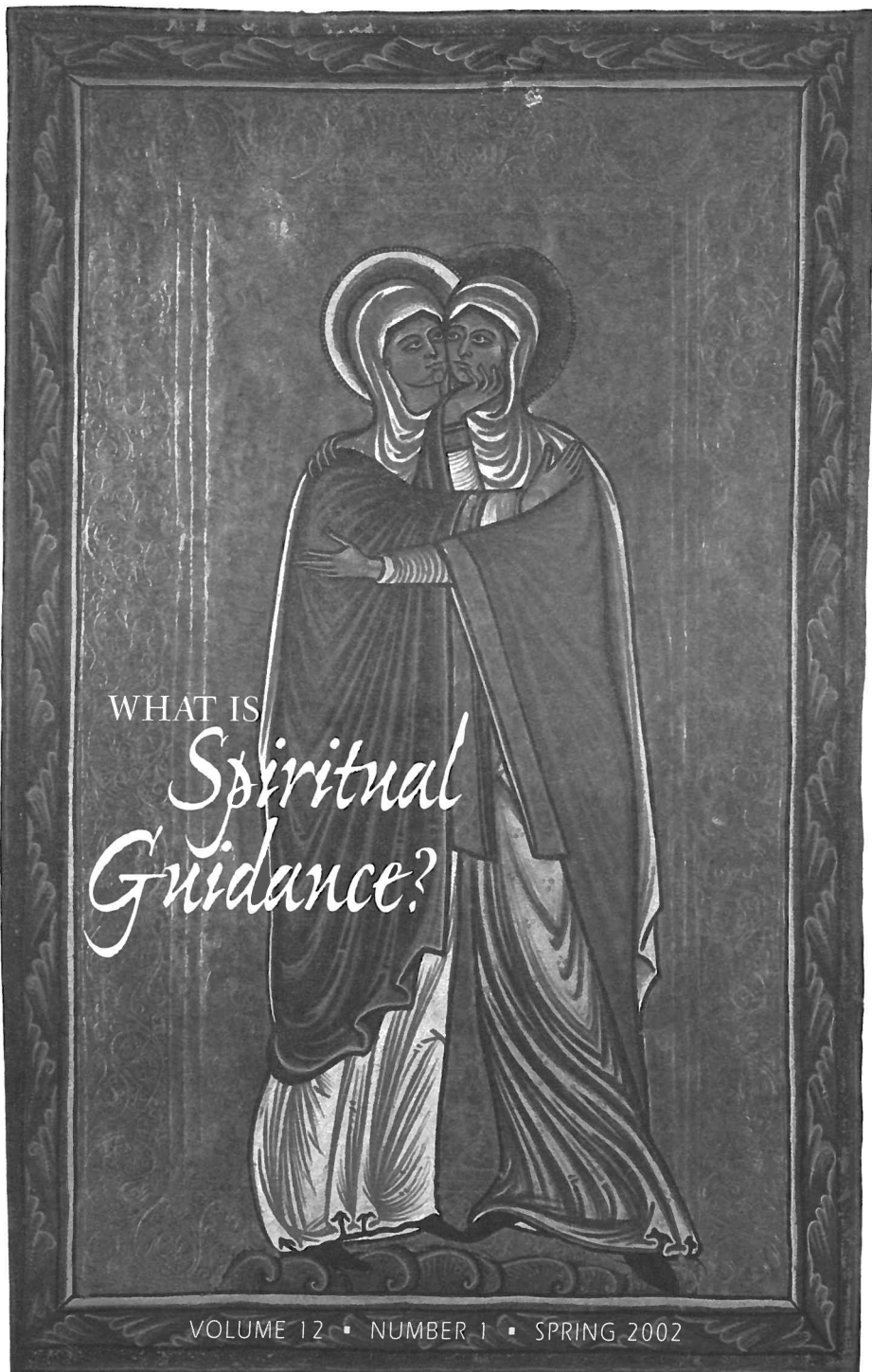


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SOPHIA

W I S D O M

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



WHAT IS
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VOLUME 12 • NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2002

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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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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 is a 12th Century manuscript miniature depicting the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth.

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Along the Journey

by Lori Matties

Over the last several years, quite a few women I know have been taking personal spiritual retreats, courses in "centering prayer" and other programs directed at helping them in their spiritual life. At Canadian Mennonite University where my husband, Gordon, teaches, several new courses are being offered in spirituality and spiritual formation. In secular culture, too, interest in spirituality seems to have risen, though it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with God. Why this surge in things spiritual?

One answer may be that as a culture we are tired of the individualism many of us grew up with. We are discovering that we can't do it all on our own after all; we need help and support. The age of information comes up short when it comes to practising what we know. And so, we are reaching across traditions, going back into our religious history and borrowing wisdom from our forebears about how to engage not only our minds but our hearts and even our bodies in spiritual practices.

Two years ago Gordon and I were invited to participate as resident directors in the Canadian portion of CMU's School of Discipleship, a one-year, after-high school program that involves teaching, service, travel and community living. We accompanied forty students and five team leader/mentors for three months of intensive learning and living together.

I enjoyed getting to know both the students and the mentors. I was reminded of how intense life can be when you're eighteen and just out of high school, with so many questions in your mind about how you're going to live the rest of your life. Often it's a time in which the faith of parents begins to give way to a new faith of one's own. As the students struggled with tough theological questions and relationship difficulties, it was easy to see how individual mentoring could provide valuable help along the journey.

I have since learned more about mentoring as I have begun to receive spiritual direction. As I meet every few weeks with my spiritual director, I am beginning to find the "stuck" places that have tripped me up in my journey and to see in new ways how God directs my path. I was reminded

in a recent sermon that God is a "Three-Mile-an-Hour God" (which is the title of a book by Kosuke Koyama); that God in love and compassion accompanies us at a comfortable walking pace. For those of us who are used to a more hurried lifestyle or for whom training and technique

are the answers to ignorance, the exercise of slowing down and waiting to see where God leads can be quite a challenge. And yet, in spite of the sometimes painful realizations I am experiencing, I am also feeling a new kind of hope. "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32 NRSV). I am learning that honesty, in the

context of God's love and with the support of my director's gentle guidance, will make me free to be who I was created to be.

In this issue of *Sophia* you will find articles introducing both mentoring and spiritual direction. Among these you can read Mary Friesen's article about "informal mentoring," the life wisdom that is passed from mothers to daughters, friends to friends, colleagues to each other, through the generations. Estér DeFehr writes about a spiritual guidance group in which she participates. Sandra Stewart describes something of both the heart and the history of spiritual direction. For your enjoyment also is Doreen Martens's story about "The Incident," and June Wieler's "Love Story."

Whether alone in our prayers or in the many contexts of our lives God is active in giving us wisdom. Out of that gift of wisdom, we are able to accompany others along the way. May this issue of *Sophia* be such a gift to you.

.....
Lori Matties, editor of *Sophia*, lives in Winnipeg with her husband and two school-aged children. She enjoys nature, creating things and good words.

The exercise of slowing down and waiting to see where God leads can be quite a challenge.

Sitting in God's Lap

by Jean Reimer

I love the idea of being mentored. I don't like "going it alone," doing things with only my own perspectives and angles. I want to lean on someone – someone whose clarity, discerning eye and integrity I trust, someone whose vision is wider, who knows more. I know the Someone I want to *lean* on. I have a wish-image way down in the core of my being: like a child, I am curled up on God's lap, nestled against that solid chest; warm arms are folded around me. And I can ask anything: "God, What do you think about this? How do you see it? What's really going on?" What I want most is for God to talk to me, to explain what is going on in me and around me, to tell me what I am to do and be in it all. (I doubt that I am the only one thirsty to be intimate with God like this, yet somewhere along the way we seem to have lost the "how" of it.)

That wish-image became a scream when, in Togo, Africa, a situation of overwhelming distress and pain brought me to the end of all my known resources. I had no idea what God wanted me to think or do or say (if anything) in that mess. On a day black with wordless agony, God sent a man to introduce me to the silence and listening of Isaiah 50:5 & 4 – *"The Sovereign Lord awakens me morning by morning, awakens my ear to listen like one being taught. He has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious, I have not drawn back. The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary"* (author's paraphrase*).

These words were like a kiss of blessing, like God's gentle, strong voice saying, "Jean, I do want to talk to you; I want to instruct and mentor you. But for that to happen, you need to learn to be quiet, to wait and listen." Thus, my journey into "giving God my ear" began. At first it was just me and God, with me waiting and listening, and God bringing Scripture passages, songs, other thoughts to my mind as instruction in what he wanted me to think and pray about, what he was up to and how he wanted me to partner him in it. Soon, it became apparent that at times others needed to be brought alongside into this kind of listening, so that God could speak and confirm his words to us as a group. Always we were profoundly moved and awed at how God spoke so directly to us.

The journey also has meant a (recurring) conviction of sin and confession for a lifetime habit of "ambitious methods and planning" instead of listening to God. The Hebrew word for "awaken" means *to rouse, to stir up to*



MILTON GLASER

activity, and "open" means to *open wide, to loosen, to plough, to carve* – the Sovereign Lord wants to be the One who rouses me every morning to what *his* thoughts and focus are, who loosens, digs and carves out my stopped-up ears, so that I can hear him. My ear needs to learn to be instructed. And if my ear does not learn to wait for that instruction, neither will my tongue be instructed for prayer or to know the Spirit's word that will truly sustain a weary fellow-pilgrim.

This journey of listening is changing my understanding of *seeing*, as well. Focused listening began to train my inner eyes to see "underneath," to see what was not visible on the surface or to first sight. Sometimes, in that listening, God brought knowledge of things I could not possibly have known on my own. Daniel and Joseph have often come to mind, with their experiences of being given supernatural

knowledge of the king's dreams; Daniel told the king that "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries," and praised the God who "reveals deep and hidden things" (Daniel 2:28, 22). Jesus was always mentoring his disciples this way – to see behind, underneath, beyond, through, to God's world, and so to discern how truly to think about, respond to and behave in the earthly world. Thus, they learned (for example) what the Sabbath, and compassion, and "religion," and God's kingdom, truly mean.

Alerted now to a different way of hearing and seeing, stories in the Bible suddenly took on new meaning. Two Old Testament stories that particularly stood out were the story of Elijah and Elisha at Elijah's ascension, and the story of Elisha facing an army at Dothan:

a) When Elijah was about to be taken up to heaven, Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit: *'Elijah said, 'if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours'....As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, 'My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!'*" (II Kings 2:10-12). Elijah had mentored Elisha in living in the spiritual dimension where there were things invisible to be seen (seeing God's real world beyond the visible surface), and things inaudible to be heard (listening for and obeying God's voice). In his apprenticeship, Elisha had watched Elijah make decisions and take action based on what he had seen and heard in God's realm rather than in the visible realm. Now, at Elijah's ascension, Elisha faced the crucial test of that apprenticeship: had he gained the eyes and ears of a servant of God? Yes, he saw indeed!, and stepped into that different spiritual dimension. His sensitivity and obedience to this new dimension were evident throughout his ministry (see II Kings, 2-8,13).

b) Elisha gave Israel's king advance knowledge of Aramean military plans, causing the Aramean officers to say to their king, *"Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom"* (II K.6:12). The Aramean king sent an army with horses and chariots to capture Elisha, surrounding the city; Elisha's servant, seeing this, was terrified. *"Don't be afraid, the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."* (II K.6:15-17). Seeing God's reality saved Elisha's servant from taking harmful action (like running, which would have taken him smack into the enemy) and enabled him to take beneficial action (staying put and resting in God's salvation).

These stories stirred another long-standing thirst in me – a thirst for a mentor I could touch and talk with face-to-face, someone physically walking my journey with me. "Listening prayer" on my own or even with a group of friends, isn't enough when I'm dealing with my own blindness to harmful patterns and dynamics within me. I need a spiritual mentor to help me see "underneath" my own surface, to be listening "underneath" to me and to God, so that I can move toward more wholeness and inner integration, move closer to God. Margaret Guenther calls this the "holy listening" of a God-gifted mentor, one who "loves and prays

for the people who trust her, [and] loves the Holy Spirit who is the true director in this strange ministry called spiritual direction"(Boston, Cowley Publications, 1992, p 1).

In glad hope, I believe this kind of holy listening

would enlarge me and set me free: *"In anguish in a tight place, I cried to Yahweh; he answered me with the freedom of Yah, the extraordinarily spacious place of Yah"* (Psalm 118:5, paraphrase from the Hebrew). It would lead me away from religious compulsion into healthy wholeness and balance, as I lean closer and closer to God: *"Be whole and complete [fully ripened, intact, sound through and through, full of harmony], as your heavenly Father is whole and complete"* (Matt 5:48, paraphrase from the Greek and author's expansion).

.....
Jean Reimer, a member of *Sophia's* editorial collective, lives in Steinbach, MB. She is a member of Cornerstone Bible Church in Steinbach and Church of the Way in Winnipeg. She works with Wycliffe Bible Translators and was involved in translation and literacy for 17 years in Togo, West Africa.

**All Scripture references are taken from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.*

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On a day black with wordless agony, God sent a man to introduce me to the silence and listening of Isaiah 50:5 & 4.

Our belief in the Mystery of God often comes down to two simple but profound truths: we are never alone, and that which seeks to destroy our life will never have the last claim! These truths for me rest at the heart of the Christian ministry of spiritual direction. To walk alongside another as she seeks to say yes to her life in all its dimensions, discovering at the very center of her longing and seeking a God who abides within, calling her to an incredible freedom barely ever imagined!

In spiritual direction we can learn to savour, to linger with, to relive such experiences of God, as well as gently unpack those dark and hidden places where we have felt abandoned by the Divine One. A spiritual director encourages us to share our feelings with God, whatever they are, and to pay close attention to God's response to us. As our attentiveness grows and our dialogue with the Divine deepens to contemplation we grow in freedom; we grow in love. Indeed, the spiritual journey is about falling madly in love with God and living out the consequences of that love! In spiritual direction we share that Love story with another, with all its ups and downs, as it unfolds in our daily life and prayer.

To know God in an abstract, conceptual way only is to be deprived of a fleshy, passionate, real experience of the Divine Presence in our lives. Indeed this latter reality can be too much for us! Yes, even while we ache for God, we fear such vulnerability and intimacy and feel threatened by the way our lives might change were

SEEKING NEW WINESKINS:



by Sandra
Stewart RNDM

A Companion for the Journey

God to fulfill that inner longing.

Having someone intentionally accompany us on our spiritual journey can help us name and claim our desire to have a richer and deeper relationship with God and to tame the fears that would keep us unconsciously avoiding the very thing we desire – a conscious, vibrant relationship with God and our own lives. These fears are the work of the false self, the very self Jesus says we must die to if we are to truly live. This false self has its roots deep in our unconscious, shaping our thoughts, emotions and behav-

our patterns, even after we have chosen to live our lives by gospel values. To confront the false self and detach from its untruth is the path of healing we are all called to embrace, but the Good News doesn't stop there. More than just healing, we are invited to live as much of the Divine Life as possible this side of death! While healing will always be part of our unfolding, as we abide in a deeper conscious contact with the Beloved we more fully taste the "new wine" that is God's Spirit alive in and around us. To really taste that new wine – to let it slip and crackle over life's every taste bud, caressing, warming, exploding with vitality – is to live in one's true Self centered in God. It inspires our view of the world, our relationship with God, nature, other people and our selves. To drink of this new wine with conscious intention is the risky, freeing danger and delight of gospel disciples. And spiritual direction can help keep us conscious about that intention to drink deeply of God; it can help to challenge the old wineskins of the false self, for gospel wisdom assures us that the wine of the Spirit that Jesus brings can be preserved only in new wineskins.

The tradition of spiritual guidance is rich in the Christian churches, as well as in other faith traditions, though not always well known or well understood. While the flavour and focus of the practice may have varied throughout history, serious spiritual seekers have always known the dangers of self-deception and delusion. Therefore seeking the wise counsel or guidance of another companion on the path to God (or however the Ultimate Reality is expressed) is and was seen as helpful, and indeed by some even necessary.

"In the Christian Church spiritual direction began after the age of martyrdom when the following of Jesus became less clear. (It's easier to know your Christian identity when you are being put to death for it!)." Indeed it was probably with the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth and fifth centuries that spiritual direction became more widely known. Men and women moved by their thirst for the Spirit heard God's invitation to flee to the desert to be embraced by a life of silence and prayer. They sought the reign of God from within, and directed others to search their own hearts for God's unfolding will. Over time, as the art and need for the skill of spiritual accompaniment grew, different persons from various life paths were perceived to have this gift and became guides and soul-friends to others. John Veltri writes that "little by little the practice of spiritual guidance decreased as religious

experience was being replaced by religious structures, though it continued somewhat in monasteries and religious orders."* However, in our own day and age, as we move through our lives with greater and greater speed and less conscious intention, the desire to be more deeply in touch with our spiritual roots is a growing phenomenon. As such, over the last thirty years or so there has developed a keen interest in seeking spiritual accompaniment. Thus, that thirst for the new wine of God's Spirit never leaves us, and is indeed a very real sign of God's promise never to leave us alone on the journey.

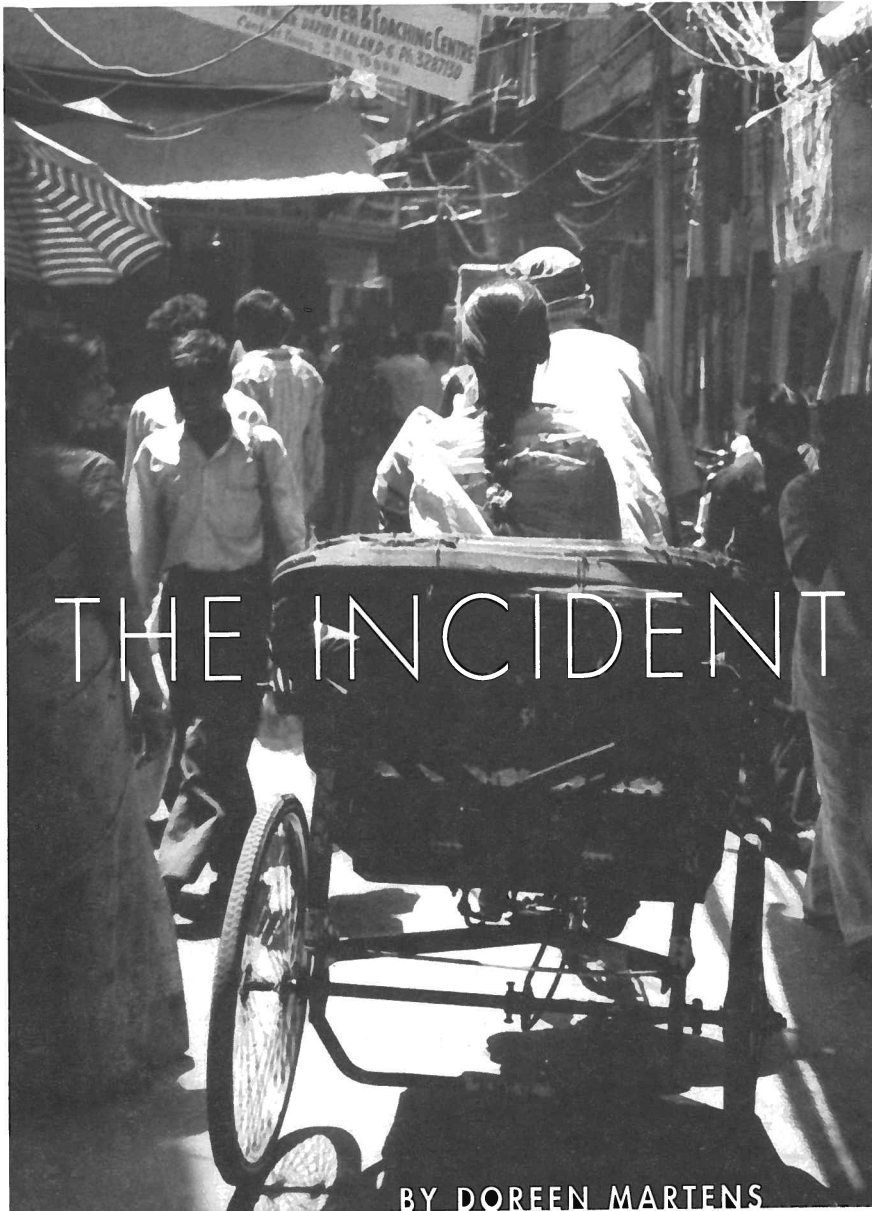
I believe this promise lives as a thirst, a hunger, within the human heart. It is a radical thirst that reaches far beyond the human categories we have defined for ourselves as followers of Jesus. It is gospel-rooted in a cosmic God whose perspective is eternal, whose love is abundant, and whose call to a life of justice and peace is clear. Many people from different branches of the Christian family tree are experiencing that hunger in a very real way and thus seek a companion on their heart's journey. This companion is not a guru or necessarily a holier person than the one being directed. She or he does not generally teach or

preach, give advice, problem solve, discuss theology or give orders to the other. Rather, such a companion helps to facilitate the seeker's growth in his or her relationship with God. Such a companion helps another to listen to that inner voice of Love, to engage that voice at ever new levels of consciousness, and to respond to that voice for the sake of the Reign of God.

So, to what inner voice do you listen? What part of God's dream for the world and the church are you called to carry? Have you really tasted the full-bodied flavour of God's Spirit in your life? These are sacred questions, best sipped and savoured perhaps like a glass of fine wine in the company of a trusted companion on the journey of faith.

.....
Sandra Stewart is a member of the religious community, the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions. She has worked in the ministry of spiritual direction since 1988 and also teaches in the Shekinah Program, a 2-year training program in spiritual direction at Saint Benedict's Retreat and Conference Centre in Winnipeg. She enjoys canoeing, hiking and Oreo cookies.

* (John Veltri, S.J.), *Directed Retreat Goes to Parish, A manual for directed retreats*, Loyola House, Guelph Centre of Spirituality, P.O. Box 245, Guelph, ON, N1H 6J9.



THE INCIDENT

BY DOREEN MARTENS

In any journey, the real adventures are often the kind of thing recorded between lines on a postcard, or between snapshots on a roll of film. There's one between two snapshots I took sixteen years ago, during an ill-advised and mostly solo jaunt through Bangladesh.

First slide: In Dhaka's hypercrowded waterfront, a man in a *dhoti* – the sort of sarong common in these parts – trudges off a gangplank bearing an enormous sack on his back, his thin body comically dusted from head to toe in what appears to be flour.

Next slide: The view from a jeep belonging to a well-fed member of Dhaka's very own Keystone Kops, who stands amid a crowd – all gawking at me rather than listening to him – pretending with great pompousness to investigate The Incident.

In between, of course, is a story of carelessness (mine), theft (that of the cycle-rickshaw driver I'd hired)

and the sort of encounter that reaches the heights of goofiness in places where rational thought, such as it is, can't quite bridge the culture gap.

As I hopped off the rickshaw to take the picture of Flour Man and foolishly turned my back on the driver, the latter quite naturally noticed the possibilities and disappeared into the churning crowd without a trace, leaving me standing there many kilometers from my guest house, with camera, three *takas* in my pocket (1/3 of a cent, tops), and a stupefied look. Peddling away with my bag was \$20 or so in Bangladeshi currency – a fortune I could hardly begrudge him – my passport, my extra visa photos, my traveler's cheques, a borrowed umbrella and, worst of all, my train ticket outta there.

The sort of thing South Asians might call a *pukka* adventure – the genuine article – sometimes begins with stupidity and ends with a laugh. The last stage we tend to reach when it's all over, of course.

After all, an adventure's hardly worth the name without a calamity to be survived, or at least a close scrape, to be related later with breathless relief. Imagining that gape-mouthed listener and the rueful laugh you'll be able to muster someday is sometimes the only way to hang on to your sanity in a real mess. In fact, the ability to do this may be what separates the adventuring woman from the mere tourist.

After realizing that my frantic "Which way did he go?"s in English were doing about as much for me in that crowd as the shriekings of a howler monkey in a zoo – that is, merely drawing more attention to the alien appearance of this hysterical woman in clunky leather shoes, sensible canvas skirt and floppy hat – I decided simply to shout "Police?" for as long as it took someone to recognize the word. By now at least fifty men in *dhotis* were gathered in a circle around me, gravely pondering my ravings. At last, a kind-faced young man nodded and beckoned to show me the way to the local police station.

Inside the darkened office an overhead fan whirled, and half a dozen policemen in beige uniforms and spiffy hats snapped out of their mid-afternoon torpor to peer curiously into the interview room, offering tea and, with their general air of ineptitude, chipping away at any faint hope I might have had for getting my passport back.

Fortunately, the captain, a man of huge dignity and

even larger girth, spoke English. He listened with great concentration to my tale. Then asked: Had I noted the number on the rickshaw?

There was a number?

He shrugged. Shook his head in that wobbly side-to-side way. For once, I knew exactly what that meant.

Clearly, this was all my fault for failing to learn the figures in Bengali script.

All right then, I said, I must at least have a police report so I can show it to the authorities to get my documents replaced.

"Of course," he said complacently.

"Well, then it will need to be a written report."

"Yes."

"Um, well, could you get someone to write it down?"

He raised his eyebrows at this request, then sighed to let me know he was humouring me and shouted something in Bengali. After some delay and more tea a young policeman arrived with stubby pencil and paper in hand, and began laboriously transcribing my statement, often pausing to debate points of syntax with the captain, erasing a bit and then writing some more.

After about an hour of this entertainment we arrived at the part where I was to list what had been lost. Now I was feeling a little smug, knowing that I had actually thought to prepare for such an occasion by printing all the numbers for my passport and traveler's cheques in indelible ink, inside my skirt.

INSIDE my skirt!

How to explain that I would need to disrobe to complete the interview?

Sheepishly wondering how much of this was being understood by the assemblage of the curious gathered around the table, I tried to explain to the dear captain that I needed a few minutes of privacy to get the numbers. Could they leave the room? Or let me go somewhere else where I could be alone for a few minutes, with pencil and paper?

A look of incredulity was replaced with suspicion. Just what was this strange white woman up to, anyway?

"Impossible," he said imperiously. "No one can be left alone in the station. It is the law."

I briefly considered undressing anyway, but then wondered what other sorts of laws would come into play.

Well then, I said, desperate, could I use the toilet?

He sighed, and after some furious discussion with the others in Bengali, reluctantly assented. I asked to borrow the pencil from the young man, who seemed startled by the request. After looking woefully at it for a long moment, knowing where it was headed, he handed it over and showed me the way to the outhouse.

Asking to use a public toilet in southern Asia – basically just a deep hole in a ground-level platform with a bucket of stale water nearby to be used for personal cleansing – is always a desperate measure. The philosophically inclined find themselves, while squatting there, pondering the essential depravity of man and wondering whether old-fashioned medicine wasn't right in its theory about bad vapours.

Worse, when the wooden door creaked shut, I found myself in utter darkness – no cutout had been made to allow light or air in, forcing me to undress sightlessly, then to prop the door open an inch with one foot while balancing above the putrid hole on the other foot, skirt and paper clutched in one hand, pencil in the other, wishing I had a third to hold my nose shut, and a policeman lingering just outside to make sure I didn't pull any funny stuff in there. Nope, nothing funny about this, constable.

Hastily, I scribbled the numbers down, wondering why in the world I'd ever thought it was a good idea to see Dhaka, anyway.

Back inside, I finished writing the statement myself, to the young policeman's obvious relief, then had it signed and stamped. But the thought of an uninvestigated crime nagged at me.

Couldn't you go down to the scene of the incident yourself, I asked the captain, and just ask around whether anyone saw it happen or knows the driver? He sighed heavily, and then – apparently deciding it was easier to humour me than argue – showed me the way to his jeep.

So it was that I came to take photo number two. And then to laugh, heartily and long. Somehow, I knew I would survive to tell this tale.

Postscript: Adventures often make you value the kindness of others, in this case particularly James Pankratz – then heading MCC in Dhaka – who vouched for my worthiness to the Canadian High Commission, and the wonderful diplomat who rustled up a new passport for me in two hours flat, just before a four-day holiday, along with an impressive gold-embossed letter requesting my safe passage through the border to India despite my lack of an entry stamp. The letter is a calamity memento I'll always treasure.

.....
Doreen Martens is an editor with the Toronto Star. She lives in Mississauga with her husband, Jeff, and their two children. They attend Toronto United Mennonite Church.

*After all, an adventure's
hardly worth the name
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The Good Shepherd

by Helga Doerner

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 23: 1-4 NRSV



and guards the sheep. Every sheep is accounted for, and each one is known by name. These are essentials, as apart from the fold the sheep are at risk of getting lost or hurt. Should ever one go missing, the shepherd is committed to searching for the sheep that has lost its way. Search is also undertaken when the flock is scattered by darkness. Weak and weary sheep are attended to with special care. At the end of each day, when the flocks are drawn back to the sheepfold, the shepherd carefully counts each

For centuries the image of the Good Shepherd has captured human hearts and brought solace to unsettled souls. What is it about the image of the Good Shepherd that continues to stir the imagination of people today? Does anyone still truly know what a shepherd is, or what a shepherd does? Or is it for most of us a mere story of long ago that continues to be told with tenderness and conveys healing in the telling?

My image of the good sheep herder has grown out of biblical stories and Sunday school pictures. My image of a shepherd is that of a man of gentle nature and a compassionate presence. It is of one who will lovingly carry a sheep/lamb wrapped over his shoulders or cradled in his arms. Many biblical references to the Good Shepherd reveal that this is a part of the traditional characterization. It is these references I have pieced together to create a portrait of the Great Shepherd.

One striking characteristic of a true shepherd is that there is no risk of a mistaken identity. The true shepherd is never a stranger. Both the gatekeeper of the fold and the sheep know the shepherd. The revealing characteristic by which the sheep know their shepherd is his voice. And it is only this voice that the sheep respond to. It is this kind and gentle voice that calls the flock from the fold and leads/guides to fresh pastures.

The shepherd has multiple responsibilities. The shepherd is caretaker and protector. The shepherd guides, feeds

sheep to ensure that none have gone astray. This is the consoling and comforting security of the shepherd's care. Within this care, the sheep have no need of fear.

Our early history tells us that the word "shepherd" was used to describe more than a sheep herder. The term also referred to people in leadership, who were called to be caretakers and protectors of humanity. Prophets, priests and kings were commonly referred to as shepherds. Their roles and responsibilities paralleled those of the shepherds. At their best, shepherds of sheep and/or humanity were caretakers and protectors. They were the keepers of communities/gatherings/flocks – keeping them together and ensuring their well-being.

The parallels go even further. Two implements were associated with shepherds – the rod and the staff. It is interesting to note that they were not unlike a magician's wand or a king's scepter. Both rod and staff were considered symbols of authority. They were symbols of legal power and knowledge. They could bring blessing or judgment or drive evil away. Both the rod and the staff were also associated with kingship and divine will. A king had the responsibility of shepherding a people/nation. The Divine was the keeper/guardian of souls. These images found their way into many religious traditions, including the Christian tradition. In these traditions, the image of

shepherd was commonly equated with three male figures: the image of a caring father; the image of a king/ruler; and the image of God.

What would a good shepherd or shepherdess look like today? Imagine all people who carry the responsibility of guiding, feeding and guarding humanity. Imagine those who shepherd with integrity – whose primary intention is to build strong and healthy communities. Good shepherds are those who, through their loving and caring, infuse life with meaning. They are those who do everything possible to care well for humanity in body, mind and spirit. They are those who enable and empower humanity to live with a sense of wholeness within themselves and in relationship to the larger community.

Who might be called to the task of shepherding? Is it our governing bodies, who carry a responsibility for our common welfare? Is it the leaders within religious structures, who attend to spiritual well-being of the soul? Is it those who care for the physical or social or emotional or psychological well-being of humanity?

Perhaps everyone who assumes a position of power is also called to responsibility – called to guide, feed and guard human lives in order to create healthful communities in which no one needs to live in fear.

Many are called to the sacred trust of shepherding. Many are invited to know the responsibility of caring for others. Yet our human experience tells us that not all shepherds are true to their calling. Not everyone respects the sacredness of the trust of guiding, feeding and guarding human lives, to nurture them to their full potential. Some shepherds assume the power of their position without shouldering the responsibility. Where there is power without a correlating responsibility to care for the other, there is a risk: of breach of trust; of broken lives; of shattered communities.

What does it feel like to experience a breach of trust?

Good shepherds are those who, through their loving and caring, infuse life with meaning. They are those who do everything possible to care well for humanity in body, mind and spirit.

Have you been kept from living to your fullest potential? Have you been kept from embracing your Divine image? Have you been isolated within or outside of your community for being different? Where a sense of belonging is absent, the experience of being loved and valued may be diminished. The ache of your untold story may lie within your heart. In this state, anxiety, fear and doubt may set in. Life may lose its sense of meaning. When you are separated from yourself, or those you care for, you know the experience of living in exile. You know what it is to live far away from home.

The good news is that even today the Great Shepherd is watching. The Great Shepherd will call every shepherd to account who has breached the sacred trust of his or her calling. All who are in a positions of power or authority, yet cause humanity to live in an exiled state, will need to answer for scattering the faithful.

There is also the promise of new shepherds – ones in whom our confidence can be reborn. Guided by the Great Shepherd, the new shepherds will be true to their task of keeping the faithful together – to fostering healthy community.

The greatest news is in the promise that no one need remain in an exiled state. Though you may have experienced a breach of trust by the ones called to be our earthbound shepherds, the Great Shepherd is always keeping watch. More than that, even in exile, the Great Shepherd is present and gathers the scattered together. The faithful will be gathered up and returned to the safety and security of the fold. Do not be afraid. Do not be dismayed, for none of the flock shall be missing, says the LORD.

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Helga Doermer, a member of Sophia's editorial collective and a regular contributor to this column, is currently working at a residency in hospital chaplaincy. She and her husband have two sons, and they live in Winnipeg. Helga may be reached by e-mail at hdltnit@netscape.net.

Guides of the Soul

by Lorraine Isaak

When my first child was small, I came to observe that he would become excessively active and unreasonable when he was overtired. Reminding him to slow down or calm down got me nowhere. The only thing that did work was to grab him up while he was running full speed and hold him to myself. He would squirm and fight, using all the energy he had to try to break free of my hold. Slowly, as I calmly talked to him and he realized he could not break free, he would begin to relax, and eventually would lean against my body and fall asleep.

That's what happened to me the spring of 2001. I was running full tilt with my life and career when God, my creator and parent, picked me up and stopped me. We would call it burnout, stress leave, or a sab-batical, but I have come to see it as a warning to look at my soul.

Parker Palmer in *Let Your Life Speak* says, "One sign that I am violating my own nature in the name of nobility is a condition called burnout. Though usually regarded as the result of trying to give too much, burnout in my experience results from trying to give what I do not possess" (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publ., 2000, p 9). That was a sobering reality, and I began to ask, "What then is my own nature?" The answer to that question lies in beginning to look at the soul I have been given, and the God who gave it.

Let's take a minute to define this soul. David Benner, in *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*, reminds us that the "soul is the meeting point of the psychological and spiritual." "Soul is the most common translation of the Hebrew word *nepesh* and the Greek word *psyche*. In the Old Testament, for example, the meanings of *nepesh* range from life, inner person (particularly thoughts, feelings and passion), to the whole person, including the body. Modern biblical scholars suggest that the best single word for *nepesh* and *psyche* is either person or self" (Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Books, 2000,

pp 13, 22). Christians today are often suspicious of modern spirituality which has focused heavily on the soul. What is more sobering is that Christian spirituality has so neglected the soul. Read Scripture, especially the Psalms, and you will be invited into the soul journey of other believers.

Just as I couldn't trust my son to lie down and sleep when he needed to, I couldn't trust myself to do what was best for my soul. I recently went to see the movie, "A Beautiful Mind." This movie portrays the life of Dr. John Nash, who was afflicted with schizophrenia, and who could not

tell the difference between reality and fantasy. I realized on a soul level that I was just like Dr. Nash; I didn't have the spiritual eyes to see what was lifegiving to my soul and what was toxic.

I began to ask myself, "Where are the road maps, the markers, the signs that would say, 'Yes, you are on

I began to ask myself, "Where are the road maps, the markers, the signs that would say 'Yes, you are on the right road'?"

the right road"? I was reminded of two winters ago, when my husband and I went to our familiar Mexican city, Mazatlan. We were heading towards our hotel when a couple approached us, looking as afraid and startled as deer caught in car headlights. They had never been to Mazatlan before, and in their adventuring had become disoriented. By the time they approached us, they were quite exhausted and fearful. Because my husband and I had been there numerous times, we were able to calm their fears, provide them with a cab, and give them advice that would make the rest of their stay enjoyable.

Fortunately, there have been guides for the Christian soul seeker since the time of the Desert Fathers. Many Catholic and other contemplatives have left numerous writings to light the way. I invite you to begin with a few contemporary writers who have been part of my discovery: Henri Nouwen, Thomas H. Greene, Parker Palmer, Alan Jones, Kathleen Norris, and Richard Rohr.

You may recognize that you have had soul guides throughout your life, including family, friends, Sunday school teachers, and pastors. When these haven't been able



to adequately address your inner psychological pain and longings, you may have gone to see counsellors and other mental health professionals. Contemplatives, such as Richard Rohr and Thomas Greene, direct us to a journey best described through the metaphor of a river. God is our river. Our soul delights as it realizes that it can let go, and trust in the river's flow. Rohr, in *Everything Belongs*, suggests faith does not need to push the river, because faith is able to trust that the river is flowing, and we flow in it. Thomas Greene, in *Drinking from a Dry Well*, says that our tendency is to start swimming, rather than allowing God to move us as we abandon ourselves to the river.

In my own experience, floating in God's river is much more difficult than swimming. Not tiring, for I have not experienced such rest for a very long time. But difficult, because everything in my "self" and in my culture, including my religious culture, suggests that we have to swim and even to push the river along. I realize that if I am to be reborn spiritually, I need someone who can hold me and encourage me, like a midwife helping me be spiritually reborn – a midwife of the soul. There are laypersons, pastors and counsellors out there who are in the river and who can assist you. The group of individuals who have experienced this journey, and who are specifically trained to assist others in their journey, are called

"spiritual directors." For those unfamiliar with the concept of spiritual direction, I encourage you to read *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* by Margaret Guenther. She, as well as David Benner, includes the qualities you need to look for in the person you choose to direct you.

Margaret Guenther says, "The person seeking spiritual direction is on a journey. Since the expulsion from Eden, we have been a people on the move.... Spiritually, too, we cannot make it through the desert or across the frontier alone, but must depend on the kindness of strangers....our sisters and brothers in Christ. They are the hosts...who sustain us on the journey, our spiritual friends and directors" (Cambridge, Mass., Cowley, 1992, pp 9-10).

Every person has a set of events, voices or angels that invite them back to their soul journey. Mine was like my son's experience of being "made to lie down." One thing I know is true: the Lord is my shepherd – the shepherd of my soul. This truth invites me to receive the guidance that is offered me, to eat at the table provided for me, to celebrate and live!

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Lorraine Isaak, wife, mother and counsellor, offers "soul care" and is presently in training to become a spiritual director. She attends South Abbotsford MB Church.



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The paintings on this page and the back cover are done by Melaney Robins. Melaney is a Winnipeg painter, many of whose paintings are inspired by the west shore of Lake Winnipeg. She teaches art in public schools, and her paintings may be seen at Art Expo, the Mennonite Heritage Gallery, 1st Corydon and Woodlands Galleries. Melaney attends Gloria Dei Lutheran Church and Grain of Wheat Community Church.



MENTORING IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS IN WHICH ONE PERSON HAS LASTING INFLUENCE ON THE OTHER AND BECOMES A ROLE MODEL.

ON TIES THAT TEACH

this warm morning the women and children of the Peters family are busy in the kitchen pickling cucumbers.

Every Tuesday the three married daughters

and the daughter-in-law, together with their children, gather at the parents' farm in this Mennonite farming community. While the men go about their usual business on their farms or in one of the small businesses in the area, the women have their own "work day" in the family kitchen or living room. Each of the young women brings some work along, usually sewing, vegetables and fruits for canning or some ingredients for a large batch of baking. While they visit and work together, the children play outside under the supervision of one of the adults or one of the older children. As the women exchange the latest news about their family and the community, they seem relaxed and content. Advice is freely given on such issues as removing stains from clothes, what pattern to use for a new dress, how to get the new baby to sleep through the night or how to stay in relationship with a difficult neighbour. At the end of the day they prepare supper together and the men join them for a fellowship meal around the family table. That ends the regular Tuesday "work day" for these women.

A little over a year ago I had the opportunity to visit with women in a Mexican Mennonite community where regular "work days" are an important part of their family life. As I reflected on the benefits of this tradition, it occurred to me that they were nurturing wholesome and supportive relationships. As the women visited and worked together, the mother continued to have opportunity to guide and influence the decisions of her daughters and also to give some practical advice. It seems to me that we find here a relationship that can be described as natural mentoring.

Such informal mentoring does not just allow the mother to be a guiding influence in the lives of her daughters once they leave home, but it also provides the opportunity for the younger women to nurture supportive relationships with each other. In addition, the children have opportunity to form a special bond with one of their aunts who in turn becomes a role model for her niece. In our society, many young women struggle with the sense of iso-

lation as they learn to balance professional and family life. Where are the supportive relationships for professional women who struggle with ethical issues at work, or for young mothers who feel overwhelmed by the daily challenges of parenting? Although most of us cannot identify with the life in a traditional Mennonite farm community as described here, we can probably think of natural mentoring relationships that have helped us through some difficult times. Mentoring is about relationships in which one person has a lasting influence on the other and becomes a role model. This happens most naturally in a family relationship, but it can just as easily happen between an older woman and a younger woman who work together, two women who serve together on a committee at church or an aunt and her nieces.

About thirty years ago when my husband and I were college students living in residence, our first child was born. I experienced such supportive relationships with a few of the women who had experience in parenting. I valued these informal relationships of support and assistance, especially since we had no family close by. Sometimes it was a simple question about a rash on the baby's arm or at what point I should call the doctor when the baby had a fever. Other support came through our church's inter-generational Ladies' Fellowship program, which I attended. When I look back now, it is obvious that many informal mentoring relationships were established through these meetings.

Although circumstances and life styles have changed over the years, the need for supportive relationships is still very real. We may not be able to set aside one day a week to nurture such mentoring relationships, but we must be willing to invest time and energy in the life of another if we aim to influence, guide and support. We do not need to introduce the regular Tuesday work day, but the challenge for us is to be creative in finding time to connect regularly in a meaningful way with each other.

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Mary Friesen, a member of Sophia's collective, is currently working on her dissertation for her Doctor of Divinity degree. Mary is a mother and a grandmother who lives in Winnipeg and serves as Moderator at River East MB Church, where she is a member.

Love Story

a fictional account by June Wieler, based on a true story

The score was even and excitement was running high. A handsome seventeen-year-old was up to bat. Anna held her breath as she watched him take his stance at home plate. His blond curly hair partially hid his eyes as he grasped the bat and waited for a good pitch. When it came, he swung, hitting the ball squarely. It sailed over the pitcher's head into left field, beyond the reach of the fielder. Jake had hit another home run, bringing John and Martin across home plate ahead of him. Anna's heart burst with pride.

It was a beautiful evening in the summer of 1935. The young men in the Mennonite community were responding to the challenge of a French rival team that had won two of the last four games. This was a tie-breaker.

Anna had hoped Jake would walk her home. She had worn her new pink blouse with her chartreuse-and-pink paisley gored skirt and white shoes and dabbed her treasured lavender perfume on her wrists and neck. Jake's deep blue eyes glanced at her after his home run, and they smiled at each other. Anna was ecstatic. Jake's hit had put his team in the lead. Lauded by his team and encouraged by Anna's smile, he felt on top of the world. Now he could ask Anna to let him walk her home.

After the game ended in a win for the Mennonites, Jake scanned the spectators to seek her out. Yes, she was there, a picture of loveliness; light brown wavy hair, dark brown eyes with long, swept up lashes and a radiant smile. He took courage and walked up to her. They were both shy, but Anna managed to congratulate him. Then he stuttered: "C-c-could I walk you home, Anna?" Anna, not wanting to show her delight, hesitated before replying, "Oh, I suppose it would be alright."

They walked from the schoolyard to Anna's home hand in hand, discussing the game. When they neared the blooming lilac hedge, the aroma tantalized their senses. The moon had risen and was just visible over the big red barn. Jake guided her to the wooden bench beside the lilacs. They sat close to each other, so close that they could feel each other's heartbeat. Anna had known Jake ever since she could remember. He lived on a farm two and a half miles down the road with his parents and siblings.

They had attended the same one-room school, and their families had often visited together. In fact, they spent all their Christmases together at their grandparents' home. They were cousins. Each had admired the other from afar, but they had never been together alone. A tidal wave of emotions took over, and they responded to each other without restraint, overwhelmed by passion.

Next morning Anna was elated as she recalled the tender embraces of the night before. She felt loved and desirable. She couldn't help but sing as she went about her daily chores – milking, feeding the calves, separating the milk and washing all the dishes. She was anticipating seeing Jake again soon.

In late summer Anna began to feel squeamish in the mornings. She was perplexed by the strange sensation in her body – her swelling breasts, her bursts of energy and lethargy. Her mother and her older sister observed her morning sickness and became very anxious. "She couldn't be with child. That's impossible!" her mother despaired. What would the family and the community think? This would be such a disgrace.

Jake's family was notified, and Anna and Jake were forbidden to see each other. Anna's mother hoped she would miscarry as she had herself with three children. However, Anna had a healthy pregnancy. When her time came, no doctor was called. She endured many hours of hard labour

and gave birth to healthy nine-pound baby boy. She named him Gordon.

While Anna matured into a beautiful woman with a strong faith in God, Gordon suffered much abuse because of his illegitimacy, and Jake became a bitter man. Anna felt Gordon's pain, and yet, she could always be counted on to help others. She made many friends. Although Gordon became a good farmer, his first sweetheart's parents forbade her to marry him. Jake drowned his troubles in alcohol and became a recluse.

Anna lived her faith. When encouragement was needed, a letter or an affirming word was given. She could be counted on to lend a hand when illness or childbirth required it. Gordon's family benefitted when she redecorated their house, sewed clothes, took them out to eat, and much more.

They sat close to each other, so close that they could feel each other's heartbeat.



Anna loved strawberries, and every year during strawberry season she managed the picking operation of a neighbor's field, being sure to pick the choicest berries for dear friends and relatives. She was known as the camera lady at family gatherings and could be counted on to get everyone in a picture with good results. Her pictures are found in many family albums.

After Gordon was married, he and his new bride moved into the big family farm home. Anna had a smaller house built nearby and took a position as a cook in the town hospital. It is said that Anna often enquired after Jake. Although he lived only two miles away from Anna's little house they never got together.

When Anna was seventy-five years old she was stricken with cancer. Jake heard about Anna's illness. There were things that needed to be said, and now his time was running out. He became desperate to see her. His fear of being rejected was outweighed by his deep desire, and with trembling hands he picked up the phone. He was not refused.

Anna, too, longed to meet with Jake again. They

became reacquainted and discovered their love for each other had never died. Why had they waited so long? To make up for lost time, Jake visited her every day, and the joy of their reunion sustained her. She even appeared to be recovering. After she was hospitalized, he continued to stay with her for most of each day, helping to care for her. Although she was dying of cancer she looked radiant. Her facial expression mirrored her inner peace.

Influenced by Anna's deep faith in God, Jake began to accept that way for himself. He gave up alcohol and began to communicate with family and neighbours. Though he suffered a great loss when Anna died, his memories of the love they had shared and his newfound faith in God sustained him and gave him hope.

When Jake died suddenly two years after Anna, he was buried by her side in the family plot. They share one tombstone with the inscription: "Together in Eternity."

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June Wieler wrote this story as a Valentine's Day assignment for a creative writing class. She and her husband, Al, are members of River East MB Church in Winnipeg.

Question for Discussion:

The events that gave rise to this story took place in a time when pre-marital sex and illegitimacy were sins that left permanent marks on their perpetrators. Yet it is ultimately a story about how a woman rose above the situation she was in and extended grace to those around her. Aside from the problems of first cousins bearing children, this story raises many questions about how we treat those "caught" in sin. As you think about how society and the church have dealt with this question, what changes do you see? What has remained the same?

Sophia welcomes your response to this discussion, or to any other subject raised in this issue. Address letters, faxes and e-mails to the addresses listed on the inside cover of the magazine.

A Gift of Poetry from Siberia

by Katie Funk Wiebe

When I was a child in the little village of Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan, at long intervals my mother received letters from relatives in the Ukraine. Mother and Dad had migrated in 1923. Mother's brother and wife came a few years later. Ten siblings and parents were left behind.

I was troubled by these letters written on very thin paper, filled with what looked like hen scratches. No tiny spot was left empty. Mother often cried for days after receiving one. Little did I realize then that some day I would read these letters. My uncle's wife, Lena Janzen, had painstakingly copied each letter from 1923 to 1957 into notebooks. These notebooks gave me a rare glimpse into the lives of my unknown relatives in a troubled land.

I was drawn to the poems in these letters and surprised to learn that my Janzen relatives were poetry lovers. In times of deep distress during the Stalinist years, and later, in Siberia, they found comfort and courage in the special language of poetry, sometimes copied, sometimes self-composed. It is difficult sometimes to distinguish between the two. Consolation was far more important then than copyright.

I have collected 22 poems and a few fragments. The first poem arrived in a letter dated Feb. 7, 1930, written in the Sagradowka colony by Aunt Neta's husband, Hans Block. His words are frank: they still have enough to eat but rationing has begun. Tobacco is unavailable. My grandfather was a heavy smoker and the lack of tobacco was making him edgy. Collectives were being formed, writes

Hans. Levies had become more demanding. The poem was written by G.C. in Moscow. Hans Block suggests reading the poem carefully for it conveys "a lot." He alludes to certain people as being "gone." The poem says why.

From behind thick walls
A stranger's eyes peer down on me.
Keys jangle endlessly,
Guards stride to and fro.
Round and round steal the footsteps.
My poor heart beats fearfully.



Hark! A bell peals as it did years ago
 And it comforts the deepest hurt.
 The poet hears heavenly bells ringing the Christmas message of peace and goodwill. His heart no longer despairs, for another Guard is watching him.

Behind thick walls
 People are lying as if in a grave
 But we need have no fear,

A Watchman walks to and fro.

This poem with subtle political overtones was sent by a male relative. Published poetry by Mennonites in the Ukraine prior to World War I and shortly thereafter in Canada was written mostly by men. Exceptions are the numerous poems by women included in the *Mosaiken oder Bunte Steinchen gesammelt in den Steppen Sued-Russlands* section of D.M. Hofer's *Die Hungersnot in Russland* (1927).

The poems in my letter collection were sent primarily by my aunts, one reason being that the men had been conscripted into the Russian army and killed or deported. These aunts seldom voice overt political criticism or protest, or anger about their victimization in hard labour camps with little food in heavy industry in the Kazakhstan area. There is little mention of evil, although Satan is mentioned as tempter of the soul, not as instigator of structural evil. These poems were never intended for literary enjoyment, only for spiritual solace. They are not Literature with a capital L.

Some treasured poems, not always identifying the poet, were copied and exchanged with friends and relatives. Bible verses, pages of an *Abreiss-kalender* and poetry were the prime sources of spiritual nurture at a time when church services were forbidden.

The poems can be categorized by themes. Several are *Gelegenheitsgedichte* (occasional poems), dear to the Mennonite soul even later on in Canada. Aunt Tina Klassen, exiled in 1931 to the Perm area with her preacher husband, writes a poem for her brother Jasch Janzen's birthday in Canada. In this 24-line poem she "yearns to fly" to him and "refresh herself" on his breast. She comforts herself that they are both walking in "the Shepherd's pastures."

Funerals and special occasions like Christmas and New Year also brought forth poems. The poetry helped the composer/copier to convey deep grief at the death of a family member and to overcome sorrow. At what should be festive occasions, poems possibly memorized at an earlier age, recall a better and more joyous time. The language is usually simple, the tone pietistic, the imagery most often drawn from the Bible (fortress, pasture, elements of nature). The faith expressed is uncomplicated theologi-

cally, a theme I plan to deal with in a future article.

Most of the poems are prayer poems for courage, for assurance of God's presence, for strength to bear disappointment and loneliness while separated from loved ones. Aunt Truda Koop writes about their trauma, using the persona of a spokesperson for all people in Siberian exile. Poetry becomes a more satisfying vehicle to publicly express her loneliness than prose.

How difficult our life is,

How scattered we are.

We can't grasp each other's hand.

Often I think of you among my tears.

Much beloved ones.

I can't quiet my heart

I want to be with you so much.

Yet we don't want to get discouraged

Even in dark, sorrowful times.

We only want to speak to our God.

He is with us all the time.

This desperate longing to be with family bursts forth in numerous poems. The aunts know they are trapped in the far north. One aunt berates herself for not having left for America when my parents did. Why didn't they leave then? My mother told me there were various reasons: They were sure times would improve. Grandpa Janzen feared a medical examination, for he had a rupture.

He also feared moving to a land where Indians still roamed the plains. Several letter writers wonder why loved ones don't write. They beg for letters. Their whole lives are wrapped up in words from relatives, immediately shared with others.

The longing to be back in the Ukraine, the homeland, is also apparent. Verses from the hymn "*Heimat fuer Heimatlose*" are quoted several times. Aunt Martha (later Froese) writes:

I am sad, tired and without hope,

And sing the songs of our homeland

And can't cry enough to stop the sorrow.

Aunt Suschen Janzen writes with poignancy about the loss of her homeland in a letter dated Sept. 2, 1956. Six sisters were exiled to Siberia in 1945. Five managed to live in the same vicinity. Three sisters and three daughters lived together in one room for a time. Life consisted of long hours of work, a little time snatched from sleep to prepare a little food (sometimes only potatoes), wash and mend clothes, sleep a few hours, and rise again to difficult labour, beyond the strength of undernourished women. Life had no leisure moments. When did Aunt Suschen compose this poem?

Continued on page 20 ►

*In times of deep distress
 during the Stalinist years,
 and later, in Siberia, they
 found comfort and courage
 in the special language of
 poetry, sometimes copied,
 sometimes self-composed.*

Voices From The Past

Continued from page 19

The wind blows over the fields of our beloved homeland
And rustles in the fields, bushes, with a deep
sorrowful tone,
It speaks of bygone days when joy and prosperity ruled
And of many tears and moans:
How one and then another was imprisoned and exiled.
All had to wander to an unknown land.
Husband was torn from wife and child.
Many mothers don't know where their children are.

Yearning and moaning fill the heart of many
young persons,
Wrested, with hot tears, from their parents' bosom.
The wind sweeps through the streets of our old home.
(I can't stop telling our story.)
The gardens lie deserted, the houses are gone,
And those who used to live there
Now wander hither and yon in a strange land.
They look for a home but can't find one.
But they shouldn't weep, only look ahead,
Beyond the stars, where there is room for all.
There the weary will find rest from their struggle
and conflict,
There they will find peace for all eternity.

After having been sick for several weeks Aunt Lena Bergman wrote a long poem in which she pleads with God to abide with her "for darkness descends, the noisy day is over." She wants to go home. She pleads with God to take her weary heart to its rest. She was lying on ragged bed linens, alone during the day, for the others had to work. She couldn't eat the coarse food; no medical attention was available for her condition, probably cancer. Her sisters describe her death and funeral in detail. Two of them included Aunt Lena's poem to my parents. Funerals were always described at length.

Though unlearned in literary craftsmanship, the sisters felt burdened to express the darkness of their spirits intensified by the political darkness as well as the natural darkness of the long Siberian night. My aunts will have had some education in girls' schools in the Ukraine. Their

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from loved ones.*



father (my grandfather) was an avid reader and storyteller. They may have recalled a few poems in the German romantic tradition and tried to pattern their poems after them.

Few poems break out with a show of strength of spirit. I believe the following poem was written by Aunt Neta Janzen Block, whose individual stamp is on several other poems. When I visited her in 1989 in Russia, the shelves of her daughter's home where she was living were lined with books. She had read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and loved to discuss ideas. She was a forthright person, quickly speaking her mind, but also a staunch Christian and adherent of the Mennonite Brethren church until that was no longer possible. She refused to join a registered church. She commented: "Have we endured all this for no reason?" "Hope is a fighter and screamer," writes contemporary poet Mary Oliver. Aunt Neta Block screams her hope despite daunting circumstances.

If I didn't hope, I couldn't live.
God has given me hope in my heart.
May it remain steadfast like my love and faith.
No power of the world can take it away from me.
When I am sick I hope for recovery;
For every riddle I hope for a solution;
For every task, the means to do it.
In difficult times I hope for a way through.
In the driest desert I hope for an oasis,
In the dark nights for the dawn,
When I am struggling, for a victory,
And when I lose something I hope for a finding.
When something fades, for a renewal,
So that spring remains in my spirit.
After a serious disagreement, I hope for reconciliation,
And a little laughter after bitter tears.
For each good wish I hope for fulfillment,
For every erring way a return.

For every seed I joyfully sow
 I hope that its fruit will bring me joy.
 With every pain I hope I hope that at the end
 There will be joy and peace coming my way.
 My heart hopes for balm for every wound,
 And after a noisy day, a time of peace.
 I hope that when I grow weary on my way
 I find a heart I can lean against.
 I hope in the darkness for light and clarity
 And that in the end truth will prevail.
 If I have sinned on my pilgrim way
 I hope for the Saviour's free grace.
 Yes, I hope for answers to prayer,
 After a long night for the red morning glow;
 After every separation, a coming together,
 And after death, a resurrection.

Aunts Lena Bergman, Tina Klassen, Suschen Janzen, Martha Wiens all died in Siberia. Aunt Neta Block made her final home in Moscow with a daughter. Aunt Gertruda Koop and daughter and her family and Aunt Mariechen Froese with husband and children migrated to Germany under the *Umsiedler* program. My uncles died in the war or in prison. One uncle died in Siberia. All of the aunt's husbands except for one died during the war. They were all familiar with suffering. Poetry allowed them to say "I hurt" and look for comfort.

.....
Katie Funk Wiebe is a well-known Mennonite Brethren author. After teaching English at Tabor College for 24 years, she is renewing her interest in church and family history. This is the first of three articles about her aunts who were exiled to Siberia following World War II.

LETTERS

I'm writing to express my joy and gratitude. Your anniversary issue was tops! What an encouragement it is to me every time I read your magazine. It keeps me inspired long after I've set it down. And this last copy was especially meaningful.

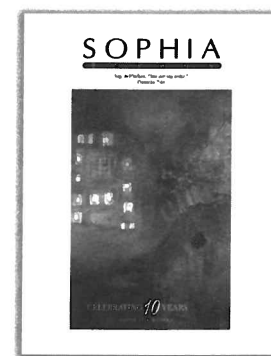
I treasure each issue of *Sophia*, who always lifts my spirits and my Oma's too, and my sisters' and my mom's. It is such good reading for all of us women. As a woman and as a pastor *Sophia* gives me fresh courage to keep going forward despite the obstacles in my path. Thank you wonderful women who write articles and send in stories, and more wonderful women who put it all together for the rest of us. Thank you, *Sophia*, for your wisdom.

Anita Schroeder Kipfer
 Cambridge, Ontario

Back Issues

Back issues of Sophia are available for sale for \$2 each, plus postage (\$1, Canada, \$1.50, US).

Volume 1- *sold out*
 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 - sold out*
 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*
 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?*
 11:3 - *Celebrating Ten Years*
 11:4 - *From the Maritimes*



I belong to a group of five women. We mentor each other using the guidelines from Spiritual Directors International (SDI). Our director Pam is a trained spiritual director, and she prayed for guidance to begin a group in our church. During her prayer time, she asked God to bring people to mind for the group, so, when she invited us to join her, she told us that we were "chosen by God." I like that.

Spiritual direction, or mentoring, can mean many things, but for me it has become the discipline of listening to my four friends in this group and learning how to pay attention to God. Seeking God is the communal focus, and we support each other in our seeking.

Each month we take turns choosing a topic to study. It could be a verse from scripture, an article on spirituality or a hymn. When we come together each month we each have twenty minutes to respond to the topic, with a time of silence before each presentation. For our responses, we refer to notes taken in our journals, and so journaling is a very important aspect of preparing for our monthly meetings.

In our group we have a nonverbal symbol that represents the Holy. Our symbol is a candle. We begin each session by lighting the candle. A nonverbal symbol can also be the Bible, or a plant, or a cross or maybe water; something chosen by the group that represents the Holy for them.

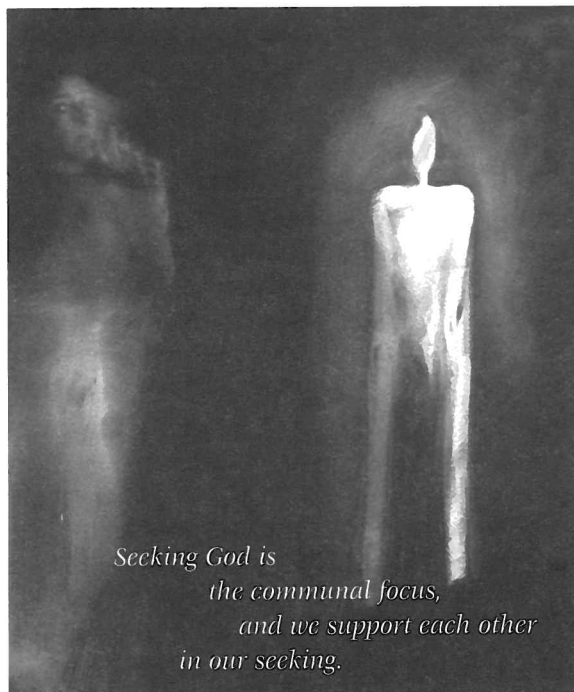
In our group we make a distinction between spiritual direction and problem solving. Spiritual direction always happens in the context of prayer and spiritual intimacy. Problem solving or counselling occurs because something is wrong in our lives such as abuse, addiction, or poor self image, and it is the crisis that brings people together. In spiritual direction the assumption is that the person is on a journey to wholeness and wants to know self in relation to

God. And while problems do get solved in the process, our focus is not to solve problems.

In preparation for our twenty-minute presentations, we have all taken a seminar (given at our church) on centering prayer – or the discipline of meditation. We studied Father Thomas Keating's books and viewed his videos. It was something new for me, to learn centering, and now it

is my huge goal. While I don't do it very well, I'm working hard to learn this. In my centering, I am focusing on "creating a room of my own" where I *listen*. I do not ask for anything and I am trying to learn how to pay attention. I can't remember where I learned that phrase "creating a room of my own," but I like that concept of creating my very own space for listening to, being with, the God within; a place of *silence* where I listen. I've learned that my mind is quite noisy most of the time – solving problems, making grocery lists, planning schedules, inventing mental forms for my next painting, etc., etc. and I hum songs all the time and if I can't think of a song to hum, I make it up – *noise*. My goal is to become quiet. The very few times I have managed it, I have enjoyed that moment of

attentiveness. And I've come away with a knowing: I know something that I didn't know before – something with no words I can put to it, but it's a something that I find relaxes my face muscles – a peace enters my being. And so, I say that I have made some advancement in this past year. My body feels and functions better, and that tells me that centering and my spiritual guidance group are good for me.



Guiding Each Other

by Estér DeFehr

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Estér DeFehr, publisher of Sophia, is an artist, a mother and a grandmother, who lives with her husband, Dave, in North Carolina. They attend St. Patrick's Episcopal Church.



A BROTHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Called Alongside

By Cam Copeland

Ross always seems to phone during the evening meal hour, when I am least anxious to talk. I stifle the inclination to remind him once again that he is in a different time zone and that it would be preferable if he would call a little later. An eighty-three-year-old man, his early memories remain precise, but his current ones are much less so, and his judgement and problem-solving skills have declined significantly.

Every call involves a current, oft-repeated crisis, whether it be a physical ailment, a recent car accident, extreme loneliness or onerous living conditions, Ross recounts in lengthy detail each predicament that weights heavily on him. He has no remaining family and no friends close by that have not long ago distanced themselves, so I muster up as much patience as possible while the remainder of my meal languishes on the kitchen table.

I used to imagine that most seniors with job and family issues long since passed must live peacefully and contentedly. But this fancy was shattered when my own mother experienced similar phone-focused crises after the death of my father. It was a shock to me that seniors might need mentoring, too.

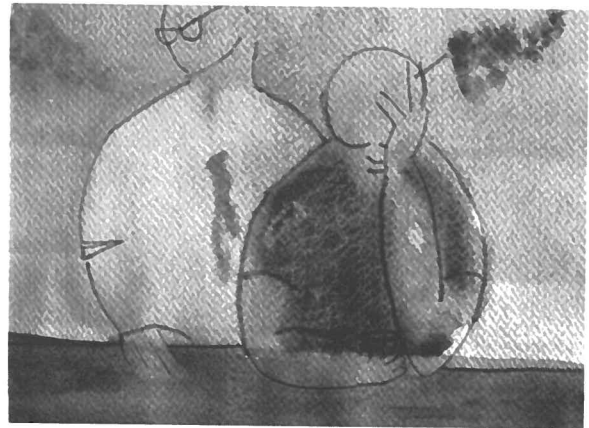
It is a great blessing to have someone come alongside to encourage, praise or gently reprove (see 2 Timothy 3:16). How well I remember the businessman who came to visit me in my college dormitory shortly

after I accepted Jesus Christ into my heart and life, over 40 years ago. He invited me out to church and then to the coffee shop at the local bus depot (Kingston, Ontario), where we spent many enjoyable, late-evening hours over the next year, talking about the Christian life. When he

drove me back to the college, we would spend some time in prayer for other students who were searchers, and with whom he was also developing similar relationships.

Being a lonely military college

It is a great blessing to have someone come alongside to encourage, praise or gently reprove (see 2 Timothy 3:16).



student, far away from my family in Winnipeg, those times of sharing and praying had a strong influence in encouraging a Christian lifestyle and a desire to be a supporter of others.

Maybe by now you have guessed that Ross and the businessman are the same person.

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Cam Copeland works at the Union Gospel Mission of Winnipeg as Director of their Family Life Centre, which ministers to the needs of the inner-city population.

SHELF LIFE

When the Heart Waits: Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions

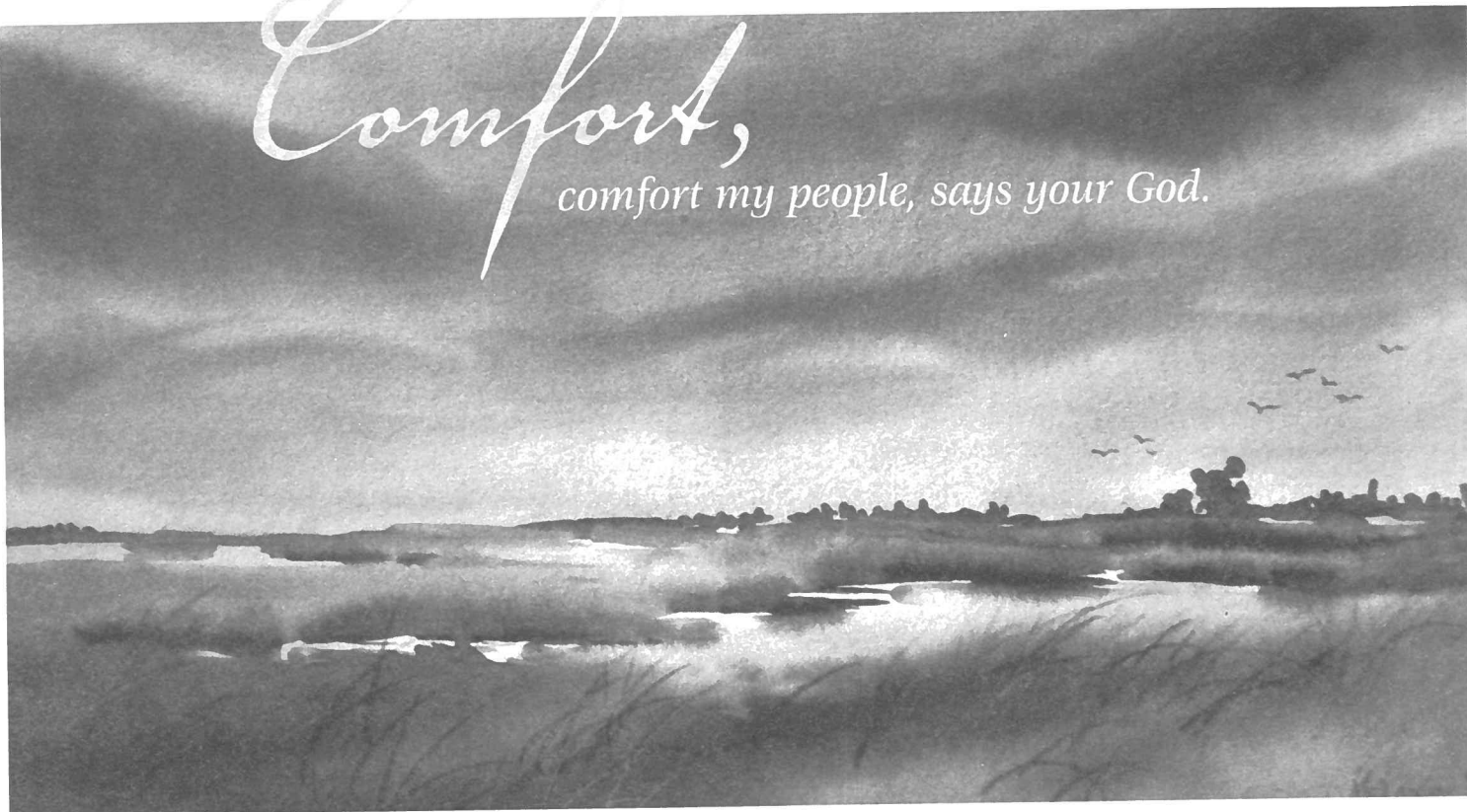
.....
by Sue Monk Kidd,
Harper Collins, 1992.

Reviewed by Carol Macpherson

In *When the Heart Waits*, Sue Monk Kidd describes her own journey through the complexities of change. Using the imagery of the larva within the cocoon and its powerful metamorphosis into a new creation, a butterfly, Kidd chronicles her own passage of inner transformation. Kidd's emphasis

is on the power of waiting, not as a passive process but "as the passionate and contemplative crucible in which new life and spiritual wholeness can be birthed." With thoughtfulness and care, Kidd focuses on inner transformation with God in the centre of one's soul. The resulting creation is a new way of being and relating, a new existence. The butterfly, and we, can only emerge once the work is complete – this cannot be rushed or there will be no flight. Kidd gently takes the reader through the sacred questions of life and in doing so has written a book that is like a warm cloak around the heart that waits.

Comfort,
comfort my people, says your God.



*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her that her hard service
has been completed,
that her sin has been paid.*

ISAIAH 40:1-2A NIV