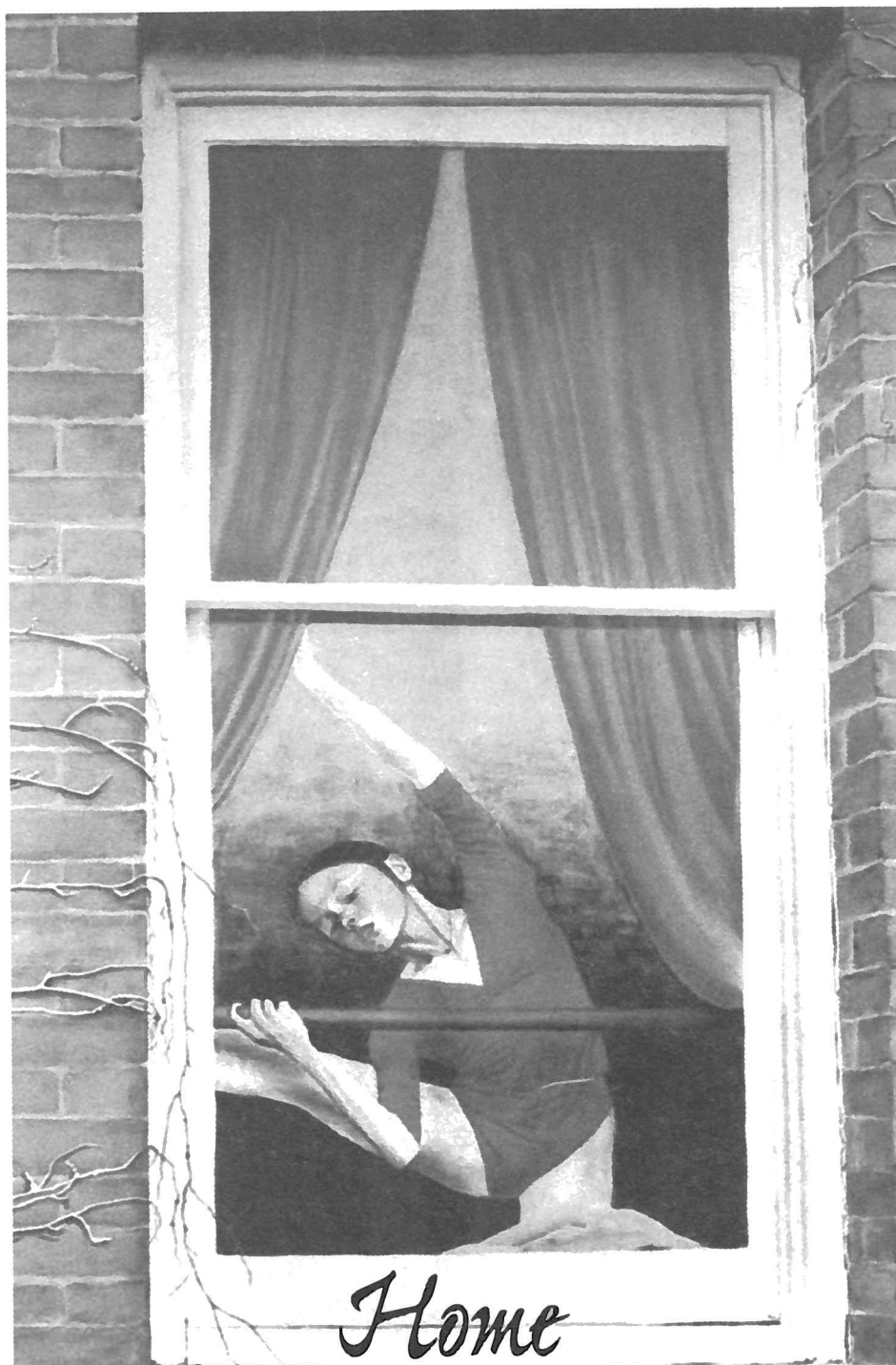


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S O P H I A

W I S D O M

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



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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).



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 **PALLISER®**

The picture on the cover is "The Ballerina" (Oil, 1995) by Cindy Nagant, member of Sainte-Rose MB Church in Montreal. Cindy,

her husband, Patrice, and children are great travellers. They never have been afraid to leave the security of their home and experience new things.





Where is Home?

by Lori Matties

We are very pleased to offer a Quebec issue of *Sophia* in this our fifth annual "regional" issue. Many thanks to compilers Elaine Reimer Paré and Annie Brosseau who chose as their theme, "home." Elaine writes:

We have noticed that many people have to deal with job-related transfers, children leaving home to make other homes, moving to safer countries /neighbourhoods, following a spouse for education /school reasons, work opportunities, etc. Many of our churches have members who have moved to the area from other places; Montreal, especially, is a very multicultural city, and has become a home for refugees and immigrants from around the world. Annie and I thought that this theme could connect with people on a variety of levels.

Annie and Elaine have written and gathered a number of articles that explore this theme of home, from such perspectives as that of a refugee, of one who has returned home, of one who has moved to the hometown of a spouse, of

a biblical concept of home. All of them raise the question, "what do my physical surroundings mean to me, and how do they influence my character and my well-being? It is a subject that women, in particular, I think, have long pondered as the traditional keepers of the role of "homemaker" in their families and societies. What does it mean to make a home? How do we make a home for ourselves and our loved ones in a world that seems

increasingly mobile and temporary? How do we survive when all that we understood as "home" is shattered or has disappeared?

I left my hometown of Edmonton in 1978, intending to spend a year of post-graduate studies at Regent College in Vancouver and then to return. As often happens with well-laid plans, however, a single year away was not to be. One year at Regent stretched into three as I worked to complete a master's degree. I got engaged during that time, and my fiancé began studies at Vanderbilt University, so after we married in the summer of 1981 we moved to Nashville, Tennessee. Toward the end of his studies he received an invitation to apply for a teaching job at Mennonite Brethren Bible College. We were excited to go there – after 3 years in the southern United States, Win-

nipeg seemed so close to "home."

Winnipeg, it turns out, is not all that close to home, at least in terms of accessibility to family. Every feast and holiday reminds us of the distance between us and our

loved ones. Much of our vacation time is spent travelling to and from Edmonton and Abbotsford. And the longer we do this, the more we discover that "home" is a moving target. Our parents and siblings travel too, both physically and experientially, so that when we meet we are never the same people we were the last time we were together. It's hard to keep up.

And of course, one can't live happily always thinking home is

somewhere else. Eventually one has to make home where one is. I am a transplant not only to Winnipeg but also to the Mennonite world in which I live, and it has taken these eighteen years to forge and discover a place for myself in this tightknit family. Many factors have contributed both to the dis-ease and to the gradual ease with which I live and work here. My children, born and raised here, feel ownership of both the city and their Mennonite community. My church, with all its tribal habits, has moved over and made a place for me. Perhaps most important is that I am learning to be at home in my own skin. In all these places I discover God, who has been welcoming me home the whole time.

The physical world, wherever we find ourselves, is always a partial and temporary home. Of this I was reminded again, as I and many others accompanied our friend Heidi Koop on her final journey home. Heidi was set free from a long journey with cancer on September 18. Heidi contributed artwork (Cover 6:1) and two articles to *Sophia* ("The Philos Factor: Familiarity or Friendship?", 8:1; and "A Decade of Transformation," 11:3). In her writing, as in her life, Heidi challenged the status quo. She was the first MB woman to complete a Master of Divinity degree (Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 1978), breaking ground for many who came after her. Her life was full of challenges and she faced each one bravely. I am glad she has finally reached her true and permanent home.

May the articles and artwork in this issue draw us closer to our sisters in Quebec, and may they be inspiring and encouraging in our ongoing journey home. As always, happy reading.

*The physical world,
wherever we find
ourselves, is always
a partial and
temporary home.*

Finding Roots in Mobile Homes

by Elaine Reimer Paré

My grandma never saw Ukraine with her own eyes, but she always recognized it as the place of her heritage. When I was in university, I had the chance to take a short study trip to Ukraine. My grandma did not request traditional painted eggs or handmade linens for her souvenir but rather handed me a jar and said, "Bring me some dirt from my homeland."

From her mobile home in central California, my grandma felt rooted in the remote villages of Ukraine, in the land that had provided for her parents and grandparents. Like many Mennonites, her ancestors were forced to move from one home to another in search of peace and fertile land. My faith heritage has always been a pillar of stability in my life, yet I was reminded at this summer's Conference of Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches that the grounded foundation I have treasured is, in fact, built on a "moving" people who have been forced to relocate and reconstruct their homes for generations. In spite of these constant changes in physical location, Mennonites have been able to foster a certain stability and security that continues to nurture the identity of their communities.

The question of home and identity has become more important to me as I have wrestled with the ways in which my own move from California to Quebec continues to have an impact on me as an individual. American writer Edith Wharton filled her fiction with travelers and expatriates who were enriched by their experiences away from home – as long as they remained grounded in their native home culture and identity. How



CINDY NAGANT: "ON THE ROAD THROUGH THE HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS" (PASTEL, 1993)

God's exile with the Judeans provided a stronghold for the people, preserving their faith and communal identity.

can one travel and build new homes without losing the tradition and stability of one's native home?

Although Scripture does not provide clear-cut solutions to the implications of living in a mobile society, it does offer countless stories of journey and exile. A thematic crux of the Old Testament centres on the relationship between people and land, embodied in God's covenant with God's people and the gift of a promised land.

When exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar, the Judeans were forced to leave their land and, most importantly, their place of worship – the temple of Jerusalem. Without a firm grounding such as this, many of God's people were suscep-

tible and vulnerable, easily assimilating into outside communities where they relinquished their faith and belief system in order to adopt the traditions of others. The exile of the Judeans, as recounted in the last chapters of 2 Kings and in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, reveals how essential it was for the people to remain faithful to their land, for it was the place where they were reminded of

their identity as a community and of the God they served. Recognising the threat that the exile posed to the Judeans, God chose to leave the temple and to move from the land with the exiled people.

Ezekiel's vision of the departure of the glory of God from the temple (Ez 10) indicates that God did not perish with the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. On the contrary, God could now be worshipped outside the temple, for God followed the people in exile, into a foreign land where the worship of other gods was the norm. God's exile with the Judeans provided a stronghold for the people, preserving their faith and communal identity while far away from their homeland. Having been accompanied by God throughout their time away from their homeland, the Judeans returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their home with a strong sense of their identity as a people – an identity now centered on their God, rather than on their land or the temple.

Like the Judeans, the Mennonites were escorted by God throughout their journeys, whether moving to another home, facing exile, or wandering homeless. While their moves may have brought insecurity and doubt, they recognised God's omnipresence and, as a

result, their journeys are memorialised with stories of faith. My grandma's request for Ukrainian soil was not so much for the opportunity to touch the land as it was to connect herself with what it represented – a heritage of people who had suffered through difficult times, but who had remained devoted and courageous nevertheless, fully aware that their God was a God who would move with them, no matter where they chose to build their homes.

.....
Elaine Reimer Paré earned a MA degree in English from McGill University and currently teaches literature at John Abbott College in Montreal. She and her husband, Marc, attend Église chrétienne de Saint-Laurent, a French-speaking MB church in Montreal.

March 15, 1998

by Diane Tucker

gulls –
 garbage angels
 raw-throat angels
 ride their harbour clouds
 play the wind like harps
 over their ragged chorus

gulls span the space between
 this shore and the far one
 endore the undulating grey expanse
 with roundeyed floating angels

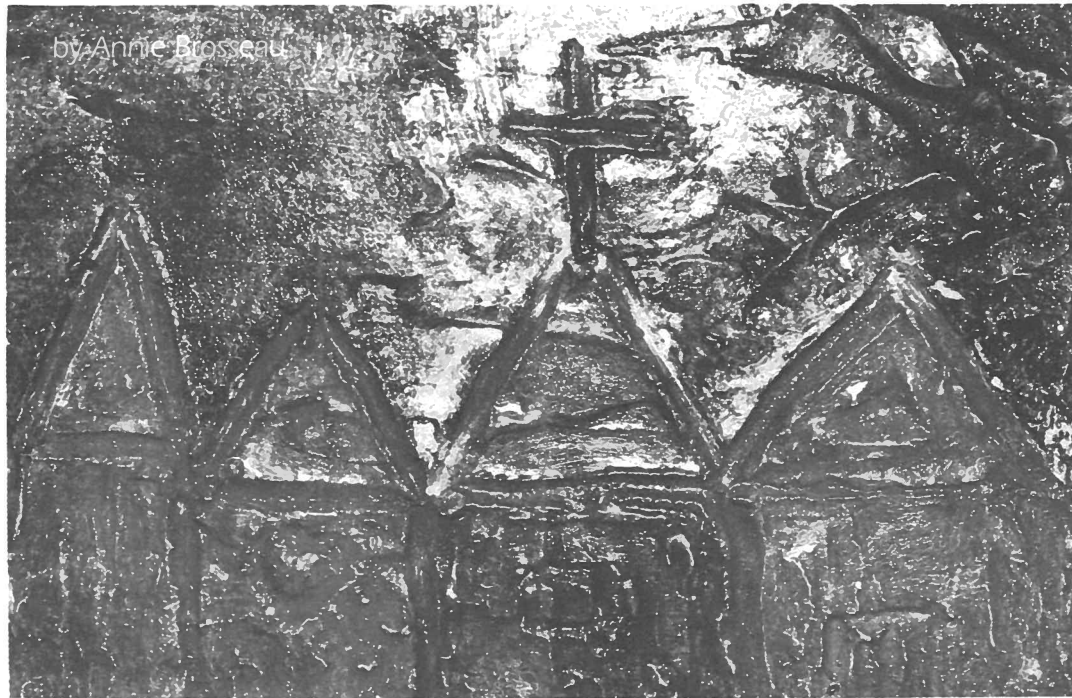
I came to this appointed spot to meet you
 under clouds chastened empty by the storm
 above the oily harbour
 above the boats waiting with tied-up eyes

waiting here
 at the high railing
 watching the gulls – blessed gulls!
 mix up the rain-rattled air
 with your guitar, your breathed voices
 and the answering flute
 makes all good promises seem true again

I have to turn away then
 re-turn
 to ordinary life, and turning
 startle a gull settled
 behind me in a puddle
 he explodes in my face
 sweeps me up in his white rising
 plucks my heart in effigy
 carries my wishes to the far green shore

.....
See bio page 9.

A House With a Mission



MAGALIE OEUVAL, "MON VILLAGE"

We are doing everything we can to provide for them a home where they need not be accountable to anyone. We want them to feel safe here.

to begin the necessary process, to be guided through the administrative procedures. They also need to know that they are

welcome and, most of all, that they are safe.

Although we are familiar with the situation of forced relocation of people fleeing their war-torn countries, we do not realize the difficulty these refugees face in rebuilding their lives, the courage necessary to glue back together the fragments of a broken life. Searching for the truth on the subject, I found myself at the Juan-Moreno Centre, an emergency shelter in Montreal for women and children wishing to seek refugee status.

A transition house

The shelter is situated in an old presbytery in the Park Extension district of Montreal. There are no signs to identify the shelter; it is camouflaged in anonymity. I ring the doorbell. I have an appointment with Célestine (her name has been changed), a former resident from Cameroon who now works at the shelter. Although I felt nervous during our initial telephone conversation, she was very kind as she took the time to warn me not to interview the residents: "These women have just arrived and have not yet received an audience with the Commission of Immigration. They are afraid that the persecution has followed them all the way here. We are doing everything we can to provide for them a home where they need not be accountable to anyone. We want them to feel safe here." First discovery: the precarious situation of refugees calls for well-advised caution.

THE Juan-Moreno Refugee Centre is the only emergency shelter in Montreal devoted to the needs of women and children.

Ever since the existence of wars and persecution, ever since the prevalence of discrimination and intolerance, there have been refugees. It is the twentieth century, however, that has produced the greatest number. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1951 by the United Nations General Assembly with the mandate to resettle some 1.2 million European refugees of the Second World War. Fifty years later, we are light-years from the context in which the UNHCR was created as well as the adoption of the Geneva Convention in 1951. The UNHCR currently aids and protects over 26 million people in 140 different countries.

Last year alone, close to 22,500 refugees entered Canada. Upon arrival, half of them claimed the status of refugee as defined by the Convention and had their cases examined by the Immigration and Refugee Status Commission. Unlike the refugees who have been "sponsored," those who seek asylum do not receive any form of financial, social or family aid. The methods usually employed to exit the country of origin and come to Canada are clandestine or highly irregular, such as false papers and smuggling. Thus, they arrive exhausted, frightened and without money. They require assistance

First welcome

All of the residents of the Juan-Moreno shelter have been selected by the Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants du Montréal métropolitain (SARIMM). Every case is studied with the help of a social worker. The women selected are given legal advice to help them defend their request for immigration in a convincing manner. This initial welcome is a determining factor, and its impact has various and multiple effects on the person asking for refugee status.

Célestine, my guide in this little-known world of refugees, smiles at me. I feel welcome. She wears a suit and walks holding a cellular phone, which gives her the appearance of a business executive. Without wasting any time, she has me visit the shelter down to the little details: offices you reach by passing the laundry room and the pantry. In the main hall, there are colourful posters of the High Commissioner for Refugees displayed on the office doors. Slogans such as "If you want peace, work for justice" bring a militant-coloured atmosphere to this house inhabited by so many moving stories of injustice. Célestine explains to me that it is quite common to find refugee women who are alone. Fleeing their country, these women leave their whole world: a husband who has been murdered or is in hiding, children and parents. It is estimated that the waiting period for reuniting families varies from two to three years.

Starting from scratch with only one suitcase

On the day of my visit, there are ten women, two of whom are minors, living in the home. Célestine introduces me to two women from Ghana. One of them is wearing a beautiful yellow "boubou" revealing the round belly of an end-of-term pregnancy. There is also a female doctor from the Republic of Georgia who shares a double-occupancy room with a refugee from Liberia. This doctor, who no longer has any social status, does not even have a refugee status. Her only possession is a small suitcase that lies beside her bed. On it are the towel, toothbrush, toothpaste and bar of soap she received the day of her arrival.

The guided tour continues. I discover a very well-organized world. The house is clean, and there is plenty to eat. Everyone eats at the same time to encourage a sense of family. The residents have access to two living rooms containing television sets and a quiet area where they can telephone over-seas with calling cards. In the basement where the laundry room is situated, a large quantity of used clothes is neatly piled and stored. The residents choose what they consider suitable for them. A large locked room serves as storage space for household articles; at the end of a four- to six-week stay at the shelter, every resident leaving for her own apartment receives a saucepan, a set of dishes for two, two glasses, bed sheets and a blanket. It takes approximately four weeks to obtain Form 14442, which grants them an embryonic identity in Canada as well as access to emergency health services. It also provides a provincial certifi-

cate giving them the right to social aid and a social insurance card. Obtaining refugee status may take from six to twelve months. The process is accelerated when a person has in her possession proof of persecution in her country of origin.

One house, one mission

Nuns opened the doors of the Juan-Moreno shelter in 1993. The shelter was named after a Salvadorian priest who was assassinated in 1989 by the Salvadoran military. In 1986, father Moreno spoke these words at a congress: "In this world, someone must pay the price for fighting in favour of the poor – a price that consists essentially of sharing the same destiny: contempt, oppression and repression." When the time came to find a name for the shelter, it was the speaker of these words that the nuns chose. In the year 2002, the shelter has welcomed 128 women and 49 children originating from 26 different countries. Thus, the heart of Juan Moreno still beats.

Delighted with the quality of the services offered by the shelter but also profoundly touched by the deprivation of these women, I make peace with the fact that there does not exist, when it comes to seeking asylum, a "best solution" but solely some "less worse solutions."

Choices for the future

The story of Célestine, like that of so many of the residents of the Juan-Moreno shelter, proves that a refugee, if she receives help on time, can find work and participate in the social and economic life of her host country. The Juan-Moreno Centre definitely bears fruit. Nonetheless, the shelter remains precarious, and the pursuit of its mission depends on the generosity of partnership organizations and private donors. The protection of the refugees challenges our capacity to welcome and share.

Canada has been looked on as a model by the United Nations because groups of citizens massively sponsored the boat people in 1979, but refugee status is no longer recognized quite as liberally in Canada. The present phenomenon of exile of some 26 million people causes concern within the government, who fears suffering repercussions. September 11th has worsened the situation and has constrained Canada into harmonizing its visa application policies to those of the United States. Will the seekers of refugee status be forced to rely more and more on clandestine means to get what they wish to obtain? How do we welcome strangers in this type of climate? We can no longer ignore what is going on elsewhere and we are condemned to solidarity. For better or worse, we must open our doors...

.....
Annie Brosseau is the editor of Le Lien, the French periodical of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. She is a member of l'Église chrétienne de Saint-Eustache in Montreal. This article and the next one were first published in Le Lien in February 2002, vol 20, no 9. They have been translated from French to English by Ginette Rolland, member of Saint-Jérôme MB Church and coordinator of "Femmes en action" (Women's concerns) in Québec.

by Annie Brosseau



MAGALIE OUELVA, 'UNTITLED'

LEAVING HOME

Without Saying Good-bye

Célestine is but one of the 26 million people in the world forced to flee their country. She represents only one of the 20,000 refugees in Canada, one of the 8,000 refugees in the province of Quebec and one of the 150 women sheltered annually at the Juan-Moreno Centre.

The story presented here occurs in 1997. Célestine is a respectable citizen of Cameroon, mother of four children. She works in a bank and possesses a nice car and can afford domestic services.

Célestine, the militant

"Democracy in Cameroon exists only on paper," says Célestine. That is why she becomes involved in the opposition party, which, during the presidential elections, calls for international observers in order to prevent fraudulent tampering of the ballot boxes. The militants of the party organize an important rally to warn the population. It is during this event that Célestine is arrested with 150 other

militants. They are all crammed into an overheated cell where they receive a bowl of soup and some rotting bread only after three days of detention. Even before sunrise, many are sick into the only bucket in the room.

Célestine is among the critical cases and wakes up in the hospital with two soldiers guarding her door. One evening, a nurse, who is sympathetic to the cause of the opposition party, discretely gives her instructions: "go to the washroom at the end of the evening and there you will find a nurse's uniform." "I pulled out the needle from my arm and I left the hospital dressed as a nurse without ever raising suspicions from the guards. Then I hid at the parish's religious order with my four daughters." She remembers as if it were yesterday.

Days pass without any improvement in the political climate. To make matters worse, a warrant for her arrest has been issued. Close friends come to see her to confirm what she dreads: she must leave the country. While telling her incredible tale, Célestine repeats again with much emotion: "It was the most difficult decision I have ever had to make in my life. To leave without my children. To leave my diabetic father. I was the one who took care of him; I shaved him, I bought his socks, I watched his diet. To leave without even warning him..."

A mother without a home, without her children

She needs a visa, regardless of her destination. To her surprise, her friends are able to obtain one from the Canadian embassy without any problem. She waits another eight days before she can rely on the help of an accomplice to pass through the airport control unnoticed. Célestine remembers that once seated inside the airplane, she no longer knew who she was: "It was as if I was dead, my whole world had just fallen apart." Canada... the name of a country heard in a geography course. She knows no one there.

April 1997. Célestine, disoriented, lands at Mirabel airport where she exits the plane, her stomach in knots. With \$150 in her pocket, she takes a taxi and asks to be dropped off at a hotel. Once there, the receptionist claims all of the remaining money in her purse. The next morning, Célestine, thinly clad and carrying her purse, her only luggage, wanders in Mirabel. She has no idea where she is. She has lost not only her country, but also her sense of bearings.

A glass of water brings relief

"I want to claim refugee status," she says to a couple walking by. Surprised, the man and woman drive her to the Immigration Bureau of Canada in Montreal. As soon as her request for refugee status is noted, Célestine is sent to the Service d'aide aux réfugiés et aux immigrants du Montréal métropolitain (SARIMM). She has such a terrible headache

that she has difficulty walking and talking. The counsellor sees her distress and offers her a glass of water, two cookies and two tablets. Even today, this gesture inspires Célestine.

Tired and anguished, she enters the Juan-Moreno shelter where a counsellor greets her and offers her a clean bed and a few hygienic items. Célestine finds rest and cries many tears. Morning, noon and night, she kneels to implore God, sometimes in anger, to reunite her with her family. While going through the immigration process, she cannot sit with nothing to do and starts doing volunteer work at the shelter. "I started being active at a young age, and for me, getting up early, dressing appropriately and going off to work is my life," says Célestine. Her faith is rewarded, thanks to the collaboration of some Catholic women from a parish in Cameroon. Victoria, her oldest daughter, and her three little sisters arrive at Dorval airport six months later. They, too, request refugee status. This is an exceptional case in the complex stories of refugee families.

Célestine is still a fighter. Today, she lives alone with her four children, works thirty hours a week and has just completed a certificate at the University of Montreal in social work among ethnic minorities. She is an undergraduate student in social services and is watchful that her children not be "uprooted baobabs." "I try to instil pride into them, to deepen their African roots until they intertwine with their Quebecois roots."

"My experience as a refugee has convinced me to change careers and to work as a social worker. I wish to help those women who arrive and need to be told, 'You can do it' when circumstances make them believe that they are nothing, that they are lost." Much like Célestine's example, the story of the residents of the Juan-Moreno shelter gives witness that refugees, if they receive the proper help on time, can become citizens who actively participate in the welfare of the country.

*"I feel fine enough, I guess,
considering everything's a mess..."*
Steven Page/ Ed Robertson ("Pinch Me")

The trees tower.
Grass greens quietly in the late afternoon.
Pale sunlight grips her throat, lifts her to the treetops.
It wants to drop her, impale her on the lilies of the valley,
their leaves elegant blades erect above the ivy.

Back home there's a telephone; at the other end of it is the World.
This morning in her room she left the Flesh in the bedclothes.

The Devil lives on her couch, on top of her TV
curled round her mirror and nested in her many

Important Personal Journals

He hates trees, hates green, hates moisture
and the throat that sings.

She has to go home
later.

But right now she's pressed between the sky and the woods.
She's putting one foot in front of the well shod other.
Her boots are wet at the toes, shiny beautiful black things
like mussel shells shuffling through the weeds;
like a dog's eager nose parting the grasses.

Birds making for the blackberry bushes
soar straight through her chest
and find the wind there.

.....
*Diane Tucker lives in Vancouver with her
husband and two children. Her first book of
poetry, **God on His Haunches**, was published in
1996. She continues to write, sings in her church's
choir, serves on the executive of the Burnaby
Writers' Society, and walks Doxa, the family dog.*

THE ART AND WORDS OF MAGALIE QUEVAL



"L'île de sable," mixed media

CREATIVITY

For as long as I can remember, I have needed to express myself through art. I remember very well the wonderful feeling at five years old when I took the liberty to draw gigantic characters on the living room walls. I probably suspected that my artistic expression would have been encouraged more strongly if it were on paper, for I hid my art behind curtains. My mother also remembers very well how surprised she was when, to shield the sun from a guest's face, she drew the curtains and discovered my fresco. At the same age, I became fascinated with the incredible potential of modeling clay. My weekends as a teenager were spent making traditional costumes and crinoline dresses with hoops out of metal hangers.

THE DESIRE TO CREATE

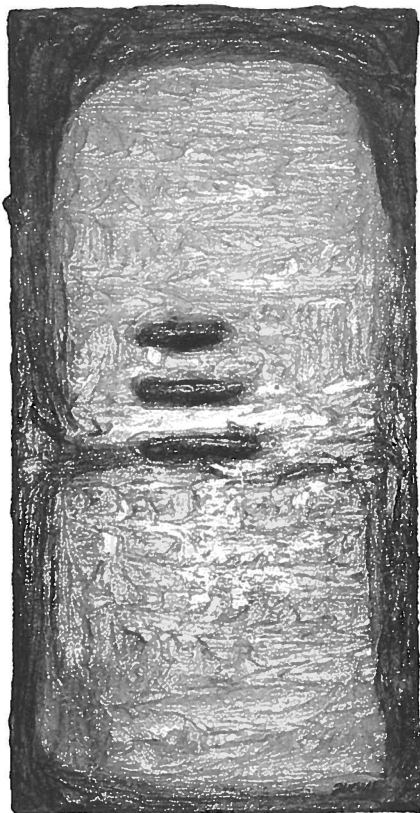
But why create? I am not yet certain if art is always a way for me to communicate to others or simply a need to externalize images I have in me. Sometimes, I even believe I just create for the fun of getting my hands in raw material and to escape in a world of forms, colours and textures.

Creating is a form of language, of course, through which one can express all kinds of emotions or messages. But it is also a moment where one is alone in thought, where everything else stops. When I am in a workshop, I have no worries, no responsibilities. The only thing left is my desire to put in two dimensions what is in my head: an impression, a feeling, a smell, an atmosphere. Sometimes the image I have in mind represents something precise that must be portrayed, but generally I do not need the image to be truly representative in order to be satisfied with the result. In art, as in nature, I like to appreciate movements, lines, forms, textures and colours for what they are and for what they form in themselves. I am inspired by what I live, see and dream. Sometimes it is people around me, other times the cliffs of Forillon and the sea in Gaspesia, and still other times it is intimacy or maternity. Recently, I gave birth at home to my second daughter. I cannot help making a link between art, creativity and the birth of a child. Anouchka and Loukia are by far my most beautiful works of art. Even though I am not really the artist, I thank God for giving us women this active part in creation.

THANKING GOD

Sometimes I almost feel guilty for spending time imagining new works and creating them. I could easily consider it quite vain to consecrate one's life to art when there are so many needs around us. When I create I am not absolutely useful to something. However, I do glorify God's beauty and creation. And recognising this need to create is also recognising and taking the time to rejoice in this gift which God has deemed good to give me. Since I have been created in God's image, I too want to create.

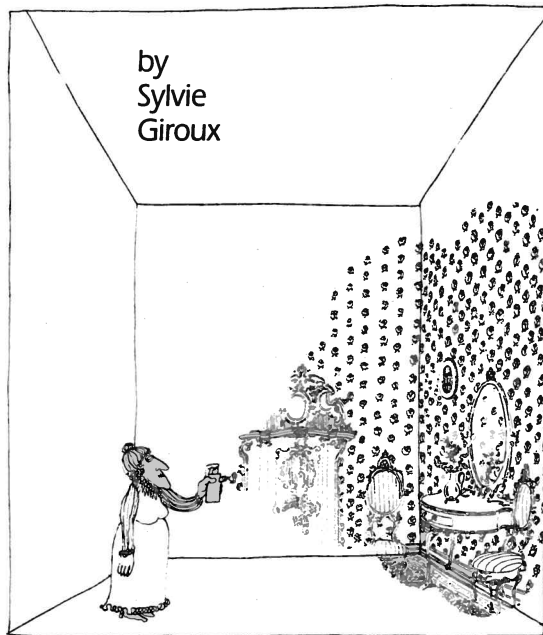
.....
Magalie Queval is a member of Eglise chrétienne de St-Laurent in Montreal. She paints in her workshop at home and enjoys her work as a full-time mother to her two daughters. The original French version of this article was printed in *Aujourd'hui Credo*, July-August 2000.



"L'ordre des choses," mixed media.

'Home Improvement' (a reflection based on the television serial)

by
Sylvie
Giroux



It is said that life often imitates art. I might amend "art" in this case to "television." Without great subtlety, one could easily picture one's life as a series of weird home repair accidents that unmistakably make one enter into conflict with family members, with a wise neighbor always at hand for over-the-picket-fence advice. But that would be just too good to be true.

One could wonder, however, if this over-the-top, sitcom-like, recipe for success really addresses something that Christians

often put into two separate corners. Are stormy relationships automatically repaired by our decision to receive Christ in our lives, or is there a need for a more well-defined process and action plan? Is there a place for both initial good intentions and continuing knowledge-gathering in relationship management?

My own weird *vilaesque* episode started with serious decorating improvement being required in my home. Previous experience in that domain had shown me that consensus, when reached, came with a certain emotional cost, and was by no means achieved in record time. With a good designer at hand, so began that always challenging saga of creating a living room we could enjoy while still enjoying each other's presence once done.

And so it goes, this pretext of choosing the wallpaper when in fact the real subject of the discussion is something deeper. How we get to this point is simple. Although we have good intentions and a seemingly Christlike attitude, we enter our negotiations using familiar patterns of behavior that, by force of habit, really address not the issue at hand but rather who will have better control or power over a given situation or individual. And until this is admitted and verbalized, the best intentions of serving Christ, although inspiring us to look at our own reaction patterns, may have little impact on our daily lives. When acknowledged, then the real home improvement can begin, one with a biblical foundation and sometimes external help.

Life is no TV show. But sometimes, trading spaces proves a good exercise. Especially knowing that our homework includes working with the Ultimate Designer, an unlimited budget, and a carpenter for work we can't always do ourselves.

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Sylvie Giroux has been attending the St-Eustache MB Church in Montreal for more than 25 years. She works in the pharmaceuticals industry as a researcher, and is active on the worship team of her church.

You Love Me, Love My Child

by Darlene Franklin

"I'm sorry, Mama." My daughter Jolene's soft voice interrupted my somber thoughts.

"I'm okay," I said.

I glanced at her before returning my attention to the road. Her shoulders slumped against the seatbelt strap, the picture of a compliant, repentant child. Dark hair hid her face. A stranger wouldn't have recognized her as the same uncontrollable hellion who had run away from daycare last night.

That was my girl. Bipolar, her moods swung in a minute's time from sweet sincerity to violent anger. Last night was the worst it had been in some time.

The anger in my heart melted. No nine-year-old should have to overcome so many problems. No doubt about it, Jolene was a fighter. While I snuck quick glances at her dejected profile, I listed some of the things she had already faced.

Number one: premature birth. Number two: colic. Number three: constant ear infections for her first two years that led to number four: problems with speech development. And that was just the beginning. Mixing physical problems with an unhappy home life had created a Molotov cocktail that would have broken a lesser child's spirit. She started running away on her fourth birthday. In spite of her father's and my safety measures, she disappeared with increasing frequency.

It came to a head after we moved to Denver. When she knocked at a stranger's door, they listened to her story and called the police. The words horrified me. "My Daddy's been hurting me...." The authorities whisked her out of the home, and I separated from her father immediately.

Blinking back tears as I remembered that terrible time, I reached out a hand and tousled Jolene's hair.

She looked at me with a question in her eyes.

"I love you," I said.

"Emahay," she answered, her own special way of saying, "I love you too."

Two long years passed while she lived in children's homes and hospitals. They gave her some measure of her lost childhood and searched for a balance of discipline and medication that would help control the Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder (PTSD) that threatened her sanity. Odd things like a locked room or stories of World War II triggered wild, irrational behavior.

That winter day she had been home for a year and a half. Jolene reached for my hand. "When I was at the children's home, we hiked up the mountain to the statue of Jesus. I made daisy chains to put around his head." Her pale face brightened with the happy memory. "I love Jesus."

"He loves you, too. Even more than I do."

We lapsed back into silence. After the children's home, Jolene continued in a day treatment program that emphasized therapy over academics. Trial and error taught me how to raise my precious girl. I didn't understand her continued pattern of running away. Last night wasn't the only time. It seemed to be her escape valve to relieve stress.

Childcare consumed much worry. Who wanted to care for a disturbed, sometimes violent child who was prone to run away? At last I thought I had found an answer at our new church home. She liked and trusted the people there. They agreed to try.

It worked for awhile. She loved learning about God, soaking up everything they taught her in Sunday school. One time she even stayed overnight at a Bible retreat.

Then last night. My lips tightened as I remembered the phone call. "Your daughter's run away." Pastor Snow came to our apartment to wait and pray. Close to midnight, the police arrived with my coatless child in tow. A few sleepless hours later, we returned to the scene of the episode.

I turned into the church parking lot. For a minute, I delayed, soaking in the peace of the sunlight reflecting off the stained glass windows. We walked inside, my high heels clicking on the linoleum floor.

"Will you be okay here?" I asked, motioning to a chair. Jolene nodded. I trusted her to stay put. She was always calmest right after she had run away. Pulling out a coloring book and crayons, she started working quietly.

"Jolene, how are you?" Pastor Snow greeted us. "You had us worried last night, you know."

"I know." She glanced up at him, then started scrib-

Mixing physical problems with an unhappy home life had created a Molotov cocktail that would have broken a lesser child's spirit.

bling angry red circles. Sometimes she expressed feelings on paper to relieve building stress.

"Please come in." The pastor ushered me into a room where the Christian education committee sat at the head of a long table. I sat down at the opposite end, the grief in their eyes making the distance between us an impassable barrier. Pastor Snow sat between us.

I drew in a deep breath. No matter how shattered my psyche, I was here as my daughter's advocate.

They started with the expected questions. How was Jolene? How was I? I explained the "down" swing that followed an incident like last night. They didn't understand. Very few people did.

The pastor cleared his throat. "You'll want to make other arrangements for daycare, of course."

Actually, I didn't. I didn't blame them for what happened, but I wasn't surprised.

He exchanged glances with the two women sitting at the table and continued. "We also think it would be best if Jolene doesn't come to Sunday school here anymore. Legal liability, I'm afraid."

Stunned, I somehow found the words to argue, to state that I would sign a release, anything. I thought we had a church home, a family here. They wouldn't budge.

As the dam of pain in my soul broke that night, I was given a glimpse into God's heart. I understood what the Bible meant when John said, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (1 John 5:1). When my church rejected my child, they rejected me. When people reject one of God's children, they reject him. God then rejects them, and even as he does so, I think he must cry.

I never returned to that particular church. And like God, I cried. I cried for myself and my child, but more than that, I cried for them.

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Darlene Franklin is a freelance writer living in Denver. She edits Dishin' It Out, an inhouse newsletter. Her work has appeared in On Mission, Heart Stirring Stories of Love, Secret Place, Colorado Mature Lifestyles, Parenttalk, and other places. Her story, "Beautiful Feet," won the 2001 Colorado Christian Writers Conference contest.

Black night

by Diane Tucker

Why black? Why night?

Why the round world

always swimming waist-deep in her own shadow?

Actually deep deep blue.

So you can see the stars.

So she'll be like us: in shadow and yet in light.

Why blue? Why stars?

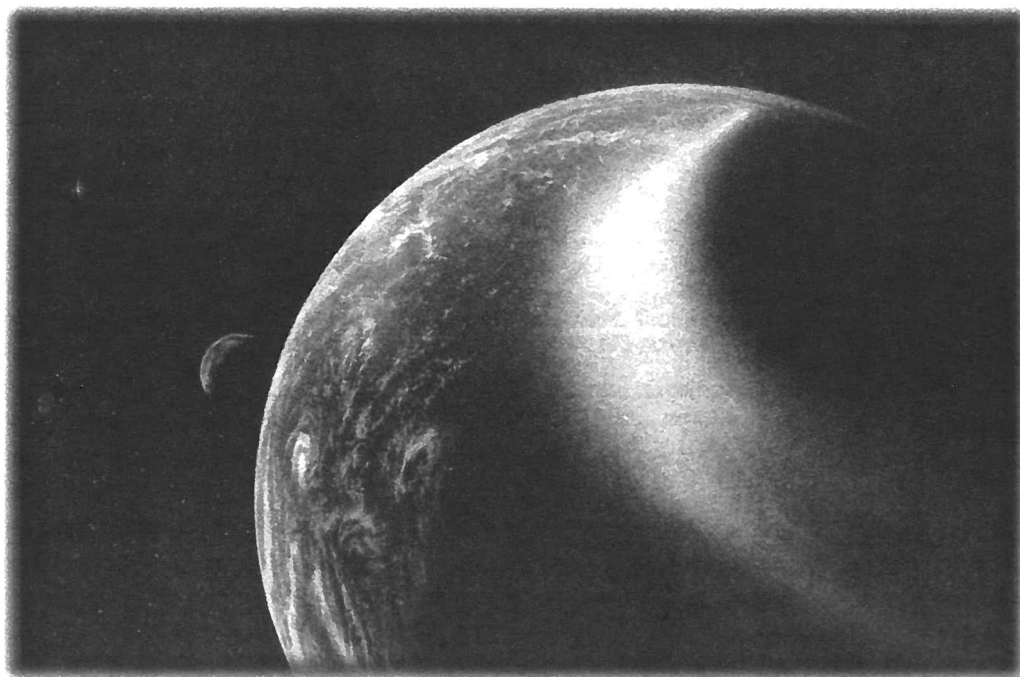
Why the round world

carrying us as we beat her down and poison her?

So that something is too deep.

So that something is too far.

So she'll be like her Maker: bearing our weight and
our wounding.



WORDS INTO WORLDS: Salvation as Creativity

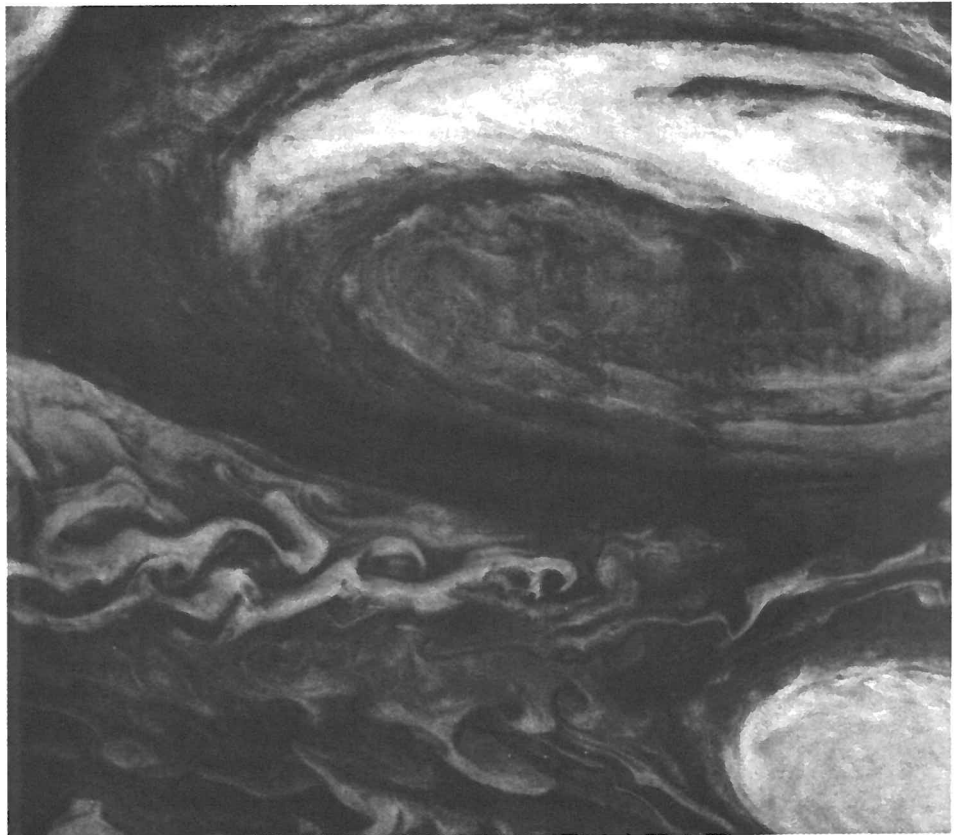
by Mary Henkelman

One fine morning God sat down at his desk to write. He got out several sheets of white paper and placed them squarely on the desk in front of him. He sharpened his pencils. Then he drew a deep breath, ready to begin. I wonder if he already knew what he was going to write about, or if he sat thinking for a long time until sure of his theme from the very depths of his being. At any rate, he knew: He would write about joy.

I wonder how he began. Jotting down words here and there on the page. Drawing lines and making connections. Arrows, designs, diagrams. The initial plans for light. Then equations, and more equations. Elegant and eloquent. He worked intensely, filling the page. Then several more pages. The process was absorbing. Great swathes of time passed amazingly quickly. But at last he had completed the outline for light: infra-red and blue, gamma rays and cosmic. He went back over what he had written. He tested his sentences to make sure that each stage of the argument held. It did. The scene was set. Ready.

So he sent forth his words, lobbing them ever higher and higher into the night sky. Great arcs of light. Like a primeval fireworks display, the light exploded in an enormous burst of brilliance, raining fierce and fiery particles down through the night sky until all the darkness glistened. He looked hard at the darkness, and knew the words he would have to write later. But right now, there was light, and it was good.

As you see, it is not really possible to think about creation, or about anything that happened in the beginning, for that matter. Regardless of how intently we try, we cannot get behind the starting line. Our minds always tumble back into this world's space and time, and even farther backwards into our own subjective spaces and times. The most we can do is to look through the lens of metaphor.



But our metaphors are never fully adequate. In fact, they are usually pale anthropomorphisms, that at best belittle.

Yet it is not totally unfair to speculate about the beginning. We do have a little to go on. After all, we have the results: the world and ourselves. Perhaps this dynamic, evolving, one-of-a-kind world in some way depicts an overarching creativity. Perhaps there are even a few deft fingerprints, some telltale marks left here or there in the making. But more importantly, we have ourselves. Like the world, we too are intensely creative. In fact, creativity is our most striking and cherished characteristic. So possibly there is some merit in what the ancients say: God took dust and breathed his life into us; he made us in his image. If so, we may be a profoundly personal piece of work – perhaps even a self-portrait.

What if there is a God whose very being involves making, forming, fashioning, establishing?



These, of course, are circular arguments. We can never make proof of God by looking at the creativity around us and in us. But what if a parallel does exist between God's creativity and ours? What if? What if there is a God whose very being involves making, forming, fashioning, establishing? What if our creativity derives from his? What would that look like?

The next morning God was back at his desk once more. He was now at the stage that called for detailed engineering designs. He made his measurements carefully and methodically. He worked out the calculations of load and stress. The graphs and diagrams were incredibly complicated, but he pressed on. He was determined that the great pillars on which the earth would sit should be strong and steady. Established. There in the watery darkness he laid a foundation and

built on it carefully, sentence by sentence. The structure rose higher and higher. He knew it was firm. And so he made a platform for the earth, and a huge dome above it to house the heavens and to separate the waters above and below. Then there were the storehouses at the sides where he would keep the wind, snow and hail. It was an immense construction, proportioned, balanced, stately. Then, letting some wind out of the storehouse, he sent his words stampeding across the heavens, galloping along the crest of the storm until with thunderous power they surged into being. Exulting and exhilarating. Yes, it was good.

I don't know if the ancient writers took their descriptions of the earth literally when they pictured it as built on a platform held up by pillars that went down into the watery deep – something like a huge Hibernia oil drilling

station, perched precariously in the North Atlantic. But whatever they thought, they were right about one thing. They knew that the threat of chaos was never far away. The old cartographers continued this theme when they drew their maps with inevitable Leviathans lurking in the world's four corners. Although this universe seems insecure, left sitting somewhere between the fullness of God's own being and nothingness, chaos will not overwhelm it. The world is called into existence by God's word. And in his final Word, his work remains established.

We, too, do our creative work, build our worlds, against the backdrop of chaos. Sometimes, we are overwhelmingly aware that we live with our finger in the dike, a last fierce stand against the North Atlantic. At other times, we get used to things, to unspeakable evil that gets spoken regularly on the evening news. And we casually assume that our civilization and its creative endeavours will stand. We forget that our dikes are never guaranteed. Our work is never finished, and we do not have the last word.



I suspect that the next stage of the work went more smoothly. I can imagine God writing steadily every day, each new topic bringing new challenges. He felt a deep pleasure as he saw his work progressing. He had finished one chapter on vegetation, exploring complex arrangements of genes and painting wonderful variations of green – from the jade pale leaves of early spring to the golden green of sunny summer. In another chapter, he called forth the planets and composed the tunes by which the distant stars would travel ever away. From there, he moved on to fish and birds. In that section, he let his imagination run wild. He doodled all over the page. Fins and feathers of every perceivable shape, fabulously outlandish. He even pulled out the coloured pencils he had been saving. His ebullience continued in the chapter on animals. Spots on the body and stripes on the tails; furry paws and hard hoofs; curly horns and branching antlers every feature provided opportunity to improvise. Then, at the end of the chapter, he returned briefly to the earlier theme of darkness. This time, though, when he allowed the old sea monster, Leviathan, to trot out on the stage, he kept him firmly on a leash. In that brief appearance, looking a little like a pet poodle, there was just the right touch of humour and satire. Yes, God chuckled to himself, what he had written so far was definitely good.

In describing creation, the biblical texts depict God as having a rich and varied creative process encompassing all of ours, and then some. The opening of Genesis pictures God moving with stately deliberation, establishing spaces and filling them with teaming life. The process is orderly and assured. One can imagine a patient craftsman who with the slow retreat of ice ages carves inch by inch

continents. The Psalms imply a wilder and more emotional creative process: God comes riding the storm winds and hurling thunderbolts; with a strong voice, he calls out planets and frames the world. He takes incredible risks. Yet when the fiery intensity calms, we see another aspect of God's creativity. He is there delighting in the perfection of detail, taking care that even the wild goats on the high rocks have water to drink. This creativity is gentle and gratuitous. Working in unseen corners of the world, he creates for the fun of it, and the love of it.

Our creativity, while it may be like God's, is nevertheless, less. First of all, our vision is imperfect and our insight incomplete. Our imaginations are never quite up to the task. It's not that we don't try hard. We explore all the avenues. For some it means harvesting dreams, hoping to catch in their gossamer webs some missed glimmers.

Others strain their left brain and their right. We will try anything, and have. I watch the students coming out of the College of Art. They seem compelled to wear the latest avant-garde fashion, however ugly or uncomfortable.

Perhaps they think that if they live out on some edge, some ledge where the wind blows raw and cold, they will see more clearly, or at least differently from the rest of the crowd. Yet I suspect their vantage point has its own

limitations, like everyone else's. While we all try hard to come to terms with the reality around us and in us, the metaphors we use, no matter how carefully nuanced, are always somewhat out of focus. The self-expression and self-knowledge of our art is never perfect, only partial.

Our creativity is also less in that it is essentially second-hand. We recycle. Unlike God, we don't have to invent the whole shebang. Instead, as magpies do, we gather up the bits and pieces – the coloured glass, the shiny foil, the old coin, the occasional pearl – and with adequate twigs and mud, we make our nests. The worlds that we create are secondary worlds. No matter how farfetched and extravagantly we build, we still make them out of the stuff of this world. Even if we are determined not to copy and definitely don't allow cameras, our constructions, no matter how abstract, still make use of the patterns and shapes around us. And we borrow the words. They grow in our world like wind-blown wild flowers: all we have to do is pick them. When it comes to God's creativity, we can't even imagine him making something out of nothing. How could

I don't know if the ancient writers took their descriptions of the earth literally when they pictured it as built on a platform held up by pillars that went down into the watery deep – something like a huge Hibernia oil drilling station, perched precariously in the North Atlantic.

he do it from a standing start, from an empty-handed beginning? How could he actually be the Word?

Perhaps the most crucial difference between God's creativity and ours comes from its motivation. God's creativity derives, I believe, from his triune nature – from the giving and receiving of love within the Trinity. This eternal dialogue involves creative self-expression and self-knowledge. We, on the other hand, have mixed motives, at best. Some of us get carried away by our own self-expression. We get puffed up by our creative potential. Then as our self-inflated, self-infatuated balloon begins to burst, we easily turn venal and vicious. Perhaps that is one reason why so much modern art has an edge of in-your-face violence. For others, creativity faces the opposite entanglement: fear. They think their knowledge is inadequate, and they don't



ERNEST UNDMER

have anything to say. For myself whenever I begin to write, I feel overwhelmed, as if the North Atlantic were blowing straight into my face. How does one muster the courage to try? And for each faltering attempt, how many other creative glimpses remain unglimped, blocked in a fog of fear? Like sedge-grass along the shore, human creativity is frail and fades easily. But the longing is there – to work humbly and freely out of love.



When God came to the next chapter, he knew it would be the hardest. After producing such an amazing array of animals, he was ready to call forth his finest work: humans. To those talented and yet unpredictable creatures, he chose to give his spirit – and his love. Yes, he would risk becoming deeply, gently, fiercely involved in his work. He thought about his plans for a long time, looking intently at the darkness. Then he decided. No doubt it would be difficult. It would take his whole heart – and more. But in the final end, he knew, it would be very good.

In fact, this chapter did run into terrible difficulties. God's most brilliant and passionate creatures never quite managed to get it together. Although so capable, some penchant for destruction and self-destruction always seemed to get the better of those humans. They were always turning away, turning sour, turning in upon themselves even though that left them lonely and chaotic. And so it was that under the door, up through the basement, over the window ledge, evil began seeping in. The flood waters were rising. The foundations of the world were beginning to shift, and were in danger of being swept away. The future was becoming unsteady.

And so God turned. He turned the page. He wrote about salvation.

Salvation is not an afterthought. It is not some "fix it" glue-job. Rather, it is part and parcel of God's ongoing creativity. In fact, it is the peak of his creative power and the turning point around which the entire story turns. In salvation, God unexpectedly yet convincingly loosens the tangles, straightens the strands, and powerfully draws the threads into a conclusion for which we hardly dared hope. Our creativity, on the other hand, never achieves such mastery. When our plots take a wrong turn, our ideas go off track or the meaning begins to dissolve, we can waste a long time fiddling. Sometimes we have to go back and ruthlessly throw away some of our best lines. Cut and paste. Rewrite.

God accomplished salvation by entering our world. The Word was made flesh. In this amazing feat, he validated the material of this world, transforming it, drawing it towards himself. He entered his metaphor and turned myth into history. While we also pour ourselves into our art and our art into our lives, there is always a gap. Although our characters may jump off the stage and leave us improvising like mad, theatre is never the same as life. And so if our art doesn't work out or needs more than we have to give, we can always get a day job. God, however, works for real. And it took a real death.

Salvation, like all art, uses recalcitrant materials. Artists cut against the grain – and into the bone. The work is frequently gritty, even grisly. It involves looking hard at horror. Yet God did more. He entered the most terrible depths of this world's darkness. He stepped into the blackest black hole, and, we believe, came out the other side. He absorbed in his love the whole shootin' match and turned it inside out. Although our words slip, slide, and will not stay still, he raised against death and evil a final Word. That Word, stretched out on the cross, embraces all the tensions of the world. There on the critical edge, where the complexity is greatest and the beauty most intense, life need no longer degenerate into chaos, but can be drawn into God's own dialogue of love. And so in this creative Word, God gives us his finest and fullest expression of himself.

All creativity is innovative, but Christ's resurrection brought never-before-seen newness. From then on, there could be a new shape to the plot and all plots. There could be a new dimension to the meaning, all meanings. Above all, the central character could have, as the phrase goes, a new lease on life. A new leaf. A new love. True innovation has no name; it defies description. At best, we're left trying to rework our old names – redeem, reform, release; rescue, reconcile, resurrect. What God did is more than just salvage. It's salvation. Joy.

Our creative works are only attempts made again and again. God's work is finished, done and done for good. We will never fully understand what God, in Christ, did when he descended into hell those three days. We cannot really know what happened down there in the murky darkness around the foundation of the earth's pillars. We have only metaphors. A cornerstone was laid. Something was realigned so that the dislocated groaning of creation could be brought to an end, the storm stilled, the cracked desert bloom. And though this world may someday shrivel like a seed, beyond will grow a final earth and heaven. Forever established.



There is a dreary hymn that gets sung at funerals: "O God, our help in ages past." It is taken from Psalm 90, but gets mired down in the first half of the psalm, which is a melancholy meditation on the brevity and futility of life. O God, our help – but where has the help gone? As the hymn proceeds, flood waters wash all the sons away. They fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day. The hymn ends there, but the psalm does not.

In the middle of the psalm, there is a prayer that God will turn again – return. What actually happens in that turning is not described. But there is a sudden shift, as powerful and as understated as Easter. The shadows melt away. The fog lifts. "O Restore us. Make us see gladness," cries the psalmist. The theme of joy emerges high and clear. We find ourselves in a world of sunlight and salvation. Meadows filled with gold-green grasses.

The psalm spreads into human lives and history. Confidently, it concludes with requests: Let us see your works, your glorious, loving, saving works. And let your favour – and your creative Spirit – rest upon us so that the work of our hands may, likewise, be established. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

And so with that prayer in my heart, one fine morning I sit down at my desk to write. I place several sheets of white paper before me. And I sharpen my pencils....

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Mary Henkelman lives and creates in Toronto, where she is working on a collection of essays called "The Country of Salvation."

A Conversion Story

by Katie Funk Wiebe

One wintry evening in 1947, a group of us students at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg gathered in the home of an older student. As the evening wore on each person tried to outdo the other in coming up with an even more interesting story. A student who had been born in Russia told us of an event that had happened in his home colony of Sagraadowka when he was a young man. I dismissed his story about a young man selling his soul to the devil as superstitious nonsense, the kind I had heard often in the small Russian community in Blaine Lake where I grew up. And forgot it.

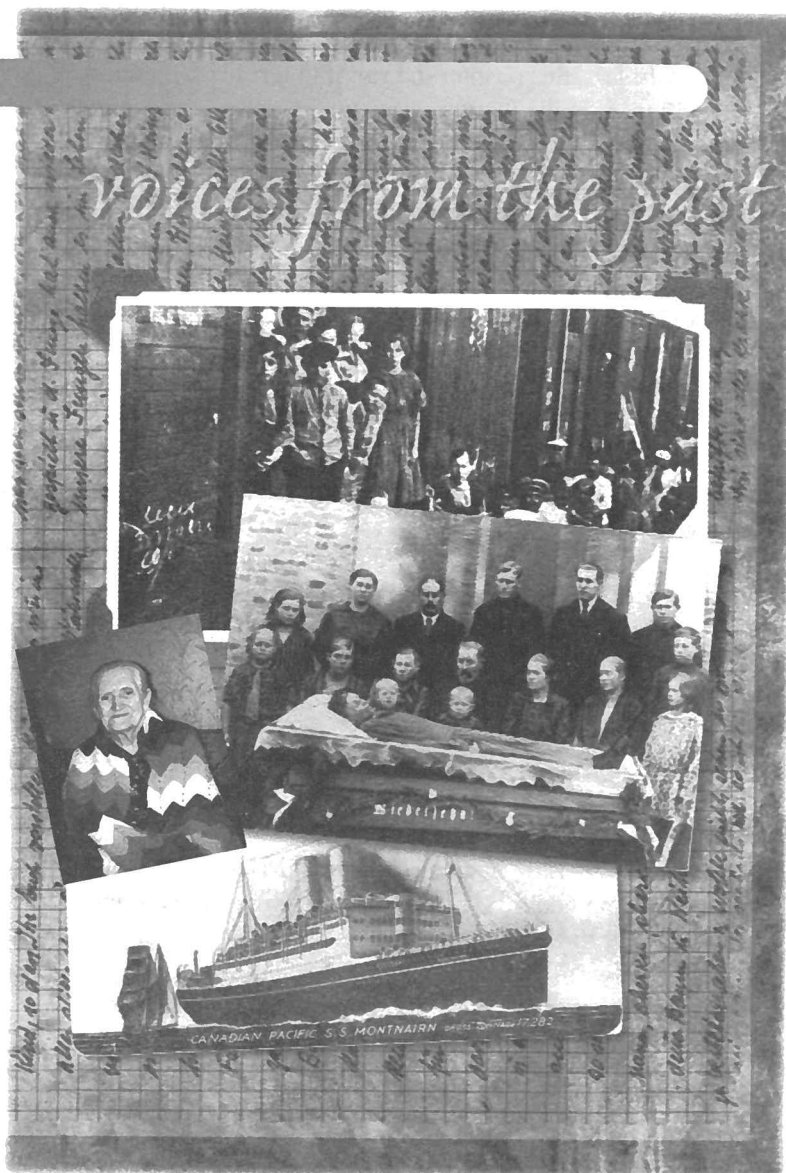
About five years ago my Aunt Neta Janzen Block began writing me her life story in letters. At once I recognized the story of her conversion as related to the one my fellow student had told us that wintry evening in Winnipeg.

The story of my conversion, by Neta Janzen Block

In 1924 when I was about 18, I drove from Friedensfeld where I was working to Trubetskoye in the Sagraadowka colony to visit my brother Hans Janzen. I stayed until after New Year's Day. While there I sensed that my friend Hans Block, who later became my husband, was ill at ease. His friend Jacob Friesen had fallen in love with a young woman working for his parents as hired girl. When Jacob's parents became aware of his feelings, she was dismissed from her service and had to leave for her home community. [While it is not clear from Neta's letter, it seems that the girl came from a lower class than Jacob did. Her friend Hans Block came from a wealthy landowner family, so his friends probably did too.]

On New Year's Day before I arrived, a number of young men, including Jacob, whose girl friends did not live close by, had arranged to have their fortunes told even though they came from Christian homes. They placed two golden rings in a glass of water in front of a mirror. [The idea was that the image of the girl friend would appear in the mirror]. My friend Hans Block became frightened. "I would rather not try to see Neta this way. I will wait until she arrives," he said.

Jacob pricked his finger and pledged his allegiance



with blood to Satan for help to see his girl friend. He prayed to Satan and Satan showed him everything. [According to my uncle Jacob Janzen, the young men had asked for a Mr. Doerksen, a tsar, and someone else to appear. Instead, a casket appeared before them.] The young men all ran home, but Jacob Friesen became possessed by Satan. He was so disturbed that the believers gathered to pray to God for grace and mercy. His mother remained in bed for a whole month, mentally disturbed. The church came together for a whole month every day and cried to God.

Two brethren from the church came to Trubetskoye and preached powerfully. Everyone was disturbed about what had happened in Friedensfeld. They told how earnestly the Lord was speaking to them. A large spiritual revival took place. Many people were converted - I think half the village. Each person wanted to serve the Lord with his or her whole heart.

I was among those who came to the Lord and was received by him. I wanted to kneel down at the place where I was staying to accept him, but Satan held me

Jacob pricked his finger and pledged his allegiance with blood to Satan for help to see his girl friend.

back with power, so I kept looking out the window. The Holy Ghost did not give me peace. I could see by the lighted windows at my brother's place not far away that they were still up. Quickly I ran there. When I got there, many people were on their knees. Here I threw myself at the Savior's feet and experienced the grace to see myself as a redeemed child of God.

When I returned home to Friedensfeld from Trubetskoye, I was more at peace. Most of the young people were converted, including Hans Block, my husband-to-be. He explained everything to me regarding Jacob Friesen, for he had been there when the episode with Satan happened. When the young men had all run home, they were full of fear and trembling, for Satan roved hither and thither. Hans Block had a room alone. He locked all doors and windows. All at once he heard a knock on the window. It was his friend Jacob Friesen. Hans didn't want to open the door to let him in because Jacob appeared much disturbed. Jacob said, "If you don't let me in peacefully, I will enter otherwise," so he let him in.

However, when his relatives came to get him, he was uncontrollable. At one point four men kept watch over him for a time until he became more peaceful. *[From the story told us when I was a student, the young man Jacob literally climbed the walls.]* His parents allowed his girl friend to visit him and they were married, but after a time she left. She said it was impossible to live with him. That was the result of wanting to have his fortune told.

Satan has a way of testing each one of us. I had a great longing to serve Jesus and prepared myself for baptism.

Aunt Neta was baptized and joined the Mennonite Brethren church. She remained a faithful member all her life, even during those times when no fellowship with other Christians was possible, in forced labour in Siberia. She lived her last years in Moscow with her daughter and family, quite isolated from other Christians, unable to attend church services. In 1989 I was able to arrange through Mennonite Brethren Communications in Winnipeg to have a Russian Baptist minister come to her periodically to have the Lord's Supper with her, which she much appreciated.

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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 third of three articles about her aunts who were exiled to Siberia following World War II.

LETTERS

Congratulations on your latest issue of *Sophia*. Timothy Findley, who has just died, often signed his books with the phrase, "against despair." I'm glad that *Sophia*, too, continues to speak against despair. For that – and I borrow the words from one of the articles – "I'm proud of you." How fitting that along with articles and stories that explore the urgency, and difficulties, of pursuing justice, you include an essay on hope. I was impressed by the breadth and depth of Mary Henkelman's reflections and moved by her story. Can we look forward to a review of *The Country of Salvation* (lovely title), when it is released, in *Sophia*?

Sarah Klassen,
Winnipeg

ONLINE RESOURCES

Mennonite Women is working on developing its website, and a number of resources for Anabaptist women are now available on-line. These include a program that calls women to be peacemakers, Spanish-language devotionals from our 2002 Bible study guide, and a mini-archive of articles from *Timbrel* magazine. Take a look at:

www.mennonitewomenusa.org

This summer, both our son and our daughter spent time with my husband and me in our home in Montreal's trendy Plateau area. A year ago Andre and Dora-Marie helped us move here from Alberta where I had been teaching history at Augustana University College, a Lutheran institution devoted to the Liberal Arts and Sciences, while my

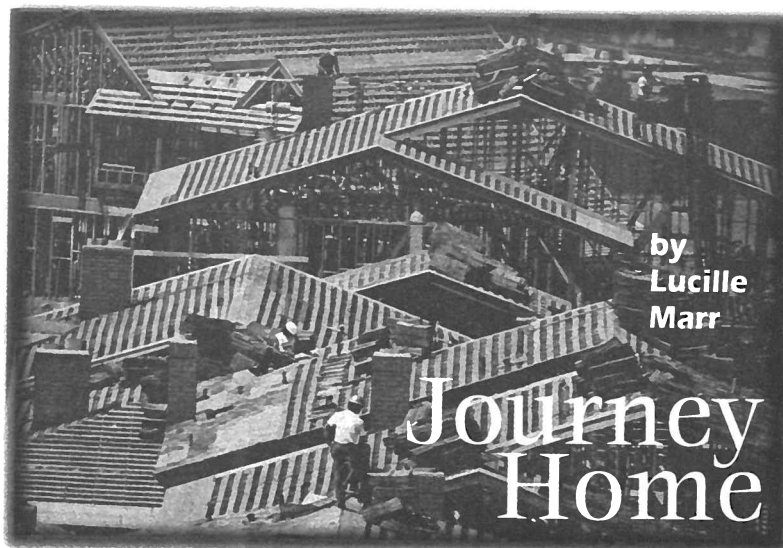
husband pastored Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton. Our return to eastern Canada was in answer to a call to co-pastor the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal, but for me, it was also about our family's journey home.

This invitation to reflect on home seems timely as we pass our first anniversary in Montreal. For my husband, we are home. Montreal is where he grew up. His mother lives here and his ancestors are buried in the massive cemetery on Mount Royal. For the rest of us, it is not so simple. I grew up in southern Ontario and our children's childhood and youth were divided between Ontario and Alberta. Does our move to Montreal make this Andre and Dora-Marie's home? Does it make it mine?

Gerda Lerner, an American historian who writes from the perspective of one who survived the holocaust, has pointed out that our cultural passion for photos, home videos, family reunions and genealogical research illustrates a deep need for roots. Our fragmented post-modern society is the product of a century of global upheaval manifested in mass migration and displacement of peoples. In Canada, all but the aboriginal people are immigrants. The quest for roots is a search for home.

During our nine years in Alberta, I often longed for home. And my experience there was, in part, a coming home. While living in the west, I rediscovered geographic places – Ontario, Pennsylvania and Indiana – during research trips and family reunions. I learned how deeply I am imprinted by the beauty of towering maples in the rich green of summer and their autumn tresses. I rejoiced in great, shimmering masses of water in new ways.

I also journeyed home intellectually and spiritually as the gift of research projects brought me in touch with my ancestral and religious roots. Days immersed in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ archives affirmed my calling as a historian. One summer in Pennsylvania, immersed in ancient college yearbooks, seeing the faces of my grand-



parents, aunts, uncles, I had a strong sense of having returned to the womb. Oral histories, with so many sharing their own journeys with me, have sometimes felt like walking on holy ground.

This past summer, I finally knew I had come home. Walking across the campus of Messiah College in Pennsylvania after participating in an academic conference

there, I felt at home amidst the rolling hills and massive trees. I met my younger self, a shy Brethren in Christ girl who, some thirty years ago, embarked on her academic career on that same campus. I felt in tune with my grandparents, my mother and numerous aunts and uncles who had studied there and served as teachers from the school's beginnings. My senses were full. I knew I had come home.

For me, the journey home means a deep spiritual connection with roots – geographic, historic, and spiritual. On the morning my son was due to return to Taiwan where he is teaching, I noticed stacks of photo albums sitting on the floor by the couch where he had sat browsing well into the night. He was looking for roots, he said, as he pored over each one of the family albums. As my son and my daughter return to Montreal, I would like them to feel they have come home. Our home will always be theirs. But my own journey has shown me that coming home has many layers. Andre and Dora-Marie are also on a journey. We are living, at least for a time, in their father's home town. And I hope at some level, they will be able to make it theirs. But they carry also my Pennsylvania and Ontario heritage, and their own experiences of Alberta. The family has returned to one ancestral place, but my children, like me, will need to embrace each piece of their past to truly come home.

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Lucille Marr is from Ontario. She was educated at University of Waterloo where she earned both her undergraduate degree and a PhD in history. She has been involved as a lay person in the Mennonite Church for thirty years, while following an academic career teaching and publishing in Mennonite history, Canadian history and women's studies for the past twenty. She continues to fulfill her passion for teaching and researching in this setting.

Homecoming

by Marc Paré

A common metaphor for Christian life is that of the exile, a notion related to the belief that Christians are only passing through this Earth on their way to the Kingdom of God, their true home. This metaphor has roots in the Bible itself, particularly with the traditions of the exile to Babylon and the wandering in the desert. In fact, the Old Testament contains an entire theology centered on the exile. The exile of Judah to Babylon is thus described as the loss of the covenantal gift of the land and the return from exile as the recovery of this gift. The return from exile allows for the renewal of the covenant, the reconstruction of the Temple and, ultimately, the eschatological (therefore future and much awaited) renewal of the land and reunification of the Kingdom of Israel.

The New Testament authors developed this theology of exile and used it as a metaphor for Christian life, speaking of us as strangers and travellers on Earth (Heb 11:13-14) and not as citizens of this world but as citizens of heaven (Ph 3:20). Passages such as these have been a comfort throughout history to Christians estranged from land, kin or country, including to Anabaptists fleeing religious and ethnic persecution. This theology is still relevant today, and not only to political and religious refugees.

In such a mobile world as ours, even people who have not lost their

homes may experience feelings of alienation and homelessness. This is especially true in the Western world, where our social and economic contexts allow most of us a certain degree of mobility. Partly through the advent of affordable car and air travel, Westerners have become so mobile that some of us could call ourselves semi-nomads, people who settle for a while in a place but are ready to pick up and leave at any moment. This mobility is sometimes accompanied by a difficulty in defining or preserving a communal identity and in nurturing a sense of belonging to a particular community.

Québécois used to be somewhat protected from such identity crises. Though at times many have left the

province – for example to work in New England factories – the linguistic and cultural barriers with the rest of North America have encouraged them to remain in Quebec. This

is changing quickly, however, as more and more people are learning English and leaving Quebec to study or work abroad.

I, too, left my Quebec home in 1995 to study in California. Even though I was in many ways “setting up a tent,” the relationships that I built often made California feel like a home. I found that what was most transforming in this extended stay was not the exposure to different food, climate, television programming or even

language but rather my personal interactions.

When I returned to Quebec several years later, I did not return to the place I had left. Events such as a major recession, a referendum on sovereignty, the floods in Saguenay and the ice storm had become part of the collective mind of my people but not of mine. I had left a home in Quebec to live in a tent in California, but I did not come back to the home I left. I was again a tent-dweller.

I am one of those people whose friends and families are separated by a continent, whose favourite restaurants are in different countries, whose hearts belong to different cultures. Some embrace this situation and call themselves “citizens of the world,” but this rarely means much, for belonging to every community is much like belonging to none. In a way, I do not feel truly at home anywhere. And yet, I have found homes everywhere I have lived. This is why I prefer to consider myself a semi-nomad, finding homes and communities along the way, wherever I am. Instead of truly belonging everywhere, I belong somewhat in many places. Paul says that we are not citizens of the world but of heaven (Ph 3:20). I think this can mean today that on this earth we set our tent in different places, but we bring our homes with us, waiting to enter our true home.

Marc Paré is a Ph.D. candidate in Old Testament at the University of Montreal. He earned masters degrees in Old and New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary and is a member of Église chrétienne de Saint-Laurent, a Mennonite Brethren church in Montreal.

Westerners have become so mobile that some of us could call ourselves semi-nomads, people who settle for a while in a place but are ready to pick up and leave at any moment.

Dakota: A Spiritual Geography

by Kathleen Norris
(New York, Ticknor & Fields, 1993).
224 pp.

Reviewed by Elaine Reimer Paré

The Plains of Dakota rarely rank among the top vacation spots in North America, yet writer Kathleen Norris has discovered that “nature, in Dakota, can indeed be an experience of the holy” (p1). In the 1970s, Norris traded the artistic circles of New York City for the barren plains of South Dakota. After inheriting the house her grandparents built in 1923, Norris encountered the Plains, a physical landscape that could both calm and terrify. It is this place of extremes and contrasts that served as the impetus of Norris’s spiritual formation, and it is this central connection between place and faith that Norris continues to explore throughout *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*.

In the opening pages, a quote from José Ortega y Gasset reads: “Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are.” Norris’s work reflects on this idea of place and self-identity and encourages readers to consider the ways in which they have been shaped by their physical landscapes. How has my location influenced the pace of my daily activities? How have my neighbours’ experiences affected my perspectives? How has my climate affected my family’s traditions? Dakota is specific to Norris’s experience in the Plains, yet the question of place and self-identity is appropriate for all readers of today’s mobile society who have had to reinvent their concepts of home.

Structured as a reflective, liter-

ary work of non-fiction, *Dakota* integrates personal experience stories with insights on belief and identity. “Weather reports” interspersed through the book bring the tangible landscape of South Dakota to the forefront, reminding readers of the physical forces surrounding Norris and how they work to shape her spiritual geography, as well as her physical. While Norris “made a countercultural choice to live in what the rest of the world considers a barren waste” (p3), she finds within the “so-called emptiness of the Plains” a beauty in the “little things” (p10). Her ability to focus on the small miracles of the desert epitomizes the wisdom of the fourth-century desert monks who have inspired much of Norris’s spiritual reflection. Living in her own American desert, Norris recognizes “the gifts of silence and solitude” and identifies how important it is to find peace and solitude no matter where you are; “in short, to be in the desert and let it bloom” (p22).

While *Dakota* is the story of a desert, it definitely blooms. The book is a treat for all readers craving mature spiritual insight and reflection. Though Norris declares herself “thoroughly Protestant,” her ecumenical approach and extensive experience with the Benedictines add a refreshing richness to her understanding of faith. By connecting herself with her heritage and the Dakota land itself, Norris integrates all aspects of her life – past and present – into a beautiful work of self-discovery.

For more about Norris’s experience with the Benedictines, read her highly-acclaimed *The Cloister Walk*.

Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership

by Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton with Janice Rogers
(Seattle, Washington. YWAM Publishing, 2000). 279 pp.

Reviewed by Donna Stewart.

When a respected friend offered to lend me *Why Not Women?* I thought I had read everything there was to read on the subject of women in ministry. But here in one volume is everything assembled in one place, with the relevant biblical passages compared and illuminated, clearly and simply explained. Conclusions are well documented and defended. Of all the books I’ve read on the topic, this is probably the most complete and accessible for laypersons and for many pastors.

Loren Cunningham, founder of Youth with a Mission, co-authored the book with David Hamilton, who is described as a “veteran missionary” and “dedicated student of the Word.” Their purpose was to study the topic “free of cultural blinders,” allowing the Holy Spirit to guide them to conclusions based on Scripture, scholarship, and experience in mission.

They navigate this theological minefield in plain language and illustrated their guide with clarifying diagrams. They include some church history that is not commonly known, and deal with each of the “problem texts” that have been translated or interpreted in ways that support predominantly male church leadership.

A book written by two authors is bound to have some overlap and flow a little less smoothly than one

Back Issues

written by a single author. Those flaws will be more noticeable to those who find the basic premise difficult.

For this is a bold book. The authors claim that the exclusion of women from the full exercise of their gifts is an attack on the gospel workforce: on men, on women, and most importantly, on the character and image of God as revealed in Jesus. When the writers argue that real men release women as Jesus did, they know that some people will resist their findings.

Cunningham especially recognizes powerful opposition to his message. The enemy, he says, knows his time is limited. Trying to confine the missionary workforce to the male third of the church, he has found layers of support in the church for that strategem. "It will be very difficult for the older generation to make sweeping application of the truths in this book," he predicts. "There are too many cultural bondages, too many obstacles to the dream."

"The dream" is a vision of a worldwide spiritual awakening, with the body of Christ recognizing leaders gifted, anointed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit "without regard to race, color, or gender" (p14). Mennonite Brethren have sometimes been proof against the enemy on the foreign mission field, but have succumbed at home.

Why Not Women? is an understandable, easily available book for people who feel the need to re-think their position on women in ministry. It would be an important addition to most church libraries.

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?*

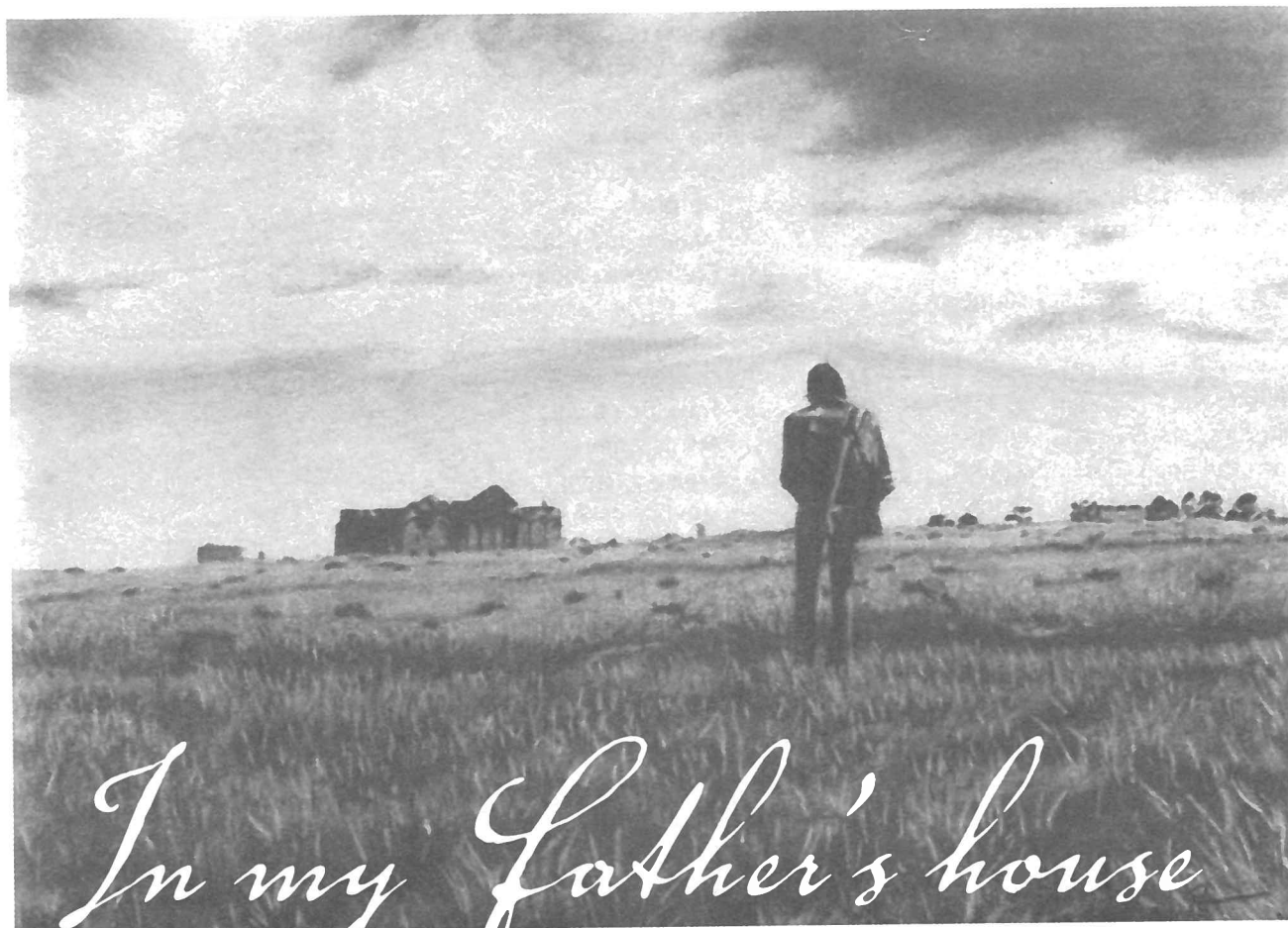
11:3 - *Celebrating Ten Years*

11:4 - *From the Maritimes*

12:1 - *What is Spiritual Guidance?*

12:2 - *Justice, With Eyes Wide Open*

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Donna Stewart is the Moderator of Kilarney Park Mennonite Brethren Church, Vancouver, and a member of the MCCBC Executive.



CINDY NAGANT: "PATRICE WALKING IN A FIELD IN TUNESIA" (PASTEL, 1988)

In my Father's house

*there are many
dwelling places.
If it were not so,
would I have told you
that I go to prepare
a place for you?*

JOHN 14:2 NRSV