MENNONITE LIFE

DECEMBER 1987

In this Issue

Storytelling is in the biblical tradition. Stephen, moments before his execution, told the story of his people. The *Martyrs Mirror* is a collection of stories of persons who died for their faith. Storytelling is an essential means of passing on values from generation to generation. Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Laureate, speaks of God creating men and women because he loves to tell stories. One could add that God may have created people because he loves to *hear* stories. This issue is devoted to stories of growing up in faith communities.

Bertha Fast Harder, who spent her childhood in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, later taught on the faculty of Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, now lives in North Newton, Kansas.

Edgar Stoesz, a native of Mountain Lake, who has held a number of administrative positions with the Mennonite Central Committee, recently returned to Akron, Pennsylvania, from a term as director of the European program of the MCC.

Jeff Gundy, Assistant Professor of English at Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio, grew up on a farm in central Illinois. He received his doctorate from the Indiana University.

John K. Sheriff, Professor of English at Bethel College, graduated from Greenville College, Greenville, Illinois, and received his doctorate from the University of Oklahoma.

Steven G. Schmidt, pastor of the New Creation Mennonite Fellowship, Newton, Kansas, is a grandson of the late David and Edith Richert.

Menno Duerksen, Memphis, Tennessee, is a retired European and Middle East correspondent for the United Press. In his autobiography, *Dear God, I'm Only a Boy*, he describes the bitter-sweet years of growing up in a Mennonite family in Oklahoma.

Anne Neufeld Rupp, North Newton, Kansas, is the daughter of the late Abram Neufeld, Mennonite pastor and evangelist. She and her husband Kenneth have served several pastorates, most recently, Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, Kansas.

Robert Kreider, North Newton, Kansas is retired from the faculty of Bethel College. He is the guest editor of this issue.

The Editors

Indexed with abstracts in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, available online through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Services), Latham, New York and DIALOG, Palo Alto, California.

MENNONITE LIFE

December 1987 Vol. 42 No. 4

Front Cover

The Aganetha and Herman J. Fast family of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, 1912. Front row, left to right: Marie K., mother Aganetha, father Herman J., Olga (Nachtigal). Second row: Henry A., Aganetha, Herman B., John B., Sara (Wall, Janzen).

Back Cover

Two scenes from Mountain Lake, Minnesota, 1909.

Photo Credits

Bertha Fast Harder, pp. 6, 7 and front cover. John K. Sheriff, pp. 10 and 11. Mennonite Library and Archives, pp. 15, 16, back cover. Menno Duerksen, pp. 16, 17. Anne Neufeld Rupp, p. 23. Mr. and Mrs. Howard Landis, Sterling, Illinois, p. 25.

MENNONITE LIFE (ISSN 0025-9365) is an illustrated quarterly magazine published in March, June, September, and December by Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas 67117. Second Class postage paid at Newton, Kansas 67114. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MENNONITE LIFE, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas 67117.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: U.S. — One year, $10.00; two years, $18.00. Foreign — One year, $11.00; two years, $20.00 (U.S. Funds).

Living Between Two Mennonite Counties

by Bertha Fast Harder

After my father and mother, Herman B. Fast and Anna Warkentin, were married, they went to live with Herman's parents on the parental farm homestead at the very east boundary of Cottonwood County four miles southeast of Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Seven months later Herman and Anna bought a small farm one mile north of the parental home but located on the other side of the road. Thus, this new farm was a part of Watonwan County, which was primarily populated by Scandinavians, especially Norwegians. In those earlier years my parents had little connection with Watonwan County, except as official business made it necessary.

Mountain Lake, largely Mennonite, was the center of our family's life and activity. The town had become a prosperous and thriving community. We did our shopping and trading in the mostly Mennonite owned places of business. Our large church, a primary focus in our life, was located on a corner across from the city park. Mountain Lake was also of great significance for our family because most of our close relatives lived in that village—mother's parents, most of mother's siblings, and our cousins. In Mountain Lake or in the surrounding Cottonwood County area were also the homes of our parents' best friends, with whom we socialized often on Sunday afternoon visits, complete with *faspas* of zwieback and coffee. There was one brief stretch of road close to our farm and also in Watonwan County where four Mennonite families lived. These neighborhood friends made Mountain Lake their business, church, and social center as well.

We children started our public school education in a Cottonwood County country school, located between our farm and Mountain Lake. In that school German instruction was given to all eight grades every day after recess, under the tutelage of the male Mennonite teacher.

Then when I was to enter third grade, a new ruling dictated that we children would henceforth be required to attend Country School District No. 24, located in our corner of Watonwan County; and so a period of major transition to a whole new environment began for us. Those first few weeks of school were somewhat painful. Here were pupils who were strangers to us. Their names were strange as well—Nordby, Nelson, Hunstad, Sulheim. And what's more we were called "Roosians" by a few! Now we were the ones who were different. But it didn't take long and we made good friends. We had a lot of fun at recess playing ball, roaming along the creek, or drowning gophers. During that first year I went for an overnight with Irene Hunstad. To my surprise the Hunstads had a very nice farm home, and her parents were welcoming and genteel. Soon she came to spend a night at our house and easily joined our family in the evening devotion time.

Some differences continued to remain between the Norwegian pupils and us. In our lunch kits we carried homemade ryebread sandwiches, a piece of cold fried *wurst*, and sometimes a fruit *perieschkje*. Many of "them" had soft white store bread sandwiches, store cookies, and golden ripe bananas. To our surprise there were occasions when the Norwegian boys and girls actually liked to trade lunch items with us.

Something given in our life on the farm were many farm rituals, such as threshing and butchering hogs. These were big occasions and days of hard work. Many hands were required, hands of persons who were skilled at the various tasks required. But equally important was that those who came to help knew *how* we did things. The helpers were accustomed to performing the jobs in the right way, and no explanations were necessary. I recall that our helping crews always consisted of some relatives and a few carefully chosen neighbors. They all knew their particular time-tested tasks and knew that excellence was assumed. Neither we nor other families in this working crew ever invited any of our Norwegian neighbors to participate in these work projects. I wonder how they would have fit in at such times. Some patterns would have had to change. For example, in this circle Low German was used as the common speaking language.

H. B. FAST
CANDIDATE FOR
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MY INTENTIONS ARE NOT ONLY TO TRY TO VOTE HONESTLY AND RIGHT, BUT TO WORK FOR GOOD LEGISLATION.
ISSUED BY H. B. FAST, BUTTERFIELD, MINNESOTA

My father (one of a very few in our Mennonite community) learned to know our closest Norwegian neighbors. Perhaps the men met as they repaired their common fences or cultivated the fields. In any event, on some cold winter evenings my Dad called these Norwegian men and invited them over to play cards. Oh, we children liked that! We watched by the windows until we saw the light of the kerosene lanterns in the distance. As the men sat around the kitchen table playing cards, we girls stood right behind them, fascinated by the game, but even more by the different kind of conversation of these men. And they liked Mother's Russian Mennonite baked refreshments.

During our country school years Dad became the president of the school board. As such he was instrumental in hiring some Mennonite school teachers from Mountain Lake for the two-room School District No. 24.

Years later, when I was in high school, my father ran for the Minnesota State Legislature. When Dad felt that he should inform his highly patriarchal father about his intentions, my Grandfather, in an emotional, quavering but emphatic voice, responded, "If you carry through with this, I'm going to die of a heart attack." And then adding more fuel for my father's thought, "And you are a trustee in the church and sing in the male choir!" At that time no other Mennonites in our area were involved in other than local politics.

Dad worked hard at trying to make himself known in this Scandinavian Watonwan County. One effective way he found was to attend the Sunday evening Luther League programs in the Lutheran churches in the county. Often he was invited to speak. Then he got what he thought was a brilliant idea. He asked us three older girls whether we would be willing to sing at the Luther League services. So we sang trios in close harmony, which we practiced while milking cows. The people liked our singing. Later we claimed that our singing was the reason for Dad's successful election.

My father was also active in other community affairs. He was the president of the first Rural Electrification Association in southwestern Minnesota, which crossed several county lines. He held offices in the Cooperative Creamery Association and in the Cooperative Grain Elevator Association.

Even though the lives of our family were encircled by the two cultures of Watonwan and Cottonwood counties during my growing up years, the town of Mountain Lake continued to be our Mecca. The family reunions in the homes of both of our grandparents (my father's parents having moved to town) were high and beautiful times in our life. Our best friends continued to be those who lived in or around Mountain Lake, and we attended high school in Mountain Lake. The school had a fine reputation, especially in music and basketball. We children were actively involved in as many high school extracurricular activities as farm work demands would allow. I loved my four years at Mountain Lake High School. I was baptized and joined Bethel Mennonite Church during those years. Gone were most of our connections with our Watonwan County friends. Once in awhile during the summertime, one or more of the Sulheim or Nordby boys would come to visit us girls at our farm home. We usually talked together about the past, the country school days, and laughed about those experiences. Frequently, we met some of these Norwegian friends at the annual Mountain Lake Pow Wow celebration. My parents continued to relate to Scandinavian friends they had learned to know. Our family exchanged regular dinner visits with the Lindstroms, a Swedish family, who were generous and gracious hosts.

Father died when he was only 51 years of age. At his funeral at Bethel Church, half of the overflowing congregation were persons from Watonwan County. When my mother died at 94 years of age, having lived in Mountain Lake for the last forty years of her life, quite a number of our former Watonwan County neighbors and friends attended her funeral. They came to express their sympathy and to greet us as friends of long ago but as friends still.

In 1983 I had the occasion to attend a reunion of School District No. 24. There I met a former teacher and also my friend Irene Hunstad, as well as others I remembered. Irene and I discovered that we had common interests and understandings. A bond had remained between the two of us inspite of the very different worlds in which we had lived.

The road still runs between Cottonwood and Watonwan counties. It would take careful research to discover what the relationship is between the farmers and residents who now live in that rural border neighborhood.

Marie K. Fast

by Bertha Fast Harder

Marie K. Fast

Marie K. Fast was born on a farm southeast of Mountain Lake, Minnesota. She was the second youngest girl in a family of seven children. The Fast farm was prosperous and beautiful, with many maple, elm, and evergreen trees, an orchard of apples, mulberries, and cherries. Marie's mother planted a large vegetable garden and varied flowerbeds. Marie worked very hard on this farm as did her brothers and sisters under the exacting orders of their father. As Marie picked apples, shocked grain, and milked cows, she began to have a dream. She wanted to be a nurse, but how could this be? She would have to go away for nurse's training. She asked herself, "Will my parents allow me to leave my farm home and our community?" Somehow it came to pass. After becoming a registered nurse, she returned to Mountain Lake as the Superintendent of Nurses at the local hospital. Marie was an effective administrator—professional, precise, always looking immaculate in her white uniform and nurse's cap. She was also a nurse with much compassion for the sick, giving them tender and loving care.

Underneath her reserved dignity, Marie had a delightful, wry sense of humor. She enjoyed fun times and chuckled over a good joke. She had a loving relationship with her married brothers and sisters and their children. Whenever her nieces and nephews saw her arriving at their house, they exclaimed with joy, "Here comes Aunt Marie!"

One summer Marie did something that very few single women in Mountain Lake had ever done. She bought a car, a black Plymouth, and named it an affectionate, "Carlotta." Marie had a secret hope of driving that car on a trip of adventure to the West that would end in Oregon, where her sister lived. But Marie wanted companions on that journey. She invited her two high school aged nieces to accompany her. The two girls were almost delirious with delight. The three set off—a first time of driving in the mountains, seeing the Grand Canyon, "swimming" in Salt Lake, deep-sea fishing. Marie lost some of her shyness and fear of the unknown on this trip. One night around a campfire she confessed to her nieces, "One of the reasons I wanted you two to go along was because I knew you were open and friendly, even with strangers. You have made this trip so enjoyable for me."

After a year or more, Marie received further training in her profession to become an anesthetist. It was while she was serving as an anesthetist in a fine hospital in a distant city that she left that position to return home to nurse her youngest and beloved sister, who was suffering from a terminal illness. Several years later, when she was employed in another city, she once again returned to Mountain Lake to care for her aging, ill father.

Then came the day during World War II when Marie read about the Mennonite Central Committee and their need for nurses to serve in refugee camps in the Middle East. After a Sunday farewell service in the Bethel Church, an occasion so unexpected but deeply appreciated, she left by train for MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania, for orientation and assignment.

Marie was loaned by the Mennonite Central Committee to serve as a nurse in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration refugee camps in Egypt. With a sense of trepidation, but also with a spirit of deep commitment, Marie landed in Cairo, where the UNRRA headquarters there assigned her to the El Shatt refugee camp located across the Suez Canal. Here the Yugoslav refugees lived in rows and rows of tents set out in the desert. Marie lived in a tent with another Mennonite nurse. There were days of blowing sand, times of great loneliness, and hours and hours of hard work. Marie worked in the makeshift hospital, wearing a drab colored uniform. But on the sleeve of that uniform was the special badge bearing the symbols of the cross and joined hands "In the name of Christ." Thus she served. Sometimes she went out at night to care for those refugees who were lying ill in their tents. Several epidemics broke out. As Marie walked in the darkness, carrying a small flashlight, she frequently stumbled over the tent ropes. Afterwards, over a cup of tea, she and her tentmate could laugh at the unusual happenings in their day's living out there in the desert sands of Egypt.

That Eastertime, Marie was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of going to Palestine to visit the land where Jesus

lived. For her this was a mountain-top experience, a time of deep emotional meaning.

When the war in Europe came to an end, the refugee camp received word that the Yugoslavs could return to their longed-for Dalmatian Coast. Marie volunteered to go as a nurse to accompany the refugees on the journey by ship. She felt that going along with the people was a part of her commitment to Christ's way, and she had a deep desire to do this.

The ship deposited the Yugoslavs happily and safely in their homeland. The crew had orders to proceed to Toronto, Italy, where they were to change ships. One stormy dark night on the Mediterranean, their ship hit a mine. Everyone was directed immediately to move to lifeboats. For some reason Marie and a British officer were the last to climb into a lifeboat. As their boat was lowered, the rope at one end slipped; and the two were thrown into the turbulent sea. The crew threw life preservers to them, hoping that they might be picked up by one of the other lifeboats. But the next day, when the count was taken, there were two missing persons—the man and Marie.

Some days later a cablegram reached Marie's home in Mountain Lake. The message read, "Marie K. Fast missing, presumably lost at sea."

Marie had left an envelope with her tentmate marked, "Just in case," with instructions to give all her clothes to the refugees, to send her precious items purchased in Palestine to her home in Mountain Lake. The El Shatt Camp held a memorial service for Marie. She would not have believed how many came—the Mennonite volunteers, UNRRA personnel, military officers, refugees—to remember the nurse they had come to respect and appreciate and, for some, to cherish.

Marie K. Fast was lost in the Mediterranean, but remembered with the greatest affection and love by her family and countless friends whose lives were enriched not just by what she did but by who she was.

MCC workers Grace Augsburger, Marie Fast and Bertha Fast (Harder) at El Shatt UNRAA camp in Egypt, 1945.

The Names of Mountain Lake

by Edgar Stoesz

Mountain Lake people had family names and given names but also middle names. When even this was not enough for identification purposes, nicknames were added. In the telphone books of the 1930s the most common family names appearing were Dick, Fast and Stoesz, in that order. By 1950 Harder replaced Stoesz in the number three spot, with Dick and Fast remaining number one and two.

Until our generation, the given names in common use were biblical names: John, Jacob, Peter, Mary, Elizabeth and Anna. There were a few Pauls, but no Silas or Timothy. I knew no Moses, Caleb, Joshua, Gideon or Matthew. Also frequently used were the names Susie, Helen, Katherine, George, Henry and Frank. Surprisingly, there was just one Menno, and he dropped it in favor of Willard.

For reasons I don't understand, all of this changed when our generation came on the scene. Our parents assigned us popular American names: Robert, Richard, Donald, Carol, Donna, Marjorie. I always thought Edgar would catch on. I have run into it in Latin America, but it has remained unique, sparing me the need for an initial or a distinguishing nickname.

To reduce the confusion which resulted from more than one John Dick or Jacob Harder, a middle initial was introduced. It was often the first letter of the father's first name. The middle initial of all but one of my Fast uncles, for example, was G for their father Gerhart. All my Stoesz uncles had the initial D for their father Dietrich. This practice was a great help in identifying family lines.

When even one intial was not adequate to distinguish between the many persons bearing the same first name, initial and last names, a second initial was introduced. There were, for example, John J. M. Dick, J. P. E. Duerksen and J. J. P. Harder. John Stoesz resolved the problem by becoming J. Arthur Stoesz.

Another way to resolve the identity problem was through the use of nicknames. They were related to where people lived, physical characteristics, what they did or, in a few unfortunate instances, they were the butt of community meanness.

To distinguish between three Jacob Dicks, one became known as Akj Dick because he lived on a major corner, a second as Bohn Dick because he lived along the railroad tracks and a third as Dakota Dick because he had lived in North Dakota.

Some nicknames described what a person did. There were several Peter Penners. One who had many ducks became known as Ente (duck) Pete. There were Küne (turkey) Pankratz, Malk (milk) Wiens and Hinjste (stallion) Quiring. There were Miera (mason) Duerksen, Drascha (thresher) Harder, Lehra (teacher) Fast and Wall and Prädja (preacher) Wiens. The community demolitionist was known as Dynamite Pete or just Poof Pete. He looked the part, having lost one eye.

Some nicknames had their basis in physical traits such as Fatty Dick and Kjleena (small) Wiens, also known as Half-Pint. His wife was a good bit taller than he and, therefore, it was said that he didn't want his wife any longer. I always thought it was a heavy burden for a small friendly man to carry. There was Blackie Janzen who happened to be a shade darker than the Mountain Lake standard. One was Deafy Dick.

Some nicknames were just plain mean. Windy exaggerated. Shotgun reportedly shot at people who attempted to steal from him. Schinkje allegedly once stole a ham. There were also Fula (lazy), Mome (mother), and Fluch (curse).

Some nicknames I never understood, though they were used widely even in the presence of the person. There was Cowboy Pankratz, Fuss Enns, Muff Enns, Schriba Fiel, Huck Eitzen, Slick Dick and Schieska Duerksen.

Many nicknames originated in school. The 1939 state basketball championship team had Butch Steinle, Wiener Remple and Eck Ewert. Eck, I'm told, was short for Eckibad and had reference to his big frame. His brother inherited the nickname, since he had a similar frame.

Nicknames were primarily a male phenomenon. There was no need to assign nicknames to women because many lost their given name with marriage. Thereafter they were, and to a surprising extent still are, just known by the given and family names of their husband, only prefacing it with Mrs. One exception was the dear old woman whose advocacy of carrot juice as a health food earned her the nickname of Carrot Juice Katy.

The golden age of nicknames has passed in Mountain Lake, perhaps because now there is less duplication in both family and given names.

Chickens

by Jeff Gundy

The relatives arrive in an old blue panel truck and drive in the barnyard driveway, not the one by the house. Dad and I are in back under one of the big maple trees, setting up the half-barrel we use to barbecue chicken for the big family gatherings. In the general greetings I notice my grandfather's gray shock of hair. I slide over, give him a one-armed hug and a "How's it going?" and shake hands with Uncle Dick. In a thick, red shirt Grandpa seems heavier but fit. Greetings over, we go back to setting up, feeling the pleasant hunger that knows it will soon be satisfied.

As we do that, I notice that my grandfather hasn't spoken, or met anyone's eyes. When I wake up, I realize he's been dead for ten years. It's the first time that I can remember that I have dreamed about him, even though all of us who are old enough to remember him at all still talk about him every time we gather. He was a hatcheryman, he worked with chickens all his life, moving from small town to small town with his wife and seven children, getting through the Depression somehow.

He ended up in a small house in the tiny town of Graymont, Illinois, in a small job in a small hatchery, raising chickens and delivering them to farmers a couple of hundred at a time. Yet he was one of those men that even children somehow know are to be respected, whether they make money or not. He was kind, gentle, he bought ice cream for us, he laughed and made us laugh, and yet there was a certain reserve about him, a quietness that went beyond his just being old. When we met the last times, when I was back from my first year of college, he took my hand in both of his and held it, weighing it, and looked in my eyes for a long moment, as though he was trying to find something in them that neither of us was quite sure was there.

His heart started to go while I was still in high school. Today we would take away his butter and eggs, run him through the bypass factory, put him on an exercise program, and he would be good for another ten or twenty years. But even fifteen years ago we were still groping toward those treatments, and helpless to do anything but watch as his color got worse. Our last game of catch ended with him spitting into the fence, holding a post, not speaking, and me curious and then afraid.

But I was one of those lucky children who learn to know their grandparents not just as playmates or dispensers of gifts, but as fellow workers. When a barnful of chickens were ready to lay he came out for the debeaking, to chop the beaks short so the chickens would not peck each other to shreds. My job was catching them, or passing them along. My father and grandfather would take each one, slide a forefinger between their beaks to hold the tongue back, and press them up against a boxy contraption with a foot pedal that brought the hot blade down. I can still smell the stink of burning as they nipped the beaks blunt and harmless and sealed off the blood. The chickens would flap and wince as the blade bit in, run away shaking their heads and squawking.

When we were almost done, the chickens almost gone, we would wander back through the empty barns, across the feeders and water lines, across the cobs that had been fresh, red and sweet five months ago but now were acrid, dingy, and gray-brown full of chicken droppings and the smell of too many birds living too close together. In dust so thick we tasted it all down our throats, we found a stunted one, one the others had pecked at the tail and the nape of the neck until it could only flop helplessly and dream dimly of a space somewhere not filled with its hostile, healthy kin. Grandfather felt her breast and thighs, then gently snapped her neck, and gently let her fall into the dusty, broken cobs.

We went inside for iced tea and rolls, tried to snort the dust from our lungs. For days the heavy stuff lingered, after the chickens were caught and caged and shipped off for their fourteen months as layers. They were dumb as gravel, ignorant as flies, cruel to each other as children on the playground. I hated them, their dirt, their scaly feet, their sudden, stupid panics.

He hatched and tended chickens all his life, and somehow still loved eggs, loved to turn chicken on a grill, loved every pullet he vaccinated or debeaked or put to its rest. Finally the sticky fats gathered at his heart, and what he loved took him. I suppose others have done worse. I came home from college for the funeral, with a new beard, and stood in the rain with my cousins and uncles and parents and brothers and sisters, all of us his blood, sitting together afterwards eating and talking, breaking despite ourselves into the laughter that comes when we gather together, even to mourn. In the dream the bulk of his belly pressed mine like a claim, like a promise, as I pressed back and held my own.

—for Gerdon Chester Gundy

Growing Up Free Methodist

by John K. Sheriff

I came to consciousness in a rural community in the Ozarks. Phelps, Missouri, was a "wide spot in the road" on what was then Route 66. A Texaco gas station and a small grocery store sat across the highway from each other, and a little frame church with gothic windows reared its high steeple from behind the properties bordering the highway. Clustered around these were the homes of forty to fifty people, and a quarter of a mile west of town was the one-room school with two outhouses. Bells announced public events from the church and school belfries.

But the community was larger than the town and extended beyond the sound of the bells. People within a five mile radius came to church and school, swelling our school population one year to sixteen in grades one through eight. And Goss Cemetery, two miles south of town, attracted people from an even greater distance. My mother's parents are there. My father's English-immigrant mother and German-immigrant father who spent most of their lives in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, came there at last to rest. And my parents who have been away from Phelps for more than thirty years have their places staked out and paid for in Goss Cemetery. It was already clear to me at age five that though there were other places, Phelps was the center; though there were other families, mine was royal. I was born lucky.

My father was pastor of the church, a Free Methodist Church. We lived in the parsonage which was set back about fifty yards behind the church. We had no running water, a wood burning heater and cookstove, a Sears catalog in the outhouse. We had family worship every day after breakfast, Sunday School every Sunday, church every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, Bible School every summer, revival once or twice every year, church dinners regularly. We had family gatherings, for butchering, woodcutting, canning, or just visiting. And we had more. We had parents who were always home, a tower built out of persimmon poles in the backyard, a swimming hole just below the hill, a dog who seemed to be immortal in spite of numerous life threatening injuries on Highway 66, a collection of Indian arrowheads, new tennis shoes every spring. Until age nine I was privileged to live in this arcadia.

Growing up in that peculiar sect of Wesleyanism called Free Methodists nothing was separate. In those early years, for example, it would be impossible to separate Bill Parkhurst in his Texaco cap, Cressy Henshaw with her gentle but firm schoolmarm manner, Slim the town derelict in his tumbledown shack living on snuff and coke, Robert Kirkpatrick, Glenna Heflin, Wenny Kingsley, and forty others from what it was to be Free Methodist, from what it was to be me. Certainly I was raised Free Methodist, but I also loved and feared nature, I too was snowbound, I too tarried and was hurried, I too dreamed what has never been and lived what will never be again, I too was led by my father's reading voice into worlds even he did not suspect.

I remember waking up one morning to find what seemed like a hundred of Kingsley's Hereford and Brahma cattle in our yard. The Brahma bull with sagging hump, drooping ears, and high arching horns was just outside my window. I suppose that the Goliath, Samson, Elijah, Satan, Jesus, and Paul that I woke up to at Phelps were also seen through the Free Methodist parsonage window, but the view I got was close-

Free Methodist Church, Phelps, Missouri, c. 1950.

up and vivid. Others may have had a different angle of vision, but few if any had a better view.

Of course any autobiography or dramatization of one's religious pilgrimage is to some extent a fiction. One selects and orders memory, creates the past by discovering emergent patterns and progressions which are a part of conscious experience only in retrospect. The following vignettes from my memory of growing up as a Free Methodist preacher's kid are true but not the whole truth.

I remember many times having my mother send me to the church to get my father for dinner (the noon meal). When I walked in through the doors of the church, I would often find my father kneeling in prayer at the altar. And I would not know whether to call him, to walk up and tap him on the shoulder, or just wait until he was finished, because the church and prayer were very sacred. The church was small and unimposing in appearance, but it was God's house and to be treated reverently. Running, loud talk, eating in the church would have been sacrilege. We honored God, his house, and the Sabbath. I remember, for example, that we had many rules about what we could and could not do on Sunday. No hammering was allowed on Sunday. Dad said that we did not hammer on Sunday for the same reason that the Israelites did not hammer in the vicinity of the temple when they were building it—"neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple, while it was being built" (I Kings 6:7). We didn't do anything loud on Sunday—no rowdy games like baseball or football, no shooting of cap guns, no swimming. One of the first belt whippings I remember was for violating the swimming rule.

Veda and Albert Sheriff and their three sons, left to right, John, Donald and Kenneth, c. 1950.

We took these things seriously. God was ever-present and aware of all our thoughts and deeds. Church three times a week, devotions every day, and regular revivals were constant reminders of that. During one of these revivals when I was six or seven, my best friend and I began to feel very guilty and fearful. We talked about sin and hell, acknowledged our mutual guilt, and decided that we would go forward together at the altar call that evening. But the service didn't go as we had planned, and instead of an altar call the evangelist held a healing service. We were feeling so guilty that we went forward anyway. I had seen enough healing services to know that the evangelist would ask me what affliction I wished to be delivered from, and I had decided to say that I was sick of sin. To my great relief, he did not ask me what my need was, but proceeded to anoint me with oil and to quote the scripture in which Jesus says to let the little children come to him and to hinder them not.

At a very early age I gained an acute sense of God being everywhere and watching and judging. As a child, with a child's perception of God, I experienced a great deal of fear and guilt because of this. However, I also felt that my actions were of cosmic significance, and that may have been a good beginning for the development of ethical consciousness. I remember on one occasion going to the church, picking up a hymnal, walking a quarter of a mile up the road to North Bridge every bit as heavy laden with sin as John Bunyan's Christian. I sat with the hymnal open in my lap with my feet dangling over the ends of the oaken planks, sang a few verses of "Just As I Am" to make my wretched state vivid to me, and confessed my sins. I probably walked home singing "Rolled Away," feeling much better. This constant awareness of living in God's world may have been the source of my firm conviction that what I did with my life was extremely important—a religious choice.

Before we moved from Phelps when I was nine, I joined the church. I do not remember much about the experience. Apparently I promised not to wear any superfluous adornment, claimed "a personal experience in regeneration," and pledged "to seek diligently until sanctified wholly if that experience ha[d] not been attained." H. E. Moore, an old retired minister probably in his seventies at the time, shook my hand afterward and said to me very sincerely, "I was saved when I was seven years old, and my only regret is that I didn't live the first seven years of my life for the Lord." It seemed to me that his life had been in two stages, sinner and saint. Mine has been nothing like that.

As I look back, I see that the Wesleyans I grew up among respected the sanctity of the individual's relationship with God. No one, parent or minister, could take responsibility for that, and no one embarrassed children or acted like they didn't belong if they participated in the services and sacraments of the religious community. Before God all were equal: parent, minister, and child. And I have to confess that I still wince as I participate in communion at our Mennonite church because the children are excluded. The Wesleyans take communion seriously. They warn against partaking "unworthily." But they invite all who "do earnestly repent of [their] sins, and are in love and charity with [their] neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God" to "draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to [their] comfort." From my earliest memory I participated in communion services. In retrospect, I think they were as meaningful to me as a child as they are now; they called upon me to reflect on whether I was living by the standards that I knew were right. And I had a pretty clear sense of what was right and wrong even if my understanding of rite and symbol was limited.

We moved away from Phelps when my father became Conference Superintendent. That position was roughly equivalent to the Conference Minister in the General Conference Mennonite Church. During the next years, when I was age nine to sixteen, my father traveled around visiting the conference churches, usually preaching the Sunday

morning and evening sermons at a different church each week. The Ozark Conference of the Free Methodist Church had churches in Mt. Vernon, Ozark, Clarksville, Eldorado Springs, Carthage, Joplin, Siloam Springs, and in many backwoodsy places you would not have heard of, such as Eldridge and Highland.

As I think about my relationship with the Free Methodists in those years, I remember camp meetings. Camp meetings were a significant part of my life at that time. The campground, Camp Ozark, was outside of Siloam Springs, Arkansas, where we lived when Dad was superintendent, and it was part of Dad's responsibilities to see that arrangements were made for camp and the grounds prepared. Moreover, new building projects were underway every summer. So while my town school friends played baseball in the summer, I worked on the campground—cutting weeds, carrying cement blocks, mixing mud; framing, decking, and shingling the new tabernacle, dining hall, and dormitories.

The actual camp meeting lasted two weeks and the last few days were given over to annual conference. The climactic event of conference was the reading of appointments. All the ministers of the conference found out at that time what churches they were assigned to for the following year. The Free Methodists liked to move their ministers about every two or three years, so this was no empty ritual. Sometimes it had the marks of the Last Judgment, with weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth by ministers' wives and children.

I think that camp meetings were for me what whaling voyages were for Herman Melville, life on the Mississippi River was for Mark Twain, and World War I was for Ernest Hemingway. In comparison to being at camp meeting, studying theology, psychology, spiritualism, and rhetoric in college is like taking swimming lessons in the desert or studying chemistry without a laboratory. A book or several books would be necessary to give an adequate account of my camp meeting experiences. Therefore, I do not know what or how much to say. Anyone who has never been wholly caught up in intense evangelical religious services is likely to find an account of them as ludicrous as H. L. Mencken found the camp meeting he once attended.

Perhaps I should share first what the daily schedule was at camp meeting. I, of course, did not participate in everything, and many of the activities most important to me were not the scheduled ones. For example, dormitory living and swimming in Flint Creek figured pretty importantly into my schedule. Some of the men of the camp got up before dawn to have a prayer meeting. They usually went out into the woods for this, away from everyone, because they sometimes got quite loud. Either just before or after breakfast, I have forgotten which, was a love feast, that is, a testimony meeting. None of the kids attended this meeting. After that were some Christian education classes for the various age groups, followed by the morning preaching service. Everyone attended these. Of course all sermons had an evangelical purpose. The afternoons, for children and young people at least, were given over to recreation or special programs. And then in the evening was another evangelical service, the main service of the day, really. I think it is an incontestable fact that evangelism works better at night.

These camp meetings, by the way, were free, as a matter of principle. The Free Methodists broke away from the Methodists in 1860 over such issues as slavery and the practice of requiring people to purchase their own pews. Free Methodists, like John Wesley, championed the poor and outcast. I think every bum passing through Phelps on Route 66 knew that he could sleep in the Free Methodist Church and get a handout at the parsonage. Dad said that since the church was God's house and all people are children of God, the church should be open at all hours to anyone. Likewise, anybody could come to camp meeting at no charge. Pledges were taken at the end of each camp to underwrite the cost of the next one. My uncle, Price Holcomb, used to say about an extended family that always came to camp seemingly to have a two week family reunion at no charge that he did not know if they were standing on the promises or not, but you could count on them to be sitting on the premises at camp time.

In retrospect, I can be cynical or nostalgic, but at the time I could not be detached. In my own personal religious experience I was like a yo-yo, up and down, saved and backslid. My experience was much more like Jonathan Edwards', if you are familiar with his account of his own early religious experience, than H. E. Moore's. I had heard many, many persuasive sermons about the need for conversion, about the dangers of hardening your heart, about the unforgivable sin, about what it was like to be eternally lost. I "hit the sawdust trail" at nearly every camp meeting. In a recurring dream I experienced the horror of being "eternally lost." My fear of hell and separation from family and God and love was great, but I found that straight and narrow way pretty slippery and it seemed that not long after a revival or camp meeting I always hit a slick spot and plummeted back down to the bottom of the Hill of Difficulty. Being a Christian was difficult partly because there was little in it for me but a clear conscience and an abnegation of self. I heard so much about the annihilation of self and eradication of the carnal nature that I knew anything I wanted was unworthy, selfish, and contrary to God's will. Moreover, there is no harder place in the world to be a Christian than among evangelicals. In my experience at least, the evangelists always seemed to preach away confidence in your faith so that they could have a rousing altar service. I knew all the possible ways to fail as a Christian, and if my friends wanted to tempt me away from the straight and narrow way a couple of weeks after camp meeting, all they had to do was point out that I had already tripped up somewhere in word, thought, or deed and so I might as well admit to being a sinner and enter into the fallen fellowship of my peers.

My understanding of the doctrines of the church was a child's understanding, but by age ten I could have given a pretty good account of everything from original sin to the Second Coming. Once when sleeping outdoors with my cousins in their backyard, inspired no doubt by the starry heavens we were gazing into, we began talking about the eternal verities. After pooling our knowledge about the Rapture of the Saints, the Mark of the Beast, the Battle of Armageddon, and the Last Judgment, my cousins got so scared that they went into the house to ask their parents to help them to "get saved."

The Free Methodists were an evangelical group of Christians, emotional in their religion, fundamental in their

doctrine, who thought that a primary reason for their existence as a denomination was to teach New Testament holiness, Christian perfection, the Wesleyan doctrine of heart purity, sanctification, or whatever you want to call the doctrine of the second definite work of grace.

Sanctification was a thorn in the flesh for me in those camp meeting years. After getting most people converted, the camp evangelist would turn to evangelical sermons on sanctification. Every itinerant preacher had a slightly different understanding of this doctrine. But I had heard enough sermons to know that sanctification did not typically come immediately after conversion. Until sanctification, Christians were still carnal, babes in Christ that needed to be fed with milk. They still were imperfect, sort of second-class Christians. But if they continued to walk in the light, at some point when they were ready the Holy Spirit will come upon them and purify their hearts. Therefore, it was sort of paradoxical to have an evangelical sermon on sanctification. But we always had them nevertheless.

I remember the last camp meeting I attended at Camp Ozark, when I was seventeen. I had already moved to Kansas a year earlier, and my brother and I went back to visit for a weekend. I was standing near the back of the tabernacle with a friend during the altar call, feeling somewhat nostalgic but not "under conviction." Harley Johnson, whom I had known all my life, came back to talk to us during the altar service. It was a common practice in evangelical services for people who felt moved by the Holy Spirit to urge other persons to go forward. There were other people moving among the crowd doing the same thing and there were others going forward in the long, drawn out altar service, so I felt only mildly conspicuous to have Harley come talk to us. In earlier years I would have been greatly troubled by this act because it symbolized not only Christian concern for my soul but also a judgment of God and this community against me, a spiritual excommunication demanding public confession or willfully chosen damnation. On this occasion, not feeling convicted by God, I felt hurt, cut off, excluded from the place and people to which I had belonged.

I liked Harley very much. Harley was a minister, an auctioneer, and a person of impeccable integrity. Almost every minister in the Ozarks was also a "tentmaker," carpenter, farmer, schoolteacher, or paperhanger. When this big burly man, who had sold me my first shotgun for half what it was worth instead of letting it go on the auction block, put his arms around my friend and me and asked how things were between us and God, we both made a decision that probably surprised him. My friend, after a few seconds, strode out of the tabernacle, jumped on his loud motorcycle, and roared away into the night with the engine at full throttle. After staring at the sawdust a little longer, I looked into Harley's moist eyes and thanked him for coming to talk to me, but I did not go forward. My friend's response and my response both expressed what I felt. Before returning to Kansas, I pledged one hundred dollars of my hard-earned summer wages to support the next year's camp, but I never went back or ever saw most of those people again. That was over twenty-five years ago.

Many of the people who shaped my life in those first sixteen years were wonderful people; most of them had little formal education. For the next six years I associated with and studied with the more educated segment of Free Methodism. I attended Central Academy, a private high school, Central College, and Greenville College, all affiliated with the Free Methodist Church.

As I look back over the first twenty-two years of my life, I can admit what I could not then without defining myself as eternally lost. Although I tried to believe in and conform to the teachings of my religious heritage about salvation, sanctification, prayer, and witnessing, I had the gnawing awareness, which I dared not acknowledge, that I was not being authentic. Something was false, a pretense. There was a time in my development when I thought that the falseness was in the teachings of the church; now I think that what I sensed was to a large degree my own lack of a genuine faith. I think that I would have reached a point, no matter what religious heritage I might have had, when I asked what I genuinely believed. Therefore, what I am about to tell should be seen as an account of my own crisis of faith, not in any sense an evaluation of Free Methodism.

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to do what was right, but I did not want to give up a sense of personal integrity, of being honest with myself. By the time I was sixteen there were two things I did not want to be—poor or a preacher. Consequently, I was convinced that was what was required of me. I even feared God might expect me to be celibate too. That is too simplistic, but true. At the church schools I felt compelled to prepare for the ministry. I studied Bible, religion, theology, Greek, Free Methodist polity and doctrine, and Christian apologetics. I learned other people's answers to other people's questions. During the last two years of college, it became clear that I was living someone else's life, professing someone else's faith, being false to myself. During the last of these years I was pastoring a Free Methodist church of about sixty members, preaching three sermons per week. I was in my second year of marriage and the father of a newborn son. I decided it was time to make a change. I found my own experiences and honest doubts treated more fully and satisfactorily in literature and philosophy than in Bible and religion classes where strict orthodoxy held sway. The poets and philosophers were not intimidated by the forbidden questions or authoritative answers.

Contrary to the expectation of parents and friends, I went to graduate school instead of seminary after college. This act was perhaps analogous to the "Everlasting No" of Thomas Carlyle's Diogenes Teufelsdrock or what Lawrence Kohlberg describes as the move from authority to principle. In any case I renounced everything that was false to me, rejected much of what I had learned about God and the Bible, and began the process of rediscovering my faith.

My conception of God has undergone tremendous change and no doubt will keep changing. Before I ever had an authentic faith, I had to get beyond the concept of God as a judge ever ready to souse the human race in a lake of fire for eternity, to a God of love who cares more about fulfillment of persons than the annihilation of them. I have worked through many of the Christian doctrines of my religious heritage and reclaimed some of them, though many Free Methodists might think me dangerously unorthodox. I certainly do not claim any exalted state of spirituality. One of the ideas I threw out a long time ago

is the belief in any kind of instant Christian maturity. Looking back over my life I see many errors in judgment, distorted values, unworthy motives, and unloving acts.

I have come to believe intensely that the Christian faith is really very simple. Long before the Apostles' or any other creed was insisted upon, long before any theologians and denominations began declaring that the salvation depended upon believing the right doctrines of the church, the teachings of Jesus were considered to be the doctrine of the Two Ways: the Way of Life and the Way of Death. The Way of Life was simply to live by the law of love. That was what Jesus taught, and to believe in him was to believe what he taught. Always there have been those persons around me, in the Ozarks and every other place I have lived, who have shown me what it is to love God and to love my neighbor.

So I have come full circle in a way. Maybe we all do. I am more and more at peace with what I saw looking through the window of a Free Methodist parsonage. I learned in Sunday School at Phelps never to lay anything on top of the Bible; I never do.

The Pointer

by Steven G. Schmidt

Above, Professor David H. Richert in his classroom at Bethel College.

Left, David and Edith Richert, grandparents of the author, in front of their North Newton residence.

I am holding in my hands an artifact and wondering how many people would know what it is.

It is analogous to a carpenter's hammer, or a quilter's needle. It looks like a glorified stick. It is a tool a teacher would use.

It is a pointer.

A teacher would use it to direct students' attention to something on the blackboard, say; or to a point on the map.

This particular pointer is a tool of higher learning since it belonged to a college professor! And if I sit and look at it long enough, I start to get goose bumps . . . I start to hear noises . . . and voices . . . Listen! Even now I can hear the shuffling feet of students in the hall . . . and then the happy chaos just before class begins. Now the pointer begins to tap, tap, tap on the desk top in front of me, bringing the class to order.

"Students . . . students. It is time to get started on today's material. We have so much to cover and so little time . . ."

As I stare at the pointer I begin to wonder just how many students have been called to attention by this pointer. How many have followed its direction, and gazed just where it aimed? Who were those students? What were they like? And where are they now?

I even start to wonder what subjects this pointer helped teach? What concepts? What particular bits of knowledge did it help point out?

"The total number of degrees in all the angles of isosceles triangles such as this one on the board must always equal 180 degrees . . ."

"We can see from this drawing that the orbital pathway this comet is taking will eventually cause it to intersect with the earth's trajectory around the sun . . ."

"I will now shine my flashlight on this pointer so you can see the direction your eyes should go to find the slightly reddish planet that we will be looking at in the telescope in just a few minutes . . ."

I suppose I should not be surprised that the tip of the pointer is worn. After all, it served the professor and his students for fifty years. And Bethel is hard on pointers! And as I stare once more at the worn pointer, I hear the voice of my grandmother.

"Look around the office here, Steve. If there is anything you want to take with you to help you remember Grandpa, you just take it, you hear?"

"Yes Grandma. I think I have found just what I want." I held professor David H. Richert's pointer to my chest as a tear landed on the handle. Professor Richert died when I was a Freshman at Bethel. I called him Grandpa. Everyone else called him "Uncle Davey."

(Steve took the pointer with him when he taught 2 years in Chicago, brought it back to Bethel where he taught 2 years, over to Hesston College where he taught four years, and now finds it useful in his teaching work as pastor at New Creation Fellowship.)

The Wildcat Bus

by Menno Duerksen

This story has a Grapes of Wrath *quality. It is one of thirty-four chapters appearing in Menno Duerksen's autobiography,* Dear God, I'm Only a Boy, *published by Castle Books. The author, a retired United Press journalist, in this book probes both the light and the shadow in his boyhood in a Mennonite farm family living through the Depression in Custer County, Oklahoma. A review of the autobiography appears on page twenty-eight.*

I guess my career as a wildcat bus driver began cracking up on that day in Bakersfield when I fell in love.

Honey blonde hair. And those alluring, pleading smiles that could have melted the heart of a polar bear.

"Mama went to heaven," said the tyke of only three years.

"We didn't have money for the doctor," said the boy of four.

It was the chapter of the Grapes of Wrath story John Steinbeck never wrote. Perhaps because it didn't happen in time. But it did happen and was part of the story.

In some ways it was probably even more tragic than the original "wrath" story. In Steinbeck's story, his people, the "Oakies," hit bottom. In the wildcat bus phase of the story the bottom dropped out. And I became involved.

The "wrath" story was the uprooting of a people. People like my father and mother, whose parents pioneered in the opening of the vast prairie land of Oklahoma, what had been Indian Territory.

Perhaps it would have been expecting too much of these early day farmers for them to have known that in the very act of plowing that vast expanse of prairie they would eventually bring tragedy to themselves or at least their children.

For the native prairie grass had not only fed the buffalo and the Indian ponies for centuries but had provided the vital protective covering for the soil underneath. The plow would lay bare the soil to the eroding force of the great winds which swept down through central America, across Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. On into the flatland of Texas.

To the people, it would be a double blow of tragedy. First would come, in the 1930s, the most cruel and devastating economic depression of all time, destroying the economic existence of workers and farmers.

Then it was as if the gods of nature, or perhaps the gods of the once resident Indians, had finally turned their wrath upon the palefaces who had driven the Indians out of this land.

For now it was the curse of drouth, marching in unison with that economic depression, which would turn the soil into dust and the dust into clouds as the rains departed and the winds came. They always came, those winds.

They had been a hardy breed, those settlers and their children. Used to hard times and hard work. But now, under the triple blows of the depression, the drouth and the dust storms, they had reached the limits of their endurance. Hunger, stark and fearful, rode the

Threshing scene near Weatherford, Oklahoma. Menno Duerksen, then a boy of nine or ten, stands by the drive belt. His uncle, Jake Friesen is the engineer standing by the Oil Pull Rumley tractor.

land. It was blowing away. The mortgage holders, the banks, were taking what was left of it.

And so the "wrath" story. Of a people pulling their meager stakes and heading for California—the Promised Land. There, they were told, a small trickle of milk and honey still flowed. All chimera, of course. Overwhelmed by the coming of so many poor, with nothing really to offer them, California simply became a staging point for more hunger, suffering and despair. California did not even have jobs for its "own," much less for the horde of hungry Oakies that swept in over their border.

All this, Steinbeck knew and wrote. His epic for our time.

But then came that phase of the story which did not get into the books: The Return. As those people, the ones who survived, gathered the last remnants of their strength and tried to go back home again.

To what? They had left the dust bowl because it had become a frying pan in which they—body and soul—had been in the process of being slowly destroyed. If California had now revealed itself as nothing more than another frying pan, perhaps even hotter and more destructive, what now would they find if they went home again?

They had seemingly severed their ties to Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas and Texas. They had sold, for a pittance, their last meager possessions to finance the trip west. A few dollars for tires, piston rings and gas for the battered old cars they might own. What tie could now lure them back?

It was a tenuous one, that last remaining tie. It was the relatives they had left behind. For the dust bowl had not completely emptied itself.

There had been those a bit tougher, perhaps. Or more stubborn. Or a bit more fortunate in having some pittance of an existence. These had been the ones to stay. Perhaps some had stayed because they lacked even the means of leaving.

My dad and his family had been among those who stayed. Dad's restlessness had taken him to California and Oregon in an earlier time when things had not been so desperate. But even then we had suffered the rolling stone existence that sentenced our family eternally to the life of the "have nots."

Perhaps it was exactly for this reason, because Dad had already been there and had learned a lesson of sorts, that he now clung to his fragile roots in Oklahoma. Roots which seemed to have less and less grasp on the eroding soil, year by year. But we stayed, somehow surviving.

Amid all that—a growing boy. Seemingly born with the gift of making broken things whole, making things, repairing mechanical things which broke down.

But even when I did obtain my first job in Charlie Kendall's motor machine shop, I was there to learn and not to earn. Apprentices were not paid, I was told. My salary, $1 a week. Of course, I was in high school and worked only afternoons and Saturdays. But it was an exciting adventure, there among the lathes, drill presses and cylinder grinders. Fingers and brain reaching out for a new existence.

But also doomed—because tough times remained tough—doomed to a sort of fringe existence for the next 10 years, even when I found other jobs. Money? There wasn't any. Skilled mechanics worked for $12 to $18 a week. The lucky ones who found jobs, that is.

Grease monkey. Mechanic. Blacksmith. Machinist. Painter. Auto body man. All these were the arts I grasped into my eager hands in that time. At $1 a day. A few times it was $10 a week.

Until one grand splurge of work brought on by still another freak of nature, the worst hailstorm in our history, which sent small boulders of ice hurtling earthward.

The frozen chunks damaged so many cars, hundreds of them, that our body shop was buried with work for months. It was insurance money, for the lucky ones who had insurance, that financed that splurge.

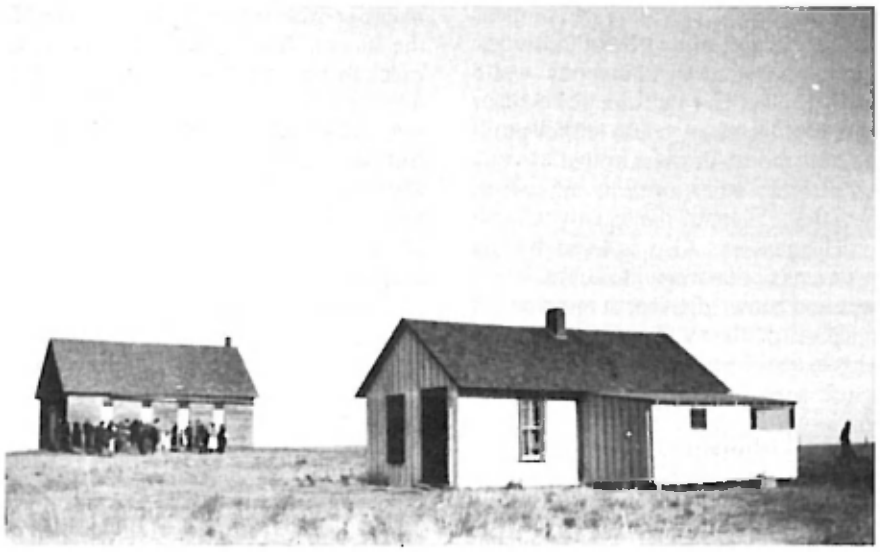
In the midst of all this, I presented my bosses with a surprise by "inventing" a machine to smooth the hail dents out of the steel tops of cars. It cut the work time in half. My salary was suddenly $25 a week. I was rich.

So rich, in fact, I bought a Packard. Which, in turn, became the propelling force which pushed me towards that wildcat bus thing. Bakersfield, California and the honey blonde hair were closer now.

First those cars—mine and those of the Okies.

My Packard wasn't a new one. Even my "riches" couldn't possibly have managed that. It was a year old. A dismal sight. A clunker. It had belonged to a building contractor from Oklahoma City who had used the brand new car more as a truck than as a car. Made an unholy mess out of it in one year and traded it in.

"You can have it for $175 if you'll



The church at Strong City, Oklahoma, which Menno Duerksen's father pastored when Menno was about seventeen, with parsonage in foreground: "the most desolate country I ever lived in."

take it like it is," the dealer said. I took it.

The machine was a natural for a young guy who liked to fix things. Straighten the banged up fenders. Give it a paint job. New upholstery. Rework the engine a bit. In a few weeks, one of the slickest and best running cars in town. Go 70 all day long, like a breeze.

Now about the Okie cars—they weren't.

Steinbeck knew about that, too. Those old clunkers the Okies had spent some of their last dollars on to make them fit for travel, but barely, for the trip west.

Many of the old cars never made it. Expired on the side of the road. Most of them that made it to California got sold out there for peanuts in a market glutted with junkers. Brought maybe the cash value of their tires and batteries. Enough, maybe, for another week or two of groceries.

Perhaps a few of the cars even survived unto the day when their owners reached that stage of despair in which they yearned to go back home. But then, faced with the reality that the old clunker wasn't up to another trek across the country, the owner would sell it to help finance the trip by other means.

And thus, born from that need for some "other means," emerged the wildcat bus. To bring the Okies back to where it all started. To where, in a sense, it would all end.

The only desperate hope that remained for them was that their relatives back home who had stuck it out, tragically poor and living on the fringe of existence, would at least be a bit less hostile than Californians fighting to keep what little they had. The hope that somewhere would be a bit of biscuit dough and flour gravy for the returning Pilgrims. Enough to keep life in hungry bodies.

But in the midst of all this struggle to return was another happening so incredible it was nearly impossible to believe it could happen—for that westward trek had not ceased. Still some, drawn like the moth to the flame, came westward.

Was it possible that word had not yet reached the Dust Bowl that the milk and honey fountains had dried up? But completely. Word that should have prevented any new Pilgrims from attempting a westward trek. But, somehow, without logical explanation, some still headed west.

A tragic, purposeless shuffling of human souls back and forth across the continent. The endless search for a grail which had ceased to exist, east or west.

Certainly the westward migration had slowed from a flood to something less, but it continued. Now, those heading west were less often families and more often the young who insisted on believing the dream. Refusing to believe the tales of shattered dreams and despair of those who had gone before. Insisting on believing that their luck, somehow, would be much better. The eternal optimism of youth.

Being young in a time of depression meant they didn't even possess the battered jalopies that had wheeled the first tide westward. Their purses, if they had any, were about empty.

The regular bus companies, Greyhound and such, would take you through Oklahoma City to Los Angeles for $23. Most of the returning Pilgrims could only dream of that kind of money.

So, in such a picture, the wildcatters were probably inevitable. There simply had to be a few people out there, lucky enough to own a car of some kind, sturdy enough to make the trip. Individuals who would offer to haul this desperate human cargo for less than the price of a bus ticket. Most of the wildcatters were victims themselves, perhaps, without jobs and hungry for the slimmest buck.

At first, they would offer to carry a "body" for half price—say $12 to $14. Since they were not insured or licensed as public carriers, they could make a buck on the deal. They were willing, as illegal operators of carriers, to dodge the lawmen.

Later, as more of the drivers got into the act, the very nature of competition would insure that even those low prices would be cut. Somebody would offer to take you through for $11 or even $10. Not many bucks left for profit but still the wildcatters rolled.

Then that other amazing adjunct to the wildcat picture, the equally wildcat travel agencies. Also ignored by the historians of that tragic time. But it was common knowledge that at one time, at the peak of the wildcat activity, Los Angeles had as many as 350 wildcat travel agencies to serve the wildcat buses.

Their operators, again victims of the depression themselves, were out of work and trying to grab a buck of their own out of this sordid traffic in human bodies. They would set up shop in a tiny store front with a splashy sign in the window, "Need To Go Home? Oklahoma City for $12." Sometimes only $10. They lured and rounded up the "bodies" for the wildcat bus men—for a small cut of the "take."

Most of the travel agency men operated them as adjuncts to another small business, a hamburger grille or a hock shop. A used clothing store, perhaps.

Technically, these operations were illegal. But despite an occasional protest from legitimate bus companies, California lawmen chose to ignore the open existence of these "bootleg" operations, both the wildcatters and the body finders, simply because it was more important to rid California of this horde of unwanted job seekers in a time when there were no jobs. Enforcing the law could only bring more woe to the enforcers, filling their jails with more mouths to feed.

It was inevitable, of course, that these agency operators were well aware of all this. How else could they dare to flaunt their illegal body commerce with the bold and gaudy painted signs in the store fronts?

Back in Oklahoma City, and in other centers of the Dust Bowl, the agencies were neither so numerous nor so flauntingly open. The badge men at least made a semblance of enforcement there. On the other hand, just as with the whiskey bootleggers, if a man needed an illegal agency he could always find one.

It was in New Mexico, the wildcatters said, where the enforcement was the toughest. No one seemed to know exactly why. The state was neither a major source nor a major recipient of the human floods. Only a stretch of miles that had to be crossed. But there it was, the danger zone. Perhaps the state government of this commonwealth had determined that there was indeed a bit of revenue in fines, or in confiscation of automobiles. The jails in New Mexico, the "catters" said, were the toughest.

Somewhere, sometime, it was inevitable that I, hanging around the automobile crowd, should become aware of the wildcatter story. Even in our small town we had a few of the "catters." Pudge, for one, who operated a small hamburger grille, together with his wife. There would come times when he would simply disappear for a few days,

running the wildcat trail in his Ford V-8, while Mrs. P. continued slinging hotcakes and hamburgers.

"If you're careful you can make a few extra bucks," he said.

With hungry ears I listened to his tales of brushes with the law in New Mexico, the long rides through the night, a few nonscheduled adventures in Los Angeles. I was young. I had the itch for adventure. I had my Packard.

Of course, I also still had my job at the body shop but there came times, especially after the big hail splurge subsided, when business was slow. My bosses didn't mind if I disappeared for a few days.

It started before I intended for it to.

Pudge simply showed up at the shop on one of those quiet days, said he had a load for the "west" but he couldn't get away. "You want to take them?" he asked. "You can have 'em. I won't even charge you a cut.

"I can even give you the names of some Los Angeles agents who can get you a load coming back."

There stood my shiny, eager Packard, ready to roll. What adventure-minded young buck wouldn't have gone?

First, I had to learn a few tricks of the trade from Pudge.

"Don't carry any luggage tied to the outside of your car. You either get it inside or make your passengers leave it at home. The outside stuff is a tip off to the troopers," Pudge said.

Then, "Be sure to memorize the name and home town of each passenger. And be sure to explain it all to them. If you get stopped, you are just a bunch of friends out for a vacation trip, sharing expenses. Nothing illegal to that. Warn your riders that if they don't stick to that story they'll land in jail, just the same as you."

I briefed my riders, but my sleek, shiny Packard must have thrown the lawmen off for I never had a challenge.

You had to carry at least five passengers, making six "bodies" in your car, to make your buck out of it. And you rolled all the way through, no stops except to gas up and grab a hamburger. If you stopped for a sleep, even at $1 a night, that and the extra food would eat up all your profits. Besides, your passengers didn't have the money for stops anyway. It was 26 hours from Oklahoma City to Los Angeles, if things went smoothly.

Somehow, none of us ever considered it an outlaw occupation, running the wildcat trails. You were just trying to make an "honest buck" in hard times. If you didn't carry the "bodies," somebody else would. You didn't even consider it cheating on the lawful bus companies because you knew the kind of people you were carrying didn't have the fares for Greyhound anyway. If they couldn't ride a wildcatter, they didn't ride.

In fact, I never even became a regular. Just a load now and then when the work in the shop was slow. Maybe Pudge would come up with that extra load he couldn't carry. He seemed to have a way of finding them and his hamburger grille was known as a sort of unofficial travel agency in our town.

Nobody was getting rich at the wildcatting business anyway. There were times when, considering the wear and tear on my shiny Packard, I wondered if I was really making any money at all.

Competition among the "catters" was getting rougher, too. Some drivers had cut the price down as low as $9 a body. I even heard of $8. That was a lot of traveling for nickles. Even if you didn't have insurance or permits. What if you wrecked your car?

In fact, I did have one small wreck in, of all places, New Mexico. The lady driving the other car insisted on calling the troopers. I sweated mightily on that one until my nervous brain came up with the idea of suggesting to my "bodies" that they take a stroll and stay out of sight until the trooper left.

No sweat. The trooper turned out to be one of the friendly ones. No questions about the passengers. Home free.

On one trip when the passengers' luggage turned out to be a bit on the bulky side, I left the spare tire at home so I'd have more luggage space inside. I regretted that decision, too, after I hit a detour where they were using chopped rocks as roadfill and split a tire. Had to walk four miles to the nearest service station for a tire. After that I even stuffed bits of luggage under the hood. Anything to make room for that precious spare tire.

It didn't take long for the glamour of the thing to wear off. I even began to suspect that Pudge wasn't really being so generous. He was probably getting fed up, just as I was. The lean pickings and the tough grind on a good car.

Those 26 or 27 hour runs with no sleep. Roll. Roll. Roll. Coffee by the gallon to try to stay awake. No-Doz pills. And still the eyes would droop. Until you got that warning rumble of a tire hitting the shoulder of the road.

A wave of sheer terror would jerk you back into wakefulness. For 15 or 20 minutes at least. Fight, fight to keep the eyes open. The senses functioning. You could, for example, occupy your thoughts with visions of your shiny Packard lying smashed up in a ditch. Perhaps a bit of blood mixed in.

On one trip, when it seemed impossible to stay awake a moment longer, I turned the wheel over to one of the passengers while I tried to take a snooze. It had been raining and water washed a sheet of slick mud across a low place in the highway. It was the rocking of the car that jarred me awake that time, the Packard in a spinning slide. I then had to make the decision that if anybody were to be allowed the privilege of wrecking that Packard, it would have to be me. I never surrendered the wheel again.

The impetus for one of my runs was a cry for help from one of my own aunts who had allowed herself to be lured to California by a son-in-law. Somewhere in the vineyards near Lodi, they had also hit their bottomless bottom. Two of her older sons left behind in Oklahoma managed to raise a part of my "fee" to bring them home. The remainder was a promise. I never got that "balance" so that trip ended up in the loss column.

The tragedy of the senseless migration and second migration was coming closer to home now. Perhaps what I had seen was becoming a sufficiency.

If all that was not enough, some of the agency people turned out to be blood suckers, too. On the make for the last buck. Even if they had to lie a bit.

First, they promise you that they had a load. Then, when you show up, ready to roll, the sad stories. "This rider only got $10. I'll give you $9 of it." Always the suspicion that the story wasn't true and Mr. Agent had pocketed the difference. I had sworn I wouldn't run for less than $12. But in the end I did. One never really knew the truth.

But something was becoming inevitable. The day when I would make my decision that I was making my last run.

That honey blonde hair.

My westward bound passengers wanted to go to Bakersfield, that trip, instead of to Los Angeles. Bakersfield was no hot spot for picking up a return load. But to avoid the 100 extra miles

of driving to Los Angeles, I would give it a try.

Yup, slim pickings. Not more than half a dozen agencies in town and I was a complete stranger to them. Even Pudge hadn't been there.

"No luck, friend. Not much moving this week." I made all the travel agencies. Maybe they wanted a bit of palm greasing. I wouldn't.

"Maybe tomorrow," said one or two of the agents. To stay over another night would eat up more of the slim profits. Hamburgers and bed, even if the beds were only $1 a night. But I stayed.

Next day, still no load. I was about to head for Los Angeles when one of the agents spoke his piece.

"I know you've got to make expenses but all I've got is two good riders. Then I've got three more on my hands who are really broke. Only $21 between them. I've had several drivers turn them down. Nobody could make a nickel off of them. But I'll let you look at 'em if you like. They're in bad shape. Need help. If you can take 'em I wouldn't charge you a nickel. You can have it all."

Normally, I would have walked out and headed the Packard towards Los Angeles. No use burning up your car for nothing. It would cost a few gallons of gas to get to Los Angeles but at least I knew some agents there.

But there had been a note of urgency in the agent's voice, too. As if he had been pleading for someone. I suppose he was. It was that crazy impulse which led me to say. "Where are they?"

"Right here in the back room," he said, taking a step towards a door. Again that crazy impulse which led me to follow him as he flung the door open.

And then I saw them. On the floor on an old blanket, a man and two kids. The girl perhaps three and the boy about four. At first I only glanced at the man. Small. Humble. Crouching in defeat. I did notice that he was clean. It was the sight of the children which grabbed my attention. God, that beautiful golden hair. And those little angel faces.

As they looked at me, they both managed to smile. Entreating, questioning smiles, somehow pleading for something they weren't old enough to understand. So utterly beautiful, both of them. Little angels with golden crowns. The beauty so vivid as to be almost shocking. I had not expected anything like this.

They had a battered little suitcase and a "bindle" beside them, their total possessions. The man took a comb from his pocket and began combing that golden hair. The little ones had been lying on the blanket and their hair had become just a bit on the tousled side. It was, somehow, as if the father was aware of that golden treasure as the only treasure he had. He must tend to it with his comb.

Then the defeated father got to his feet and offered me a hand. As the agent had said, several drivers had already been there and turned their backs. Now I stood there, an awkward young red head. A stranger. Would I turn my back, too?

"Their mother is dead," the man said. "Died a couple of months ago. We're finished. I've got to get back. I've got some kinfolks at Fort Smith, Arkansas. If we can just get back there we will manage some way."

"I only go as far as Oklahoma City," I said. "And the agent tells me you don't even have enough money to get that far."

"If I could get to the railroad station at Oklahoma City," he said, "I could get my kinfolks to come pick us up there. The little ones can sit on my lap. They won't take full spaces. I've got $21. I'll give it all to you." His eyes were doing most of the pleading.

Perhaps, if it had only been the man asking, I could have turned my back and walked out on him. It was when I looked at those golden children that I could feel something creeping up in my throat. Such singular beauty. Or, were all children golden and precious?

I didn't give the man his answer at that moment. We walked out of the back room, the agent and I, closing the door.

"How long have they been here?" I asked.

"Three days. I been giving them a bite of food."

Maybe all those agents weren't crooks, with hearts of flint.

And I, at that moment, was becoming aware of the fact that I wasn't going to be making any money this trip.

I went back into the back room. "O.K. I'll take you to Oklahoma City," I said.

It was in the man's eyes that I read the prayer of thanks. And then it was the little boy who spoke. "Are we going home?"

"Yes, you're going home," I told him.

Going home? What did this child know about home? Something he had heard his father speak of, perhaps?

Could a child of four understand what was going on? The utter defeat in his father's life? His own? Knowing only that anything was home if it was better than this faded blanket lying on a stranger's floor.

As for the little girl, that tiny bit of shimmering, golden-haired beauty, her offering at that moment was another of those pleading smiles. At that moment I believe it would have melted the engine block in my Packard.

It was late that night before the agent had the other passengers rounded up and we were ready to roll. It was going to be another of those long nights. It would be morning before we stopped for gas and a bit of breakfast.

I, and the other passengers, headed for a hamburger joint near the service station. The father, leaving the children in the car, headed for a grocery store that was just opening. He came back with a nickel box of soda crackers and a tiny sliver of cheese. He proceeded to divide the food for the children.

Somehow I had forgotten to think about how they would eat on the journey if he gave me all his money.

"How much money did you have left when you gave me the $21?" I said.

"I had 47 cents left," he said. "We'll get by." It was not a plea. It was only a statement. That was when I walked back to the hamburger grille and spent some money. I was trying very hard to feel tough, emotionless, but it wasn't working very well.

Next time we stopped for lunch I simply told the father to bring the children and come with me. I no longer gave a damn what the other passengers thought.

It was fall time. Somewhere in New Mexico it began to rain and it never stopped. All the way through the Texas panhandle and into Oklahoma it rained steady. Rain. Rain. Rain. It was still raining when we hit Oklahoma City and I let the other passengers out of the car.

Then, as I began to head for the railroad station, my big mouth got me into trouble again. I began asking questions about those "arrangements" for his kinfolks to pick him up.

It was easy now to see that the man had been lying. Yes, he had those kinfolks at Fort Smith, but they lived far out in the country. He had never been able to contact them.

He simply knew he was heading in the direction of the only "home" he knew. Carrying with him the hope that somewhere was a bed and a bit of food for him and those golden angels. From kinfolk nearly as poor as he.

I had been watching the children on the whole trip. God, how could a man keep his eyes away from such beauty? The boy, bright as a chrome button, had talked about when his mother had died, after she had been ill for months.

"We couldn't take her to the doctor because we didn't have any money," he said. The father tried to hush him. But the little girl angel was talking a bit, too. "Mama went to heaven," she said.

They had been such good children on that trip. Never cried. Not even the little one. So quiet most of the time, as if tragedy had somehow made them older. More sober. As if it had robbed them of their childhood.

A few times, the father, apologetically had quietly asked if I could stop a moment so the little ones could "go." And that was it.

We found the railroad station. I stopped the car and they got out, the father and the two golden children.

I started to say something, but the father, sensing what I was about to say, interrupted me. "Just leave us here. There is a waiting room with benches. We'll manage. You've already done so much. God will bless you."

For a moment I considered doing exactly as the man said. My eyes were once more leaden for lack of sleep. My bones ached from the long drive in the endless rain. My bed at home was only 75 miles away.

But it was not to be. Not now.

I almost barked it, like a command when I spoke, to cover what I was feeling inside. "Get back in the car. We're going to Fort Smith."

What a night. The torture of the damned. It was still raining and we had gone barely a dozen miles east of Oklahoma City when we found the road under construction. A detour.

That detour route, battered by hours of pouring rain and the pounding of cars and heavy trucks, had virtually disintegrated. It was no longer a road, only a gravel track gutted by a million potholes. Potholes filled with water so you couldn't even see them in the darkness, only hit them.

Now I truly had reason to regret my decision. But I had made it and I would keep my promise.

Fort Smith was 200 miles to the east and if my poor Packard, seemingly being pounded to bits, held together we were going to make it. That car must have hit at least 90 per cent of those million potholes between Oklahoma City and Fort Smith. Bang. Bang. Bang. Hour after hour. It was impossible to travel more than 15 or 20 miles an hour. Any faster would only have invited disaster—on a night when nobody could afford it.

My three "passengers" just huddled there as if afraid to speak. Fearing, perhaps, that I might yet put them out on the road and head for home. I am sure they could hear my whispered curses at this bedeviled road and knew the hell I was going through. My soul, that of a mechanic, was the kind that could feel an affinity for a thing like a motor car, as if it were something alive and precious to me. The hurt being transmitted to this vehicle of iron and steel beneath me was being transmitted to my gut as well.

If I had never had reason to respect the quality that the Packard people built into their cars, I did now. It was magnificent. Indestructible. But at the rate we were going, it was going to take forever. It almost did.

I don't know what time it was when we finally arrived in Fort Smith. Perhaps I had lost all sense of time. My brain, my bones, an aching mass. From the endless pounding, the endless strain of watching that road of horror, hour upon hour upon hour. The lack of sleep for two nights.

This time, in Fort Smith, I didn't argue when the man insisted that I leave them at the train station and not try to drive into the country to find his kinfolks. I was so numb my brain was no longer functioning normally. My only thought and longing was for sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Sleep.

"I have a friend here in Fort Smith. He will take me to my kinfolks," the man said. "God will bless you for what you have done."

At that moment I felt no blessings. Only pain. And numbness. So I left them, the father and those two golden angels. Forever.

And I still had that return trip over that seemingly endless and heartless road. Only now it would be impossible to face it until I had parked beside the road and slept for several hours.

Back home, I took a day off to catch up with my sleep before heading back to the shop and work. It was perhaps some 10 days later when Pudge dropped by again.

"I've got another load. Want to take them?" he said.

It took me all of a half second to say no.

It wasn't that I was only weary of those long, dreary night hours of fighting sleep. The uncertain and meager profits. The pounding of my precious Packard.

The real fear in my heart was that once again, somewhere, sometime, I would meet another angel with dimpled cheeks and honey blonde hair.

Childhood Memories in Manitoba

by Anne Neufeld Rupp

It was a cold winter Sunday on the Manitoba prairie. The clouds hung low and gray, while a sharp wind whispered its warning through the trees in the backyard. Dad and Mom had gone to visit some friends more than twenty miles away. My youngest brothers had gone with them, but George and I stayed home. I was in the seventh grade and he was in the fifth. Dad said we were old enough to feed the calves and milk the cows when evening came.

Winter days were short, and dark came before supper. "Let's start the chores early," my brother said to me, as our parents left the yard, "so we don't have to work after dark." We never put it in words, but we both knew after supper was scary in that big dark barn, where the lantern cast crazy shadows along the walls, and the corners and stalls were crammed with black. I quickly agreed with George. We would do our chores early. When Dad came, he would help us with the harder jobs such as watering the cows and feeding large forks of hay to the horses.

As the day wore on, the sun completely forgot about us. The clouds grew heavier and gloomier, and occasional wisps of snow began to run back and forth across the field, blown by the wailing wind.

George and I had been playing Monopoly and Crokinole all afternoon, but as we looked out of the window, where the frost patterns were spreading out along the pane, we became rather uneasy. Not only was the snow starting to blow, but heavy, white flakes were swirling down from the sky.

By four o'clock, we had hurried into our boots and parkas, and headed for the barn. The cows were soon milked. The calves were fed. The kittens got an extra bowl of warm, creamy milk, and the dog chewed on a big bone we had brought from the house.

When we were finished, we went to the barn door and peered anxiously toward the darkening fields where the car would be crossing. No car. No lights. The wind began to howl and moan, as it spit clouds of snow into the air. George and I looked at each other, and then crept up the stairs into the large, cold loft. A few mice scurried around, and sparrows fluttered back and forth as we climbed onto the high mounds of hay. Together we pulled and tugged until we had enough hay thrown down the stairway to feed the horses. We jumped down into the soft hay and carried one armful after another into the mangers.

Again we went to the door. No car. No lights. By now we could hardly see the lighted windows of the house. We left the watering jobs and struggled against the wind until we reached the front door. Stomping the snow off our feet and beating our cold hands, we arrived, panting and laughing in the big, warm kitchen. We weren't laughing inside. We were worried. We were wondering why our parents hadn't come home.

We made some scrambled eggs and toast, and while I cooked some hot chocolate, George pressed a warm penny against the frosted glass until he had melted the ice. He peered out. No car. No lights.

We ate in silence and washed the dishes. I put some more wood on the fire, while George fed our large gray cat. The clock struck seven. George looked up and said in an anxious voice, "They may be stuck. Maybe we should go to meet them."

I nodded, and in a few moments our boots and parkas were on. We pushed open the front door and stepped out into the black world. I couldn't see and fell headfirst into a new, deep snowdrift in front of the gate.

Slowly, we pushed toward the barn, the icy wind nipping at our legs and faces. The harness was soon on the two big horses, King and Prince, and we hitched them to the sleigh. We felt brave and frightened at the same time. Brave because we were going to rescue Mom and Dad and our little brothers. Frightened, because we knew from growing up on the prairie how dangerous it is to venture out into a storm. Yet in the bravado of the moment, when we visualized parents and brothers stuck in a snowdrift and freezing, we somehow forgot to think about ourselves. We refused to acknowledge what a foolhardy thing we were doing.

George opened the barn door and I drove the horses out. Slowly, the warm barn and the big door closed behind us. Once more we peered into the dark night. We looked. We looked again. Through the snow-fogged air, we dimly saw two lights worming their way toward the gate. It was the car!

We stood, watching, as it inched toward us. Soon we could hear the roar of the motor above the howling wind. Neither George nor I thought of turning the horses back to the barn. We clutched the reigns tightly in our mittened hands and waited. We didn't look at each other. We didn't say anything. My knees were jelly. My stomach an unscrambled egg. How, when you're thirteen and eleven, do you talk about things like, "relief," "scared," "worried?" We didn't. We just stood there, holding the horses back, and waited.

A Christmas to be Remembered

"Froehliche Weihnachten." "Froehliche Weihnachten." The familiar Christmas greeting floated towards the tall man coming through the door. The young preacher, known as "Big Abe," walked into the room. A lightweight coat hung from his broad shoulders. Hands were encased in woolen home-knit mittens. A fur cap pulled over his ears. Blue, intense eyes looked at the expectant faces gathered in the living and kitchen areas of this large prairie farmhouse. Creases formed around his eyes and across his cheeks until they stretched into a smile that spilled across the room. "Froehliche Weihnachten," he called back in a deep, resonant voice, loud enough for everyone to hear.

It was Christmas day 1934. Abram G. Neufeld, ordained as pastor and itinerant minister only a few years earlier, had agreed to leave his wife and two small children on this day, take the train to Brandon, and spend three days preaching in this small, isolated settlement of Mennonites, in western Manitoba.

It was bitterly cold outside. Snow lay hard and white on the ground, but inside the large home, the gathered people experienced the warmth of shared community and renewed faith.

The three days flowed into each other and seemed to end before they had begun. It was time to return home. Abram's mind began to move towards his wife and children. Yes, by early tomorrow afternoon, he would be home.

"Go to bed now and rest," Justina, his hostess, said. "My brother will take you to Brandon in the morning. The train leaves at six-thirty."

Abram obeyed without further prompting. To be in Brandon by six-thirty meant early rising. Rising while night still lay on the fields and stars shone bright on the winter snow.

After what seemed moments, alarms were ringing, doors banging, and voices shouting. Abram sprang into his clothes and shut his small suitcase. Already he heard Jacob's voice calling through the back door, "The car won't start. It's twenty-five below, and the model T's radiator is frozen. We can't take the car."

Abram bounded down the stairs. He looked at his host.

"My wife is expecting me today. She will worry if I don't come." Abram looked at Jacob as he spoke and then at Justina.

"I tell you what," Jacob said, "four miles from here there is a shed where people leave their cream cans. The train stops there at seven o'clock. I will take you there by sled, and you can catch the train."

Hurriedly they ate breakfast, hitched up the horses, and drove into the dark morning. Harnesses jangled. Hooves bit crisply on the hard, cold snow. The wind caught a wisp of white and blew it into sharp drifts across the road. Abram pulled the robe around him. The fall coat he wore could not keep him warm. Within an hour they arrived at the shed.

Shed was the best description for this small, lean-to type of building. Weathered boards held it together. A sagging door, blown open by the wind, creaked back and forth against the snowdrift forming in the doorway. Inside the shed, a small, pot-bellied stove greeted them. Half a pail of coal stood beside it, as though expecting visitors.

"The train will be here in half an hour. I will make a fire. You are not dressed warm." Jacob made these comments as he searched his pockets for matches. Slowly, a small heap of coal was coaxed into a glowing flame and warmth spread a tight circle around the small, black stove belly. Abram held his hands over it.

"Fifteen more minutes," Jacob said. "The fire will keep you warm. I will leave now."

An hour later, Abram put on a second handful of coal. He nursed it into a flame. For what seemed like the fiftieth time, he went to the half open door and gazed north. The gray dawn pointed its fingers along the long, thin railroad track. No train in sight.

Abram returned to the stove. He warmed his back, then turned and warmed his front. His sides. He pulled his cap further over his ears. Clapped his hands briskly to keep them warm. Stomped his feet to keep them from becoming numb.

By twelve noon, a brisk wind was rising, blowing angry tufts of snow high into the air. Farmhouses drifted out of sight, and a sense of aloneness gripped Abram. Or was it fear? Where was that train?

"I will lift up mine eyes . . . ." The familiar words paced themselves through his mind, and he held them one at a time, pondered them, and claimed them.

It was two o'clock. The last precious handful of coal had been fed to the small greedy stove. Abram eyed the wooden coal bin in the corner. It was empty except for some coal dust caught in cracks and crannies along the bottom. He bent over the edge and with bared hands began to scrape the dust into a small heap in the middle. Blackened fingers probed every corner. Carefully he scooped it up and lifted it into the coal

Margaret and Abram G. Neufeld and their four children left to right, George, Waldo, Anne and Abram.

pail.

Four o'clock. Intensely, Abram worked with the fire. Half a handful of coal dust, blowing on the stubborn embers, waiting for sparks, adding a little more. His body felt chilled through and through. A snowdrift formed inside the door, creeping towards the half-hearted stove. The wind gusted and blew. Early winter dusk began to blanket the landscape.

"I will wait one more hour," Abram said. "then I must find the nearest farm before dark."

The last coal dust now settled into a glow. Nothing was warm anymore. But not yet freezing. Abram eyed the wooden bin. If he could kick it down and break it into pieces, it could go next.

He went to the door again and peered to the darkening north. A light! Through the blowing snow, a light! Then the familiar whistle, the chugs, and the train ground to a halt. Abram sprang aboard with no goodbyes or backward glance to the shed, stove, or coal bin.

"Five o'clock. Where have you been?" he asked the conductor.

"The train has a gas engine, and it's water cooled. The water pipes froze last night, and they've been thawing them out till now."

Relief and warmth crept through Abram. Three days of blessed meetings. Now this great saving. The blood thawing his veins spoke of life, certitude and hope. He rubbed his mittened hands until the numbness turned to burning.

An hour later, the train reached Boissevain. Only seven miles from home. With newly purchased bread and apples in his pockets, his first meal since breakfast, Abram began the homeward trudge. This was the last lap. Snow crackled under his feet. The wind lay low. Stars shone like Christmas greetings through the galaxies, and bent down warmly towards the solitary figure striding along the road. He sang as he walked, loud and clear into the night. His feet were firm and steady on their path. An inner joy penetrated his being. It was as though power greater than his own bore him homeward, lifted him up, and fused time, space and being into one ultimate whole, freed of the confines and limitations of the frail human spirit.

"I will never forget that night," Abram, my father said to me, many years later. "Never have I sensed such communion, such God presence. It seemed as though he was walking with me, beside me, like a path of light. It was a Christmas to be remembered!"

My Christmas Doll

I was eight years old, and I wanted a doll for Christmas. Not just any doll. It was to be a wettums doll. A doll you could diaper and bottle and change.

How did I find out about a wettums doll? Not from the toystores. Because in isolated, western Manitoba, I had never seen a toystore. Maybe a friend had one. I can't remember. My real source was the Eatons catalogue. Early in fall, when the catalogue arrived, my brother and I drank in the toy section. This was our fantasy, our utopia, our millenia. All these wonderful toys you could play with. Which one would we choose? Which one could we possibly ask for? And then I saw the wettums doll. This was it! All my eight year old maternal instincts turned loose. This would not be like my noisy baby brother who was always crying and sick. This would be one I could hold and nurture and love and care for. It wouldn't bring up when I gave it the bottle, or kick and scream when I changed its diapers. The more I studied that catalogue, the more I knew that the wettums doll was the only thing in the world that I wanted.

December neared. Now was the time. I went to my mother and said, "Mama, ech well disa popp!—Mother, I want this doll." I pointed it out to her in the Eatons catalogue. She looked at it but didn't say anything.

"Could I have this one for Christmas?" I urged. "THIS ONE?" "We'll see," she answered quietly. Fear gripped me. What did she mean, "We'll see"? Did that mean that maybe my parents had already planned something else? Something I didn't really want? Maybe a coat? What do you do as a child when you want something so desperately, but feel so powerless because your young life is in the hands of those who give? I stood there for a moment, and then cried out, tears streaming down my face, "I don't see why I can never have what I want! Never!" Mother was quiet. I ran from the room.

On Christmas Eve, after the program, we came home. The living room door stood open. The tree glittered in its glory. Under the tree stood the plates we each had selected with candies, nuts, and fruit on them. Beside each plate, our gifts. I approached the tree. Almost reverently. I looked at my plate for just a moment, to make sure this was the right one, and then at my gift. There sat my wettums doll. Just as beautiful and wonderful and splendid as I had dreamed her to be. I picked her up and held her. Close. Happy eight year old I was. I had gotten what I wanted. The little Christmas doll I held in my arms became a symbol for me, not only that Christmas Eve, but in the years to come, that my father and mother would always do for me the very best they could.

But there was another feeling, that kept rousing its ugly little head. Why had I yelled at my mother? Why hadn't I trusted her? When you're eight years old, what do you do with the guilt?

That Holy Place on Science Ridge

by Robert Kreider

"Sunday, March 30, 1919, he went to church for the first time." These words my mother recorded in the pink baby book which she kept of her first child. Not even a trace of that significant event lingers in my memory. But I note with interest that in that winter of the Great Flu Epidemic, my parents felt it safe to expose me, then less than three months old, to the eyes and the embraces of congregation members.

Church, family and farm combined in 1918 to draw my parents back to Whiteside County, Illinois, my father's home community. Following completion of seminary, my father had taught for one year at Goshen College. Earlier as a student pastor he had been ordained at the Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Topeka, Indiana. When father returned to his home community, he joined A. C. Good, the senior pastor, of the (Old) Mennonite congregation.

The name of the congregation remains unique in the Mennonite world: "Science Ridge Mennonite Church." Was it a bold affirmation of a people's modernity: juxtaposing science and Mennonite? Probably not. In an earlier day a one-room school on that road bore the name "Science Ridge School."

The church was two miles north of the city of Sterling. Two miles beyond was my parents' 110 acre farm owned by Grandfather Kreider. On it Dad raised red Duroc hogs, milked Jersey cows, and planted fields of corn, oats, wheat, clover and timothy hay. Until the end of his life at 86 my father, teacher-pastor, continued to think of himself as part farmer.

On neighboring farms lived my father's older brothers—Harry, Frank, Abe and John—and his sister Tilly. At the age of 49 my grandfather built a large house and moved to town from where he managed his farms and counseled his sons in the ways of agricultural success.

Science Ridge Mennonite Church was important to our family. My affection for the congregation is cradled in a story from the first months of my life, the winter of the Great Flu Epidemic. This plague spread across the land. Schools and businesses were closed. Public meetings, church services were cancelled. Many were dying in the community. My father came down with the flu, then mother. Chores must be done: cattle, horses, hogs and chickens to be fed, cows to be milked. And there lay an infant child to be cared for. But in those days of the influenza peril, no help could be found. A good member of the congregation, John Conrad, heard of the plight of their young pastor's family. He walked two miles across snowy fields to volunteer his services: to do the chores, prepare meals for mother and father and care for the child. To this day as I hear the story of the Good Samaritan an image crosses my inward eye of John Conrad walking across the wintry fields on a mission of mercy.

Several years later my father received an urgent invitation to return to Goshen College. After a farm sale of stock and equipment, we tucked ourselves in our 1919 open Maxwell and drove to our new home on South Eighth Street in Goshen. I carried with me memories of those early Sterling years: possessing a black and white kitty, pushing my younger brother Gerald down the concrete cellar steps, grandfather taking ill at butchering time and being carried into the house on a barndoor, having a little bucket with which I helped father feed the hogs, sitting with mother in the white frame meetinghouse.

Science Ridge Mennonite Church, Sterling, Illinois, c. 1950.

Almost every year for a decade we returned to Sterling to spend several weeks with relatives, my mother helping with summer work, my father off doing important things. Those earliest memories of farm and church, the Sterling and the Goshen years, blur together into a pleasant whole.

I remember going to church with Uncle John in his spring wagon pulled by Grandfather's handsome carriage horse, Prince. We could choose between two roads, the upper graveled and graded road for cars and the lower dirt "summer road." We took the summer road. We passed the Glassers, who were Catholics and sometimes did field work after attending mass on Sundays. We passed another neighbor, member of the threshing ring, where cleanliness and housekeeping were not the queen of the arts. Uncle John, who had an ulcer, dreaded the day in the threshing cycle when they must eat there. Uncle John pointed out the school where his and Aunt Jenny's first child, John—a first cousin we never knew—had been run over and killed by a passing motorist. That story of death rooted itself deeply in my consciousness.

Rounding the next corner we could see the church on the ridge, the white frame structure set in a grove of trees and embraced to the north and east by long, low rows of horse barns, where Uncle John tied up Prince and gave him hay. I associate our approach to morning worship in Science Ridge Mennonite Church with the fragrant aroma of horses and horse manure. The Greek Orthodox have their burning incense to symbolize the pervading presence of the Holy Spirit. That meetinghouse also had its aromas of worship.

We entered by the men's door at the back and were immediately greeted by another aroma: the musty smell of a building which had been closed all week, a smell that carries pleasant memories. Some years later the aged pastor and bishop, A. C. Good, took me to that back door and explained, "It was here after an evening service that your father, when a young man, came to me and said, 'I want to join the church.' " Holy ground.

My earliest memory of Sunday morning worship is one of sitting with Mother on the women's side. In the distant righthand corner sat the older women, including Grandmother. She dressed differently than the others because to her dying day she remained River Brethren, dressing in a severely plain grey dress in the style of her people. Grandfather sat with the older men to the left of the pulpit. Grandfather was a portly man, wore no tie, and always seemed to be half asleep.

I still remember that exhilarating moment when Mother permitted me to cross the center aisle to sit with Uncle John and Cousin Charles on the men's side. That was my rite of passage to manhood.

Up front sitting on the preachers' bench and wearing plain coats were my father and A. C. Good, nine years Dad's senior. A. C.'s face fascinated me with its boney angularity: sunken cheeks, bushy black eyebrows, penetrating eyes. Father and A. C. had strong voices—Dad a bass and A. C. a tenor—both with a volume many decibels more than that little church required. A. C., who had attended some short terms at Moody Bible Institute, had a bit of a revivalist's flair in his sermons. Dad was more meditational and instructional in style. Actually, I remember nothing of their sermons. I do remember my father's prayers which gave me the distinct impression that he and God were on close speaking terms. I liked prayers because in those days you turned around, faced back, and knelt with your knees on the floor and your elbows on the bench. Then no one sent their trousers to the cleaners or wore nylon hose. I found much comfort during long prayers to be able to lay my head down on the cool seat of the pew.

Hymn singing was special because it was led by Sol Good, A. C.'s brother. Sol did not wear a plain coat but he always wore a tiny, black bow tie. He gave the pitch for the a cappella singing by striking his tuning fork on the pulpit and placing it to his ear. Sometimes after the service we would come up to Sol Good and he would strike the tuning fork and place it to our ears. The hymn book he used was the black *Church and Sunday School Hymnal* of 1902, which contained two of Grandfather Shoemaker's hymns and bore his name as publisher. Later I noted in the 1927 hymnal they dropped Grandfather's hymns from the collection.

We felt close to Sol Good, a particular sympathy. One summer at threshing time we heard that his barn was burning. We drove over to witness the last stages of the fire. We could see the bodies of cattle and hogs caught in the holocaust, roasting amidst the burning embers.

Sometime in the mid-twenties they added a west wing to the meeting house to accommodate a growing congregation. As a child with conservative instincts, that expansion and modernization offended me. I liked the crowded little rectangular framed church.

Sunday school, less deeply etched in my memory, actually preceded the worship service. I liked Sunday school, especially for those colored pictures we could take home at the end of a quarter. For each Sunday of attendance we could paste a sheep, a bird or a star on the picture. It was fun being creative: pasting a sheep on the top of a tree. Sunday school was distinguished for its distinct sound of music. We had no musical instruments in church but in Sunday school we opened and closed with the sound of stringed instruments: the pulling of the curtains hanging on metal rings along the taut wires. The Psalmist speaks of praising the Lord with stringed instruments. At Science Ridge I knew what that meant: the ceremony of the pulling of the curtains before and after Sunday school, harp music of the angels.

After church, while adults talked, we went out front by the road to the old hand pump, where we pumped and pumped and pumped until a flood of cool, refreshing water gushed forth and kept flowing after the pumping stopped. A drink from the tin cup hanging on that pump was the best water in all Whiteside County. Again I knew what the Bible meant when it spoke of "giving a cup of cold water" or Jesus referred to as "the living water."

On some Sundays we wandered west into the cemetery where we saw the graves of great grandparents. In 1854, when the railroads had opened up the Illinois country, they moved from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In the cemetery were the graves of kinfolk: Rutts, Ebersoles, Mellingers, Byers and more.

Often there were invitations to homes for Sunday noon dinner. We particularly welcomed invitations to A. C. Goods' because they had a gravel pit next to their farmstead, where, if we promised to be careful, we could play. On the other side was a small creek. All that, plus a barn, offered all that one could wish for a playground.

Science Ridge Mennonite Church: a place of sounds, aromas, touch and

memories—memories laden with values, memories that will not let me go. At Science Ridge the pump is still there, also the cemetery and many of the trees. The horse barns are gone. The white frame church is gone. In its place has been built a tan brick church with an educational wing and individual classrooms, colored windows, an electric organ, a refrigerated drinking fountain, flush toilets and soap dispeners, and printed orders of service. There are Ebersoles, Barges, Conrads and Goods who still attend. Cousin Charles and his wife Ethel still attend. For hundreds of persons, like myself, that first experience with God's people still hovers in that holy place on Science Ridge.

Book Reviews

Menno Duerksen. *Dear God, I'm Only a Boy.* Memphis, TN: Castle Books, 1986. Pp. 416. $7.95 paperback.

Here we have the dark side of twentieth century Mennonite and world history: pathological restlessness and rootlessness, both geographical and religious; intra-family hatred; abysmal poverty; cruelty to animals; a religion of fear, punishment, and arbitrary rules; Elmer Gantry-like evangelists; hierarchy, privilege, and class structure in the church; war; the Nuremberg Trial. All of this is told in the style of personal anecdote, in a happily irreverent way, sometimes with a cynical smirk.

The portrait Duerksen paints of Mennonite religious identity is particularly interesting. We even have a classic born-again conversion story, only Duerksen converts to agnosticism. We see the Mennonite community in a state of failure and collapse.

The colors are not unrelievedly dark, however. Duerksen tells many happier tales of human and natural relationships. He seems to particularly like animal stories.

Those interested in the history of the American Left should note that Duerksen is a cousin to Gordon Friesen, author of *Flamethrowers*. Duerksen describes the somewhat ambiguous role that Friesen played in his intellectual growth and liberation.

This book is at first repellent, but in the end absorbing, reading. It is a valuable corrective to the usual, more positive and more pious Mennonite *Bildungsromane*.

John Thiesen
Mennonite Library and Archives
North Newton, Kansas

Mary S. Sprunger, ed. *Sourcebook: Oral History Interviews with World War One Conscientious Objectors.* Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1986. Pp. 200. ($10.00 paperback).

A definitive history of the Mennonite experience during World War I has yet to be written. Fortunately, much material has been collected and a number of personal reminiscences and articles have been published. Furthermore, about twenty years ago, under the auspices of the Schowalter Oral History Collection, some 270 individuals were interviewed, most of whom had been conscripted during the war. These interviews are in the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, and are available to scholars and others. Brief summaries of these interviews were made and published under the title *Voices Against War: A Mennonite Oral History of World War I* (North Newton, KS: 1973). However, many individuals who might be interested in these interviews will find the summaries too short and do not have the time or opportunity to listen to the tapes.

Sourcebook makes available some of the interviews to the reading public. It consists of eight transcribed interviews with conscientious objectors, six transcribed interviews with other individuals, one of which is not really an interview, and a miscellany of other materials.

The criteria for selecting the interviews were "random" although those who were good story tellers and had dramatic experiences were preferred. Since this reviewer has not listened to all the tapes in the Schowalter Collection it is difficult to judge if the best interviews were chosen. Those that are included are certainly most interesting and in part illustrative of the Mennonite experience during World War I.

What amazes this reviewer is the strength of conviction of the conscientious objectors. Apparently, many of their home churches had done very little in the area of peace education. Wilmer Shelly, who came from a well-established Mennonite church in Pennsylvania, declared that his congregation seemed to know nothing about the traditional Mennonite peace position. Furthermore, as various interviewees indicated, many congregations and their leaders were either afraid or simply not in sympathy with their own young men in the military camps and urged them to be a bit more compromising.

It is regrettable that no accurate records were kept to determine the number of conscripts who opted for non-combatant service. There must have been many as there were undoubtedly several Mennonite young men who served in regular military service. *Sourcebook* contains only one interview with a noncombatant, David A. Janzen, who had earlier written his "My Experiences as a Young Man of the Mennonite Faith in World War I, 1918-1919" (unpublished manuscript). Was Janzen a good selection? Does he represent a "typical non-combatant" position? Janzen could barely hide his dislike of his fellow Mennonites who, he felt, should have done "everything they were told" (p. 185).

Sourcebook also includes an interview with a "regular" serviceman, Wilmer Shelly. Having learned nothing at home about Mennonite peacemaking, Shelly was influenced by students and faculty at Bluffton College. Yet he did not become a C.O. and chose to enlist in the Army Signal Corps, serving for the duration of his service as an airplane mechanic. Yet Shelly is not really a "regular." This reviewer would have preferred an interview with a Mennonite who served as a combatant in the trenches in France. To the best of my knowledge, the Schowalter Collection does not contain such an interview.

One of the most interesting interviews in *Sourcebook* is the conversation with Charles Gordon, who participated in the mob action against John Schrag, a wealthy Mennonite near Burrton, Kansas. Gordon gives a rather graphic description of what happened in his hometown on Armistice Day 1918 when Schrag was almost lynched by a frenzied mob.

Sourcebook also includes a brief bibliography on the history of World War I C.O.'s and two appendices. In the latter we find inter alia a two-page description of the Schowalter Oral History Project and a map of all the military camps. Unfortunately, the latter is of poor quality.

Sourcebook is a very interesting and important publication containing a wealth of information about one aspect of Mennonite history that is not readily available. It can serve as an important source of inspiration to those who search for peaceful ways to deal with conflict. Yet it is regrettable that *Sourcebook* was not edited a bit more carefully. Thus in the Introduction we find Rachel Waltner Goossen's name twice in the last sentence. The interview with Henry J. Becker contains many typographical errors for which there can be no excuse. Finally, Clemenceau's name is misspelled twice on the same

page (p. 195). Although many names are identified in the footnotes, a name index would have been helpful. Finally, a brief history of the Mennonite experience during World War I would have been appreciated by the general reader for whom *Sourcebook* was especially composed. A subsequent edition could easily remedy these shortcomings. In conclusion, may I suggest a similar sourcebook on World War II?

Gerlof D. Homan
Professor of History
Illinois State University
Normal, Illinois

Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987. Pp. 278 ($29.95).

This book is a published form of Peter Hamm's 1978 Ph.D. dissertation in sociology from McMaster University. Both the dissertation and the book have the same title except that the former specifies the years encompassed by the study, 1925-1975. The book covers the same time frame, but the reader is not informed of this fact, either in the title or preface.

This essay is an attempt to combine a study of the sociology of religion with religious sociology, that is, to examine scientifically a sociological theory of religion and at the same time, to analyze a religious movement in order to better understand it. This study hypothesizes that for a sectarian movement to persist both integration, represented by the sacralization process, and differentiation, represented by the secularization process, must occur, the dialectic of the two forces guarding against overly restrictive rigidity and excessive adaptability. The author uses the Canadian Mennonite Brethren as a case study to test the utility of such an identity theory. At the same time, he is seeking to gain a better understanding of the processes of growth and decline, of continuity and change, and of the ongoing tension resulting from a religious movement's confrontation with society. In pursuit of these objectives the author employs three types of source materials—empirical data derived largely from the 1972 Church Member Profile, historical data retrieved from conference writings, and secondary materials regarding sociological theory.

Hamm divides his book into five major sections, all containing several chapters for a total of fifteen. The first section presents the theoretical framework, focusing on sectarianism and religious continuity and change. He argues that the church-sect typology as a whole is applicable to the Mennonite Brethren. The author, however, fails to deal with two models—the established sect and the denomination, both of which could be applied to the Mennonite Brethren experience. Part two is the historical background. Hamm argues for the sectarian beginnings and the persistence of such characteristics with both the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement and the Canadian Mennonite Brethren in the nineteenth century.

Part three, the sacralization of identity, contains five chapters testing the central hypothesis of the study, namely, that the synthetic process of sacralization contributes to the continuity of sectarianism. The author contends that his information supports such a conclusion regarding the Canadian Mennonite Brethren. Part four, the secularization process, also with five chapters, analyzes the components contributing to such religious change and tests the hypothesis that these components of change lead to secularization. These chapters thus focus on education, urbanization, occupational change, economic ascendance, and assimilation. Despite these forces of secularization, Hamm argues that the Canadian Mennonite Brethren have largely maintained their sectarianism and have not been assimilated by the church type, in part because their religious identity is no longer determined by external cultural patterns but by ideology.

Peter Hamm has written a well researched, scholarly book addressing a legitimate area of study—Mennonite Brethren identity and sectarianism. He has been careful to distinguish the Canadian Mennonite Brethren from their counterparts in the United States, with whom the acculturation process has proceeded further. Moreover, he does not hesitate to challenge some standard theories regarding sectarianism (e.g., those of Niebuhr and Herberg), pointing out when the Mennonite Brethren experience does not correspond to these patterns.

This book, however, does have its shortcomings. As noted earlier, the author ignores the established sect and the denominational type. The Canadian Mennonite Brethren certainly have not become a church type, but the denomination, which stands between the church and sect, has some relevance to their experience in North America. In fact, it can be argued that the Canadian Mennonite Brethren are a denomination. Hamm mentions some areas in which the Mennonite Brethren have departed from their sectarianism. Yet, there are other criteria that point toward the development of denominationalism that he does not note. Still, the most serious problem with *Continuity and Change* is that it bears all the marks of a published dissertation, which has received little if any revision since 1978. The bibliography contains only a few post-1978 sources—and there have been publications addressing the issues in Hamm's book, including an update of the Church Member Profile. More significant, the content does not discuss the years since the span of the original dissertation, 1925-1975. If this was the intent, such should have been noted in the title or preface. Even more obvious are the dated references and statements. For example, the author calls ten- to twelve-year old articles recent publications and refers to Edmund Janzen as the current president of Fresno Pacific College. (He relinquished this post in 1985.)

Richard Kyle
Professor of History and Religion
Tabor College
Hillsboro, Kansas

Lois Barrett, *Building the House Church*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1986. Pp. 176.

"How about going to the church that meets just down the street?"

"Are you kidding? No way. That's a house church. I want to go to a real church."

Comments like these, Lois told me at a recent Western District Ministers' Retreat, are ones she hears rather frequently. And perhaps it is no surprise, for the house church that Lois describes in her book goes against the grain of our modern society. Lois advocates and tells how to build churches like those established in the first century in Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Rome and "wherever the Christian movement spread." This kind of church calls for intimacy, for wholistic worship, for commitment, and for a good deal of trust. Americans of the Eighties—the "modern" person—are

independent, aloof, have a "specialist" mentality, and live by the motto "never let them see you sweat." If they relate to a church at all, it is in relative anonymity; and it is with the church with the most "perks."

The truth is, however, authentic Christianity requires the hallmarks Lois identifies for the house church. (By the way, don't let the term "house church" in the title scare you off. Lois says "a house church doesn't have to meet in a house, and it can even be a group of people within a larger congregation.") The hallmarks can be seen in this definition: "a group of people small enough to meet face-to-face who have covenanted with God and each other" to be living and ministering the love of Jesus. These are basic Gospel requirements, and they are what the reformer sought to restore to the church. Lois quotes Luther as writing "Those who want to be Christian in earnest . . . should sign their names and meet in a house to pray, read, baptize, receive the sacraments, and do other Christian work . . . (Alas) I have not yet the people for it nor do I see many who want it." Of course the Radical Reformers of the 16th Century put just such a vision into practice.

Building the House Church is a "how to" book. It gives practical suggestions in addition to Biblical and historical perspectives. It is useful for Sunday Schools, small groups or "cell groups" within a church, for emerging churches and church "planters," and for individual study. In addition to the brief sweep through history, it touches on eleven topics: covenant, worship, teaching and learning, children, sharing, discipling, decisions, gifts, mission, growing, and beginning. Each chapter has questions at the end for reflection and action.

I heartily recommend it for anyone wanting more than just "milk" in their church diet!

Steven G. Schmidt
Pastor, New Creation Fellowship
Newton, Kansas

Le Roy Bechler. *The Black Mennonite Church in North America: 1886-1986.* Scottdale & Kitchener: Herald Press, 1986. Illustrated. Pp. 196.

Rafael Falcón. *The Hispanic Mennonite Church in North America: 1932-1982.* Scottdale & Kitchener: Herald Press, 1986. Illustrated. Pp. 223.

Mennonites, despite all stereotypes to the contrary, are a multi-ethnic people. The message and witness of the Mennonite Church has spread far beyond the isolation of its original German-speaking enclaves, and today encompasses numerous races and cultures. Clearly this has been the case in countries such as India and Zaire, where large Mennonite conferences exist today. Yet this phenomenon has also taken place in North America, resulting in various "ethnic" Mennonite groups developing alongside the mainline Mennonite churches. Unfortunately, many of us within the traditional Mennonite world know little about these fellow church members. Our own self-understanding has been impoverished by an unfamiliarity with Mennonites of other racial backgrounds.

This gap in our understanding has been remedied somewhat by recent books on the Black Mennonite Church by Le Roy Bechler and the Hispanic Mennonite Church by Rafael Falcón. Bechler, a longtime church planter and pastor, and Falcón, a professor at Goshen College, have both made valuable contributions to the total picture of the Mennonite Church in North America.

Bechler, after four very brief introductory chapters that help to set the larger context for his story, follows an essentially congregation-by-congregation format throughout the book. He first describes each of the original thirteen Mennonite Church missions among the blacks, all founded prior to 1950. We are introduced to the various personalities who built and shaped these congregations as well as their triumphs and struggles. Though this section is more descriptive than analytical, the reader nonetheless comes away with a sense of how the black Mennonite Church began.

Considerably less attention is given to the churches since 1950. According to Bechler's own appendix there have been over thirty black or integrated Mennonite Church congregations founded since that time, yet he chooses not to mention most of them in the text. The only detailed treatment of individual black congregations since 1950 is limited to discussions of three representative churches: Calvary Mennonite in Inglewood, California; Lee Hieghts Community in Cleveland, Ohio; and Calvary Mennonite in Newport News, Virginia.

Bechler's congregational approach to this history results in the omission of numerous important topics. He virtually ignores the Afro-American Mennonite Association and its predecessors, despite the role it has played in representing the black constituency of the Mennonite Church as a whole. There is also no significant discussion of how the larger Mennonite Church has dealt with issues of race relations and black congregations, beyond a few specific and not necessarily representative examples. What effect, if any, did events such as the 1955 Mennonite Church statement "The Way of the Cross in Race Relations" or the writings of Guy F. Hershberger during the same period have on the black Mennonite Church? A more concerted effort to contextualize the black Mennonite Church within its own conference would have been helpful.

"Church growth" is a dominant theme throughout Bechler's book, who acknowledges church growth theoretician C. Peter Wagner's influence on his book. Most of Bechler's congregational sketches are run through a church growth grid, and he goes so far as to state that "It is the mission of the church to grow" (p. 106). One might easily argue that it is the mission of the church to be faithful and to make disciples. Of course, we all hope that growth comes about as a result of such a mission, but growth must be understood as concomitant to that mission and not as the mission itself. Regardless of one's views on this issue, Bechler's church growth emphasis does little to help the reader understand the significance of the black Mennonite Church. Serious discussions of leadership styles, attitudes toward peace and justice issues and modes of worship are missing from this book. We do not learn from Bechler in what ways the black congregations are alike or differ from their more traditional Mennonite Church counterparts. Answers to questions such as these would have been far more valuable than simple discussions of growth trends.

Bechler's documentation is limited. Chapters one and two are documented, but once he turns to specifically Mennonite topics, all documentation vanishes. The book contains no bibliography. Serious readers will probably want to know more about the sources Bechler used in researching and writing this book.

Rafael Falcón's book on the Hispanic Church to a certain extent overcomes some of the problems evident in Bechler's work. Falcón begins with a discussion of the origins of Hispanic church work within the Mennonite Church. Here we meet the individuals and institutions that played important roles in the development of this work. It becomes evident already within the first few chapters that Falcón takes the larger Mennonite context more seriously than does Bechler. Discussions of Mennonite Church statements and programs on race relations and of organizations such as the Hispanic Council give the reader a view of the story beyond the limits of the individual congregation. In fact, Falcón more adequately tells the story of black Mennonite organizations than does Bechler. Chapter five is entirely devoted to the various organizations founded by and on behalf of the Hispanic Mennonite Church.

Most of Falcón's book, however, is devoted to sketches of the various Hispanic congregations in the Mennonite Church. These sketches for the most part limit themselves to "factual" information and make little effort to interpret or analyze the larger story. While this does allow the reader to become familiar with the people and places of the Hispanic Mennonite Church, it also reads in an encyclopedic rather than narrative style and thus loses some of the impact that a more analytical narrative would have provided.

Falcón does conclude with some generalizations in chapter six about the Hispanic Mennonite experience as a whole. Here he briefly notes matters as leadership styles, self-identity and independence, language, culture, education, prejudice, economics and national diversity, and how these issues have influenced the Hispanic churches. While such a discussion is helpful, it would have had more effect if lengthened and woven into the main body of the text.

Documentation is more adequate in Falcón's book than in Bechler's. Though his endnotes are limited in number, a several-page bibliography will allow serious readers to follow some of the leads provided by Falcón.

Neither Bechler or Falcón gives more than a brief overview of black and Hispanic church work in other Mennonite conferences. Bechler devotes an entire, though brief, chapter to this topic, while Falcón limits his inter-Mennonite comments to one short appendix. Neither author intended to write the histories of these other Mennonite groups, and these comments should thus not be construed as a criticism of either book. However, readers expecting to find detailed accounts of General Conference, Mennonite Brethren or other Mennonite work among blacks and Hispanics should realize that those stories are not included here.

Despite the limitations of both books, they do provide an important and needed service to those interested in Mennonite Church history. In the evolution of historical studies on any given topic, first efforts generally provide only a basic outline to which later scholars may subsequently add more sophisticated theoretical interpretations. Both of these books are examples of this process, in that they provide frameworks from which future researchers may now probe these stories more deeply. No longer are the experiences of black and Hispanic congregations of the Mennonite Church hidden from our view. For this important first step we are grateful.

Kevin Enns-Rempel
Center for
Mennonite Brethren Studies
Fresno, California


BIRDS EYE VIEW — MT. LAKE, MINN.


DEPOT AND ELEVATORS MOUNTAIN LAKE MINN.