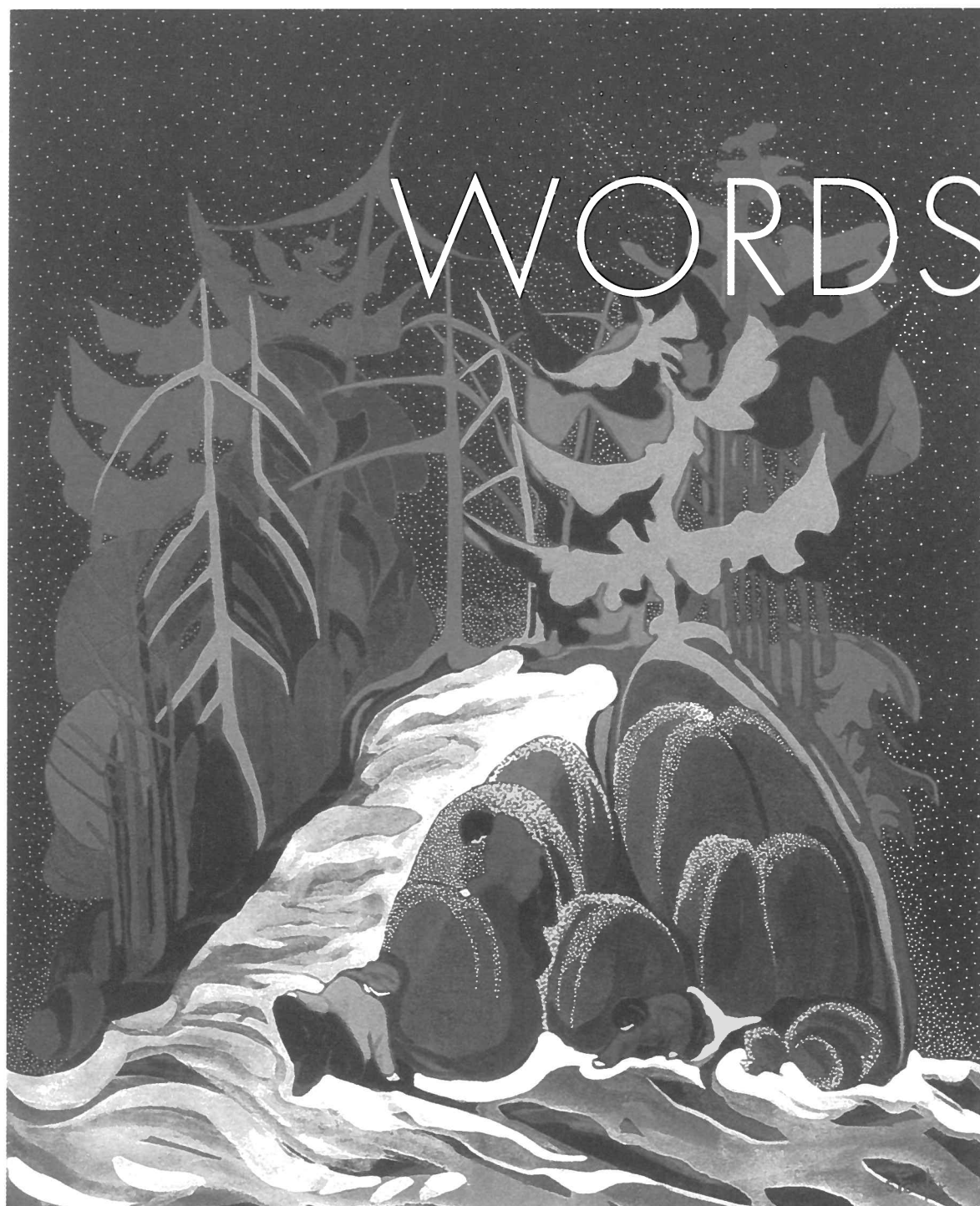


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S O P H I A

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 Collective

Estér DeFehr, *Publisher*

Lori Matties, *Editor*

Hanny Labun, *Circulation*

Esther Reimer, *treasurer*

Christine Enns

Tina Fehr Kehler

Mary Friesen

Jean Reimer

Lis Vensel

Layout/Design

Darrell Dyck, *Pegasus Design*

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correspondence and manuscripts to:

SOPHIA

P.O. Box 28062

RPO North Kildonan

Winnipeg, MB R2G 4E9

fax: (204) 668-2527

e-mail: lmatties@escape.ca

phone: (204) 339-5668

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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).



Front and back cover art by Sandra Fowler. Please see biography on p. 15.

 **PALLISER®**



EDITORIAL

Day to Day Pours Forth Speech

by Lori Matties

When God created the earth, Wisdom was there. She speaks in Proverbs 8: "The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ...then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race" (Proverbs 8:22-23,30-31 NRSV).

I like the picture those words create in my mind – of God creating wisdom and then wisdom working alongside as God spoke the earth into being. I imagine wisdom as a kind of midwife, encouraging God's birthing words along and rejoicing as each infant creation showed its face. It's an image of the good hard work we call labour. It's also an image of the connection between God and wisdom, and of the very intimate connection between God and language.

There is a language that does not speak, yet proclaims God's glory. Psalm 19 says, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." The psalm goes on to describe the sun's joyful journey across the heavens and the perfection of God's law, which both instructs and protects from harm. At the end of the psalm, the psalmist acknowledges the connection between his own language and God's: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,

O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."

What I learn about language from this psalm is that it is more than speech, that all of Creation in its voiceless way reflects the glory of its Creator, that the words of the Creator – both those that create and those that give instruction – are for my pleasure and my protection. I learn further that my own words have both creative and destructive power. My language connects me and identifies me with the One who gave me speech.

It is fitting that there is a biblical tradition that links Wisdom with Jesus, the *Logos* (Word) in the Gospel of John. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." Somehow Jesus *was* that creative Word that brought the world into being. God/Wisdom/Word: it's an equation I can't quite fathom. The Apostle Paul wrote about it in his letter to the Corinthians: "[God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption," (1 Cor 1:30) and later, "we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor 2:7). Jesus, as God's incarnate Word, is a language that speaks of God's earthy, infinite and ongoing love for all of creation, but for humans in particular.

These two languages – Creation and Jesus, the Word of God – are gifts beyond speech. They embody both wisdom and joy, the very essence of God's own self, and, more amazingly, they are embodied in God's creatures, in human beings,

who also reflect their Creator.

This issue of *Sophia* (wisdom!) is about human words. It's about how words create pictures, how they can delight us, how they tell the stories of our lives, how they fail sometimes to explain us, how they are capable of causing damage and destruction. Words are powerful, given to us by the Creator who loves us and who spoke us into being. Our words, like the Creator's, can create and destroy. It is no wonder to me, then, that wisdom and word should have been connected even before the world came into being. So may we continue to seek after wisdom and wed her to our words.

We are pleased to announce the four winners of *Sophia's* fourth New Writers Contest. Congratulations to Helen Baergen, Connie Braun, Alicia Karen Elkins and Diane Trail, whose articles appear in this issue. Also, we are sad to say goodbye to Helga Doermer (though we will continue to hear from her for a little while longer), who has been a member of *Sophia's* editorial committee since the fall of 1998. We will miss Helga's soft-spoken, creative spirit and her enthusiasm for *Sophia*. Thanks for sharing this part of your journey, and your words, with us, Helga.

And, for all of you, may your journey to the cross with Jesus in these troubled times bring you hope and resurrection. Shalom.

God's Words

by Jean Reimer

The God of the universe is a God of words. Words of exuberant life and power formed our solar system. Words of joy and beauty created our earth. Words of love, pleasure, and desire shaped us into the Creator's own likeness.

We, God's creatures so jubilantly spoken into life, turned away from the Speaker. And ever after, a grieving God has poured out upon us words of love and reconciliation – words spoken, carved into stone, inked onto parchment, fashioned into flesh.

In myriad ways, our Maker has taken great pains to speak with us, to reveal things to us. Radiating through our universe, permeating the world around us, are lines of communication from the Creator to the creature, placed there from the beginning of time.

God's words pricked into the night sky

David's ear was tuned to God's lines; he heard even the stars and sky speak God's words: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge... Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."* (Ps.19:1,2,4 NIV)

From ancient times, myths about the constellations and their meaning for mortals have abounded. Some years ago, I chanced to see a book which viewed these celestial signs through the lens of Scripture and understood them to be God's word-pictures to us – star-scenes proclaiming a startlingly vivid story of God's interactions in the heavenly sphere and with humankind.

Some mirror what the Hebrews ritually experienced with God: Taurus calls to mind the bull offered on the altar

for sin; the Ram is known as rescuer and sacrifice, and also as the "signpost"; Aquarius, the Water Jug Carrier pouring healing water upon the earth, is reminiscent of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, where, after a mighty blast on the ram's horn, water from the pool of Siloam was poured from a golden pitcher onto the altar, while the people prayed for earthly and spiritual rain and for the coming of the Messiah.

Starry voices "display knowledge," telling of a fierce struggle between goodness and evil, light and darkness. In the north sky, a great God grapples with a monstrous Serpent, the snake's head poised to strike a bright Crown. A Warrior has his foot on the head of a Dragon, whose body curves menacingly towards a King. The stars of that King identify him as the "shepherd of the flock" – under his foot, the North Pole; at his head, the northern Cross.

Further south, along the ecliptic circle, the Archer aims his arrow at the heart of a Scorpion. With raised sting and poised claws, the Scorpion, representing death, darkness and evil, creeps towards the Virgin, whose brightest star pulses on the sheaf of Wheat in her left hand. Beyond the Virgin rises Leo, the kingly Lion, facing a Crab and a long, many-headed Water Snake. Just below the Lion lies the southern Cross. Orion, associated with light and goodness, faces the Bull.

Next in the circle comes the Ram – deliverer and sacrifice. Following the Ram are two Fish (Pisces) connected by a long cord; the head of the western Fish is a pentagon of stars called the *circlet*. In the time of Christ, the spring equinox moved into Pisces, thus bequeathing the name "Age of the Fish" to the Christian era. After Pisces comes Aquarius, the Water Carrier, pouring healing waters of peace onto the earth.



I suspect that lines to God, key ideas and customs linking people to the sacred story, exist in every language and culture.

耶 穌 義

Ye Su Yi

The song of the stars finds its counterpoint on earth: our Kingly Lion, our Ram, has come; his Cross dealt the first deadly blow against the dragon and serpent; our Living Water will return. These form the central melody. Smaller themes also interweave sweetly with the heavenly song – the early Christians, for example, enduring persecution and needing to hide their faith from Roman authorities, took the fish as a secret symbol of recognition: the Greek word “fish” is made up of the initial letters of the words “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.”

God's words made visible and lively

In Jesus Christ a new Word came to us from God, a Word fused with vital lifeblood, bones and skin. The very essence of the God who speaks and writes came wrapped around with the human form. “A *living* Word”, John said, “that we have seen with our eyes, and touched with our hands” (I John 1:1 paraphrase). A Word you could wrap your arms around, smell, walk and eat with, and love. A Word that cherished you, and brought you, through his very body and blood, back into the embrace of the Father. A Word that now lives within us and speaks to us directly.

God's words shaped to the tongue and heart

Not only are God's words of covenant love and redemption etched and fused into our visible, physical world, they seem to be woven into the very fabric of the languages of the globe. I suspect that lines to God, key ideas and customs linking people to the sacred story, exist in every language and culture.

Chinese, for example, is one of the world's oldest living languages, existing ages before Christ arrived. Yet God arranged for Christ to be manifested within the very structure of that language: The name “Jesus” in Chinese is “Yesu.” The characters *ye* and *su* graphically symbolize Jesus' nature and ministry:

The left part of *ye* (see character above) depicts an ear. (Jesus often said, “they who have ears to hear, let them hear.”)

su (see character above) uses two characters, the left

depicting “fish,” the right “wheat” – images that again echo the motifs of the night sky: Jesus the Fish, Jesus the Wheat Seed dying and rising to life, Jesus the Bread of Life.

yi, the Chinese character for “righteousness” (see character above) is made up of two parts:

the top part is a “lamb,” the part underneath means “me.” “Righteousness” in Chinese thus literally means “the lamb over me,” or “the lamb covers me.” Indeed, true rightness with God can be accomplished only by the Lamb's blood covering me – the atoning blood of the Ram of sacrifice.

In the Mangseng area of Papua New Guinea lives a type of caterpillar called a *thong*. When the *thongs* are ready to spin their cocoons, each caterpillar spins its cocoon on top of the ones below, creating a big pile in a fork of a tree. To protect the cocoons from deadly exposure to wind and rain, one of the *thongs* starts spinning a strong covering over the whole pile. He spins and weaves until he has made a waterproof and fireproof covering over all the other cocoons. This *thong* is called the *husband* of the others, and they are called his *brides*. When the *husband* has finished his weaving, he dies and falls to the ground. The *brides*

survive to hatch into beautiful butterflies and fly up and away. For the Mangseng people, the *husband thong* is a vivid picture of Christ. Christ, their *husband thong*, gave his life for his brides so that they might shed their old selves and be released into new life.¹

Interweaving melodies. Lines within lines. God's words singing and spiralling and patterning through all the layers of our world. We step ever more deeply into wonder and glory.

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

1. Janet Seever and Lloyd Milligan, “Of Caterpillars and Redemption,” in *Word Alive*, Summer 2001, (Calgary: Wycliffe Bible Translators), p 15.

JOY by Doreen E. Ewert

TRANSCENDENT CONNECTIONS

The following is part of a talk Doreen gave at Fresno Pacific College. She defined joy as "the sense of passion and assurance that comes in an experience of transcendent connectedness."

When our family left the U.S. to spend a year in Krakow, Poland, in 1990, I had to choose which two or three books to take along for myself. The three I took were a Bible, T.S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets*, and an English grammar.

These books were chosen because each of them has led me to moments of transcendent connectedness. They represent the major loves of my life: my love of relationship (with God, the community of faith, other humans, the natural world) and my love of language (in literature, words, grammar).

I can still remember sitting in a tenth-grade classroom in Winnipeg, writing an essay on a theme from Dickens's *Great Expectations*, when I experienced a moment of joy, awakening, deep seeing. I recognized that the power of language came not only from the meanings of the written words on the page, but also from the meanings to which the words pointed beyond the page.

It was not that I now understood what the meaning beyond the page was; I didn't achieve that certainty. But I grasped that there was more meaning, more truth. It was as though the words on the page were pointing to an order beyond the specific time of the text, to all time, and into that place beyond – but through – the text where internal coherence and structural unity are found. I experienced for the first time the joy of being connected to the search for meaning.

Not all my reading leads to these moments of joy. I read from a wide variety of genres to escape, to get a quick pleasure fix. I have fun with such reading, but not joy. I will only experience this joy, I have discovered, when the text is complex, when the language is at once obvious and obscure, and when I have to work to unravel the inner voices and the deep structures.

T.S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets* has been such a piece of literature for me. In one passage in "Burnt Norton," the first of the quartets, there is a short passage that time and again illuminates for me that moment when Christ in time and



Christ out of time become one at resurrection:

At the still point of the turning world.

Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still
point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement.

And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered....

...both a new world

And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.

As a sophomore in college, I experienced transcendent connection once again when I came to love Jesus in a new and life-changing way. In a moment of joy, awakening, deep seeing, I recognized that following Christ was not about being good enough, not about working on a series

of behavioral goals, but about becoming. It was about entering a process, not alone, but with Christ and the community of faith. I was now a part of something much larger than myself.

For some time now, I have been enamoured with syntax – the inner principles and structures of language itself. That explains the grammar book in my luggage. While literature pointed me toward connections with the wide view, syntax points me toward connections with the minute view. There I see the nuts and bolts of our ability to construct language creatively.

Steven Pinker points out in *The Language Instinct* that a sentence is not a chain of words but a tree. Then he quotes a poem, "Only God can make a tree."

The language of Scripture leads me to joy in the words and events of paradox and complexity:

where to seek life is to lose it, and to lose life is to preserve it;

where the first will be last, and the last first,

where swords become plowshares;

where the outcast is received as the expected guest.

These are the conundrums and puzzles that point to an order and structure, a perfection and completeness beyond our existence. This is language that points to God, to meaning and truth beyond the murky viewing of my everyday eyes. In this I experience joy.

Doreen Ewert is currently in doctoral studies in Applied Linguistics at Indiana University. She will return to Fresno Pacific University in the Fall and continue as Director of the Intensive English Language Program there. She's a member of College Community Church, MB, in Fresno, CA

The Light of the World

by Helga Doermer

Living in the city, we barely know what darkness is. Even if our homes are unlit, street lights keep the night from fully closing in. Yet, imagine on this late winter's day that as the sun sets and the light fades, there is nothing to illumine the room again – no candle light, no house light, no street light.

It may be easier to imagine the darkness that pervades the countryside or the lake shore on a starless night. Even though they are steeped in a deeper layer of darkness than our cities, it is still a darkness layered in shadows. As our eyes adjust, we can discern the contours of a changing terrain and the silhouettes of our companions. Yet there is an even deeper darkness. It is a darkness I have only experienced once, while on vacation in the Black Hills.

On a brilliant, burning hot August day, our family came across a novel opportunity to follow in the adventurous footsteps of spelunkers down winding tunnels into the depths of a mountain. The mouth of the first cave welcomed us with its shade and its cool rock walls. It was an inviting respite from the heat of the day. The tour guide led us along passageways lit by fairy lights. Every footfall was a deeper descent. At times the passages narrowed so that we could barely squeeze our bodies through. Down we went until the cool air became chilled and the light of day seemed very distant.

We reached an interior cave, scarcely large enough to hold a dozen people. The tour guide invited us to find a spot and stand very still. When we had found our places, the lights were shut off.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I experienced in that dark space. Never had I experienced such an enveloping blackness. I closed my eyes to adjust them to the lack of light and then opened them again. Still there was nothing but dense black before my open eyes. I placed my hand in front of my face, but it was imperceptible to me. What an eerie sensation to be absolutely invisible to myself, as invisible as the people standing just inches away from me. The darkness was so heavy, I could almost feel it wrapping itself around me. It was so thick, it seemed hard to breathe. Nothing could have induced me to move in that absence of light. It was as if the darkness itself had imprisoned me.

As I reflect on the intensity of the darkness experi-

enced in the depth of the mountain cave, it seems a fitting symbol for the soul darkness humanity can encounter – darkness so deep and dense and impenetrable it becomes immobilizing. Vision is gone. A sense of location is lost. There are no clues, no compass of orientation for direction. In the dark and formless void, there is only the sound of the despairing dying.

During this season of Lent, we in northern climates find ourselves still in winter – in the barren season of darkness and death. It seems a fitting time of year to follow the unfolding drama once again of the Light that came into the world, yet was neither recognized nor accepted by his own (see John 1:3,10,11). Only months ago we celebrated his birth. We heard the story of his baptism, and the trials he endured before he began the work to which he was called.

We followed his incarnate journey in this world – healing and empowering through his ministry. We again hear the crowds hailing him as king. Then we are confronted by that fateful moment of betrayal and the blackest moment of human history.

The darkness experienced in the depth of the mountain cave seems a fitting symbol for the soul darkness humanity can encounter.

Imagine the moment of his dying cry, the anguish of being betrayed. Imagine the moment in which he felt alone, in which it seemed that even God had hidden God's face.

Yes, we are in the season of Lent, and it seems fitting that the ground is still hard and frozen as we again remember the moment in which the Light of the World was momentarily snuffed out. It is an apt moment in which to acknowledge the depth of darkness the human soul can know. Hear the promise spoken into this darkness: "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79 NRSV).

We do not need to live in darkness. The Light of the World has come. The curtains of death/darkness have been pulled back to reveal the illuminating brilliance of a new dawn. Soon we will celebrate the resurrection, and remember the coming of the Eternal Light.

.....
Helga Doermer has recently opened "Beyond Words," a counselling service in downtown Winnipeg.

Words Fail Me

by Mary Henkelman

Even though I've never been there and know little about it, the Arctic has an important place in my imagination. There in the north all pretense is stripped away: a severe land of snow and ice, earth and stone – and wind. There a century later they find the bones of lost expeditions. In the tropics, dying and decay are quickly overrun by fresh vegetation, the buzz of insects and chirping of birds. But in the north, death is still and silent. There you have time to look and listen.

One feature of the Arctic particularly intrigues me: the *inuksuk*. Built by the native Inuit people, an *inuksuk* consists of a pile of rocks. Broad at the base, it stretches up in a vaguely human shape. Sometimes the base is even split as if to form two heavy stone legs. Near the top, just before the boulder for a head, there is always a slab of stone that reaches out like arms. Nothing holds these rocks together. They are simply piled in ways that appear precarious and yet are balanced to stand and withstand long wind-bitter winters.

I have a friend who likes to photograph *inuksuks*. Her work is beautiful. In her pictures, grey stone stands against grey sky. Because of the absence of colour, one is made more aware of shape and texture: the wind-scoured contours of boulders, the ice-etched grain in the granite. But the photos are not totally colourless. Amidst the greyness there is just the slightest, faintest hint of hues that range from rusty earth to rock-vein rose, from lichen jade to creamy ivory and bone. But you have to look closely.

I do not know exactly what *inuksuk* means. I tried to find out on the internet and did discover that an *inuksuk* was not a grave marker but some kind of journey marker. All too soon, though, I found myself lost in the net's thickets of information. Next I tried the reference library and they managed to come up with one small book from a special reserve section. When I opened it, I discovered it was not in English and not even in Roman script. Instead it was in syllabics. I looked at the smooth black shapes on the white paper. Helpless, I handed the book back. From my Oxford Dictionary I found out that *inuk* means person and its plural is *inuit*, the people of the Arctic. Somewhere in my search I also



discovered that *inuksuk* was sometimes written *inuksuit*. As we used to do in linguistics class, I matched up my minimal pairs and decided that -k must indicate singular and -it plural. An *inuksuk*, then, would be a person's *suk*. But what did *suk* mean? There my search dead-ended. Without translation, all the *inuksuk* says is simply: "We were here, but have gone on."

Recently I went to a funeral home. To my mind, funerals belong in the north with the wind wild and wailing. But this funeral home is in the suburbs. It is new, with the

interior tastefully decorated in colours that are currently fashionable. The staff welcome me in voices that are gracious and discreet, and direct me to the appropriate room. There I find small circles of family and friends standing around quietly talking. The dead man lies in his coffin to one side, I knew him only slightly; it is because of my friendship with his daughter that I have come. He seems more or less the same as I remembered, only more faded and grey – and silent. In fact, there isn't a single peep from him all evening. Gradually the buzz of conversation increases and the visitors turn their backs on him. It is as if he isn't really there. And in fact, he isn't there. He's gone. And despite all our talking – which perhaps just reassures us that at least we ourselves are still here – our words fail. For what can you say, whatever can you say, to make up for a life gone?

Still we keep trying. We humans are a species who love to talk. We talk in English and Spanish and Chinese, in Gujarati, Kalenjin, Inuktituk. On cell phones and satellite phones, our endless chatter encircles and enmeshes the globe. And we are not the only ones talking: an endless variety of wildlife trumpet, roar, yelp, chirp, buzz, hum. We try to eavesdrop on dolphins, teach chimpanzees to sign. Even the non-verbal world has its own language written into it: equations of matter and energy; laws of thermodynamics; algorithms of snowflake and snowdrift. But it is perhaps in the genomes of living species that we find the most language. There scientists are currently struggling to decipher their DNA data. Like linguists they painstakingly match up minimal pairs – in this case genetically altered mice – so as to find the meaning of the nucleotide base letters and genetic sentences. When they finally come up with a simple dictionary and rudimentary grammar, that will only be the beginning. Then they will need to know how the overlapping and interconnecting patterns, arranged in discourse structure, become this complex biomass of meaning. Whatever they conclude, their work will show only more clearly that this world is inextricably wound up with words.

Living with all this – this profusion of language both in and around us – it might not be unreasonable to believe that our world was in some way *spoken*. And if it has been *spoken*, it might therefore be *bespoken* ...

Except for death. Death ends words. All the words that once spoke the wonders of a conscious being are swallowed up by death. Deathly quiet. True, there are a few fragments saved in the memories of friends and family, but even these blur and fade. On a larger scale, entire languages and their accompanying cultures, die out. Of the world's approximately 6,000 languages, it is estimated that perhaps as many as 3,000 – half of them – will be gone by

the end of the 21st century. Even where languages do remain, words don't last. They shift and change and lose their meaning. Libraries decay; technology becomes obsolete. Words get lost in the scrap heaps of floppy discs, reel-to-reel tape, and vinyl recordings. Like the worn-down rocks of runes, they are ruined and unreadable. The physical world, too, loses its language. Bodies disintegrate; DNA disperses. Starlight fades; suns turn black. Even the laws of thermodynamics wind down, grind down to grey entropy.

I have a friend who is now in her late eighties. Once a big-boned woman, she is now so thin I sometimes fear the wind will blow her over. But like an *inuksuk* she usually manages to stay balanced, although always with the aid of a walker. As I help her up the steps and into church each Sunday, I can sense people holding their breath, expecting her to topple. But so far, she hasn't. Sometimes I think it is sheer determination keeps her going.

She developed this determination during her long

years on the prairies – not the fertile, wheat-rich prairies – but the land farther north in Saskatchewan where the soil was thin and the living hard. There, for most of her life she was a deaconess in the Anglican church. Her job was to do the marrying and burying, preaching and

Without translation, all the inuksuk says is simply: "We were here, but have gone on."

praying, among scattered farming communities. Today many of these places have become ghost towns as folks died off or moved to cities where the living was easier and the houses had plumbing. Yet while these villages existed, this woman was there, travelling around through sub-zero winters and hot dusty summers to meet the needs of her parishioners. Not until nearly the end of her career did the churchmen in cities decide that they might finally ordain her as priest. She was proud of the recognition, but it wasn't words of recognition that kept her going. It was the scripture-shaped, prayer-shaped words of her faith that kept her *faithful*. These words kept her going, and now in her late eighties keep her going still.

As I take her to church each Sunday, the thing that amuses me – and impresses me – is that even though she no longer has the strength to stand for the hymns, she always hoists herself to her feet for the Gospel and the creed. Her formality makes me mindful that the familiar time-worn words are, in fact, astounding and dumbfounding: Gospel – Word spoken and spelled into flesh, God translated into this human world; and creed – our faith returning mustard-seed-small words. The language in which the creed affirms the gospel story is so terse it seems pared down to tiny kernels: "Jesus Christ...was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On

the third day he rose again." The resurrection is, of course, what takes our breath away. It means that death is swallowed up; the whale gets gulped down whole. Death doesn't have the last word. Instead, the end – and the beginning – is resurrection.

After this pivotal proclamation, the creed concludes in what by comparison are but quick and casual corollaries: "...the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen." But we shouldn't get caught off guard. These too are startling words though we rarely realize what we are really saying. We may, in fact, be playing with matches, dry seeds, that could burst into foliage, leaving our tongues flaming with fire.

Recently I helped my elderly friend move to a nursing home. Such a move is never easy. Nursing homes are obviously a kind of stop-gap shelter before the final journey. That's a fact that we both know although we usually avoid talking about it. For days now, we have been sorting through her belongings, packing boxes, deciding what to keep, give away, throw away. One doesn't need much in a nursing home, and even less in a funeral home.

Today we are going through old papers, receipts, tax forms, letters. I pass her a hand-written list of names and telephone numbers, and ask if it is still useful. "No," she replies matter-of-factly, "those people are all dead now." I wince at her bluntness.

But then it is my turn to be blunt. "You're not going to need these old recipes. After all, you're not going to cook in the nursing home. They provide meals." But she refuses to throw them out. And so the recipes get packed along with no less than two aprons. I shrug.

Then I discover her collection of expired passports. We compromise and keep only the most recent one. She hates to admit that her travelling days are done. But we both know it is true. On the only journey that she is about to take, passports are irrelevant.

Yes, the collection of appointment books, going back nearly twenty years, must be kept. "I might need to look up a date or something," she explains. I nod, but I know it's more than that. These calendars are the record of how she spent her days and lived her life. She can't part with them.

Likewise all the commentaries and theology texts must be packed for the nursing home. I know she will never read them any more. These days, working with her huge bubble of a magnifying glass, she can decipher only a few words at a time. But the books were the tools of her trade and form part of an identity that she cannot yet relinquish.

Around us are endless piles of papers and books: the words of a lifetime.

Meanwhile, around us in her cluttered apartment, there are endless piles of papers and books: the words of a lifetime. The packing process is frustratingly slow, I worry that we won't be ready on time. I worry even more that all this stuff will never fit into one small nursing-home room. What is needed are some clean-sweeping take-it-or-leave-it decisions. Instead, she rambles, recounting stories from years ago. I know it is part of saying goodbye to her possessions, her memories, her life. But I don't have time and I'm running out of patience. It seems as if for days now, I've been fighting with her fierce spirit and we're both exhausted.

Then, in the midst of sorting pictures, I discover the photograph of a young child. It's a formal portrait taken by a photographer and pasted onto a cardboard frame. The child, not more than three or four years old, is sitting calmly, looking out from the age-battered cardboard with a clear, steady gaze. Though the hair is cut in a no-nonsense style with straight bangs, the effect is not severe. Rather,

the sepia tones in the old photograph provide a softness; a creamy light blesses the child's beautiful skin. I raise the picture questioningly toward my elderly friend.

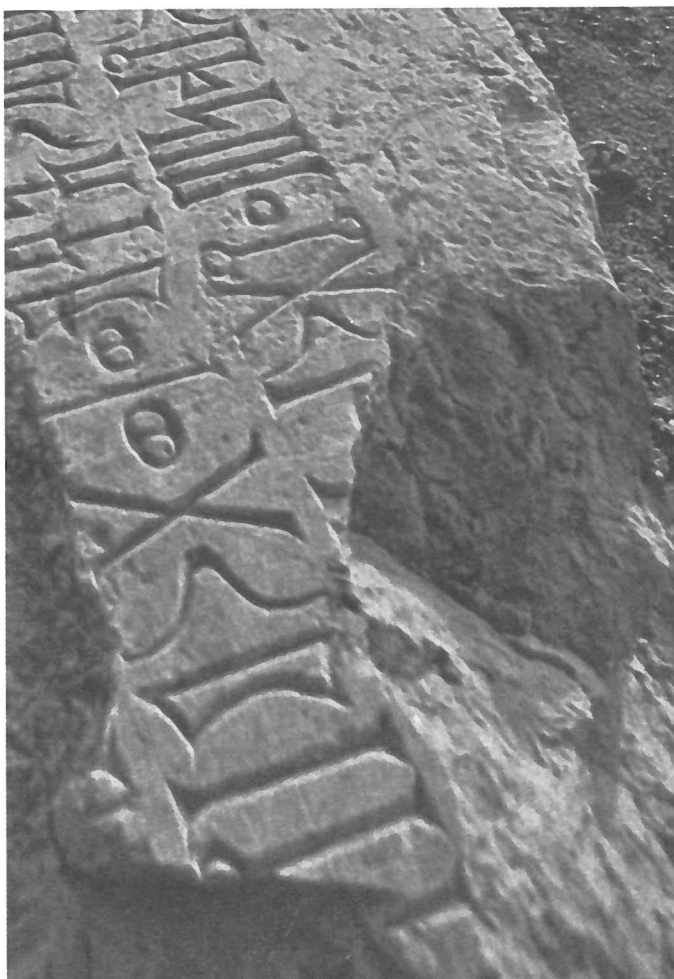
As I look at her grey complexion with the wrinkles of her face askew as she tries to see out her one good eye, I can't quite believe what I know she will say. "Yes,"

she replies, "it's me."

I never knew this child and never dreamt she even existed. Actually, although I heard the stories, I also never knew the middle-aged woman who worked those long years on the prairies. All I've known this past decade or two has been an old lady, living out the lees of her life. Time is cruel in what it takes away, but the process of dying is even more so. Dying is the last paring down, the final humbling. One becomes, in George Herbert's words, "most thinne." No wonder she wants to keep her things. In a time that is empty and draughty, she needs them for warmth. But as mind and body are deconstructed by death's cold wind in the brain and in the bone, everything one has and has been gets blown around and away – even the words.

If we believe in the resurrection, it means these blown bits get caught up, reconstituted, consummated. Not just the dregs of dying, but the whole person – the beautiful young child, the hard-working woman, the tough old lady – all are transformed and translated into a firmer reality, the words and deeds and even the dreams of a lifetime construed into truer meaning. The hints of ourselves that occasionally flashed out in metaphor but could never be fully articulated, not even to ourselves, may finally radiantly bloom, If you believe

For resurrection is a word whose meaning is not fully



part of human language. We can't really talk about it. It's a foreign tongue. As humans, we seem mainly bound to think in metaphors, analogies. We look at something new through something old. We see what is the same and what is different. But our thoughts, like everything else we know, are embedded in time. Our metaphors live – and die – in time. Resurrection points outside our time. And though, of course, we do make metaphors for resurrection (since metaphors are all we have with which to work), they always are, at very best, inadequate.

The best metaphors for resurrection come from St. Paul's first-century letter to the Corinthians. His foremost picture is that of a seed. Buried in death, it will grow in soil beyond our time. There new life will sprout and branch, alive and strong (see 1 Cor 35ff). It is as if in this new context some DNA of our inner being were to unfold once more into bifurcations of bone and vein and neuron, and grow anew into rich vegetations of grammar and metaphor and memory.

Paul's second resurrection metaphor comes from a lifetime spent translating Jewish gospel into Greek culture. In this, like a translator, he matches up his minimal pairs in order to learn from the similarities and differences: the first man, Adam; the second man, Christ. And he

concludes, "for as all die in Adam, so will all be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor 15:22). Although Paul loses me a little in what seem like rather tricky rabbinical arguments, I get the sense that Christ becomes a kind of translation key. Translated in our world, he can thus translate us into his world. Spoken and spelled, our storied selves are caught up into a new story, a more alive language and culture.

Paul's final image uses a special form of metaphor: oxymoron. With this kind of metaphor, the two sides of the analogy are so far apart that one side cannot be used as a lens for the other. There are no similarities – only differences and contradictions. So the two ideas are simply set together, or more exactly smashed together, like particles slammed in high speed accelerators. In the resulting explosion, symmetries merge, matter and energy reconfigure, new particles appear. St. Paul's oxymoron lies in his insistence that resurrection involves a *spiritual body*. For him, resurrection is not just *spirit*, not just software for some virtual reality. Rather, spirit and body *spirit/body* – collide and explode into unspeakably new reality.

All these are metaphors, glimpses, longings of what we try in vain to say. And yet in faith we try again, with creed-words, prayer-words. Words translated and translating.

When she dies, I hope to be there. She will, I'm sure, face her last breath with the same courage and straightforwardness that she has lived her life. There won't be much to see.

But I like to think that possibly I may catch a glimpse of that famed flaming chariot when it swings low and scoops her up. And thin, yes, thin enough to fly, she will mount high on eagle wings, on angel wings, George Herbert's "Easter-wings." That chariot will fly with her far north, through all the whirling-wild dark winter wind, and past. On it will carry her toward that of which the north can only briefly glimmer: light perpetual and sempiternal summer.

All this, were I to see it, would leave me tongue-tied, speechless, powerless to tell. No wonder there are so few visions given. Instead, the moment will be unremarkable, almost unmarked. And yet I will in good faith sense the words: "She was here, but has gone on."

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

Talking to Trees

by Alicia Karen Elkins

This year has started out to be one that will create extreme inner conflict with me over Christianity and my Native American heritage. Actually, the conflict began last summer when my favourite pastor strolled silently up behind me. I was in the middle of a conversation with a sick tree. The pastor immediately jumped onto a soapbox about how my talking to trees was nothing more than idolatry. The Bible clearly tells me that worshipping idols is wrong! He took the opportunity to get in a few jabs at my Native beliefs and to tell me that he knows all about Native American beliefs because his mother was a Navajo. He also assured me that animals will not be in Heaven because they have no soul or spirit. By the time he was finished with his "counselling session" I was in tears.

Then, in December, a Native American monk who serves as an editor for a religious magazine contacted me. He asked me to write an article about my Native American beliefs and how they interact with my Christianity. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the American Indian Freedom of Religion Act. My soul-searching began. All my beliefs went under a magnifying glass. I think I have now progressed to a microscope.

Most Native Americans have a name for the Supreme Being. Of course, it varies among the 500 Nations because our Native languages differ, just as English and French differ. But regardless of the name, we are in agreement that there is a Creator – one Supreme Being that rules over all creation. That much works well with Christianity.

The very next principle in Native American beliefs is the one that causes most of the conflict with Christians. These Christians do not understand what they see, want to quickly pass judgment, and begin to correct the situation. Unfortunately, they are not in accordance with the very book upon which they are trying to base their lives. The Bible tells you that God is everywhere. As a Native American, I believe that. I believe God is everywhere, including in the trees, rocks, Mother Earth and animals. It is arrogant and self-centered for me to suppose that I am supreme to God's other creations – that I am more important to God than the other creations. However, I do believe that as a

human, I have a certain responsibility to protect God's creation and to extend love to all beings on Mother Earth...animals and plants included.



ILLUSTRATION CREDIT

Normally, this does not cause problems for me. I feel most at peace within myself and with the world around me when I am being of service to the plant or animal kingdoms. Science has proven through Kirilian photography that plants do respond to human voice and touch. That cannot be denied. I majored in agriculture and minored in forestry and am well versed in the physiological attributes of the plant kingdom. When someone begins to tell me that talking to a tree is worshipping an idol, I start to think they are an ostrich hiding their head inside the

Bible and hoping that science will go away. This magnifies the stress and confusion I feel inside by adding guilt for the "bad thoughts." It is especially profound when it comes from a member of the clergy!

As I move into the new century, I find myself caught in complete conflict and confusion over what to believe. I struggle to maintain a belief in what the Bible says, while keeping my mind open to the scientific discoveries and advances and maintaining the few remaining remnants of my Native American heritage. Yet, on a daily basis, I find that my faith in the Bible is being tested anew, while my Native American beliefs are receiving support from the scientific community through new discoveries. Most days, I question how much longer I can continue to believe

All my beliefs went under a magnifying glass. I think I have now progressed to a microscope.

in a system that actively instigates an internal war for me while attempting to defy the laws of science. I worry that my faith is being reduced to less than that of a mustard seed. At any rate, I do not expect to stop talking to trees any time soon.

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Alicia Karen Elkins is completing her MA in Creative Writing and plans to continue with doctorate studies. She has just arranged a student teaching assignment and PR internship with the Chief Joseph Foundation on the Nez Perce reservation in Lapwai, Idaho.

The Seduction of the Internet

by Diane Trail

At 16, Eric had attended church with his parents all his life. Eric was a good kid from a good Christian family. His parents had prayerfully tried to raise Eric properly. They had even scrimped and saved to send him to a Christian school, hoping to protect him from unhealthy pressures and influences.

But their illusion of safety was shattered one evening when one of his parents, innocently searching the "History" of previously viewed Internet sites on their home computer, discovered that someone had been accessing pornographic sites online. It was Eric.

The parents' reaction was one of shock and hurt. How could this have happened? Why? What could they do?

This scenario is increasingly common in many relatively peaceful homes.

Few decent teens would dare to buy a pornographic magazine at a local store or rent a porn movie, but now, as Focus on the Family on their website www.pureintimacy.org, dedicated to helping people deal with pornography, states, "an Internet saturated with pornography is making it alarmingly easy to bring sexual temptation right into our homes. This is a growing problem for thousands of families that struggle with the effects of sexual compulsion and addiction."

Fellow schoolmates introduced Eric to soft-porn websites. Friends thought peering at airbrushed nudity was cool and harmless. The surge of arousal intrigued Eric who then decided to check out the sites for himself in the privacy of his own home, when his parents were out.

Youth are extremely vulnerable to exploring forbidden websites on the Internet. They are curious, and at risk to anything that suggests excitement and intimacy, even if the intimacy is illusory. Focus on the Family says, "Sexual images ranging from the seemingly harmless airbrushed nudity you find in "skin" magazines to violent, hardcore pornography are easily available to anyone with a computer and a modem. Plus, the interactive features of the Web – email, newsgroups and chat rooms – easily connect strangers who share sexual interests, luring married men and women [and youth] away from their families."

Even if Eric had never intentionally searched for pornography, he might accidentally be exposed while searching for something else. Pornographic websites are hidden everywhere. Without permission, email addresses are sold to pornography distributors who, in turn, inundate email users with unsolicited suggestive email links.

Why is Internet pornography such a problem for youth?

According to Dr. Soggie, psychology professor at Atlantic Baptist University in Moncton, New Brunswick, "It is my experience that when there is a mixture of low personal involvement between parent and teen, combined with an isolated location for internet access (i.e. the teen's bedroom) that such sites can accessed." There are Internet filtering systems that block offensive material. These are aids for parents but are no substitute for parental involvement. "In all honesty, often times parents and church leaders do not even know how these systems work," Dr. Soggie says. He recommends that parents/leaders become well informed; be brave enough to discuss the issues without getting emotionally enraged (this just frightens the adolescent away); and, lastly, be clear about rules and expectations (not just *what* you expect, but *why*).

Soggie explains that we need to remember "adolescents are trying to develop a whole new world within their minds and it is our job to help them through this difficult process. Too often we forget how difficult our own adolescence was."

Let me go back to the story of Eric once more. When Eric's parents discovered that Eric had been viewing pornography online, they confronted him about it. Tears were shed. Eric confessed and apologized, promising never to do it again. After a few weeks, the issue was dropped. The parents returned to their other concerns. Eric returned to his usual activities. However, when Eric got lonely again, the siren call of the airbrushed seductive models sounded in his brain. Eric occasionally failed to resist the temptation. A cycle of desire, struggle and guilt ensued, unbeknownst to the parents or friends.

"What makes porn so addictive?" asks Marshall Allen in his article entitled "Fighting Porn" (Focus on the Family's college website, www.boundless.org), "Men are attracted to pornography because the women are always willing... Unlike real women, they'll never reject the viewer."

Allen says, "It demeans people, it desensitizes people, it makes people unable to form or sustain real relationships. It's never 'harmless fun' or 'a healthy release.' It's always offensive to God; it's always corrosive to God's design for our sexuality."

If you discover your adolescent or someone you know struggles with pornography or other sexual compulsion, confront him/her with the facts with compassion. Learn how to reduce the risk. Then love enough to understand weakness, and realize the struggle may well be ongoing. Dare to ask again and again if he/she is successfully fighting the temptation.

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Diane Trail is a part-time journalist for *ChristianWeek*, a Canadian interdenominational newspaper. She has lived in India and Kenya and now lives in New Brunswick, where she and her husband, a Baptist pastor, have three young adult children.

A Christmas Gift

by Connie Braun

from the Sea

This Christmas we are away from family and friends. The decision to leave was mine, and I wonder if I'm flawed, like a sweater with a snag, or worse, a defect in the domestic fabric of motherhood. I feel so overwhelmed at this time of year when other wives and mothers immerse themselves in the traditions of the season. Part of what makes leaving a little easier is that we both have families living close by that we see regularly, so, with our children, my husband and I come to an island in the sea this year. There will be no usual Christmas activities and obligations. And, as if to justify missing the snowfall at home, I imagine that a balmy breeze is truer to the nativity setting in Bethlehem anyway. I have brought along a book, *Gift From the Sea*, by Anne Morrow Lindbergh, in which she comments on the luxury of choice many of us in our North American culture have, including me, between complexity and simplification of life. "For the most part, we who could choose simplification choose complication." This statement stirs me. The author goes on to say that a simplified outward life is not enough, but I decide that it is definitely a start.

Throughout the book, the author uses the image of an island as a metaphor for solitude and reflection. Solitude is necessary for a peaceful inner life, and vacations, she writes, are like an island of space and time – I think of the five of us here as being our own island. My thoughts shift like the sand in the breaking waves to another place, to home, where it is snowing. Our mothers will be engaged in activity for Christmas Eve while I have spent the day at the beach with no responsibilities – lazy hours liberally sprinkled with sand and salt.

Showered and refreshed, I recline on the patio sipping a glass of eggnog and gaze at the ocean in anticipation of the sunset and the descent of this special night. Just offshore, the water softly breaks and a dark shape emerges; the back of a whale! Elated, I call my family over with a hushed trace of urgency in my voice. They know how inexplicably drawn I am to these mysterious graceful giants and quickly gather around me. Together we watch, captivated, as the whale gently rolls to the side and a long fin, like a slender hand, claps the water's surface, as if to ensure our attention. Her act is audible a moment later,

just as thunder is heard moments after lightning. Again and again, fin against water. Then a tiny fluked tail pops up from the waves and wags in response. The mother raises her tail, bringing it down with a thud and displacing water into a fan of spray that arches and showers like a summer downpour. I am mesmerized by this affectionate interplay between whale and offspring. It goes on for fifteen minutes, a half hour, is it longer? And suddenly during that time I sense the significance of what I am witnessing, so grateful that I wasn't preoccupied but rather still and available. That these whales should pause along their journey to play in front of us, on this evening, seems intentional, as if this was an intimate gift from the Divine Creator to me. Time seems to stop, until the shimmering sun slowly slips into the sea.

At church, in the glow of candlelight, once again I think of our families at home, gathered by now around the tree, exchanging gifts. Mild guilt washes over me like a wave, then flows away as the singing begins. "Oh Holy Night... The night when Christ was born..." As if speaking

to reassure me, the pastor prefaces his sermon by commenting on all the things we do to get ready for Christmas, making ourselves three times busier than usual – baking, cooking, shopping, visiting, decorating – yet that is not what Christmas is about. All around me heads nod slightly, creating a subtle move-

ment throughout the congregation, like an undulating body of water. I feel acceptable. The purpose of Christmas, he declares, is simply for us to know God personally. The message that follows warms me like tropical sun rays.

A few days later, I enquire about a whale-watching excursion and an islander tells me that this is not the right time of year; experts have sensed only about twenty whales in these waters. He says I'd be lucky to see any activity at all. My intuition about the whales on Christmas Eve was correct; they were a gift, and they will become my personal metaphor for a simpler life wherein I recognize God's grace in the deeper, quieter moments.

"For the most part, we who could choose simplification choose complication."

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 Connie Braun lives with her husband and 3 active teenagers in Abbotsford, B.C., where they attend Bakerview MB Church. Besides her passion for housing the vulnerable and providing global Christian-based education, she is currently working on a family memoir.

The Art of Sandra Fowler

Sandra Fowler is a Winnipeg artist. Of her work she says, "I was raised on the Prairie and spent my summers in Lake of the Woods. From a very early age I have been strongly affected and connected to the beauty and grandeur of our land. I have found that our natural surroundings speak to me of God's overwhelming love for us. My art has been a vehicle in which to share this love. When people of faith see my work they often say to me - 'What is here - there is something more than just trees and rock?' I invite them to enjoy the work and be filled with the feeling of God's goodness to us."



Sandra Fowler holds a Bachelor of Social Work and a Bachelor of Interior Design (Dean's Honor List) from the University of Manitoba. The paintings shown here in black and white are full of vibrant colour.



Two Women in Bogotá

by Helen Baergen

"So that's why I felt so surrounded!" she exclaims with delight when I tell her how we e-mailed our friends to pray for her. "That's why I was able to give this over to God and feel such peace."

We sit across from each other in a crowded restaurant in the heart of noisy, uneasy Bogotá. She has a husband old enough to be her father, a large family including five grandchildren; she runs the family's three music stores in Bogotá as well as managing two in other cities, and she is 9 years younger than I. I have two sons and a daughter-in-law in Canada and have lived in Bogotá since October 2001. Most days I long for green grass, conversations in English and mint tea that tastes like mint. She is telling me how a two-week nightmare of negotiating with men threatening to kidnap members of her family unless she paid an exorbitant sum of money finally ended, how she had to go to a funeral home on the outskirts of this huge city to deliver the money, how her husband feared she'd never come back, how she wondered at thirty male 'family members' at the funeral home, only later realizing that they were undercover police in case this was an extortion arranged by the FARC (an illegal paramilitary group) and, most of all, how she felt God's arm around her, holding her.

She thanks me profusely for my prayers, says my prayers are helping her entire family, and calls me her guardian angel. How did I get into this picture? Since I've been here my prayers are mostly gluts of "please, God, I'm lonely,...afraid...do I have to stay? ...if I must, then you'll have to give me courage...but I'd as soon get out...and oh, yes, there's Amparo,..." Hardly a best-seller on prayer. So how? And why?

In April 2001, in preparation for a trip home, we walked into a music store, picked out a harp and said, "We'd like to take it to Canada. Is that possible?"

"Canada?" said the woman in charge of this small but packed music store on Calle 24. "All my life I have felt indebted to some people in Canada. How I would love to find them, to show them that their sacrifice was not in

vain." And she told us how a family in Canada had supported her from primary school through high school through some kind of a sponsorship plan. "Without their help," she said, "I would never have been able to go to school. But you see," she added, "I got married before I finished school, against my mother's wishes, and that's when the sponsorship ended. I've never been able to thank them."

Do you know their name or where they lived?" we asked casually, playing the "do-you-know-so-and-so-in-Canada?" game.

"S...s..., it started with 'S', I think," she responded.

"Saskatoon, Saskatchewan?" I joked. "We'll be there three weeks from now."

Her face lit up. "I still have a letter from them – the last letter I received 28 years ago. I'll bring it to the airport."

(In addition to wrapping up the harp at no extra cost, she and her son were at the airport at 3:30 a.m. to make sure it would go through customs okay!)

Three weeks later, with help from the Saskatoon telephone directory, the Internet and the 1974 letter, which had only a Foster Parents' Plan sticker and a name on it, we found the author, now a widow living in a seniors' high-rise. "We did so little," she said, when we met her, took some pictures, and gave her the letter she had written to that young girl half a world away so long ago. "I never dreamed it was making such a difference."

Back in Bogotá we placed those pictures on the counter in front of Amparo and suddenly the world halted. "God has answered my prayers," Amparo murmured over and over through her tears as ignored customers excused themselves and left. "Twelve years ago," she continued, "I nearly died of a malignant brain tumour. But

God knew there was something I still needed to do. Now I can do it. I can thank that family."

Two women: one who trusts God intimately even though she says she has not experienced God in the church, and one a church-going mission worker with feeble, fearful prayers who happens to come from Saskatchewan, who happened to buy a harp from this particular store, who happened to stop by there on December 29, saw the tears and heard about the extortion demands. What does God make of all this? Do I hear a gentle chuckle?

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Helen Baergen and her husband are working at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Bogotá for the Mennonite Church Canada.

*She thanks me profusely for my
prayers, says my prayers are
helping her entire family, and
calls me her guardian angel.
How did I get into this picture?*

POEMS FROM COLOMBIA

Dark in the Garden

by Helen Baergen

It's dark in the garden –
Fear dark, anxiety dark.

Leaving the cattle bawling fleeing
to the city dark;
Purple bougainvillea blossoms weeping
Gasping for air in smoking
Burning buses dark;
Child soldiers trampling, piercing sunshine
yellow hibiscus under dynamited
bridges, toppled hydro towers dark;
Fear-heaving mist shrouding
brooding mountains menacing pathways dark;
Coffee-turned-cocaine dark;
Paying in blood for
the sins of others dark,
Cowering in my own city
Prisoner dark;
50 years – all my life,
Hopeless dark;
Waiting for redemption dark;

Mary, have you seen the Lord?
Has he risen yet?

Are You Keeping Well?

by Helen Baergen

last night
my mother's voice
at the other end,
"Are you keeping well?"
and I smell prairie attic dust & dill
dried between layers of yellowing Saskatoon Star-Phoenix
and stored in ancient Roger's Golden Syrup pails;
"How is it going with your work?"
and I hear memories in the sighing
of the old clock ticking,
echoes in a wind-swept, nearly-empty house,
the creak of the third step
on the stairs,
the clink of the front door,
(we never could sneak in).

today
an old woman lies
on a hard, broken-up sidewalk,
her grey hair a matted mop on
a garbage bag pillow,
another garbage bag clutched in weathered, leathery hands,
layers of garbage bags wrapped
neatly, even, around her feet,
(someone must have taken time and care to do that),
like everyone else in their smart-soled feet,
I step over, around her,
while she sleeps.

Is she someone's mother?
Has she ever had the privilege of asking, "Are you keeping well?"
(Has anyone ever asked her?)

Magdalena R.

by Alice Foltz

Flowing without moving, the river slides through alluvial mud,
Deep and rich under hazy sun that threatens to melt all.

Descendants of the Maya travel here, poling canoes, tending corn,
Catching fish in woven nets they throw across the river in slow arcs.
Homes perch on banks and sometimes slide into the dark floodwater:
The river is the source of life and death.
Others come, toting guns, collecting cash, demanding loyalty for life,
Ending the rhythm of the river with promises of wealth.

Child of peace, whose dusty feet were washed by Magdalene,
Heal the hearts consumed by golden oil and drugs;
Dry up the tears, wipe the eyes of those who wait along the banks,
And bring songs of hope to those who look for peace.

A Theological Dilemma

by Elfrieda Schroeder

My Oma, Katharina Kroeger, died in 1976 at the age of 83. She left a notebook in which she reflects on some of the events of her flight (together with our family) from the Ukraine to Poland and Germany during WW II. Her account begins with the accidental death of one of her sons.

What is fascinating about my Uncle Dietrich's death is the theological dilemma it caused for my grandmother. The following excerpts, translated by me from the original German, tell how she came to terms with it.

Preussisch-Stargard, 1944. A place of refuge from our war-torn home in South Russia, Chortitza. We are safe, but we fear for our young boys, conscripted into the German military. Hans has been in the military for almost a year already, and now it is 18-year-old Dietrich's turn.

June 15, a lovely summer evening. Sister Tina Penner and I sit on a bench, engrossed in conversation. Suddenly I experience a jolt that sends shock waves throughout my body. I don't understand what has happened. Upset, I suggest to Tina that we leave and go to our rooms. The time is 8:45.

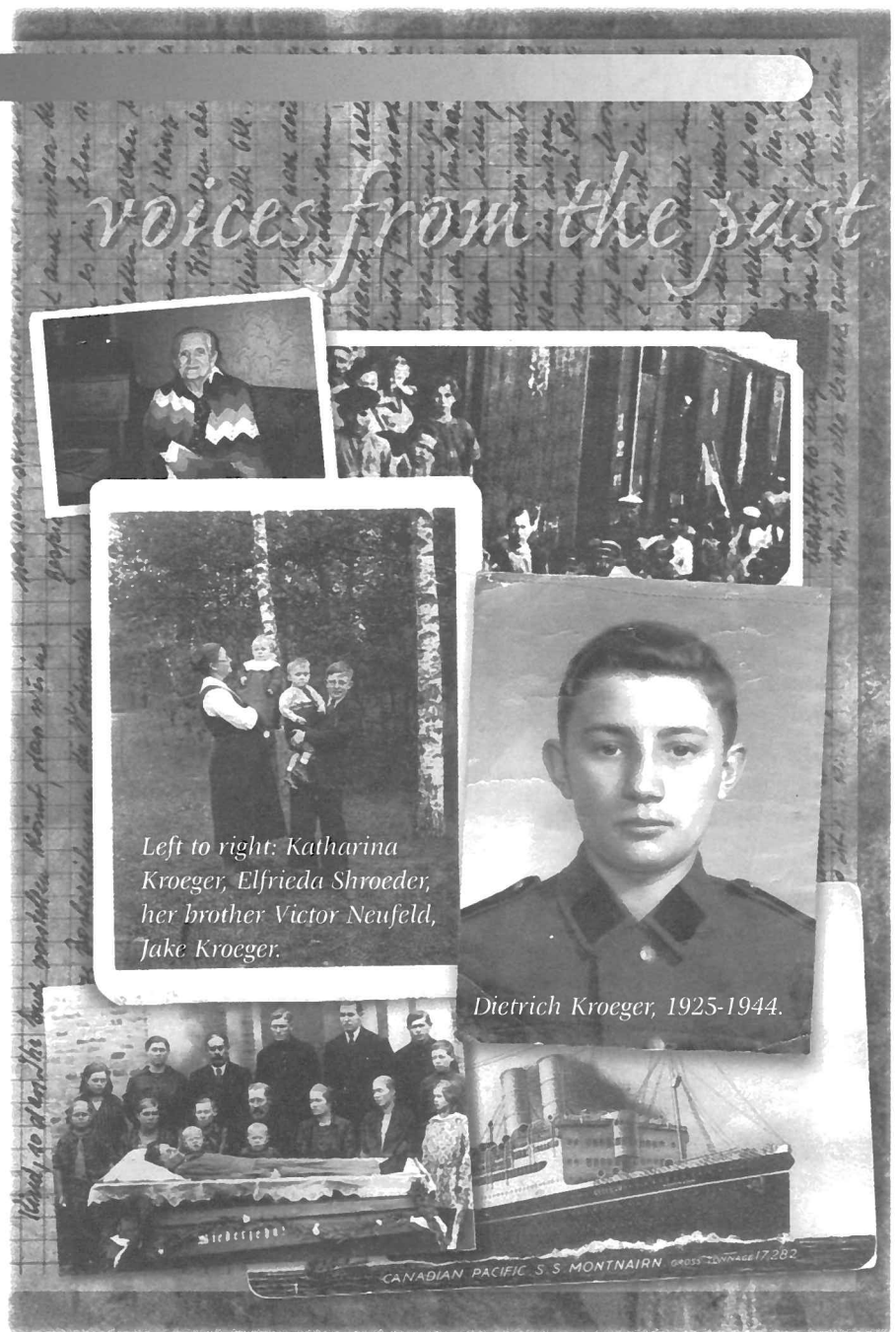
Around mid-afternoon the next day, Anna Loewen, my refugee neighbor, is called to the office of the camp director. After a lengthy absence she returns, a look of shock on her face. She whispers in a low and trembling voice: "I have something very difficult to tell you.... A terrible thing has happened to your son, Dietrich!" Looking directly at her, I say the words that she cannot say to me: "He is dead?" "Yes, indeed, it is true," she tells me, relieved of the burden of having to tell me this awful news. She turns and hurries off.

I am left alone in my sorrow. "Lord, you called him so quickly from this life, what have you done with his soul?" I cry out from the depths of my anguished heart. If only I knew....

Very clearly I hear the words: "His soul is with me!" Oh, how I thank my heavenly Father for this comfort! Deeply humbled, I feel so close to him, so close....

[She is given free train tickets for herself and close family members to attend the military funeral in Berlin. Since she is a widow, she is allowed to choose a companion to go with her. She picks her sister-in-law, Tina.]

I prepare myself for the trip. Not long ago I sewed a black dress from the lining of an old coat someone gave me. What more do I need? My thoughts are far away with my dear son. What could have caused this sudden death? He was learning to be a wireless operator. I had been comforted and calmed by the fact that he was far removed from the battlefield. But what does a mother know of the



Left to right: Katharina Kroeger, Elfrieda Shroeder, her brother Victor Neufeld, Jake Kroeger.

Dietrich Kroeger, 1925-1944.

CANADIAN PACIFIC S.S. MONTNAIRN GROSS TONNAGE 17,282

intrigues of war?

[She describes the train trip, the ravages of war visible everywhere. The captain of the unit to which Dietrich belonged meets them in Berlin.]

Now everything that has happened to our dear Dietrich is revealed to us. One evening the unloaded weapons were to be cleaned. The rifle of the person sitting directly across from Dietrich had inadvertently remained loaded and went off accidentally, the bullet entering the right eye of our Dietrich and passing through his head, killing him instantly. It happened the night I had such a strange experience in the park. My heart trembles at this information.

The captain expresses satisfaction at Dietrich's conduct under his command. He then explains that as a soldier Dietrich has the good fortune to have his body cremated and his ashes placed in an urn.

Tina turns toward me and whispers: "Do you actually know what it means to be cremated?" I do not understand and she explains this horrible thing to me. Like a destructive sword slashing its way into my soul, like a second much more terrible death for my son, the thought of Dietrich being denied a bodily resurrection almost causes me to pass out.

I tell the captain that my greatest wish is to provide a grave for my son in accordance with our own traditions, not to destroy his body while it is still on earth. His response: According to military rules, every dead soldier is honoured in this manner. We can take the urn containing Dietrich's ashes along with us until we once again find a home of our own.

Oh, it is a horror for me to even hear these words and before he is finished I interrupt him: "Surely you can't believe that at a time like this we would concern ourselves with such things! Impossible!"

Sleep eludes me that night in spite of my prayers. The events of the day replay themselves in my head as I wrestle in prayer, pleading for comfort in my sorrow. There seems to be no relief. On the contrary, I hear someone calling me! "From the crematorium there is no resurrection," says the voice. "Both body and soul are lost eternally and go straight to hell." I weep bitterly and plead fervently: "Oh Lord, not that, not that. Have pity on me and on my dearly beloved child. Don't allow him to be eternally lost; you are the victor over death and the grave." Then I hear as if from a great distance: "And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done" (see Rev 20:13).

Even hell gave up its dead – is hell not also a fire? I am reminded of Christians who were tied to pillars and burned alive. Suddenly it is clear: Satan is at work to lead

me into darkness and doubt. Did not the Lord God himself give me the assurance that Dietrich's soul was with *him*? He is in Paradise, the place of joy and redemption. I have overcome Satan and can say: "Away with you, let me be!" I have peace at last, and sink into a light slumber.

At six o'clock I am wide awake, get dressed and step outside. Today I will see my son for the last time. Will I ever experience joy again, and also give joy to others?

"The person who did this horrible thing is behind bars, robbed of his freedom and living in constant turmoil," the captain tells me. "He feels enormous guilt because of what he did, even though it was not intentional." When I hear these words, the Lord through his Spirit speaks to me very clearly: "Here is a job for you." I know what I must do. "May I speak with him?" I ask the captain. Although he

questions my intentions he gives permission and I am taken to see the young man, firm in my resolve. I offer him my hand and I assure him of my forgiveness and that I will not hold this act against him because I consider it to be an act of God. At the end I ask

him if he is willing to give me a kiss in my son's place – which he readily does, and our forgiveness is sealed by God. Both of us are left feeling comforted.

[Katharina and her family go to the funeral chapel to view Dietrich's body. Leaving, she meets the director of the crematorium, who has heard of her desire not to have Dietrich cremated.]

Very politely he attempts to make apologies and to defend himself. When I realize that he will not move from his position, I excuse myself. Why make compromises – this is not the time. I have given it to the Lord; he will take care of it.

[Dietrich receives a full military funeral, including an honour guard, speeches of praise, and three wreaths placed in his honour. The casket, placed on a revolving platform, is slowly lowered as if descending into a grave. It is an illusion (since the body was cremated) but it becomes symbolic for my grandmother.]

I hold on to the thought that Dietrich's body was committed to the earth. Rest in peace my dear son, while the cannons thunder outside, taking many a young life with it. Now, after the unanticipated horror that assailed you, you are resting in the arms of Jesus. Amen.

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Elfrieda Shroeder is a freelance writer and tutor of ESL students. She holds a PhD in German from the University of Waterloo and is a deacon at the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church where she also teaches a College and Career Sunday School class.

Logos and Logos: *Living as Christians in a Branded Culture*

by Paul Dyck

We live in a culture where branding has become a central feature; where identity has become a commodity, where we more and more are being asked to "buy into" competing ways of life rather than simply buying products we need. The urging of our culture that we each make a strong personal identification with commodified ways of life seems to conflict directly with the church's urging that we each identify with Christ.

Naomi Klein's book *No Logo* describes, in a nutshell, the relatively recent changes in the marketplace from companies selling products to companies selling image. Of course, image has always played a role in successful sales, and projecting an image can have integrity when the image reflects the goodness of the product. Honda, for example, can legitimately attract attention to the goodness of its product because Honda takes exceptional care to make its cars. Some corporations, though, have found it more profitable to sell product by selling an image not linked to the quality of its product. Nike, therefore, no longer makes the shoes it sells but rather has them made in the third world by contract. Its advertising centres not on claims about its product but on lifestyle. Going a step further, Tommy Hilfiger did not even start by having clothes made but simply bought what was available and added a brand.

Tommy Hilfiger has made a

fortune by understanding fantastic desire. He started off knowing that white middle-class American youth have a great deal of disposable cash, and if he could sell clothes to them, he could make a lot of money. Since middle-class American kids think the Black ghetto, and particularly the rap stars and star athletes who come out of the ghetto, are cool, he had to figure out a way to get youth in the

the high life. The black boy in the ghetto dreams of being that man. He buys the one thing in the picture that's accessible – the Hilfiger clothes. The middle-class youth see that kids in the ghetto think Hilfiger is cool, and they buy it too. The real world is exchanged for fantasy.

The Hilfiger t-shirt is not merely a fantasy of a superior shirt – its quality in fact is irrelevant. As long as it's not actually falling apart, its branding conveys a fantasy of self-worth that plays off of a perverse culture that produces its heroes from precisely the exploitative economics that produce hopelessness and despair. The extreme consequences of this fantasy are fleshed out in incidents where ghetto youth kill each other for a pair of shoes or a jacket. The newest Nike shoes that depend for their economic value on the cultural pain of the ghetto are too expensive for the kids who live in that cultural pain to afford. Ironically, the violence that breeds the cool on which Nike and Hilfiger play feeds

back in on itself so that ghetto kids who buy into what these corporations say about them are actually increasing their chances of being victims of that violence.

George Orwell, in his essay "Politics and the English Language," makes a striking connection between quality of language and the politics of a culture. Orwell rails against the cluttering up of daily language with bureaucratic and legalistic jargon, in



Projecting an image can have integrity when the image reflects the goodness of the product.

ghetto to wear his clothes. But kids in the ghetto don't have the same fantasy as middle-class kids – kids in the ghetto know the ghetto isn't really that cool. What *they* fantasize about is the world of the white upper class, the world in which their heroes – Michael Jordan and company – live. So, Tommy Hilfiger's ads feature a single, attractive black man wearing Hilfiger branding along with beautiful rich white people on a yacht living

which falsely ponderous words such as “usage” replace perfectly good words like “use” and in which mystifying passive sentence structures replace plainly spoken active ones.

Orwell becomes radical, though, in connecting the cluttering up and dulling of language with politics. He argues that the less our language allows clear speaking, the less possibility there is for

political debate and dissent. If language blocks people from expressing opposition, then that language necessarily acts politically in

support of the *status quo*. As well, the mystification of a message is actually a tool of power. If you cannot understand a message, you can hardly oppose it.

Both governmental bureaucratism and branding use language not to clarify but to cloud. Whether the phrase is “reinforced protection reaction strike” – a bit of American Vietnam war jargon – or “Just do it,” the words move in the opposite direction of the thing signified. A “reinforced protection reaction strike” is in fact an invasion, or, more precisely, a way of convincing a population that wouldn’t otherwise support an invasion that this particular one really isn’t – it’s actually for protection. The present American government makes similar obfuscating linguistic moves in trying to justify an invasion of Iraq. But what does “Just do it” actually do? It’s not that people are against buying Nike shoes in the same way they are normally against offensive wars. Instead, the motivation behind the mystifying statement seems to be that Nike has lost faith in the goodness of making shoes and selling them to people who like them. It now claims through its advertising to sell not things but a quality of life. What it actually sells, though, are things, and so the slogan “just do it”

manages to draw attention to the thing by drawing attention away from it. The slogan presents us with the fantasy of a better life, one subtly but firmly connected to the purchase of a shoe. The meaninglessness of the phrase feeds our desire to fantasize while simultaneously robbing verbal communication of its ability to question. “Just think about it” is exactly

what Nike doesn’t want you to do. If they advertised the quality of their product, that would be an appeal to reason and would lead to

things. By appealing to fantasy, Nike can convince us not to worry about things.

Why do we tend to identify ourselves with brands? I’m assuming that this is in fact a tendency already in us, and not only the effectiveness of advertisers. Are we just born suckers, or does this advertising manipulate a weakness in us that is actually a good weakness? I’m thinking here of our God-given desire for community, the urge to belong to a group. Corporate branding presents an illusion of belonging to a community – the community projected is a false one, and so there is no actual belonging to it. You may like

the idea that you can be a Pepper, and you may even experience a fragment of something like real community when you talk with a fellow Pepper, but a soft drink does not actually unite people. Instead, its sales make money for its owners. Your urge to belong to a community is temporarily and partially satisfied in exchange for your money, and the moment your money stops, the community disappears.

Most of us know perfectly well that the loyalty corporations desire is

purely fiscal and that their loyalty to the consumer is contingent upon money. This doesn’t stop us, though, from floating along in a culture saturated with corporate manipulations designed to entice.

I’d like to suggest that a theology of incarnation (Christ becoming human) rips through the fantastic play of branding precisely because in Christ word and thing are perfectly unified. The Greek word *Logos* (“word”), used of Christ in John’s Gospel, includes both inner thought and thought put into action. The beginning of John invokes the beginning of Genesis, in which God speaks words, and things come into existence. This creative word is itself incarnated, made thing, in Christ, who enters our world as the locus of all meaning – of word and thing together.

This suggests to me a profound ethic of the integrity of word and thing and the theological basis for resistance to a culture of branding that works precisely by disconnecting word and thing and thus by leading people into fantasy. To identify oneself as Christian is to claim that in fact reality is far more wonderful and imaginative than any fantasy. It is to recognize the Creator

and Redeemer in all around us and to seek the identities already there. It is to believe that language can be used well and can communicate truth, and, indeed, that there is

truth to communicate. Branding has jumped into the cultural vacuum where truth used to be, and it is playing its own little games there. The job of the church is to tell its story, which will necessarily be at odds with the gospel of Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, and others.

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Paul Dyck is a professor of English at the Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. He and his wife have two children, and they attend St. Margaret’s Anglican Church.

Tommy Hilfiger has made a fortune by understanding fantastic desire.

“Just think about it” is exactly what Nike doesn’t want you to do.

Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader

by Anne Fadiman (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998). 62 pp.

Reviewed by Elaine Reimer Paré

Anne Fadiman may claim to be a "common" reader, but her passion for books and language is extraordinary. In this delightful collection of essays, Fadiman reveals the ways in which words and language have formed her. In her preface to *Ex Libris*, Fadiman describes how books "recorded the passage of real time" in her life, for they "reminded us of all the occasions on which they had been read and reread." A bibliophile in the truest sense, Fadiman recollects how books have been instrumental in shaping her world from her earliest memories of building castles with her father's twenty-two volume set of Trollope to her most recent treasure hunt at Riverrun Bookshop. As Fadiman confesses, "Books wrote our life story, and as they accumulated on our shelves (and on our windowsills, and underneath our sofa, and on top of our refrigerator), they became chapters in it themselves. How could it be otherwise?"

Fadiman's "confessions" are a pleasure to absolve; they offer warmth and wit with a literary astuteness that will put most readers to shame. Those searching for some titles for summer reading should keep a notebook at hand while reading Fadiman (as well as a dictionary!). Fadiman's "joy of sesquipedalians" is a passion that carries over into her own writing, for she recognizes the value of building vocabulary and eagerly welcomes new words into her life (and writing). As she recounts in the

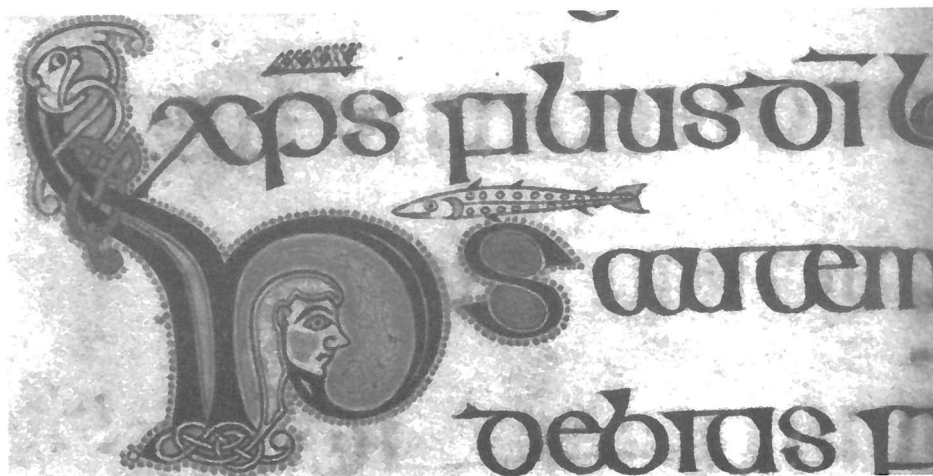
delightful essay "Never Do That to a Book," her family believed "a book's words were holy, but the paper, cloth, cardboard, glue, thread, and ink that contained them were a mere vessel, and it was no sacrilege to treat them as wantonly as desire and pragmatism dictated. Hard use was a sign not of disrespect but of intimacy."

One of the most intimate of reading experiences is what Fadiman affectionately calls "You-Are-There Reading," which means that you are actually reading a book in the place that it describes. These reading opportunities allow you to "walk into the pages" of a book and "to see exactly what the author described, so that all we need do to cross the eidetic threshold is squint a little." While one may not always be able literally to "walk into the pages" of a book, Fadiman attests that the written words of others invite readers to explore worlds that may be unreachable otherwise. In her essay "True Womanhood," Fadiman recalls inheriting a book from her great-grandmother titled *The Mirror of True Womanhood*. While the conservative nature of the book contradicted most of what she believed to be true about womanhood,

the words of the book allowed her to better understand her great-grandmother's world – a world that will now be passed on to Fadiman's own daughter.

In her essay "Secondhand Prose," Fadiman includes this book-shopper's reflection from Vincent Starrett's *Penny Wise and Book Foolish*: "Every new search is a voyage to the Indies, a quest for buried treasure, a journey to the end of the rainbow; and whether or not at the end there shall be turned up a pot of gold or merely a delightful volume, there are always wonders along the way." Fadiman's *Ex Libris* is one of those "wonders along the way" whose discovery will thrill book lovers. Her personal reflections on topics as varied as handwritten inscriptions, gender inclusive language, mail-order catalogues, plagiarism, proofreading and reading with children are insightful, stimulating and always delightful. For anyone who hears the rumblings of a bibliophile within, this book is a must.

Elaine Reimer Paré teaches literature at John Abbott College in Montreal. She and her husband, Marc, attend Église chrétienne de Saint Laurent.



Latin lettering from the Book of Kells.

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers

by Gary Chapman (Chicago, Northfield Publishing, 2000), 259 pp.

Reviewed by Alicia Karen Elkins.

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers is the fourth in the series of books about love languages. This book targets teenagers, specifically dealing with how their needs and means of communication undergo changes when they reach adolescence. Dr. Chapman uses actual cases from his counselling sessions as examples. He frequently refers to applicable Scriptures and includes notes that refer to other reading materials.

He begins by comparing the current generation to previous ones. There are five similarities: facing physical and mental changes, entering the age of reason, confronting personal morality and values, thinking about sexuality and marriage and questioning the future. There are also five major differences: technology, knowledge of and exposure to violence, the fragmented family, knowledge of and exposure to sexuality and neutral moral and religious values. He points out that this is the first generation to be raised without the moral guidelines of the Bible and strict religious values.

There are five primary "love

languages"—ways to communicate your love to another person. Only one of these is verbal. They are: words of affirmation, physical touch, quality time, acts of service and gifts. Within each of these realms of communication there are different "dialects." As children move from the juvenile to the adolescent stage, their love language usually changes dialects. Parents who try to continue communicating as they always have suffer loss of communication without understanding why. Confusion reigns.

Dr. Chapman provides a wonderful example of this problem. A father was at wit's end because he had always fixed things for his son and knew that his son felt loved from the way his eyes would light up when his father returned the fixed toy. But once the boy reached his teens, he no longer wanted his father to fix things, responding that he would do it himself. Communication between the two was decreasing and they were becoming distant. Dr. Chapman explained that the father had been communicating in the juvenile dialect of the acts-of-service love language. He needed to change to the teenager dialect. Instead of offering to fix things, he should offer to teach his son how to do more difficult repairs. This resulted in renewed communication and greater amounts of quality time spent together.

Most of us go through life oblivious

to the fact that our verbal exchanges are only a small percentage of our overall communication. We are guilty of saying "I love you" but failing to follow our loves with sufficient action to make them credible. Dr. Chapman's series on the love languages will open your eyes to all the subtleties of your unspoken love languages. His writing style is lively and conversational, attention commanding and easy to understand. I would like to see these books used in sociology classes in all the schools. Every person can benefit from reading the entire series. They will help each one to become a better person and will assist in improving relationships with all other persons.

Dr. Gary Chapman is one of the leading marriage counsellors in America. He hosts a nationally syndicated radio show, *A Growing Marriage*. In addition, he has a regular counselling practice, teaches seminars and classes across the country and works as an educational facilitator for his church. His titles include: *The Five Love Languages*, *The Five Love Languages of Children*, *Your Gift of Love*, *Toward a Growing Marriage*, *Hope for the Separated*, *Five Signs of a Loving Family*, *Parenting Your Adult Child*, *Loving Solutions* and *The Other Side of Love*. I have attended one of his seminars and can assure you that you will walk away from them feeling different inside. They will change you.

"My love for the alphabet, which endures, grew out of reciting it but, before that, out of seeing the letters on the page. In my own story books, before I could read them for myself, I fell in love with various winding, enchanted-looking initials drawn by Walter Crane at the heads of fairy tales. In 'Once upon a time,' an 'O' had a rabbit running it as a treadmill, his feet upon flowers. When the day came, years later, for me to see the *Book of Kells*, all the wizardry of letter, initial, and word swept over me a thousand times over, and the illumination, the gold, seemed a part of the world's beauty and holiness that had been there from the start."

Eudora Welty, from her memoir, *One Writer's Beginnings*.



SANDRA FOWLER

In the beginning

*was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. He was in the beginning
with God. All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people. The light shines
in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

JOHN 1:1-5 NRSV